

## Sisters Crossing Boundaries: German Missionary Nuns in Colonial Togo and New Guinea, 1897-1960

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Katharina Stornig

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German Missionary Nuns in Colonial Togo  
and New Guinea, 1897–1960

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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by  
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Mainz, May 2013

Katharina Stornig

## Introduction

On October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1881, twenty-eight-year-old Helena Stollenwerk (1852–1900), a farmer's daughter and heiress to the parental farm, wrote to Arnold Janssen (1837–1909), a German priest and the founder of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), one of the first and most important German Catholic mission-sending societies established in 1875<sup>1</sup>, and asked him for admission. In her letter, Helena spoke of her deep yearning to become a missionary nun in China that had shaped her vita since her childhood in Rollesbroich, a small village in North Rhine-Westphalia. She wrote:

In [my] early childhood [...], when I occasionally heard or read in the annuals of the Holy Childhood [Association]<sup>2</sup> about the proselytization of the heathens, every time I felt a keen longing to play my part in the proselytization of the poor heathens; yet I thought that women were not suited at all to this endeavor, and this often made me feel very sad; only later I came to understand that nuns in fact could do much for the proselytization of the heathens; especially in China [...]<sup>3</sup>.

Although until then Janssen had rejected all applications by women, in 1882 he invited Helena to come to the society's headquarters, which, due to German legislation during the so-called culture war, had been established in the Dutch town of Steyl, where he offered her a position as a kitchen maid<sup>4</sup>. In the hope of getting closer to the fulfillment of her missionary vocation, Helena stood up to the initial resistance of her parents and her confessor, ignored her

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1 Historian Simone Höller referred to the foundation of the Society of the Divine Word in 1875 as the »seedling« from which organized Catholic missions developed in Germany. Cf. Simone HÖLLER, *Das Päpstliche Werk der Glaubensverbreitung in Deutschland 1933–1945*, Paderborn 2009, p. 40.

2 The German Holy Childhood Association was founded in 1846 and modeled on its French counterpart, the so-called *L'Œuvre de la Sainte Enfance*. Its main task was the promotion of the mission venture among children. On the French branch, cf. Henrietta HARRISON, »A Penny for the Little Chinese«. *The French Holy Childhood Organization in China, 1843–1951*, in: *American Historical Review* 113 (2008), pp. 72–92.

3 »In früher Kindheit [...] hörte ich mitunter oder las in den Vereinsheftchen der Heiligen Kindheit von der Bekehrung der Heiden; dabei fühlte ich jedes Mal ein lebhaftes Verlangen, an der Bekehrung der armen Heiden mitzuwirken; jedoch glaubte ich, das weibliche Geschlecht sei dazu ganz unfähig, weshalb ich oft sehr traurig war; nachher leuchtete es mir ein, daß auch Nonnen viel an der Bekehrung der Heiden, besonders in China, arbeiten könnten; [...]« Helena Stollenwerk, 24.10.1881, in: Ortrud STEGMAIER (ed.), *Mutter Maria Helena Stollenwerk 1852–1900. Briefwechsel mit Arnold Janssen*, Rome 1999, pp. 3–6, quotation p. 3.

4 Cf. Salesiana SOETE, *Geschichte der Missionsgenossenschaft der Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes*, Diss. Universität Wien 1953, pp. 14f.

sisters' complaints, left her home and inheritance and moved to the society's headquarters<sup>5</sup>. There she performed kitchen work for seven years together with another six women who had joined her in waiting for a German congregation for missionary nuns to be founded. In 1889, Janssen eventually established the Servants of the Holy Spirit and the kitchen maids became novices.

The new foundation appealed to many women, and candidates from all over Germany and Austria applied for admission. By 1900, despite Janssen's strict selection procedure, which had resulted in many applications being rejected<sup>6</sup>, the congregation counted 201 members who had already spread over four continents<sup>7</sup>. Contrary to Helena Stollenwerk's hopes that were pinned on the Catholic mission venture in China, however, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's first »missions among heathens« as they called it<sup>8</sup>, were established in Togo (1897) and New Guinea (1899), both part of the German colonial empire since 1884. Helena Stollenwerk, now Sister Maria, never went abroad. At Janssen's request, she became the master of novices and stayed in the congregation's Motherhouse in Steyl until her death in 1900. Yet her successors soon acknowledged Helena as one of the congregation's co-foundresses and commemorated her as the »spiritual mother of thousands and thousands of virgins« who, following a divine calling, »wandered out to the very borders of the universe in order to gain souls for the kingdom of Christ«<sup>9</sup>.

Missionaries are people who migrate for religious reasons. Referencing the Great Commission (that is, the instruction of the resurrected Christ to his apostles to spread his teachings to all nations and baptize them as described in several passages in the Bible<sup>10</sup>), Christian missionaries have long been traveling the globe. Etymologically, the term »missionary« derives from »missio«, the translation into Latin of the Greek terms »apostole« and »apostólos« which signify an »act of sending« or »someone who is sent«. A »missionary«, in the Christian understanding, is a person who is sent to the various parts of

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5 At some point during her youth, Helena's confessor even barred her from reading the Holy Childhood Association's periodical and talking about her desire to become a missionary nun. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 25.

6 Janssen selected the first 35 candidates out of 193 applicants. Cf. Fritz BORNEMANN, Arnold Janssen. Der Gründer des Steyler Missionswerkes 1837–1909. Ein Lebensbild nach zeitgenössischen Quellen, Nettetal 1992, p. 230.

7 By 1900, the Servants of the Holy Spirit had established a network of branches over four continents. Up to 1918, they founded women's convents in Argentina (1895), Togo (1897), New Guinea (1899), USA (1901), Brazil (1902), China (1905), Japan (1908), Philippines (1912) Netherlands (1910) Germany (1912), Austria (1912) and Indonesia (1917).

8 Apart from the missions »among heathens«, i.e., the majority, non-Christian, populations of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Servants of the Holy Spirit also engaged among European migrant populations in the Americas.

9 Cf. Assumpta VOLPERT, Ein Rebenhang im Wahren Weinberg. Geschichte der Missionsgenossenschaft der Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes 1889–1951, Steyl 1951, pp. 8–9.

10 Cf. Matthew 28:19–20.

the world on behalf of a Church in order to evangelize<sup>11</sup>. Historically, the term gained importance with the sending of the first Jesuits to China and the Americas in the sixteenth century. In Catholic tradition, the missionary profession was gendered male, with its conception relating to clerical authority and a gendered definition of ministry and discipleship that barred women from delivering the sacraments and preaching the gospel<sup>12</sup>. Early modern women, however, who, as Jo Ann McNamara has insisted, were »no less enthusiastic than men« about the idea of serving a missionary vocation, would engage in a different kind of apostolate, one that concentrated on the inner domains of prayer, religious exercises and spiritual support<sup>13</sup>. Since the period of Catholic Counter-Reformation, which had seen the external world being assigned to priests, while nuns were being confined to the inner world of their respective cloisters, many nuns transformed the latter into the venue of their missionary vocation, participating in Christianization through fortifying themselves and practicing silence and enclosure<sup>14</sup>. It was only in the last third of the nineteenth century that women were admitted to the Catholic mission fields in larger numbers. Yet, even though at that time many women, like Helena Stollenwerk, enthusiastically volunteered to serve the nascent Catholic missionary movement, they were considered as the subordinate assistants to men. The notion of the roles of nuns in missions as a function supplementing the proselytizing activities of priests also determined the ideas of founder Janssen, who in 1891 codified the Servants of the Holy Spirit's »principle purpose« by the task »to aid the works of the Society of the Divine Word's priests« in the fields »especially through those kinds of work that naturally better befit women than men«<sup>15</sup>.

From this point of view, it is hard to imagine that the nuns formed an important part of (the organization of) Catholic life in German Togo and New Guinea and impacted on the social relations in both colonies more generally. After all, in Janssen's understanding, »works that naturally better befitted women than men« first and foremost involved domestic chores (cooking, laundering, ironing, sewing etc. for themselves and the priests), the cleaning and decorating of missionary churches or chapels and what was then called

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11 Cf. Douglas WEBSTER, *Missionar*, in: Stephen NEILL et al. (eds), *Lexikon zur Weltmission*, Wuppertal 1975, p. 353; Horst RZEPKOWSKI, *Lexikon der Mission. Geschichte, Theologie, Ethnologie*, Graz 1992, pp. 297f.

12 Strictly speaking, the Church only considered ordained priests missionaries. This was due to their role as administrators of the sacraments and the preached Word. Cf. Josef GLAZIK, *Missionar*, in: Josef HÖFER/Karl RAHNER (eds), *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 7, Freiburg <sup>2</sup>1962, p. 457.

13 Jo Ann Kay McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms. Catholic Nuns through two Millennia*, Cambridge 1996, p. 493.

14 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 515.

15 Cf. the first draft of the congregation's constitutions, in: SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 19.

»works of charity«. Colonial historiographies addressing both settings have done little to challenge this impression. While scholars did acknowledge the presence of nuns, they continued to either ignore their activities or to subsume their experiences under those of men, largely confining missionary nuns to subordinate clauses or footnotes<sup>16</sup>. This can partially be explained by their research agendas that were marked by the overarching interest in the Christian missions' impact on the arenas of politics or economy rather than on the religious and cultural domains and their often invisible power over daily habits and implicit practices<sup>17</sup>. But it is also the missionaries' scattered settlement pattern, their engagement in the sector of education<sup>18</sup> as well as their close interaction with both western and indigenous agents in the colonial encounter<sup>19</sup> which secures them a prominent place in the modern colonial historiographies in both areas<sup>20</sup>. All this, to be sure, equally applied to

16 A recent historiographical survey of mission history in the German colonial context has arrived at a similar conclusion. Cf. Andreas ECKL, *Grundzüge einer feministischen Missionsgeschichtsschreibung. Missionarsgattinnen, Diakonissen und Missionsschwestern in der deutschen kolonialen Frauenmission*, in: Marianne BECHHAUS-GERST/Mechthild LEUTNER (eds), *Frauen in den deutschen Kolonien*, Berlin 2009, pp. 132–145. On the British context, cf. Norman ETHERINGTON, *Missions and Empire*, in: Robin W. WINKS (ed.), *Historiography*, Oxford/New York 1999 (OHBE 5), pp. 303–314.

17 The first scholars of mission to insist on the need to scrutinize the interplay between power and meaning not only in the sphere of politics (and institutionalized power relations) but also in what they have called the »arena of common-sense meanings« in day-to-day worlds are Jean and John Comaroff. Cf. Jean COMAROFF/John COMAROFF, *Christianity and Colonialism in South Africa*, in: *American Ethnologist* 13 (1986), pp. 1–22. Additionally, Adrian Hastings has pointed to the inseparability of religion and politics in early colonial Africa, arguing that even though most missionaries attempted to avoid the sphere of politics, »there was no way in which the average missionary could avoid politically significant behavior«. Cf. Adrian HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950*, Oxford 1994, p. 408.

18 Especially in Togo, much consideration was given to missionary schooling. Cf. Christel ADICK, *Bildung und Kolonialismus in Togo. Eine Studie zu den Entstehungszusammenhängen eines europäisch geprägten Bildungswesens in Afrika am Beispiel Togos (1850–1914)*, Weinheim/Basel 1988; Christel ADICK, *Muttersprachliche und fremdsprachliche Bildung im Missions- und Kolonialschulwesen*, in: *Bildung und Erziehung* 46 (1993) pp. 283–298; Celia SOKOLOWSKY, *Sprachenpolitik des deutschen Kolonialismus: Deutschunterricht als Mittel imperialer Herrschaftssicherung in Togo (1884–1914)*, Stuttgart 2004; Sena YAWO AKAKPO-NUMADO, *Mädchen- und Frauenbildung in den deutschen Afrika-Kolonien (1884–1914)*, Diss. Ruhr-Universität Bochum 2005.

19 Peter HEMPENSTALL has referred to the missionary infrastructure in terms of personnel, churches, farms and schools as a »state within the colonial state«. According to him, missionaries frequently »gained a level of acceptance among New Guineans that other colonial parties were often denied«. Cf. Peter HEMPENSTALL, *The Neglected Empire. The Superstructure of the Colonial State in German Melanesia*, in: Arthur KNOLL/LEWIS H. GANN (eds), *Germans in the Tropics: Essays in German Colonial History*, New York 1987, pp. 93–118.

20 For an overview of the role of missionaries in German colonialism, cf. Horst GRÜNDER, *Christliche Mission und deutscher Imperialismus. Eine politische Geschichte ihrer Beziehungen während der deutschen Kolonialzeit (1884–1914) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Afrikas und Chinas*, Paderborn 1982; Klaus J. BADE (ed.), *Imperialismus und Kolonialmission. Kaiserliches Deutschland und koloniales Imperium*, Stuttgart 1982 (Beiträge zur Kolonial- und Über-

missionary nuns. In German Togo, the Servants of the Holy Spirit established and maintained five women's convents mostly in the settlement area of what had come to be known as the Ewe-speaking population groups<sup>21</sup>. Two of the convents were situated along the economically important coast (Lomé since 1897 and Aného since 1901) and three in the country's interior (Kpalimé<sup>22</sup> and Atakpamé since 1905 and Kpandu since 1912). The nuns' pattern of settlement in German New Guinea was even looser<sup>23</sup>: The ten convents established before 1914 were scattered along the linguistically fragmented north coast of the mainland within a distance of more than 500 kilometers<sup>24</sup>.

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seegesichte 22); Horst GRÜNDER, *Die Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*, Paderborn 1985, pp. 127–137 and 169–187; Andreas ECKERT, *Kolonialismus*, Frankfurt a.M. 2006, pp. 105–111; Sebastian CONRAD, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*, München 2008, pp. 71–75. On missionaries in mainstream histories of colonial Togo, cf. Arthur J. KNOLL, *Togo under imperial Germany 1884–1914*, Stanford 1978, pp. 94–123; Arthur KNOLL, *Die Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft in Togo 1890–1914*, in: BADE (ed.), *Imperialismus und Kolonialmission*, pp. 165–188; Peter SEBALD, *Togo 1884–1914. Eine Geschichte der deutschen »Musterkolonie« auf der Grundlage amtlicher Quellen*, Berlin 1988, pp. 469–505; Ralph ERBAR, *Ein »Platz an der Sonne«? Die Verwaltungs- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der deutschen Kolonie Togo 1884–1914*, Stuttgart 1991 (*Beiträge zur Kolonial- und Überseegeschichte* 51), pp. 235–302. On New Guinea, cf. Klaus BADE, *Colonial Movement and Politics, Business and Christian Missionaries under colonial Rule. The Rhenish Mission in New Guinea*, in: Sione LATUKEFU (ed.), *Papua New Guinea. A Century of colonial Impact 1884–1984*, Port Moresby 1989, pp. 203–222; Ron MAY, *The Impact of early Contact in the Sepik*, in: LATUKEFU (ed.), *Papua New Guinea*, pp. 109–130; Hermann Joseph HIERY, *Das Deutsche Reich in der Südsee (1900–1921). Eine Annäherung an die Erfahrungen verschiedener Kulturen*, Göttingen/Zürich 1995. Moreover, cf. the various chapters dealing (at least partly) with missions in: Hermann Joseph HIERY/John MCKENZIE (eds), *European Impact and Pacific Influence. British and German colonial Policy in the Pacific and the indigenous Response*, London/New York 1997; Hermann Joseph HIERY (ed.), *Die deutsche Südsee. Ein Handbuch*, Paderborn 2001; Hermann MÜCKLER, *Mission in Ozeanien*, Wien 2010 (*Kulturgeschichte Ozeaniens* 2).

- 21 The term »Ewe« appeared first in early-twentieth-century European linguistic and anthropological literature. It constitutes an umbrella term for the people that resided along the West African coast between the Volta River (Ghana) and the Yoruba settlement area (today the south-east of Benin). Cf. Kokou AZAMEDE, *Transkulturationen? Ewe-Christen zwischen Deutschland und Westafrika, 1884–1939*, Stuttgart 2010 (*Missionsgeschichtliches Archiv* 14), pp. 22–33. Moreover: Jakob SPIETH, *Die Ewe Stämme. Material zur Kunde des Ewe-Volkes in Deutsch-Togo*, Berlin 1906; Sandra GREENE, *Gender, Ethnicity and social Change on the upper Slave Coast. A History of the Anlo-Ewe*, London 1996.
- 22 This book generally uses present-day names for places. Colonial toponyms are used only in the quotations. During German colonial rule Kpalimé was called Agome Palime.
- 23 As for New Guinea, mention must be made of two important chapters by anthropologists both of which have discussed the Servants of the Holy Spirit's missionary activity and experience in twentieth-century New Guinea from the long-term historical perspective. Cf. Mary Taylor HUBER, *The Dangers of Immorality. Dignity and Disorder in Gender Relations in a Northern New Guinea Diocese*, in: Mary Taylor HUBER/Nancy LUTKEHAUS (eds), *Gendered Missions. Women and Men in Missionary Practice*, Ann Arbor 1999, pp. 179–206; Nancy LUTKEHAUS, *Missionary Maternalism. Gendered Images of the Holy Spirit Sisters in Colonial New Guinea*, in: HUBER/LUTKEHAUS (eds), *Gendered Missions*, pp. 207–236.
- 24 Up to 1914, the nuns established convents in Tumleo (1899), Monumbo (1902), Bogia (1905),

Up to 1960, another twelve women's convents followed<sup>25</sup>. Throughout Togo and New Guinea, the nuns established and managed girls' schools, contracted indigenous girls and young women as boarders or housemaids and organized Catholic feasts. In addition, they sought to maintain close contact with the respective indigenous populations mostly through their engagement in nursing and what they called charitable services.

Catholic nuns constituted a considerable quantitative share of the missionary workforce in particular and in the European settler communities more generally. From 1897 to 1918, fifty-one Servants of the Holy Spirit moved to the Prefecture Apostolic Togo, which had been erected by Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903 Pa.) on the territory of the homonymous German colony in 1892. There, they lived and worked side by side with 109 of the Society of the Divine Word's priests and friars, thus accounting for more, than 30% of the Catholic mission's European personnel<sup>26</sup>. Given the generally small number of German settlers in Togo, the Catholic missionaries thus not only formed an important social group along with their Protestant counterparts, administrators, traders and merchants but also constituted a considerable part of the European population<sup>27</sup>. In 1907, for instance, colonial administrators recorded 288 »whites« living in Togo, only forty-four of whom were women<sup>28</sup>. At that time, sixty-one Catholic missionaries, among them eighteen nuns, were living in the colony<sup>29</sup>. The percentage of women in the Catholic mission in the prefecture apostolic Kaiser-Wilhelmsland, which Pope Leo XIII established in 1896 on the German part of the New Guinean mainland and offshore islands of the same name, was even higher. In 1907, at a time when administrators recorded 144 male and thirty-eight female »white« settlers (mostly administrators, planters or Protestant missionaries) in Kaiser-Wilhelmsland<sup>30</sup>, eighteen nuns and twenty-seven male missionaries worked in the prefecture<sup>31</sup>. Besides, at the end of 1908, eleven newcomers raised the number

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Ali (1906), Mugil (1906), Alexishafen (1907), Walman (1908), Malol (1911), Leming (1912) and Boikin (1912).

25 These are Yakumul (1916), Wewak (1919), Manam (1924), Uligan (1925), Marienberg (situated inland, 1935), Kariru (1937), Lae (1946), Mingende (1949), Timbunke (1953), Kondiu (1954), Dagua (1955), Par (1957) and Yampu (1958). Cf. Dominique COLES/Frank MIHALIC, *Sent by the Spirit. Missionary Sisters, Servants of the Holy Spirit. 1899–1999 Papua New Guinea, Madang 1999*, pp. 43–46.

26 Cf. Karl MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche in Togo*, Steyl 1958, pp. 503–519.

27 Cf. Bettina ZURSTRASSEN, »Ein Stück deutscher Erde schaffen«. *Koloniale Beamte in Togo 1884–1914*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2008, p. 49.

28 Denkschrift über die Entwicklung der Schutzgebiete in Afrika und der Südsee im Jahre 1906/07, BArch, R 1001/6537, p. 15.

29 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 478, 113.

30 Cf. Denkschrift, BArch, R 1001/6537, p. 15.

31 Thus, the nuns accounted for 40% of the missionary personnel in the Prefecture Apostolic. Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 414, 394.



of women missionaries to twenty-nine<sup>32</sup>. In contrast to the Togo-based nuns who in 1917/1918, when German colonial rule had drawn to an end, were all expelled, their colleagues in New Guinea were ultimately allowed to stay and continued to work during the Australian military occupation (1914–1920) and subsequent colonial administration (1920–1973). To date, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's mission in New Guinea has lived through two world wars and three regimes<sup>33</sup>. Between 1899 and 1960, a total of 181 European and North American nuns moved to the New Guinean mainland<sup>34</sup>.

The lack of attention paid to missionary nuns active in Togo and New Guinea mirrors three larger trends in colonial and mission historiography addressing both regions. First, most historians have focused on Protestant missionaries<sup>35</sup>, a fact that can be explained by the better accessibility of Protestant missionary archives and their less complex, as compared with the Catholic case, institutional involvement<sup>36</sup>. Second, it reflects the strikingly persistent perception of colonialism as a masculine undertaking which has shaped the analysis of empires for decades<sup>37</sup>. Third, it relates to the type of archives that historians have consulted and the kind of evidence they have

32 Cf. Jahresberichte über die Entwicklung der Schutzgebiete in Afrika und der Südsee im Jahre 1907/1908, BArch, R 1001/6538, p. 85.

33 While the Servants of the Holy Spirit returned to Togo only in 1989, their New Guinean branch has developed to date.

34 Cf. COLES/MIHALIC, *Sent by the Spirit*, pp. 43–53.

35 Cf. Martin PABST, *Mission und Kolonialpolitik. Die Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft an der Goldküste und in Togo bis zum Ausbruch des ersten Weltkrieges*, München 1988; BADE, *Colonial Movements and Politics*.

36 Two studies dealing with the Catholic mission in Togo and New Guinea and concentrating on the Society of the Divine Word's contributions to the field of ethnography likewise paid no attention to nuns and gender relations. Cf. Barbara KÖFLER, *Die Begegnung mit dem Fremden. Eine Studie zu Mission und Ethnologie. Zum Wirken des Steyler Missionsordens »Societas Verbi Divini«*, Horn 1992. Huppertz' book on New Guinea, in turn, is marked by a general lack of attention to issues of power. Besides, already her preface betrays the author's ideological implications, when she refers to the early missionary activity in colonial New Guinea as an »impressive pioneer work« which she aims to provide with a »positive« image. Cf. Josefina HUPPERTZ, *Begegnungen zweier Welten. Aus den Anfängen der Steyler Missionsgesellschaft in Deutsch-Neuguinea ab 1896*, Waldeck 1998. On New Guinea, moreover, cf. Peter HEMPENSTALL, *Europäische Missionsgesellschaften und christlicher Einfluss in der deutschen Südsee. Das Beispiel Neuguinea*, in: BADE (ed.), *Imperialismus und Kolonialmission*, pp. 225–242; Paul STEFFEN, *Die Anfänge der Rheinischen, Neuendettelsauer und Steyler Missionsarbeit in Neuguinea* (Excerpta ex dissertatione ad Doctoratum in Facultate Missiologiae Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana) Roma 1993.

37 Cf. e.g. Trutz VON TROTHA, *Koloniale Herrschaft. Zur soziologischen Theorie der Staatsentstehung am Beispiel des »Schutzgebietes Togo«*, Tübingen 1994; SEBALD, *Togo*; ERBAR, *Ein »Platz an der Sonne«?*. While historiographical surveys on German colonialism have taken the aspirations of secular women into consideration, they have largely not referred to the hopes that religious women linked to colonial expansion. Cf. Andreas ECKERT/Albert WIRZ, *Wir nicht, die Anderen auch. Deutschland und der Kolonialismus*, in: Sebastian CONRAD/Shalini RANDERIA (eds), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt a.M. / New York 2002, pp. 272–392; CONRAD, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*.

preferred. Women are under-represented both in colonial and Church archives. Unlike their husbands, the wives of Protestant missionaries had no obligation to write to institutions at home or journal editors. Nor were private letters to relatives recorded in archives or considered by researchers, who would examine the missions' political and economic significance instead<sup>38</sup>. Ultimately, it was the male missionaries and Church leaders that negotiated with colonial governments and district officers. Despite the fact that Catholic nuns wrote large amounts of letters and reports to their European congregations' headquarters, their voices can hardly be traced in colonial or Church archives, for the simple reason that with neither colonial offices nor the Propaganda Fide, the Roman department of the ecclesiastical administration in charge of the spread of Catholicism, they would negotiate directly.

This book sets out to develop an alternative perspective on the missionary encounter rather than attempting to enrich existing narratives by adding women. It therefore mainly draws on the sources produced by its principal subjects, missionary nuns. These are mostly the correspondence with Europe, travelogues, chronicles, reports and, to a lesser extent, articles, photographs and memoirs, all of which provide new insights into the nuns' religious and practical worlds and their gendered dimensions as they moved within and across imperial and religious systems. The book, moreover, draws on colonial records and ecclesiastical sources in order to scrutinize the power relations that structured the nuns' missionary engagement and their ambiguous roles as enthusiastic women missionaries who on the one hand took their privileged position as »white« Christians for granted and on the other subordinated to male religious and secular power. Ultimately, religious perspectives are accorded a prominent place because, to borrow from Andrew Porter, missionaries »viewed their world first of all with the eye of faith«<sup>39</sup>.

Since the 1980s, new approaches in the humanities and social sciences have opened exciting ways of thinking about modern mission history<sup>40</sup>. Historians of empires and anthropologists have moved away from studying colonial and indigenous societies as two opposed, culturally and socially homogeneous groups to place their focus on encounters and cultural exchange<sup>41</sup>.

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38 Cf. Patricia GRIMSHAW/Peter SHERLOCK, Women and cultural Exchanges, in: Norman ETHERINGTON (ed.), *Missions and Empire*, Oxford/New York 2005 (OHBE Companion Series), pp. 173–193, i.e. p. 175; ECKL, *Grundzüge*, p. 132.

39 Cf. Andrew PORTER, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914*, Manchester 2004, p. 13.

40 In the following I concentrate mostly on the missions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

41 Already in 1989, Ann Stoler has criticized that scholars examining the colonial encounter took »the politically constructed dichotomy of the colonizer and the colonized as a given, rather than as a historically shifting pair of social categories that need to be explained«. Cf. Ann L. STOLER, *Rethinking colonial Categories. European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989), pp. 134–161, here pp. 136f.

Scholars have departed from the simple dichotomous conception of colonial histories in terms of western impact and indigenous resistance and started to acknowledge the complexity of colonial societies and the immanent tensions and contradictions that marked the systems of rule<sup>42</sup>. Recent scholarship has revealed much about the various western and indigenous agents that shaped and were shaped by colonial pasts and, moreover, fuelled the interest of mainstream historians and anthropologists in missionary archives<sup>43</sup>, which came to be seen as privileged sources to study the colonial encounter and cultural change through records relating to everyday life<sup>44</sup>. Historical and ethnographic studies of missions, often conceptualized as case studies or micro-histories, have discovered a great deal about the (individual) missionaries'

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42 Cf. Woodruff SMITH, Contexts of German Colonialism in Africa. British Imperialism, German Politics, and the German Administrative Tradition, in: HIERY/MACKENZIE (eds), *European Impact*, pp. 9–22, i.e. p. 10. Moreover, cf. Peter SEBALD, Das deutsche »Fußvolk« in Togo 1884–1914, in: Andreas ECKERT/Jürgen MÜLLER (eds) *Transformationen der europäischen Expansion vom 15. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert (Loccumer Protokolle 26/96)*, Rehburg-Loccum 1997, pp. 171–178. Frederick COOPER, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 2005; Hermann MÜCKLER, *Kolonialismus in Ozeanien*, Wien 2012 (*Kulturgeschichte Ozeaniens 3*) and, with a particular focus on women and gender, Dorothy HODGSON/Sheryl McCURDY (eds), *Wicked Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, Portsmouth 2001; Jean ALLMAN/Susan GEIGER/Nakanyike MUSISI (eds), *Women in African colonial Histories*, Bloomington 2002.

43 Cf. Rebekka HABERMAS, Mission im 19. Jahrhundert. – Globale Netze des Religiösen, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 56 (2008), pp. 629–679; Monica JUNEJA, Mission, Encounters and Transnational History – Reflections on the Use of Concepts across Cultures, in: Andreas GROSS/Y. Vincent KUMARADOSS/Heike LIEBAU (eds), *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India. Vol. 3: Communication between India and Europe*, Halle 2006, pp. 1025–1047, i.e. 1043–1045.

44 Cf. Thomas O. BEIDELMAN, *Colonial Evangelism. A socio-historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots*, Bloomington 1982; Jean COMAROFF/John COMAROFF, *Of Revelation and Revolution 1. Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Chicago 1991; Jean COMAROFF/John COMAROFF, *Of Revelation and Revolution 2. The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Chicago 1997; Joel ROBBINS, *Becoming Sinners. Christianity and moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society (Ethnographic Studies in Subjectivity)*, Berkeley 2004; Peggy BROCK (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples and religious Change*, Leiden 2005; Chima J. KORIEH/Raphael Chijioke NJOKU (eds), *Missions, States, and European Expansion in Africa*, New York 2007; Hilde NIELSEN/Inger Marie OKKENHAUG/Karina HESTAD SKEIE (eds), *Protestant Missions and local Encounters in the twentieth Centuries*, Leiden 2011. An important interdisciplinary series that also includes theological perspectives was published in Germany under the title »Missionsgeschichtliches Archiv«: E.g. cf. Ulrich VAN DER HEYDEN/Heike LIEBAU (eds), *Missionsgeschichte – Kirchengeschichte – Weltgeschichte. Christliche Missionen im Kontext nationaler Entwicklungen in Afrika, Asien und Ozeanien*, Stuttgart 1996 (*Missionsgeschichtliches Archiv 1*); Ulrich VAN DER HEYDEN/Jürgen BECHER (eds), *Mission und Gewalt. Der Umgang christlicher Missionen mit Gewalt und die Ausbreitung des Christentums in der Zeit von 1792 bis 1918*, Stuttgart 2000 (*Missionsgeschichtliches Archiv 6*).

biographies<sup>45</sup>, transculturality<sup>46</sup>, conceptions of »self« and »Other«<sup>47</sup> as well as the limits of missionary power<sup>48</sup>.

A second important impact on the study of missions has come from feminist theory. The first studies to examine the late-nineteenth-century Protestant missionary movement as a sphere of activity or even professional opportunity for »white« American women were conducted in the United States<sup>49</sup>. Patricia Hill has argued that thousands of American middle-class women experienced their engagement in the missionary movement, both at home and abroad, as a socially acceptable activity enabling them to renegotiate their own roles<sup>50</sup>. Hill and others have depicted the modern mission venture as the single largest social movement in which American women participated<sup>51</sup>. To be sure, feminist scholars of mission have not only reintroduced forgotten women to mission histories but, moreover, started to study the relationship between men and women in mission-sending institutions and their particular forms of social organization abroad<sup>52</sup>. Most of this predominantly Anglo-

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45 Cf. Diane LANGMORE, *Missionary Lives. Papua, 1874–1914*, Honolulu 1989. Some scholars have, moreover, published biographical studies of individual missionaries or histories of major mission-sending societies. Cf. Clemens GÜTL (ed.), »Adieu ihr lieben Schwarzen«. Gesammelte Schriften des Tiroler Afrika-Missionars Franz Mayr 1865–1914, Wien/Köln 2004; Kevin WARD/Brian STANLEY (eds), *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799–1999*, Richmond 2000.

46 In this context, first and foremost the German research project on transculturation, which has been based on the exploration of the archives of the Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft, must be mentioned. E.g. cf. Rainer ALSHEIMER, *Mission, Missionare und Transkulturalität*, in: *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 23 (2000), pp. 189–240; Stefanie LUBRICH, *Missionarische Mädchen- und Frauenerziehung. Fallstudien aus Westafrika*, Bremen 2002; Azamede, *Transkulturationen?*

47 Cf. Thorsten ALTENA, »Ein Häuflein Christen mitten in der Heidenwelt des dunklen Erdteils«. Zum Selbst- und Fremdverständnis protestantischer Missionare im kolonialen Afrika 1884–1918, Münster 2003. Regarding a theological approach to the study of the missionary self and its historical structure cf.: Werner USTORF, »What if the Light in you is Darkness?« An Inquiry into the Shadow Side of the Missionary Self, in: VAN DER HEYDEN/BECHER (eds), *Mission und Gewalt*, pp. 139–153.

48 Cf. Sonja SAWITZKI, *Ho/Wegbe, Die Etablierung einer Missionsstation in West-Afrika*, Bremen 2002.

49 Cf. Jane HUNTER, *The Gospel of Gentility. American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China*, New Haven 1984.

50 Cf. Patricia HILL, *The World their Household. The American Women's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation 1870–1920*, Ann Arbor 1985; Doris KAUFMANN, *Frauen zwischen Aufbruch und Reaktion. Protestantische Frauenbewegung in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, München 1988, pp. 124–182.

51 Cf. Fiona BOWIE, Introduction. Reclaiming Women's Presence, in: Fiona BOWIE/Deborah KIRKWOOD/Shirley ARDENER, *Women and Missions. Past and Present. Anthropological and historical Perceptions*, Oxford 1993, pp. 1–22.

52 Much of this pioneering work has focused on Protestant women missionaries in Australia and the Pacific regions. Cf. Patricia GRIMSHAW, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Women in nineteenth-century Hawaii*, Honolulu 1989. Significantly, in Jolly and Macintyre's volume on family and gender in the Pacific all twelve historical and anthropological chapters deal with missionary institutions which came to be seen as the primary colonial institutions impacting on

phone scholarship has focused on Protestant missions<sup>53</sup>, examining the roles the so-called missionary wives played in the missionary household economies, exemplifying western gendered ideals through their own lives<sup>54</sup>. Looking at the British and American religious institutions in the Pacific regions, scholars like Patricia Grimshaw and Diane Langmore have examined cultural conflict over gender relations, marriage, sexuality, parenting and the family through the study of missionary records<sup>55</sup>. Fiona Bowie's important edited volume of contributions by historians and anthropologists entitled »Women and Missions« (1993) has done so with a focus on Africa<sup>56</sup>. Focusing on the study of the gendered and racialized body as a site for the imagination, inscription and operation of power, scholars have, moreover, started to examine mission activity in relation to an imperial body politics that attempted to discipline its subjects and propagated new standards of dress, bodily adornment and beauty<sup>57</sup>. Shifting the focus from the missionaries to the missionized, historian of Africa Heidi Gengenbach has argued that missionary activity and colonial efforts in Mozambique represented an intimate intercession and had become »an embodied experience where power engages even private identities, behaviors, and affections«<sup>58</sup>. Most recently, histo-

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the transformation of domestic life. Cf. Margaret JOLLY/Martha MACINTYRE (eds), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the colonial Impact*, Cambridge 1989.

- 53 Cf. Deborah GAITSKELL, *Female Faith and the Politics of the Personal: Five Mission Encounters in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, in: *Feminist Review* 65 (2000), pp. 68–91; Deborah GAITSKELL, *Whose Heartland and which Periphery? Christian Women crossing South Africa's racial Divide in the twentieth Century*, in: *Women's History Review* 11/3 (2002), pp. 375–394.
- 54 Cf. For German-speaking scholarship, first and foremost mention must be made of a set of works all of which have questioned, even though from a very different perspective and to a varying extent, the educational (and disciplining) practices deployed by Protestant women in missions. Cf. Simone PRODOLLIEF, »Wider die Schamlosigkeit und das Elend der heidnischen Weiber«. Die Basler Frauenmission und der Export des europäischen Frauenideals in die Kolonien, Zürich 1987; Dagmar KONRAD, *Missionsbräute. Pietistinnen des 19. Jahrhunderts in der Basler Mission*, Münster 2001; Vera BÖTZINGER, »Den Chinesen ein Chinese werden«. Die deutsche protestantische Frauenmission in China 1842–1952, Stuttgart 2004; Ilse THEIL, *Reise in das Land des Todesschattens. Lebensläufe von Frauen der Mission der Norddeutschen Mission in Togo/Westafrika (von 1849 bis 1899) – eine Analyse zur pädagogischen Erinnerungsarbeit*, Berlin 2008.
- 55 Cf. GRIMSHAW, *Paths of Duty*; JOLLY/MACINTYRE (eds), *Family and Gender*; LANGMORE, *Missionary Lives*.
- 56 Cf. BOWIE/KIRKWOOD/ARDENER (eds.), *Women and Missions*. For another, equally important interdisciplinary volume with an interesting introduction and chapters by well-known scholars of Christian missions such as the editors, T.O. Beidelman and Susan Thorne, cf. HUBER/LUTKEHAUS (eds), *Gendered Missions*.
- 57 Cf. Kathryn ROUNTREE, *Re-Making the Maori Female Body: Marianne Williams's Mission in the Bay of Islands*, in: *Journal of Pacific History* 35 (2000), pp. 49–66.
- 58 Cf. Heidi GENGENBACH, *Tattooed Secrets. Women's History in Magude District, Southern Mozambique*, in: Tony BALLANTYNE/Antoinette BURTON (eds), *Bodies in Contact. Rethinking colonial Encounters in World History*, Durham 2005, pp. 253–273, quotation p. 254. On the crucial importance of matters of the intimate to imperial politics cf. Ann L. STOLER, *Carnal Knowledge and imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in colonial Rule*, Berkeley 2002.

rians and anthropologists have started to examine the ways in which indigenous women made sense (or use) of gendered mission Christianity as well as the roles they played in evangelization<sup>59</sup>.

Missionary records, moreover, have come to be used as sources for the study of the relations between gender, race and empire<sup>60</sup>. Feminist scholars have shown that constructions and ideologies of gender were central to the cultural and religious agenda promoted by the missionaries of both sexes and placed them within the broader context of the so-called »civilizing mission« of colonialism<sup>61</sup>. Pointing out the hopes and strategies that European women, both religious and secular, placed in colonial expansion, historians have profoundly challenged the perception of empires as genuinely masculine enterprises<sup>62</sup>. Applying a postcolonial theoretical framework, some scholars, in emphasizing the crucial roles of missions in the interplay between colonial

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59 Cf. Dorothy Louise HODGSON, *The Church of Women. Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries*, Bloomington 2005; Ulrike SILL, *Encounters in Quest of Christian Womanhood. The Basel Mission in pre- and early colonial Ghana*, Leiden 2010; Mera KOSAMBI, *Indian Response to Christianity, Church and Colonialism. Case of Pandita Rambai*, in: *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, No. 43/44 (1992), pp. WS 61–WS71; Mera KOSAMBI, *Multiple Contestations. Pandita Rambai's Educational and Missionary Activities in late nineteenth-century India and abroad*, in: *Women's History Review* 7 (1998), pp. 193–208.

60 Cf. Catherine HALL, *Missionary Stories. Gender and Ethnicity in England in the 1830s and 1840s*, in: Lawrence GROSSBERG et al. (eds), *Cultural Studies*, New York/London 1992, pp. 240–276. For an overview on recent scholarship on gender and empire, cf. STOLER Ann L., *Foucaults »Geschichte der Sexualität« und die koloniale Ordnung der Dinge*, in: CONRAD/RANDERIA, *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus*, pp. 313–334; Philippa LEVINE, *Gender and Empire*, Oxford/New York 2004 (OHBE Companion Series); BALLANTYNE Tony/Antoinette BURTON, *Introduction. Bodies, Empires and World Histories*, in: BALLANTYNE/BURTON (eds), *Bodies in Contact*, pp. 1–18.

61 Cf. Patricia GRIMSHAW, *Missions, Colonialism and the Politics of Gender*, in: Amanda BERRY et al. (eds), *Evangelists of Empire? Missionaries in colonial History*, ([online] Melbourne: University of Melbourne eScholarship Research Centre, 2008, pp. 1–12, here p. 6. Moreover, cf. Christine CHOO, *Mission Girls. Aboriginal Women on Catholic Missions in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1900-1950*, Crawley 2001.

62 Cf. Nudur CHAUDHURY/Margaret STROBEL (eds), *Western Women and Imperialism. Complicity and Resistance*, Bloomington 1992. For German historiography cf.: Martha MAMOZAI, *Schwarze Frau, weiße Herrin*, Reinbek 1989; Lora WILDENTHAL, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945*, Durham/London 2001; Katharina WALGENBACH, »Die weiße Frau als Trägerin deutscher Kultur«. *Kolonialer Diskurs über Geschlecht, »Rasse« und Klasse im Kaiserreich*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2005; Katharina WALGENBACH, *Emanzipation als koloniale Fiktion. Zur sozialen Position weißer Frauen in den deutschen Kolonien*, in: *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 16 (2005), No. 2, pp. 47–67; Birte KUNDRUS, *Weiblicher Kulturimperialismus. Die imperialistischen Verbände des Kaiserreichs*, in: Sebastian CONRAD/Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL (eds), *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt*, Göttingen 2006, pp. 213–235; Anette DIETRICH, *Weißer Weiblichkeit. Konstruktionen von »Rasse« und Geschlecht im deutschen Kolonialismus*, Bielefeld 2007; BECHHAUSGERST/LEUTNER (eds), *Frauen. On German women in the German South Seas* cf. Livia LOOSEN, »Trägerinnen deutscher Bildung, deutscher Zucht und Sitte«. *Alltag und Rollenbild deutscher Frauen in den Südsekolonien des Kaiserreichs*, in: BECHHAUSGERST/LEUTNER (eds), *Frauen*, pp. 40–49.

metropolis and oversea empires in the context of gender, have argued for the full integration of mission history into mainstream historiographies. This work is part of larger efforts of historians, anthropologists and literary scholars to re-examine the ways in which imperialism has shaped European societies and cultures. Historians have re-evaluated the role of missions in the emergence and circulation of knowledge<sup>63</sup> as well as metropolitan ideas of gender and race<sup>64</sup>. Scholars of British imperialism like Antoinette Burton and Susan Thorne have pointed out the ways in which British women managed to make use of the image of colonized women (as individuals in need of rescue and liberation) and the ideology of »white« hegemony in order to negotiate their own advance<sup>65</sup>. Susan Thorne has brought together early British feminism and missionary enthusiasm by showing that the missionary movement offered Victorian women not only employment opportunities and the valorization of their skills and virtues but also the institutional space to challenge male privileges. Like others, she has come to the conclusion that the success of this »white« middle-class missionary feminism depended on the subordination of »non-white« or working-class women, for it »rested on the existence of a degraded female Other in the colonies and at home«<sup>66</sup>.

Compared with the Protestant case, less attention has been paid to the study of the experiences and activities of Catholic nuns in modern missionary contexts. This appears striking considering the growing scholarly interest in the study of religion and the significance of religious experience for feminine concepts of life<sup>67</sup>. Early modern historian Silvia Evangelisti has

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63 Patrick HARRIES, *Butterflies & Barbarians. Swiss Missionaries & Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa*, Oxford 1997.

64 Cf. Antoinette BURTON, *At the Heart of Empire. Indians and the colonial Encounter in late Victorian Britain*, Berkeley 1989; HALL, *Missionary Stories*; Susan THORNE, »The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World inseparable«. *Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class 1750–1850*, in: Frederick COOPER / Ann L. STOLER, *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a bourgeois World*, Berkeley 1997, pp. 238–262; Susan THORNE, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an imperial Culture in nineteenth-century England*, Stanford 1999; Catherine HALL, *Civilizing Subjects. Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*, Cambridge 2002. For the German-speaking context Rebekka Habermas has argued for the need to reevaluate the roles of missions and their religious networks in nineteenth- and twentieth-century German society and culture. Cf. HABERMAS, *Mission*.

65 Cf. Antoinette BURTON, *Burdens of History. British Feminists, Indian Women and imperial Culture, 1854–1914*, Chapel Hill 1994.

66 Susan THORNE, *Missionary Imperial Feminism*, in: HUBER/LUTKEHAUS (eds), *Gendered Missions*, pp. 39–66, i.e. p. 60.

67 While at the beginning the study of gender and religion was a domain of English-speaking scholarship, the last decades have witnessed a growing interest in German historiography. Cf. Catherine PRELINGER, *Charity, Challenge and Change. Religious Dimensions of the mid-nineteenth-century Women's Movement in Germany*, New York 1987; Edith SAURER (ed.) *Die Religion der Geschlechter. Historische Aspekte religiöser Mentalitäten*, Wien/Köln/Weimar 1995 (*L'Homme* Schriften 1); Susan E. DINAN/Debra MEYERS (eds), *Women and Religion in old and new Worlds*, New York/London, 2001; CLARK Elizabeth, *Women, Gender and the Study*

observed that nuns »have recently attracted many fans«<sup>68</sup>. Scholars increasingly reject the conventional treatment of nuns as ahistorical and passive subjects having withdrawn from society. Instead, historians and anthropologists have started to explore the histories of convent life within and beyond the confines of Europe<sup>69</sup>. Nuns have been reintegrated into mainstream historical narratives and it has become clear that the historical evolution of women's orders or congregations has always been closely intertwined with broader social, political and economic developments in Europe and beyond. Early modernists have demonstrated that women's monasteries were among the first institutions to be recreated in the Americas and scrutinized their vitality to the erecting and securing of religious orders and colonial regimes<sup>70</sup>. Sarah A. Curtis has recently traced the life trajectories of three French nuns, showing how they helped Post-Napoleonic France re-establish a global empire<sup>71</sup>. In her important contribution to the study of female religious life forms in mid-nineteenth-century Germany, historian Relinde Meiwes has explained the proliferation of Catholic women's congregations by their members' active involvement in society in general<sup>72</sup>. According to Canon

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of Christian History, in: *Church History* 70 (2001), pp. 395–426. For historical anthropological approaches to the subject cf. Edith SAURER, »Bewahrerinnen der Zucht und Sittlichkeit«. Gebetbücher für Frauen – Frauen in Gebetbüchern, in: *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 1 (1990), pp. 37–58; Edith SAURER, *Frauen und Priester. Beichtgespräche im frühen 19. Jahrhundert*, in: Richard VAN DÜLMEN (ed.), *Arbeit, Frömmigkeit und Eigensinn. Studien zur historischen Kulturforschung II*, Frankfurt a.M. 1990, pp. 141–170; Rebekka HABERMAS, *Weibliche Religiosität – oder: Von der Fragilität bürgerlicher Identitäten*, in: Klaus TENFELDE/Hans-Ulrich WEHLER (eds), *Wege zur Geschichte des Bürgertums*, Göttingen 1994, pp. 125–148.

68 Cf. Silvia EVANGELISTI, *Nuns. A History of Convent Life*, Oxford/New York 2007, p. 1.

69 Rose H. EBAUGH, *Patriarchal Bargains and latent Avenues of social Mobility: Nuns in the Roman Catholic Church*, in: *Gender and Society* 7 (1993), pp. 400–414; McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms*; G. HÜWELMEIER, *Närrinnen Gottes. Lebenswelten von Ordensfrauen*, Münster 2004; R. SULLIVAN, *Visual Habits. Nuns, Feminism, and American Postwar Popular Culture*, Toronto 2005.

70 Cf. Natalie Zemon DAVIS, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives*, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 1995; Kathryn BURNS, *Gender and the Politics of Mestizaje. The Convent of Santa Clara in Cuzco, Peru*, in: *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 78 (1998), pp. 5–44; Kathryn BURNS, *Colonial Habits. Convents and the spiritual Economy of Cuzco, Peru*, Durham/London 1999; EVANGELISTI, *Nuns*, i.e. pp. 175–200.

71 Cf. Sarah A. CURTIS, *Civilizing Habits. Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire*, Oxford/New York 2010. Another recent work devoting much room to nuns is Phyllis Martin's history of Catholic women in the French Empire in the twentieth century. Cf. Phyllis M. MARTIN, *The Catholic Women of Congo-Brazzaville. Mothers and Sisters in troubled Times*, Bloomington 2009; Phyllis M. MARTIN, *Celebrating the Ordinary. Church, Empire and Gender in the Life of Mère Marie-Michelle Dédié (Senegal, Congo, 1882–1931)*, in: *Gender and History* 16 (2004), pp. 289–317. In addition, also scholars of modern African History have started to investigate the activities of nuns; for instance in Apartheid South Africa. Cf. Catherine HIGGS/Jean N. EVANS, *Embracing Activism in Apartheid South Africa: The Sisters of Mercy in Bophuthatswana, 1974–1994*, in: *The Catholic Historical Review* 94 (2008), pp. 500–521.

72 Cf. Relinde MEIWES, »Arbeiterinnen des Herrn«. *Katholische Frauenkongregationen im 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2000.



Law, women's congregations differ from women's orders in status and rules. In contrast to the members of orders, who take the indissoluble so-called »solemn vows« and are subjected to strict »papal« enclosure, those of congregations can be dispensed from their »simple« vows and live under conditions that facilitate the combination of work and religious life<sup>73</sup>. Outlining a dynamic picture of these founding histories, Meiwes has related women's enthusiastic engagement in religious life forms to both their striving to renegotiate their roles in a changing society and their religious concepts that derived from a gendered monastic tradition<sup>74</sup>. Anthropologist Gertrud Hübhelmeier has introduced nuns to the discussion of globalizing processes in the social and cultural sciences by pointing out the transnational religious networks that Catholic women's congregations created and maintained since the late nineteenth century<sup>75</sup>. Significantly, most women's congregations established during the 1880s and 1890s, hence at a time when religious and secular expansion enthused many Germans, were missionary congregations<sup>76</sup>.

According to Patricia Grimshaw and Peter Sherlock, it was mainly two factors that had persuaded Christian Church leaders to admit growing numbers of women to the mission fields since the second half of the nineteenth century. These were the crucial contributions of women to the various mis-

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73 Originally, the term »nun« had applied exclusively to the members of religious orders and only later was expanded to members of congregations, who were correctly entitled as »sisters«. In this book, the word »nuns« is used for two reasons. First, as Jo Ann McNamara has pointed out, in the perception of those concerned the distinctions were much blurrier than suggested by Canon Law. Second, the term »nun« comes closer to the way in which the subjects of this book saw themselves. McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms*, pp. 631–644.

74 MEIWES, »Arbeiterinnen des Herrn«, pp. 310–314.

75 Cf. Gertrud HÜBELMEIER, »Global Players – Global Prayers«. *Gender und Migration in transnationalen religiösen Räumen*, in: *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 100 (2004), pp. 161–175; Gertrud HÜBELMEIER, »Nach Amerika!« *Schwester ohne Grenzen*, in: *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 16/2 (2005), pp. 97–115; Gertrud HÜBELMEIER, *Ordensfrauen unterwegs. Transnationalismus, Gender und Religion*, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 13 (2005), pp. 91–111; Gertrud HÜBELMEIER, *Ordensfrauen im Jumbojet. Katholische Schwestern als Akteure im Prozess der Globalisierung*, in: Florian KREUTZER/Silke ROTH (eds), *Transnationale Karrieren. Biografie, Lebensführung und Mobilität*, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 64–82; Gertrud HÜBELMEIER, *Negotiating Diversity. Catholic Nuns as Cosmopolitans*, in: *Schweizerische Zeitung für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* 102 (2008), pp. 105–117. These days, researchers also examine the activities of African congregations: Cf. Katrin LANGEWIESCHE, *African Roman Catholic Missionary Networks between Africa and Europe*, in: Ludwig FRIEDER/Kwabena ASAMOAH-GYADU (eds), *African Christian Presence in the West. New Immigrant Congregations and transnational Networks in North America and Europe*, Trenton 2011, pp. 225–235.

76 MEIWES, »Arbeiterinnen des Herrn«, p. 310. Examples include the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing (1884) and the so-called Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood (1885). For an overview of the foundations of numerous mission orders and congregations in mid-nineteenth-century Europe cf. Gerald FASCHINGEDER, *Missionsgeschichte als Beziehungsgeschichte. Die Genese des europäischen Missionseifers als Gegenstand der Historischen Anthropologie*, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 10 (2002), pp. 1–30, pp. 16–18.

sion movements at their home fronts in many western countries as well as the growing awareness among Church leaders that women missionaries could propagate new forms of evangelization, given that they had access to places that were out of bounds to men. The employment of women missionaries became a prominent issue in the last third of the nineteenth century – at a time when the conversion of indigenous women gained significance in the eyes of Christian leaders, who increasingly came to view indigenous women (in their capacity as mothers) as the key to changing indigenous moral and religious regimes<sup>77</sup>. In the eyes of founder Arnold Janssen, who since the 1870s had emphasized in the Catholic media women's importance to the mission venture, nuns enjoyed two significant advantages over priests operating in missions. Firstly, indigenous peoples would not identify women with the representatives of foreign powers striving for domination and profit. They were, as a consequence, less likely to become the targets of (violent) resistance, but, quite the contrary, would engage sympathy and gain the people's confidence<sup>78</sup>. Secondly, Janssen, who wrote this with a strong focus on the Catholic missions in China during the 1870s and 1880s<sup>79</sup>, credited missionary nuns with key roles in the creation of an indigenous clergy. Accordingly, they were needed abroad in order to educate indigenous girls to become pious Christian mothers, who, in turn, constituted the precondition for the emergence of what Janssen called »good families«, meaning particular social units and domestic environments in which »priestly vocations could thrive«<sup>80</sup>.

Ultimately, what Jane Hunter has called the »feminization of the mission force« depended on the enthusiasm of large numbers of Christian women to go abroad<sup>81</sup>. In one way or another, several scholars have explained this within a predominantly secular argumentative framework, suggesting that women missionaries experienced migration as a liberating move with the missionary situation providing opportunities for adventure, professional service and achievements rarely available to them at home<sup>82</sup>. Still, for women missionary life also entailed multiple hardships. Studies on Protestant missionary wives, the best researched group in this context, have shown that these

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77 Cf. GRIMSHAW/SHERLOCK, *Women*, pp. 184f.

78 Cf. BORNEMANN, Arnold Janssen, p. 222.

79 The mission in China, established in 1879, was the Society of the Divine Word's by far most important field of work particularly during its early years.

80 Cf. HUBER, *The Dangers*, p. 186; Bornemann, Arnold Janssen, p. 222.

81 HUNTER, *The Gospel of Gentility*, p. 14.

82 Cf. *ibid.*; BÖTZINGER, »Den Chinesen ein Chinese werden«; Thomas O. BEIDELMAN, *Altruism and Domesticity. Images of missionizing Women among the Church Missionary Society in nineteenth-century East Africa*, in: HUBER/LUTKEHAUS (eds), *Gendered Missions*, pp. 113–144; HUBER, *The Dangers*; Valentine CUNNINGHAM, »God and Nature intended you for a Missionary's Wife«. Mary Hill, Jane Eyre and Other Missionary Women in the 1840s, in: BOWIE/KIRKWOOD/ARDENER (eds), *Women and Missions*, pp. 85–105.

women's manifold duties (e.g. housewifery, childrearing, cooking, cleaning, food supply, etc.) were set in pre-industrial household economies; they frequently resided in isolated areas without medical schemes, had suffered the loss of their husbands and children and lacked official recognition<sup>83</sup>. Somewhat paradoxically, comparatively little attention has been paid to the religious concepts, beliefs and experiences that informed these women's motivations and gave shape to their activities abroad. In fact, even the few studies dealing with Catholic missionary nuns have privileged secular patterns of explanation<sup>84</sup>.

Missionary nuns, however, based their individual life choices first and foremost on their religious belief system and a vocation they derived from a divine calling. Helena Stollenwerk's life trajectory shows that missionary vocations related to individual experiences within broader historical developments in and outside the Catholic Church, to the Church's multiple entanglements with the non-Christian world and to the kind of globalized religious order the Church constructed. The nuns' total dedication to a life-long service within the mission venture must be understood as their acting upon the powerful desire to realize this individually experienced divine call. Even though they were aware of the high death rates on the mission field, departing nuns often referred to the realization of their missionary vocation as the »aim of their lives«; for it allowed them to actively contribute to what they perceived to be the most meaningful venture of their times. For these women, to venture abroad in the capacity of missionaries meant to work for both their own salvation as well as the salvation of others. Speaking in terms of women's empowerment, the entry of nuns into the mission force not only signified the transcendence of the cloistered convent, access to employment and the departure for an adventure abroad, but also implied their participation in activities that were associated with the clergy. Their missionary experiences and practices are, indeed, incomprehensible without considering both the religious *and* secular cultures of which the nuns were a part as well as their gendered dimensions. Just as the religious beliefs, concepts and traditions

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83 Cf. GRIMSHAW/SHERLOCK, *Women*, pp. 180–184.

84 Huber has emphasized the professional tasks that the nuns were expected to perform abroad (i.e. as managers of girls' schools, orphanages and hospitals). Cf. HUBER, *The Dangers*, p. 183. In her dissertation about German and Austrian nuns in South Africa, Martina Gugglberger has suggested explaining the life choices of her subjects of study between individual and social limits and ruptures in terms of a »regulated adventure«. While entering a congregation was seen as a socially accepted life path for women, the missionary context involved the possibility to transcend social and cultural norms (e.g. through higher education and migration). Cf. Martina GUGGLBERGER, »Ich wollte immer nach Afrika!« *Lebensgeschichten deutschsprachiger Missionsschwestern nach 1945*, Diss. Universität Salzburg 2009, pp. 5f.

that formed the social worlds of the nuns are essential to a thorough investigation so also the social and cultural processes that gave shape to German colonialism must be taken into consideration.

Entering a sphere new to Catholic women in the German empire, missionary nuns crossed multiple literal and figurative boundaries. The chapters that follow discuss their experiences and activities by exploring the nuns' ambiguous roles as travelers, believers, religious reformers, nurses, teachers and representatives of the Church and the congregation from the perspective of gender. Chapter 1 argues that the nuns, departing in the capacity of women religious who idealized the seclusion of the convent and largely rejected what they called »the world«, at first had to create their own roles as women missionaries who acted in public spheres. During the passage to the fields of mission, aspects of religion, gender, race and nationality intersected in ways that empowered the nuns to become »missionaries«. As such, they entered into professional associations with male political, economic and religious elites without forsaking their status as exceptional women religious, and in doing so they created their own niche at the margins of colonial society.

This public role as nuns *and* missionaries, however, produced multiple tensions on the individual and the collective level for the subjects of this book (Chapter 2). As missionaries they voiced the need for autonomy, greater spaces of action and mobility. As nuns they belonged to a religious tradition that acknowledged seclusion, hierarchies, religious discipline, control and the following of rules as the way to sanctification. While the organizational form of the women's congregation with its strong emphasis on uniformity and coherence constituted a source of security for the nuns in migration, it also created a social framework in which any form of change involved structures of authority and was thus slowly realized through a negotiation that stretched over continental borders.

Given these tensions, it is necessary to analyze the nuns' notions and perceptions of success. Chapter 3 explores the ways in which the missionary nuns attempted to transform what they perceived to be »heathen« lands into Catholic territories. It shows that religious expansion as perceived by the subjects of this book was inextricably linked to a particular (gendered) culture of space, which on the one hand involved symbolic and material manifestations and on the other was constituted through social practices and daily routines. Chapter 4 explores narratives of missionary nursing as a primary sphere of women's contribution to missionary success. Contrary to male missiologists and priests, who conceptualized nursing as a feminine caring role that merely supplemented the religious works of priests, missionary nurses crossed these gendered boundaries of the missionary profession by accentuating its genuine promise of religious change: Through nursing they obtained access to the sick and dying, with whom they realized the possibility of

administering the sacrament of emergency baptism. By participating in this way, they executed the biblical Great Commission and, moreover, contributed to the introduction of Catholic rituals relating to sickness and death. Parallel to this genuinely religious framing of nursing, a secular oriented field of nursing emerged which increasingly emphasized professionalism and the patients' medical wellbeing.

The nuns' second field of increasingly professional service, girls' schooling, constitutes the subject of Chapter 5. Like nursing, girls' education was also marked by the entanglement of religious and secular concepts and practices, for it was through the introduction of European-style education, discipline and bodily practices (e.g. clothing and work) that the nuns aimed to prepare or to dispose non-Christian girls and women for religious conversion. Schooling was considered of great importance by the nuns in bringing about religious, moral and cultural transformation on both the individual and the social level. Ideologies of gender and certain ideas of the proper roles and responsibilities of men and women in the Church and society informed the Catholic missions' activities in this regard. The chapter analyzes these educational policies in the context of gender and, moreover, shows that the celibate life in Catholic sisterhood also attracted some young indigenous women.

Notwithstanding the initial discouragement of the missionaries, some indigenous women sought to get admission to the congregation. It was a wish that the nuns would largely reject. Chapter 6 starts by exploring a paradox concerning Catholic universalism and religious sisterhood. Even though the conversion of women – as key figures who were instrumental to moral and religious change – was given great importance by the nuns in both settings, for a long time converted women in Togo and New Guinea were denied admission to the congregation. Introducing social constructions of race, Chapter 6 sets Togolese and New Guinean examples in the wider context of religious politics of diversity as it was pursued until the eve of Vatican II (1962–1965). Before turning to Chapter 1, the following section gives a brief overview of the sources and relevant aspects of the Servants of the Holy Spirit's history.

### Missionary Writing(s)

Nuns started to record their experiences almost immediately after their departure from the Motherhouse. Instructed by their superiors to »take advantage of every opportunity« to send a postcard or letter<sup>85</sup>, they produced a considerable amount of travelogues, which is kept in the congregation's gen-

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85 Cf. *Belehrungen und Empfehlungen für die in die Mission reisenden Schwestern*, AG SSpS 034 Tg Varia (1,2,3,5) – *Belehrungen für Missionarinnen*, 9.

eral archive<sup>86</sup>. The function of travel writing was multilayered. Firstly, the detailed descriptions of the passage to the mission fields, which included many practical hints concerning both the sea voyage (e.g. the treatment of seasickness, notes regarding dress and luggage) and suitable accommodation facilities at stopping points, were used to create the congregation's archive of knowledge regarding the routes to the respective destinations. Since the travelogues were read out to the community in the Motherhouse during recreation times, it may well be assumed that the nuns there were familiar with the respective routes<sup>87</sup>. Secondly, writing served to bridge distance and to maintain unity across continental borders. That way, superiors in Europe kept track of their subordinates' movements, attitudes, routines and expenses. Departing nuns, in turn, through writing affirmed their bond to the congregation and shared their travel experiences with their colleagues who had stayed at home by sending detailed, reflexive and often humorous reports. Often the travelogues started with the writer recalling the farewell scenes in the Motherhouse.

Correspondence with Europe was maintained also after the nuns' arrival in Togo and New Guinea, respectively. This allowed them to participate in all important events taking place in the Motherhouse such as the mother superior's name day that regularly saw waves of letters from all parts of the world coming in. Generally speaking, the regular correspondence between Europe and the mission fields may be divided into what can be qualified as »personal« and »collective« letters<sup>88</sup>. This characterization derives from the strict regulations and social practices that shaped the production of the correspondence. The only persons ordinary missionary nuns were allowed to write uncensored letters were their legitimate superiors in Europe. All other letters were subjected to censorship. This likewise applied to familial correspondence, which was, moreover, regulated in quantity. Altogether, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's historical archive houses four categories of let-

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86 The Servants of the Holy Spirit's so-called »General Archive« is accommodated in the congregation's Roman headquarters.

87 In 1912, for instance, a nun wrote en route to Togo addressing the community in the Motherhouse: »What else might I tell you? The passage, which you have heard about so often that you probably know it by heart, is far too boring to be described in greater detail.« (»Was soll ich nun noch ferner erwähnen? Die Reise, die sie ja doch so oft hören, so dass sie selbige schon auswendig können, ist doch allzu langweilig, (um sie) noch weiter zu beschreiben.«) AG SSpS 034 TG 00 Reiseberichte 1896–1914, Sr. Anastasia Wagner/Sr. Custodia Engels, 15.11.1912.

88 All unpublished letters quoted in this book are filed in the Servants of the Holy Spirit's general archive in Rome. The correspondence is archived mainly in chronological order. In contrast to the New Guinean case, the so-called »official correspondence«, the letters exchanged between the mother superior in Europe and the head of the nuns in Togo, is filed separately. The rest, irrespective of the addressee, is organized chronologically. In the case of New Guinea, a sample of letters dated from 1899 to 1917 is stored separately for non-defined reasons.

ters from daughter missionaries in New Guinea to their relatives (usually mothers, sisters and brothers)<sup>89</sup>.

»Personal« letters addressed to the mother superior mostly served individuals to discuss their spiritual and physical wellbeing. During the first decade of the Servants of the Holy Spirit's engagement abroad, the individuals were, moreover, obligated to regularly accomplish in written form the so-called »private talks«. In monasticism, »private talks« were one-to-one appointments between superiors and subordinates that took place on a regular basis. Geographically separated from their mother superior, missionary nuns at first had practiced them in writing. They sent to Europe written records of discussions concerning their observation of the congregation's religious rule, their state of health, their fields of work, their satisfaction with their vocation and their self-assessment of their advance in spiritual life. As a result, a considerable number of written »private talks« are preserved and it was only with the consolidation of the religious structures in both settings that this practice was increasingly performed face-to-face with superiors on location. Individual nuns would write to the mother superior also on their own initiative, often in order to speak out on particular problems<sup>90</sup>. Besides, all nuns occupying superior positions corresponded with the European leading committee on a regular basis discussing all aspects of religious life abroad (e.g. with regard to the order of the day, the individual nuns' spheres of work, personnel transfers, etc.). Although the archival coverage of the correspondence is not complete (and many letters are fragments<sup>91</sup>), its chronological and biographic reorganization provides much insight into the individual nuns' careers and missionary experience as well as the reconstruction and historical assessment of communities. With regard to the other party of the correspondence it must be mentioned that only a limited amount of transcripts of the mother superior's letters from Europe to the fields are recorded<sup>92</sup>.

As »collective letters« those letters are qualified that individual nuns addressed to whole convent communities. Although this type of correspondence was likewise exchanged in both directions, no copies were produced

89 These letters were handed over to the congregation's archive by the nuns' relatives. In two cases, the correspondence starts already with the respective candidates' training period in Steyl. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6204 SSpS Briefe.

90 Although this was legitimate, superiors warned departing nuns from writing in emotional challenging situations. Instead, they were recommended first to pray for divine advice and to sleep on the matter before sending letters. Cf. II. Vortrag in: AG SSpS Tg Varia (1,2,3,5) – Belehrungen für Missionarinnen.

91 In the case of intimate letters or letters discussing problems between nuns abroad, names or whole passages are partly cut out.

92 As for Togo, a total of twenty-seven letters by Mother Superior Theresia Messner, all of which date from the years between 1905 and 1912, are recorded. Cf. AG SSpS 0311.2 Tog Briefe von M. Theresia Messner nach Togo. In the case of New Guinea, only the copies of twenty letters from the Mother Superior are filed between the remaining correspondences.

of the letters that were sent from Europe to the fields. While from Togo and New Guinea the nuns frequently wrote to the Motherhouse and vice-versa, they were not supposed to correspond with their colleagues in other missionary settings. Hence, the communication between the nuns in Togo and New Guinea functioned exclusively via the congregation's headquarters in Europe. In either case, letter writing was crucial, for it fostered the creation and maintenance of transnational bonds and sisterhood. After revision by the responsible superiors, »collective« letters were read out to the respective convent communities during recreation times. Frequent comments by the nuns attest to the great significance the receipt and collective reading of such letters had for the individuals and communities in Europe and abroad<sup>93</sup>. It was precisely for this reason that the missionary nuns kept writing to Europe notwithstanding the often troublesome conditions under which this was accomplished. Due to high workloads, letters were often produced at nighttime and over long periods of time. Many writers apologized for the bad style of their letters, admitting that they had repeatedly fallen asleep over writing<sup>94</sup>. Generally speaking, »collective letters« are strikingly diverse, differing in length, content and style. They introduce different aspects of missionary life and work and many also tell of the writers' aim to entertain their readers<sup>95</sup>.

The congregation's archive holds large amounts of letters covering the period up to the Great War. During the war years the correspondence died down. While from Togo the last nuns returned to Europe at the beginning of 1918, their colleagues in New Guinea took up writing again. As historical records from 1919 and the early 1920s show, they were doing this with

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93 In 1902, a nun wrote to Europe from Tumleo, German New Guinea, emphasizing the important social function of the maintenance of a correspondence: »Back in Steyl, it was always a pleasure when the letters from the missions were read out. But I can tell you the pleasure will be much greater once the tables are turned around.« (»Ehedem in Steyl war es immer eine Freude, wenn Briefe aus der Mission vorgelesen wurden. Aber ich kann Ihnen sagen, wenn der Spiess einmal umgedreht wird, die Freude noch weit größer ist.«) AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Magdalena Wagner, 5.4.1902.

94 For instance, a nun wrote from Togo in 1913: »Dear rev. Mother, excuse my sending off this letter like this. But the week before Easter we were so busy that we had to postpone writing to the time after the evening prayer. Again and again I fell asleep over writing and I made many mistakes.« (»Verzeihen Sie, liebe ehrw. Mutter, daß ich den Brief so abschicke. Wir hatten in der Woche vor Ostern so viel zu tun, sodaß wir unser Schreiben meistens auf die Zeit nach dem Abendgebet verschieben mußten. Ich bin während des Schreibens öfters eingeschlafen und habe mich oft verschrieben.«) AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Fidelis Weitkamp, 30.10.1913.

95 Especially some of the working nuns, who had no experience as writers at first, often wrote in an excusatory way. For instance, Sister Ursula Sensen, wrote only shortly after her arrival at New Guinea in 1899: »[...] in my life I have written so few letters, I am afraid that the sisters in Steyl might laugh at my silliness [...]« (»[...] ich habe in meinem Leben so wenige Briefe geschrieben, ich fürchte, die Schwestern in Steyl könnten über meine Dummheit lachen [...]«) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 25.2.1900.



great enthusiasm. Beginning in the second half of the 1920s, however, the amount of letters filed continuously decreased again. From that time on, the correspondence available mostly consists of letters exchanged between superiors. Apart from archival considerations, this was mainly due to the changes that had occurred in the congregation's structure. After its New Guinean branch had consolidated the nuns started to write to their colleagues in the region. Besides, the correspondence with the Motherhouse began to be shaped by the congregation's rapid growth and geographical expansion in Europe (e.g. through the establishment of new novitiates) and beyond. Missionary nuns were increasingly being trained in novitiates other than that of Steyl. In 1922, for instance, New Guinea saw the arrival of the first North American Servants of the Holy Spirit. Altogether, it can be assumed that at that time the nuns were more likely to send »private letters« to their »home convents« than to the Motherhouse, with which they had no or only few personal relationships. The letters available in the congregation's general archive dating from the decades after the mid-1920s must thus be characterized as a type of reports or formal correspondence. From all missionary settings, the nuns, moreover, submitted to the Motherhouse so-called »chronicle reports« on a regular (ideally annual) basis, in which they outlined the most important events that had occurred during the time covered by the report.

Complete chronicles, however, which were produced at all convents, have been preserved only in two cases, since many documents got lost either in the wake of the nuns' enforced departure from Togo or the bombings of the mission edifices in New Guinea during World War II. The chronicles from Lomé (Togo) and Manam Island (New Guinea) are entirely preserved<sup>96</sup>. Convent chronicles, which historian Christine Schneider has characterized as the »official memory of the spiritual house«, constitute particularly valuable sources because their production related to a European monastic tradition rather than to a missionary writing culture. Chroniclers sought to record all events that mattered to the respective community, which in the missionary context also involved local events (e.g. the admission/dismissal of indigenous housemaids)<sup>97</sup>. In some cases, the chronicles preserve information about the lives of people who have left no written sources themselves. Their evaluation delivers an interpretative grid for the outlining of a pattern of female missionary work over time and space and enables the study of the convents' roles

96 AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Lome and PNG Chroniken, H-P.101.h-12 Manam. In the case of Manam a priest had most spectacularly buried the parish records during World War II and that way saved them. Cf. Nancy LUTKEHAUS, Introduction, in: Karl BÖHM, *The Live of some Island People of New Guinea. A Missionary Observation of the Volcanic Islands of Manam, Boesa, Biem, and Urub*, Berlin 1983, pp. 13–69, i.e. p. 37.

97 Cf. Christine SCHNEIDER, *Kloster als Lebensform. Der Wiener Ursulinenkonvent in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Wien/Köln/Weimar 2005 (*L'Homme Schriften* 11), pp. 10f.

in the respective societies. In this context, the records of the Servants of the Holy Spirit's general chapters (held in 1909/1910, 1922, 1934, 1948 and 1960) have likewise proved extremely useful. General chapters are the meetings to which a congregation's delegates from all over the world gather on a regular basis in order to elect its leadership and to consult over present and future developments. Extant records of the Servants of the Holy Spirit's general chapters include reports on current congregational issues (e.g. changes in the constitutions), reports from the various fields of mission and the transcripts of the proceedings of all meetings<sup>98</sup>. Other administrative material available is the vast correspondence between the nuns' leading committee and the Society of the Divine Word's leadership<sup>99</sup>.

Missionary nuns also wrote for external audiences. Occasional comments show that some of them also corresponded with whom they called »benefactors« in Germany. Accounts by women missionaries were, moreover, printed in the Society of the Divine Word's mission journals<sup>100</sup>. Starting in 1922, the Servants of the Holy Spirit published their own periodical in which accounts of missionary nuns took a prominent place<sup>101</sup>. Last but not least it must be mentioned that missionaries made extensive use of photography in order to visualize their activities, their edifices, their fields of work and the people among whom they lived. Although it was mostly priests who managed the production and distribution of images, the nuns attached photos to their letters whenever possible. In Europe, the photos were reprinted, circulated among benefactors in the form of picture postcards or in publications, and collected. In the congregation's Steylean archive, two photo albums, compiled by the nuns in the Motherhouse, are filed together with a considerable number of loosely arranged postcards and photographs, all of which had been taken in the nuns' fields of work in Togo and New Guinea. Altogether, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's historical archives provide a rich basis for a qualitative research on the nuns' complex mission histories.

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98 In the Servants of the Holy Spirit's case, general chapters took place every twelve years until the 1960s. Since then, they have been organized at six-year intervals.

99 For this correspondence, which is available mostly in copies, there is a useful inventory from which some valuable insight may be drawn. Cf. AG SSpS 000 Gründungszeit 0006.1 Schriftverkehr SVD–SSpS 1892–1904; 000 Gründungszeit 0006.1 Schriftverkehr SVD–SSpS 1905–1911; 000 Gründungszeit 0006.2 P. Hermann auf der Heide. In addition, two published sets of correspondences must be mentioned: Cf. Joseph ALT (ed.) Arnold Janssen – Letters to New Guinea and Australia, Nettetal 2001 and STEGMAIER (ed.), Mutter Maria Stollenwerk.

100 Up to 1960, the most important periodicals were the so-called »Herz-Jesu-Bote« and the »Steyler Missionsbote. Monatsschrift der Glaubensverbreitung«.

101 Except for interruptions during the 1940s, the »Missionsgrüße der Steyler Missionsschwestern Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes. Organ des Hilfswerks vom Heiligen Geist zur Unterstützung der Schwesternseminare und Noviziate der Steyler Missionsschwestern« appeared throughout the period under consideration.

Methodologically, this book is based on the combination of a small-scale analysis (e.g. individual nuns, convents, bodies) with larger investigative questions. At places, the scale of observation is reduced with the goal to explore the ambiguity that marked the nuns' interaction with the various cultural systems in which they operated. In order to explore the complexity of the nuns' individual and collective engagements, the emphatic approach that microhistory – as attributing explanatory value to social contradictions – applies to individual lives, relationships, choices and events is adopted<sup>102</sup>. Inspiration is also drawn from historical anthropology and its concern with the investigation of daily life and the observation of ritual, religious practices, material culture and symbolic manifestations. Several aspects of missionary life are analyzed through case studies in an effort to reveal the tensions between individual and group strategies as well as the foundation and consolidation of the individual missionary convents on the one hand and normative (social and religious) frameworks on the other. In view of the fact that colonialism and missionary work as pursued in either setting differed<sup>103</sup>, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's missionary activity and experience in Togo and New Guinea are largely approached separately. At the same time, however, much attention is paid to the connections between Steyl, Togo and New Guinea and thus to the transnational space that the nuns created and in which they operated. Ultimately, a comparative perspective is adopted on defined issues in order to explore the tension between religious ideals and practice as well as to highlight the local specificities in the implementation of globally-oriented concepts and policies<sup>104</sup>.

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102 Cf. Giovanni LEVI, *On Microhistory*, in: Peter BURKE (ed.), *New Perspectives on historical Writing*, Oxford 2001, pp. 90–119, i.e. pp. 95–97.

103 Scholars nowadays underline that colonialism was no homogeneous phenomenon and should therefore be characterized as the plurality of colonialisms. Historians of German colonialism have discussed whether or not a single German colonialism existed. Cf. Gunter PAKENDORF: »Kaffern lügen, Lehrer reden die Wahrheit!« Zur manichäischen Ordnung des missionarischen Diskurses, in: Peter HEINE/Ulrich VAN DER HEYDEN (eds), *Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus in Afrika. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Peter Sebald*, Pfaffenweiler 1995, pp. 418–428; Arthur KNOLL, *German Africa and the German Pacific. Continuity and Contrast*, in: HEINE/VAN DER HEYDEN (eds), *Studien*, pp. 341–249. On the diversity of Christian missions, cf. Norman ETHERINGTON, Introduction, in: ETHERINGTON (ed.), *Missions and Empire*, pp. 1–18.

104 As an example for a fruitfully applied comparative perspective on missionary encounters, cf. Thor WAGSTROM, *Broken Tongues and foreign Hearts. The religious Frontier in early nineteenth-century South Africa and New Zealand*, in: BROCK (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples*, pp. 51–78.

## The Servants of the Holy Spirit – Foundation and Consolidation

As indicated at the beginning, the congregation's founding histories drawn up by the Servants of the Holy Spirit gave much room to the life and achievements of Helena Stollenwerk<sup>105</sup>, who, together with Hendrina Stenmanns (1852–1903)<sup>106</sup>, another Catholic woman from rural background who had joined Helena as a kitchen maid in Steyl during the 1880s, is acknowledged as the congregation's co-foundress. The years the founding generation spent with performing kitchen service in the male missionary house was interpreted as a period of, to put it in the words of one of their successors, Sister Assumpta Volpert, from 1953, »holy maidhood«, meaning a particularly important contribution to the missionary cause<sup>107</sup>. These years of service also impacted on the congregation's later development inasmuch as domestic duties (i.e. kitchen work, laundry and sewing) for Janssen's priests continued to constitute an important task for the Servants of the Holy Spirit worldwide<sup>108</sup>. Besides, all novices and nuns in the Steylean convent were extensively engaged in bookbinding. In order to carry out the folding, creasing and stapling of Janssen's mission periodicals, a distinct room was established in the convent. From the outset of their foundation in 1889, the Servants of the Holy Spirit organizationally and economically depended totally on the Society of the Divine Word and founder Janssen who, in his capacity as the priests', friars' and nuns' general superior for life, remained their all-powerful leader<sup>109</sup>.

In addition to manual labor, the second crucial task assigned to the nuns was the provision of spiritual support for the priests and the mission venture through prayer. In the congregation's first constitutions (1891), Janssen codified prayer as its members' central task and ruled that one part of the nuns should make the provision of spiritual support to the principal duty of their lives. Practically, he conceptualized the Servants of the Holy Spirit as one congregation with two branches: the missionary nuns on the one hand and the so-called Adoration Sisters on the other. While both shared the overall aim to

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105 In this context, first and foremost three histories published must be mentioned. Cf. Perboyre NEUSS, *Die Steyler Missionsschwesterinnen »Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes«*. Ein schlichter Kranz zu ihrem silbernen Jubelfest, Steyl 1914, i.e. pp. 3–9; VOLPERT, *Ein Rebenhang*, pp. 6–22; SOETE, *Geschichte*, pp. 4–28.

106 Soete has described Hendrina Stenmanns as a pious girl from the municipality of Issum at the Lower Rhine, who had been socially active already as a young woman by nursing the sick and caring for the poor in her home village. Similar to Helena, in Hendrina's case it had also been a religious call since adolescence that ultimately prompted her to move to Steyl. Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, pp. 27f.

107 Cf. VOLPERT, *Ein Rebenhang*, p. 14.

108 Cf. HUBER, *The Dangers*, p. 187.

109 Cf. BORNEMANN, *Arnold Janssen*, pp. 240–241.

provide support to missionary priests worldwide, they sought to achieve this in different ways. While for the missionary nuns assisting the Society of the Divine Word's priests this involved prayer and practical labor particularly in the missionary fields and, to quote the founder, »in a way appropriate to their sex«<sup>110</sup>, for the Adoration Sisters »missionary activity« as defined in the first constitutions related to a gendered Catholic tradition according to which the cloister functioned as the site of the missionary vocation<sup>111</sup>. Practically, the Adoration Sisters' missionary contribution derived from their firm belief in the practical force of prayer (i.e. through perpetual adoration<sup>112</sup>), labor, the strict observance of the permanent cloister as well as from what Janssen had called the »sacrifice and virtues of contemplative life«<sup>113</sup>.

Once the bishop responsible for Roermond, Franciscus Boermans (1815–1900), had approved the constitutions, the congregation's consolidation advanced quickly. In 1892, its members were invested with the religious habit designed by Janssen and officially started their ecclesiastical novitiate. At first, it was the founder himself who presided over the novitiate, managed monastic instruction and took all relevant decisions. In 1896 he restructured the congregation's subdivision into an active and a contemplative branch and established his third foundation, the so-called Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration. Subsequently, the members of the new cloistered-contemplative congregation moved into a separated wing of the convent where they stayed until they received their own Motherhouse in 1914. Two years after the institutional separation of both branches, Janssen required co-foundress Mother Maria Helena Stollenwerk, the contemporary head of the missionary nuns, to move over to the Adoration Sisters and to recommence as a novice there. Although Helena by then had already abandoned the hope of becoming a China missionary, she, according to the congregation's »historian« Sister Salesiana Soete, complied with this order »with a bleeding heart«<sup>114</sup>. Helena's biographers have particularly emphasized this last demonstration of obedience to the founder as an act of »heroic humility«<sup>115</sup>.

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110 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 233–234.

111 Cf. McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms*, pp. 489–497.

112 In Catholicism, perpetual adoration is a form of Eucharistic devotion, during which the worshippers take turns in their hours of adoration before the exposed sacrament. For the adoration sisters it was the goal to provide this form of prayer ubiquitously.

113 Significantly, Janssen's earlier draft of the constitutions had compared the Servants of the Holy Spirit's subdivision into missionary and contemplative nuns with the traditional ecclesiastical distinction into choir and lay nuns thus implying the subordination of the missionary nuns to their cloistered counterparts. In the first effectual constitutions of 1891, however, he gave up this hierarchical organization of the congregation and codified the relations between both branches as »two sisters belonging together, as belonged together Mary and Martha, their guides«. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 19. Moreover, cf. BORNEMANN, *Arnold Janssen*, pp. 233f.

114 Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 26.

115 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26; VOLPERT, *Ein Rebenhang*, p. 19.

After Helena's departure, Josepha Hendrina Stenmanns was appointed head of the missionary nuns. As for any efforts at hierarchic stratification among the female monastic community, her term of office, however, likewise failed to bring about any other than a cosmetic change, actually leaving the management of the nuns' affairs in the hands of the male general superior and a number of individually appointed priests. Following the demise of Mother Josepha Stenmanns in 1903, Janssen appointed the former novice mistress, Sister Theresia Messner (1868–1940), head of the nuns, who was to become the congregation's first elected superior serving from 1909 to 1922. As compared with her two antecessors, Messner gradually appeared as a self-conscious leader of the congregation, seeking to reinforce the hierarchic differentiation among the nuns with the explicit goal to lead the women's congregation toward increasing independence from the Society of the Divine Word. In a second step, she extended her efforts at the disentanglement of institutional structures in the congregation's non-European spheres of work. Even though the women's congregation's independence and self-management by a mother superior and leading committee had been the official prospect from the outset, in the long run the Servants of the Holy Spirit's institutional involvement with Janssen's male society – in which priests continued to occupy key positions – remained a source of trouble for nuns in Europe and abroad. The priests would decide about the nuns' religious lives and professional training and also manage the congregation's spheres of work. During the congregation's early years, nuns holding leading positions were barred from arranging things among themselves; quite the contrary, all practical matters they were compelled to negotiate with the male superior general, who more often than not failed to inform them about certain issues or to answer their written requests immediately<sup>116</sup>. Altogether, this created an extremely difficult sphere of action for the emerging female congregational elites. In part, competing views about priorities and activities carried out on a regular basis in the nuns' day-to-day lives also strained their relations. Thus, while during Mother Maria's (1896–1898) and Mother Josepha's (1898–1903) terms of office great importance was accorded to manual labor, the teaching nuns who managed the training of the future missionaries kept insisting on the need for a greater deal of intellectual training and the reduction of extensive workloads<sup>117</sup>. And even though Mother Theresia Messner (who held office between 1903 and 1922) appeared as a comparatively self-confident leader, her sphere of activity was equally limited by rigid boundaries<sup>118</sup>. The nuns

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116 Cf. STEGMAIER, Mutter Maria Stollenwerk, pp. LXIIIff.

117 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. LXIV.

118 It was founder Janssen himself who had added a clause to the congregation's first constitutions regarding the (gendered) differentiation of power. Accordingly, the congregation's female

experienced this restriction of their sphere of action as increasingly unacceptable, as the following incident, which illustrates the set of structural problems that dominated much of the nuns' interaction with the Society of the Divine Word's priests, shows.

In July 1906 Cardinal Girolamo Maria Gotti (1834–1916), who, as the prefect of the Roman Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (1902–1916), was in charge of all Catholic missionary congregations, received an anonymous letter from Steyl<sup>119</sup>. The letter set out the substantial complaints of a nun who, so she claimed, addressed herself to the cardinal »in the name of all sisters«<sup>120</sup>. On seven pages the writer explained her position, calling for the reorganization of the Servants of the Holy Spirit's congregation in terms of putting it under Episcopal jurisdiction with the urgent goal to emancipate itself from the Society of the Divine Word and its leaders. Following her account of the congregation's founding history, she explained the nuns' all-embracing dependence on the male order and its superior general:

We sisters are not allowed to pray anything, to eat anything, to work anything [–] in one word [–] to do anything without having consulted the men's convent. Normally, this would be good and right and indeed it is our explicit wish to have a priest as a director, if only the administration of the sisters by the [male] missionary house were carried out in a good, regulated and solid manner<sup>121</sup>.

This obviously was not the case. Rather, the nuns in Steyl experienced the administration by Janssen and his priests as alarmingly deficient. On the following pages the writer explained her point of view by raising three issues concerning both religious and secular matters.

Firstly, the three priests (including Janssen) in charge of the nuns' religious training, regarding the nuns' spiritual guidance as a minor duty, were unable to cater to the religious needs of the (by then around 300) women who lived in the Steylean convent, failing to live up to the nuns' requirements as lecturers and as confessors alike. She also questioned the priests' suitability as the nuns' confessors considering that they, interacting with them on a regular basis, frequently »upbraided and berated« them in day-to-day matters. Ultimately, the writer complained about the female convent community's lack of

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»line« of superiors could be activated only after the congregation counted more than 150 professed members. Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 30.

119 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 340, 861–864.

120 *Ibid.*, 862.

121 »Wir Schwestern dürfen nichts beten, nichts essen, nichts arbeiten, mit einem Worte nichts tun, ohne das Männerkloster befragt zu haben. Dies wäre an und für sich auch gut und recht, und wir Schwestern wünschen auch ausdrücklich einen Priester als Lenker, wenn die Leitung der Schwestern von Seiten des Missionshauses eine gute, geordnete und gründliche wäre.« *Ibid.*, 862.

appropriate books in order to compensate for the inadequate religious input on the part of their religious leaders<sup>122</sup>.

The second set of complaints related to the nuns' day-to-day activities in general and their extensive workload in Janssen's printing press in particular<sup>123</sup>. The writer described her position in dramatic terms:

Although we want a[nd] should be nuns, in effect we are factory workers. We have a big factory in which machines whistle and roar the whole day, where everything smells of oil, petrol and gas. There we sisters are forced to work from early morning to late evening. Not only does the continuous standing at the folding machines leave the sisters overly exhausted, but, as a consequence of the supply air produced by the machines, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, gastric troubles and pulmonary diseases crop up. [...] Dearest Father, how can the head of a poor nun in which dozens of machines rear day and night, how can a nun, who is neither able to eat nor sleep, pray and contemplate<sup>124</sup>?

In the writer's eyes, the Society of the Divine Word's leaders' interest in the women's congregation was largely restricted to the nuns' manpower, whereas their religious lives were accorded only minor importance. As a consequence, many nuns were discontent with the situation and some had even left the community on the grounds that they refused to become »factory girls«<sup>125</sup>. The writer's next complaint related to the fact that only those nuns were assigned for the missions who had previously served in the printing press for a considerable time, which had often ruined their health. She continued, sharpening her tone:

Our superiors of the [male] missionary house are girls' catchers. They dress us sisters like dolls so as to lure the poor virgins, who come here for spiritual exercises, and to get workers. Our contemplative sisters wear wonderful admirable costumes<sup>126</sup>; all

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122 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 340, 862.

123 The nuns' extensive engagement in printing is also mentioned in: BORNEMANN, Arnold Janssen, pp. 240–241.

124 »Wir wollen u. sollen zwar Klosterfrauen sein, sind aber im eigentlichen Sinne des Kloster Fabrikarbeiterinnen. Wir haben eine große Fabrik worin den ganzen Tag die Maschinen sausen und brausen, worin alles nach Öl, Benzin und Gas riecht. Darin müssen wir Schwestern vom frühen Morgen bis späten Abend arbeiten. Infolge des immerwährenden Stehens bei den Falzmaschinen werden die Schwestern nicht nur bis über das Maß ermüdet, sondern auch wegen des Zugwindes, den die Maschinen uns ins Gesicht schlagen, stellen sich Appetit- und Schlaflosigkeit, Magen- und Lungenleiden ein. [...] Wie kann, teuerster Vater, der Kopf einer armen Ordensfrau, indem dutzende von Maschinen Tag und Nacht brausen, wie kann eine Ordensfrau, die weder essen noch schlafen kann, beten und betrachten?« APF N.S. Vol. 340 863.

125 Ibid., 863.

126 As the writer points out, a contemplative nun's dress (which was of pink color that symbolized



priests and lay people are astonished by them. [...] We missionary sisters wear a sky-blue dress, which is indeed very alluring for young and inexperienced children whose hearts can easily be won over. We sisters are in desperate need for an activity that would be appropriate for nuns. Our rev. mother superior and the sisters would like to take over boarding schools, orphanages and similar institutions but as long as we are chained to the men's convent our rev. mother is neither able nor allowed to do anything; any step toward acting independently would certainly be responded with immediate degradation<sup>127</sup>.

The writer's last comment already leads to her third point of criticism which revolved around the way the nuns were treated by the priests, particularly in view of the unequal power relations. All priests in superior positions (and, what is quite remarkably, she explicitly included Janssen), tended to insult them in religious lectures or in mutual interaction. In the talks they gave to the nuns, leading priests repeatedly even suggested discontent members of the women's congregation to leave. In addition, male superiors decided upon the individual nuns' status (e.g. their promotion to the vows) without giving much thought to the matter and likewise rashly dismissed individuals from the congregation. According to the writer, they did so without considering the myriad of implications the enforced return to the secular world had for a woman religious:

What is a poor sister supposed to do in the world after having spent a dozen of years in the order? Aren't these poor sisters unfortunate for all their lives? Aren't they the mockery of the people? And still so many sisters are sent away after having worked here hard for years and, as is often pointed out, without ever having been admonished or rebuked. And, what is more, dismissals take place in the most awful manner. Who of us wouldn't remember the words rev. fr. superior general told sisters who had worked in the congregation for more than 10 years: ›By 12 o'clock you must have left the house!‹

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love) rather resembled that of a secular woman. More precisely, she complained about the contemplative nuns' ›precious headgear, the modern footwear, the white stockings, the precious and beautiful underskirts‹ and the ›purple-red, silken, baggy clothes‹. *Ibid.*, Vol. 340, 863.

127 ›Unsere Obern des Missionshauses sind Mädchenfänger. Sie kleiden uns Schwestern wie Puppen, um die armen Jungfrauen, die zu den geistlichen Übungen hierher kommen anzulocken und Arbeiterinnen zu bekommen. Unsere Klausurschwestern tragen ein wunderbar herrliches Kostüm; bei allen Priestern und Laien erregt es Erstaunen. [...] Wir Missionsschwestern tragen ein himmelblaues Kleid, das für junge und unerfahrene Kinder, deren Herzen leicht eingenommen sind, auch sehr verführerisch und bestechend ist. Wir Schwestern wünschen dringend eine sich für Ordensfrauen geziemende Tätigkeit. Unsere ehrw. Mutter Oberin und alle Schwestern würden gerne Pensionate, Waisenhäuser und derlei Anstalten übernehmen; aber so lange wir an das Männerkloster gekettet sind, kann und darf unsere ehrw. Mutter nichts tun; der erste Schritt zum selbstständigen Handeln würde gewiss mit der sofortigen Absetzung beantwortet werden.‹ *Ibid.*, 863.

Dearest Father, we can't respect or love such superiors and it's impossible for us to open them heart and conscience in holy confession [...]<sup>128</sup>.

Eventually, having once again repeated her request to put the women's congregation under direct Episcopal jurisdiction, the writer closed her letter by apologizing for its anonymous form:

Dearest Father, you will most gracefully apologize that I conceal my name out of fear. [But] If the rev. fr. superior general knew my name he surely would tell me as well: ›By 3 o' clock you have to leave the house!<sup>129</sup>.

The letter suggests that the troubles between the nuns and their male superiors exceeded competing views on the proportionality of work and study, as the published founding histories keep insisting<sup>130</sup>. Its content as well as its sophisticated style and clean orthography strongly suggest that at least a well-educated nun was involved in its production. By 1906, most of the educated Servants of the Holy Spirit (i.e. the registered women teachers who had entered the congregation) were employed in the congregation's headquarters, where they managed the internal missionary seminary and occupied upper ranks in the hierarchy. The letter must thus be interpreted as symptomatic of the structural troubles that characterized the congregation's first two decades of existence in Europe and abroad. It bears, moreover, witness to the fact that, notwithstanding their firm belief in the vow of obedience, strict hierarchies and the following of rules as a way to sanctification, Catholic nuns held firm ideas about what was justified, taking measures against anything they perceived to be unwarranted. In this concrete case, however, the actual consequences of the intervention remained marginal<sup>131</sup>. Although Rome launched

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128 »Was soll eine arme Schwester in der Welt tun, nachdem sie ein Dutzend Jahre im Orden zugebracht hat? Sind diese armen Schwester, teuerster Vater, nicht unglücklich für ihr ganzes Leben? Sind sie nicht das Gespött der Menschen? Und doch werden so viele Schwestern von hier fortgeschickt, nachdem sie jahrelang schwer gearbeitet und wie man oft sagt ohne dass sie jemals einen Tadel oder eine Ermahnung erhalten haben. Und dazu geht diese Wegschieken auf die hässlichste Weise vor sich. Wer von uns erinnert sich nicht der Worte des hochw. H. Generalsuperiors, die er zu Schwestern gesagt hat, die über 10 Jahre in der Genossenschaft gearbeitet hatten: ›Bis 12 Uhr müssen Sie das Haus verlassen haben!‹ Teuerster Vater, solche Obern können wir nicht achten und lieben und es ist uns unmöglich, Ihnen Herz und Gewissen in der hl. Beichte [...]« Ibid., 863.

129 »Teuerster Vater, Sie wollen gnädigst verzeihen, dass ich aus Furcht meinen Namen verschweige. Gewiss würde der hochw. Herr Generalsuperior auch mir sagen, wenn er von meinem Namen hörte: ›Bis 3 Uhr haben sie das Haus zu verlassen.« Ibid., 864.

130 Cf. STEGMAIER, Mutter Maria Stollenwerk, pp. LXIII–LXV.

131 However, while Rome, according to an Italian translation of the letter filed in the Propaganda Fide's historical archive, at least acknowledged the protest of the nun(s), the effects remained marginal. Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 340, 866–870.

an inquiry into the situation in Steyl by the bishop in charge, the institutional status quo remained unchanged. Since independence from the male institution and the subordination to Roman jurisdiction were the declared objectives anyway, in 1906 ecclesiastical authorities refrained from interference.

In fact, it was not until 1909/1910 that the situation started to change. In December 1909, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's religious elites from across the world gathered in their Motherhouse on the occasion of the congregation's first general chapter. In the course of this reunion, the first elections took place which confirmed Mother Superior Theresia Messner in office. Counseling about the congregation's future development, the capitulars confirmed their commitment toward independent management. By Canon Law, the question of a women's congregation's management was linked to its ecclesiastical status. In order to raise its status from a diocesan institute to a congregation approved by Rome, a women's congregation had to administrate itself and independently from male institutions. Consequently, once the Servants of the Holy Spirit's leading committee had officially (and unanimously) voted in favor of the goal to gain papal approval, changing policies were enacted in order to prepare subsequent steps. Theresia Messner established contact with the responsible Bishop of Roermond, who not only approved this decision but, moreover, demanded decisive efforts in this regard.

The revised constitutions of 1910 must thus be seen as an interim solution with regard to the production of inner-congregational authority. Firstly, the capitulars ruled that the women's congregation be managed independently by their mother superior jointly with the four elected members that constituted the so-called leading committee<sup>132</sup>. Secondly, the Society of the Divine Word was granted influence with the appointment of a male general director through the bishop in charge. This general director functioned as the bishop's representative and was still equipped with considerable rights to interfere (e.g. in personnel questions). Extending this model to the mission fields, the general director appointed priests on location who were responsible for the nuns' management in certain matters. As a result of the entangled histories between Janssen's male and female foundations and their overlapping geographical spheres of activity, all positions were filled with the Society of the Divine Word's own local directors<sup>133</sup>. Ultimately, it was only shortly before the Servants of the Holy Spirit's second general chapter, held in 1922, that General Director Hermann auf der Heide resigned. In 1922, the capitulars voted for the union with Rome. The Roman *decretum laudis*, the decree that officially initiated the shift to papal jurisdiction, was issued in 1925<sup>134</sup>. By

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132 Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, pp. 30f.

133 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 32f.

134 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 859, 407–409.

then, the nuns had assumed full control of their economic affairs. In 1928 they purchased an estate in Rome to where in 1937 they moved their so-called generalate, the congregation's administrative center<sup>135</sup>. Ultimately, in 1938 their religious rule and constitutions were recognized and confirmed by the Propaganda Fide. Therewith, in accordance with Canon Law, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's vow of obedience was directed to the pope as their ultimate religious superior; moreover, they were responsible to the bishops in their respective sphere of activity<sup>136</sup>.

### *Training, selection and missionary appointment*

During the early years of the Servants of the Holy Spirit, Arnold Janssen also defined the system that framed the nuns' secular education. From the outset, the congregation was conceptualized as an institution that provided the training of its members within its own framework. At first, it was the founder in person who instructed the novices but as the need grew for educated women who could take over the classes, he soon entrusted candidates holding teacher certificates with the provision of secular education (i.e. German classes) for their fellow nuns and novices. In 1893, when work among German emigrants in Argentina was to become the nuns' first overseas sphere of activity, Janssen added foreign language teaching to the syllabus. Practically, he chose seven students whom he taught Spanish from behind the grill in the convent's parlor, a task that was subsequently performed also by other priests. One year later, he started English classes which were being given by an Anglophone nun who had entered the congregation in 1900<sup>137</sup>. At that time, language training was mainly conceptualized as a method to screen potential candidates for service abroad. In Janssen's eyes, future missionary nuns first and foremost had to demonstrate their ability to study foreign languages<sup>138</sup>. Hence, the most talented candidates were selected to receive a more sophisticated training in order to become the future missionary teachers in the congregation's overseas missionary girls' schools.

In 1895, Janssen opened what was commonly called the »missionary seminary« in the Motherhouse<sup>139</sup>. Alongside two priests, it was the better educated nuns who provided the lessons to their fellows. In the first year, the semi-

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135 Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 42.

136 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 32.

137 Cf. BORNEMANN, Arnold Janssen, pp. 238f.; SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 21.

138 Practically, Janssen divided the students into potential candidates for work in the fields of mission and in Europe as measured by their course achievements in the study of English and Spanish. Cf. BORNEMANN, Arnold Janssen, p. 239.

139 Significantly, he had done so without conferring with the congregation's female leaders. Cf. STEGMAIER, *Mutter Maria Stollenwerk*, p. LXIII.

nary which, depending on the exercise courses, lasted between six and eight semesters, was attended by eighteen nuns<sup>140</sup>. Although formalized, the seminary did not constitute a state-approved educational institution but followed its own syllabus. Apart from elementary education, language training (i.e. English, Spanish and French) and religious instruction the subjects studied involved music classes, stitching, needlework, air dressing and nursery. Until 1900, it was Janssen himself who functioned as the director of studies and chaired the examinations. By 1905, he turned the responsibility for the missionary seminary over to the nuns<sup>141</sup>, who, in addition, established a candidacy in which young girls from the age of sixteen (and later fourteen) could receive training as missionary teachers or nurses. Put up in separated accommodations in the Motherhouse, these girls lived and worked according to a slightly alleviated (compared with the nuns) order of the day and returned to their families during holidays. In this almost monastic environment, their days were structured by school, study and domestic work<sup>142</sup>. Once they reached the compulsory age of twenty, the candidates could apply for admission to the postulancy, a preliminary stage to the novitiate<sup>143</sup>.

During their stay in Steyl, all candidates were to become acquainted with the congregation's worldwide activities. They attended the farewell ceremonies for departing sisters, read the letters coming in from abroad and met nuns who had returned to the Motherhouse for physical recreation. Besides, visiting priests read lectures to the missionary seminary about Janssen's missionaries' spheres of activity in the various parts of the globe. As we learn from a letter which a candidate (and later missionary nun in New Guinea) wrote to her family in 1906 recounting her mother a slide show by one of the Society of the Divine Word's priests she had attended, such lectures were based on the introduction of the Catholic missionary world seen through the lenses of Janssen's institutions. Departing nuns were familiar with both the kind of representation of the missionary situation and the religious geographies the missionaries constructed. Besides, the institutional bond between these young candidates and their future colleagues in the fields connected them closely to the scenes they observed. In 1906, Maria Josepha Krämer (1888–1944), the later Sister Constantina<sup>144</sup>, summarized the slide show she had attended as follows:

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140 Cf. *ibid.*, p. XXXVIII.

141 Cf. BORNEMANN, Arnold Janssen, p. 240.

142 Cf. AG SSps PNG 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Sr. Constantina Krämer an ihre Familie, 29.2.1906.

143 Cf. NEUSS, Die Steyler Missionsschwestern, p. 77.

144 Sister Constantina Krämer (1888–1944) was a trained teaching nun who arrived in New Guinea in 1913.

There we saw the most various types of people, Indians, Negroes, Kanaka, and cannibals. We saw the assiduous missionary surrounded by his little black pupils or workers. We could also see our good sisters with their schoolgirls, the diversity of plants growing there, the missionary stations and the huts of the poor black heathens [...]<sup>145</sup>.

An important novelty was introduced to the congregation's educational system in 1929, when a state-approved secondary school opened in the Servants of the Holy Spirit's Motherhouse (its first students graduated in 1934). The missionary seminary was maintained in parallel. At that time, future missionary teachers, moreover, were to complete a two-year course on pedagogy<sup>146</sup>. In addition, the congregation opened up hospitals some of which had affiliated nurses' training schools, where future women missionaries were trained and gained work experience<sup>147</sup>. In 1940, a new type of religious seminary, which involved the study of foreign language catechism, was established in Steyl. Its graduates were accorded the *missio canonica*, the ecclesiastical authorization to give religious instruction. Besides, the congregation's expansion in Europe (e.g. Austria, Germany and the Netherlands) entailed the partial transfer of missionary training to other women's convents. Thus, it may be concluded that while during the first half of the twentieth century the Servants of the Holy Spirit's missionary training was becoming decentralized and more professionalized, it continued to take place within their own congregational framework<sup>148</sup>.

However, it was only a limited number of candidates that were admitted to this type of intellectual training<sup>149</sup>. From the outset, the majority of the congregation members belonged to the so-called »working sisters«, whose train-

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145 »Dort sahen wir die verschiedensten Arten von Menschen, Indianer, Neger, Kanaken und Menschenfresser. Den eifrigen Missionar erblickten wir umgeben von seinen kleinen schwarzen Schulkindern oder Arbeitern. Auch unsere guten Schwestern mit ihren Schulkindern durften wir sehen, die verschiedenen Pflanzenarten, die dort wachsen, die Missionsstationen und die Hütten der armen schwarzen Heiden [...]« AG SSpS PNG 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Sr. Constantina Krämer an ihre Familie, 9.12.1906.

146 A one-year pedagogical seminary was introduced in 1929, which congregational elites on the occasion of the general chapter held in 1934 decided to expand. Cf. SOETE, Geschichte, p. 21.

147 Before 1914, when the Servants of the Holy Spirit's had opened up their first hospital in the Dutch town of Kerkrade, future missionary nurses were occasionally offered the possibility to gain work experience at a hospital of the Vincentian Sisters of Charity in the German town of Bochum. Cf. NEUSS, Die Steyler Missionsschwestern, p. 76.

148 With the exception of the secondary school in the Motherhouse, which was closed down by force after 1939 due to the occupation by German military forces, the various seminaries underwent a gradual expansion. The Steyl-based secondary school was reopened in 1950. Cf. SOETE, Geschichte, pp. 21f.

149 By 1919, for instance, at a moment when the congregation counted 1,267 members, only 190 nuns had graduated from the missionary seminary. Although an upward trend can be observed, the balance between »working« and »teaching« nuns remained uneven. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 21 and 199.

ing focused on the instruction in a range of manual skills (i.e. needlework, cooking, making preserves, gardening and laundering). Although the Servants of the Holy Spirit never acknowledged any class distinction (into, for instance, choir and lay nuns) among its members, an individual nun's educational career would nevertheless shape her future path. Depending on the type of training they received, individuals either belonged to what they called »working« or »teaching sisters«<sup>150</sup>. In contrast to the »teaching sisters«, who spent a considerable part of their training studying, the »working sisters« were mainly occupied in the convent's kitchen, the laundry, the craftsroom or the printing press. In addition, they provided gardening, engaged as sextons and baked altar bread<sup>151</sup>. Apart from pursuing domestic work in their own convents, the Servants of the Holy Spirit also did the laundry and sometimes cooking for the Society of the Divine Word's friars and priests worldwide.

A nun's educational path would, moreover, shape her future missionary career. While graduates from the missionary seminary had high chances of being sent abroad, »working nuns« might never leave Europe but would continue to serve in the Motherhouse for a lifetime. For them, missionary work resembled that of the congregation's founding mothers in that it consisted in the provision of praying and other support to the venture of evangelization. In any case, being appointed for oversea service meant being selected among many. By 1906, the congregation counted around 500 members, only 200 of whom were actually living abroad<sup>152</sup>. It can be assumed that the announcement of the appointees' names by the congregational elites indeed did create tensions in the communities<sup>153</sup>. Since during the period of education usually no geographical specialization was made, the nuns, as a rule, were not informed whether, when and where they were going to leave. Although they could express their geographic preferences<sup>154</sup>, the assignment for a mission was the superiors' decision and the only (unlikely) possibility that appointed candidates had was to reject<sup>155</sup>. As will be seen in the following chapter, many nuns were enthusiastic about the prospect of going abroad. In her his-

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150 Rather than by the distinction into »working« and »teaching« nuns an individual nuns' position in the congregational hierarchy was determined by her office (as for instance head of a convent) and the state (temporary or perpetual) and date of her vows. Cf. *ibid.* pp. 35f.

151 Cf. NEUSS, *Die Steyler Missionsschwester*, p. 73.

152 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 340, 861–864.

153 Prior to the first general chapter it was Janssen who, together with the mother superior, decided upon the nuns' missionary assignments. After January 1910, this decision lay exclusively with the mother superior. Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 34.

154 The SVD priests, by contrast, had the chance to choose a particular geographical setting. Interestingly, Togo turned out to be a much more popular destination than New Guinea. Cf. Arnold Janssen, 1.8.1901, in: ALT (ed.), *Arnold Janssen – Letters*, p. 76.

155 Thus, a retired missionary nun and a bookkeeper by training, who had left for the mission in 1956, admitted in an interview that even though she was not entirely happy with her superiors' choice of place, she accepted the appointment. If she had declined, she explained, she might

tory of the congregation (1914), Sister Perboyre Neuß noted that the subject »mission« was a popular theme during recreation times which was, moreover, fuelled through the letters by fellow nuns from all across the globe. Usually, the congregational superiors consulted about the annual appointments in early spring, an exciting period that the nuns consequently referred to as the outbreak of »missionary fever«<sup>156</sup>. Every year, a joint farewell ceremony took place in the Motherhouse which was attended by the entire community as well as by the departing nuns' relatives<sup>157</sup>. However, as the following example shows, the announcement of the mission assignment might as well occur on short notice. In February 1902, a German nun wrote from the steamship to Togo:

Things always seem to happen when you least expect them. And this has been true for me as well; consider, only eight days have passed since Sister Thaddäa and I were called to the parlor, and now we have been swimming on the open sea for already for days<sup>158</sup>.

The following chapter ties in with the issue of departure, introducing the traveling nuns' reflections, perceptions and emotions that prepared and shaped their arrival abroad.

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not have been given a second chance to go abroad. Interview conducted in St. Koloman (Stockerau, Austria) on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

156 Cf. NEUSS, *Die Steyler Missionsschwestern*, p. 35.

157 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Sr. Constantina Krämer an ihre Familie, 25.5.1911; Briefe von Sr. Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, 14.7.1931.

158 »Unverhofft kommt oft.« So darf auch ich wohl sagen; denn es sind gerade acht Tage her, dass Schw. Thaddäa und ich so schnell zum Sprechzimmer gerufen wurden, und jetzt schwimmen wir schon längst auf hoher See.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Immaculata Göcke, 18.2.1903.



# 1. Traveling Nuns

In December 1903, a group of three nuns happily approached Tumleo, the island that accommodated the first Catholic headquarters in what was then Kaiser-Wilhelmsland, part of German New Guinea. Situated near Berlinhafen, the German plantation and trading post in the north of the mainland, Tumleo Island was located on the way to the German maritime connection between the colonies in the South Seas and Australia and Asia, respectively<sup>1</sup>. Having traveled by train from Steyl to Genoa, the three nuns had boarded a steamship to take them to Singapore on a journey lasting about one month. They had changed ships in Singapore and boarded the *Prinz Waldemar*, a steamer run by the North German Lloyd, which called at the ports in German New Guinea<sup>2</sup>. After another two-week sea voyage, the nuns eventually approached their travel destination. When word about their forthcoming arrival spread among the passengers on board of the *Prinz Waldemar*, the nuns started to look out for Tumleo Island and its inhabitants. In her account of the journey to her fellow sisters in Europe one of them recalled her first impressions of the island and its inhabitants, also reflecting on her (last) memories from the steamship:

There, all at once we saw a big sailboat with a German flag. [...] Now the island began to fill with life. The reverend fathers and brothers in their white robes contrasted significantly with the black figures surrounding them. After a short moment, a nice little boat filled with black and white occupants headed for our steamer. Ready to go, we were all standing on board – not only all of us, but almost all the occupants of the ship, from the captain down to the lowest ranks. They all wanted to see how the blacks would react to us and what face we would put on when meeting the savages<sup>3</sup>.

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1 Cf. Tumleo, in: Heinrich SCHNEE (ed.), *Deutsches Koloniallexikon* 3, Leipzig 1920, p. 557, and »Berlinhafen« in: SCHNEE (ed.), *Deutsches Koloniallexikon* 1, Leipzig 1920, p. 184. For the German shipping connection and the transport of passengers to and across the Pacific colonies cf. Arnold KLUDAS, *Deutsche Passagierschiffs-Verbindungen 1886–1914*, in: HIERY (ed.), *Die deutsche Südsee*, pp. 156–176.

2 The *Prinz Waldemar* was a German steamer operating the routes between Australia and Asia. Particularly constructed for use in the South Seas, it was first put into commission by the Norddeutsche Lloyd in 1903. Cf. KLUDAS, *Deutsche Passagierschiffs-Verbindungen*, p. 167.

3 »Da auf einmal erblickten wir ein großes Segelboot mit einer deutschen Flagge. [...] Jetzt wurde es auch lebendig auf der Insel. Die hochwürdigen Herren Missionare und Brüder in ihren weißen Talaren stachen wesentlich ab von denen sie umgebenden schwarzen Gestalten. Noch ein kleines Weilchen, und ein nettes Boot, gefüllt mit schwarzen und weißen Bewohnern, steuerte unserem Dampfer zu. Wir standen alle reisefertig an Board, aber nicht wir nur allein, sondern ungefähr alle Bewohner des Schiffes, vom Kapitän angefangen bis zur untersten Stufe

Migrating missionaries were curiously looking forward to becoming acquainted with the environment that was to constitute their »new homes« as nuns often put it, seeing the convents where they were going to stay and eventually encountering face-to-face the subjects of their mission, the people among whom they were going to work. In the passage quoted, the writer's first encounter with the alien environment was represented by the German flag. Recalling her first impressions of the people waiting inshore, she produced notions of »black« and »white«, emphasizing the perceived distinction between missionaries and native islanders or, in terms of a cultural discourse of difference, the western civilizer on the one hand and the indigenous »savage« on the other hand. Adjectives like »yellow«, »brown«, »half-black« or »black« were frequently used by nuns on travel in order to describe the indigenous populations of the (increasingly) alien environment they encountered on their way to Africa and the Pacific. Still, the above passage also points in another interesting direction, touching upon the question of the social dimension of transcontinental mobility and the impact of the steamship voyage on both individuals and communities.

The author's explicit reference to the community on board of the steamship or, more precisely, the mention of the fact that all the passengers were curiously watching their reaction to the New Guinean cultural environment implies that during the sea voyage to New Guinea some sort of social grouping had occurred between the nuns and the other passengers. The joint experience of the steamship voyage in combination with the perspective of starting anew in colonial New Guinea was thus represented as a common experience that bonded together the passengers on board of the *Prinz Waldemar* irrespective of their individual (social, religious, etc.) backgrounds. Indulging in a description of the Tumleo Islanders who came over by boat in order to land nuns and goods, the same writer continued her account remembering the last moments on board:

Time was running out; we were already advised to bid farewell. Everyone wished us good luck and good health, which we will indeed require. By the way, I'd like to mention that one day the captain told me that Catholic sisters in fact had more courage to make sacrifices than their Protestant sisters<sup>4</sup>.

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herab. Alle wollten sehen was die Schwarzen mit uns machen und welches Gesicht wir aufsetzen würden beim Entgegenkommen der Wilden.« AG SSps PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Josephine Steiger, 22.12.1903.

4 »Doch jetzt hatten wir keine Zeit mehr; wir wurden schon zum Abschiednehmen ermahnt. Alle wünschten uns Glück und eine gute Gesundheit, die wir ja auch recht nötig haben. Ich möchte hier noch nebenbei bemerken, dass der Herr Kapitän eines Tages zu mir sagte, dass die katholischen Schwestern doch vielmehr Opfermut besäßen als ihre protestantischen Schwestern.« Ibid.

The writer's reference to the issue of health affecting both the passengers on board of the *Prinz Waldemar* and the nuns must be seen in the larger framework of European migration to the tropics. Health care and the threat of perilous sickness (i.e. malaria) were basic concerns that connected Europeans in colonial settings and, in turn, influenced the construction of the colonizer's image that incorporated physical strength. The emphasis the writer placed on the captain's respect for the nuns' work is interesting in two respects. Firstly, as women, the nuns belonged to a subordinate minority in the German colonial enterprise<sup>5</sup>. In the passage quoted, however, this was somehow compensated by the recognition the nuns had obviously gained in the eyes of the captain and fellow passengers. As missionaries they were not only appointees of a powerful institution that contributed to European expansion but, moreover, women who acted in a well-defined sphere of work. It was precisely their official function in the German colonial enterprise by which the nuns distinguished themselves from (the rarely seen) other female travelers, e.g. the wives of colonial administrators, traders or Protestant missionaries. Secondly, the captain's commendation of the nuns' remarkable resolution to make sacrifices must also be discussed in terms of religion or – to be more precise – in terms of the nuns' understanding of piety. »Piety« in a broad Christian understanding refers to a person's religious actions as well as reverence and love for God, which demands expression not only towards God (through religious practice) but also towards his creation, inter alia all humans, through a religious tenor in life. Apart from knowledge and religious feelings or perceptions, the pious life also involves active responses, decision and attitudes<sup>6</sup>. In the nuns' understanding, piety signified the active dedication to serving God and their fellow men. Seen from this angle, the reference to the captain's commendation witnesses to the fact that the nuns' perceived being recognized as acting exceptionally pious; for, their religious beliefs guided their life choices in a way that was, moreover, recognized by others. Emphasizing that it was the Protestant chief officer of a German steamship who explicitly acknowledged the Catholic nuns' greater willingness to make sacrifices as compared with their Protestant counterparts, the writer added a confessional nuance, pointing out that the women religious of the Catholic faith had obtained extraordinary recognition across denominational bound-

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5 Trutz von Trotha, for instance, has described the »white« colonial society in German Togo as a society of men aged between twenty and fifty. Cf. VON TROTHA, *Koloniale Herrschaft*, pp. 208f.

6 Cf. Alfons AUER, *Frömmigkeit als menschliche Grundhaltung*, in: Josef HÖFER/Karl RAHNER (eds), *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 4, Freiburg <sup>2</sup>1960, pp. 400–405, 402f. Greschat has, moreover, emphasized the importance of religious actions when it comes to characterizing piety. Cf. Hans-Jürgen GRESCHAT, *Frömmigkeit I. Religionsgeschichtlich*, in: TRE 11, Berlin 1983, pp. 671–674.

aries. To sum up, the image the writer of the letter sought to outline was that of a group of self-confident Catholic women who had traveled there in a male and mostly Protestant environment. And this image was built on exceptional piety and mutual respect for the fellow passengers on board of the *Prinz Waldemar*, both of which challenged gender and denominational boundaries for European women in colonial settings.

This chapter discusses the travel of nuns from the European Motherhouse to their missions in colonial Togo and New Guinea, respectively and explores the effects that the experience of the passage and mobility in a colonial context had on individuals and communities. Emphasizing the significance of travel for cultural change in history, Eric Leed has argued that »collective and individual identities arise from and are transformed by a process of mutual reflection, identification and recognition in human relationships«<sup>7</sup>. Identities, according to Leed, are not »implicit in the organism or the collective« but »arise from the relations with others«<sup>8</sup>. Mobility thus alters identities and constitutes a significant force that has shaped human history in very basic terms. Leed has introduced the typology of departure, passage and arrival in order to describe the structure of travel and to conceptualize its transforming power. Accordingly, departure, characterized as the detachment of individuals from a familiar context, establishes the motives, first meanings and »the initial identity« of the traveler<sup>9</sup>. In turn, Leed has identified the establishment of bonds and identifications with the new environment as the essence of arrival, thus qualifying it as a process rather than a static moment. Ultimately, territorial passage, the »motion through space«, connects departure and arrival. It replaces the traveler's identification with places and implicates the creation of new social groups as well as the establishment of bonds between strangers<sup>10</sup>.

The Servants of the Holy Spirit's approach to travel was ambiguous. While mobility, on the one hand, was a logical premise of any missionary activity, it was perceived as morally and physically dangerous on the other. In part this perception related to a broader western cultural discourse that characterized the sea as a physical threat to European expansion<sup>11</sup>. Additional issues were rooted in a gendered ecclesiastical culture, according to which the secluded convent constituted the favored model of social control and the restriction of movement formed an important tool by means of which religious superiors

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7 Eric LEED, *The Mind of the Traveler. From Gilgamesh to global Tourism*, New York 1991, p. 20.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 25f.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 15 and 19f.

11 Cf. Bernhard KLEIN/Gesa MACKENTHUN, Einleitung. Das Meer als kulturelle Kontaktzone, in: Bernhard KLEIN/Gesa MACKENTHUN (eds), *Das Meer als kulturelle Kontaktzone. Räume, Reise, Repräsentationen*, Konstanz 2003, pp. 1–16, i.e. 1.

exercised control over their subordinates. Women's convents were conceptualized as controllable, exclusively feminine spaces whose inhabitants lived and socialized largely separated from the outside world and according to a set of specific rules and regulations<sup>12</sup>. As such, convents constituted religious sites that were opposed to the secular world both symbolically and structurally. The nuns' departure for Togo or New Guinea necessarily involved the displacement of individuals as well as their physical separation from the local religious community. For traveling nuns, the transitional phase of the passage was conceived of as a period of time in which they were staying *in* the secular world, which held a series of threats to body and spirit. Religious discipline was considered as the main source of resistance to the corrupting influences of the secular, culturally and religiously hybrid environment the nuns encountered during their travels. Thus, in 1901 a nun wrote from aboard a steamship en route to New Guinea:

What's going on in the world you can in fact tell by the ship's passengers who come from all over the world, – Europeans, Chinese, Mohammedans in a wild mix. [...] Indeed, every morning you have to get prepared well and take care if you are to spend the whole day with them. The elegant Englishmen appear in a way that is scandalous. But thank God we don't lack the opportunity to get strength and energy to steel ourselves against all this with every morning attending three or four holy masses in the smoking room, that is to say when the ship doesn't swing too much<sup>13</sup>.

With departure, the nuns not only stepped out from behind the convent walls symbolically but they literally encountered the (religious and secular) world beyond institutional, national and continental borders. While groups of nuns going to New Guinea counted at least three members and were always accompanied by priests and/or friars, their colleagues bound for Togo often went in pairs only and without any male escort. En route all travelers visited (German and other) convents in Europe and abroad, thus acquiring knowledge of the work of other women's congregations in the diverse locations they passed. Yet, apart from members of religious orders there were other people they would meet on board of the ocean liners such as the crew, colonial

12 For a discussion of the monastery as a social space cf. GUGGLBERGER, »Ich wollte immer nach Afrika!«, pp. 112–115.

13 »Was im Übrigen mit ihr [der Welt] los ist, sieht man hier zur Genüge auf dem Schiff, denn eine ganze Welt ist dort vertreten: Europäer, Chinesen, Mohammedaner, alles im bunten Durcheinander. [...] Wahrlich, jeden Morgen kann man sich gut rüsten und vorsehen, wenn man den ganzen Tag unter diesen sich aufhalten soll. Die vornehmen Engländer besonders kommen in Aufzügen, daß es zum Empören ist. Doch Gott sei Dank fehlt uns nicht die Gelegenheit, uns gegen all diese die nötige Kraft und Stärke zu holen; denn jeden Morgen können wir im Rauchsalon drei bis vier hl. Messen beiwohnen, d.h. wenn das Schiff nicht zu arg schaukelt.« AG SSP PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Philomena Herzog et al. 23.12.1901.

officials, traders, Protestant missionaries and other (male and female, western and other) travelers. It was precisely this mainly male and secular-dominated environment of the steamship heading for Africa and Oceania that shaped the collective and individual identity of missionary nuns, somehow forcing them to translate their mission into enlarged social and cultural terms in order to define their roles in the German colonial world.

Recent scholarship in the cultural sciences has historicized the sea. Based on Mary Louise Pratt's famous concept of the »contact zone«<sup>14</sup>, Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun have suggested approaching the sea as a hybrid zone of cultural contact<sup>15</sup>. They regard, according to structural anthropology, the ship as a social space or a micro-system shaped by the dialogue between a strict hierarchy on board and linguistic, political, ethnic and cultural diversity<sup>16</sup>. The sea thus becomes a space that is marked by its potential to destabilize continental social relations and cultural patterns. Literary scholar John Noyes, discussing gender and mobility in a German colonial novel, has, moreover, questioned the (symbolic) function of the steamship as linking (the social order in) Germany with the colonies<sup>17</sup>. Here, the questions of the possibility of cultural mobility in general and cultural transfer from Germany to the colonies in particular emerge as key issues involving both aspects of culture and social order. In his travelogue »Die Reise nach Afrika« (1913), the German author Emil Ludwig (1881–1948) employed the symbolism of the pyramid in order to illustrate his observations with regard to the social order on board of the ship he characterized as a »ship of men«, for the thirty men on board faced only three women travelers<sup>18</sup>. Ludwig wrote, reflecting on what he called the »sociology on board« of the German East-Africa Line's steamer that took him to Africa in 1912:

I thought: Nowhere in the structure of our society can an area be found over which the big pyramid builds up more obviously than in the hulk of the ocean liner. In the tarantulas, the Arabs fight with the fire at nights, over months. Above them, the white machine operator does the thinking, regulates. Above him, the passengers reside in three classes: on the tween-deck [they are] bent on a new attempt to strike roots on another

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14 Pratt uses the term »contact zone« to describe »the space of colonial encounters« in which »peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict«. Cf. Mary Louise PRATT, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London 2<sup>1993</sup>, p. 6.

15 Cf. KLEIN/MACKENTHUN, *Einleitung*, p. 2.

16 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10.

17 Cf. John NOYES, *Geschlechter, Mobilität und Kulturtransfer*. Lene Haases Roman »Raggys Fahrt nach Südwest«, in: Birte KUNDRUS (ed.), *Phantasiereiche. Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2003, pp. 220–242.

18 Emil LUDWIG, *Die Reise nach Afrika*, Berlin 1913, p. 30.

spot of the globe; then, [there are] the ones who aim to broaden the circle of their position, to attain new goods; and at the top [there are] the gentlemen of life, in white clothes, indulged with every luxury of these times [...] yet willing and obliged to pay deference to the order of the captain, who paces up and down the bridge above their heads, studying the maps, assessing the trip<sup>19</sup>.

In Ludwig's account of the passage to colonial Africa, the social order on board mirrored social stratification according to categories of gender, race and class. The steamship passage indeed was the nuns' first (immediate) experience with the masculine-dominated colonial order<sup>20</sup>. Traveling nuns in colonial settings found themselves being part of both a subordinate (and relatively powerless) group of women and a privileged group of »whites«. The experience of travel provoked observable shifts in their identities as well as the redefinition of their own position as missionary nuns with intersecting aspects of religion, gender and race playing the most prominent roles.

Scholars discussing gender and the writings of women travelers have repeatedly referred to the concept of female exceptionality. Gender identity, according to the theory of the exceptional woman, was constructed on the difference to »other« (»normal« or »ordinary«) women and thus turned into a source of power which apparently enabled female travelers to perform activities that »normal« women were not capable of doing<sup>21</sup>. Recent feminist research on women travelers, however, has criticized this line of argumentation notably for its conceptualizing women as a single category and has pleaded for the acknowledgement of diversity as well as the broader reflection of cultural and social difference with regard to women travelers<sup>22</sup>. Still, the notions of »exceptionality« and »difference« provide a useful framework to discuss the travelogues produced by the Servants of the Holy Spirits in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Missionary nuns constructed the narratives of their passage to Togo and New Guinea, respectively, on the interacting themes of female exceptionality and exceptional piety. They would represent their religiously motivated migration as a sacrificial travel across alien lands, which came to signify their response to a divine calling. Their exceptional image was based on gender and a strong sense of belong-

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19 Ibid., pp. 35f.

20 Women travelers have often been discussed as individuals struggling with social conventions, and little attention was paid to the colonial contexts in which women traveled and wrote. Cf. Sara MILLS, *Discourse of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, London 1991, pp. 3–5.

21 Cf. Susan BASSNETT, *Travel Writing and Gender*, in: Peter HULME/Tim YOUNGS (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 225–241, i.e. 228f.

22 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 228.

ing to that peculiar group of religious men and women who dedicated their lives to the Catholic venture of evangelization and therefore to the salvation of others who were not yet part of the Christian community.

### »Who can describe the Feelings?« – Departure

In 1899, Sister Fridolina Vökt (1857–1926), the head of the Servants of the Holy Spirit's first missionary community established on Tumleo Island, posted a summarized travel account to the European convent in which she recalled the »indefinable« feelings between joy and sorrow that the four nuns had been experiencing when they parted from the central convent, separated from its inhabitants and left for an uncertain future. In the nuns concerned, departure usually produced ambiguous sentiments: On the one hand, being understood as something irrevocable it implied both pain of separation and a sometimes threatening outlook on missionary life. On the other hand, however, with the nuns leaving for religious reasons, the act of departure also marked the first step toward the realization of their »life's goal« (or the »desire of a lifetime«<sup>23</sup>) as they often put it and actively responded to what they referred to as a vocation and experienced as a divine calling. Besides, being appointed for mission also meant to be selected among many candidates and indeed written accounts often evidence a sense of pride. Sister Fridolina described her departure from Steyl in 1899 as follows:

Who can describe the feelings that overcame us when the first beam of light announced the dawning of this memorable day? Joy filled our hearts when we thought of the fulfillment of our long-standing wish to participate immediately in the great venture of evangelization. [...] It was essential now for us to rise above nature, to direct our eyes up [and] to direct our steps afar in good spirits, resting our whole fate in the hand of the Almighty. [...] Now it became clear again how tightly the bonds of love entwine us. We were awaited at the [convent's] gate: When we stepped out, a crowd came up; each sister wanted to shake hands with us once more, perhaps for the last time. [...] Joy and grief fought for mastery; and if not bloody, the struggle was still hard<sup>24</sup>.

23 Thanking her superiors for the mission appointment in New Guinea, a nun explained her vocation experience by the encounter of a purported Chinese nun at her primary school who pretended to collect for the missions. She explained this incident by divine providence: »God used this false woman to lead me to a missionary community. Reverend Mother, you can well believe that the mission appointment is the desire of a lifetime. Warm thanks to God and to you for it!« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Theophane Maier, 1934.

24 »Wer vermag zu schildern mit welchen Gefühlen wir den ersten Lichtstrahl, der uns den Anbruch dieses für uns so denkwürdigen Tages verkündete, begrüßt haben? Freude erfüllte das Herz bei dem Gedanken an die nunmehrige Erfüllung des so lange gehegten Wunsches, an dem großen Werke der Glaubensverbreitung unmittelbarweise mitzuwirken. [...] Es galt nun



Others gave more room to the description of the sorrow they were experiencing at parting from their fellow sisters, and which they related to a broader transcendental significance of their travel and their future engagements as missionaries:

To say farewell was quite hard for us. [...] It was one of the hardest days of my life, the impressions of which I will never forget. Only the thought: ›All for the greater glory of Jesus and the salvation of the immortal souls!‹ provided us with courage and strength [...]<sup>25</sup>.

Necessarily disrupting the community in the Motherhouse, departure posed a challenge to the congregation's strong desire for unity and coherence. This was equally the case for the nuns' first passage from Europe to the respective field of mission as well as for later transfers between the congregation's convents abroad. Leaving behind their colleagues, to whom, according to a gendered ecclesiastical tradition, they referred to as their »fellow sisters«, the nuns separated from the secluded environment of the convent in which they had lived, worked, prayed and studied. However, the physical separation of institutional, religious and imagined bonds between the congregation's members was somewhat compensated for through the exchange of letters and prayers as well as through the maintenance of a joint order of the day. Paradoxically, some nuns suggested that the feeling of belonging to the central convent and its community were even strengthened by departure. For instance, en route to New Guinea in 1903 a nun wrote:

[It's] strange – but it seems like in the distance the bond of sisterly love entwines us even stronger; and sometimes, in the midst of this elegant world, a feeling of yearning creeps over us for the quiet monastic walls and our dear fellow sisters<sup>26</sup>.

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für uns, sich über die Natur zu erheben, den Blick nach Oben zu richten, unser ganzes zukünftiges Schicksal in des Allmächtigen Hand legend, frohen Mutes unsere Schritte nach der Ferne zu lenken. [...] Nun zeigte sich wieder, wie enge das Band der Liebe uns umschloss. Vor der Pforte erwartete man uns: da wir hinaustraten, entstand ein Gedränge, jede wollte uns doch noch einmal und vielleicht auch zum letzten Mal die Hand reichen. [...] Freude und Trauer rangen im Wettkampf um den Sieg; wenngleich nicht blutig, so war doch hart der Kampf.« AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 14.3.1899.

25 »Der Abschied wurde uns recht schwer. [...] Es war eine der schwersten Stunden meines Lebens, deren Eindrücke ich niemals vergessen werde. Nur der Gedanke: ›Alles für Jesus und die Rettung der unsterblichen Seelen!‹ gab uns Mut und Kraft [...].« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Ehrenfrieda Scheffers, 11.1.1912.

26 »Seltsam –, es ist als ob das Band der schwesterlichen Liebe in der Ferne sich noch fester um uns schlinge, und zuweilen beschleicht uns inmitten dieser vornehmen Welt, die uns umgibt, das Gefühl der Sehnsucht nach den stillen Klostermauern, nach unseren lieben Mitschwestern.« AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Josephine Steiger, 13.11.1903.

After the appointees' departure, the exchange of letters and prayers remained as the only means to sustain the connection between the nuns in Europe and abroad. This was equally true for their connection to their relatives. Hence, many nuns characterized their migration to the mission as a spate of departures, which started with the separation from the sisterhood in the Motherhouse and continued with the valediction from particular spots they passed as well as from relatives, who often met them at some point along the railway route to bid them farewell. This narrative of multiple departures, moreover, included the parting from other convents which temporarily accommodated the nuns during their passage. Travel writers constructed and frequently used the metaphor of the missionary nun as a »bird of passage« that was forced to move and never allowed to settle down for any longer period<sup>27</sup>. The nuns in the Motherhouse, in turn, would pray for the safe arrival of their sisters on the move. There is no doubting that traveling nuns did believe in the power of their colleagues' prayers for which they would reciprocate by posting extended and entertaining travelogues to Europe. Thus, writing and praying served to bridge distance and to substitute the personal contact between the fellow sisters in Europe and abroad, enabling the travelers to share their experiences with the ones they left behind. One nun, prior to narrating her experiences on her passage to Togo and the immediate continuation of the voyage to the outpost convent in the coastal town of Aného, thanked the community in the Motherhouse for its collective spiritual support. In her perception, it was notably the European sisters' powerful prayers that had ensured the travelers' safe arrival: »First of all, thank you for praying the whole of us across the wide sea so well and me even all the way down to Klein-Popo [Aného]«<sup>28</sup>.

To be sure, spiritual support was not the only reason why migrating nuns thought of their counterparts in Europe. Although the pre-Vatican II concept of religious sisterhood dictated »sisterly love« as the dominant ethical principle that demanded an egalitarian relationship among the nuns of equal rank<sup>29</sup>, social life in the convent was also based on age. Nuns who entered the congregation at the same period consequently passed the candidacy and

27 AG SSps 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Dominica Craghs et al., 28.10.1900.

28 »Zunächst danke ich Ihnen, dass Sie uns so gut über das weite Meer hinüber- und mich jetzt auch noch nach Klein-Popo gebetet haben.« AG SSps 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Norberta Vaßen, 7.8.1904.

29 Sisterly love as a monastic principle relates to the old self-designation of Christians as brothers and sisters, which lay at the base of the formation of brotherhoods and sisterhoods since the early Church. In the monastic context, »sisterly love« was defined by mutual respect and demanded an egalitarian relationship between all nuns of equal rank. Until Vatican II, so-called particular friendship, meaning the preference of individual members of the community over others, constituted a taboo in female monastic communities. Cf. Vera DEISSNER, *Gottes Mägde oder christliche Kommunardinnen? Zum Selbstbild von Frauen im Nonnenkloster*, in: Ulrike KRASBERG (ed.), *Religion und weibliche Identität. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf Wirklichkeiten*, Marburg 1999, pp. 19–34, i.e. 28f. More generally, cf. Gerhard KRAUSE/Robert STUPPER-

the novitiate together. Nuns of equal »congregational age« often attended the same preparatory classes and shared one table during meals and recreation. Often they did their religious exercises together and took their vows at the same date. Thus, despite the Catholic ideal of egalitarianism and the proscription of friendship in women's convents, individual nuns formed part of sub-communities in the Motherhouse that shared many aspects of day-to-day (religious) life and experience. These informal sub-communities were disrupted by the departure of individual members, who would scatter all over the congregation's branches on five continents. Hence, traveling nuns also addressed messages to individual colleagues:

What happened to my dear companions at the table chaired by rev. Sister Florentine? [...] Dear Sister Ludow., Notburga, Borgias, Lucia and Canisia; what a quiet and pleasant life you must have now that you are rid of me? [...] Don't forget me! Isn't there anybody of my classmates who might follow me hither<sup>30</sup>?

With the appointment for a specific mission field, the nuns became part of another sub-group, namely members of the congregation working and living in one geographic region. These women not only shared their concern with the development of the Church in a particular setting but also the knowledge and experiences which informed their missionary identities. Even though the nuns employed in Togo went home for several months every couple of years, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's »African« sub-community was maintained over the distance. Usually, all nuns traveling to or staying in Togo dedicated some lines in their letters particularly to those Togo-based nuns (mostly addressed as »Africans«) that were currently in the Motherhouse. In 1905, Sister Eulalia Hewing wrote to the Motherhouse en route to Togo: »And particularly cheerful greetings to the Africans who stayed home!«<sup>31</sup>.

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NICH, Bruderschaften/Schwesternschaften/Kommunitäten, in: TRE 7, Berlin 1981, pp. 195–207.

30 »Was macht denn meine liebe Tischgesellschaft unter dem Vorsitze der ehrw. Schwester Florentine? [...] Liebe Schwester Ludow., Notburga, Borgias, Lucia und Canisia, was müssen sie jetzt für ein ruhiges und zufriedenes Leben haben, wo Sie mich los sind! [...] Vergesst mein nicht! Ist nicht noch jemand von meinen Schulgenossen da, der mir hierhin folgen möchte?« AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Josephine Steiger, 22.12.1903.

31 »Noch einen extra herzlichen Gruß an die zurückgebliebenen Afrikanerinnen!« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reisberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Eulalia Hewing, 12.8.1905.

*Regulating the passage – travel communities*

Transcontinental expansion challenged the Servants of the Holy Spirit's hierarchic structure with regard to both collective relations and individual relationships to superiors. In contrast to the principle of egalitarianism that structured the relations among the congregation's ordinary members, their relationship to superiors was defined vertically and demanded total subordination. When entering the congregation, all nuns vowed obedience alongside the two other religious vows of chastity and poverty. However, from the individual's point of view, the acceptance of authority was not the only aspect of her relationship to superiors. While obedience constituted the dominant ethics, openness and mutual trust were equally emphasized by the nuns when they were reflecting on their individual relationship to the mother superior. The vertical relations between subordinated nuns and their superiors were idealized in familial terms: Referring to the female head of the congregation as their »spiritual mother« the nuns conceived of themselves as the latter's »obedient daughters«. Parting travelers frequently lamented about the lack of possibility to hold personal conversation with their »spiritual mother«, who usually gave them company until the train station where she bid them farewell. Some of them later expressed the difficulties they experienced in seeking to substitute the relationship with local superiors for their particular relationship with the mother superior in Steyl.

Congregational elites aimed to counteract the loosening of collective ties and hierarchic structures that travel and migration tended to entail. Therefore, prior to departure traveling communities were established, with one member being appointed temporary superior. In making such appointments, the conventional religious hierarchy came into play, which was either based on a nuns' office or, in the case that only nuns of equal rank traveled together, on their experience in convent life. Practically, the date of a nun's entry into the congregation was decisive for her position in the hierarchy, for the Servants of the Holy Spirit do not recognize a religious class distinction in terms of choir and lay members. Consequently, what was decisive when it came to the stratification of female travel communities were both the (temporary or eternal) state of vows and the date of the profession. Since most nuns did not take their perpetual vows before departure, their congregational »age« was determined by the date of their temporary vows<sup>32</sup>. In the capacity of a temporary superior, the »voyage mother«, as her subordinates used to address her, was expected to adapt the congregation's rule to the shifting conditions

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32 Postulants, followed by novices and professed nuns who had no official post, constituted the bottom of the congregational hierarchy. For postulants, the date of entry to the postulate was decisive, while the position of novices was ultimately determined based on the date of their admission to the novitiate. Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 36.

and to supervise its observance. The efforts of congregational elites to counter any lack of supervision during the passage to the mission fields went to such lengths that – even in the case that nuns traveled to Togo in pairs only – one nun was appointed superior.

In October 1896, Sister Bernarda Althoff (1872–1897) was appointed head of the first group of four nuns bound for Togo where they were to establish the congregation's pioneer convent in Africa. Before departing for Africa via Manchester, where she spent three months at a British teaching congregation in order to improve her command of English, Sister Bernarda posted a letter to the mother superior. In this letter she reconfirmed her all-embracing loyalty to her superiors and the congregation. Furthermore, she reconfirmed her subordination to the congregation's religious rule and promised to respect all guidelines put forward by its authorities. She wrote:

It shall be my serious endeavor, first of all, to be and to remain an obedient daughter of our holy rule and congregation. Furthermore, I aim to comply most faithfully with all your orders, wishes and suggestions that you will give me for the travel and the mission<sup>33</sup>.

In the same letter, Sister Bernarda Althoff acknowledged the importance to maintain the »justified boundaries« in associating with the Society of the Divine Word's priests and monks who happened to be on the same steamship. According to the congregational guidelines, interaction on board between the missionaries of both sexes was to be kept at a minimum level. Sister Bernarda, moreover, confirmed her efforts to keep the group of women closely together and to avoid public places where their »innocence or virtue might be in danger«<sup>34</sup>.

Generally speaking, the traveling nuns' association with men, be they secular passengers, crew members, priests or monks, was regulated by rigid restrictions. Nuns bound for Togo made the three-week passage in groups of two, three or four, and – depending on the situation – with or without male company. The missionary communities traveling to New Guinea, on the other hand, always included priests, who were to guarantee religious service and sacramental practice throughout the voyage, which lasted up to three months. In the case of mixed travel communities, the appointed male supe-

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33 »Es soll mein ernstliches Bestreben sein, an erster Stelle selbst eine gehorsame Tochter unserer hl. Regel und Genossenschaft zu bleiben. Auch will ich allen ihren Befehlen, Wünschen und Ratschlägen, welche Sie uns sowohl für die Reise als auch für die Mission geben werden, aufs treueste zu entsprechen suchen.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Bernarda Althoff, 26.10.1896.

34 Ibid.

rior represented the last instance in the temporary hierarchy although his female counterpart was, at least theoretically, in charge of all matters concerning the nuns only. In most matters, priests and friars on the one hand and nuns on the other were expected to operate separately. In 1899, a nun reported from the passage to New Guinea that Janssen's nuns and priests only met at the dinner table and that the other passengers were not even aware that both groups belonged to affiliated institutions<sup>35</sup>. The endlessly repeated (and certainly ideally suited from the nuns' point of view) phrase with regard to interaction between the sexes said that the attitudes between nuns and priests should be »respectful but reserved«<sup>36</sup>.

In practice, however, the interaction between nuns and priests went beyond the sphere of religious service. In fact, there is much to suggest that the latter's presence on board was considerably determined by the attitudes of the former. During the passage, gendered power relations came into play, blurring the ideally separated, in terms of gender, hierarchies in the missionary community. Traveling nuns ran the risk of enhanced male supervision – an aspect that, forming part of missionary life in general, will be discussed in the next chapter. At this point it should just be kept in mind that the congregational as much as the ecclesiastical hierarchy acknowledged only one legitimate male superior for the nuns. By maintaining distance to priests, they potentially escaped male interference thus ensuring their independence. Still, priests who would tell nuns what to do are omnipresent in the travelogues. This again suggests that, notwithstanding their restricted legitimate power over the nuns, they were largely accepted as authorities in most religious and secular matters. During the passage, priests, for instance, decided whether or not the nuns should accompany them on land excursions and where and how these would be spent. Besides, with the responsibility for the Society of the Divine Word's finances lying with the priests, the nuns, even though they had small travel budgets at their disposal, also experienced economic dependence<sup>37</sup>.

As the travelogues reveal, priests figured as the nuns' translators, informants and protectors. With regard to their transportation to the European ports of departure, the women travelers often portrayed priests as their active guides, whereas themselves they depicted as passive participants. In making a point of their inexperience in moving through secular public spheres, the

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35 Cf. AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 13.2.1899.

36 »Respectful but reserved« is the phrase that was used by the majority of nuns to describe their attitude toward both religious and secular men on board. For an extended description cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Bernarda Althoff, 26.10.1896.

37 Cf. AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, The New Guinea Travelers, 23.6.1905.

travel writers indeed fell back on conventional (ecclesiastical) gender roles. There is, in fact, much to suggest that the nuns were neither sufficiently prepared nor equipped to manage their tours through foreign European cities en route to the ports of departure on their own. The following passage, in which a nun described the day that a mixed group of missionary travelers spent in the city of Milan, is taken from a travelogue dated from 1905:

I would like to add that the bulk of us moving through the streets must indeed have been a funny picture. Everyone would look at us. I felt sorry for the reverend fathers. Since we didn't know the direction, we had to make an effort not to lose sight of them and follow them up<sup>38</sup>.

In the writer's perception it was particularly the nuns' appearance that drew the attention of the city-dwellers while the presence of priests in urban spaces apparently did not cause any excitement. Although the sources remain largely silent with regard to the traveling friars' and priests' dress styles, it can be assumed that it was the nuns' elaborate dresses that accounted for the great public attention in early-twentieth-century European urban spaces.

Up to 1910, the Servants of the Holy Spirit traveled to the port of departure, usually Genoa or Hamburg, by train, dressed in the congregation's historically first religious habit. Designed by founder Arnold Janssen, the habit consisted of a light-blue dress, a scapular (that is, the long garment worn over the dress) of the same color, a white veil and a dark-blue coat (Figure 1). According to Sister Salesiana Soete, it was the conspicuous (because unusually light-blue and white) coloring of the habit, which made it an inappropriate dress for missionary nuns. Inevitably moving into public domains, missionary nuns would have needed clothes that attracted as little attention as possible<sup>39</sup>. Dark colors (i.e. black) seemed to better meet this requirement. In 1909, the capitulars of the congregation's first general chapter unanimously decided to change the light-blue habit for a new dark-blue ensemble of dress, scapular, veil and coat (Figure 2)<sup>40</sup>. Consequently, the only items of white color – as the color symbolizing humility and designed to call to mind the purity of Mary – the Servants of the Holy Spirit were supposed to wear were the headgear, the collar and a belt<sup>41</sup>.

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38 »Möchte noch erwähnen, dass es doch ein komisches Bild sein musste, wenn wir alle über die Straßen gingen. Alles sah uns nach. Ich habe die hochw. Herren bedauert. Da wir keinen Weg wußten, mußten wir machen, daß wir sie im Auge behielten und hinter ihnen herliefen.« Ibid.

39 Cf. SOETE, Geschichte, p. 33.

40 Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 1 1909, Protokoll, p. 31.

41 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 31.



Figure 1: First group of nuns that traveled to Togo (1.11.1896);  
AG SSpS Album Schwestern S.S.S. Afrika, 1.11.1896.





Figure 2: Group of nuns that traveled to New Guinea (2.8.1911);  
AG SSpS Album Schwestern S.S.S. Neu Guinea, 2.8.1911.

All nuns who departed after 1910 were thus clothed in dark-blue<sup>42</sup>. Upon arrival they replaced the congregation's urban habit with another, completely white one<sup>43</sup>.

Due to their peculiar clothing and behavior, nuns were easily recognized as both agents and symbols of the Catholic Church in general and a female way of religious life in particular. As the travelogues show, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's presence in public space produced a variety of responses. Generally speaking, the people's reaction toward nuns reflected the value attributed to them by the respective society. Drawing the respect of Catholic circles in many European settings, nuns' religious habits, on the other hand, might make them an easy target for (sexist) anti-Catholic discrimination or harassment<sup>44</sup>. Interestingly, whenever missionary travelers experienced hostile reactions by bystanders, nuns would relate these incidents to their own presence in European public spheres rather than to the appearance of priests. At times, they even referred to the priests as actually protecting them against the harassment of strangers. In 1907, for example, a group of eight nuns on their way to Genoa by train, after arriving at Chiasso, a marshaling yard situated at the Swiss-Italian boarder, saw themselves confronted with hostilities by working class people. This is how one of them described the people's reaction to the group that had entered the waiting room:

Soon, a bunch of ordinary folks such as baggage porters, workers, etc. had gathered around us and started shouting abuse at us. One baggage porter flew into a rage. He built himself up in front of us and shook his fist. »Do we already have to give our lives?« I thought and imagining that our last moment had come I called all the Saints. The reverend fathers and brothers positioned themselves closely in front of us; and if they hadn't been there, we would have got beaten up<sup>45</sup>.

42 The connection between the change of the habit and superiors' considerations about the nuns' movements in public spaces, moreover, becomes clear when comparing the religious dress of missionary nuns with that of their contemplative sisters. While the former, after 1910, were supposed to be dressed in dark blue, the latter, who lived and prayed exclusively behind the convent's walls, continued to wear their pink religious habit. The pink coloring of the contemplative nuns' dress was designed to symbolize the »blaze of love of the Holy Spirit«. In addition, they used a white scapular and a long white veil. Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter I 1909, Protokoll, p. 31.

43 Cf. AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1908–1913, Sr. Itha Schulte, 21.5.1909 and Sr. Nicola Sauermilch et al. 7.6.1913.

44 Cf. Elizabeth KUHN, *The Habit. A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns*, New York 2003, pp. 120 and 136. On the social and political status of the Church and anti-Catholic attitudes in several European countries around 1900, cf. Martin FRIEDRICH, *Kirche im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch. Das 19. Jahrhundert (Zugänge zur Kirchengeschichte 8)*, Stuttgart 2006, pp. 123–129.

45 »Bald hatte sich eine Menge gemeines Volk, wie Packträger, Arbeiter, etc., um uns versammelt, und das Schimpfen ging erst recht los. Ein Packträger war rasend. Er stellte sich vor uns und drohte mit der Faust. »Müssen wir denn hier schon unser Leben lassen?« dachte ich und rief alle Heiligen an, glaubte ich doch, unser letztes Stündlein hätte geschlagen. Die hochwürdigen Her-

Quite obviously, this incident was experienced by the nuns as truly threatening and left them with a feeling of discomfort and vulnerability. And it was explicitly the female half of the group that the writer of this account identified as the target of anti-Catholic harassment, whereas the attendant priests at first remained uninvolved in the scene and then figured as the nuns' protectors only. Even though it is not possible to judge whether or not these nuns had actually been in danger, the sources do show that their colleagues back in Europe took the incident seriously. The incident found its way into the congregation's shared knowledge on traveling routes, so anyone heading for Genoa would give a detailed account of what had happened at Chiasso. Most importantly, however, the example shows that the main reason why traveling nuns experienced the train ride as potentially threatening was that they were thus exposed to the reactions of the secular world. The threat of discrimination was rooted in both their gender and religion. Their peculiar attire and behavior made them easy targets of anti-Catholic actions, their appearance made them conspicuous figures moving through public space – their sphere of activity proper, after all, was located behind convent walls<sup>46</sup>.

Generally speaking, accounts of train rides to the respective port of departure reflect the uneasiness that the nuns felt about moving in public spheres, which caused a feeling of vulnerability resulting from the notion that their presence *in* the world conflicted with their religious ideal of remoteness from the secular world. The authors of the travelogues often conceived of the congregational framework and the protecting walls of the Motherhouse as a Catholic nun's actual area of life which is why they depicted them as a desired space of retreat or source of security. One of the traveling nuns almost nostalgically referred to the Motherhouse as her »golden cage«<sup>47</sup>. Hence, while religious travelers idealized the convent as the private and segregated space for women religious, European (Protestant) metropolises were seen as particularly scary terrains. There was hardly any nun boarding the steamship in the port city of Hamburg who would not have expressed her relief about getting there by coach and not being forced to expose herself to the eyes of the city-dwellers. Experiencing Hamburg as a modern, socially hybrid and Protestant city, they arrived at the conclusion that the city was altogether »poor of faith«<sup>48</sup>. In other cases, it was time and place that, in the nuns' eyes, produced

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ren und die ehrwürdigen Brüder stellten sich dicht vor uns, und wären diese nicht dagewesen, so hätten wir sicher Prügel bekommen.« AG SSsP PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Paschalis Klein, 31.5.1907.

46 Kuhns has reported on American nuns who in order to avoid harassment traveled in secular clothes. Cf. KUHN, *The Habit*, p. 121.

47 AG SSsP 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Notburga Puthé/Sr. Norberta Vaßen, 12.7.1904.

48 For instance, in 1900 a nun recounted an incident that had taken place at the Hamburg train station: »At the Hamburg train station, a rather uneducated man told Maria [a woman who

secular travelers' attention. In 1904, two nuns en route to Togo wrote about a nightly waiting time they spent on the platform of a German train station:

As we were standing there under the open sky in the midst of the night, surrounded by unknown people, strangers to us, a feeling of uneasiness came over us. [...] While here too the railway officials were most courteous, among the passengers present our nightly journey seemed to have caused quite some stir<sup>49</sup>.

Thus, in spite of the high mobility that missionary life demanded from both individuals and communities, a nightly train ride in metropolitan Germany still appeared to be beyond a nun's usual horizon. Arguably, this mirrors the gendered identity of a woman religious not yet having fully incorporated the missionary aspect of mobility in her understanding of her profession. Or, to put it in other words, a high degree of mobility and the imperative to travel had not yet come to be conceived as part of a (missionary) nun's status.

Certainly, the nuns' departure from the Motherhouse did not necessarily cause an immediate change in their understanding of their profession. Departure and the experience of travel did, however, initiate a process in the course of which *nuns* gradually *grew into* their future roles as *missionaries*. In contrast to the gendered self-conception of *nuns*, who shared the Catholic belief in seclusion and the limitation of movement as means of social control, the (masculine connoted) *missionaries* were essentially mobile figures. The missionary profession was inseparably connected with the imperative to travel. Missionaries acted as the worldwide ambassadors of the Church; embodying mobility they could be encountered in all means of passenger transportation. The tension between the Servants of the Holy Spirit's vocation as nuns and missionaries dominated much of their travel writing. Recalling how they had been stared at during their train ride from Steyl to Genoa, a writer noted that other passengers »seemed to have spoken about us as of missionaries«<sup>50</sup>. Obviously, the fact that they were traveling by train made the nuns identifiable as missionaries (and thus as properly positioned professionals) rather

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assisted nuns traveling through] to leave the old boxes here. Well, he would be given a lesson! Good that we are going to travel on by carriage, otherwise something might happen with this city poor of faith.« (»In Hamburg am Bahnhof sagte ein recht ungebildeter Mann zu der Maria, sie solle doch die alten Schachteln dalassen. Doch dieser wurde von ihr eines besseren belehrt. Gut, dass es dort mit uns per Wagen geht, sonst gäb's da was mit dieser glaubensarmen Stadt!«) AG SSsP 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Dominica Craghs, 29.10.1900.

49 »Als wir da nun mitten in der Nacht unter freiem Himmel standen, umgeben von uns lauter unbekanntem, fremden Leuten, wurde es uns doch etwas sonderbar zumute. [...] Die Bahnbeamten waren auch hier recht zuvorkommend. Hingegen schien unsere nächtliche Reise bei den am Bahnhof anwesenden Passagieren etwas Aufsehen zu erregen.« AG SSsP 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Notburga Puthe/Sr. Norberta Vaßen, 12.7.1904.

50 »Man meinte, sie hätten von uns, von Missionarinnen, gesprochen.« AG SSsP PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Kunigundis Vedder, 28.5.1907.

than ordinary (and thus out-of-place) nuns. The above remark is indeed noteworthy. The writer used the German term »Missionarin«, the female form of *missionary*. In its contemporary use, the German term for *missionary* had a male connotation and was hardly ever used in the female form. According to Valentine Cunningham, in the Christian context the term *missionary* originally was »a male noun« for »it denoted a male actor, male action, male sphere of service«<sup>51</sup>. The Servants of the Holy Spirit usually referred to themselves as »Missionsschwestern«, meaning »missionary sisters«, emphasizing at once both the monastic and the apostolic element of their vocation. In contrast to the term *missionary*, which referred to a profession, however, the word »missionary sister« suggested a merely supplementary function assigned to women in this gendered enterprise<sup>52</sup>. The experience of mobility during the passage did, however, impact on the way in which individuals and communities perceived their state and vocation. Traveling nuns became *missionaries*, a transition that was visually manifested by the replacement of the congregation's metropolitan religious habit with the white religious garb of the missionary nuns.

### Out of the Convent: the Passage

Missionary travel writing is marked by the immanent tension between the notion of the community having the precedence and a writer's individual experience, which relates to the tension between the maintenance of rules and the crossing of boundaries. The congregation's sisterhood as the larger social framework is always present in the travelogues and set in dialogue with the small communities on the move. Accounts of the passage would characterize distinct spaces as different levels of social interaction, such as the joint experience on the steamship (e.g. the deck, the dining hall etc.) and the intimacy of the cabin. Thus, while the social space of the steamship appears as some sort of microcosmos mirroring colonial society more generally, the intimate room of the cabin somehow substituted sacred space, in which prayer, mass and collective recreation took place. All travelogues mention the joint efforts to adapt the cabins' furniture according to a gendered monastic tradition. In order to create what the nuns perceived as an appropriate environment for their stay on board, they (almost ritually) masked mirrors, positioned devotional images and erected small altars<sup>53</sup>. By transforming the cabin into a nun's cell, they consciously differentiated themselves from the secular passengers.

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51 CUNNINGHAM, »God and Nature«, p. 93.

52 Cf. GUGGLBERGER, »Ich wollte immer nach Afrika!«, pp. 9f.

53 Concerning the furnishing of cells in western women's monasteries cf.: EVANGELISTI, Nuns, pp. 29f.

Parallel to these efforts to recreate a monastic environment for the time of the passage, however, strong voices of first-person narrators can be traced in the texts. The situation on the swaying steamship often disrupted communities in their day-to-day routines with, for example, seasickness affecting travel companions to various degrees. Consequently, individual nuns saw themselves forced to move on their own. In such cases, collectively regulated voices often gave way to accounts of individual reflections and experiences of mobility. Individual writers gradually produced alternative travel narratives in which they transformed the voyage into an exciting experience that would »pass by too fast«<sup>54</sup>. This contrasted sharply with the conventional religious narrative of the passage as a series of sacrifices to the divine.

At times, the rigid segregation of male and female missionaries loosened during the passage and vertical relationships translated into rather considerate terms. Individual writers represented themselves as the confident partners of priests and integral parts of the missionary community. Sometimes, Catholic priests or friars of other Catholic institutions were on the same steamship, a situation that was either arranged by European superiors or simply coincidence. The presence of priests on board enabled the nuns, who rather tried to avoid their Protestant counterparts, to travel in Catholic company. Most importantly, it allowed them to have mass and sacraments (i.e. confession, communion). Congregational elites in Europe also called upon professional help in the arrangement of travel affairs. The passage to Togo, for instance, was coordinated by a Hamburg-based agent, whom the nuns referred to as »man of confidence«<sup>55</sup>. This »man of confidence« would meet the nuns at the Hamburg train station and guide them through the city to the port, which usually included stopovers at the hospital of a local women's order and a church. Furthermore, he assisted the nuns in handling their luggage and tickets and introduced them to the steamship's facilities, the crew members and other travelers of Catholic confession. Sometimes, the Catholic missionary community on board was a mixed one in terms of sex, class, nationality and institution thus offering the possibility to discuss missionary work in different regions<sup>56</sup>. Sometimes there were even high Church authorities on board of the steamships, such as bishops and prefects apostolic from diverse missionary backgrounds<sup>57</sup>. Describing these encounters, the writers tended to represent

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54 AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Eulalia Hewing, 12.8.1905.

55 The term used by the nuns was »Vertrauensmann«, meaning »man of confidence«.

56 E.g., according to a travelogue dated from 1912, a pair of nuns who on the steamer to Togo had met other male and female missionaries enjoyed interesting discussions of missionary work in German Cameroon. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Custodia Engels/ Sr. Athanasia Görtz, 15.11.1912.

57 For instance, in 1907, two nuns moving to Togo gave an account of the encounter and a talk they had with the Bishop of Dahomey, the Prefect Apostolic of Monrovia as well as several other

themselves as professional (though subordinate) partners actively taking part in accomplishing the Catholic missionary enterprise. Besides, traveling nuns sought to establish a rather cooperative relationship to priests to whom they sometimes even referred to as their accomplices in stretching the congregational guidelines. Priests who functioned as the nuns' confessors and thus, moral authorities provided them the opportunity to visit places they otherwise would not have seen. In 1899, a pair of nuns debarked in Madeira where they spent one day in the company of some Pallotine priests and friars that were also on their way to West Africa. One of them, depicting the day trip to the island as some sort of moral balancing act between religious rules and the flaring-up of self-initiative, wrote:

›What sisters they are!‹, I hear our dear fellow sisters in Steyl wondering, ›to debark in such company!‹ Anyway, with the fathers (so far we haven't had any contact with the brothers at all) behaving so monastically in every respect and the rev. Father Högen strongly suggesting this outing for the strengthening of our health, and also given that the other passengers had debarked as well and the view of this island was too seductive, we gladly accepted, but would have been equally willing to remain on board, if our confessor had required us to do so<sup>58</sup>.

In Madeira, the pair of nuns joined the friars and priests on a mountain hike of several hours to a pilgrimage church, an experience they described as physically demanding but »unforgettable«<sup>59</sup>. Interestingly, although the nuns' dress drew the attention of the rural population, they did not take any offence at that<sup>60</sup>. They also visited the island's capital, Funchal, where they hired an English-speaking guide to take them to the cathedral and the seminary. There they attended a conversation in English and French between the priests

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missionaries from the colonies Ivory Coast and Gold Coast. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Anastasia Wagner, 27.10.1907.

- 58 »›Oh was sind das doch Schwestern! werden die lieben Mitschwester in Steyl sagen ›in dieser Begleitung and Land zu gehen!‹ Da die Herren (mit den Brüdern hatten wir noch gar nicht verkehrt) in jeder Weise sich ganz klösterlich gegen uns benahmen und der hochw. P. Högen zur Stärkung unser Gesundheit diese Landpartie wünschte, außerdem auch alle Passagiere an Land gingen und der Anblick dieser Insel zu verführerisch war, so willigten wir mit Freuden ein, wären aber geradeso bereit gewesen, auf dem Schiffe zu bleiben, wenn unser Beichtvater es gewünscht hätte.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 5.11.1899.
- 59 »I have to admit that I am a bad mountaineer. This first and maybe last mountain hike I will never forget.« (›Ich muss zugeben, dass ich ein sehr schlechter Bergsteiger bin. Diese erste und vielleicht letzte Bergpartie werde ich nie vergessen.«) Ibid.
- 60 »Surely I needn't mention that during our stay in the countryside all eyes were resting on our clothes and red cheeks. (People [here] look rather yellowish and don't have red cheeks at all.« (›Dass während unseres Weilens auf dem Lande aller Augen auf unsere Kleidung und roten Backen sahen, brauche ich wohl nicht zu erwähnen. (Die Leutchen sehen sehr gelb aus ohne rote Wangen.)) Ibid.

from Germany and Madeira. Significantly, from then on the German-language travelogue is increasingly interspersed with English phrases as if the writer had been trying to demonstrate her skills in coping with a culturally changing environment<sup>61</sup>.

Alongside physical strength and endurance, traveling nuns referred to other qualities they (re)discovered on the move (e.g. communication skills). The farther they moved away from Europe the greater became the share of English phrases featured in the travelogues, and writers implicitly emphasized the importance of foreign language competence. In their accounts of their experiences during land excursions, the nuns described the strategies that helped them to move through alien settings. On stopovers resulting from the steamers' schedules, the nuns tried to visit a church and/or a women's convent. In places which did not afford the opportunity to get into contact with local congregations they would hire a carriage and have themselves taken to a local women's monastery. This way, traveling nuns networked, establishing connections with other women's congregations. Their new contacts they conveyed to their successors in Europe so these might call on them on their stopovers on the respective routes<sup>62</sup>. Simultaneously, by visiting other congregations and their (non-European) spheres of work, the nuns learned about different forms of convent organization in various cultural settings and the apostolic work of other women's congregations of different national backgrounds. They inspected Catholic schools, orphanages, homes for the elderly and hospitals in many, both European and non-European, port cities (e.g. Funchal or Monrovia en route to Africa and Colombo, Singapore or Batavia en route to New Guinea). These (spontaneous) visits to convents enabled the nuns to encounter new places and to experience mobility that in part resulted from self-initiative. In 1903, a nun, recounting a trip three nuns had made from the port to the city of Batavia en route to New Guinea, wrote:

On the way, the three of us really had to laugh heartedly calling each other to mind all the places in the world we were traveling both by sea and by land. Where is all this going to lead us? (To the kingdom of heaven, we do hope.)<sup>63</sup>

These lines exemplify the tension between the nuns' experience of mobility and the religious determination that guided them. Invariably bearing in mind the purpose of all traveling, some obviously enjoyed the passage. Some-

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61 Cf. *ibid.*

62 Cf. AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1908–1913, Sr. Christiana Wallmeyer, 31.7.1910.

63 »Unterwegs mußten wir drei doch herzlich lachen und sagten untereinander, wo in aller Welt wir doch herumreisten, bald zu Wasser, bald zu Land. Wo wir am Ende noch hinkommen? (Ins Himmelreich, so ist unsere Hoffnung.« AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Veronika König, 23.12.1903.



times, a relaxed and joyful tone shines through the texts. This was particularly the case when missionary nuns repeated the passage to Togo. Representing themselves as experienced voyagers, they laughed at the newcomers who would have expressed worries about the sea voyage. Having spent a couple of years in Togo, they had some command of both the indigenous Ewe as well as of English and their language skills enabled them to get in touch with European and African travelers alike. In case experienced nuns traveled together with newcomers, the former often used the journey to instruct the latter in the Ewe language. In 1904, Sister Rosalia Falkner (1870–1940) returned from her home leave to Togo, where she had already spent about four years<sup>64</sup>. On her second passage to West Africa she was accompanied by a newcomer who spent most of the travel time writing. Sister Paulina Weyand gave a lively account of maritime recreation taking place on deck »one time in English and the other time in Ewe-language«<sup>65</sup>. Furthermore, the pair of them, who, apart from one friar, were the only European passengers on board of the steamer, at times moved down to the lower class deck occupied by African travelers for a chat. At dinner, however, the nuns usually shared a table with the captain and two of his officers. The description of these multiple interactions as given in their travelogue represents an interesting blend of a depiction of the hierarchical social and racial order on board and the nuns' mobility between the respective classes. Emphasizing their companion relationship with the steamer's »white« authorities on the one hand, on the other hand they equally pointed out the close contacts they had established with some of the »black«, lower class, travelers.

On this concrete sea passage to Togo, the absence of other European passengers, combined with the fact that one of the nuns was familiar with (traveling in) the colonial context, obviously accounted for the voyage to become a joyful experience, with language skills and colonial experience, moreover, empowering the nuns to assert their position on the steamship. After a stop in Monrovia, they proudly reported on two relatives of the president of Liberia who had come on board and joined them for dinner. For the nuns this served as an occasion to represent themselves as capable partners of male politicians in an English conversation. Rather than on the margins of the secular community on board, they saw their roles in the center of the traveling society. The humorous and entertaining tone in which the writer depicted the nuns' activities allowed her to portray their interactions with the ship's crew as almost »natural«. One day, when seasickness prevented them from showing up in the dining hall, it was the captain himself who called for them:

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64 Sister Rosalia Falkner moved to Togo in 1899 and returned to Europe on home leave for the first time in 1904.

65 AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Paulina Weyand, 24.11.1904.

›Sisters, won't you be coming to the table?‹ the captain shouted from the adjoining dining room. ›Sister Rosalia, come over! You are an old sailor!‹ But Sister Rosalia didn't show up. ›Sister Paulina, come over!‹, the voice continued, ›beef steak, tastes excellent.‹ ›Thank you, Sir, I don't feel like it today!‹ I shouted from the lowest shed. ›ha, ha, ha!‹ I heard several voices sound from the dining hall. Before we went to sleep we dared to take some fresh air. The two of us waggled around like two people who had drunk too much<sup>66</sup>.

The experience of the voyage diverged depending on individuals and the respective situation on board (e.g., with regard to other passengers). Some nuns who had been in colonial Togo before, had come to adopt a rather critical stance on the secular travelers and their moral attitudes. Some of them even argued that, in view of the low moral standards of the average colonist, traveling nuns should observe the religious ideal of distance from the secular world in a particular strict manner.

Generally speaking, it was not too often that travel superiors leveled criticism at subordinate nuns' behavior during the passage. In case they did, it was directed to an inadequate degree of observance of collective guidelines or subordination to the travel superior's authority. In single cases, it was the behavior of individual nuns toward male passengers that was being reproached. One nun, after arriving in Togo for the second time in the company of a young newcomer, handed over a written warning to the mother superior in which she cautioned against groups of young nuns being allowed to travel on their own given their inexperience in colonial affairs. In particular, the writer pointed at what appeared to her as doubtful moral qualities of the average European traveler to Africa. Young nuns in general and her last travel companion in particular, she complained, tended to act in their »ingenuous manner« in a way that was »not suitable« for women religious in »such an environment«<sup>67</sup>. Her warning thus referred to two major issues, namely the perceived threats of the German colonial world in view of the doubtful moral behavior of secular colonists as well as the need for supervision and close control over young nuns traveling, who had just stepped out from behind the protecting walls of the convent. Notwithstanding such criticism, however, the travelogues gave much room to the encounter with religious and secu-

66 »›Schwestern, kommen sie nicht zu Tisch?‹ rief der Herr Kapitän aus dem anstossenden Speisesalon. ›Schwester Rosalia, kommen Sie! Sie sind ein alter Seemann!‹ Doch Schw. Rosalia liess sich nicht sehen. ›Schwester Paulina, kommen Sie!‹, ging es weiter, ›Beefstück, schmeckt ausgezeichnet.‹ ›Ich danke, Herr Kapitän: ich hab keine Lust!‹ rief ich aus dem untersten Verschlage hinaus. ›ha, ha, ha!‹ klang's nun mehrstimmig aus dem Salon herüber. Bevor wir zur Ruhe gingen, wagten wir uns doch noch an die frische Luft. Nun wackelten wir beide auf dem Deck einher wie zwei, die zu tief ins Glas geschaut.« Ibid.

67 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Fidelis Weitkamp, 30.10.1913.

lar travelers, a fact that can be read as the nuns' individual and collective attempt to reflect on their own roles in the community on board in particular and colonial society more generally.

### *Encounters on board*

»How we are looking forward to being greeted by Lome! After all, to us everything is rather alien. Although all the passengers are friendly, still we are not at home<sup>68</sup>«.

The author of this passage, Sister Fidelis Weitkamp (1879–1958), traveled to Togo together with a fellow nun in 1906. In her letter posted from aboard the steamer she described a certain uneasiness or strangeness experienced by the pair, apparently as a result of both the travelers' temporary severance from a convent and their physical separation from the sisterhood which, in the eyes of the writer, were the two main features constituting »home«. As another factor contributing to this condition Sister Fidelis Weitkamp mentioned the social environment on board in general and the lack of priests in particular. Ultimately she bemoans the absence of a chapel, a fact that deeply troubled the nuns for whom sacred spaces served as places of retreat for (private) prayer and devotion. To her description of the discomfort experienced throughout the passage Sister Fidelis added: »If only we could just kneel in front of the tabernacle for the quarter of an hour!<sup>69</sup>«

Conceiving of the passage as a somewhat negative secular experience, Sister Fidelis contrasted her stay on the steamer to the idealized religious world of the convent. According to her description, the nuns did their best to isolate themselves in a friendly manner from the other travelers, all men and some of them members of the colonial government<sup>70</sup>. Having spent a couple of days on the steamship, she referred to the secular life on board, which also involved the passengers' entertainment (i.e. concerts), as the probably most difficult part of their profession compared to which »in the mission things could not be any worse<sup>71</sup>«. Some days later, however, Sister Fidelis started to adopt a more positive attitude toward the passage. This change began with her description of an encounter between the nuns and Julius Zech (1868–1914), the German governor of Togo (1905–1910), who happened to be on board of the ship and one morning approached the nuns in the steamer's parlor to in-

68 »Wie froh werden wir sein, wenn uns Lome grüsst! Es ist doch alles fremd. Wenn die Passagiere auch alle freundlich sind, wir sind doch nicht daheim.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Fidelis Weitkamp, 15.10.1906.

69 »Könnten wir nur eine Viertelstunde vor dem Tabernakel knien.« Ibid.

70 Cf. *ibid.*

71 *Ibid.*

roduce himself. In her travelogue Sister Fidelis gave a detailed description of the nuns' conversation with the governor, which the latter opened by apologizing for not having introduced himself earlier due to illness. Sister Fidelis also pointed out to her European readers that the governor inquired about the nuns working in Togo. Not without pride she added that Zech even mentioned individual nuns thus proving his personal acquaintance with them and his care for their wellbeing. He also offered his condolences for the recent death of one of their Togo-based colleagues. The conversation, moreover, touched upon missionary political issues. According to the writer, Governor Zech »asked if we were going to move over to a new foundation, [...] and expressed his pleasure about the sisters having taken over the school in Porto Seguro«<sup>72</sup>. Ultimately, the governor assured the nuns of his further assistance, adding that the three of them were certainly going to »meet more often during the voyage and in Africa«<sup>73</sup>. And from that moment on the other passengers appeared to Sister Fidelis as being »particularly kind« toward the nuns, and she resumed: »I think there's hardly anyone in our class anymore who wouldn't greet us when passing by«<sup>74</sup>.

The nuns' conversation with the governor which, having taken place in the public space of the parlor, could be witnessed by the entire community on board constituted a turning point in the travelogue. In contrast to the first part, in which the passage to colonial Togo was described as a largely negative experience for women religious, in the passages to follow Sister Fidelis shifted her focus to the sub-community of travelers to Togo, emphasizing their respect for the nuns, who, in turn, increasingly saw themselves as part of this community. This shift also manifested itself by the vocabulary employed by the writer. Suddenly she chose words that resembled the language of colonial officials, who (repeatedly) »crossed over«, i.e. moved between the metropolis and the colony. It was above all the governor's familiarity with the Togo-based nuns' names and current locations which raised the conversation to another level. More precisely, instead of a casual talk it appeared as an instance that associated the nuns with socio-political issues in the colony, taking them from the (ideological and physical) space of the convent to the political sphere of colonial education and politics. Ultimately, the writer, adding that all of them were going to meet more frequently in the future, apparently assumed that in Togo there would be constant interaction between the nuns and the colonial officials.

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72 »Er fragte, ob wir zu einer Neugründung hinübergangen, [...] und sprach seine Freude aus, dass die Schwestern die Schule in Porto Seguro übernommen hatten, war überhaupt sehr freundlich.« Ibid.

73 Cf. *ibid.*

74 »Ich glaube, es ist wohl kaum noch einer in unserer Klasse, der nicht im Vorübergehen grüsst.« Ibid.

Many of the nuns traveling to Togo made a point of their fellow passengers' political or economic importance and social status. In 1905, three nuns came across the shipping company owner, Adolph Woermann (1847–1911), on board of one of his steamships. At that time, Woermann was not only a prominent German figure in passenger transportation and a figurehead of the successful trade in colonial West Africa but also a promoter of the missionary venture<sup>75</sup>. All missionaries operating in Togo belonged to his regular customers and even enjoyed a discount on Woermann's lines<sup>76</sup>. One nun proudly reported of a parcel with chocolate that Woermann on the occasion of a joint sea voyage had sent to the nuns' table during dinner which they gladly accepted<sup>77</sup>. Besides, the nuns had conversations with a number of parliamentary representatives that happened to be on the same steamship and in their travelogues were referred to as »doctors, lawyers, editors and other high gentlemen«<sup>78</sup>. Once again, they characterized these men's attitude toward them as courteous and full of respect for their work: »An attorney told me that we were looking so happy and that it was such a great thing to sacrifice ourselves for the salvation of our neighbors, given our young age«<sup>79</sup>.

Interestingly, in the travelogues there are no traces of uneasiness about such encounters with members of the German secular elites on board. Quite the contrary, travel writers depicted the steamship bound for Africa as a logical place for both colonists and Catholic nuns to meet and, as a consequence, interact. There, the nuns' presence was legitimated by an institutional framework which overlapped with the colonial political sphere that these men represented<sup>80</sup>. In their travelogues, the nuns created a specific social position for themselves as women religious that would place them at the center of the largely male and secular traveling community. In doing so, they often transcended the religious ideal of female restraint and subordination to men, rather characterizing the nuns' roles on board by a high degree of (social) mobility as they associated with other passengers independent of social, ethnic or gender boundaries.

Their interactions with colonists were not the only encounters they recorded. The nuns also described their meetings with indigenous people. Frequently they recorded encounters with children or converted African passen-

75 Cf. Renate HÜCKING/Ekkehard LAUNER, *Aus Menschen Neger machen. Wie sich das Handelshaus Woermann in Afrika entwickelt hat*, Hamburg 1986, pp. 29 and 91–94.

76 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 91–93.

77 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Eulalia Hewing, 12.8.1905.

78 *Ibid.*

79 »Ein Rechtsanwalt meinte wir sähen doch so glücklich aus und es wäre doch eine große Sache, sich so für das Heil des Nächsten zu opfern, da wir noch so jung seien.« *Ibid.*

80 For instance, the author of this account also referred to the presence of Mister Lenz who was engaged in the construction of the Togo railway line – yet another central project of German imperialism in Togo. Cf. *ibid.*

gers, giving the latter voice to speak for the missionary venture in general and the role of women in particular. In her account of the passage to Togo (1904), a nun described the stopover in the port of Axim, British Gold Coast. Sister Immaculata Göcke (1876–1929) recalled the moment in which she and her colleague watched some boats taking African passengers to the steamer. She wrote:

One Negress with a child on her back had seen us standing on the deck from the boat. After a couple of minutes she was already next to us and started to talk to us in a friendly tone. She spoke English so we were able to understand her well. She immediately asked us if we were traveling to Lome as she was going there as well. When we confirmed, the mummy was so pleased that (in her gladness) she gave a talk to the delight of all bystanders. For instance she said: ›When I saw you right now from the boat I said to the woman next to me: ›I see Catholic sisters; surely they are going to Lome.« I am Catholic too, and my husband is also baptized, and all my children are baptized, and so we are all Catholic. My boy goes to school and on Sunday we all go to church. In Lome we have a new church now. I saw a picture of it. I know the sisters in Lome and Klein-Popo, and Sister Rosalia<sup>[81]</sup> was the godmother of my son<sup>82</sup>.

Here, an African woman incorporated the powerful voice by which the writer honored the congregation's activities in the evangelization of Togo and pointed out the travelers' part. Again, the author related the missionary enterprise to the larger project of German colonialism in particular with respect to the introduction of western education and construction activity, both milestones in the contemporary European understanding of civilization<sup>83</sup>. The Togolese family referred to in the report had converted to Catholicism and, moreover, adopted aspects of western-Christian culture more generally. The woman

81 Sister Rosalia Falkner (1870–1940) had arrived in Togo in 1899 and was among the pioneer nuns who moved from Lomé to Aného (Klein-Popo) in 1901 in order to establish the congregation's first outpost convent. With the exception of two holidays in Europe (1904, 1913) she stayed in Africa until the expulsion of all German missionaries in 1918. Cf. AG SSsP Totenglöcklein 1939–1941, pp. 147–152.

82 ›Eine Negerin mit einem Kinde auf dem Rücken hatte uns vom Boote aus auf dem Deck stehen sehen. Nach einigen Minuten war sie schon bei uns und redete uns ganz freundlich an. Sie sprach Englisch, wir konnten sie gut verstehen. Sie fragte sofort, ob wir nach Lome reisten; sie ginge auch hin. Als wir diese bejahten, freute sich das Mütterchen doch so sehr, dass sie (in ihrer Freude) eine ganze Rede hielt zur Freude aller Umstehenden. So sagte sie uns z.B.: ›Als ich Sie eben vom Boote aus sah, da habe ich zu meiner Nachbarin gesagt: ›Ich sehe katholische Schwestern; die gehen sicher nach Lome.« Ich bin auch katholisch, und mein Mann hat sich jetzt auch taufen lassen, und meine Kinder sind auch alle getauft, und so sind wir alle katholisch. Mein Knabe geht zur Schule, und sonntags gehen wir alle zur Kirche. Jetzt haben wir in Lome eine neue Kirche. Ich habe ein Bild davon gesehen. Ich kenne die Schwestern in Lome und Klein-Popo, und Schw. Rosalia ist bei meinem Knaben Taufpatin gewesen.« AG SSsP 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Immaculata Goecke, undated (April 1903).

83 Cf. the discussion of both subjects in Chapters 3 and 5, respectively.

quoted represented a nuclear family. Having good command of English she gave value to the missionary education of her children. Ultimately, explicitly naming a member of the congregation as the godmother of one of the children, the writer linked the conversion of this family directly to the Servants of the Holy Spirit's engagement in Togo.

The nuns abroad conceived of themselves as the visible ambassadors of the Catholic Church and the self-confident agents in its missionary venture. In their travelogues they constructed their own exceptional roles on both their gender and religious identities. Whereas the former served the writers to set the traveling nuns apart from »ordinary« male travelers, the latter related to their confessional identities and was used to distinguish them from Protestant missionaries as serious rivals on the market of evangelization in Togo and New Guinea. It was first and foremost the missionaries' wives who, often engaging in similar spheres of work like the nuns, were at the center of the authors' of the travelogues attention. The nuns' exceptional religious identity, however, also derived from Catholic monastic tradition. Accordingly, it was precisely the nuns' celibate state that allowed them to serve God and their fellow men in a uniquely energetic and self-sacrificing manner. Unencumbered by husbands or children, they conceived of themselves as privileging religious service over human relationships. This can be observed most clearly in a set of travelogues penned by a group of four nuns who migrated to New Guinea in 1901.

A young German woman traveling from Genoa to Singapore in the company of her brother had fallen seriously ill after a few days on board of the steamer. The nuns, some of whom were trained in nursing, volunteered to take care for the patient. Noting the general lack of interest in the sick woman's fate on the part of the other passengers, the travel writers emphasized their caring role as an act of selfless charity. This understanding of Christian charity was gendered female. Thus, whereas they would abstain from any criticisms of Christian men (e.g. the Catholic priests on board) for failing to take care of the woman, they used the case to question the religious and moral qualities of Protestant women missionaries in general and the Protestant missionary wives aboard the ship in particular. Having spent a sleepless night on deck nursing the patient, one of the nuns noted:

Sitting there quietly, I thought: Now where are they, all the Protestant [women] missionaries? Neither on the first evening nor in the following days none, not a single one would show up in order to replace us<sup>84</sup>.

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84 »Ich dachte dann, als ich so still da saß: Wo sind jetzt all die protestantischen Missionarinnen? Keine, nicht auch eine einzige ließ sich blicken weder am ersten Abend noch in den folgenden

In view of her critical state of health, the ship's doctor relocated the patient to a cabin in the first class section, and the nuns kept staying with her taking turns in caring for her round the clock. More importantly for the subject under discussion, however, is the writer's insisting that the nuns' selfless caring role impacted on their social position on board more generally. According to Sister Magdalena Wagner (1875–1957), even though the nuns were always paid respect by the other passengers, their altruistic behavior toward a stranger in need of care impressed all travelers and the crew alike. This, in turn, considerably affected their further stay on board. For instance, although they had purchased second class tickets only, nobody would prevent them from moving around freely in the restricted first class passenger areas. Moreover, according to Sister Magdalena, the nuns' exemplary attitude appeared to have made such an impression on the patient that she even expressed her wish to take the vows herself; also, it changed the patient's brother's idea of religion in favor of Catholicism<sup>85</sup>. Most importantly, their exemplary behavior as selfless care givers, the nuns asserted, had ultimately enhanced their reputation in the eyes of the secular (and/or Protestant) passengers. According to Sister Philomena Herzog (1873–1935)<sup>86</sup>, this became apparent in day-to-day interaction:

Gentlemen and ladies, who – judging by their appearance – seem to know quite little about religion and who behaved coldly against us at first now can't greet us friendly enough and even try to tie in with a conversation. And every time we fail to notice the captain crossing the deck he would greet us with such a loud voice, only to call our attention<sup>87</sup>.

Here, special emphasis is placed upon the fact that secular travelers did take notice of the nuns' exceptional piety, translated into a selfless act of charity. This was the case also with regard to their total dedication to the missionary cause. Travelogues of nuns en route to New Guinea tell about encounters with strangers who showed deep admiration for their commitment to sac-

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Tagen, die uns ablösen wollte.« AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Philomena Herzog et al., 16.12.1901.

85 Cf. AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Magdalena Wagner, 16.12.1901.

86 Sister Philomena Herzog (1873–1935) arrived in New Guinea in 1901. Trained as a teaching nun, she served as head of the province from 1917 to 1926 and remained a member of the provincial leading committee until her death in 1935. Cf. COLES/MIHALIC, *Sent by the Spirit*, 55f.

87 »Herren und Damen, die schon ihrem Äußeren nach sehr wenig über Religion zu wissen scheinen und sich in der ersten Zeit auch recht kalt gegen uns benommen haben, können jetzt nicht freundlich genug grüßen und suchen auch mal ein Gespräch anzuknüpfen, wenn's gelingt. Geht der Herr Kapitän über Deck und wir sehen ihn nicht, dann grüßt er im Vorübergehen so laut, dass wir aufmerksam werden.« AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Philomena Herzog, 23.12.1901.



rifice their lives for the salvation of others in remote parts of the globe. By the turn of the century, New Guinea was still considered a colonial frontier with its climatic, cultural and political conditions bearing a series of risks for European settlers. Travel writers frequently took down secular Protestants' alleged remarks reflecting the recognition Catholic women were receiving across ideological and denominational boundaries. There are many letters by travelers recounting the conversations between nuns and strangers, who appeared to be curious about the former's motivations and deeply impressed by their selfless disposition to migrate for religious reasons. The (mostly secular) men the nuns encountered en route would praise their exemplary commitment to the salvation of others, which involved traveling to a country in which they had »only a limited time left to live«, without expecting any worldly reward<sup>88</sup>. Thus, the respect paid to the nuns by secular passengers was rooted in the latter's appreciation of this peculiar apostolate that involved the dedication of one's own life to the service to God and others. To use the words of a nun who wrote about the reaction of strangers in response to Catholic women missionaries: »One almost feels ashamed of the high opinion they have of us«<sup>89</sup>. However, such statements can just as well be discussed as a strategy employed by the travel writers in order to deal with some of the scary predictions concerning their own future<sup>90</sup>. In 1905, a nun recounted a conversation that she and her fellows had with the captain of the steamer bound for New Guinea. According to her letter, the nuns answered to the captain's inquiry about the duration of their stay in the colony as follows:

We told him that hopefully we would never ever return to Europe and that we were glad about that, but this was almost beyond the good man's comprehension. But then the good Sister Eustachia, full of holy eagerness, started to speak assuring him that we were happy with our vocation and that it didn't make a difference to us where we would die. Most of the passengers can't understand that we are so happy<sup>91</sup>.

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88 AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Josephine Steiger, 22.12.1903.

89 Ibid.

90 For instance, in 1903 a nun, describing the farewell to a British passenger who had tried to care for the nuns during the joint passage added »But he didn't approve of our going to this country where we would soon be devoured, like the discoverer Cook.« (»Aber er hielt es nicht für recht, daß wir in dieses Land gingen, wo wir bald aufgefressen würde, wie der Entdecker Cook.«) Ibid.

91 »Da wir ihm sagten, wir würden hoffentlich nie wieder nach Europa zurückfahren und dass wir uns dessen freuten, doch dies war aber dem guten Herrn fast unbegreiflich. Aber da nahm die gute Schwester Eustachia voll heiligem Eifer das Wort und versicherte ihm, wie wir uns in unserem Berufe glücklich fühlten und dass es uns einerlei sei, wo man sterben würde. Die meisten Passagiere können nicht begreifen, dass wir so glücklich sind.« AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Chrysostoma Wehner, 16.7.1905.

Apart from European passengers, traveling nuns also encountered the subjects of their mission, the indigenous men and women they came to proselytize. Usually, the first encounter with larger numbers of African people en route to Togo took place in the port of Monrovia. There the ships regularly stopped in order to board indigenous workers for the remaining leg of the passage. In general, the travelogues refer to the stop in Monrovia as an important turning point on the way to Togo, because there the nuns were introduced to what they subsumed as »Africa« and its inhabitants. The halt in Monrovia was eagerly awaited by the travelers, who consequently shared their first »African« experiences with their colleagues back in Europe. In their descriptions, the writers gave much room to their first impressions of indigenous people, their dress as well as their eating and working behavior. Almost all nuns claimed to have observed native boys in the port of Monrovia diving for coins that the travelers threw into the water and therewith referred to a visual topos of Africa that was widely circulated in colonial tourism at that time<sup>92</sup>. Many writers also related their observations to their own roles as religious emissaries:

I can't tell you what an impression these people gave me. If I had moved to Africa just for pleasure, I'd go on the return voyage as soon as possible. But it's a superior motivation that has led me to Africa, and this is why from now on I appreciate my vocation ten times more than I have done so far, and I am twenty times happier to go to Africa [...]»<sup>93</sup>.

Alongside the peculiar paternalism that marked the nuns' attitude, i.e. the tendency to refer to all Africans as »children« in need of supervision, in their travel writings they developed and reproduced specific stereotypes. Despite the general characterization of the indigenous peoples they encountered along the West African coast as noisy, lazy, dirty and miserably dressed, individual assessments could still, however, be varied. Conceiving of western Christian culture as being absolutely superior, travel writers distinguished between indigenous Catholics and non-Catholics as well as between the (often westernized and Christianized) African elites and lower classes. In the eyes of the nuns, Christianity constituted the most important point of refer-

92 Cf. Roberto ZAUGG, *Zwischen Europäisierung und Afrikanisierung. Zur visuellen Konstruktion der Kapverden auf kolonialen Postkarten*, in: *Fotogeschichte. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Ästhetik der Fotografie* 118 (2010), pp. 17–28, p. 25.

93 »Was für einen Eindruck diese Leutchen auf uns machten, kann ich gar nicht sagen. Wenn ich nur zum Vergnügen nach Afrika gegangen wäre, dann hätte ich so bald als möglich die Heimreise angetreten. Aber es führt mich ja ein höherer Beweggrund nach Afrika, und dieser macht, dass ich von jetzt an meinen Beruf noch zehnmal höher schätze, als ich es bisher getan habe, und noch zwanzig mal lieber nach Afrika gehe [...]« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Immaculata Goecke, undated (March/April 1903).

ence in the sense that they pointed out the essential function of Christianity for what they interpreted as religious and cultural development. Interestingly, notwithstanding Janssen's explicit instruction to forbear from criticizing local social and political conditions<sup>94</sup>, individual nuns also commented on the colonial division of labor they experienced for the first time. Still, most of them took the services provided by African peoples on the steamers for granted. In their texts, the writers clearly gave priority to religious causes over potential criticism of the colonial economy of inequality<sup>95</sup>.

In turn, traveling nuns emphasized their compassion with the indigenous populations in Africa, who, as they saw it, lived in both material and spiritual poverty. While they referred to the people's economic situation from an industrialized and capitalist society's point of view, »spiritual poverty« meant their lack of Catholic knowledge and thus their inability to serve God in accordance with Church teachings. The aspect of religion invariably remained the decisive element that was given precedence. A nun, commenting on a group of African workers she observed boarding the steamer in 1907, wrote: »Oh, I am so sorry for these poor children, and [...] I am frequently reminded of the words of the little courageous apostle: ›Mister Savage, have you already been baptized?‹<sup>96</sup>? In the eyes of the nuns, the (historical) absence of Catholicism was the main disadvantage experienced by African peoples. Conversion, according to this point of view, constituted a milestone toward what the nuns called »civilizing« uplift. Missionary writers developed the metaphorical depiction of baptism as an act of »washing white« indigenous people (or simply »blacks« as they used to call them), an expression that obviously did not demand any further explanation. In doing so they were drawing on a discourse of difference that related »white« and »black« hierarchically and moreover made *whiteness* constitutive to European (and national) identity. *Whiteness* in this context refers to the social construction of racial categories according to which »whites« behaved in certain ways that European missionaries linked with superior moral and religious status<sup>97</sup>. »Blacks«, in turn, were seen as subordinate to »whites«, given that the African populations had long lacked the historical (cultural and religious) experience of Catholicism.

94 Cf. Empfehlungen und Belehrungen für die in die Mission reisenden Schwestern, AG SSpS 034 Tg Varia (1,2,3,5) – Belehrungen f. Miss., points 2, 15 and 16.

95 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Bernolda Renner, 24.9.1909.

96 »Ach, diese armen Kinder dauern mich immer so und [...], ich werde so oft an die Worte des kleinen mutigen Apostels erinnert: ›Herr Wilder, sind sie schon getauft?‹« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Custodia Engels, 20.5.1907.

97 In her essay on American women missionaries in China, Carol Chin discussed the intersection of categories of religion and race. According to her, due to cultural transfer and western education, Chinese converts were considered as »almost American« by the missionaries. Cf. Carol CHIN, Beneficent Imperialists. American Women Missionaries in China at the Turn of the twentieth Century, in: *Diplomatic History* 27/3 (2003), pp. 327–352, here p. 331.

At least in theory, Christian impact could thus »wash white« African peoples. The agency of the salvation of Africans, however, remained on the part of the missionaries<sup>98</sup>. In 1907, a nun wrote en route to Togo:

Please, dear fellow sisters, [...] recommend all the dear blacks, the little and the big, to our Divine Redeemer, and pray for the undeserved grace for us to be able to wash white as many as possible of the little curly heads<sup>99</sup>!

In the eyes of traveling nuns, converted, »properly« dressed and western educated indigenous people embodied the success of the missionary venture on the one hand and overall cultural progress on the other<sup>100</sup>. Accordingly, indigenous converts were believed to be happier than their non-Catholic counterparts. In 1910, a nun wrote of an encounter with indigenous Catholics during a stopover in Colombo that the nuns had felt »quite happy among these brown people who thought and felt like we do«. According to her, the Catholics in Colombo »were much happier than all this educated [European] society on the ship that does not know God and strives for nothing else than the satisfaction of their penchants«<sup>101</sup>. Furthermore, travel writers emphasized the obliging attitude and friendly behavior they were shown by Catholics unknown to them. On the occasion of an encounter between a group of nuns and converts from the Caroline Islands aboard the steamship to New Guinea, the travel writer clearly distinguished them from their non-Catholic counterparts, whom she described as being »pretty much the same everywhere«. In order to illustrate her point she recounted the case of a Catholic Caroline Islander who had greeted her on board »with the Catholic salute ›Praised be God the Lord!‹« and she added: »We were pleased about this and said to each other: ›How great it must be to see these people praying one day!‹«<sup>102</sup> In their encounters with indigenous Catholics during their travels, some nuns praised

98 Cf. Anette DIETRICH, Konzepte von »Rasse« und »Geschlecht« im Kontext des deutschen Kolonialismus, in: Gisela ENGEL/Katja KAILER (eds), *Kolonisierungen und Kolonisationen*, Berlin 2004, pp. 73–86, i.e. 2.

99 »Bitte, liebe Mitschwester, empfehlen Sie auch an diesem Tage dem göttlichen Heiland all die lieben Schwarzen, die kleinen und die großen, und erleben sie uns die unverdiente Gnade recht viele Krausköpfchen weisswaschen zu können!« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Custodia Engels, 20.5.1907.

100 The function of (western) dress and education in missionary constructions of race is discussed in Chapter 5, pp. 276–292.

101 »Wir fühlten uns ganz glücklich unter diesen brauen Leutchen, die wie wir dachten und fühlten, sind diese doch weit glücklicher als die gebildete Gesellschaft hier am Schiffe, die Gott nicht kennen und nichts anderes suchen als die Befriedigung ihrer Neigungen.« AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1908–1913, Sr. Wiltrudis Hasselmann, 21.6.1910.

102 »Wir haben uns hierüber sehr gefreut und sagten zu einander: »Wie schön muß es doch sein, wenn man solche Leute einmal beten sieht!« AG SSpS PNG Reiseberichte 1908–1913, Sr. Firmina Janzing, 25.5.1913.

Church universalism and the unifying force of Catholicism as bridging national, cultural or ethnic differences. One of them wrote in response to her encounter with African Catholics on board of the steamer to Togo: »I have never before been that aware of how great the unity of the Catholic Church is«<sup>103</sup>.

However, up to the mid-twentieth century, western missionaries portrayed themselves as the main agents in the proselytism and (religious) supervision of non-European peoples, who were seen as the objects of missionary work rather than as equal partners in the building of indigenous churches. In 1931, a nun described her arrival in New Guinea to her German relatives. The narrative of her arrival is based on the construction of New Guinea as a hostile religious and colonial frontier. Recalling her first moments on location she stated: »A hundred of curly heads turned their black blazing eyes toward us newcomers and looked up and down us.« The writer continued with the description of the local missionary headquarters noting that she had already changed her European blue religious habit for the white one designed for New Guinea. Eventually, she gave a résumé: »Now I am deployed at the front like soldiers in the war«<sup>104</sup>.

### Debarkation and the Doubts at Arrival

Upon arrival, the newcomers' first challenge was to adapt to the climatic, social and cultural environment. Apart from this general level of adaptation to the local conditions, individuals were facing the need to integrate into the respective convent communities. Since up to 1918 all nuns bound for the missions in New Guinea and Togo had been trained in the Steylean Motherhouse, some newcomers were already personally acquainted with their sisters in the missions. In the narratives of arrival, the reunion or making acquaintance with the members of the local sisterhood constituted the most prominent issue. Whereas most nuns portrayed the scenes of arrival as joyful moments, for some they were obviously marked by mixed feelings. In 1903, for example, a nun, having just debarked, described the first encounter with her fellow sisters in Tumleo Island as follows:

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103 »Noch niemals ist es mir zum Bewußtsein gekommen wie schön die Einheit in der Katholischen Kirche ist, als hier.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Theodosia Grotendorst, 11.10.1909.

104 »Auch hundert Krausköpfe richteten ihre schwarzen feurigen Augen auf uns Neulinge und musterten uns von Kopf bis zum Fuß. [...] Ich stehe jetzt an der Front wie die Soldaten im Krieg.« AG SSpS PNG 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, 5.11.1931.

There, all at once, two sisters appeared from behind the copse, reverend Sister Superior and Sister Evangelista. We were given a heartily welcome. But I noticed them looking at me inquisitorially, as if I weren't the one they had expected, and, in fact, I wasn't mistaken; surely they'd expected Sister Monica, but instead, my worthlessness appeared. What a disappointment!<sup>105</sup>

Integrating themselves into the local convent communities was a task newcomers would not always achieve easily. Good relations with both colleagues and superiors, however, were considered essential. Generally, the nuns arrived at the respective congregation's headquarters and it was only then that they would be told whether they were supposed to stay or to travel on to outpost places. In the fields, the arrival of new nuns often created tensions both within the groups of newcomers as well as between the small convent communities, which were not always informed about who was going to come. Sometimes, nuns did not feel welcomed by the respective communities for personal or professional reasons (e.g. regarding the training that the newcomers had enjoyed), an issue that was rife with potential conflict<sup>106</sup>.

In the fields of mission, the arrival of nuns was invariably appreciated, for it meant the reinforcement of personnel and first-hand communication of news from the Motherhouse. In New Guinea, the arrival of newcomers was a particularly important event for which the community gathered in the often adorned convents<sup>107</sup>. Newly arrived nuns were usually granted some days of recovery from the long and demanding voyage and during these days the convent community was partly dispensed from monastic silence<sup>108</sup>. Consequently, the nuns passed these first days in mission exchanging all kinds of news that had not found their way into letters. Besides, joint prayer according to congregational standards was taken up immediately just as the new-

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105 »Da auf einmal kamen zwei Schwestern aus dem Gebüsch. Es waren Schwester Vorsteherin und Schwester Evangelista. Herzlich wurden wir von ihnen empfangen. Doch fiel es mir auf, dass man mich so forschend anschaute, als ob ich nicht die Erwartete sei, und ich hatte mich wirklich nicht getäuscht, hatte man doch sicher Schwester Monika erwartet, und nun war statt dessen meine Nichtswürdigkeit eingetroffen. Welch eine Enttäuschung!« AG SSsP PNG Reiseberichte 1899–1907, Sr. Josephine Steiger, 22.12.1903.

106 The (internal) effects of dislocation are discussed in Chapter 2.

107 Consequently, the disappointment was huge when the eagerly anticipated steamer arrived without the expected nuns on board. In New Guinea, the lack of communication facilities at times led to the spread of wrong information and the nuns in New Guinea prepared everything for the arrival of new colleagues who then turned out to be still en route. Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Martha Sieverding, December 1900.

108 For example, a nun wrote about her first days in New Guinea in 1908: »We had recreation for two days. During that time, we told everything from Steyl that came to our minds.« (»Zwei Tage hatten wir Erholung. Da haben wir alles erzählt was wir von Steyl nur wussten.«) Cf. AG SSsP PNG Reiseberichte 1908–1913, Sr. Geneveva Gordeyns, 20.8.1908.

comers' first way always led them to the church or chapel, where they collectively thanked God for having arrived safely.

The newcomers' first days in the congregation's headquarters in the fields of mission were, moreover, marked by their waiting for the superiors' decision as to their actual sphere of activity. In case they were to travel further to outpost convents, their stay in the regional headquarters was just another sequence of the passage. Thus, during their first days abroad the newcomers, being kept in suspense as to if and when they were supposed to travel on, would be plagued by insecurity. Only two days had passed since Sister Immaculata Göcke's arrival in Lomé in 1903. She was about to go to sleep when somebody knocked at the convent's door and handed her a letter from the prefect apostolic, which gave details of her missionary appointment for the outpost convent in Aného. Recalling this peculiar night, she wrote:

I quickly opened it [the letter] and I saw that the lot had fallen on me. [...] Hastily I packed the most indispensable items, because in the next morning I was already to take my leave from Lomé, where I had been staying for only three days<sup>109</sup>.

At dawn Sister Immaculata climbed onto a hammock and two indigenous bearers carried her over to the coastal town of Aného, where she arrived later that day. Up to 1905, when the coastal railway line went into service, the nuns in Togo traveled »by hammock« as they called this colonial way of passenger transportation. Since the bearers were supposed to be paid a fee, nuns usually traveled to Aného without European or female company. It was either the prefect apostolic or the experienced nuns in Lomé who arranged the passage and who often accompanied the traveler part of the way on foot. The bearers usually stopped at a German missionary station about halfway, at Agbodrafo (at this time called Porto Seguro), from where the traveler took a lagoon canoe for the last section to Aného. Interestingly, most of the newcomers did not express discomfort about this stage of the passage. Quite the contrary, travel writers proudly wrote about their first steps performed in Togo on their own. Sister Immaculata, for instance, reported that at the sight of her the bearers were »pulling a long face« fearing she would be terribly heavy. Although her body weight gave her reason to feel sympathy with them, this did not initiate any critical contest of colonial ways of traveling. Yet, traveling in Togo without European company, the nuns found themselves depending on indigenous people. In her travelogue, Sister Immaculata referred to the moment

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109 »Ich öffnete ihn schnell und sah, dass das Los auf mich gefallen war. [...] Schnell wurde das Allernotwendigste gepackt; denn am anderen Morgen sollte ich schon wieder von Lome, wo ich erst drei Tage gewesen war, Abschied nehmen.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Immaculata Göcke, April 1903.

when her fellow nuns ultimately took their leave and entrusted her »to the care of the blacks«, as follows: »When the sisters left us, they [the bearers] immediately went close to the beach and I thought at first: Take care! You are too heavy. They are going to throw you into the sea«<sup>110</sup>.

Sister Immaculata depicted herself as a brave and curious traveler, ensuring her readers that she was not scared at all but, quite the contrary, passed the time in the hammock comfortably, saying her prayers and snoozing. Three times during that one-day trip by hammock she found herself dropped in the »hot sand«, while the bearers disappeared to take some refreshments<sup>111</sup>. When Sister Immaculata finally arrived at the missionary station in Agbodrafo, she had to face the fact that the local missionaries were not informed about her arrival and that both priests were currently out of town. Luckily, according to the author, an African boy informed a German friar who was working nearby. The latter then helped her to get a boat and rowers in order to cover the last distance to Aného. Sister Immaculata Göcke outlined her memories regarding the last part of her voyage as follows:

I was glad when they [the rowers] finally arrived. At six o'clock it gets already dark. And I thought: How fast everything can change! Four weeks ago I wasn't even thinking of Africa. Now I had already been sweating for four days on African soil and in that moment I found myself totally alone with two Negroes and one little missionary boy, whom the reverend Brother Norbertus had assigned me as a company. Unfortunately he didn't understand me and I didn't understand him, because he only spoke the language of the country. Although I was not able to chat with the people, I could converse with the Lord – He would understand me perfectly<sup>112</sup>.

In the travelogues, the description of troublesome (means of) traveling functioned as markers of *real* missionary life. Writers literally transformed missionary trips in colonial settings into sacred undertakings bringing them closer to God and the aspired religious goal of redemption. As the example of Sister Immaculata's trip to Aného shows, the mobility of nuns in the colonial

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110 »Die Schwestern verabschiedeten sich dann auch bald und ich wurde der Obsorge der Schwarzen anvertraut. Als die Schwestern uns eben verlassen hatten, gingen sie ganz nahe an den Strand, und ich dachte erst: Pass auf! Du bist ihnen zu schwer. Sie werfen dich gleich ins Meer [...]« Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 »Ich war froh, dass sie endlich da waren. 6 Uhr wurde es schon dunkel. Ich dachte noch: Wie schnell doch alles geändert werden kann! Vor vier Wochen dachte ich noch gar nicht an Afrika. Jetzt hatte ich schon vier Tage auf afrikanischem Boden geschwitzt und befand mich augenblicklich ganz allein bei zwei Negern und einem kleinen Missionsknaben, den der ehrw. Bruder Norbertus mir zur Begleitung gegeben hatte. Leider verstand er mich nicht, weil er nur die Landessprache sprach. Wenn ich auch nicht mit den Menschen schwätzen konnte, so konnte ich mit doch mit dem lieben Gott unterhalten; denn Er verstand mich sehr gut.« Ibid.



context depended on indigenous people who functioned as carriers, while »missionary children« (a term that usually referred to the mission's indigenous boarding school pupils or employees) acted as their company, translators, guides, informants and mediators. The dependence on indigenous carriers to move nuns, goods and information basically shaped the congregation's activities also in the interior of colonial Togo until 1911, when the northern railway line went into service. This may be exemplified by discussing the first trip that three nuns made to the town of Kpalimé, situated about hundred and twenty kilometers northwest of Lomé, in order to establish a women's convent on demand of the prefect apostolic in 1905.

In December 1904, Sister Pancratia Tendahl (1873–1950)<sup>113</sup>, a Togo missionary and the future head of the projected convent in Kpalimé, was sent on home leave to the Motherhouse in order to recuperate physically and to participate in the religious exercises<sup>114</sup>. Still in Europe, she was appointed superior of the community of three nuns that was to establish the convent. Her two companions were missionary newcomers. In August 1905, the three of them arrived in Lomé, where they stayed for five days until they left again for Kpalimé. Their second departure was delayed, however, because – to the great surprise of all individuals involved (the female superior in Togo<sup>115</sup>, Sister Pancratia Tendahl<sup>116</sup> and the nun in question<sup>117</sup>) – the prefect apostolic had decided that one of the newcomers should stay in Lomé and at short notice appointed another local nun to substitute for her. Significantly, the prefect's ultimate decision to remodel the group that was about to depart for the interior was firstly based on complaints about the respective nun's disciplinary behavior during the steamship voyage<sup>118</sup> and secondly explained by his doubts regarding her qualification after having observed her the few days she

113 Sister Pancratia Elisabeth Tendahl (1873–1950) entered the congregation in 1896. She took her first vows in 1908 and was appointed to Togo in 1900, where she stayed until October 1917.

114 Cf. AG SSps 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Lome, p. 15.

115 The head of the Lomé convent related the Mother Superior her surprise about this decision. Besides, the appointment influenced the convent community in Lome as well, for a local nun had to leave for Kpalimé.

116 »Usually things don't turn out the way you think they would. I'd never have expected that Sister Paulina would be sent together with us. But this was God's will and that's why we are going to accept it.« (»Es kommt doch gewöhnlich anders, als man sich denkt. Ich hätte nie daran gedacht, dass Schw. Paulina mit uns geschickt würde. Doch es ist so Gottes Wille gewesen und darum wollen wir jetzt auch gerne zufrieden sein.«) AG SSps 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 5.9.1905.

117 »Well, the two esteemed travel companions left me behind in Lome, because our most reverend father prefect wanted it like that.« (»Also die zwei werten Reisefährtinnen liessen mich in Lome zurück, weil unser hochwürdigster P. Präfekt es so wünschte.«) AG SSps 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Eulalia Hewing, 26.8.1905.

118 In particular the female head of the trio complained to superiors that during the passage to Togo the nun used to »contradict« and »object«. Cf. AG SSps 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 10.9.1905.

was in Lomé<sup>119</sup>. Again, the prefect apostolic took his time to communicate his decision. The lack of information about who was to join them unsettled the newcomers who commented on this in their travelogue: »While the bearers were already waiting for the third sister's luggage we didn't even know who was supposed to pack. Then of course all went in a rush«<sup>120</sup>.

Ultimately, on August 30<sup>th</sup> 1905, the three nuns left Lomé by train and headed for Noepe, the terminal stop where some sort of carriage, pulled by four indigenous men, awaited them<sup>121</sup>. The prefect apostolic kept the travelers' company, covering the distance by bicycle. During the three-day trip to Kpalimé, the missionary caravan stopped by in several villages, none of which hosted any western settlements. The nuns, still unconcerned with the fact that it was humans who moved their carriage, emphasized their roles as the pioneer »white women« who had managed to penetrate the interior of colonial Togo. Hence they gave much room to descriptions of the indigenous people's puzzled reactions when for the first time they were facing »white« women in general and nuns in particular. One of the travelers stated about their stop in a village called Badja: »At the market we got off. We seemed to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Young and old gazed at us as if we were ghosts from the underworld«<sup>122</sup>.

Alongside the puzzled reactions, however, the travel writers emphasized the friendly reception they received from indigenous Catholics. These were either indigenous catechists, i.e., teachers who were trained and employed by the missionary church, or their students. Accordingly, missionary pupils not only showed a friendly behavior toward the nuns but also accompanied their caravan bit by bit along the path, assisting in pulling the carriage. Altogether, converted Africans and Catholic-educated pupils welcomed the nuns and acted as mediators between the missionary travelers and the locals they came across on their way. When the caravan approached its final destination, Kpalimé, the local priests together with the missionary pupils and converts gathered to meet the nuns on the road. That way the Catholic population in Kpalimé gave them a festive reception in the town and led them to the chapel. A nun wrote:

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119 Cf. *ibid.*

120 »Die Träger warteten schon auf das Gepäck der dritten Schwester, während wir noch nicht wußten, wer einzupacken hatte. Nachher ging es natürlich Hals über Kopf«. AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Amadea Kaub, undated (1905).

121 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Amadea Kaub, 1.9.1905.

122 »Auf dem Markte stiegen wir ab. Wir schienen hier eines der Sieben Weltwunder zu sein. Groß und klein starnten uns an, als seien wir Geister aus der Unterwelt.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Amadea Kaub, undated (1905).

Under the sound of trumpets and the ringing of bells we moved to the mission's chapel. A short sacramental devotion followed, after which reverend Father Schönig delivered a speech to the people and to us. Then he led us to the sisters' house, the band ahead. Thus we had happily arrived in our new home<sup>123</sup>.

The gradual opening of the three railway lines in German Togo (Lomé–Aného in 1905, Lomé–Kpalimé in 1907 and Lomé–Agbonu in 1911<sup>124</sup>) introduced change to the local congregational policies of travel in that it improved the connections between the headquarters in Lomé with the outpost convents in Aného, Atakpamé and Kpalimé<sup>125</sup>. From then on, the Togo-based nuns were able to move independently between the congregation's local branches while their colleagues in New Guinea, in contrast, at first depended totally on the limited number of available shipping routes. Besides, the Catholic mission also owned some boats, which were navigated by priests or monks. In 1909, Prefect Apostolic Eberhard Limbrock (1859–1931) purchased the »Gabriel«, a 93-foot steamship, in order to establish a regular connection between the various missionary stations positioned along the north coast of the mainland. Ideally, the »Gabriel« performed a monthly round to all coastal stations transporting people, goods and information, thus functioning as the bond that kept the mission together<sup>126</sup>. Unlike the nuns in Togo with their increasing independence in terms of moving between the convents throughout the region, their counterparts in New Guinea depended totally on male missionaries. There it was the priests and friars who administered the means of transportation and, in their function as captains (and later pilots), routed the missionary shipping lines (and since the 1930s the flight schedules)<sup>127</sup>.

When the first three nuns left Tumleo Island in 1902 in order to travel the about 300-kilometer distance to the area called Monumbo, where the congregation's second convent in northern New Guinea was to be established, some of them thought that they had left their colleagues for good<sup>128</sup>.

123 »Unter Trompetenschall und Glockenklang zogen wir zur Missionskapelle. Darauf war eine kurze sakramentale Andacht, worauf Hochw. P. Schönig eine Ansprache an das Volk und an uns hielt. Dann führte man uns zum Schwesternhaus, die Musikkapelle voraus. So waren wir glücklich in unserem neuen Heim angelangt.« Ibid.

124 By 1911, the so-called *Hinterlandbahn* went from Lomé to Agbanu, a small village situated close to Atakpamé. The last, four-kilometer stretch to Atakpamé was constructed from November 1912 to May 1913. Cf. SEBALD, Togo, p. 336.

125 Cf. Donna J.E. MAIER, Slave Labor and Wage Labor in German Togo, 1885–1914, in: KNOLL/GANN (eds), *Germans in the Tropics*, pp. 73–92, i.e. 77.

126 Cf. Mary Taylor HUBER, Constituting the Church. Catholic Missionaries on the Sepik Frontier, in: *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987), pp. 107–125, i.e. 113.

127 Since the late 1930s and 1940s the plane superseded the boat in missionary service in both practical use and (symbolic) connecting function. Cf. HUBER, *Constituting the Church*, p. 117.

128 »On Monday morning, at a quarter to four we bid our Tumleo sisters farewell – perhaps for ever – and then we went on board, accompanied by four Tumleo girls who will work for us in

Even though the Catholic mission in New Guinea used modern means of transportation (such as steamships or aircraft), the nuns largely depended on the travel facilities provided by their male colleagues. Besides, meteorological conditions impacted on the usability of waterways or air strips, at times forestalling the regular circulation of people, goods and news between the single convents<sup>129</sup>. Given the fact that it was hard to determine either the date or the duration of missionary voyages in New Guinea they indeed remained exhausting undertakings well into the twentieth century.

### Mobility and Missionary Life

Female missionary life required mobility on a daily basis even beyond traveling between the single convents. In contrast to what scholars have observed with regard to Protestant missionary wives, whose primary sphere of activity was the missionary household<sup>130</sup>, the regular work tasks of Catholic nuns in missions involved a range of outdoor duties, such as regular trips to neighboring villages or outpost schools<sup>131</sup>. In their capacity of mobile missionary nurses or teachers they were expected to establish and maintain good relations with the nearby population. This requirement for mobility, however, created tensions with regard to both the demanding infrastructural conditions and the rigid restrictions that ecclesiastical authorities traditionally placed on the movements of nuns. In Togo and New Guinea, the nuns utilized all means of transport accessible, such as canoes, bicycles, horses, carriages or boats. Besides, they undertook extended, physically demanding hikes. Mobility also shaped the missionary nun's visual representation: Given her numerous outdoor duties under demanding climatic conditions, the so-called »tropical hat« (a big straw hat) and a parasol became indispensable items of her equipment.

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Potsdamhafen in order to earn some dresses and the like.« (»Am Montag morgen, gegen ¼ vor 4 Uhr sagten wir den guten Schwestern auf Tumleo Lebewohl – vielleicht auf immer – dann gingen wir an Bord und mit uns 4 Tumleo Mädchen, die ein Jahr bei uns in Potsdamhafen arbeiten wollen, um sich einige Kleider und dergl. zu verdienen.«) AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Philomena Herzog, 30.10.1902.

129 The scattered character of the Catholic enterprise in northern New Guinea shaped both the collective organization and the individual's experience of missionary life in complex ways that are discussed in the next chapter.

130 Cf. LANGMORE, *Missionary Lives*, pp. 65–88.

131 Considerations regarding the mobility of women have a long-standing tradition in feminist discourse and scholarship, for it was also through physical movement that women conquered space for them in the nineteenth century. Cf. Johanna GEHMACHER/Maria MESNER, *Geschlechtergeschichte/n in Bewegung*, in: Johanna GEHMACHER/Maria MESNER, *Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte. Positionen/Perspektiven (Querschnitte 14)*, Innsbruck 2003, pp. 7–17; i.e. 7f.



Figure 3: Group of nuns in Togo, undated;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, Togo P1010602.



Figure 4: »Sr. Gertraud Hennes and a fellow sister on their way in the bush«;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, New Guinea, Album: PNG 36.



Figure 5: »Two sisters on their way on horseback«;  
Archive SSPS Steyl Fotos, New Guinea, Album: PNG 34.

These items appeared in both textual<sup>132</sup> and visual representations (Figure 3). In some New Guinean settings, the missionary nun's equipment was completed by a pocket knife that she used to cut her way through the bush<sup>133</sup>. There, mobility featured prominently in the visual representation of female missionary work. Mission photography from New Guinea juxtaposed the mobile missionary nun to the male-gendered image of the adventurous traveler penetrating alien space and savage nature.

According to the archival record, Figure 4 represents two nuns on their »way into the bush«. The carefully staged image was conceptualized as a snapshot representing missionary practice as an adventurous and physically demanding undertaking. The same applies to Figure 5 that shows two nuns on a missionary trip by horse. The photo gives an impressive account of the missionary situation from the western Catholic point of view: Nuns, equipped with their well-visible crucifixes, were represented as the mobile ambassadors of an expanding Church who self-confidently crossed non-European space, bringing the faith to non-Christian peoples. In contrast, the indigenous children (in the right upper corner of the photo) formed part of the static background of the scene, somehow melting into the tropical setting. Both photos claimed to visualize two women missionaries on their daily routes. Here, the nuns are clearly depicted as *missionaries*, meaning as brave and adventuresome figures who conducted evangelical voyages notwithstanding the troublesome conditions. Indeed, there is a shift to be observed in the visual representation of nuns in Europe and the field. Whereas in Europe nuns were photographed exclusively on special occasions and in ordered (uniform) groups in front of churches or convents, the rough New Guinean setting set a highly unusual background for the visual representation of women religious<sup>134</sup>.

Interestingly, despite the fact that horse riding was seriously disputed and at times and places even prohibited by male and/or female religious superiors in Europe and abroad, photographs of nuns on horseback in New Guinea (Figure 6) can frequently be found in the Servants of the Holy Spirit's photo archives. This can be explained by the particularity of the local situation. With the nuns' workday mobility on foot being challenged by the condition of roads and paths due to seasonal influences they imitated priests resorting to the use of horses, which were available at most missionary stations.

132 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 24.2.1903.

133 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 27.12.1924.

134 The only photographs showing the nuns in Europe were the group images taken prior to their departure. The style of these photos, which were carefully collected and archived in albums, remained unchanged up to the mid-twentieth century: Earnest-looking nuns posed uniformly against the background of the façade of the Motherhouse. E.g. cf. Figures 1 and 2, pp. 62f.





Figure 6: »On the way to the outpost stations in New Guinea«;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, New Guinea, Folder 6.5/Transport.

Horse riding became a quotidian feature of missionary life in New Guinea that was obviously not restricted to particularly deserted or physically demanding settings<sup>135</sup>. Significantly, in the first decade of the twentieth century, local nuns were even trained in horse-riding on demand of the prefect apostolic<sup>136</sup>. Still, in sharp contrast to priests, the mobility of nuns in missions had always been a subject of discussion. As the transcontinental discussion of the use of bicycles in colonial Togo from 1907 to 1910 shows, superiors in Europe aimed to control their subordinates' movements abroad through rigid restrictions.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, some nuns in Togo used bicycles to get to outpost places. They did so at the request of the prefect apostolic, who emphasized the bicycle's practical importance in the missionary context<sup>137</sup>. According to the head of the Togo-based nuns, it was the local priests who had purchased the bikes and advised their female colleagues to use them<sup>138</sup>. Some nuns obviously appreciated this, and one of them even asked her father to send a bicycle to Togo<sup>139</sup>. In fact, the nuns used the bicycles obviously not knowing that this had never been approved by their European superiors<sup>140</sup>. Significantly, it was only retroactively, namely in 1908, that founder Arnold Janssen, who at that time still functioned as the joint superior of nuns and priests, agreed with the nuns' use of bikes<sup>141</sup>. However, the discussion flared up again immediately after the congregation's first general chapter in 1910 and thus at a moment when female congregational elites were gradually assuming power<sup>142</sup>.

Congregational elites saw the nuns' mobility as a source of autonomous agency that challenged the ecclesiastical culture which was based on community, control and seclusion. In 1910, Mother Superior Theresia Messner introduced a moral dimension to the discussion, emphasizing the multiple threats

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135 E.g., in 1908, the local head of the nuns reported to Europe that nuns in the new developing missionary headquarters in Alexishafen at times took horses on their daily way to the slightly distant church. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 6.2.1908.

136 Cf. *ibid.*

137 For instance, it was the prefect apostolic who purchased a lady's bike for the nuns in Kpalimé in 1907. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 8.10.1907.

138 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 20.11.1907.

139 Cf. *ibid.*

140 All nuns who addressed the issue in their letters appeared to be assuming that the priests in Togo acted in accordance with European superiors when they introduced cycling for nuns. Cf. *ibid* and AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 8.10.1907.

141 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 9.2.1908.

142 Cf. Chapter 2, pp. 122–128.

that derived from autonomous mobility and the lack of control. Arguing against the Togo-based nuns' use of bicycles, she stated:

Let's just imagine that day by day one or the other sister goes to an outpost school by bicycle! [...] Afield, she totally depends on herself and the unedifying environment. This independent life, the complete lack of religious inspiration and order, the continuing influence of the environment, the work and sorrows; the danger of being unobserved will – in most cases – hardly be conducive to leading a religious life. The serious quest for perfection, the care of the spirit of prayer, the exercise of virtue out of spiritual reasons will get lost sooner or later. The sisters will decline, become half-hearted and profane-minded, if not worse things are going to happen in single cases<sup>143</sup>.

Simultaneously another regulation was introduced with the aim to better control the individual nuns' movements. Accordingly, subordinated nuns had to ask the head of the convent to make upon them the sign of the cross prior to their leaving the house. This symbolic gesture of blessing was aimed at both the expression of spiritual custody and the control of the movements of subordinates<sup>144</sup>. Interestingly, attempting to explain why such restrictive religious policies targeted exclusively women missionaries' movements the head of the congregation referred to European gender roles, more precisely, to the imagination of separated spheres for the sexes in order to emphasize her point of view. Mother Theresia Messner naturalized gender difference, thus falling back on the nineteenth-century European construction of the characters of the sexes, which attributed the public or external sphere to men and reduced the women's sphere of activity to private and internal domains<sup>145</sup>:

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143 »Denken wir uns, fährt die eine und andere Schwester nach einer Außenstation zur Schule? [...] Sie ist draußen ganz auf sich und ihre wenig erbauliche Umgebung angewiesen. Diese selbstständige Leben, der Mangel an jeder religiösen Anregung und Ordnung, der stete Einfluss der Umgebung, die Arbeit und die Sorgen, die Gefahren des Unbeobachtetseins werden in den meisten Fällen nicht günstig auf das religiöse Leben einwirken. Das ernste Streben nach Vollkommenheit, die Pflege des Gebetsgeistes, die Übung der Tugend aus übernatürlichen Beweggründen wird sich schneller oder langsamer verlieren. Die Schwestern werden zurückgehen, lau und weltlich gesinnt werden, wenn man in einzelnen Fällen nicht noch Schlimmeres wird erfahren müssen.« AG SSpS 0311.2 Tog Briefe von M. Theresia Messner nach Togo, 3.8.1910.

144 In an advise to the head of the Lomé nuns Mother Theresia Messner put it like this: »It is a good thing, though, to see the sisters leave with the blessing of holy obedience and to always know where to and when the sisters have gone out.« (»Es ist doch schön, wenn die Schwestern immer mit dem Segen des heiligen Gehorsams gehen und Sie immer wissen, wo and wann die Schwestern ausgegangen sind.«) AG SSpS 0311.2 Tog Briefe von M. Theresia Messner nach Togo, 11.9.1910.

145 Cf. Karin HAUSEN, *Family and Role-division: The Polarization of sexual Stereotypes in the nineteenth Century. An Aspect of Dissociation of Work and Family Life*, in: Richard EVANS/W.R. LEE (eds), *The German Family. Essays on the Social History of the Family in nineteenth- and twentieth-Century Germany*, London 1981, pp. 51–83.

One may hold that the abovementioned mischief also applies to the reverend fathers and brothers and, moreover, to a much higher degree than to the sisters. This is true but the reverend fathers and reverend brothers once got the vocation and the task to work in public life by God; for them it's natural. In many cases they provide for their protection themselves; they are men in terms of character and action. With regard to the sisters, it's a totally different matter<sup>146</sup>.

Ultimately, the belated attempt to prohibit the use of bicycles in Togo failed because the missionary way of organizing day-to-day work depended on the nuns' high mobility. Prefect Apostolic Nikolaus Schönig (1867–1925) clearly told the mother superior that, should the prohibition be implemented, the mission would be forced to give up some of its outpost places<sup>147</sup>. Hence, in 1910, one year after the discussion reached its peak, the use of bicycles was not only legitimized<sup>148</sup> but the nuns in some Togolese settings were even systematically instructed in cycling<sup>149</sup>.

Compared with the controversy on cycling in Togo, the issue of horseback riding in New Guinea caused less excitement in Europe. In part, this can be explained by the notion that the New Guinean field was a colonial frontier that demanded exceptional rules and regulations. Still, the topic was brought up at times and places and discussed across continental borders, and temporarily congregational elites did ban nuns from riding horses. Besides, unimpressed by the local superiors' complaints about the lack of horses and suitable candidates, European superiors continued to call for obligatory female escort for nuns who performed missionary trips on horseback<sup>150</sup>.

In turn, the priests operating in New Guinea argued that the cooperation of nuns in what they called active missionary work (meaning the carrying-out of regular apostolic trips across larger geographical areas) was essential to the local venture of evangelization, and women missionaries would be able to move across certain terrains only on horseback. In particular, it was

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146 »Man wird vielleicht sagen, die oben erwähnten Übelstände treffen doch auch bei den Hochw. Patres und Brüder zu und zwar in noch ganz anderer Weise als für die Schwestern. Das ist wahr, aber die Hochw. Patres und ehrw. Brüder haben nun einmal den Beruf und die Aufgabe vom lieben Gott erhalten im öffentlichen Leben zu wirken; es ist dies für sie ganz natürlich. Sie schützen sich in vielen Fällen selbst, sie sind Mann im Charakter und Handeln. Eine ganz andere Sache ist es in dieser Hinsicht mit den Schwestern.« Cf. AG SSps 0311.2 Tog Briefe von M. Theresia Messner nach Togo, 3.8.1910.

147 Cf. *ibid.*

148 Still, although the nuns were allowed to cycle to outpost places, the use of the bike in towns or villages remained strictly prohibited. Cf. AG SSps 0311.2 Tog Briefe von M. Theresia Messner nach Togo, 5.3.1912.

149 This was the case in outpost convents, where extended outgoings formed part of the nuns' day-to-day duties. Cf. AG SSps 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1896–1914, Sr. Thaddäa Brands, 2.5.1912.

150 Cf. AG SSps SVD-SSps Gründungszeit 0006.2, auf der Heide, 17.01.1906.

the use of men's saddles that caused strong resistance in Europe<sup>151</sup>. A local priest, however, pointing out that riding side-saddles caused too many accidents appealed to European superiors to give in and to allow the nuns to use men's saddles, the more as there were neither »moral« nor »medical« objections<sup>152</sup>. In addition, referring to the particularities of the New Guinean social and cultural setting, he noted that neither Europeans nor indigenous people on location considered riding nuns in men's saddles as objectionable. In the eyes of the priest, the social roles of (European, religious) men and women were being shaped by local circumstances. He therefore suggested transcending European gender models and accommodating gendered congregational guidelines to the respective setting and the imperatives posed by missionary life<sup>153</sup>.

For the nuns, temporary (or local) bans on horse riding entailed exhausting walks of several hours across difficult terrains. According to the individual field of work and status in the religious hierarchy, single nuns sometimes spoke out on this issue to European superiors or even leveled slight criticism on their rigid policies. In 1912, a nun directed a letter to Mother Superior Theresia Messner in which she gave an elaborate description of two six-hour walks she had been forced to perform together with a colleague. On their way to a friar's funeral at a neighboring missionary station, the two of them had to plod through the sand and cross three mountains on foot, while suffering from the heat at daytime and the darkness at nighttime. Summing up the demanding trip, she added: »It's a pity that we are not allowed to ride«<sup>154</sup>. However, similarly to what applied to the use of bicycles in Togo, European superiors finally gave in and legitimized the use of horses, although not without adding that preference should be given to the use of side-saddles<sup>155</sup>.

Notwithstanding these discussions, nuns on horseback were to become symbols of female missionary work in the New Guinean frontier. Apart from the photographic representation of nuns mounting horses, individuals also filled their letters to fellows or relatives with adventurous accounts of their rides in the jungle. The crossing of gendered boundaries in the representation

151 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Fr. Andreas Puff, 19.2.1917.

152 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Fr. Andreas Puff, August 1917.

153 »What might be offensive in Europe isn't necessarily objectionably here; indeed, some things are necessities here, and nobody gets angry about it.« (»Was eben in Europe vielleicht anstößig sein kann, ist es darum hier noch nicht; ja manches ist hier oft eine Notwendigkeit, an der sich niemand ärgert.«) Ibid.

154 »Es ist doch schade, dass wir nicht reiten dürfen.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Valentina Steinkeller, 26.1.1912.

155 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Fr. Andreas Puff, August 1917. However, once the use of men's saddles was legitimized, what followed was a transcontinental discussion on the different concepts of appropriate dress (i.e., replacement of the ordinary trousers with the riding breeches to be worn under the skirt). Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, M. Theresia Messner, 24.8.1919 and Sr. Philomena Herzog, 13.12.1919.

of missionary nuns as essentially mobile figures was, moreover, reflected by the priests' in the field praising single nuns for performing a »man's job«, meaning their filling in for priests by carrying out extended trips on horseback. These regular all-day trips involved giving religious instruction in outpost schools and visiting indigenous villages or sick persons<sup>156</sup>. Outstanding bravery and physical robustness in combination with the nuns' willingness to engage beyond the confined space of the convent distinguished these extraordinary figures in the eyes of their male colleagues.

Nuns constructed the image of female missionary life on similar premises. They integrated physical and psychological challenges in their narratives of self-sacrifice and total commitment to the missionary cause. The imperative of mobility, while functioning as a potential threat in both religious and physical terms, from the nuns' point of view, however, was clearly compensated for by divine protection and support<sup>157</sup>. Besides, individual nuns tended to refer to missionary experience as one full of adventure, stressing the skills and knowledge they had acquired concerning the non-European cultural and ecological setting. Moving through colonial space on a regular basis, they conceived of themselves as the skilled, fearless and confident ambassadors of a superior religion and culture. In this context, the theme of exceptionality again constituted a consistent feature. In the New Guinean frontier, missionary nuns not only reproduced the colonial discourse of western expansion but emphasized their own contribution to the (religious) opening up of »heathen« space. This became particularly obvious during the late 1920s and 1930s, a period that was marked by increasing participation of nuns in external missionary work due to the general lack of missionary personnel on the one hand and the steady advance of westerners (explorers, colonial administrators, anthropologists, etc.) to the country's interior on the other.

In 1926, Sister Hermengilde Simbürger (1891–1934), who had arrived in New Guinea in 1913, described a two-day trip she had undertaken on Manam Island together with a colleague. In a letter directed to her biological sister and fellow Servant of the Holy Spirit in Europe, she recounted in detail this missionary journey in the course of which they had circled the entire island in order to give religious instruction. While the local nuns usually did so by boat, a temporary lack of all means of travel made them consider going on foot. Prior to this, the nuns consulted male villagers about the possibilities to go by land:

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156 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Fr. Andreas Puff, 7.4.1922.

157 Cf. E.g. AG SSpS PNG 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, 20.4.1937.

›Is the path passable or not?‹ I asked. ›No‹, a couple of men immediately replied, ›impossible, it's too dangerous. Big slopes and rocks; at some places you will have to swim. The waves of the sea will swallow you. The sea will bury you.‹ ›Good‹, I answered, ›but you must at least cry a little over the loss of us when you hear that we are dead‹<sup>158</sup>.

Despite this warning the two nuns, accompanied by some schoolgirls, set out on their trip fearlessly. Except for two indigenous catechists, whom they asked for guidance on the first critical stage, they traveled without male escort. Sister Hermengilde's travelogue contains a detailed account of the rough terrain the travelers had to pass, the mountains and ravines they climbed and the heat and thirst that troubled them as they moved from village to village. ›We were praised as strong women‹, she added, describing the indigenous observers' astonishment and admiration for the nuns because of the ›round trip of the local world‹ they had performed<sup>159</sup>.

While here exceptional courage is referred to as one of the missionary nun's indispensable qualifications it had also become clear that mobility in the colonial context depended on the indigenous people's assistance, their communication skills and the travelers' ability to negotiate with local authorities. The successful missionary nun thus distinguished herself by her language and communication skills. For instance, in a letter to her family, a nun operating in New Guinea, who regularly covered considerable distances on horseback in the capacity of a missionary nurse, described a trip to which she referred to as part of an ordinary working day: On her way to a patient on her own she came across a river with no bridge or canoe in sight to allow her crossing it. Yet, she reacted with courage and creativity, appealing to some indigenous men. She proudly wrote:

Without making a great fuss I called three men and made my horse swim through [the river], then I had them carry me through. You should have seen that picture. The river wasn't very deep, but the water reached up to the men's chest and partly even higher; then they had to carry me with their arms high in the air. But the men were most delighted that I was so courageous and I wasn't scared at all!<sup>160</sup>.

158 ››Ist der Weg gangbar oder nicht?‹, fragte ich. ›Nein‹, sagten sofort mehrere Männer, ›geht nicht; es ist zu gefährlich. Große Abhänge und Klippen; stellenweise müsst ihr schwimmen. Die Meereswellen werden euch verschlingen, die See wird euch begraben.‹ ›Gut‹, sagte ich, ›dann müsst ihr uns aber wenigstens ein Stückchen nachweinen, wenn ihr hört, daß wir tot sind.‹« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 1.8.1926.

159 Ibid.

160 ››Ich machte nicht viele Geschichten, rief drei Männer ließ mein Pferd zuerst hindurchschwimmen, dann ließ ich mich durchtragen. Das Bild hättet ihr einmal sehen müssen. Der Fluß war wohl nicht sehr tief, aber das Wasser ging den Männern doch bis an die Brust, an einigen Stellen noch weiter, dann mußten sie mich jedes Mal mit ihren Armen hoch in die Luft halten.

Ultimately, the nuns' travelogues also mirrored the discourse on discovery and exploration that accompanied western advance into the interior of the New Guinean mainland during the 1920s and 1930s. This is illustrated in the following passage taken from a letter that a nun sent to Europe in 1932:

On one of my tours I dared to advance a bit more into the bush and I reached a Kanaka village that no European had entered so far, leave alone a missionary sister on horseback. Spotting my approach early enough, everybody ran away seeking to escape and creeping into the huts to hide from the strange arrival<sup>161</sup>.

Representing herself as the pioneer European entering alien terrain the writer brings to mind a secular exploration narrative. Interestingly, there is a shift to be observed in the gendered power structures. The account, according to which the indigenous people tried to hide from the approaching nun, was to underline the position of power she claimed to have occupied vis-à-vis the native villagers of both sexes. Not experiencing a fit of fear herself, she described the villagers' frightened and defensive reactions. In the writer's interpretation, it was her knowledge of the vernacular and the mission's regional social and cultural significance that ultimately helped her to dispel the initial distrust. According to the account, some indigenous boys, who were familiar with the Catholic mission, ultimately identified her as a nun and her horse as an imported domestic animal. Observing her conversation with these boys, the indigenous »runaways« slowly »overcame their fear« and approached the nun on horseback:

Slowly they sneaked up on us, the most anxious ones crawling on hands and feet, and now the examination started. The fact that I spoke their language encouraged them. They touched the horse, my shoes, my dress etc. Having talked to them for some time, I jumped off the horse. But then, unexpectedly panic arose. Almost all run away in big swarms. [...] It took them a while before they would show up again. Now, that I have been there several times, I am already known to them and they don't run away anymore<sup>162</sup>.

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Aber die Männer hatten eine Riesenfreude dass ich so viel Mut hatte und nicht bange war.« AG SSpS PNG 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, 20.4.1937.

161 »Auf einer meiner Wanderungen wagte ich mich mit meinem Pferdchen etwas weiter in den Busch und kam in ein Kanakendorf, das noch kein Europäer, noch viel weniger eine Missionschwester, auf dem Pferd reitend, betreten hat. Mein herankommen wurde früh genug entdeckt, und – alles flüchtet – versteckt und verkriecht sich in den Hütten vor dem sonderbaren Ankömmling.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, fragment, 1932.

162 »Langsam kamen sie herangeschlichen, die Ängstlichen selbst auf Händen und Füßen herankrochen, und nun ging es ans Untersuchen. Daß ich ihre Sprache kannte, gab ihnen Mut. Das Pferd wurde betastet, meine Schuhe, meine Kleider usw. Als ich einige Zeit mir ihnen gesprochen hatte, sprang ich vom Pferd. Aber da entstand eine unerwartete Panik. Fast alle



In the letter quoted, the Catholic mission figured as the institution through which this group of Pacific Islanders came into contact with western ways of life and the testimonies of European culture. Indigenous boys, who had spent some time at a missionary station, recognized the nun as the representative of a powerful religion and institution – indeed, they functioned as important cultural intermediaries. And yet the writer represented herself as the self-confident key agent in the scene. Traveling around, she had managed to establish relations with a previously unknown, from her European/colonialist point of view, population group. Irrespective of her sex, the nun's education, her equipment, her ethnic background and her mobility would guarantee her a position of power in the encounter described. The writer constructed the image of a mobile missionary culture and opposed it to the villagers' stagnation and immobility.

The nuns' travelogues must thus be seen as narratives of a colonial modernity that was essentially marked by European agency and mobility. Mobility, the missionary's essential emblem, became the colonizers' privilege, against which the indigenous culture appeared as static and receiving. In this kind of adventurous narrative of empire the travel writers claimed an outstanding role as exceptional women. They promoted and actively supported the mission's geographical expansion over imperial space and, as was the case with New Guinea, the penetration of the mainland's interior of territories that had been untouched by Europeans hitherto. Similarly to their male colleagues, the nuns bemoaned the lack of missionary personnel as this prevented the mission from, to use the words of a nun in 1923, »pushing forward into the highly populated territory of the real cannibals«<sup>163</sup>. The nuns thus shared the official ecclesiastical policy of evangelization that conceived of the missionary venture as geographically unlimited<sup>164</sup>.

Summing up, mobility formed an integral part of female missionary experience and practice. As such, it challenged traditional ideals of a gendered ecclesiastical culture that centered on stability and promoted the convent as a secluded system of social control. Departure challenged existing forms of social organization in a uniform and vertically structured sisterhood. Religious communities were at first disrupted in Europe and then reestablished abroad. The departure for Togo and New Guinea, respectively, forced

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flohen in großen Scharen davon. [...] Es dauerte lange bis sie sich aus ihren Verstecken wieder hervorwagten. Jetzt, da ich schon öfter dort war, bin ich Ihnen schon bekannt, und sie laufen nicht mehr davon.« Ibid.

163 »Yes, If we had more missionaries, then we could push forward into the highly populated territory of the real cannibals.« (»Ja, hätten wir mehr Missionare, dann könnten wir auch in das stark bevölkerte Gebiet der echten Menschenfresser vordringen.«) AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 1923.

164 This thought is developed further in the discussion of »heathen« space in Chapters 3 and 4.

the nuns to adapt to a mobile and gradually secular framework. Despite the attempts of religious superiors to maintain the status quo, gender relations were renegotiated just as the temporary loosening of the religious hierarchies marked these communities on the move.

As they encountered new spaces traveling nuns started to incorporate mobility as a significant feature of their professional identities. Through migration they actually became *missionaries*, meaning people religious, who, referencing the biblical Great Commission, were traveling all over the world for religious reasons for a long time. To belong to this well-established Christian evangelizing forces and to actively support what they perceived to be the holiest venture of their times impacted on both individuals and communities. During the passage, elements of religion, gender, ethnicity and race intersected in ways that empowered the nuns, who constructed their own peculiar identities in the German colonial world. Gradually changing their urban blue habit for the tropical white religious dress of the missionary nun, they associated with male political, economic and religious elites without forsaking their status as exceptional women religious who responded to a divine vocation. Common concerns for a safe passage, good health and physical strength as well as the promotion of a civilizing mission connected the nuns with the secular Europeans they encountered. In part, they not only took their privileged roles as »whites« in a colonial system of inequality for granted but represented themselves as the recognized partners in the German colonial project, for their work's social and moral features were acknowledged by the environment. This was particularly the case for two central tasks performed by the nuns in missions, namely teaching and nursing. In contrast to prewar Germany where the nuns' activities were confined to their own institution, in the colonies they occupied a public social, religious and educational function.

Yet, the passage constituted an exceptional situation for the nuns. Temporarily out of the convent, they experienced a significant scope of autonomy deriving from both the travel circumstances and the temporary loosening of congregational guidelines and hierarchies. Both the departure from the Motherhouse and the arrival at the »new home«, were emotionally challenging experiences for individuals and communities alike. Hence, the travel to the mission field was also a transition period. The next chapter broaches the issue of individual and collective experiences of displacement and explores how nuns (re)created their peculiar religious way of life abroad.

## 2. (Re-)producing religious Structures

According to the ecclesiastical monastic tradition, the way of life of nuns was embedded in a concept of spiritual cooperation and support that centered on prayer and religious exercises. The Catholic ideal of sisterhood was, moreover, characterized by complex set of social rules and rituals. Since the early centuries of the Church, nuns had committed themselves to a life based on the vows of poverty, obedience and chastity and recognized the following of a religious rule as a way to sanctification. Religious life and consecration thus involved (and still do involve) the »radical self-giving« to God, which is to be understood as the imitation of the life of Christ<sup>1</sup>. A virtue central in this context is that of obedience as something to be strived for by the religious in order to approach the ideal of resembling most closely the »self-emptying sacrifice of Christ«, thus following the divine example of the Son who observed the Father's will<sup>2</sup>. In the pre-Vatican II Catholic understanding, the total subordination of a congregation's members to its religious rule represented what Carmel McEnroy has aptly called the »full-coverage insurance for this life and the next«<sup>3</sup>. Day-to-day life in the women's convents followed a rigidly defined combination of work, prayer and study in correspondence with the respective congregation's constitutions and religious rule.

The Servants of the Holy Spirit's first constitutions and religious rule were established in 1891 by their founder Arnold Janssen on the model of religious rules of other women's congregations<sup>4</sup>. Thus, these first constitutions, which shaped the (social) space in which succeeding missionaries were to receive their religious and secular training, originated in a specific continental German Catholic context. Up to 1918, all nuns sent to Togo and New Guinea shared a common background, having passed their candidacy, novitiate, missionary training and first vows in the stable environment of the Motherhouse where they were instructed in the uniform principles of convent life. It was in their responsibility, though, to adapt these principles to the new and chal-

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1 Cf. Mary Dominic PITTS, *The Threefold Response of the Vows*, in: *The Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious* (ed.), *The Foundations of Religious Life. Revisiting the Vision*, Washington 2009, pp. 85–112, 85.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 104. On obedience as a virtue cf. HÜWELMEIER, *Närrinnen Gottes*, pp. 198–200.

3 Cf. Carmel Elizabeth McENROY, *Guests in their own House. The Women of Vatican II*, New York 1996, p. 161.

4 Janssen's rule was consequently licensed by the responsible bishop of Roermond. Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 20.

lenging living conditions they encountered abroad and to transplant this particular ecclesiastical culture to non-European settings.

Upon entry to the congregation, all nuns vowed obedience to their superiors and the religious rule. Once established in the mission fields, however, the question emerged as to *who* and *where* the legitimate authorities were to interpret this rule? Were they priests, ecclesiastical authorities or (superior) nuns? Were they in Europe or abroad? This chapter discusses the (re)production of religious structures through the biographies of two nuns, one active in Togo and the other one in New Guinea, showing how (gendered) authority was negotiated among nuns in Europe and abroad as well as among nuns and missionaries of both sexes in the fields. Conflicts among the missionary personnel often resulted from issues of authority in combination with structural problems in the fields. Significantly, problems cropped up quickly among the first nuns who settled in the small missionary convents in Togo and New Guinea, respectively. As for Togo, early correspondence with Europe suggests that the collective relationships between the small number of women who resided in the first convent established in the colonial capital Lomé in 1897 were dominated by serious disputes.

Due to the humid tropical climate and the health issues this posed to Europeans, the start of the women's convent in Lomé was all but easy, with malaria and blackwater fever being regular occurrences. From 1892 to 1899, the Catholic mission in Togo had to put up with a mortality rate of 29%<sup>5</sup>. Historian of medicine Wolfgang Eckart explained this above-average mortality rate by both the missionary personnel's lifestyles (i.e. frequent travels and close contact with the malaria-infected indigenous population) and their dependence on colonial medicine (i.e. only irregular consultation of government doctors or the incorrect use of quinine, the first effective anti-malaria drug)<sup>6</sup>. The first community of nuns in Togo was heavily affected by frequent sickness and mortal fevers. From the four pioneer women missionaries who settled in Lomé at the beginning of 1897 (Figure 1<sup>7</sup>), only one was still alive by January 1900. Sister Bernarda Althoff (1872–1897), the head of this first community and its most profoundly trained member<sup>8</sup>, passed away only two months after her arrival in Togo. Later that year Sisters Petra Frericks and Georgia van Oopen (1869–1940) debarked in Lomé, the former with the

5 E.g., according to an official report from 1898/99, the colonial government counted thirty-four cases of malaria among the forty-five Europeans who resided in the colony. Cf. Wolfgang ECKART, *Medizin und Kolonialimperialismus. Deutschland 1884–1945*, Paderborn 1997, pp. 123f.

6 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 123.

7 Cf. Figure 1, p. 62.

8 Prior to their departure for Togo, the two teacher-trained nuns of the first community in Togo, Sister Bernarda Althoff (1872–1897) and Sister Franziska Dold (1872–1900), traveled to Manchester. In Manchester they stayed with an English teaching congregation in order to improve their language skills.

explicit assignment to replace the deceased superior. Already in 1899, Sister Petra was forced to return to Europe due to illness. The next pair of nuns sent to make up for the unexpected drop-out were Sisters Didaka Micheel (1866–1916) and Rosalia Falkner (1870–1940) who came to Togo in 1899. It was only two months after their arrival that two other nuns of the pioneer group died, once again reducing the community<sup>9</sup>. Thereafter, the superior's office was assumed by Sister Margareta Zintinger (1864–1936), the only survivor of the Togo pioneers, who held the office until September 1900, when she went on home leave for medical reasons<sup>10</sup>. On this occasion, Sister Georgia van Oopen, another relatively well-trained teaching nun, was appointed head of the Togo nuns and remained in this position until 1918<sup>11</sup>. Summing up, up to 1900 the nuns in Lomé were facing a tough time: Three out of eight nuns had died from illness and two others were forced to return to Europe for health reasons with only one of them managing to return to Togo. Apart from the psychological effects (e.g. despondency, homesickness) caused in individuals and communities by the frequent experience of illness and death of a colleague, this also implied an increased workload (e.g. nursing duties) for healthy nuns. The recurrent changes in the community's leadership, moreover, challenged their sense of community structure, which was built on a stable hierarchy.

The first years in Togo saw serious troubles emerging in the collective relations between the nuns, which, judging by the correspondence available, deeply affected everyone involved. This is evidenced in particular by the written records of Sister Didaka Micheel, a talented writer, whose lively and humorous coverage of the passage belongs to the most interesting travelogues filed in the congregation's archive. A missionary teacher by training, Sister Didaka happily arrived in Togo in 1899 at the age of thirty-three<sup>12</sup>. Soon thereafter, however, she fell into a deep depression, which she attributed to the bad relationship that had developed between her and Sister Margareta Zintinger, the temporary head of the nuns. Early in 1900, Sister Didaka sent a personal letter to the superior in Europe, in which, after ensuring her loyalty and prayer, she wrote:

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9 According to the chronicle, both died due to, not otherwise specified, sickness, one in the convent under the care of her fellows and the other one in the Aného colonial hospital. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Lomé, p. 2.

10 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 1–4.

11 Sister Georgia van Oopen (1869–1944) was trained as a teaching nun and, in addition, spent three months in a teaching congregation in Manchester to study English before she departed for Lomé in 1897. According to her obituary, her fellows as well as the priests in Togo considered her as a highly educated superior. Cf. AG SSpS Totenglöcklein 1937–1941, p. 153.

12 Sister Didaka Micheel (1866–1916) entered the congregation in 1895 and took her first vows in 1897. She completed the teacher training and left Europe for Togo in 1899.

Please dear good rev. Mother, pray [...] for me to Saint Joseph that the will of God may be done on me. How I long for talking heart-to-heart with you one more time. But now that I can't, I just beg you to pray for us for true love for the cross and sacrifice. Sr. Mag. certainly writes you about much what is happening here. But, good mother [...] I don't know what to write you, but in my opinion true sisterly love will be restored here only after one sister returns to Steyl or the good Lord intervenes. I even offered the good Lord the sacrifice of my life if only this would come true<sup>13</sup>.

In Sister Didaka's eyes, what made the situation even more complicated was that her opponent was not an ordinary nun. The only survivor of the Togo pioneers, Sister Margareta functioned as the temporary head of the convent. Aged thirty-six, she was not only the oldest but also the most experienced with regard to convent life. Historically, she was the first nun in the Togolese community to be invested with the congregation's religious habit in 1893, which certainly secured her a special status in the eyes of the congregational elites<sup>14</sup>. During the following months, Sister Didaka's writings were dominated by her bad relationship with Sister Margareta. Increasingly ridden by despair, she implored the mother superior's support through prayer. To be sure, neither Sister Didaka's situation nor the bad relations among the small number of nuns established in Togo left the congregational elites in Europe unconcerned<sup>15</sup>. Mother Superior Josepha Stenmanns addressed Sister Didaka in the form of a personal letter. This, however, only added to Sister Didaka's despair as she felt herself systematically misunderstood by both the Togolese and European parties. She responded:

Dear reverend Mother! A sincere »God bless you« for your letter. It seems to me that you too don't believe the few things I wrote to Steyl [...] yet it was nothing but the absolute truth. [...] I can't change things here, [and] no further word will pass my lips than these few: Since the first moment, I have been a thorn in rev. Sister Mag. eyes. [...] But I don't want to lose heart, even though I am being misjudged by everyone on both sides, it doesn't matter, as long as I am answerable to God. He is the one who intended

13 »Bitte beten Sie, liebe, gute Mutter, aber auch besonders an diesem Tage für mich zum heiligen Josef, dass an mir der Wille Gottes geschieht. Wie gerne möchte ich mich noch einmal bei Ihnen aussprechen. Doch ich kann es nicht, bitte beten Sie nur für uns um wahre Opfers- und Kreuzesliebe. Schwester Mag. wird Ihnen vielleicht wohl vieles von hier schreiben. Doch gute Mutter, Ehrwürdige Schwester Vorsteherin, ich weiß nicht, was ich Ihnen schreiben soll, aber meiner Meinung nach, wird erst dann wahre schwesterliche Liebe hier herrschen, wenn eine Schwester nach Steyl zurückkehrt, oder wenn der liebe Gott eingreift. Ich habe dem lieben Gott schon das Opfer meines Lebens angeboten, um dieses hier zu erreichen.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 4.2.1900.

14 All other »old« nuns operating in Togo had entered the congregation one year after her. Cf. the list of nuns in Togo in: MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, p. 515.

15 This can be seen also by the way readers would mark the letters. Usually they underlined exactly those passages in which nuns wrote about disturbances in the community.

this agony for me right from the beginning, blessed be His name and I, beggarly sinner, don't deserve better. [...] Hopefully, these cloudy days will pass by soon, even if we shall be disburdened only through death. Now, after 9 months, for the first time we were given paper to write to the dear sisters. But what to write? – You can't write the truth and lying is sin<sup>16</sup>.

It was only after Sister Margareta had left Togo in September 1900 due to illness that the communal relations in the Lomé convent started to improve. While the conflict seemed to have impacted mostly on Sister Didaka, in fact it had affected the entire community. Most of the problems were attributed to Sister Margareta's obviously difficult character (which was described in the obituary issued by the congregation as marked by »bitterness and distrustfulness« caused by a difficult youth<sup>17</sup>). However, already shortly after her departure to Europe, Sister Georgia van Oopen, the new head of the convent, ensured her superiors that community life was imbued by »true peace and sincere sisterly love«<sup>18</sup>.

In January 1901, Sister Georgia explicitly referred to the striking transformation Sister Didaka Micheel had undergone during the past few months, noting that »Sister Didaka is like a different woman« and that »who had known her during the first year in Africa wouldn't recognize her, as cheerful and contented as she is now«<sup>19</sup>. Sister Didaka, in turn, noted that she had »regained her peace of heart« and ever since refused to come back to the events that had dominated her first year of mission experience<sup>20</sup>. Obviously, with Sister Margareta's departure her troubles had come to an end. What is more, with her qualification as a missionary nun never called into doubt by

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16 »Liebe ehrwürdige Mutter! Für Ihren Brief ein herzliches ›Gott vergelt‹s«. Es scheint mir, daß auch Sie das Wenige was ich nach Steyl geschrieben, nicht glauben, und doch war es die reinste Wahrheit. [...] Ich kann die Sache hier nicht ändern, es wird weiter kein Wort über meine Lippen kommen als diese Wenigen: Ich bin vom ersten Augenblick meines Hiereins der ehrwürdigen Schwester Mag. ein Dorn im Auge gewesen. [...] Doch ich will nicht allen Mut verlieren, wenn ich auch hüben und drüben von allen verkannt werde, es schadet ja nichts, wenn ich's nur vorm lieben Gott verantworten kann. Er ist ja, der all dieses Leid von Anfang an mir zgedacht hat, sein Name sei gebenedeit, den ich armselige Sünderin hab's sicher nicht besser verdient. [...] Hoffentlich werden diese trüben Tage bald verschwinden, und wenn's auch nur der Tod ist, welcher uns davon befreit. Jetzt nach 9 Monaten ist uns zum ersten male Papier gegeben worden, um den guten Schwestern zu schreiben. Doch was soll man schreiben? – Die Wahrheit kann man nicht schreiben und Lüge ist Sünde.« AG SSps 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, undated (1900).

17 AG SSps Totengloeklein 1918–1936, p. 485.

18 AG SSps 034 Tg Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 15.1.1901.

19 »Sr. Didaka ist wie umgewandelt, wer sie im ersten Jahre in Afrika gekannt wird sie nicht wiedererkennen, so heiter und zufrieden ist sie jetzt.« AG SSps 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, fragment January 1901.

20 AG SSps 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, January 1901.

congregational elites and ecclesiastical superiors, in May 1901 Sister Didaka was appointed head of the three nuns and entrusted with the establishment of the second women's convent at Aného on the Togolese coast, about forty kilometers east of the colonial capital. From there, all three nuns once again ensured their European superiors that love and peace dominated the sisterly relationships. Yet the past experience of the tense collective relations had left marks on everyone involved. This became obvious whenever new colleagues from Europe were about to arrive. On each such occasion they expressed their hopes that European superiors »will choose the right ones, who are suitable for Africa, because this is of utmost importance«<sup>21</sup>.

Generally speaking, in the missionary nuns' perception convent life in Togo and New Guinea diverged fundamentally from that in Europe. In particular, they largely agreed on the notion that the observance of »sisterly love« was more difficult in the fields of mission<sup>22</sup>. Conflicts concerned everyone, ordinary nuns, their superiors and ecclesiastical authorities in the fields. The latter becomes evident in Prefect Apostolic Hermann Bücking's (1863–1931) written response to the above-mentioned troubles. As a consequence, he requested the mother superior to refrain from sending »nuns either crabby or tending to mournfulness« to the African field with its demanding living conditions<sup>23</sup>. And, referring to recommendations he had been given by experienced nuns working in the Catholic mission in Lagos, he stated:

It would be important, though, to select sisters of a blithesome and joyful nature as for them it would be easier to overcome difficulties; and peace, the importance and value of which is ten times higher in tropical lands and in small houses [convents], would be maintained in a more effortless and better way. Oh, how sad it is, for instance, when there is such a sister [gap] among them; such a sister is very, very unhappy by herself and, moreover, makes others sick<sup>24</sup>.

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21 AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 9.1.1903.

22 For example, in an intimate letter directed to the mother superior a nun stated after reconfirming her best intentions for the future: »[Previously] I never imagined that observing sisterly love would be more difficult in the mission, however, experience has taught me otherwise.« (»Dass die schwesterliche Liebe zu üben, in der Mission schwieriger sein würde, konnte ich mir gar nicht denken, doch die Erfahrung hat mich eines Besseren belehrt.«) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Anselma Rupp, 23.7.1905. Regarding the principle of »sisterly love« cf. footnote 29, p. 56.

23 AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Hermann Bücking, 23.1.1903.

24 »Man solle mehr auf muntere und freudig veranlagte Schwestern sehen. Diese würden leichter über alle Schwierigkeiten hinwegkommen und der Friede, der in tropischen Ländern und in kleineren Häusern von zehnfach größerer Notwendigkeit und Werte sei, würde von solchen viel leichter und besser gewahrt. O wie traurig ist es z.B. wenn so eine Schwester [Lücke] darunter ist, eine solche ist für sich selbst sehr, sehr unglücklich und macht andere noch dazu wirklich krank.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Hermann Bücking, 23.1.1903.



What Bücking requested for his prefecture were nuns who were well-grounded in »virtue« and »charity«, since the demanding climate and the understaffed Togolese convent communities, he insisted, required a much greater deal of personal skills (e.g. tolerance, optimism) than did religious life in Europe. No doubt did the small number of nuns in the missions create a dramatically different situation. In 1903, the religious community in the Motherhouse encompassed 129 professed nuns, 57 novices and 33 candidates, whereas in Togo eight nuns were scattered across two convents<sup>25</sup>. So it was only consequent that Bücking requested the mother superior to consider only those candidates for his mission who were »deeply rooted in the true grace of charity«<sup>26</sup>.

The local nuns agreed that »in the mission one gets to know the sisters well, because there they behave just as they are«<sup>27</sup>. Most of them shared the belief that living in a tropical climate had an adverse effect on individual characters. Trying to explain to the mother superior why jealousy arose more frequently in the convent community in Africa, Sister Georgia van Oopen stated: »Here, the climate strongly affects man, so much needs to be excused«<sup>28</sup>. The Togo-based nuns doubted their European colleagues' capability to realize the impact of migration, holding that they were unable to »understand a sister, who has worked in Africa for a longer time and suffered from the climate, in all her moodiness, her excitement, her temporary gloom and her activities«<sup>29</sup>. Seeking to curb inner-congregational gossip and sharing antipathies over continental borders, Sister Georgia referred to the incapacity of European readers to fully understand what she called the »African conditions«. She pointed out the diverging local conditions in which the nuns lived, worked and prayed, and warned her European readers against judging prematurely:

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25 By then, eight nuns were spread over the two convents that the Servants of the Holy Spirit had established in German New Guinea hitherto. Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 199.

26 AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Hermann Bücking, 23.1.1903.

27 AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 10.9.1905.

28 »Das Klima hier wirkt auch sehr auf den Menschen und somit muss man schon manches entschuldigen.« Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg Offizielle Korrespondenz Georgia van Oopen, 10.9.1905. In addition, comparable voices came from turn-of-the-century New Guinea, where the first community of nuns also struggled with serious conflicts that had emerged between the four of them and its superior stated: »It is true, the heat contributes much to [the fact that] one is more delicate here than in Europe. And defects, like obstinacy, sensitivity and impatience, that one already believed dead, revive here again.« (»Es ist wahr die Hitze trägt sehr viel bei, dass man hier mehr empfindlich ist als in Europa.«) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 24.6.1900.

29 »Es wirkt teilweise so sehr auf den Menschen, dass es schwer sein wird, eine Schwester, die längere Zeit in Afrika gearbeitet und die dadurch durch das Klima gelitten hat, in ihrer ganzen Launenhaftigkeit, in ihrer Aufgeregtheit, in ihrem zeitweiligem Trübsinn und Schaffen zu verstehen.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 5.3.1901.

Europe is not Africa! Yes, in Europe one may well lack any idea about the host of troubles, afflictions and sacrifices associated with the heathen mission. [...] But, as a matter of fact, in the mission things work totally different than one might imagine in the dear Motherhouse<sup>30</sup>.

Being aware of the fact that all decisions regarding the promotion or transfer of personnel were taken by the congregational elites in Europe, the Togo-based nuns did their best to defend themselves in the case of collective conflicts. The first generation of missionary nuns not only tried hard to maintain a good and trustful relationship with their superiors in the Motherhouse but also sought to nourish the ties with fellow colleagues back in Europe. The only way to achieve this was by writing. The question what exactly was reported about them to Europe was thus of tremendous importance to the nuns. Ultimately, all of them aimed to protect their reputation in the Motherhouse's rapidly growing community over the distance. Even though we do not know whom European superiors declared responsible for the incident quoted earlier, remarks by other nuns traveling to Togo suggest that Sister Didaka was considered as being at least difficult by some of her colleagues back in Europe<sup>31</sup>.

### Competing Roles – Togo

Although the available sources do not provide details of the conflict that had emerged in 1900 between Sister Didaka and Sister Margareta, there is much to suggest that it was rooted in the way in which both nuns practiced convent life and complied with the religious rule abroad. On the one hand, there was Sister Margareta, the »elder« nun (who had three more years of convent experience) and contemporary head of convent. Trained as a working nun, her area was domestic work (i.e. laundry) and she was also actively engaged in the mission venture's spiritual support through prayer<sup>32</sup>. On the other hand, there was Sister Didaka, a resolute teacher, who soon became highly appre-

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30 »Europa ist nicht Afrika! Ja, in Europa hat man freilich gar keinen Begriff von den vielen Mühen, Beschwerden und Opfern der Heidenmission. [...] Denn es geht in der Wirklichkeit in der Mission ganz anders, als man es im lieben Mutterhause träumt.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 5.3.1901.

31 For example, a nun who had arrived to Togo in 1903 and was positioned in the convent headed by Sister Didaka stated that she had feared her superior until she fell sick and Sister Didaka nursed her devotedly. She added, reflecting on Sister Didaka's reputation in Europe: »I thought, it's not true what they say about her in Europe.« (»Ich habe gedacht, es ist doch nicht so, wie man in Europa von ihr spricht.«) AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Anastasia Wagner, 6.12.1903.

32 Cf. AG SSpS Totenglöcklein 1918–1936, p. 485.

ciated by the local priests. Significantly, in 1901, when Sister Didaka once again came back on the earlier quarrels, she ensured her European superiors that she »never made an exception to the holy rule without the permission of the reverend Father Prefect«<sup>33</sup>. Altogether this suggests that she relied on the prefect apostolic rather than on her female superior when it came to the issue of adapting religious rules to missionary practice.

In spite of the positive judgment of her work as a missionary teacher and head of the convent in Aného on the part of the prefect apostolic<sup>34</sup>, Sister Didaka became the subject of discussion again in 1904/05. This time it was the convent's religious administration that constituted the point of critique. Notably her subordinates found fault with her way of supervising the observance of the rule of silence, her insistence on cloistered sections in the convent (i.e. the nuns' cells) and failure to regularly practice both the »chapter of faults«<sup>35</sup> as well as the so-called »private talk«<sup>36</sup>. According to her subordinates, Sister Didaka neglected her duty to respect some of the basic elements that constituted the lives of women in convents. European superiors, on the other hand, criticized her reluctance to arrange practical matters with Lomé, the congregation's historically first convent and later official headquarters<sup>37</sup>. Collective relations in Togo were thus disturbed in two ways, with local nuns expressing their discontent with the lack of religious discipline and congregational elites in Europe seeing the unity between both Togolese convents at risk. Meanwhile, when the claims were raised against her, Sister Didaka was about to leave for Europe for physical recuperation and to take her perpetual vows. The congregational elites in the Motherhouse reacted quickly.

At first, the mother superior confronted Sister Didaka with the dissatisfaction her administration had produced among her subordinates. Subsequently, after attempts had failed to work on Sister Didaka, who remained incorrigible and, according to leading nuns, relied »always on the most reverend

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33 »Nochmals schreibe ich Ihnen, dass ich nie ohne Erlaubnis des hochw. P. Präfekt Ausnahme von der heiligen Regel gemacht habe.« AG SSpS Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 5.3.1901.

34 In the eyes of Prefect Apostolic Hermann Bücking, from the eight nuns who served in Togo in 1903 only the two heads of the convents, Sister Georgia and Sister Didaka, »coped with the [local] circumstances«. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Hermann Bücking, 23.1.1903.

35 The so-called »Schuldkapitel« was the reunion of a convent's inhabitants held on a regular basis. During this reunion every nun had to confess any kind of misdoings she had committed against the community (e.g. carelessness, transgressions of the rule of silence or other activities that had disturbed collective life). Most congregations abolished this practice during the 1960s. Cf. HÜWELMEIER, Närrinnen Gottes, pp. 209f.

36 Cf. AG SSpS SVD–SSpS Gründungszeit 0006.1 SVD–SSpS 1905–1911, 1905 I, Mother Theresia Messner, 22.6.1905.

37 Cf. *ibid.*

father prefect«, the case was forwarded to the male general director<sup>38</sup>. More concretely, the female head of the congregation sought to persuade the priest in charge to rethink Sister Didaka's approval to the eternal vows<sup>39</sup>. In a letter she wrote him in this matter, Mother Superior Theresia Messner, however, also expressed her doubts as to the role of Prefect Apostolic Hermann Bücking, by then a well-known promoter of Sister Didaka, pointing out that the »selfsame has an inclination to interfere«<sup>40</sup>. In a second step, the priest in charge, indecisive of how to proceed, invited Bücking in his capacity as the highest ecclesiastical authority in the field to instigate an investigation into convent life in Aného. Although the outcome of this investigation, which was carried out by local priests, confirmed the criticisms raised by the nuns, the actual consequences for Sister Didaka remained marginal. Ultimately, the male superiors in charge, being aware that time was short and she was needed in Togo, decided against delaying the date of her eternal vows<sup>41</sup>. Back in Togo in 1905, things once again turned out in Sister Didaka's favor: Together with two nuns she had brought along from Europe, she moved to the five-day trip's distant town of Atakpamé in the country's interior, where she founded and headed a new convent.

Against the objections of her superiors and fellows, Sister Didaka was appointed head of the convent again by Hermann Bücking in 1905. The European leading committee, which had not been consulted in this question, could hardly comprehend this decision<sup>42</sup>. And the nuns reacted to this event by critically pointing out the particularly good relationship and mutual support between Sister Didaka and the prefect apostolic<sup>43</sup>. Yet, in spite of the Togo-based superiors' original intention to put the establishment of the women's convent in Atakpamé into the hands of an experienced missionary nun who had served in Lomé for many years instead of one of those newly arrived, eventually it were Sister Didaka together with her young European colleagues who

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38 AG SSpS SVD–SSpS Gründungszeit 0006.1 SVD–SSpS 1905–1911, 1905 I, Mother Theresia Messner, 22.6.1905.

39 Cf. AG SSpS SVD–SSpS Gründungszeit 0006.1 SVD–SSpS 1905–1911, 1905 II, Mother Theresia Messner, 5.7.1905.

40 AG SSpS SVD–SSpS Gründungszeit 0006.1 SVD–SSpS 1905–1911, 1905 I, Mother Theresia Messner, 22.6.1905.

41 Cf. AG SSpS, SVD–SSpS, Gründungszeit 0006.2, auf der Heide, 3.7.1905.

42 Cf. AG SSpS, SVD–SSpS Gründungszeit 0006.1 SVD–SSpS 1909–1911, 1905 II, 2.8.1905.

43 In a letter to the European female head of the congregation, Sister Georgia van Oopen, at that time the appointed superior provincial of Togo, made clear who had the final say in the matter: »Finally, the reverend f. prefect said, well, then the three who arrived together will leave together. Obviously Sister Didaka did not want it otherwise.« (»Schließlich sagte der hochwürdige P. Präfekt, nun ja, gehen die drei mitsammen, welche gekommen sind. Schw. Didaka hat es wohl nicht anders gewollt.«) AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 11.10.1905.

traveled north<sup>44</sup>, thus escaping control by an experienced colleague of more or less equal status<sup>45</sup>. Ultimately, Sister Didaka was granted not only a restart in Atakpamé but also the possibility to once again create a missionary convent community in accordance with her own ideas. This must be explained by both the high recognition she had obtained on the part of the prefect apostolic as well as the mission's high demand for experienced and enthusiastic workers.

Yet, leading nuns in Europe and Togo continued to call for action with regard to inner-congregational affairs. In particular, they felt the necessity to establish within the Togolese institutional framework an office of the female superior provincial. By strengthening the vertical relations between the nuns they aimed to improve inner-congregational control mechanisms. Up to then, Prefect Apostolic Bücking had been reluctant to acknowledge the institutionalized hierarchy between the Togo-based nuns. For example, in 1906, Sister Georgia van Oopen, head of the Lomé convent, admitted to the mother superior that she had often been hesitant to fully administer her office in view of the prefect's resistance to accept any nuns in superior positions<sup>46</sup>. Obviously, Bücking, who also resided in Lomé, had discouraged the local woman superior from acting upon her authority. As a consequence of what was then known as the »Aného matter«, however, he had to relent and eventually acknowledged the appointment of Sister Georgia van Oopen as the nuns' official superior provincial.

The prefect's initial reluctance to acknowledge the introduction of a hierarchical differentiation among the nuns can be explained by ecclesiastical power relations in the context of gender. From the Roman point of view, every mission field was headed by an appointed representative, who, depending on his ecclesiastical status, was entitled prefect apostolic, vicar or bishop. In any case, he was the highest religious authority on location and, moreover, constituted the link between the respective field and the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, the Catholic mission ministry in Rome. As such, the prefect apostolic was responsible for all aspects of evangelization. Moreover, according to Canon Law, all the mission's religious employees were subordi-

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44 Sister Sophia Heifort (1877–1926) and Sister Euphemia Schnorr (1881–1966) had entered the congregation in 1900 and 1902, respectively. They thus belonged to the *youngest* nuns in Togo with regard to both biological and religious age. Cf. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, p. 517.

45 Superior Provincial Georgia van Oopen also raised concerns over the fact that she was not personally acquainted with either of both newcomers. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 10.9.1906.

46 According to Sister Georgia van Oopen, Bücking had responded to her attempts to assume her duties as the head of the convent that, in view of the small number of nuns constituting the convent communities, »one can't even speak of superiors and that I better place myself on the same level with the other sisters«. Ibid.

nated to the local ecclesiastical authority<sup>47</sup>. Parallel to that, the single congregations appointed one superior in each field of work. This so-called »superior provincial« functioned as the representative of the institution's centralized power, thus constituting the link between its leading committee and members in the field. In our case, in which Janssen's priests and nuns worked side by side, the respective institution's branch was headed by both a male and a female superior. As a consequence of both institutions' entangled foundation history as well as the vast dependence of the women's congregation on the male society, all nuns were, in addition, responsible to the male superior provincial, who, acting as the representative of the male superior general, constituted the last instance in congregational matters in the field<sup>48</sup>. During Hermann Bücking's tenure (1896–1907), however, this division of powers between the Church (Rome) and the religious institution (Steyl) was not yet activated. Instead, both functions were still concentrated in the person of Hermann Bücking as the only and omnipotent authority with regard to all Catholic affairs in Togo<sup>49</sup>.

The congregational elites' attempts to introduce a centralized hierarchy in Togo encountered resistance also on the part of the nuns. Obviously, some of the first nuns in missions had developed practices that partly favored the cooperation with priests on the local level over the construction of regional female unity. This, however, was contradictory to the contemporary Catholic ideal of the women's congregation which emphasized religious, organizational and cultural unity. In contrast to the canonical institution of the women's order, which demanded the autonomous administration of its single branches, a congregation's organization was based on strict centralization<sup>50</sup>. The

47 Cf. points 2–4, in: Über das Verhältnis der ehrwürdigen Schwestern zur Mission und unserer Kongregation S.V.D., AG SSps SVD–SSps, Gründungszeit 0006.1 SVD–SSps 1905–1911, No. 29.

48 This was the case until 1922, when the women's congregation ultimately gained independence from the male institution.

49 The separation of powers between the Church and the male order was introduced with the appointment of Nikolaus Schönig as the pro-prefect. While he functioned as the head of the mission, the so-called administrator, Theodor Kost, was responsible for all congregational issues, thus also functioning as the nuns' last institutional instance on location. (Cf. Müller, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, pp. 199–206). With the concrete spheres of power and responsibility for both offices being all but clear at that moment, however, the situation considerably affected the nuns as they ultimately depended on both. Whenever both male superiors disagreed about a decision taken by one of them in accordance with the female superior provincial, the latter ran the risk of being subjected to (illegitimate) critique. In 1909, Sister Georgia van Oopen, recounting such an incident and pointing out the play of power between both priests, noted: »You really have a hard time in a mission where there are two superiors, in the past it was not like that.« (»Es ist halt schwer in einer Mission wo zwei Obere sind, früher war das nicht so.«) AG SSps 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 12.10.1909.

50 Cf. MEIWES, »Arbeiterinnen des Herrn«, pp. 63f.

single convents of a congregation constituted the lowest level of a pyramidically structured organization that was headed by the mother superior and the leading committee in the Motherhouse. Consequently, the introduction of the office of the superior provincial was aimed at uniting the single convents established within one region. Ultimately, it was the task of the superior provincial to link the heads of the single convents vertically with the centralized power in the Motherhouse.

When Superior Provincial Georgia van Oopen assumed office in 1905, she declared the introduction of a vertical interdependence between the four women's convents in Togo as one of her main objectives. As her first official act, she confirmed her obedience to (male and female) superiors in Europe and emphasized her aim »to love all sisters entrusted to my care with all my heart, to always attend to them lovingly and obligingly and to assist [them] with words and deeds«<sup>51</sup>. Secondly, Georgia van Oopen referred to the linking function the Lomé convent was expected to fulfill as the congregation's regional headquarters: »It's my most eager wish that the sisters' houses be faithful to one another and particularly to our dear Motherhouse in Steyl«<sup>52</sup>. To reach this goal she was promised backing from Europe. Congregational elites invited the nuns in the Togolese outposts to seek a close relationship with the provincial headquarters in Lomé. More concretely, the mother superior reminded them of the obedience they had vowed and advised all subordinates to »show reverend Sister Georgia, as the superior provincial, the God-wanted veneration, love and filial submission«<sup>53</sup>. Still, as occasional claims expressed by the superior provincial show, the introduction of a strict hierarchy between the single convents was not achieved easily. Quite the contrary, some remarks suggest that the heads of the outposts partly tried to bypass Lomé by referring to conventional practices they were obviously reluctant to change<sup>54</sup>.

While this caused troubles with all heads of the local convents on a small scale, Sister Didaka's management of the Atakpamé convent particularly challenged the superior provincial's authority<sup>55</sup>. Given the five-day trip's dis-

51 »Ich will mich bestreben alle mir anvertrauten Schwestern von Herzen zu lieben, ihnen stets liebevoll und zuvorkommend zu begegnen und mit Rat und Tat zur Seite zu stehen.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 10.9.1906.

52 »Mein sehnlichster Wunsch ist es, dass alle Schwesternhäuser recht treu zueinander halten und ganz besonders zu unserem teurem Mutterhaus in Steyl.« Ibid.

53 AG SSpS 0311.2 Tog Briefe von M. Theresia Messner nach Togo, 14.12.1906.

54 For example, in unison with the mother superior Sister Georgia van Oopen suggested the heads of the single convents to direct their orders for all kind of goods to the Lomé headquarters rather than to European donators, e.g. the Motherhouse. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 20.11.1907.

55 During the first decade of the twentieth century, with the gradual opening of the railway connection between Lomé and Atakpamé, the traveling time between both convents was reduced step by step.

tance to Lomé, Sister Didaka had considerable scope for autonomy in organizing day-to-day convent life in Atakpamè. While Sister Georgia van Oopen totally depended on the scarce information forwarded to Lomé by the head of the convent in Atakpamé, Sister Didaka communicated her needs directly with Europe. As a consequence, the head of the province was unable to watch over religious life and discipline in Atakpamé. In spite of her formal position and the written support of European authorities, Sister Georgia could neither control the Atakpamé nuns nor impact on the way they practiced religious life. She explained her situation to Europe as follows: »Rev. Sr. Didaka and her fellow sisters live in Atakpame totally on their own, as if they didn't belong to us. I am always very sorry about this, but I can't do anything but pray for them and that's what I am going to do«<sup>56</sup>.

More disturbing from the superior's point of view, however, was the general outlook of female missionary life in Atakpamé. Contrary to the ecclesiastical ideal which required that any kind of (personal or collective) initiative be sanctioned by legitimate superiors, missionary practice as developed in Atakpamé was shaped by self-initiative and Sister Didaka's close collaboration with the local priests. In response to a letter of enquiry from the mother superior, Sister Didaka admitted that she rode horses and bicycles and undertook extended excursions on her own, accompanied by indigenous girls only<sup>57</sup>. More importantly, she did so in accordance with the local priests but without permission from congregational superiors, who certainly saw religious discipline at risk. Historian Relinde Meiwes has suggested that it was precisely the externally-oriented activities of women's congregations which, in the eyes of ecclesiastical authorities, called for a strictly centralized form of organization as otherwise there would have been a threat of secularization. Therefore, a complex internal system of (religious) control was to be enacted<sup>58</sup>. In the eyes of congregational superiors, moreover, the principle of obedience was being challenged by Sister Didaka's refusal to consult Lomé in all practical and religious matters. Yet, from her own point of view, she was neither challenging obedience nor risking her spiritual merits but, quite the contrary, acted out of religious conviction. Sister Didaka's actions derived from her interpretation of women's role in mission as resembling that of priests in many respects. Unlike the well-defined regulations and restrictions which framed and controlled female missionary life in the coastal convents,

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56 »Ehrw. Schw. Didaka lebt dort in Atakpame mit ihren Mitschwestern ganz für sich, als ob sie gar nicht zu uns gehörten. Das tut mir immer sehr leid, kann aber weiter nichts machen, als für sie beten und das werde ich auch tun.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 27.09.1907.

57 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 18.9.1907.

58 Cf. MEIWES, »Arbeiterinnen des Herrn«, p. 65.



the Atakpamé nuns' activities were inextricably linked to an active interpretation of the female apostolate.

In 1907, the local chronicler (probably Sister Didaka herself) pointed out the limited success of girls' missionary schooling in town. She also noted that in Atakpamé Catholic-educated girls often married according to indigenous custom, which meant that they were lost for the Church<sup>59</sup>. As opposed to teaching, the nuns' engagement in nursing was described by the chronicler as a most satisfying field of work, with their (often questioned by the congregational elites) extended trips on behalf of visiting and baptizing the sick being a logical implication of the local social and cultural conditions:

Given that there are many farms belonging to Atakpame, where the sick from the city are customarily taken to, and given our wish to save them for heaven, there was no other way for us than to travel the often exhausting distances of two, three, up to three and a half hours in order to administer baptism to these fatally ill. [...] and indeed, what a joy it is to hear shortly thereafter that the baptized has passed away. Oh, then you would forget about everything and think: ›What a great deed the Good Lord gives for small troubles!‹<sup>60</sup>.

This way, the nuns would subordinate institutional constraints to an active interpretation of apostolic work. However, with the spontaneous outings of single nuns at day and nighttime being disapproved of by the congregational authorities, this invariably entailed the transgression of gendered boundaries of accepted behavior<sup>61</sup>. While regular visits to neighboring villages did form part of the nuns' duties, their movements were regulated and controlled by rigid restrictions – in Lomé, nuns would go in pairs and during designated hours only. In 1910, a regulation was introduced which required nuns to ask for the »blessing« by (and thus admission of) the head of the house

59 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg Chronicles, Die Geschichte unseres Hauses in Atakpame 1905–1907, p. 2.

60 »Da zu Atakpame viele Farmen gehören und es so Sitte hier ist, Kranke, welche hier in der Stadt sind, dorthin zu bringen und wir auch diese gern für den Himmel retten möchten, so blieb uns nichts anderes übrig, als die oft recht sehr beschwerlichen Wege von zwei, drei bis dreieinhalb Stunden zu machen, um diesen Schwerkranken die hl. Taufe zu spenden. [...] und welche Freude hat man, wenn man kurz nachher hört, die Getaufte ist gestorben. O, dann vergisst man alles und man denkt: ›Für unsere kleinen Mühen gibt der liebe Gott solch großen Lohn!‹« AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Die Geschichte unseres Hauses in Atakpame 1905–1907, p. 2.

61 For instance, an inquiry made by a priest in New Guinea with regard to the sanctioning of the nuns' leaving without company was discussed and dismissed by the authorities in Europe. In their reply, they pointed at missionary practice in Africa, stating that not even in Togo the nuns would go out on their own. Cf. AG SSpS SVD–SSpS Gründungszeit 0006.2 auf der Heide, 17.1.1906.

before leaving the convent<sup>62</sup>. These rules were soon to be challenged by Sister Didaka's missionary practice, which focused on the administration of emergency baptism. In administering baptism to the fatally ill she not only found rich spiritual reward but also actively contributed to the statistics of the missionary Church<sup>63</sup>. Accordingly, Sister Didaka's input to missionary practice in Atakpamé was commended by many priests even beyond her presence on location<sup>64</sup>.

Sister Didaka's way of managing the convent continued to raise the suspicion of congregational authorities both in Togo and Europe. Eventually, in 1909, the leading committee found itself forced to interfere and a wave of disciplinary transfers followed. Generally speaking, personal transfers constituted an important disciplinary measure by which superiors aimed to enforce the individual nuns' »subordination, obedience and God-willed dependence«<sup>65</sup>. According to Mother Superior Theresia Messner, the (frequent) relocation of individuals between the single convents in one region, moreover, served to »forestall, drive out or prevent the unbecoming attachment to persons, places and objects«<sup>66</sup>. In 1909, the three nuns established in Atakpamé were appointed elsewhere and Sister Didaka Micheel was divested of office and sent to the congregation's headquarters in Lomé, thus being put under the immediate control of the superior provincial. In addition, despite her missionary experience and advanced age, she was denied appointment to any superior or advisory office<sup>67</sup>. According to the written statement of Father Nicolaus Blum (1857–1919), the joint superior general of priests and nuns since Janssen's death in January 1909, congregational elites considered the removal of the nuns from Atakpamé as »absolutely essential«<sup>68</sup>. Although the personnel transfers were not limited to the community headed by

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62 Mother Theresia Messner wrote to the superior provincial concerning the introduction of this new regulation: »But it's good that the sisters always go with the blessing of holy obedience and that you always know who has gone out and when.« (»Es ist doch schön, wenn die Schwestern immer mit dem Segen des heiligen Gehorsams gehen und Sie immer wissen, wer und wann die Schwestern ausgegangen sind.«) AG SSpS 0311.2 Tog Briefe von M. Theresia Messner nach Togo, 11.9.1910.

63 Sacramental practice functioned prominently in the statistics of the missionary Church. Cf. the discussion of missionary statistics in Chapter 4.

64 For example, on the occasion of his visit to Togo in 1912, the male superior general praised Sister Didaka's administration in Atakpamé noting that she had »accomplished quite a lot«, traveling »3–6 hours to the farms in order to visit the sick«. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 22.1.1912.

65 AG SSpS 03.11.2 Tog, Mother Theresia Messner, 29.09.1906.

66 Ibid.

67 By 1909, the offices awarded to the nuns had become quite complex: In Lomé the superior provincial was supported by a regional leading committee consisting of an assistant, an advisor and an advisory board of four experienced nuns. Cf. Letter of appointment, AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Wahl der Oberin 1909, Nicolaus Blum, 4.8.1909.

68 Ibid.

Sister Didaka, the exchange without exception of all Atakpamé-based nuns constituted a serious issue that was contested also by the local priests. While administrator Theodor Kost (1863–1934) approved the personnel transfers, the prefect apostolic and some priests from Atakpamé expressed criticism<sup>69</sup>. The latter at first even refused to let Sister Didaka move<sup>70</sup>.

By 1909 it had become obvious that there was a collision between the women's congregation's priorities and the endeavors of the missionary Church. Significantly, the Atakpamé nuns were taken by surprise by the criticism raised, which suggests that they had never perceived the local missionary practice as conflicting with congregational guidelines. Sister Sophia Heifort (1877–1926) who had been working in Atakpamé since her arrival in Togo four years earlier and thus never experienced missionary life elsewhere described the community's reaction when they first took notice of the decree:

We were not sure whether we could believe our eyes and ears when we read that the Atakpame sisters altogether were supposed to clear the field. Surely, we were not the only ones to be bewildered at what was stated there<sup>71</sup>.

Although the decree is not preserved, the passage quoted illustrates the recipients' consternation about the (obviously severe) criticism with which the superiors had responded to the religious life in Atakpamé.

However, considering that the wave of personnel transfers of 1909 also affected more experienced nuns from other outposts, it could be argued that this particular wave of personnel transfers was also part of a broader attempt to strengthen the Togolese congregation's internal hierarchy. This view seems to be corroborated by the fact that at the same time, for example, European superiors advised the local nuns to address superiors by title, a practice quite unusual in Togo, where subordinated nuns used to call the heads of the convents simply by their monastic names<sup>72</sup>. Another point to be taken into consideration is the chronology of events. The enforced transfers of September 1909 occurred a few months ahead of the opening of the Servants of

69 Superior provincial Georgia van Oopen reported about the »dissatisfaction« on the part of the head of the mission and the critique she received with regard to the personnel transfers in 1909: »What comments he made on this occasion I would prefer to tell you orally.« (»Welche Äußerungen er bei dieser Gelegenheit tat, will ich Ihnen lieber mündlich mitteilen.«) AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 12.10.1909.

70 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Ambrosia Hamerts, 19.9.1909.

71 »Wir wussten nicht richtig, was wir sahen und hörten, als wir lasen, dass die Atakpame Schwestern so ganz und gar das Feld räumen sollten. Mit uns haben auch sicher noch andere gestaunt ueber jenes, was da zu lesen war.« AG SSpS 034 Tg Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Sophia Heifort, 10.10.1909.

72 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 12.10.1909.

the Holy Spirit's first general chapter scheduled for December of the same year. It was thus only shortly after she had communicated these personnel transfers that Superior Provincial Georgia van Oopen boarded the steamer to Europe in order to attend the chapter to be convened in the Motherhouse<sup>73</sup>. There, elite nuns from all (European and overseas) branches were to gather to consult about the congregation's present and future development. For our context, the chapter of 1909/1910 was of significance first and foremost in view of three aspects. Firstly, the capitulars elected Sister Theresia Messner<sup>74</sup> mother superior and appointed her advisory board. This was the first time that the women's congregation was managed by an elected leadership – previously all leadership positions had been appointed by founder Janssen. Janssen, to whom certainly most nuns had devoted their loyalty, had died in January 1909. Secondly, the chapter officially decided to promote the women's congregation's self-government and to obtain approbation by Rome<sup>75</sup>. Thirdly, its convening involved that the leading nuns from all provinces worldwide gathered at the congregation's historical center, which thus came to serve as a platform to emphasize congregational ties<sup>76</sup>. Many of the overseas capitulars, in the hope to maintain transnational ties and to better communicate the troubles they experienced abroad, invited the mother superior to visit their fields of work<sup>77</sup>. Altogether, the religious policies of 1909, starting with Janssen's death in January and culminating in the general chapter at the end of the year, must be seen as the nuns' first collective efforts to disentangle institutional implications between male and female authorities. Or, to put it in other words, the female line of superiors was to be activated and empowered.

This new policy of the women's congregation's gradual independence challenged the conventional practice in the Togolese outpost convents where some of the nuns, due to the lack of institutional control in the pioneer years, had developed a rather pragmatic understanding of missionary work, as a consequence of which boundaries between the gendered spheres of activity and authority had somewhat blurred<sup>78</sup>. Since priests were present wherever the nuns acted, they were consulted by them in many issues which, however, contradicted the ecclesiastical ideal of female self-government. Hence, even after her return to Togo from the general chapter in May 1910, Superior

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73 Sister Georgia left Lomé for Europe on October 24<sup>th</sup>. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Lomé, p. 33.

74 Theresia Messner (1868–1940) belonged to the first group of twelve women who officially entered the congregation in January 1892.

75 Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 31.

76 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 33.

77 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 40.

78 Cf. also the discussion on the use of bikes, which reached its peak exactly in 1910, in Chapter 1.

Provincial Georgia van Oopen had to recognize that conventional practices were not erased easily. Although by then Sister Didaka Micheel had already moved to Lomé, some of the practices of the Atakpamé mission were still in place. To the despair of the superior provincial, some customs now affected religious life in the regional headquarters. Seeking advice, she asked the European head of the congregation how to proceed when priest and friars who used to have their teeth treated by Sister Didaka in Atakpamé came to Lomé for dental treatment. When the prefect apostolic did not hold them back but – quite the contrary – encouraged them to entrust themselves to Sister Didaka's dental treatment in the convent's parlor, Sister Georgia van Oopen admitted her helplessness in this matter:

Please reverend Mother, advise as soon as possible [...] so that I know how to behave in such situations. I am quite embarrassed whenever I have to accompany them [Sister Didaka and the respective priest] to the parlor, because the reverend fathers always put on an astonished face at the sight of a second sister. A couple of times I was already tempted to let Sister Didaka enter alone<sup>79</sup>.

The statement quoted illustrates the writer's precarious situation. While she was supposed to adhere to the congregation's rule according to which subordinated nuns were to avoid any contact with priests, in fact authority was negotiated on the local level and among all individuals involved, which also included the formation of alliances across gendered and institutional boundaries. This can be seen in the person of Sister Didaka, who, still building on the recognition of priests, would challenge congregational authorities. Although she remained quiet during her years in Lomé<sup>80</sup>, her way of administering the Atakpamé convent remained highly recognized by her male colleagues. This became obvious during the male superior general's visit to Togo in 1912. On this occasion, Superior General Nicolaus Blum, who was certainly influenced by the opinion of his priests on location, spoke to Sister Georgia van Oopen in praise of Sister Didaka and her earlier missionary achievements<sup>81</sup>.

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79 »Bitte Würdige Mutter, wenn möglich um baldige Antwort auf die gestellte Frage, damit ich weiß, wie ich mich bei solchen Vorkommnissen zu verhalten habe. Es ist mir immer recht peinlich, wenn ich dann mit ins Sprechzimmer gehen muss, denn die hochw. H. Patres machen immer ein so verwundertes Gesicht, wenn eine zweite Schwester mitkommt. Habe schon ein paar Mal die Versuchung gehabt, Schw. Didaka allein hineingehen zu lassen.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 21.9.1910.

80 From these years only few letters are preserved from Sister Didaka, who seemed to have lost all her hope of being relocated to the interior. In one of the rare letters filed from her unwanted years in Lomé she admitted to be »homesick for the bush«. AG SSpS 034 Tg 03 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 22.9.1911.

81 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 22.1.1912.

Obviously unimpressed by the lack of inner-congregational loyalty, the superior general interrogated Sister Georgia van Oopen about the circumstances of Sister Didaka's dismissal despite the positive results that had marked her term of office from his perspective. This, in turn, alarmed the local head of the nuns, who rephrased the past conflict over authority in Atakpamé, bringing in gendered power relations. According to Georgia van Oopen, priests appreciated the quality of women's missionary work only in terms of its external orientation, consequently disregarding what she called the nuns' spiritual development, which was closely related to the respect of guidelines and religious discipline. Thus, the priests' image of a *good nun* did not correspond to the congregational ideal. Recounting her talk with Blum, Sister Georgia noted: »I added that some of the rev. fathers here in Togo consider only the external activities of the sisters; those who are able to act freely, who are always outdoors etc. – these are the best [sisters], this is what is acknowledged most«<sup>82</sup>. Surely, such an understanding of female missionary activity contradicted a monastic tradition that was built on the secluded convent as the model of social control and in which obedience to superiors was the dominant ethics. Sister Georgia disagreed with the priests when she argued that the preservation of what she called the congregation's »spirit« (meaning its collective principles and guidelines) was much more at risk than the individual nuns' will to embrace the public dimension of the apostolate:

I don't like to see them [the nuns] behaving that squeamishly, which, to be sure, is most rarely the case; usually, once having spent some time in the tropics, they would become more resolute and free in their way of acting by themselves anyway. The opposite happens very rarely. Moreover, this is how it has to be – that the sisters often, very often go to the city; yes, I think that's right, because that's how we must try to win over the people, the women, virgins and children, but outward activity alone is to no avail as long as it lacks the blessing of God<sup>83</sup>.

According to this interpretation, the divine blessing of the missionary venture depended on the performance of religious exercises and the compliance with rules. Sister Georgia's critique, rather than addressing the fact that nuns assumed duties in public was directed against the self-initiatives they would

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82 »Fügte noch bei, dass übrigens manche der hochw. Patres hier in Togo nur die äußere Wirksamkeit der Schwestern ins Auge fassen, wer recht frei auftreten kann, immer draußen ist usw., das sind die besten und das wird am meisten anerkannt.« Ibid.

83 »Ich sehe es auch nicht gerne, wenn die Schwestern so zimperlich sind–, das ist ja auch höchst selten der Fall, meistens, wenn sie eine Zeitlang in den Tropen sind, werden sie von selbst schon resoluter und freier im Auftreten. Das Gegenteil ist höchst selten der Fall. Dann soll es ja auch sein, dass die Schwestern viel, sehr viel in die Stadt gehen, ja, das finde ich auch ganz recht, denn dadurch müssen wir die Leute, Frauen, Jungfrauen und Kinder zu gewinnen suchen, aber das Wirken nach Außen hin allein tut auch nichts, wenn nicht Gottes Segen darauf ruht.« Ibid.

take at times. Besides, she explained some priests' discontent with the contemporary situation by the recent shifts in gendered religious power relations in general and the empowerment of the female line of superiors in particular. Accordingly, what made priests use the nuns to let off steam was precisely their gradually losing the ground they had previously held albeit without ecclesiastical justification. She wrote:

Previously, the heads of the houses mostly stuck with the reverend father rector of the station; with him they thought things over, him they asked for advice, etc. But now the heads of the houses stick to the provincial house, and this obviously doesn't please some of the reverend fathers<sup>84</sup>.

From the superior provincial's point of view, in 1912, the nuns in intermediate superior positions ultimately started to exercise their offices properly and to subordinate themselves to the congregation's provincial headquarters. This, however, produced the resistance of priests, who consequently lost authority (particularly on the local level) in day-to-day questions of missionary practice. Sister Georgia's newly gained self-confidence was surely rooted in the experience of the general chapter in 1909/10 where she had conferred with her colleagues over three months about the congregation's development and the goal of self-administration. The Togo case also shows the troubles congregational elites encountered in their efforts to implement this new direction of religious policies to the fields of mission, where authority was negotiated on a local basis. Still, the regional superiors also received support from the European heads of both institutions, who in 1910 issued a set of documents codifying the interaction between men and women in the field<sup>85</sup>.

The mere existence of these documents shows that the situation in Togo was far from being exceptional. Quite the contrary, they suggest that the power relations between the sexes in many of the Servants of the Holy Spirit's fields of activity were marked by statutory confusion. Interestingly, European superiors used a draft that had previously been set up and put into force by the prefect apostolic in New Guinea as the guideline to codify the interactions and authority between nuns, priests and friars<sup>86</sup>. This document first of all emphasized the women's congregation's independent status and management by its own leading committee, pointing at the desired approbation by Rome. According to Canon Law, the congregation was to be administrated

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84 »Früher hielten sich die Vorsteherinnen meistens an den hochw. P. Rektor der Station, sie überlegten mit ihm, frugen ihn um Rat usw. Jetzt aber halten sie die Vorsteherinnen an das Provinzialhaus, und das scheint manchen der hochw. H. Patres nicht zu gefallen.« Cf. *ibid*.

85 Cf. Über das Verhältnis der ehrwürdigen Schwestern zur Mission und unserer Kongregation S.V.D., in: AG SSps SVD–SSps Gründungszeit 0006.1 SVD–SSps 1909–1911, No. 29.

86 Cf. *ibid*.

by women. Yet, like all women's congregations, the Servants of the Holy Spirit were, moreover, subjected to the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. In practice this implied that the nuns' subordination to priests was limited and concentrated on the prefect apostolic and the administrator as the representatives of both ecclesiastical power and congregational authority. Priests who headed missionary stations in places where nuns had convents were only entitled to decide on issues linked to evangelization. Other clerics, in contrast, were, firstly, expected to completely avoid contact with the nuns and, secondly, were not invested with the power to interfere in any of the female communities' internal matters. The decree explicitly interdicted any mutual »interference in domestic affairs«, meaning conflicts among either nuns or priests<sup>87</sup>.

Notwithstanding the ecclesiastical ideal of independent administration, the decree set forth that both institutions should be closely related in their common »genesis«, »goal« and »assignment«. Like the priests, the nuns were called upon to advance the goals of the mission venture by »teaching and educating children and adult women as well as through domestic works«. With their assignment in those fields of mission that were headed by the Society of the Divine Word's priests, the Servants of the Holy Spirit assumed the duty to manage missionary institutions according to the intention of the local prefect apostolic. In addition, all women's convents were embedded in the Catholic hierarchy and thus subjected to the prefect apostolic. This was particularly the case with issues regarding »religious doctrine, the respectability of mores, the maintenance of piety, the administration of the sacraments and holy mass«<sup>88</sup>. Although the priests heading the single missionary stations were neither entitled to give orders to nuns nor to issue dispensations, they could address petitions or appeal to the prefect apostolic whenever they considered this necessary. It must be seen in the context of social constructions of gender when the editors of the decree stated:

Although the head of the station should on no account consider himself as the sisters' superior, he nonetheless remains their main supporter, their natural consultant, guardian angel and minister, whose finest and most important assignment it is to lead the souls entrusted to his care to an ever-deepening surrender to God and thus to their ultimate true fortune<sup>89</sup>.

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87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 »Aber wenn der Stationsvorsteher also auch keineswegs als den Obern der Schwestern sich betrachten darf, so bleibt er doch ihre erste Stütze, ihr natürlicher Berater, Schutzengel und Seelsorger, dessen vornehmste und wichtigste Aufgabe es ist, die ihnen anvertrauten Seelen zu einer zu einer stets innigeren Hingabe zu Gott und dadurch zu ihrem höchsten, wahren Glück zu führen.« Ibid.



This entailed a gradual limitation of female self-administration. In this multiple capacity, priests were called on to (indirectly) impact on the nuns' organization of religious life. More precisely, they were expected to »hold off obstacles and dangers« from the nuns and to ensure, by means of »words and example«, their fulfilment of their prayer duties and observance of religious rules (i.e. cloister) and convent order. Presumably in response to the extensive workloads placed on nuns in missions, the authors of the document warned priests against demanding inappropriate amounts of work from nuns. This was considered necessary because, to quote the text, nuns »out of diligence and delicacy of feeling« often did not »dare to reject petitions, so that they overstrain to the detriment of their health and the religious exercises«<sup>90</sup>.

However, the relationship between female superiors and the priests in the missions continued to be delicate also after 1910. This can be seen in Superior Provincial Georgia van Oopen's correspondence with Europe, which suggests that her chance to negotiate authority with (leading) priests was actually limited. In several cases, she was not able to assert herself in a number of issues. Thus, she was not in the position to forbid the provision of dental treatment to priests<sup>91</sup>, and male religious authorities continued to interfere in her area of responsibility<sup>92</sup>. With the struggles over authority continuing, Sister Georgia pointed out the difficulty she experienced in dealing with these issues over distance, which was partly related to her reluctance to pass criticism of ecclesiastical authorities (i.e. the prefect apostolic) in writing<sup>93</sup>. As a consequence, she accentuated the need for a »visitation« by the mother superior to »witness and view everything herself«<sup>94</sup>. Already planned by Mother Theresia Messner, the outbreak of the Great War ultimately forestalled the »visitation« to the Togolese convents. Hardly surprisingly, the war and the

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90 »Endlich muss der Stationsvorsteher sich hüten, von den Schwestern zu viel Arbeit zu verlangen; denn aus Eifer und Zartgefühl wagen diese oft nicht, Bitten zurückzuweisen, so dass sie sich überanstrengen zum Schaden ihrer Gesundheit und ihrer religiösen Übungen.« Ibid.

91 Quite the contrary, male authorities encouraged the priests to make use of it. Cf. AG SSps 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 22.1.1912.

92 E.g., in 1912 both the prefect apostolic and the male superior regional refused to let a particular nun return to Togo from a home leave, thus anticipating the women's congregational elites' decision. Since the names are cut out of the letter filed, the case cannot be reconstructed. What does become clear, however, is that both male authorities prevented one nun from returning to Togo, arguing that »her misconduct in Palime and Anecho is well-known in the entire mission«. Cf. *ibid.*

93 In 1914, she wrote to the mother superior: »It would go too far if I wrote you everything about this [the relations with priests]; also I am very embarrassed because it relates to r.[everend] f.[ather] prefect.« (»Es würde zu weit führen, wollte ich da alles schreiben, zudem ist es mir sehr peinlich, da es den hochwst. H. P. Präfecten betrifft.«) AG SSps 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 10.3.1914.

94 *Ibid.*

occupation of Togo by British and French troops somewhat silenced these struggles over authority and in August 1914 all German – male and female – missionaries closed ranks.

This closing of ranks during the Great War also marked the last years of the missionary career of Sister Didaka Micheel, who was once again appointed head of the convent in Kpalimé, in the interior. However, having worked in Togo without respite since her last (and only) home leave in 1904/05, in 1916 she fell ill and traveled to Lomé to see a doctor, who diagnosed typhus. Ultimately, Sister Didaka died in Lomé in March 1916 at the age of forty-eight. The troubles that had marked her sixteen years of missionary career in Togo disappeared from her congregational record. Quite the contrary, Sister Didaka was revered as a recognized member of the Catholic mission in particular and the German colonial society in general<sup>95</sup>. The superior provincial wrote about her funeral in Lomé during the British occupation:

It was a great funeral cortege, which set out amid the sound of the funeral music and the prayers and chants of the numerous participants. The German prisoners, gentlemen and ladies, were also permitted by the commander to follow the mission's invitation and to attend the requiem and the funeral cortege. Everybody showed up, even the Protestant missionaries, women and sisters<sup>96</sup>.

According to her obituary, Sister Didaka's popularity derived from her tireless commitment to charity work and her efforts on behalf of the advancement of Catholicism. Even Bishop Franz Wolf, vicar apostolic in Togo since 1914, in his letter of sympathy praised her merits for the venture of evangelization. Ultimately, Sister Didaka was lauded by both priests and nuns for her engagement with schooling and nursing. The so-called »chronicle of the dead«, moreover, records that she »alone had administered baptism to some hundreds of children«<sup>97</sup>.

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95 Historian Bettina Zurstrassen has discussed sickness and death as a unifying, collective experience of the German settlers in colonial Togo. Indeed the funerals of Germans appear to have constituted the most important secular events attended by the nuns. Cf. ZURSTRASSEN, »Ein Stück deutscher Erde schaffen«, pp. 73–77; also: VON TROTHA, *Koloniale Herrschaft*, pp. 97 and 211, respectively.

96 »Es war ein grossartiger Leichenzug, der sich unter den Klängen der Trauermusik und den Gebeten und Gesängen der zahlreichen Teilnehmer in Bewegung setzte. Auch die deutschen Gefangenen, Herren wie Damen, hatten vom Herrn Kommandanten die Erlaubnis erhalten, der Einladung vonseiten der Mission zu folgen und dem Requiem und Leichenzug beizuwohnen. Alle waren erschienen, auch die Bremer Mission, Frauen und Schwestern.« SPS Totenchronik bis Juli 1918, p. 157.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 155.

## Adapting Concepts – New Guinea

Like their colleagues in Togo, the pioneers who arrived in Tumleo Island, German New Guinea, in April 1899 passed hard times. Soon troubles emerged also among them. And like their counterparts in Togo, they would seek advice from European superiors. Given the rare opportunities to post letters in the colonial outpost and the transport time (of up to three months) for mail between Tumleo and Steyl<sup>98</sup>, however, European superiors could assist the nuns only to a very limited extent. The correspondence with the Motherhouse nonetheless constituted an important channel for them to communicate their situation and to discuss any troubles they experienced with local superiors. Despite the authoritarian principle in women's congregations that prohibited ordinary nuns from uttering criticism on superiors in the presence of colleagues of equal standing, nuns of any status were generally allowed to address uncensored letters to congregational elites. Thus, writing letters was the only legitimate way to express dissatisfaction with colleagues, superiors or collective relations in the field. Today, these confidential letters represent valuable sources to study the perceptions and experiences of these first nuns in New Guinea.

The first convent community established in Tumleo Island counted four members (Figure 7, f.l.t.r.: Sisters Fridolina Vökt, Valeria Diezen, Ursula Sensen and Martha Sieverding), all of whom had known each other for years. Three of them had entered the congregation simultaneously in 1894. Only Sister Martha Sieverding (1864–1914) had already done so in 1891<sup>99</sup>. Accordingly, she belonged to the thirty pioneer women who had been invested with the congregation's religious habit in 1893, a fact that probably empowered her in the eyes of colleagues and superiors<sup>100</sup>. Interestingly, however, forty-two-year old Sister Fridolina Vökt (1857–1926), the oldest member of the community, was appointed head of the group<sup>101</sup>. This specific constellation shaped the conflicts that emerged soon after the women's arrival in New Guinea.

98 According to Reinhard Klein-Arendt, at best it took between two-and-a-half and three months for a letter from Berlin to arrive at the colonial administration. Cf. Reinhard KLEIN-ARENDE, *Die Nachrichtenübermittlung in den deutschen Südsekolonien*, in: HIERY (ed.), *Die deutsche Südsee*, pp. 177–197, i.e. p. 178.

99 Sister Martha Sieverding (1864–1914) entered the congregation in 1891 and took her first vows in 1894. She was trained as a working nun.

100 For instance, in 1906 Arnold Janssen directed a letter to all nuns in New Guinea in which he remarked with regard to Sister Martha that she was one of the »eldest« sisters on location and one of the »eldest« Servants of the Holy Spirit still alive. He added: »For that reason I think that the sisters should pay all the more attention to her example and words«. Janssen in: ALT (ed.), *Arnold Janssen – Letters*, p. 330.

101 Sister Fridolina Vökt (1857–1926) was a working nun who had entered the congregation in 1894. Accordingly, she took her first vows in 1896. From 1899–1906 she headed the Tumleo convent.



Figure 7: The first group of nuns that traveled to New Guinea (28.1.1899);  
AG SSpS Album Schwestern S.S.S. Neu Guinea, 28.1.1899.

In particular the early letters written by the two youngest members of the community, Sisters Valeria Diezen (1872–1917) and Ursula Sensen (1869–1932)<sup>102</sup>, show that both were deeply concerned by the bad relationship that had developed among their older colleagues. Obviously, Sister Martha and Sister Fridolina had diverging visions of the (re)establishment of convent life in the missionary context. Sister Martha openly expressed her dissatisfaction with the religious management of the convent, which was perceived as an illegitimate contestation of the superior's authority by the others. In 1900, Sister Valeria Diezen, the only teacher-trained nun in Tumleo, wrote to Europe complaining about what she called bad »familial relations« in the convent:

I don't know what the sisters always bicker about because I am not present most of the time and overhear it only from the school, but I don't believe the blame lies with one side only. Everyone has their faults, one more, the other less. And one false step by the superior does not give the sisters the right to disdain her [...]<sup>103</sup>.

One of the main challenges faced by the New Guinea pioneers was the re-establishment of convent life and the adaptation of a specific European ecclesiastical culture to the local cultural setting and missionary situation. In Tumleo, the first religious order of the day, formulated by Prefect Apostolic Eberhard Limbrock, slightly deviated from the religious schedule in the Motherhouse<sup>104</sup>. According to the ringing of the bell in the priest's house, the nuns got up at 5 a.m. After morning prayers and (up to three) masses, they had breakfast at 7 a.m. Until lunch at 12 a.m. each member of the community went about her daily work, which included teaching, gardening, laundry or sewing and patching. At Limbrock's instruction, the nuns had to take a rest instead of the usual hour of collective midday recreation, which they spent with conversation and needlework. Afternoon work was interrupted for coffee time at 3.50 p.m. At 6 p.m. the community stopped work to gather for dinner, which was followed by an hour of recreation. At 8.30 p.m. the nuns said their evening prayers, and bedtime was scheduled for 9 p.m.<sup>105</sup>. How-

102 Sister Valeria Diezen (1872–1917) entered the congregation in 1894 and took her first vows in 1896. She was the pioneer community's only teacher-trained nun and was to become the head of the province in 1906. Sister Ursula Sensen (1869–1932) was a trained working nun. She also entered the congregation in 1894 and took her first vows in 1896.

103 »Ich weiß nicht was die Schw. immer mit einander zu zanken haben, denn ich bin meistens nicht da, ich höre es nur von der Schule aus, doch glaube ich dass die Schuld selten auf einer Seite liegt. Jedermann hat seine Fehler, der eine mehr, der andere weniger. Wenn nur Schw. Vorsteherin auch einmal einen fehlen Tritt tut, so haben die Schw. doch deshalb noch nicht das Recht sie deshalb gering zu schätzen [...]« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 21.6.1900.

104 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 30.7.1899 and 24.6.1900.

105 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 7.1.1900.

ever, as Sister Fridolina noted in her description of the religious routine in Tumleo, the nuns usually went to bed later because they had to look after the children present<sup>106</sup>. In her capacity as head of the convent she was tasked to watch over the observance of this order. Yet, Sister Fridolina's way of organizing convent life obviously failed to fully meet her subordinates' expectations. Sister Ursula, in a letter to European superiors in 1900, complained about the lack of monastic discipline<sup>107</sup>. And at the same time Sister Valeria wrote that the head of the convent cared only insufficiently for »ordered monasticism«, the observance of the religious order of the day (i.e. punctual collective prayer) and cleanliness in the building<sup>108</sup>. On the other hand, Superior Fridolina Vökt, while assuring Europe to do everything in her power to observe the congregation's religious rule, however, admitted that in New Guinea religious life could not be practiced as regularly as in Europe<sup>109</sup>. Altogether, she characterized her office as difficult and added: »Oh how wonderful it is to obey and to be the last sister in Steyl«<sup>110</sup>.

Generally speaking, the nuns' perception of the process of collective adaptation to the New Guinean cultural setting was ambiguous. Clinging to the idea to imitate the order of the day and religious discipline as practiced in the Motherhouse, at the same time they had to acknowledge that the adaptation of convent life to the missionary context demanded a great deal of flexibility<sup>111</sup>. All nuns, for instance, admitted transgressions of the rule of silence, an essential element of monasticism<sup>112</sup>. The Servants of the Holy Spirit were obliged to observe the so-called »strict« silence from evening prayers till breakfast, and »simple« silence (i.e. the attempt to avoid speaking or, if necessary, to speak in low voice only) during the rest of the day with the exception of recreation times. Occurring transgressions with regard to both missionary practice and the local cultural setting they explained as follows: Given the host of outdoor duties and the frequent visitors they received at the convent, they argued, they were at times forced to speak as remaining silent might be misinterpreted by the indigenous people and offend them. According to the majority of nuns, the challenge to religious discipline, rather than practicing silence as in Europe, was »to talk in due time and to keep silent in

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106 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 30.7.1899.

107 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 22.6.1900.

108 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, July 1900.

109 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 24.6.1900.

110 »O wie schön ist es gehorchen und die letzte Schwester in Steyl zu sein.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 8.1.1900.

111 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, July 1900.

112 Cf. Edmond OBRECHT, Silence, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 13, New York 1912, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13790a.htm> (16.1.2010).

due time«<sup>113</sup>. Besides, missionary life entailed a set of novelties that substantially affected the day-to-day rhythm in the convent.

One of the major differences between convent life in Europe and abroad was that the nuns lived together with indigenous children and female employees, and the consequences this had for their collective religious life they interpreted differently. In contrast to life in the Motherhouse, which was structured according to a strict cycle of collective prayer, study and work, missionary practice in New Guinea implied an overlapping of various duties. Sister Valeria Diezen, who was responsible for the sphere of education, while complaining about the general lack of religious discipline, at the same time emphasized the nuns' responsibility to guarantee close supervision of the children present, a view not all of the nuns would share. Thus she noted that working nun Sister Martha tended to »grumble« when collective prayer was impossible due to supervising duties. In her capacity as missionary educator, Sister Valeria considered this reaction as unjustified. In contrast, she argued, constant supervision of the children had to be given precedence, for »what responsibility would press on us if the children did bad things due to lack of control«<sup>114</sup>.

Notwithstanding the fact that each of the three nuns kept sending confidential letters to Europe in which they passed criticism on their local superior, both of the younger members of the community referenced the principle of obedience and subordinated to the head of the convent<sup>115</sup>. Thus, while they did not challenge the superior's authority by criticizing her openly they stated that Sister Martha was causing troubles in this regard<sup>116</sup>. In 1900, one of them accused Sister Martha of contesting the authority of Superior Fridolina: »When she believes to be right Sister Martha sticks to [her opinion] and without any inhibition insists that this has to be that way and that has to be this way«<sup>117</sup>. Apart from criticizing Sister Martha's attitude toward the local authority, the community of nuns also took offence at the way she practiced religious life. For example, when they had produced a set of new religious habits of lighter material »for the torrid period« for which they had received the European superiors' sanction, Sister Martha still refused to accept the new dress<sup>118</sup>. And Sister Valeria pointed out to the mother superior the counter-productive effect of some nuns' »peculiar« behavior, citing as an example

113 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 19. 7.1901.

114 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, July 1900.

115 Cf. AG SSsP 6201 PNG Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 4.1.1900 and Sr. Ursula Sensen, 7.1.1900.

116 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 26.2.1902.

117 »Schw. Martha hält fest wo sie glaubt Recht zu haben und sagt ohne Scheu dieses muss so sein und das muss so sein.« AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 4.1.1900 and Sr. Ursula Sensen July 1900.

118 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 25.2.1900.

Sister Martha's practicing collective prayer in the convent's chapel: When doing penance for having arrived late, she refused to use the pew but rather kneeled down on the floor right beside the entrance<sup>119</sup>. Complaints at Sister Martha's behavior were also leveled by the superior. In December 1900, Sister Fridolina Vökt reported that »a sister« had called on her to ask the community's confessor for an additional weekly reception of communion. Regarding this as contradictory to her sense of duty against congregational elites in Europe, Sister Fridolina at first forwarded this request to the Motherhouse<sup>120</sup>. When about six months later she received a negative response, she found herself in a difficult position because in the meantime Sister Martha had effected special approval by her confessor. Sister Fridolina described her subordinate's reaction to the decision taken in Steyl as follows: »When I told Sister Martha about it, she replied with agitated affection: »Nobody has any saying in this apart from the confessor; he knows how I am, in Steyl they don't know, and that's what the rules say«<sup>121</sup>. For Sister Fridolina, missing out one weekly reception of the Eucharist produced a deep sense of spiritual disadvantage that was not compensated for by her certainty to act in accordance with her interpretation of obedience. She stated: »It's not easy to remain kneeling in the back once or twice a week and watch the sisters receiving the Holy Communion [and] I've already cried more than once«<sup>122</sup>.

The relationship between her and the rest of the community had developed badly also from Sister Martha's point of view. After ten months in Tumleo, she turned to the mother superior emphasizing the need »to bare her afflicted soul« in writing in order to »take fresh heart and courage«<sup>123</sup>. Although she, in her own opinion, had aimed to tacitly endure the situation and thus convert it into a sacrifice, she ultimately needed to confide herself to the mother superior: »I have to confess to you that I often find it difficult to keep a calm and joyful temper when at the same time I see what they would excogitate to annoy me«<sup>124</sup>. In her view, the situation culminated in June 1901 after the community had taken in a newborn orphan girl. While the rest of the nuns noticeably cheered up during this period and full of enthusiasm reported to

119 Cf. AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 26.2.1902.

120 Cf. AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 5.6.1901.

121 »Schw. Martha gab mir, als ich es ihr mitteilte, in erregtem Eifer zur Antwort: »Da hat mir niemand etwas zu sagen als der Beichtvater, der weiss wie ich bin, in Steyl wissen sie es nicht, und in der Regel steht es so drin.« Ibid.

122 »Es ist nicht so leicht jede Woche 1 bis 2 mal hinten knien zu bleiben, und den Schwestern nachsehen wenn sie zur heiligen Kommunion gehen ich habe schon mehr als einmal geweint.« Ibid.

123 AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 26.2.1900.

124 »Doch muss ich ihnen gestehen, dass es mir dennoch oft sehr schwer wird die ruhige Stimmung zu bewahren, wenn ich sehe wie gleichsam alles ersonnen wird um mich zu ärgern.« Ibid.



Europe about the girl's progress, Sister Martha felt excluded from the vivid discussions on child care. In a confidential letter to Europe she admitted that she was assailed by a »great temptation« which she attributed to her increasing isolation from collective activities. She wrote: »Now the good sisters take turns in taking the child with them and caring for her at night, only I am excluded from it. I am not even allowed to get a bit of water for her. Also the sisters always consult with each other; only I am excluded by everyone«<sup>125</sup>.

Sister Martha's dilemma was more complex, though. In 1901, she spoke about a »big aversion« that she had developed against her »dear fellow sisters«, which made her even consider resigning from the congregation. Interestingly, she related the hopelessness of her situation to the temporary absence of the prefect apostolic. During these early years of missionary practice in Tumleo, Prefect Apostolic Eberhard Limbrock was the second legitimate contact person for the nuns to discuss personal problems, obviously functioning as some sort of mediator whenever problems arose. Six months after Sister Martha had expressed the thought of resigning, she reported that, following a conversation with Limbrock, this »temptation« had gone. She stated that the other nuns had finally permitted her to care for the child and even »allowed« her »to accommodate the child [...] at night«<sup>126</sup>. Obviously Limbrock had managed to mediate among the four women. Generally speaking, the possibilities for individual nuns to articulate personal dilemma were limited to talks with superiors. Thus, in a case like the one presented, in which a nun suffered from the bad relationship with the head of the house, the possibilities to discuss the problems were almost nonexistent. In such situations the prefect apostolic might jump in and function as a confidant for those nuns who did not rely on their women superiors. Sister Martha, for example, ensured European authorities that Limbrock perfectly cared for the nuns' well-being and was »a good father« for them, particularly in times of crisis:

When your heart is virtually broken by pain and grieve he knows how to prop it up again with his gentle mild words. Oh, what a pleasure it is to turn to this good father to unbosom oneself to him; indeed you can tell him everything, without hiding anything. What we unfortunately lack in one respect, thank God, we gain in another<sup>127</sup>.

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125 »Nun wechseln sich die guten Schwestern ab das Kind nachts mitzunehmen und zu versorgen nur ich bin davon ausgeschlossen. Noch nicht mal ein wenig Wasser darf ich dafür holen. Dann beraten die guten Schwestern immer zusammen miteinander nur ich bin von allen ausgeschlossen.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 2.6.1901.

126 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 10.11.1901.

127 »Wenn das Herz von Schmerz und Leid gleichsam gebrochen ist, er weiß es wieder aufzurichten durch seine sanften milden Worte. O wie gern geht man zu diesem guten Vater und schüttet sein Herz vor ihm aus, ja, alles kann man ihm sagen, ohne auch nur etwas zu verheimlichen. Was uns von der einen Seite leider abgeht, das wird uns Gott sei Dank von der

Sister Martha characterized her relations with the prefect apostolic as full of trust and compensating for the lack of confidence she had in the local female superior. Similar issues troubled many nuns in the rapidly expanding mission in early-twentieth-century New Guinea. Despite the increase of the Catholic communities the region had seen since 1903, the creation of congregational structures (i.e. close relations between the single convents) advanced slowly. The appointment of a female superior provincial in 1906 brought about little change. With the single convents being scattered throughout the region they were largely administrated autonomously and communication between them was complicated due to irregular shipping connections. The lack of contact often prevented the nuns to seek the assistance of the superior provincial. The absence of a broader congregational infrastructure became particularly obvious in the case of disturbed social relations within the single convents. Unlike their colleagues established in Togo, who could ask their female superiors in Europe for advice and hope for intervention within about two months, nuns in New Guinea could expect a response at best within six months' time. Consequently, instead of trying to approach female superiors in Europe, they preferred to discuss personal issues with local priests or their confessors<sup>128</sup>. However, particularly at times when collective relations had already become tense, additional interaction between single nuns and priests was not appreciated by local women superiors either<sup>129</sup>.

As for Sister Martha Sieverding, however, the relaxation in the relations with her colleagues was short-lived. Indeed, problems with fellow nuns were to prevail throughout her missionary career because her peculiar understanding of the female apostolate often collided with the religious ideas and missionary practice of others. Sister Martha linked progress in evangelization to a set of religious exercises, which related to a centuries-old religious tradition practiced in women monasteries. As Jo Ann McNamara has shown, nuns had developed their own religious activities to serve the missionary vocation since the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Established behind cloister walls and denied direct access to foreign missions, early modern nuns had practiced activities they derived from what McNamara has called »the concept of spiritual cooperation and support«: Over centuries they perceived the cloister as a site of the missionary vocation and employed a range of religious

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anderen Seite ersetzt.« AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 2.6.1901.

128 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Eustachia Wirtz, 12.3.1906.

129 For example, Sister Eustachia Wirtz suffered from homesickness, which she related to the lack of confidence she had in the head of the house, with her confessor being the only local person she trusted. And yet she experienced difficulties having a heart-to-heart talk with him as it was »not appreciated that I talked to the reverend father in the parlor«. Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Eustachia Wirtz, 24.5.1908.

practices (e.g. prayers, silence, sacrifices and self-mortification) to support the more mundane, external works of male missionaries<sup>130</sup>. The deep belief in the practical force of prayers and contemplative practices for the missionary venture was constitutive to the Servants of the Holy Spirit's founding history. In 1889, Arnold Janssen had established one congregation with two branches, the missionary sisters and the contemplative nuns. Although both branches were founded for the same purpose, i.e. to serve the venture of evangelization, their respective approaches differed: While the former supported the mission through prayers and external work, the latter practiced adoration of the sacrament, sacrifices and the observance of a contemplative life and permanent cloister<sup>131</sup>. Two things derive from this tension between »internal« and »external« aspects of women's roles in evangelization. Firstly, all of them shared the belief in the importance and practical power of prayer and certain religious practices for the mission venture. Secondly, the crucial challenge all missionary nuns faced was to balance these religious practices with external (and partly mundane) duties. This, moreover, mirrored the larger situation in the Catholic Church for, as Carmel McEnroy has argued, many twentieth-century women's congregations, notwithstanding their apostolic bias, operated from a monastic spirituality of asceticism<sup>132</sup>.

Many nuns in missions (e.g. like Sister Didaka) developed an understanding of missionary work that emphasized external activities and achievements (nursing, teaching, baptism etc.). That is not to say that they neglected concepts of spiritual support deriving from particular religious exercises but, quite the contrary, integrated external duties into their understanding of suffering and self-sacrifice. Indeed, for many being a nun in the missions and working to the benefit of others under the omnipresent threat of sickness and early death was the ultimate expression of self-sacrifice. Thereby, all (physical and psychological) inconveniences (»sufferings«) they experienced they sacrificed to God and the salvation of others. Although nuns embedded all activities in this narrative of suffering and sacrifice, they engaged in external activities, attempted to advance secular conditions of service and observed mundane standards (e.g. of work, health, rest, etc.). According to this understanding, the active contribution to the missionary venture constituted the path leading to redemption. Nuns like Sister Martha, by contrast, emphasized their individual advancement in religious life, which resulted from the immersion in prayer and the strict observance of religious discipline, as preparing the ground for redemption. However, due to heavy workloads, exter-

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130 McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 493.

131 Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 19.

132 According to Carmel McEnroy, the preparatory period to Vatican II constituted an important turning point in this regard. Cf. McENROY, *Guests in their own House*, p. 161.

nal duties and psychological pressure, missionary life posed a threat to this understanding of advance. According to Sister Martha, life in general and in particular the demanding and (partly mundane-oriented) missionary life in an environment she perceived as morally threatening involved an omnipresent threat of sinful behavior. Sinful behavior in this context was not restricted to words and actions but also to thoughts and emotions<sup>133</sup>. In November 1901, Sister Martha wrote:

Again we are at the end of the year and at the beginning of a new one. God alone knows if we will live to see the beginning of the New Year. But what would it matter if the good Lord called us home, as our position will soon be filled again and better looked after than now, while we, so I hope, will be placed in the fortunate situation to be no longer able to displease God, our good father and beloved groom. And this thought makes death desirable<sup>134</sup>.

For Sister Martha, missionary life was based on a contradictory premise: On the one hand, she perceived the striving for spiritual perfection as the path to redemption, while, on the other hand, local conditions challenged the observance of the necessary religious discipline. Consequently, she sought to counteract sinful behavior by means of ascetic practices of doing penance (e.g. mortifying the body by refusing to wear lighter dress or kneeling on the floor). This, however, collided with the ideas of her fellow nuns, who rather welcomed any legitimate alleviation in view of the already high workloads under difficult conditions. Sister Martha therefore found herself in a real dilemma, because, in her eyes, missionary practice involved the threat of decay in spiritual life. This dilemma determined much of her writing. In confidential letters to superiors she repeatedly expressed her worries to regress on the path to redemption and begged for prayer support from the Motherhouse. In 1900, she called upon the mother superior to pray particularly »for all your children in the distance, (because they are in need of it), so that they don't spoil their own salvation and miss their true goal«, namely to find themselves »unified in heaven with our much beloved groom Jesus Christ«

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133 For instance, many nuns admitted having violated »sisterly love« in mind. Other kinds of sinful behaviour that had to be battled included features like impatience, sensitivity, lack of humility, etc.

134 »Schon wieder stehen wir vorm Schlusse des Jahres und am Anfang eines neuen Jahres. Ob wir aber den Anfang des Neuen Jahres erleben, das weiß Gott allein. Doch was schadet es auch wenn der gute Gott uns heim ruft, unsere Stelle wird bald wieder besetzt sein und besser versorgt werden wie jetzt und wir hingegen sind dann so, hoffe ich, in der glücklichen Notwendigkeit versetzt Gott unseren guten Vater und liebsten Bräutigam nicht mehr beleidigen zu können. Und dieser Gedanke macht den Tod ersehenswert.« AG SSps PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Martha Sieverding, November 1901.

one day<sup>135</sup>. In contrast to other nuns who understood missionary practice as the most promising path to redemption, for Sister Martha it was a real threat to this very goal.

Sister Martha's situation remained largely unchanged even after the arrival at Tumleo of a second group of four nuns at the end of 1901. Eventually, in November 1902, she moved to the Monumbo area in order to establish the second women's convent in the region. There, Sister Martha was appointed head of the convent that she had founded together with Sister Philomena Herzog (1873–1935) and Sister Christophora Einzmann (1876–1956), who had both lived in New Guinea since December 1901<sup>136</sup>. Although this decision by the prefect apostolic is perfectly understandable, in view of her age in combination with her missionary and convent experience, her colleagues dissented over the appointment, pointing out that Sister Martha »was never able to contend with« the head of the house in Tumleo<sup>137</sup>. But while the nuns reported from Tumleo that »peace and joy« were restored in the convent, there was another component adding to Sister Martha's dilemma: In the capacity of superior in Monumbo, she took on the responsibility for the religious development of the community. She therefore immediately wrote to Europe asking for advice and the sanctioning of the order of the day. In addition, she asked her European fellows to support her by prayers so as to ensure that, to use Sister Martha's words, »no soul gets lost because of my fault«<sup>138</sup>.

Sister Martha Sieverding held office in Monumbo until 1910. Interestingly, she remained ambiguous with regard to her post throughout the whole tenure. On the one hand, the capacity of a superior afforded her the possibility to shape convent life according to her own standards of religious discipline. On the other hand, however, Sister Martha kept struggling with the responsibility she felt she had for the religious development of her subordinates. In 1906, she discussed these issues in a confidential letter to Europe:

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135 »O liebe Mutter beten Sie [...] für Ihre Kinder in der Ferne, (den[n] sie haben es nötig) das sie doch nicht ihr eigenes Heil verscherzen und ihr wahres Ziel verfehlen. O bitte beten Sie doch dass uns recht das große Glück zu theil werde, uns alle vereint im Himmel wieder zu finden bei unserem vielgeliebten Bräutigam Jesus Christus.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 25.2.1900.

136 Sister Philomena Herzog (1873–1935) was a teaching nun who had entered the congregation in 1896 (first vows in 1896). She was appointed part of the local congregational administration in 1912 and functioned also as the superior provincial from 1919 to 1926. Sister Christophora Einzmann (1876–1956) was a working nun. She had entered the congregation in 1897 and taken her first vows in 1899.

137 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 11.12.1902.

138 »Bitte beten Sie mit den lieben Mitschwestern doch recht fleißig für mich damit doch keine Seele durch meine Schuld verloren gehe.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 12.12.1902.

Concerning the administration of my office, I feel more than ever that I am no good for it. Oh if only God did not permit these souls who I am called upon to guide to decay. That's what I fear very much. Oh, please pray with the whole community that God may prevent this harm. I'd rather suffer the cruelest pains than becoming guilty of doing such great harm. Any other discomfort this office brings to me I will gladly endure in atonement for my sins as well as for the penance of the sins of the souls entrusted to my care<sup>139</sup>.

The passage quoted highlights the centrality of sin and penitence to Sister Martha's understanding of advancement in spiritual life. Also, it points out an ascetic concept of suffering as a way to do penance. As mentioned earlier, many missionary nuns tended to turn the psychological (e.g. homesickness, isolation, depressions) and physical (e.g. fever, exhaustion) hardship they experienced into a sacrifice to the divine. That way they related the experience of missionary hardship to the concept of suffering, which has had a long-standing tradition in Christianity<sup>140</sup>. Suffering was associated with the striving of an individual for a state of compassion and a share in »the sufferings of the Redemption«<sup>141</sup>. The ultimate sacrifice was martyrdom, thus the sacrifice of the self in imitation of the death of Christ for the salvation of humankind.

In the pre-Vatican II Catholic context, the notion of missionary sufferings as the sharing of the suffering of Christ was very widespread<sup>142</sup>. All nuns related day-to-day hardship to this concept and sought to reach their own redemption as well as the redemption of New Guinea through suffering. At the same time, however, the majority of nuns acknowledged the importance of mundane (i.e. disciplining, teaching, etc.) practices for the conversion of the people as well as the care for their own health and body<sup>143</sup>. Therefore, they

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139 »Was dann die Verwaltung des Amtes betrifft, so fühle ich immer mehr, dass ich dafür nicht taue. O wenn der liebe Gott doch nur nicht zulässt, dass durch mich die Seelen, die durch mich geleitet werden sollen, zu Grunde gehen. Das fürchte ich sehr. O bitte beten Sie doch mit der ganzen Kommunität, dass der gute Gott doch dieses große Unglück verhüten möge. Lieber möchte ich die grausamsten Schmerzen leiden, als schuld an so einem großen Unglück sein. Was dieses Amt im Übrigen für mich unangenehmes bringt, so bin ich ja gerne bereit, es zu tragen für meine Sünden sowie auch zur Buße für die Sünden der mir anvertrauten Seelen.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Martha Sieverding, January 1906.

140 Generally speaking, the theme of suffering has a long-standing tradition in Christianity that refers to God's redemptive activity in the sufferings of Christ. Cf. Walter SPARN, *Leiden IV. Historisch/Systematisch/Ethisch*, in: TRE 20, Berlin 1990, pp. 688–707.

141 McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 516.

142 In her cross-denominational study of missionary lives in Papua, Diane Langmore has contrasted the Catholic belief in missionary sacrifices as sharing the suffering of Christ to the Protestant approach that rather tried to »explain it away«. LANGMORE, *Missionary Lives*, p. 249.

143 Right from the beginning, founder Arnold Janssen instructed the departing nuns that living in alien countries demanded a particular preventive health care. Cf. *Empfehlungen und Belehrungen*

actively tried to improve their living conditions and to repeal hardship. Superiors in part softened certain religious rules (regarding e.g. fasting, recreation, rest, etc.) for missionaries in tropical settings in order to reduce health risks. Most missionary narratives constructed on the notions of suffering and self-sacrifice must thus be understood as the religious ground on which nuns dealt with high workloads, sickness and psychological pressures. Or, to put it in another way, frequent notions of suffering can be read as the nuns' legitimate strategy to give religious meaning to the day-to-day hardship they experienced. According to this logic, the missionaries' suffering would ultimately lead to the redemption of New Guinea. In this context, the concept of martyrdom functioned prominently and some nuns, especially in view of the lack of progress in evangelization, regarded it as a necessary step to reach this goal. Sister Martha was not the only nun to deal with martyrdom, yet it was she who repeatedly expressed an innermost desire for it<sup>144</sup>. In a written »private talk«, she responded to the question about her satisfaction in her vocation:

I am happy and the only wish I have is to live and to die here, among the poor heathens, and to be granted to shed my blood for the poor heathens or at least to suffer as much as possible for them out of love to Jesus. [...] Oh yes, to imitate Jesus in His suffering and loving – that's the aspiration of my heart<sup>145</sup>.

Here, the Catholic belief in the saving power of suffering and martyrdom works in two directions: Both concepts appear as central promoters of proselytizing activities and, at the same time, function as a means to achieve one's own redemption<sup>146</sup>. Sister Martha's praise of suffering, however, was soon to collide with the ideas of others. It were not the theoretical implications of

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gen für die in die Mission reisenden Schwestern, in: AG SSpS 034 Tg Varia (1,2,3,5) – Belehungen f. Miss.

144 For example, in 1901 when the news about the Boxer Rebellion had reached the nuns in New Guinea, she wrote with reference to the events in China: »I almost got jealous thinking of the many that were already granted the Marterkrone [the crown of the martyrs]. But I am not worthy of this; I have no martyr's blood in my veins. God grant that I may at least become a martyr of love.« (»Da hab ich bald Eifersucht bekommen wegen der Marterkrone die dort so vielen schon zuteil geworden. Doch ich bin dessen nicht würdig, kein Marterblut fließt in meinen Adern. Gott gebe, dass ich wenigstens eine Marterin (Martyrerin) der Liebe werde.«) AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 2.6.1901.

145 »Was die Zufriedenheit mit meinem Stande und Beruf betrifft, so bin ich glücklich und habe nur den einen Wunsch, hier unter den armen Heiden zu leben und zu sterben, und wenn es mir gegönnt wäre, für die armen Heiden mein Blut vergießen zu dürfen oder doch wenigstens aus Liebe zu Jesus recht vieles für dieselben leiden zu dürfen.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Martha Sieverding, January 1906.

146 Catholic doctrine recognizes martyrdom as the glorious »baptism of blood« as, analogous to baptism in water, it involves the martyr's absolution from all sins and obtaining of grace. Cf. William FANNING, Baptism, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 2, New York 1907, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm> (7.12.2009).

her approach toward the female apostolate that troubled both her fellows and superiors (who certainly shared them in both theory and language) but the practical ones. This became most obvious during her term of office as the head of the convent in Monumbo (1902–1910).

Applied to day-to-day practice, Sister Martha's apostolic spirituality meant placing the focus on prayer and hard work as well as the denial of any pleasure or comfort. Her subordinates reported that she »cared much« about the observance of the religious rule<sup>147</sup>. And while the majority of nuns appreciated the strict observation of congregational norms, Sister Martha's way of ruling the convent obviously went beyond the collectively aspired standard of religious discipline. Her subordinates complained about her strictness<sup>148</sup>. This, in turn, provoked a remarkable reaction in Europe. Although normally Mother Superior Theresia Messner did admonish the nuns to observe religious discipline despite their multiple external missionary duties, she criticized the sternness displayed by Sister Martha in pursuing administration in 1906, tackling mainly two issues. Firstly, she instructed her in relation to leadership ability. After expressing her appreciation of Sister Martha's internal struggle for perfection in spiritual life, she advised her to accept possible weaknesses on the part of others. Theresia Messner called upon Sister Martha to better control her »hot-blooded nature« in the interaction with her subordinates:

Dear Sister Martha, beware of excitement and unloving behavior, hard and grievous words in enragement. Look, Sister Martha, excited words and accusations are poisoned arrows piercing hearts and inflicting injury and bitterness, thus disturbing the good relationship between superior and subordinate, which will come to bear heavily on both parts<sup>149</sup>.

In the second part, the writer discussed the religious administration in Monumbo. In particular, she proposed Sister Martha to gradually loosen religious practices of mortification. Practically speaking, Sister Martha's efforts to lead her soul as well as the souls of her subordinates to virtue implied the observance of strict self-discipline and denial of all pleasure and comfort. This was related to the Catholic belief that temptation could be overcome by

147 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, fragment, 24.10.1909.

148 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Mother Theresia Messner, 17.6.1906.

149 »Hüten Sie sich, lb. Schw. Martha, vor Aufregung und lieblosem Benehmen, harten, kränkenden Worten in der Erregung. Sehen Sie, Schwester Martha, aufgeregte Worte und Vorwürfe sind giftige Pfeile, welche in das Herz dringen und dasselbe verwunden und verbittern, so dass das gute Verhältnis zwischen Vorgesetzten und Untergebenen gestört wird und beide Teile schwer daran tragen.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Mother Theresia Messner, 28.11.1906.



mortifying oneself, meaning to consciously induce one's will to accept hardship<sup>150</sup>. Mother Superior Theresia Messner, however, called upon Sister Martha to gradually loosen related practices in order to cheer up the local nuns and to establish good collective relations.

Then, dear Sister Martha, for the good cause's sake you must try to be a little less severe and to share with and concede, and also to provide to the sisters little harmless pleasures. Such little disports are necessary for lively natures to keep well spiritually and physically. They brighten up mind and heart, incline people to do good, disperse bad moods etc., of course one must not be jolly<sup>151</sup>.

The writer emphasized the importance of »little pleasures« for the nuns to maintain their »spiritual and physical« health in the mission. This leads us back to the tension between religious practices and worldly aspects of missionary work. Even though the concept of suffering was central to the nuns' religious identities, as missionaries they were nonetheless expected to strive for physical and psychological well-being. The question of health had complex institutional implications, because the nuns, as employees of the Catholic Church in New Guinea, took the responsibility to care for their (working) bodies in order to serve the missionary venture as efficiently and as long as possible. In Sister Martha's understanding, however, religious concepts of mortification and suffering could be implemented solely by engagement in exaggerated works. Embracing suffering as a religious exercise, she disdained health regulations and ignored her fading bodily ability. This ultimately prompted critique on the part of both superiors and subordinates who suffered from the consequences.

Generally speaking, in early-twentieth-century New Guinea, the small convent communities had to cope with extraordinarily high workloads. Maximum productivity was what the local nuns demanded of themselves and what the mission's superiors demanded of the communities. Hence, in order to keep their bodies functioning under exhausting climatic conditions, the nuns had to look after their state of health. Janssen himself had cautioned departing nuns about sickness (i.e. malaria) and instructed them to »preserve their

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150 Cf. Mortification, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 10, New York 1911, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10578b.htm> (16.1.2010).

151 »Dann, liebe Schw. Martha, müssen Sie sich auch um der guten Sache willen Mühe geben, etwas weniger ernst zu sein und kleine harmlose Freuden gern mit den Schwestern teilen, sie gerne gestatten und ihnen, wenn eben möglich auch solche bereiten. Solche kleinen Ergötzen sind lebhaften Naturen nötig, um geistig und körperlich gesund zu bleiben, sie erheitern Geist und Herz, machen aufgelegt zum Guten, vertreiben die üblen Launen usw., natürlich ausgelassen darf man nicht sein.« AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Mother Theresia Messner, 28.11.1906.

health without growing soft<sup>152</sup>. In the missionary context, the falling sick of one community member directly entailed enhanced workloads for the others, requiring them to fill in the deficiency and simultaneously provide the necessary medical care. Health and the ability to work thus constituted an issue of both individual and collective concern: Knowing that one's own failure to take part in working activities inevitably increased the workload of the community, bodily debility as a result of sickness or accidents (or, as we will see later, the aging process) aroused both a sense of guilt in individuals and criticism on the part of fellows. Caring for the own body as a requirement for coping with the workload and, thus, the ability to serve the missionary cause had an important collective dimension. This interplay of individual and collective approaches to the body with regard to work, health and suffering considerably shaped the Monumbo convent community during 1902 and 1910.

The three nuns who, guided by Sister Martha Sieverding and accompanied by three indigenous housemaids from Tumleo, moved to Monumbo in October 1902, took up work immediately. Since some priests had settled there before, some basic missionary buildings already existed. The nuns' convent, »a cute little place, a small villa amidst the wilderness«, was already inhabitable and some working quarters were available<sup>153</sup>. On the second day on location one nun overtook the collective missionary kitchen and Sister Martha supplied the laundry for all local Europeans. The third nun cared for the accommodation at the convent and did the sewing for the missionaries, indigenous pupils and housemaids, who were usually paid with dresses. Sewing constituted an activity in which all nuns would engage<sup>154</sup>. About three months after their arrival, the nuns opened a school and one of them took up teaching. When the priests, in addition, assigned them the care for the chapel, Sister Martha's responsibilities expanded to encompass the kitchen and the laundry until two new women missionaries arrived from Europe who assisted them in teaching and domestic work. Apart from these regular duties, the nuns, with huge efforts, prepared the (church) decoration for religious ceremonies, for instance on the occasion of the annual Corpus Christi procession or Christmas celebrations. Starting in 1905, the nuns, invariably assisted by some indigenous housemaids and pupils, also engaged in farming activities; a cowshed was constructed and gardens were set up<sup>155</sup>. As this brief overview shows, every single nun in Monumbo was assigned a field of work for which she was responsible. Consequently, the shortfall of an individual due to sick-

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152 Empfehlungen und Belehrungen für die Mission reisenden Schwestern, in: AG SSsP 034 Tg Varia (1,2,3,5) Belehrungen f. Miss.

153 AG SSsP PNG Chroniken, Monumbo, p. 2.

154 The nuns in Monumbo produced the dresses for Europeans and indigenous Christians of two missionary stations.

155 Cf. AG SSsP PNG Chroniken, Monumbo, pp. 1–11.

ness posed a serious challenge to the work-sharing community that counted between three and five nuns.

In 1905, in a letter to Europe, in which she touched upon the issue of the division of work in Monumbo, a nun pointed out the extended workloads Sister Superior Martha Sieverding had to cope with:

Of course, the most and hardest [work] falls upon sister superior. She does the laundering, the ironing, the folding of the clothes. In addition, she is in charge of 4 cows, 4 calves, a flock of sheep and a barn of fowl. And then there are all kinds of little things the office of a superior brings with it. To this, every now and then, the good Lord would add a hard little cross. Thus, over the last time the good sister superior has again been stricken by ulcers. Furthermore she was unlucky to run into the pitchfork and incur a serious injury. She has been limping on both legs already for more than 14 days. And yet the good sister superior would not think of having some rest. Rather she blames herself for not being tough enough<sup>156</sup>.

Despite the writer's carefully chosen words, a slight critique of Sister Martha's ignoring her injury can be traced in this passage as could in accounts by other nuns who likewise reported on Sister Martha's disregarding her wounded leg, her refusal to take a rest, thus preventing recuperation. And even the mother superior worried about Sister Martha's sluggish healing process. About one year after the incident was mentioned for the first time, Mother Theresia Messner told Sister Martha, who still suffered from the wound, that she was »strictly ordered« to »rest her leg as much as possible« and to »do everything that seems good to cure it«<sup>157</sup>. Sister Martha, however, obviously disregarded this advice and suffered from the wound for another year. Eventually it was the nuns in Monumbo who took action and forwarded the case to Superior Provincial Valeria Diezen. In consequence, the superior provincial traveled to Monumbo and sentenced Sister Martha to an eight days' confinement to her room<sup>158</sup>. By then, the state of her leg had worsened to a degree

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156 »Natürlich hat Schwester Oberin das meiste und Schwerste. Sie besorgt das Waschen, das Bügeln, das Wäsche falten. Daneben hat sie noch 4 Kühe, 4 Kälber, eine Herde Schafe und ein Stall voll Geflügel unter ihrer Obsorge. Daneben finden sich noch allerlei Kleinigkeiten die das Vorsteheramt mit sich bringt. Dazu schickt der liebe Gott auch dann und wann mal ein hartes Kreuzchen herbei. So hatte die gute Schwester Vorsteherin in letzter Zeit wieder mit Geschwüren zu tun. Dazu hatte sie noch das Unglück in die Mistgabel zu laufen und sich dadurch eine recht bedenklich Wunde zugezogen. Schon über 14 Tage hinkt sie auf beiden Beinen. Sich ein wenig schonen davon weiß die gute Schw. Vorsteherin nichts. Sie meint immer sie wäre zu empfindlich.« AG SSsP PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Christophora Ihler, 20.8.1905.

157 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Mother Theresia Messner, 26.5.1906.

158 Cf. AG SSsP PNG Chroniken, Monumbo, p. 12.

that made medical treatment inevitable. Eventually, Sister Martha had to be taken to the colonial hospital and was absent from Monumbo for a period of three months<sup>159</sup>.

For the community, Sister Martha's disregard of her own state of health entailed a whole series of problems. Her dropout for almost three years as well as her three-month absence from Monumbo implied higher workloads for her colleagues who, moreover, were forced temporarily to do without another local nun who had accompanied Sister Martha to the hospital in Friedrich-Wilhelmshafen around 200 kilometers away. Ultimately, the missionary Church had to cover the costs for her treatment<sup>160</sup>. In 1908, a nun wrote from Monumbo: »Oh what a sacrifice this was for sister superior, and for us sisters, too, it was quite difficult!«. From her letter we also learn that Sister Martha had been close to losing her leg by amputation. With regard to Sister Martha's attitude after her return to Monumbo the writer noted: »The wound has not healed yet and it goes only slowly. But it seems to me that it doesn't hurt much anymore because sister superior has heartily resumed work«<sup>161</sup>.

Sister Martha embraced both the accident and the pain as a God-given possibility to advance the mission venture through bodily suffering. Five weeks after the accident had occurred she attributed her aching wound to the lack of missionary success in the conversion of the Monumbo people and thanked God for »this suffering as that way I have something to sacrifice to the good Lord for the dear heathens. Oh, if only I could open heaven to one soul that way. Then I'd gladly suffer even more«<sup>162</sup>. Up to 1910, she administered her office without introducing observable changes. Quite the contrary, she continued to embrace the suffering of bodily afflictions as integral to the female apostolate for the redemption of New Guinea<sup>163</sup>.

159 Cf. AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, Monumbo, 13f.

160 In Togo and New Guinea, doctor's bills just as hospitalization were covered by the male heads of the mission. Yet, at least in some cases, this didn't happen without letting the nuns know about the costs generated through their bodily debility. For instance, Prefect Apostolic Hermann Bücking sent a letter to the female European superior in which he complained about the lack of personnel as well as the improper training of the nuns sent. Interestingly, he introduced this letter by itemizing the costs incurred for the mission by hospitalization of nuns. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Hermann Bücking, 23.1.1903.

161 »Oh was war das für ein Opfer für Schw. Vorsteherin, und auch für uns Schwestern war es recht schwer! [...] Die Wunde ist bis jetzt noch nicht heil, es geht auch sehr langsam damit. Doch scheint es mir, dass dieselbe nicht mehr viel schmerzt, denn Schw. Vorsteherin arbeitet tüchtig dabei.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Christophora Ihler, 22.8.1908.

162 »Die Wunde bessert sich sehr langsam, doch Gott sei Dank für dieses Leiden, so habe ich doch etwas was ich dem lieben Gott opfern kann für die lieben Heiden. Oh wenn ich doch einer Seele dadurch den Himmel öffnen könnte. Gerne möchte ich dann noch größeres leiden.« AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 1.10.1905.

163 In 1909 she wrote: »One cannot resemble Jesus without suffering, and for me, too, suffering is the most appropriate way to serve the poor heathens.« (»Ohne Leiden kann man Jesus ja nicht

Sister Martha's general state of health continued to deteriorate with chronic cough and frequent fever weakening her even more. Eventually, the superior provincial, on the occasion of an inspection of the Monumbo convent in 1910, decided to dismiss Sister Martha from office and to move her to the regional headquarters in Alexishafen. There, Sister Martha Sieverding once again had to see a doctor, who diagnosed tuberculosis. According to Superior Provincial Valeria Diezen, there was »no rescue for Sister Martha«: The doctor had given her only six months to live<sup>164</sup>. Valeria Diezen informed European authorities that Sister Martha had to be removed from Monumbo anyway, as she was not able to get along with the local priests anymore. She added that Sister Martha's »strong will« and »hard mind« would prompt her to make improper statements at which »even the natives took offence«. Without giving any further details as to their content the writer found clear words for Sister Martha's attitude with regard to her state of health:

If Sister Martha had done for her health what was reasonable, she could have worked longer on behalf of the mission. The colds, which finally produced the consumptiveness, she contracted because she did not change her clothes the whole week. Reasonable care for our body is what we owe to God and the congregation. Sister Martha went too far [...]<sup>165</sup>.

The head of the province once more emphasized the imperative of productivity over the performance of spiritual concepts of the suffering body. Again she pointed out that nuns in missions were first and foremost responsible for caring for their physical well-being in order to serve the mission venture as long as possible through their labor. Hence, to care for the own state of health became a responsibility toward both God and the institution. Accordingly, Sister Martha's way of mission life ultimately had become a matter of authorities. Superior Provincial Valeria Diezen, who had already criticized Martha's self-inflicted suffering (when she was still an ordinary nun in Tumleo) about a decade ago, also referred to other practices that Sister Martha had tried to introduce in the capacity of head of the Monumbo convent.

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ähnlich werden, und leiden sind ja auch für mich das geeignetste Mittel, um den armen Heiden nützlich sein zu können.«) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 31.1.1909.

164 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 11.8.1910.

165 »Hätte Schw. Martha für ihre Gesundheit getan, was vernünftig war, so hätte sie noch länger im Dienste der Mission wirken können. Die Erkältungen, woraus endlich die Schwindsucht entstanden ist, hat sie sich dadurch zugezogen, dass sie sich die ganze Woche nicht umgekleidet hat. Eine vernünftige Sorge für Leib und Seele sind wir Gott und der Genossenschaft schuldig. Schw. Martha ist zu weit gegangen [...].« Ibid.

For example, she had asked for the permission to establish her own kitchen because she considered the food too rich even though the local European missionary community »commonly lamented about it«<sup>166</sup>. Valeria Diezen also touched upon the negative consequences Sister Martha's lifestyle – her ignorance of standards of personal hygiene – had for her environment: »One time I myself heard a priest, who was kneeling behind her, tell her that she better wash her clothes, and recently a sister sitting by her side at dinner got nauseated from this fetor«<sup>167</sup>. All this made the superior provincial arrive at the conclusion that Sister Martha had become an incalculable factor. Ignoring congregational guidelines with regard to her body, she was no longer acceptable as head of a convent. With her transfer to Alexishafen, she was put under the direct control of the superior provincial.

In 1910, nuns in need of care were taken to the congregation's New Guinean headquarters located in Alexishafen, the only convent in the region at which a slightly larger number (e.g. ten in 1914) of nuns resided. For Sister Martha, going there certainly was a difficult step, because this implied that she had to accept her fading working ability. Fellow nuns observed that she tried to »keep herself upright with might and main« in spite of the tuberculosis<sup>168</sup>. Apart from being forced to reduce physical work, during her last years in Alexishafen Sister Martha had to face difficult conditions. She lived largely isolated from the rest of the community together with another nun who also suffered from tuberculosis. According to her self-assessment, Sister Martha was allowed to perform only »light works« such as darning stockings and caring for chicken farming<sup>169</sup>. Still she doubted the diagnosis. Unfortunately, we do not know how Sister Martha perceived these last years filled with needlework and isolation. Her fellow sufferer, however, complained to Europe about the lack of contact with the rest of the community. For her too, the inability to work seemed to have caused troubles. She wrote:

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166 Ibid. Concerning the role of food, fasting and the body in female devotional practice cf. Caroline WALKER BYNUM, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The religious Significance of Food to medieval Women*, Berkeley 1987; Caroline WALKER BYNUM, *Why all the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective*, in: *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1995), pp. 1–33.

167 »Habe selbst einmal gehört, dass ein Pater, der in der Kirche hinter ihr gekniet hatte, ihr sagte sie solle ihre Kleider besser waschen, und einer Schwester wurde es kürzlich noch schlecht von diesem Gestank.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 11.8.1910.

168 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Veronika Koenig; 31.5.1911 and Sr. Ehrentrudis Diezen, 20.12.1913.

169 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 12.2.1911.

So, with Sister Martha I have to say: »I am a tree standing in others' way«. Of course I am saying this in jest. Everything like God wants! His holy will shall be done always and everywhere! He knows, what is good for us; He sees through the core of the heart. Sister Martha and I – we share a cell. We live together peacefully. I like Sister Martha a lot; she is a saint-like soul<sup>170</sup>.

This statement exemplifies the difficult situation facing individuals once their physical debility prevented them from performing their former duties. Many nuns were afflicted when their state of health, or simply age, reduced their ability to work, making them dependent on the care by fellows. This was certainly linked to the absence of institutional facilities (i.e. personnel, place) to provide care for those who needed it. In June 1914, Sister Martha died from tuberculosis at the age of fifty<sup>171</sup>. And although it did not come by surprise, her death gave reason to a lively discussion on health issues in New Guinea. It were, however, not religious practices but the lack of recuperation facilities for nuns that constituted the main issue. Superior Provincial Valeria Diezen took Sister Martha's sickness and death as an opportunity to open a discussion on the »first generation's« fading state of health. By then, these women had already been living in the mission for up to fifteen years without enjoying any recovery time.

### The Body, Health and institutional Implications

By 1914, fifty-four nuns had set out for New Guinea. Except for one, who had died en route in Batavia in 1913, all had reached their point of destination without serious health problems. In contrast to Togo, where a series of early deaths had soon brought up the topics of health care and physical recreation, the first of the New Guinea nuns died from fever in 1904<sup>172</sup>. Despite the frequent occurrence of fevers, the first decade of female missionary work did not see any other fatalities except for the death of Sister Deogratias Simonis (1872–1908), who drowned in a shipping accident. This, however, was going to change around 1910, when both nuns mentioned were diagnosed with

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170 »So muss ich mit Schw. Martha sagen: »Ich bin ein Baum der im Wege steht.« Doch dies sage ich nur im Scherz. Alles wie Gott will! Sein Heiliger Wille geschehe immer und überall! Er weiß, was gut ist für uns; er durchschaut das Innerste des Herzens. Sr. Martha und ich – wir teilen eine Zelle. Wir wohnen friedlich zusammen Ich habe Sr. Martha sehr gern; sie ist eine heiligenmässige Seele.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Pacifica Schmitz, 6.1.1911.

171 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 5.6.1914.

172 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 24.5.1904.

tuberculosis and another one died from pneumonia<sup>173</sup>. From the time of their deaths in 1913 and 1914, respectively, until 1917, another four nuns passed away. In addition, by 1914, nine nuns, who had already lived and worked in New Guinea for more than a decade, were suffering from the consequences of the demanding missionary life. Altogether, after the first decade of missionary work the issues of health and recuperation facilities had become an urgent matter. Just like her Togolese counterpart, Superior Provincial Valeria Diezen at the end of 1909 traveled to Europe in order to attend the general chapter. After her return to New Guinea in May 1910, she made an inspection to all local convents in the course of which she found several nuns in an alarming state of health. She wrote: »It's very difficult for me to see the sisters pass away one after the other. If only we had a bigger house or more means to give to the sick!«<sup>174</sup> At that time, a period of heat and drought even aggravated the situation. Altogether the institutional disadvantage experienced by the nuns in New Guinea became obvious. In contrast to friars and priests, they were not granted home leaves for health reasons. In August 1910, Valeria Diezen warned her European superiors about the implications of lack of possibilities for the nuns to physically recover: »You will see that they will be taken to the cemetery sooner than you would believe«<sup>175</sup>.

In 1910, the superior demanded the establishment of a »recreation home« in New Guinea<sup>176</sup>. She suggested creating the institutional facilities to enable the congregation's local members to take some time off for physical recuperation and total dedication to religious exercises<sup>177</sup>. Since the Catholic building activity and the mission's economic and material resources were managed and controlled by priests, however, the regional head of the women's congregation totally depended on her male counterparts in this question. In 1912, she came up with an alternative proposition. Valeria Diezen suggested the introduction of home leaves for women missionaries to enable physically weak nuns to travel to Europe to restore their health. Spending some time in the Motherhouse, she argued, would also serve what she called the »care for the congregational spirit«<sup>178</sup>. Interestingly, the introduction of home leaves

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173 This, at least, was the diagnosis of the doctor. The nuns, however, were convinced that Sister Wiltrudis Hasselmann had also suffered from tuberculosis. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 3.10.1910.

174 »Es ist mir sehr schwer, eine Schwester nach der anderen hinsinken zu sehen. Hätten wir nur einmal ein grösseres Haus und hätten etwas mehr für die Kranken!« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 11.8.1910.

175 »Sie werden sehen, dass man sie dafür auf den Friedhof trägt, eher als man glaubt.« Ibid.

176 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 3.10.1910.

177 In monasticism the religious exercises that nuns carry out collectively on a regular basis are called »spiritual retreats«.

178 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Valeria Diezen, undated (before June 1912).



for New Guinea-based nuns was not taken into consideration at any point of time. Apart from a handful of exceptional cases, neither the prefect apostolic nor the congregation's European leaders seriously proposed or agreed on the return to home of sick or, in later years, old nuns. Up to 1960, this missionary policy remained gendered. The only women missionaries to return to Europe were some young nuns, who had been examined by an official doctor who stated that staying in the tropics would inevitably lead to their premature death<sup>179</sup>. It was only in these exceptional cases that local male authorities would consent that those affected might return to Europe either for good or be assigned another missionary duty. Thus, returning home was seen as a revocation from the mission and rationalized by the candidates' potential usefulness elsewhere<sup>180</sup>. In contrast, neither old age nor long-term service in the field constituted an adequate reason for being granted to return to Europe, as the case of Sister Fridolina Vökt, the oldest nun on location, shows. Fridolina Vökt had arrived in New Guinea in 1899 at the age of forty-two. By the early 1920s – after more than twenty years of missionary service – she already depended on the care of fellow nuns. The care of sick or older colleagues, however, was a service difficult to provide given the shortage of nuns in good health after the Great War: On the one hand, by the beginning of 1922, out of 54 nuns 13 (among them Superior Provincial Valeria Diezen) had already died, four had reached the age of fifty, and three were already forty-nine-years old<sup>181</sup>. On the other hand, between 1913 and 1922, no newcomers had arrived from Europe. Yet, the mission's geographic expansion advanced steadily. As a consequence of this tense situation with regard to the missionary workforce, the imperative of productivity obviously affected the nuns of every age and state of health. In 1922, Sister Philomena Herzog, the new head of the province, tackled the subject of aging abroad when she wrote: »Sister Fridolina still hauls herself along with her sixty-four years«<sup>182</sup>. In response, congregational elites in Europe proposed that »faithful Sister Fridolina«, in view that she »is old and provided many services to the mission« and thus deserved »to be paid the money for the journey«, should return

179 E.g. three nuns aged between 31 and 34 years, who had spent in New Guinea between one and five years, returned to Europe in 1912. According to the superior provincial, a doctor had arrived at the conclusion that none of them would endure the stay in tropics. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 20.1.1913.

180 »The three sisters departed to Europe upon the request of reverend F. Prefect and rev. F. Regional who held that it was irresponsible to expose such young forces to mortal danger, while they still could accomplish much in another climate.« (»Die drei Schwestern sind auf Wunsch des hochwürdigsten P. Präfekten und des hochw. P. Regionals nach Europa geschickt worden; denn – sagten sie – es ist nicht zu verantworten, solch junge Kräfte hier in den sicheren Tod zu schicken, während sie in einem anderen Klima noch vieles leisten könnten.«) Ibid.

181 Cf. the statistics in COLES/MIHALIC, *Sent by the Spirit*, pp. 49–53.

182 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Schw. Philomena Herzog, 13.10.1922.

to the Motherhouse<sup>183</sup>. However, although sources remain silent as to the reasons for the failure of this plan, it was obviously the congregational elites' decision not to make any exceptions to the rule. Fridolina Vökt died in Alexishafen in 1926 at the age of sixty-nine<sup>184</sup>.

The discussion of recuperation facilities after 1910 also brought up issues of authority, and the nuns in New Guinea started to tentatively question their relationship to the local priests. As had done her Togolese counterpart, Superior Provincial Valeria Diezen emphasized the importance of an official »visitation« by the mother superior. Interestingly, both superior provincials thereby somehow reversed the original idea of a canonical »visitation« as the right of superiors to examine the (religious and material) way of life of subordinates. In turn, the nuns in the field regarded the »visitation« by women superiors as the favorite means to communicate their living conditions and to improve gendered institutional relations. Therefore, Valeria Diezen not only invited the mother superior to visit New Guinea but, moreover, asked her to personally inspect every single convent in the region<sup>185</sup>. From the superior provincial's point of view, this »visitation« was necessary in order to counterbalance the power of male authorities. She wrote:

You will surely allow me to tell you openly my opinion regarding a visitation by fathers. Men are men, and you can well believe me that, however good their intentions, they do not understand the needs of women. Sisters need to be treated differently than brothers. I perfectly understand what the reverend Bishop of Roermond has said, namely that women monasteries should be visited by sisters only<sup>186</sup>.

Much to the delight of all nuns in New Guinea, Mother Superior Theresia Messner left Steyl in April 1913 for an extended journey that would take her to all convents located in the congregation's fields of activity in Japan, China, New Guinea and the Philippines<sup>187</sup>. On the occasion of her stay in New Guin-

183 AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Raphaela, 12.5.1921.

184 Cf. AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Schw. Philomena Herzog, 19.2.1926.

185 Cf. AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Valeria Diezen, undated (before June 1912).

186 »Gewiss darf ich hier auch offen meine Meinung sagen in Bezug auf eine Visitation von Patres. Männer sind eben Männer, und Sie können mir sicher glauben, dieselben mögen es noch so gut meinen, sie haben kein Verständnis für die Bedürfnisse der Frauen. Schwestern muß man anders behandeln als Brüder. Ich verstehe sehr gut was der hochwürdigste Bischof von Rörmond sagte, dass nämlich Frauenklöster auch nur durch Schwestern visitiert werden sollen.« AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 16.2.1913.

187 Altogether, the journey lasted from April 1913 to July 1914. Mother Superior Theresia Messner traveled in the company of Sister Epiphania Dickerhoff, who wrote a detailed travelogue on this occasion. Cf. AG SSps, Epiphania Dickerhoff, Missionsreisen mit Würdige Mutter Generaloberin Theresia von April 1913 bis Juli 1914. Kurzgefasstes Tagebuch von Sr. Epiphania Dickerhoff, Part 4 / Neu-Guinea.

ea, religious authorities discussed several issues concerning inner-congregational affairs as well as the nuns' relationships to priests and the missionary Church. The head of the congregation and the prefect apostolic set up and signed a contract aimed at regulating the economic affairs between the institutions involved<sup>188</sup>. In view of the New Guinea-based nuns' total economic dependence on the missionary Church, the regulations concerned the financing of the care for invalid nuns, travel costs and living support<sup>189</sup>. However, with the Great War having interrupted the communication with Europe, most novelties discussed were never implemented. Besides, during the war years the leadership of both the congregation and the Church in New Guinea changed following Superior Provincial Valeria Diezen's death in 1917 and Prefect Apostolic Limbrock's resigning from office. In 1918, the new religious authorities were not familiar with the agreements made<sup>190</sup>. Thus the »visitation« in 1914 did not initiate the changes that many had hoped for. More than ever, the declining state of health of many nuns kept troubling all women involved both in New Guinea and Europe.

In contrast to the nuns, who discussed health issues always in connection with the question of recuperation facilities, the priests in New Guinea diverted the discussion to religious dress codes. More precisely, they declared the nuns' clothing, as being »too heavy and too thick«, responsible for the frequent fevers and fatalities occurring in the second decade of the twentieth century<sup>191</sup>. Such causality, however, was firmly contested by the mother superior who would not accept dress as the single factor detrimental to the nuns' health. Quite the contrary, she countered this assumption by once again pointing out the impossibility for long-term women missionaries in New Guinea to restore their health in Europe. Having visited all convents personally, she, moreover, criticized the hard work the nuns provided in and

188 Cf. AG SSsP 100 General Chapter 1922, Durchführung, Sr. Philomana Herzog, Allgemeiner Bericht über die Region Neuguinea bei Gelegenheit des II. Generalkapitels im Jahre 1922.

189 From the contract it becomes clear that the nuns actually were the employees of the missionary Church. Accordingly, both the passage to the field and living support (food, dress, and dwelling) were funded by the Church. Furthermore, it disbursed one-hundred marks annually to the congregation for each member working in New Guinea. The congregation, in turn, was responsible for the care of all former women missionaries who lived outside the prefecture. The missionary Church committed itself to defray potential travels to Europe of handicapped nuns or of those in need of recuperation due to missionary work. Practically, however, nuns were not granted recuperation holidays. Besides, the contract contained a special requirement with regard to physical weakness that did not directly result from missionary work. Hence, in the case that a nun was declared unfit for missionary service in tropical regions by a doctor within her first two years in New Guinea, the costs of the return journey were to be shared between the missionary Church and the congregation.

190 Significantly, after 1918 even leading nuns in New Guinea were neither sure as to the content of the contract nor were they informed about its legitimacy. Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Schwester Philomena Herzog, 13.10.1922.

191 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Mutter Theresia Messner, 10.2.1917.

beyond the domestic realm. In particular, she referred to farming (i.e. milking, cattle-breeding and gardening) and the management of large »tropical« missionary kitchens such as the one in the Catholic headquarters in Alexis-hafen where nuns cooked for the whole local European personnel. Mother Superior Theresia Messner also considered the extended outgoings »uphill and down dale« that frequently involved »wading through deep rivers« as a risk for the nuns' »female nature«<sup>192</sup>. Eventually, comparing the situation in New Guinea with that of Togo she concluded that »in Africa they are more considerate in many respects and would not challenge to such a degree the sisters' health and strength«<sup>193</sup>. And, rephrasing the congregation's official perspective on the issue of dress and health, Messner added: »We think that what the sisters can wear in Africa without damaging their health [...] the sisters there can wear as well«<sup>194</sup>.

The adaptation of the missionary nuns' religious habit to the living conditions in colonial Togo and New Guinea had constituted an issue from the outset. Here, the term »habit« refers to the complex ensemble of clothing and attire that made up the religious dress of nuns. It was made up of a set of distinct items of clothing such as a tunic-like dress, a scapular, a veil, a mantle, a coif (a close fitting cap which is worn underneath the veil), a collar, a bandeau, a belt and a crucifix on a red neckband<sup>195</sup>. Besides, it included a set of other clothing items that were not (directly) visible or only worn for special activities (i.e. work, rest). These were distinct undergarments, underskirts, aprons, nightclothes (dress, jacket and cap) and sleeves<sup>196</sup>. Altogether, the habit not only powerfully symbolized the nuns' status and value in society but had, moreover, come to signify a set of gendered religious ideals and practices<sup>197</sup>. As pointed out by Elizabeth Kuhns, from early Christianity on, the phrase »taking the habit« was »synonymous with becoming a religious person«<sup>198</sup>. The dress of nuns demonstrated their religious identities with regard to both their status as consecrated women and their attachment to a particular institution. Their uniform habit marked all Servants of the Holy Spirit as members of one congregation and also distinguished them from the secular world,

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192 Ibid.

193 »In vielen Sachen ist man in Afrika doch rücksichtsvoller und stellt nicht so hohe Anforderungen an die Gesundheit und Kräfte der Schwestern.« Ibid.

194 »Wir meinen, was die Schwestern in Afrika ohne Schädigung der Gesundheit bezüglich der Kleidung tragen können, werden die Schwestern dort auch tragen können.« Ibid.

195 For a more precise description of the nuns' religious attire cf. KUHNS, *The Habit*, p. 5.

196 Cf. the list of articles of clothing in: AG SSpS 6201 PNG Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 18.04.1906.

197 For a discussion of the veil cf. Laurene M. LAFONTAINE, *Out of the Cloister: Unveiling to Better Serve the Gospel*, in: Jennifer HEATH (ed.), *The Veil. Women Writers on its History, Lore, and Politics*, London 2008, pp. 75–89, i.e. p. 81.

198 KUHNS, *The Habit*, p. 65.

while at the same time it erased the differences among them. Consequently, nuns in general and superiors in particular were reluctant to introduce changes to the complex attire that constituted this distinct religious garb.

Even so, in Togo the issue of dress was brought up already in 1901, when the nuns suggested changing the fabric according to the local climate. Subsequently, Sister Georgia van Oopen informed European superiors of the Togo community's preference for lighter fabrics for dresses, aprons and stockings<sup>199</sup>. One year later, European superiors by order of the prefect apostolic were requested to send to Togo white woolen material so the nuns could produce their first habit for missionary use in the »tropical« colonies. According to the petitioners, the switch to white color was desirable because, in view of the climate (i.e. the sun, sweat, etc.), white dresses were easier to wash, whereas their traditional blue dress would wash out too quickly<sup>200</sup>. »Proper« appearance was tremendously important since »orderly dress« reflected the dignity of the nun. At the same time, similar requests came from New Guinea, where the first nuns were allowed to use lighter fabrics they had received from Europe<sup>201</sup>. Ultimately, congregational elites, in view that priests in both colonial settings had already turned to white clothing and demanded that the nuns followed their example, approved the production of white habits. Given the extensive work that large quantities of white clothes meant for the laundresses, the powerful symbolism of white dress in colonial contexts must also be taken into consideration. The significance of white clothes as the outward sign of colonial elites surely influenced the priests' choice of color of dress<sup>202</sup>. Practically, however, the shift from blue to white dress was implemented only slowly, because superiors negotiated the matter (and exchanged samples of fabrics) over three continents in their aim to prevent missionary nuns in Togo and New Guinea »from becoming all too different« in their appearance<sup>203</sup>. Consequently, their habit distinguished nuns in Togo and New Guinea from the secular people as well as from other religious, while its color also symbolized their belonging to both the mission forces and the colonial elites.

Thereafter, the subject of clothing was largely closed for discussion in Togo. Sporadic complaints about single items (e.g. legwear) were dismissed with reference to the »blessing« that derived from obedience in this regard<sup>204</sup>.

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199 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 5.3.1901.

200 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 19.6.1902.

201 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 15.12.1904.

202 Cf. the description by Emil Ludwig quoted in Chapter 1, p. 45 and: Robert Ross, *Clothing. A Global History. Or The Imperialists' New Clothes*, Cambridge 2008, p. 70; MÜCKLER, *Kolonialismus*, p. 46.

203 AG SSpS 0311.2 Tog Briefe von M. Theresia Messner nach Togo, 23.3.1906.

204 AG SSpS 0311.2 Tog Briefe von M. Theresia Messner nach Togo, 11.9.1910.

Generally speaking, congregational elites were very reluctant to approve the abandonment of items of clothing or the introduction of greater changes (e.g. with regard to the cut of the dress). The gendered Catholic approach to dress and the body was characterized by an essentially moral perspective. As historian Robert Ross has noted, clothing in the Catholic context was used to ensure bodily discipline<sup>205</sup>. The habit had a dual function. Firstly, its elaborate composition veiled the shape of the body and its sexual characteristics. Secondly, it was perceived as a protection against the temptations of the world and a reminder of the body's corruption<sup>206</sup>. As such, the habit was at once both a uniform sign of purity and its protector. And what applied to nuns in general was particularly true for those in missions who spent much time outside the seclusion of the convent. For them the habit functioned as some sort of extension of the cloister that protected a nun's pure body and thus enabled her to move in public. Carmel McEnroy has suggested that the habit in the pre-Vatican II context »served to create visually the convent walls« that set nuns apart »literally, psychologically, or both«<sup>207</sup>. The essentially moral function of the habit at the crossroads of self and society framed the female religious policy of dress. In contrast to many priests in missions, who discussed the heavy dress of nuns with regard to health only, congregational elites perceived religious clothing as inextricably linked with the identities of nuns as chaste and consecrated women. They therefore agreed only on slight changes (e.g. the use of lighter fabrics) and kept emphasizing the importance of the distinct cut of the dress and the proper use of its single items<sup>208</sup>. To the repeated criticism of female religious dress expressed by priests Mother Superior Theresia Messner responded by pointing out its protectionist function of purity: »The nun's external dignity must be kept up to a certain degree. Once you tear down the wall it won't be long before the garden will be devastated«<sup>209</sup>. This view was even supported by those ordinary nuns in missions who acknowledged a potential causality between frequent sickness and heavy clothes. One of them wrote: »Almost all sisters think that we cannot wear less as this would be against common decency«<sup>210</sup>.

205 Cf. ROSS, *Clothing*, p. 83.

206 Cf. Aileen RIBEIRO, *Dress and Morality*, Oxford 2003, p. 14.

207 McENROY, *Guests in their own House*, pp. 163f.

208 Although Mother Superior Theresia Messner agreed on lighter grey fabrics for the production of working dresses, she emphasized that these needed to be modeled to the distinct cut of the habit rather than »girls' dresses«. In addition, she reminded the nuns to use other items (i.e. the coif) in an orderly way. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Mother Theresia Messner, 24.8.1918.

209 »Die äussere Würde der Ordensschwester muss doch in etwa hochgehalten werden. Reißt man die Mauer ein, so wird der Garten bald verwüstet dastehen.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Mutter Theresia Messner, 10.2.1917.

210 »Fast alle Schwestern meinten, weniger könnten wir nicht anziehen; es wäre doch gegen den Anstand.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 7.10.1920.

Ultimately, at the congregation's second general chapter held in 1922, the capitulars conceded one exception to the New Guinean province. Henceforth, the local nuns were allowed to use grey working dresses on weekdays. Simultaneously, however, the capitulars voted unanimously for the uniform cut of religious dress and the compulsory use of the scapular (the cloth worn over the dress and extending down in front and back), which – depending on the setting – was either made from thicker blue or lighter white fabric. In addition, the chapter decided that in hot countries undergarments (i.e. corsets, legwear) could be produced from lighter fabrics but would nonetheless remain compulsory. Yet, individual nuns in New Guinea were entitled to petition their European superiors for dispensation from single items. The only item from which the local heads of tropical branches were allowed to dispense their subordinates was the nightcap<sup>211</sup>. These concessions, however, were not enough in the eyes of priests, and struggles over religious clothing continued to strain the relations between the religious elites of both sexes. The theme also dominated the European male superior general's visit to Alexishafen in 1922. While General Superior Wilhelm Gier (1867–1951) lauded the good relationship between nuns and priests, he criticized the female leaders with regard to their strict policies on dress<sup>212</sup>. In turn, Superior Provincial Philomena Herzog, after ensuring her women superiors that the complaints had not been raised by the nuns, wrote to Europe: »It's always the old story«<sup>213</sup>. According to her, the nuns »won't find peace and quiet soon« with regard to this issue unless they would give in at least in the question of compulsory undergarments (corset and legwear), which constituted the priests' main point of critique. She therefore suggested that the European superiors authorize her to dispense individuals from single items: »In fact there are some nuns here who need not wear corsets. As for bigger sisters, however, decency demands that they wear corsets«<sup>214</sup>. In the course of the »visitation« in 1922 another item worn by the last group of newly arrived nuns led to discussions. Dressed in the latest model of the congregation's habit, they were heavily attacked for their coif. As mentioned, the coif is a close-fitting headpiece fitted to the skull and tied under the chin. This is the piece of cloth to which the veil is attached<sup>215</sup>. What annoyed the male superior general was the fact that the newcomers wore the new coif de-

211 Cf. AG SSps 100 General Chapter 1922, Protokoll, pp. 14f.

212 Cf. AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Sr. Philomana Herzog, 3.7.1922.

213 Ibid.

214 »Es sind tatsächlich manche Schwestern hier, bei denen das Tragen der Untertaillen überflüssig ist. Bei anderen stärkeren Schwestern fordert aber der Anstand dass sie Untertaillen tragen.« AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Sr. Philomana Herzog, 3.7.1922.

215 Cf. the detailed description of the habit in KUHNS, *The Habit*, p. 5; McENROY, *Guests in their own House*, pp. 163f.

spite the hot climate. Superior Provincial Philomena Herzog, who actually wanted to wait for the decisions taken in Europe in this regard, wrote: »He almost became indignant and asked me if I didn't want to take [the coif] off from the new sisters«<sup>216</sup>. And indeed she had to admit that even though none of them complained, three out of the four nuns who were wearing the head-gear constantly dealt with colds, sickness and rash. Ultimately, she gave in to Gier's demand and removed the coifs. She wrote: »We hope, dear rev. Mother, that you will give your consent«<sup>217</sup>. Altogether, the early-twentieth-century discussion on clothing in the missionary context in many respects mirrored the profound debates over the habit that was to evolve in Catholic congregations in the late 1950s when Rome called for simplicity and practicality of religious dress and its correspondence to modern requirements of health and hygiene<sup>218</sup>. However, while female religious elites defended the congregational dress codes that had been put in place in New Guinea, they used the discussion over health to overtly address the issue of living conditions more generally. In 1921, they criticized that, due to the huge lack of personnel, some nuns lived in the convents in pairs only, which »demanded too much« from them as it precluded appropriate convent life<sup>219</sup>. Also they bemoaned the lack of male protection for women's convents due to the frequent absence of priests from the nearby missionary stations<sup>220</sup>. All these circumstances made life in the outposts unsatisfactory for many nuns. From the European point of view, religious life in post-war New Guinea was threatened by the fact that essential religious rituals (i.e. church services, sacraments) were not guaranteed on a regular basis everywhere. By 1918, congregational elites had come to perceive the local conditions as getting out of hand. Reminding the superior provincial of her responsibilities with regard to her subordinates, the head of the congregation sent a letter to New Guinea in which she suggested rethinking the organization of convent life there:

May we expect such sacrifices from the sisters, the more as they have to do almost without religious stimulation? As superiors we must know what we can require from our sisters. In the ordinary course of the events, nuns can't keep themselves at the height of their vocation if they lack the means of grace and the religious stimulation and in-

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216 »Er wurde fast unwillig und fragte, ob ich diese den neuen Schwestern noch nicht abgenommen hätte.« AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Sr. Philomena Herzog, 3.7.1922.

217 »[...] wir hoffen, liebe Würdige Mutter, dass Sie Ihre Zustimmung dazu geben werden.« Ibid.

218 Cf. KUHNS, *The Habit*, pp. 138–148.

219 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Raphaela, 12.5.1921.

220 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, M. Theresia Messner, 10.2.1917.



structions. We have the spiritual and physical well-being of the sisters in New Guinea at heart and we are worried about it<sup>221</sup>.

In fact, due to the mission's rapid geographic expansion as well as their traditional engagement in material works in connection with what anthropologist Mary Taylor Huber has called the Catholic »frontier economy« in northern New Guinea<sup>222</sup>, priests were not always present at the mission settings. According to Huber, the early years of missionary presence had considerably shaped the later outlook of the local Church. When the pioneer group of six male missionaries arrived on the New Guinean mainland in 1896, they immediately engaged in the mission's material and religious buildup. They set up plantations and industries in order to open up local sources of finance and support as the economic base for the works of evangelization. And although material and religious spheres of work were ideally divided between friars on the one hand and priests on the other, control over the relations between both were soon lost. For Huber, Eberhard Limbrock, the first head of the prefecture, »appears to have decided that a civilized infrastructure was required for missionary work and that, given the impotence of government and commerce, he and his missionaries would simply have to provide it themselves«<sup>223</sup>. The priests in New Guinea engaged in farming, plantation work, cattle breeding, construction activity and navigation. For the nuns, the priests' focus on secular work meant that they were expected to actively contribute to evangelizing works. As a result the nuns were not always able to attend mass or to receive sacraments on a daily basis. Occasionally they remained without clerical assistance over long periods and also on high feasts such as Pentecost or Ascension<sup>224</sup>.

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221 »Dürfen wir den Schwestern solche Opfer zumuten, zudem sie auch sonst fast ganz die religiösen Anregungen entbehren müssen? Wir als Vorgesetzte müssen wissen, was wir für die Schwestern verantworten können. Nach dem gewöhnlichen Gange der Dinge können sich Ordensleute nicht dauernd auf der Höhe ihres Berufes erhalten, wenn ihnen die Gnadenmittel und die religiöse Anregung und Anleitung fehlen. Das geistliche und körperliche Wohl der Schwestern in Neuguinea liegt uns sehr am Herzen und macht uns Sorge.« Ibid.

222 Cf. HUBER, *Constituting the Church*, pp. 107–125.

223 Ibid., p. 111.

224 E.g., Sister Hermengilde Simbürger, an experienced missionary operating in remote places, wrote to her biological sister and fellow Servant of the Holy Spirit in disbelief of an article by a European nun which had been published in the congregation's journal for internal circulation: »Namely she mentioned that in Steyl [the community of nuns in the Motherhouse] you had to fast on a high feast – I think it was Easter or Ascension – in terms of having only three holy masses! Was this a slip of the pen? I already celebrated Pentecost, Ascension and other feasts without holy mass. Sometimes there is a week of fasting, now and then also three or four weeks, namely in the case that the reverend father has set out for a missionary journey or on a recovery trip. On an island named Ali three sisters have been alone for one year because of the lack of priests. When the sea is quiet, the father from the other island travels there for a couple of days. But many a week, when the sea is rough, they have to do without

Congregational elites in Europe complained about this neglect toward religious services from which some nuns suffered heavily. Others, in turn, incorporated these uncharacteristic living conditions into their narratives of self-sacrifice. Thus, they referred to periods without clerical supervision as times of »spiritual abstinence« or »fasting«, which they could sacrifice to God and the redemption of New Guinea. Contrary to their superiors, who perceived irregular religious services as a threat to their integrity, many nuns in missions also put aside their own religious needs in favor of the salvation of others. In 1919, for instance, a nun wrote with regard to the relative isolation of the Boikin convent and the lack of religious exercises there due to the absence of priests: »We have a big shortage of spiritual [activity]«. She, however, concluded: »The good Lord cannot blame us for this shortcoming but has to reward us for our deprivations«<sup>225</sup>. Many women missionaries shared the priests' standpoint which was inextricably linked with the imperative to work toward the quantitative growth of the Church. Consequently, they accepted the loss of religious services and acknowledged the demand for the priests to engage in other duties elsewhere. Yet, the individual nuns responded to the missionary living conditions differently. While some expanded their own role in evangelization, others suffered from the lack of a proper religious framework. Meanwhile, congregational elites increasingly watched over the religious activities of their subordinates, controlling their observation of the religious rule, the ultimate bond that kept the nuns together across continental borders.

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Holy Mass, Holy Communion and Holy Confession. But then again, we are Catholics already; so let the missionaries go to the heathens! That's how a most devoted sister recently put it.« (»Sie erwähnte dort nämlich, dass Ihr in Steyl an einem hohen Feste – ich glaube an Ostern oder Pfingsten – fasten musstet, da Ihr nur d r e i hl. Messen hättet! Ob sie sich verschrieben hat? Ich hab' schon Pfingsten, Christi Himmelfahrt und andere Feste ohne hl. Messe gefeiert. Manchmal gibt es eine Woche fasten, hier und da auch drei und vier Wochen, wenn nämlich der hochw. Pater Missionsreisen oder eine Erholungsreise macht. Auf einer Insel namens Ali sind schon seit einem Jahr drei Schwestern allein wegen mangels an Priester. Ist die See gut, kommt der Pater von der anderen Insel fuer einige tage dorthin. Aber gar manche Woche müssen sie wegen schlechter See auf hl. Messe, hl. Kommunion und hl. Beichte verzichten. Doch wir sind ja schon katholisch; lass nur die Missionare zu den Heiden gehen! So äußerte sich neulich eine recht opferfreudige Schwester.«) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, 1922, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger (undated).

225 »Wir haben großen Mangel an Geistigem. [...] Der gute Gott kann uns diesen Mangel nicht zum Vorwurf machen, sondern muss uns für die Entbehrungen belohnen.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Josephine Steiger, 9.4.1919.

## Individual Strategies and striving for congregational Unity

Sister Didaka and Sister Martha were no exceptional figures in the Servants of the Holy Spirit's early mission history. Even though their cases are exceptionally well documented and both were above-average diligent writers, most of their fellow sisters were surely familiar with (some aspects of) the highs and lows that Sisters Didaka and Martha experienced throughout their careers. This is particularly true for the other members of this first generation of nuns who migrated for religious reasons.

This early stage of female missionary activity was marked by a pragmatic understanding of collective adaptation rather than concerned with the production and consolidation of institutional structures. The distance to superiors in Europe gave these nuns a scope for autonomy in organizing their day-to-day lives. For both individuals discussed, their early affiliation to the congregation and their arrival in the mission fields constituted a source of authority over younger (and less experienced) colleagues. Although both at times occupied a superior position, either of them also experienced disruption due to disciplinary interventions. After 1905, congregational elites in Europe appointed superior provincials (Togo in 1905 and New Guinea in 1906) with the aim to recreate the hierarchical organization that characterized women's congregations according to Canon Law. They emphasized the (re)production of vertical ties between the single convents and its inhabitants. European elites chose one convent to function as the congregation's headquarters in either location, which consequently constituted the regional centers of congregational power. Sister Didaka and Sister Martha nonetheless continued to manage their convents according to their own standards and negotiated authority with priests and nuns. However, obedience ultimately demanded their subordination to superiors and both nuns were transferred to the headquarters for disciplinary reasons. Yet, although placed under the superior provincial's direct supervision, neither of them made basic changes to their particular ways of life. Quite the contrary, Sister Martha continued to work and suffer and Sister Didaka still counted on the support of priests in many issues of day-to-day missionary life.

The balancing of »internal« and »external« duties as well as religious concepts and mundane guidelines was a challenge that all nuns faced in the missions. Sisters Didaka and Martha perceived missionary life differently and developed diverging concepts with regard to the female role in evangelization. Sister Didaka, who shared the official policy aiming at quantitative growth of the missionary Church, was therefore prepared to abandon certain restrictions for nuns. And while this ensured her commendations from priests, it conflicted with congregational authorities. Sister Martha, on the other hand, understood the female contribution to evangelization as inex-

trically linked to the strict observance of religious discipline and the application of concepts of suffering to day-to-day life. Most importantly, the religious choices of both nuns derived from their understanding of the female apostolate and were not intended to openly challenge the vow of obedience. Quite the contrary, obedience became an issue of negotiation since both nuns aimed to serve the mission venture as well as possible. The numerous conflicts were rather rooted in the individuals' perception of their vocation.

Simultaneously with the Servants of the Holy Spirit's striving for gradual independence and self-administration since the first decade of the twentieth century, congregational elites in Europe aimed to reconnect the vertical bonds with their sub-branches abroad<sup>226</sup>. The reunion in the Motherhouse of all superior provincials from five continents on the occasion of the congregation's first general chapter in 1909/1910 constituted a milestone in this development. Yet, this newly gained self-confidence on the part of congregational elites against priests and illegitimate interference was not easily transferred to non-European settings. In order to explain the diverging responses to the project of strengthening vertical ties by »ordinary« nuns in both fields, the different starting points must be taken into consideration. With the possibility of home leaves and better post connections with Europe, the nuns in Togo did not run the risk to actually lose the channel of communication and the (material and spiritual) support with/from the Motherhouse. Neither did superiors in Europe totally lose control over their subordinates in Togo, for these usually returned to Europe for a period of religious exercises and physical recuperation. In contrast, the nuns in New Guinea were in fact cut off from the congregational body. Even though they constantly reconfirmed spiritual ties in writing, the congregation's unity was in danger of being reduced to an abstract concept. While the strengthening of con-

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226 A significant step towards the strengthening of both the horizontal and the vertical bonds between the congregation's members was the introduction of the so-called »Genossenschaftsbote« in October 1911. The »Genossenschaftsbote« was a kind of internal newspaper, which was printed in Steyl in bimonthly intervals. It was distributed to the Servants of the Holy Spirit's branches worldwide, where it was read out during recreation times. Apart from general information about the congregation's development, the »Genossenschaftsbote« covered articles or letters in which the mother superior addressed her subordinates and, for instance, explained novel regulations. Since its use was highly regulated and the individual nuns – depending on their position in the hierarchy – were allowed to read or listen only to specific sections, it helped to produce the transnational community of nuns as well as to mark its boundaries and to emphasize its vertical structure. Recently, the function of text and print in the making of transnational communities in the missionary context was emphasized by scholarship inspired by the work of Benedict Anderson: Cf. Gisela METTELE, *Eine »Imagined Community« jenseits der Nation. Die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde als transnationale Gemeinschaft*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 32 (2006), pp. 44–68; Jane HAGGIS/Margaret ALLEN, *Imperial Emotions. Affective Communities of Mission in British Protestant Women's Missions Publications c1880–1920*, in: *Journal of Social History* 41 (2008), pp. 691–716.

gregational inter-dependence in Togo potentially entailed the gradual loss of autonomy (at least for the single nuns heading the convent), in New Guinea it meant the struggle against the total fragmentation of the scattered and isolated outposts. There, unity was hard to maintain. From the individual nun's point of view, the establishment of good relations with the female head of the region (as the representative of the congregation's central power) probably meant the reconfirmation of collective roots. Hence, when Sister Valeria Diezen was reconfirmed in this office in 1912, many nuns thanked Europe for this reappointment and expressed their joy about it<sup>227</sup>.

The increasing emphasis placed on the hierarchy between the nuns in both missions challenged previous forms of social organization, which had often built on the extended (and frequently illegitimate) authority of priests. The shift of power from priests to the female superior provincial constituted a potential source of conflict between all parties involved. Therefore, the nuns appreciated the carrying out of a *visitation* in order to communicate their situation. After 1910, contracts were set up in order to regulate institutional entanglements and to clarify the (power) relations between the sexes. Yet, the situation remained ambiguous and often depended on the agency of individuals.

Gender roles in the Catholic Church were characterized by female subordination to clerical authority. This certainly influenced the actions of nuns, who usually tried to avoid arguments with priests. Female superiors in Europe took this issue seriously and, after 1910, remained focused on the path to self-government in Europe and abroad. In both settings, however, one important objective, namely the nuns' economic independence from the missionary Church, was not achieved during the period of research. Hence, priests continued both to decide on the missionary construction activity as well as preset most aspects of missionary practice. The nuns' subordination to priests thus related to the mission venture's form of social organization more generally. Depending on the decisions taken in its powerful Roman center, it remained a male-dominated enterprise in which priests stipulated the policies and determined all official goals. The following part turns to issues of evangelization and explores the women missionaries' approaches and contributions to the Catholic mission enterprise in colonial settings.

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227 One nun, for instance, described the announcement of the official appointment as follows: »The sisters' joy was great. The following Thursday we had quite a celebration and a lot of fun. The sisters bounced and jumped out of joy and although I didn't feel all too well, I not only didn't miss it out, but even showed many where it's at.« (»Groß war die Freude aller Schwestern. Am darauffolgenden Donnerstag feierten wir tüchtig, und es gab da manchen Spass. Die Schwestern hüpfen und sprangen vor Freude und obwohl ich mich nicht ganz wohl befand, so war ich nicht die letzte dabei, sonder machte es noch mancher vor.«) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Pacifica Schmitz, 12.9.1912.



### 3. Transforming Space

Nineteenth-century Catholic doctrine understood evangelization in global terms<sup>1</sup>. The German exponents of the Catholic missionary movement explicitly propagated what they called »Weltmission«, i.e., the »proselytization of the world«<sup>2</sup>. The most characteristic feature of the Christian mission enterprise was its striving for expansion. Not unlike the European secular powers in the Scramble for Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century<sup>3</sup>, the Roman Propaganda Fide, approaching non-European territories as »free« spaces, drew borderlines, dividing non-Christian territories into ecclesiastical administrative units<sup>4</sup>. Church authorities divided the African continent and the Pacific Islands into prefectures apostolic, which were handed over to the various mission-sending societies. Depending on the number of Catholics as well as on other indicators of the stability of Catholicism in the respective units, the ecclesiastical form of jurisdiction was either called prefecture apostolic, vicariate apostolic or (ultimately) dioceses. Once on location, the missionaries who had been dispatched by the diverse religious institutions started not only to evangelize people but also to institutionalize Catholicism.

Parallel to these Church policies, a popular European classification (and representation) of space can be observed that incorporated Christianity as the main feature of inquiry. In an anniversary publication issued in 1914, Sister Perboyre Neuß stated that Togo »was the Servants of the Holy Spirit's first field of work in the heathen world«<sup>5</sup>. And Sister Salesiana Soete, in her history of the congregation (1953), characterized turn-of-the-century New Guin-

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1 Cf. Roland HOFFMANN, *Die katholische Missionsbewegung in Deutschland vom Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte*, in: BADE (ed.), *Imperialismus und Kolonialmission*, pp. 29–50, here p. 33.

2 The best example therefore is the book published by the Catholic theologian and missiologist Robert Streit in the aftermath of the universal missionary exhibition set up in the Vatican in 1925. Cf. Robert STREIT, *Die Weltmission der Katholischen Kirche. Zahlen und Zeichen auf Grund der Vatikanischen Missionsausstellung 1925*, Hünfeld 1928.

3 Historian Ralph Erbar used the term »Scramble for souls« in order to describe the missionary run on African lands. ERBAR, »Ein Platz an der Sonne«?, p. 286.

4 In this sense, missionizing was a spatializing project just as was empire-building, with, in the words of Ballantyne and Burton, »colonizers attempting both to impose their own topographies on conquered space and [...] to unmake preexisting maps of native communities or refashion them to suit their own political, economic, and military ends«. Cf. Tony BALLANTYNE/Antoinette BURTON, Introduction. *The Politics of Intimacy in an Age of Empire*, in: Tony BALLANTYNE/Antoinette BURTON (eds), *Moving Subjects. Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of global Empire*, Urbana 2009, pp. 1–30, here p. 2.

5 NEUSS, *Die Steyler Missionsschwestern*, p. 91.

ea as a »real heathen land« in the South Seas<sup>6</sup>. In the German popular missionary discourse, the terms »heathen world« or »heathen land« came to be used in the long run to designate the counterpart to Christian Europe notwithstanding the fact that Europe and the mission fields were, in fact, connected in many ways and thus underwent substantial transformations. Yet, while the term »heathen world« seems to refer to an abstract concept of a non-Christian »Other« in tension with Catholic universalism, the term »heathen land« rather suggests geographically defined, non-Christian, parts of the globe that missionaries set out to transform<sup>7</sup>. There was a vertical relationship between the »heathen land« and Catholic Europe with the latter, according to this classification of space, representing the center while the remote »heathen land« was placed in the periphery of this conception of the world<sup>8</sup>. In either case, the term already implied hidden hierarchies and intrinsic (vertically-understood) oppositions such as Christian-heathen, civilized-savage, divine-dia-bolic, »white«-»black« or colonizer-colonized. Thus, as a spatial category in the missionary discourse, the term »heathen land« must be thought of critically as the representation of space pervaded by power relations that were rooted in European religious-ideological imaginations.

Scholars have pointed out that this spatial dimension formed an integral part of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionary discourse<sup>9</sup>. The construction of the (territorialized) »heathen land« figured as some sort of enemy territory that was to be conquered by the Christian missionary forces. Semantics of war and conquest were a common feature in missionary writing and authors often used a militarist terminology to describe Christian expansion. Missionaries were represented as the »soldiers of Christ« whose aim was to penetrate the non-Christian world in order to establish what they perceived to be the word of the Lord<sup>10</sup>. Closely related with this missionary notion of evangelization as the Christian conquest of the »heathen lands« was the metaphoric analogization of the missionary encounter as the biblical

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6 SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 186.

7 By the early twentieth century, German theologians understood India, China, Japan, Korea, all Africa and Oceania as well as indigenous settlements in parts of South America as »heathen lands«. Cf. the structure of the directory in: Johannes THAUREN, *Die religiöse Unterweisung in den Heidenländern*, Wien 1935, pp. V–VI.

8 The persistent representation of the »heathen land« as a distant location, moreover, suggests that even those nuns who spent decades in the mission fields kept up this opposition of Christian Europe and a »heathen« periphery.

9 Cf. PAKENDORF, *Mission als Gewalt. Die Missionsordnung im 19. Jahrhundert*, in: VAN DER HEYDEN/BECHER (eds), *Mission und Gewalt*, pp. 239–240; PAKENDORF, »Kaffern lügen, Lehrer reden die Wahrheit!«, pp. 418–428.

10 Judith ROWBOTHAM, »Soldiers of Christ?« Images of Female Missionaries in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain: Issues of Heroism and Martyrdom, in: *Gender and History* 12/1 (2000), pp. 82–106.



opposition of light and darkness<sup>11</sup> or its metaphoric representation as an (ultimate) struggle (for souls) between divine and diabolic forces<sup>12</sup>. Missionaries created images of the »heathen lands« by evoking (racialized) ideas of darkness which were to become closely associated with certain regions, above all on the African »black« continent. »Gladly I will fight in the land of the blacks for the most holy interests of Jesus until my last breath«, a nun wrote from Togo<sup>13</sup>. In the same spirit did one of her colleagues describe the situation of the inhabitants of »heathen New Guinea«: »For them, everything is enveloped in a veil of darkness, all they see and hear is sin, always sin and once again sin«<sup>14</sup>. While the first quotation shows that European conceptions of gender roles did not hinder nuns from representing themselves as belonging to the »army« of Christ<sup>15</sup>, the second statement raises the question as to what constituted »heathen lands« in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionary context as well as the ways in which this construction actually related to mission experience and practice.

In 1948, a chronicler in New Guinea referred to the annual Corpus Christi procession moving through several villages close to Alexishafen, the Catholic center in northern New Guinea, with the active participation of indigenous Christians as the »triumphal procession of the Redeemer in the heathen land«<sup>16</sup>. Here, the term »heathen land« points to both a discursive construction of the New Guinean setting as the non-Christian »Other« and a »real« space (re)produced by social practice. To put it in other words: Even though Europe and the mission countries were connected in a myriad of ways, this line of Christian thought conceived of the »heathen land« in territorial terms, localizing it in a particular, originally non-Christian, part of the world. Scenic features attributed to the »heathen lands« in both visual and textual representations marked them as non-European and non-Christian environments, such as the »bush«, the »native village« or what missionaries called the »temples of idols«. Not only were »heathen lands« at the same time both symbolic and material spaces, but the perception of them was, moreover, characterized pre-

11 Cf. HOFFMANN, *Die katholische Missionsbewegung*, p. 35.

12 Cf. PAKENDORF, »Kaffern lügen, Lehrer reden die Wahrheit!«, p. 427.

13 »Freudig will ich im Land der Schwarzen für die Heiligsten Interessen Jesu kämpfen bis zum letzten Atemzuge meines Lebens.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Immaculata Göcke, 23.9.1906.

14 »Mit einem dunklen Schleier ist ihnen alles verhüllt was sie sehen und hören ist Sünde immer Sünde und wieder Sünde.« AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, fragment, 13.11.1907.

15 The collective representation of Catholic women missionaries as an »army of missionary sisters« can also be found in priests' texts. E.g. cf. Francis BALTES, *Der Beruf weltweiter Frauenherzen*, in: *Missionsgrüße der Steyler Missionsschwestern Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes* (1926), pp. 36–40, i.e. 39. It is, of course, important to note that the expressions »army of God« or »soldiers« of Christ« have been brought to use by a variety of Christians throughout the history of the religion.

16 AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, Regionalhaus Alexishafen, 20.6.1948, p. 4.

cisely by this intersection of symbolism and materiality of space<sup>17</sup>. Missionary approaches to their host countries were marked by the tension between their attempts to transform »heathen lands« (understood as material landscapes and townscape as well as social space produced by social practice and ritual) on the one hand, and endeavors to maintain their powerful (symbolic) conceptualization as the »Other« of Christian Europe on the other.

On the various levels of the single fields of mission, however, the »heathen land« also became a sensorial experience. Although the majority of women's convents were part of spatially separated missionary compounds, the nuns kept characterizing missionary life as life »amidst the heathens«<sup>18</sup>. Such perception also reflected the nuns' actual living situation abroad. The structural separation of missionary convents from indigenous living quarters did not prevent the nuns from witnessing (seeing or hearing) indigenous social and cultural practice sensuously. These observations, in turn, they described and translated into Christian terminology on the basis of the discursively constructed category of the »heathen«. »While I am writing this, at close range a number of heathens pay tribute to their clay idol through their chants, dances and drumbeats«, a nun in the missionary convent in Kpalimé wrote in 1906<sup>19</sup>. Thus, the writer, who at that time resided behind the protecting walls of the Catholic enclave of the convent, pointed out both the material existence of what Europeans usually called »idols« or »fetish«, i.e., indigenous sacral objects manifest in the local environment as well as (the sensorial perception of) indigenous religious and cultural practice.

Missionaries transformed or aimed to transform what they perceived as »heathen« spaces. Cultural scientist Doris Bachmann-Medick has suggested thinking of space as the »product of social and political actions with its material correspondent in architecture, building trade etc.«<sup>20</sup>. Such an understanding of space provides for the analysis of the fields of mission as hybrid zones of cultural contact which are being created through social practice and

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17 For an interesting discussion of German missionary perceptions of the tropical forest cf. Albert WIRZ, *Innerer und äußerer Wald. Zur moralischen Ökologie der Kolonisierenden*, in: Michael FLITNER (ed.), *Der deutsche Tropenwald. Bilder, Mythen, Politik*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2000, pp. 23–48, i.e. 35–45.

18 Depictions of missionary life as »life in the midst of the heathens« can be found in the letters from nuns in Togo and New Guinea: AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Paulina Weyand, 9.6.1907 and PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 18.9.1915.

19 »Während ich dies schreibe, huldigen in nächster Nähe eine Anzahl Heiden durch ihren Gesang, Tanz und Trommelschlag ihrem Lehmgötzen.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Paulina Weyand, 26.2.1906.

20 Doris BACHMANN-MEDICK, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Reinbek 2010, p. 307. Regarding (the intersection of) social constructions of gender and space cf. Doris WASTL-WALTER, *Gender-Geographien. Geschlecht und Raum als soziale Konstruktionen*, Stuttgart 2010.

pervaded by structures of power, and the study of those (social, political, religious) practices and their material manifestations that shaped the missionary encounter. Obviously, to the same extent to which missionaries continued to insist on the existence of »heathen lands« as a precondition for their activities and a legitimization of vertical relations between regions of the globe, ecclesiastical authorities promoted the »evolution« of those spaces and their ultimate transformation into indigenous dioceses, i.e., fully-fledged units of the Catholic Church. Hence, a discussion of the question of the nuns' agency in the transformation of »heathen lands« must draw on an analysis of how »heathen« spaces and their gradual Christianization were being characterized or measured by religious authorities.

One possibility to learn about the way in which Rome measured Catholic advance is the study of the annual reports sent to the Propaganda Fide by the ecclesiastical heads of the mission fields. Usually, the prefects or vicars started their official reports by giving detailed accounts of the number of missionary stations, chapels, churches and cemeteries established on location. This was followed by an overview of the respective mission's (European and indigenous) religious personnel encompassing priests, friars, nuns and catechists. Another essential part of the reports was dedicated to what can be characterized as a qualitative survey of Catholic life on location, which consisted of listed details of the sacraments administered (e.g. baptisms, emergency baptisms, confessions, communions, marriages, funerals, etc.) in the corresponding ecclesiastical unit in the year covered by the report. Moreover, the prefects or vicars apostolic regularly informed Rome about the number of schools established and the quantity of missionary pupils attending school.

In 1913, the Society of the Divine Word applied to Rome for elevation of the prefecture apostolic Togo to a vicariate. A statistic was attached to the application to document the prefecture's religious development since its foundation in 1892 and the stable growth of Catholicism over two decades of missionary presence<sup>21</sup>. Mainly based on the above-mentioned components gathered at quinquennial intervals, it gave an overview of steadily rising numbers of missionaries in Togo, their edifices, employees, pupils and sacraments administered. Moreover, it displayed the recent quantitative growth of the Catholic population in the prefecture. While for 1892 the statistic showed only forty Christians (i.e., Catholics), in 1897 it recorded 937; 1,854 in 1902; 3,856 in 1907, and in 1912, the Catholic population had ultimately grown to 14,657 persons<sup>22</sup>.

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21 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 550, 93.

22 *Ibid.*, 93.

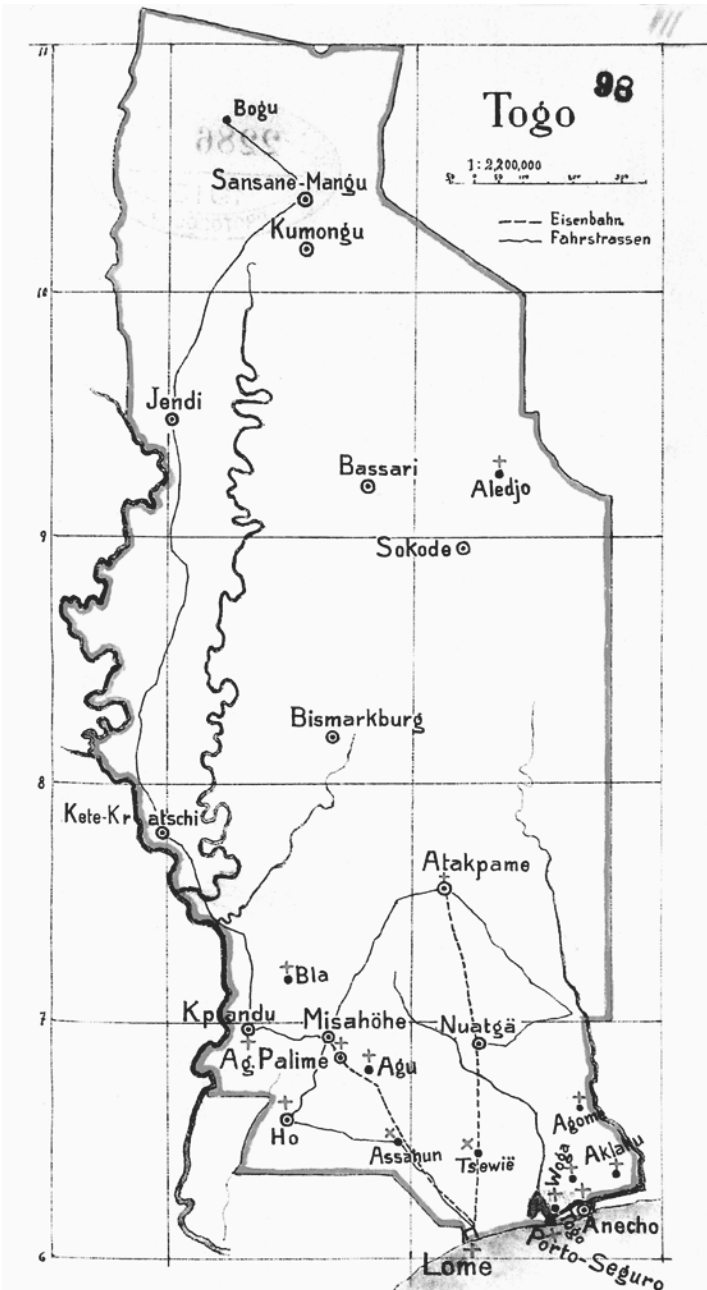


Figure 8: Map of the Prefecture Apostolic Togo, 1913;  
APF N.S. Vol. 550, 98.

With the official number of Catholics doubling within periods of five years during the first fifteen years of missionary presence, the number of Togolese Catholics had almost quadrupled from 1907 to 1912. This certainly suggested an extremely positive trend for the future<sup>23</sup>.

Besides, a map (Figure 8) was attached to the documents forwarded to Rome. Its creator(s) took a colonial geographical illustration of the colony as a basis that outlined its political boundaries, which corresponded to the prefecture's demarcation. Apart from the main watercourses, the map also showed Togo's most important towns, roads and railway lines. In order to visualize Catholic expansion, the cartographer marked with red crosses sixteen towns, the centers of Catholic presence, in which churches had been erected<sup>24</sup>. This again suggests that the assessment of religious change was linked to an expansionist way of thinking and, moreover, resulted in the development of some sort of (obviously lopsided) religious geography. In March 1914, the Togo prefecture was eventually elevated to a vicariate and Franz Wolf, a local missionary, was appointed vicar apostolic and thus titular bishop. In the same year, Father Franz Wolf left Togo for Steyl where his festive consecration was to take place<sup>25</sup>. However, due to the outbreak of the Great War and the subsequent expulsion of all German missionaries from Togo in 1917/1918, the bishop never set foot on the vicariate again.

Interestingly, the vicariate Franz Wolf entered next in the capacity of titular bishop was the vicariate apostolic that Rome had established in 1922 under the name of Nuova Guinea Orientale (East New Guinea), thus renaming and geographically redefining the Society of the Divine Word's and the Servants of the Holy Spirit's traditional New Guinean field of work. Established on the basis of the German colonial boundaries, the former prefecture apostolic administrated by the society had been called, according to the colonial nomenclature, Kaiser-Wilhelmsland. Also in 1922, the respective territory was divided into the vicariate mentioned and a new prefecture called Central New Guinea. The aim of the division of the still vast territory was to facilitate access for Catholic action, since hitherto missionary presence had largely been limited to the northern coast of the mainland. Altogether, some sort of religious mapping can be observed also here since (what ecclesiastical authorities interpreted as) the different levels of stability of Catholicism in both ecclesiastical units were expressed in diverging forms of ecclesiastical status and jurisdiction.

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23 Cf. *ibid.*, 93.

24 Although there is no caption, it can be assumed that the crosses in the map mark the churches established in the prefecture. For 1912, the report recorded 15 churches for the prefecture. Cf. *ibid.*, 93.

25 Cf. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, pp. 239–241.

Starting in the early 1920s (just as one last – and thus concluding on the part of the Society of the Divine Word – survey relating to Togo was sent to Rome<sup>26</sup>), the ecclesiastical heads in New Guinea used a pre-printed form for their annual reports. The first part of the so-called »prospectus status missionis«, an official protocol that was handed out by the Propaganda Fide, was to provide »basic information« regarding the respective ecclesiastical unit (in relation to a set date at the end of the year covered by the report) such as the number of living Catholics, Protestants (»haeretici«) as well as the quantity of »pagans« who settled in the area. Information regarding the mission's personnel was expected to be structured in terms of sex, ethnic origin (European or indigenous) and (in the case of priests, friars and nuns) religious institution. Apart from quantitative data regarding »secular« mission establishments (e.g. missionary schools for both sexes, number of pupils, orphanages, charitable institutions), the form recorded the number of sacral edifices (e.g. chapels, churches, convents, cemeteries) that existed in the prefecture and vicariate, respectively. The part of the survey requesting information on religious practice was most detailed: Apart from the quantity of sacraments administered (baptism, confirmation, confession, communion, extreme unction and marriage), Church authorities were also interested in the number of deceased Catholics as well as of Catholics who had converted to Protestantism.

### Creating Catholic Landscape

Thus, Church authorities measured the success of missionary work in terms of increase (i.e. the number of baptisms and living Catholics) of the Catholic population as well as some qualitative (e.g. kinds of sacraments) features of local (indigenous) religious practice. What mattered as well was the mission's actual geographic advance and hence the visible transformation of the landscape through the establishment of Catholic edifices. In his book on the »global mission of the Catholic Church« (1928), the well-known Catholic missiologist Robert Streit (1875–1930)<sup>27</sup> referred to missionary stations as the »pedometers« of mission activity<sup>28</sup>. Streit combined Catholic building activity with Church expansion when he wrote that the »line of the missionary stations«

26 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 773, 507–508.

27 Robert Streit was one of the founders of the German missiological movement. In 1924 Cardinal Marinus van Rossum (1854–1932) called him to Rome, where Streit participated in the Universal Missionary Exhibition (1925). After the closing of the exhibition, he was appointed librarian at the Papal Missionary Library. Cf. Joseph WICKI, Robert Streit, in: Josef HÖFER/KARL RAHNER (eds), *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 9, Freiburg <sup>2</sup>1946, pp. 1112f.

28 STREIT, *Die Weltmission*, p. 107.

(meaning those areas where missionaries had already established themselves) constituted »the line of the advancing missionary army«<sup>29</sup>. Accordingly, the foundation of a missionary station implied that the Church, to put it in Streit's words, »took possession of a country, gained a strong foothold among a people« and »systematically started missionary work«. Referring to the missionary stations as »centers of light«, he implicitly used the spatial category of the (hostile, dark, etc.) »heathen land«<sup>30</sup>. According to this point of view, the presence of Catholic edifices and the concomitant refashioning of non-European space testified to both religious change and the growing power of the Church. Photographs (of churches, convents, etc.) which documented the mission's material advance form an important body of the visual sources filed in missionary archives<sup>31</sup>. The heads of the missionary organizations forwarded images of re-shaped colonial settings to their home institutions in Europe, which the latter circulated among their European audiences mainly to justify donation-raising activities. Such visual demonstrations, to be sure, went beyond that. As the editors of the volume »Getting Pictures Right« have recently argued, photography in the colonial context served »the visual and conceptual domination of the globe and was part of a culture which stressed the classification of human beings and space«<sup>32</sup>.

In 1899, Prefect Apostolic Hermann Bücking attached to his report to Rome two photos featuring views of both the interior and exterior of the new church established in the town center of Aného, a coastal town in colonial Togo (cf. Figures 9 and 10). In this case, the, quite impressive, photos were intended to evidence the consolidation of the Catholic Church in Togo more generally. The depicted church, inaugurated in 1898, was the first Catholic church in the prefecture and its location was of significance for several reasons. Until the upturn of the colonial capital Lomé, Aného was an important center of (pre-)colonial trade in the region<sup>33</sup>.

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29 Ibid., p. 107.

30 Ibid.

31 Cf. Andreas ECKL, *Ora et Labora. Katholische Missionsfotografien aus den afrikanischen Kolonien*, in: Marianne BECHHAUS-GERST/Sunna GIESEKE (eds), *Koloniale und postkoloniale Konstruktionen von Afrika und Menschen afrikanischer Herkunft in der deutschen Alltagskultur*, Frankfurt a.M. 2006, pp. 231–250, i.e. 232.

32 Michael ALBRECHT et al., Introduction, in: Michal ALBRECHT et al. (eds), *Getting Pictures right: Context and Interpretation*, Köln 2004, pp. 5–10, i.e. 7.

33 According to Peter Sebald, it was the new economy in twentieth century Togo that brought about Aného's economic stagnation. Whereas the nineteenth-century export-import trade had favored the economic development of many coastal towns, Sebald holds, the construction of the gangplank in Lomé (1904) and the opening of the coastal railway line involved the development of Lomé as the main local center of trade. Cf. SEBALD, Togo, p. 416.

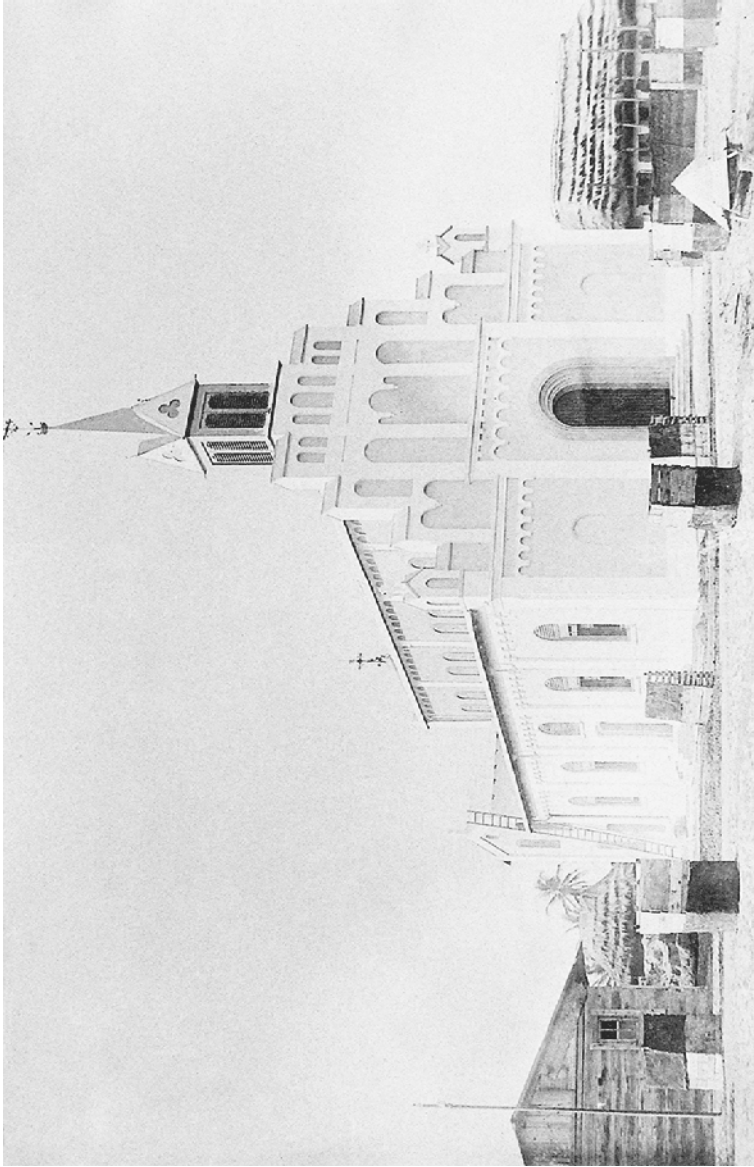


Figure 9: »Ecclesia nova missionis Togonensis in Klein Popo« (Aného, 1898);  
APF N.S. Vol. 214, 88.



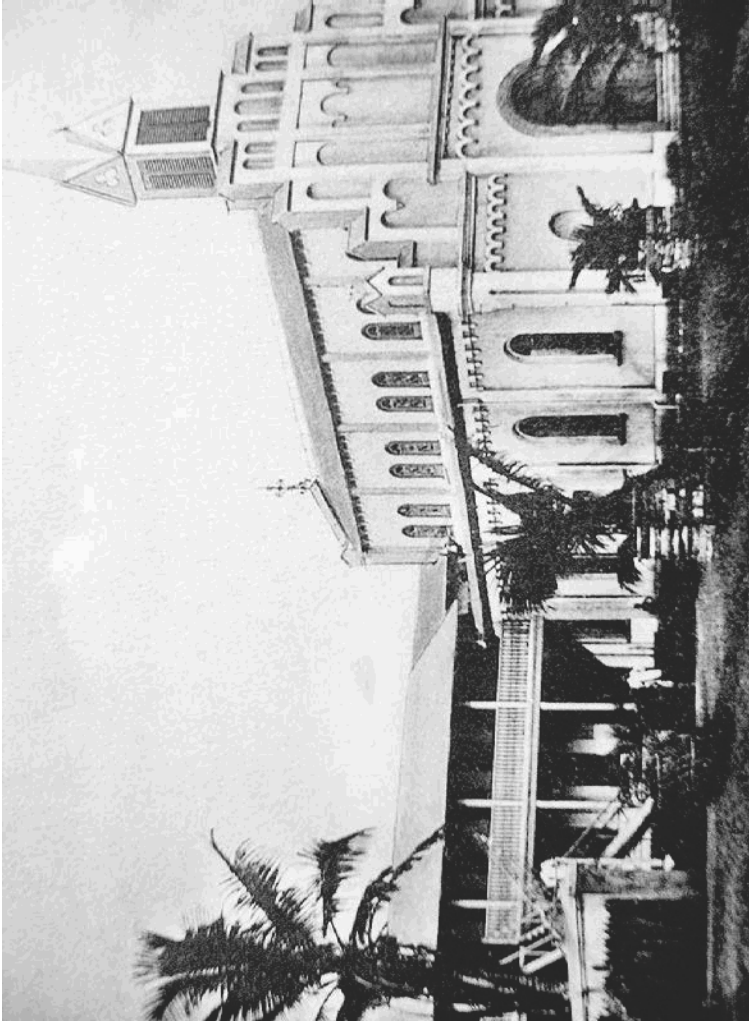


Figure 10: »Church and missionary house in Aného«, undated;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, Togo P 1010591.

Besides, missionaries had soon come to characterize the greater area of Aného as a stronghold of what they subsumed under the term »fetishism«, meaning all kinds of indigenous animist beliefs and religious practices<sup>34</sup>. Last but not least it must be mentioned that the town also housed the headquarters of the Wesleyan Methodist mission, which had been operating in the region since 1850<sup>35</sup>. Hence, the erection of impressive, western-style churches in the fields of mission was a signal to both indigenous and European people. This was even more the case in particularly contested sites of the missionary encounter, for the growing number of sacral edifices symbolized the growing power of Catholicism.

Figures 9 and 10, showing the church in Aného, bear witness to the systematic reconfiguration of the (formerly »heathen«, from the popular European point of view) square on which it was erected. Planned, sanctioned and financed by the Catholic authorities in Togo and Superior General Arnold Janssen, this church was the first architectural work of Brother Johannes Hopfer (1856–1936), an SVD friar who functioned as the architect and, during his stay in Togo until 1917, became the construction manager of most of the local convents, churches (including the cathedral in Lomé) and other missionary buildings<sup>36</sup>. While the first image forwarded to Rome by Prefect Apostolic Bücking in 1899 represents an impressive western-style religious building positioned amidst vernacular edifices, the second photo shows the same setting at a later date. Both images bear witness to the transformation of landscape that missionary presence brought about.

The growing material presence of Catholic edifices in colonial space was connected to the refashioning of non-European topographies as a result of western expansion and colonial conquest. In his theoretical overview of colo-

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34 Apart from the letters, this can, moreover, be seen in the opening passages of the chronicle, which runs as follows: »Anecho is an old heathen town almost completely surrounded by water. Like a tongue of land it stretches between the grand ocean and the lagoon. Its inhabitants and the environment are very loyal to idolatry. Every year, many feasts are celebrated to the honor of the Gods.« (»Anecho ist eine alte, heidnische Stadt und ist beinahe ganz von Wasser eingeschlossen. Gleich einer Landzunge erstreckt es sich zwischen dem gewaltigen Ozean und der stillen Lagune dahin. Seine Bewohner und die Umgebung sind dem Götzendienst sehr ergeben. Alljährlich werden den Göttern zu Ehren viele Feste gefeiert.«) AG SSsP 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Die Geschichte des Schwesternhauses in Anecho, p. 1.

35 The Methodists' mission in Aného predated German colonial rule. Notwithstanding its early arrival, the Methodists' sphere of activity remained restricted to Aného and its immediate surroundings, where they maintained three schools. Ralph Erbar has suggested that the Methodists' religious influence remained limited also due to the lack of economic means and the strict moralistic way of life they promoted. Cf. ERBAR, »Ein Platz an der Sonne«, pp. 245f.

36 Cf. MÜLLER, Geschichte der katholischen Kirche, pp. 105f. On Hopfer's building activities in Togo, cf. Alfred MÜLLER-FELSENBERG, Architekt Gottes. Leben und Werk des Bruders Johannes Hopfer SVD (1856–1936) Steyler Missionar und Baumeister in Togo/Afrika, Nettetal 1985.

nialisms, Jürgen Osterhammel has referred to churches as one »unvarying landmark« among others (e.g. government buildings, train stations etc.) of colonial cities<sup>37</sup>. In German Togo, the colonial administration closely monitored the missionary construction activity and gave account of it in its annual reports forwarded to Berlin. Certainly, the cathedral erected in the center of the colonial (and Catholic) capital Lomé represented the most important visible sign of Catholicism in German Togo. Apart from functioning as a sacral edifice, the cathedral was also designed to remind beholders of central features of European townscapes. Its completion and inauguration in 1902 was indeed welcomed by the colonial authorities, who, as Peter Sebald has shown, by then had already achieved their goal to manifest colonial domination in the city architecture<sup>38</sup>.

At the turn of the century, colonial Lomé was practically divided into two parts. There was the colonial administrative center and the coast which constituted the settlement area for the small number of Europeans. The rest of the town housed the diverse African quarters<sup>39</sup>. Established close to the gangplank and the European trading posts, the Catholic cathedral (just as the local Protestant church) formed part of the westernized coast. In their reports to Berlin colonial officials commented positively on the »beautiful church«, characterizing the bordering missionary buildings added in later years as an »embellishment of the city«<sup>40</sup>. Besides, colonialists produced and circulated images of the cathedral as an integral part of the town center (Figure 11), aiming to evoke the imagery of a new German and Christian town created abroad<sup>41</sup>. The impressive cathedral thus functioned as a piece of evidence testifying to the transformability of African (»heathen«) space due to German religious and secular impact<sup>42</sup>.

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37 Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL, *Colonialisms. A theoretical Overview*, Princeton 2005, p. 88.

38 SEBALD, *Togo*, p. 406.

39 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 406. With regard to the society in the colonial capital Lomé, cf. Trutz VON TROTHA, *Das »deutsche Nizza an Afrikas Westküste«*. Zur politischen Soziologie der kolonialen Hauptstadt am Beispiel Lomés der Jahre 1897–1914, in: *Sociologus. Zeitschrift für empirische Ethno-soziologie und Ethnopsychologie* 49 (1999), pp. 98–118.

40 *Annual Report Togo 1909/1910*, BArch, FA1/316/4–6, p. 249.

41 On the function of churches in German colonial photography, cf. Jens JÄGER, »Heimat« in Afrika. Oder: die mediale Aneignung der Kolonien um 1900, in: *zeitenblicke* 7/2 [01.10.2008], URL: [http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2008/2/jaeger/index\\_html](http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2008/2/jaeger/index_html), URN: urn:nbn:de:0009-9-15447, 21–26 (26.03.2012).

42 Significantly, all edifices shown on the photo are western-style houses, rooftops and gardens. The only markers of the southern (and from the German metropolitan point of view »colonial«) setting were the palm trees.

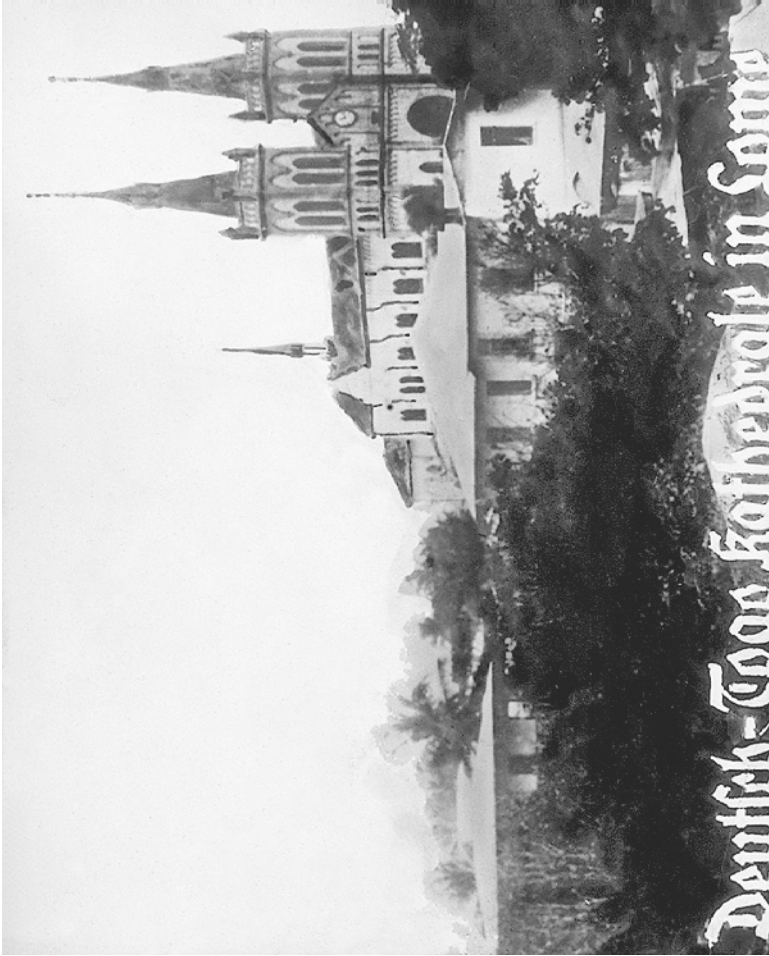


Figure 11: The cathedral in Lomé, German Togo, undated. Bildbestand der deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft in der Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main: Image No.: 023-0262-61.

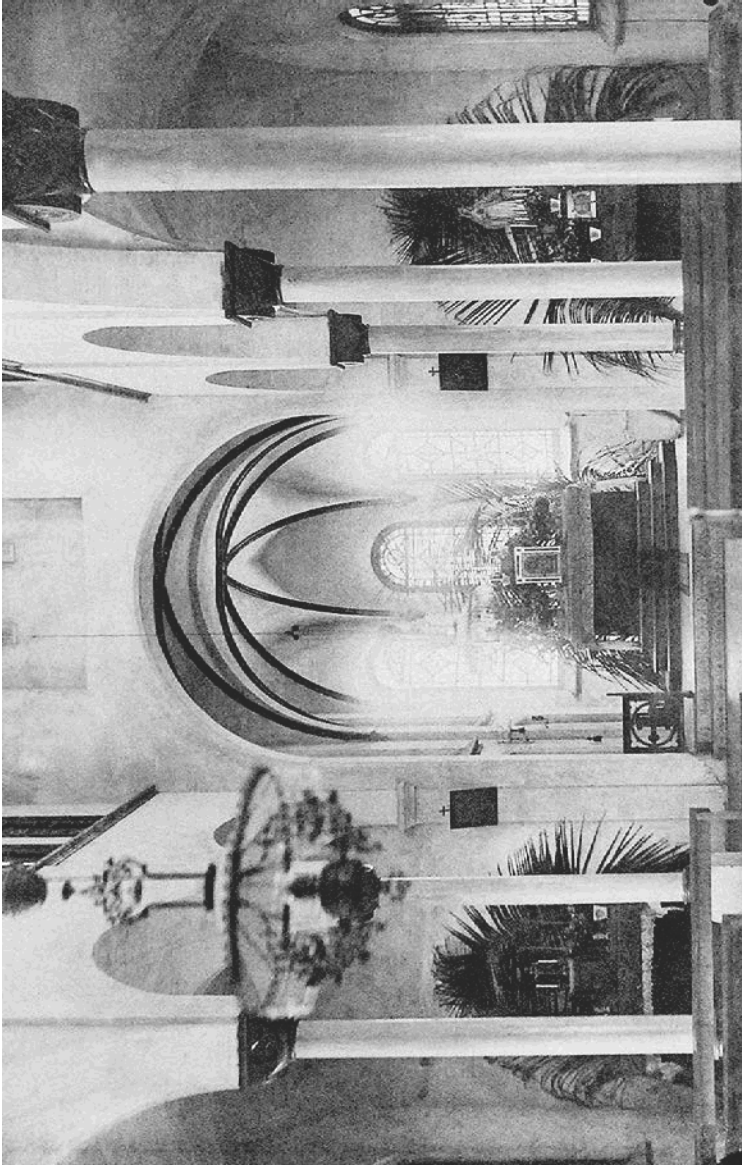


Figure 12: »Ecclesia nova missionis Togonensis in Klein Popo 1898/99«;  
APF N.S. Vol. 214, 88.

Figure 11, a post card with a view on the Catholic cathedral in Lomé, which is filed in the photo archive of the German colonial society, suggests that missionary construction activity in colonial settings was to an important extent about the reproduction of European ecclesiastical institutions. However, the construction of western-style churches was possible only due to indigenous contributions in the form of goods and, above all, manpower. According to the Society of the Divine Word's order »historian« Karl Müller, alongside European benefactors, indigenous Catholics contributed considerably to the construction of the church by providing workforce and resources of building materials<sup>43</sup>. Still, while Christian churches certainly formed an important element in the refashioning of colonial townscapes in Africa by underlining the role of Christianization as an essential part of the so-called »civilizing mission«, the question emerges how Catholic advance in »heathen lands« was perceived by nuns and also which role the construction of sacred edifices played in this context.

The nuns, too, associated the construction of western-style churches with the advance of Catholicism. Just like other religious and secular colonialists in Togo, they appreciated the re-shaping of the local topography according to German standards, aesthetics and usability. The first Servants of the Holy Spirit who settled in Aného in 1901 and generally characterized the town as a center of »heathen« culture and religion<sup>44</sup> did comment positively on the local church (Figures 9, 10, 12 and 13). More precisely, they expressed their surprise about its (internal and external) configuration stating that visiting the church, »one had the impression of being in a European house of God«<sup>45</sup>. When a new high altar arrived from Europe in 1902, this was, in the words of a local nun, a major contribution to the adornment of the church at the time of Easter celebrations. She even characterized the festive course of this high Christian feast as a marker of the »blossoming of the holy Catholic Church« in Aného<sup>46</sup>. However, she also noted that the festive exercises benefited highly from the high mass being sung in several voices for the first time, adding with satisfaction that additional benches had to be put up to accommodate the large number of attendants<sup>47</sup>.

43 MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, p. 122.

44 E.g. in her first letter from Aného, a nun described the town in terms of the visible presence of the material manifestations of indigenous belief in the form of so-called legba clay statues (which are central figures in the West African religious world that guard crossroads) as follows: Aného »is still a true legba nest. Clay chumps, from which one should take to one's heels, stand in all corners.« (»Klein Popo [=Aného] ist noch ein wahres Legbanest. Lehmklötze, von denen man Reißaus nehmen sollte, stehen an allen Ecken.«) AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Dominica Craghs, 2.6.1901.

45 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Dominica Craghs, 2.6.1901.

46 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Dominica Craghs, 31.3.1902.

47 *Ibid.*



Figure 13: »The interior of the church«, Aného, undated;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, Togo P1010593.

This is to say that in the overall picture of Catholic consolidation as outlined by the nun, the sophisticated endowment of the local church figured as just one component among others.

Similar perceptions are reflected in the nuns' written statements in response to the completion and inauguration of the cathedral in Lomé in 1902. Many nuns, recalling their feelings of joy they experienced as they entered it for the first time, at the same time called to mind the aspired growth of the local Catholic community, pointing out the cathedral's important function as a means in the evangelization of Togo<sup>48</sup>. For example, a nun, anticipating the inauguration of the cathedral, wrote: »Hopefully this new house of God [...] will contribute much to the honor of God and be a means for many poor children of cham<sup>[49]</sup> to become acquainted with the one who can make them happy in time and in eternity«<sup>50</sup>. In general, the completion of the Heart of Jesus Cathedral in Lomé was considered as both a marker of, and catalyst for the consolidation of the Church in Togo. Besides, while nuns arriving after 1902 would write about the favorable first impression the widely visible cathedral and its steeples had on newcomers<sup>51</sup>, their experienced colleagues

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48 »What a joyful feeling came over us when we entered the newly inaugurated house of God. [...] Dear sisters, let us thank the Lord for the now finished, new [and] beautiful church and beg Him that He let find many of the children of Cham the way to the true faith.« (»Welch ein freudiges Gefühl beherrschte uns, als wir das neu geweihte Gotteshaus betraten. [...] Danken Sie, teure Schwestern, mit uns dem lieben Gott für die nun vollendete, neue, schöne Kirche und bitten Sie ihn, dass er in derselben viele armen Chamskinders den Weg zum wahren Glauben finden lasse.«) AG SSps 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 5.10.1902.

49 References to the Ewe as »Chamskinder« (»children of cham«) can frequently be found in the nuns' letters. They refer to the biblical figure of »Cham« (or »Ham«, Noah's youngest son and one of the eight persons that survived the flood. According to the Old Testament (Genesis 9:22), Cham behaved shamelessly and impiously against his father. This is why Noah cursed him indirectly (through his son Canaan), while blessing his brothers. Cham then moved to Africa which is why he is acknowledged as the forefather of the African nations. Since the eighteenth century, related interpretations and tales had come to associate Cham with »blackness« and »Africans«. E.g., cf. Hubert JUNKER, Cham, in: Josef HÖFER/Karl RAHNER (eds), *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 2, Freiburg 1958, p. 1011.

50 »Hoffentlich wird dieses neue Gotteshaus [...] recht viel zur Ehre Gottes beitragen und vielen armen Chamskinders möge sie ein Mittel sein, denjenigen kennen zu lernen, der sie zeitlich und ewig glücklich machen kann.« AG SSps 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 1.12.1901.

51 The existence of a proper church was considered important by the newcomers also for aesthetic reasons with regard to the configuration of town space. For instance, in 1905 a nun adjusting her expectations of Lomé to the setting encountered wrote: »And indeed: Lomé is a city of which I had totally false idea. The beautiful Heart of Jesus Church is an adornment for the whole surrounding, and how majestic its high steeples rise into the hot air!« (»Und wirklich: Lomé ist eine Stadt, von der ich einen ganz falschen Begriff hatte. Die schöne Herz-Jesu-Kirche ist eine Zierde für die ganze Umgebung, und wie majestätisch ragen ihre Türme in die heisse Luft empor!«) AG SSps 034 TG 00 Reiseberichte 1896–1914, Sr. Eulalia Hewing, 26.8.1905.



in Lomé placed the emphasis on its inauguration as an important event for all Catholics in the region.

Apart from the entirety of Lomé-based nuns, the preparations for the inauguration ceremony, which was to be carried out by the bishop of the neighboring Gold Coast colony, also involved indigenous Catholics. While missionary pupils had a crucial function in the shaping of the festive church service and the accompanying procession, indigenous Catholics engaged under the nuns' guidance in the (interior and exterior) decoration of the church, the missionary compounds and parts of the town<sup>52</sup>. According to the nuns, it was the Lomé Catholics themselves who wanted to make the ceremony as splendid as possible. On this occasion, Lomé was to host also indigenous Catholic elites from other parts of the colony as well as a number of Gold Coast Catholics accompanying their bishop, who was the first Catholic bishop ever to set foot on Togolese soil<sup>53</sup>. Altogether, in the nuns' view the whole event had an integrating public function involving believers across social, racial and gender boundaries. One of them, describing the moment when the procession with the bishop reached the cathedral, accompanied by the hymn-singing choir and flanked by the local Catholics who lined the streets, wrote: »One wouldn't believe that such a gathering is possible in Africa, where almost everybody has to move by foot. Certainly, Lome has never accommodated such a crowd before and isn't going to see something like this anytime soon«<sup>54</sup>.

This way, Catholicism was represented as a unifying force, and the inauguration of the cathedral was depicted as an event that affected day-to-day rhythm in the colony and whose significance went beyond the realm of religion. Apart from »almost all local European Catholics«, a number of high colonial officials (e.g. the deputy governor of Togo, Waldemar Horn, the imperial doctor Ernst Krüger and the bailiff of Lomé, Freiherr von Rotberg) and some representatives of the local merchant community also followed the Catholic mission's invitation and attended the festive church service held by Prefect Apostolic Hermann Bücking subsequent to the actual inauguration<sup>55</sup>. According to Bücking's report published in Germany, Bishop Maximilian Albert (1866–1903) directed some words to the indigenous Catholics in Togo, committing them to express their »gratitude and duty« to God and the »European benefactors«, who had enabled the construction of the church, by »lead-

52 In order to facilitate these preparations, classes in the Catholic missionary schools were cancelled and »everybody with hands and feet were fetched to work«, as one nun put it. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 5.10.1902.

53 Cf. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, pp. 124–126.

54 »Man sollte nicht glauben, daß in Afrika, wo doch fast alle zu Fuss gehen müssen, ein solche Zusammenlauf möglich wäre. So eine Menschenmenge wird Lome wohl noch nie beherbergt haben und auch nicht so bald wieder sehen.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 5.10.1902.

55 Cf. Bücking and Kost's report, in: MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholische Kirche*, pp. 126f.

ing a truly Christian life according to the commandments of God and His Church«<sup>56</sup>.

Subsequent to the liturgical part of the ceremony, the mission invited all local Catholics as well as the attendant indigenous and European elites to a banquet prepared by the nuns<sup>57</sup>. The guests were divided into »two classes«, as a nun in a letter to her European fellows noted: The first class comprised the bishop, the priests, the governor, the Catholic Europeans, »the first citizens of the town« and the indigenous chiefs of the surrounding villages<sup>58</sup>. Interestingly, while the report of the prefect apostolic exclusively dealt with this elite reception, the nuns gave an account of the »other feast« organized for the ordinary Lomé Catholics in front of the women's convent. Confronting the two accounts of one and the same occasion, the reader gets the striking impression of a social division predominantly based on gender: Bücking's version recounted the various speeches given by the male ecclesiastical leaders, colonial authorities and indigenous elites, all of whom hailed the good collaboration between state and church (i.e., male dominated domains) in the evangelization (and thus, according to the notion shared by all speakers, the »civilization«) of Togo<sup>59</sup>.

The nuns' account of the »other feast«, in contrast, opened with the description of the local women's and girls' arrival at the convent on the inauguration day around six o'clock in the morning. Indigenous Catholic women and girls, the »regular churchgoers« as a nun put it, prepared the feast for the »ordinary« parishioners that was to take place at the nuns' place after the first high mass. The mission provided the convent's court as a cooking place and supplied the food. The guests then prepared their preferred dishes (of meat, vegetables and rice) on several open fires in the convent's courtyard. The nun who observed the cooking activities emphasized the pleasure that the women took in the whole event. After attending the high mass, the Catholic women and girls again assembled in the convent's court, where it was getting crowded because of the great number of people. The nuns nonetheless tried hard to prepare the place in a festive manner. One of them wrote:

The old disused tables from the ironing-room just as school desks, flower boxes, old cranes and cases and whatever else could be used to sit on was fitted up, because on the high feast we wouldn't put up with sitting on the floor as the Negroes usually do. Since not all could be placed at the set table at the same time, the invitees were divided into several groups. When one was done, the next took a seat to the feast. It goes with-

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56 Ibid., p. 127.

57 On the significance of feasts to the German colonial society in Lomé, cf. ZURSTRASSEN, »Ein Stück deutscher Erde schaffen«, pp. 59–67.

58 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 5.10.1902.

59 Bücking and Kost's report, in: MÜLLER, Geschichte der katholische Kirche, pp. 127–129.

out saying that an animated conversation took place at table. When the Negroes have good food, they are in good humor. Naturally, I had to have some food with them and to compliment them on their cookery<sup>60</sup>.

The writer's pityingly smile with regard to the indigenous women's customs and behavior notwithstanding, there is nothing in her description of the event resembling the strong hierarchic element that structured the prefect's narrative of the feast for the colony's elites. Another peculiar difference between both perceptions was connected with the nuns' own roles: Although it was they who staged the reception for Togo's ecclesiastical, political and economic elites (by cooking, cleaning, binding flowers and decorating the cathedral), they did not take part in the festivities but worked and remained largely in the background. In contrast, as an account of the feast taking place in front of the women's convent says, at least the nun in control participated up to a certain extent and took some food together with her guests. In either case, however, the women's convent in Lomé was represented as the center of the female Catholic community in town and, moreover, as an important (social) center of Christian life in the area.

### Women's Convents in colonial Settings

In 1897, when the first nuns arrived in colonial Togo in order to support their male colleagues who had arrived four years earlier, the building designated to become the first women's convent already awaited them. Founder Janssen had agreed on the dispatch of female missionaries to Togo only after the fulfillment of his conditions concerning their accommodation abroad, which should enable them to lead religious lives according to the congregation's rule and constitutions. This, in turn, was closely related with the century-old ecclesiastical tradition according to which the cloistered convent constituted the favored model of social control.

The first Catholic missionary building in colonial Togo was erected in 1892 on the outskirts of the later capital Lomé on a territory that was partly donated by Jesko von Puttkamer, the contemporary German commissar, and

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60 »Die noch vorhandenen alten Tische aus dem Bügelzimmer, sowie die Schulbänke, Blumenbank, alte Kisten und Kasten und was sonst noch eben zum Sitzen dienen konnte wurde herbeigeholt, denn am hohen Fest wollte man nicht nach der gewöhnlichen Weise der Neger mit dem Boden Vorlieb nehmen. Weil aber nicht alle auf einmal auf dem gedeckten Tische Platz finden konnten, so wurden die Geladenen in mehrere Partien geteilt. Wenn die eine fertig war, setzte sich die andere wieder zum Schmause hin. Natürlich herrschte bei Tisch eine muntere Unterhaltung. Wenn die Neger einen guten Schopp haben, sind sie auch guter Dinge. Selbstverständlich musste ich auch etwas mitessen und ihre Kochkunst tüchtig loben.« AG SSsP 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 5.10.1902.

partly purchased by the mission from chief Adjale from Amutive<sup>61</sup>. Similarly to the first missionary house that was shipped from Steyl to New Guinea in 1894, the first building erected by the German missionaries in Lomé consisted of what they called a »tropical house«, i.e., a prefabricated wooden construction that was shipped to the colony from Germany. Once set up in Lomé, however, the house proved inadequate and the missionaries decided to add another building. The construction work was supervised by missionary and master-builder Brother Johannes Hopfer. Still, the arrival of nuns demanded special structural considerations because women's convents in colonial settings had to function as both tools in the evangelization of the female population and the home of a German Catholic sisterhood. This implied that women's convents had to be spaces accessible for the indigenous population on the one hand and facilitate seclusion from society on the other to allow convent life to be practiced in the same way as in the European Motherhouse.

During the early years of the Society of the Divine Word's mission activity in colonial Togo, the dispatch of a first group of nuns was vividly discussed among priests in Africa and Europe alike. While the priests in charge of the prefecture at first disagreed upon their first female co-workers' future place of action, Arnold Janssen framed a range of terms concerning the nuns' stay abroad. These were based on some general rules for male and female missionaries. When a building for a prospective convent was purchased by the priests in the center of Lomé, Janssen once again emphasized his point that any women's convent in Togo had to be established according to the architectural principles of the congregation's Motherhouse. Crucial in this context was the nuns' separation from the outside world in general and from men in particular, for the convent had to enable its inhabitants to strictly observe monastic enclosure as a crucial element of European monasticism<sup>62</sup>. This implied that separate entrances were to be installed for priests and women. The priests' entrance was to lead only to the parlor, yet another indispensable element of women's monasteries. Needless to say, secular men were not supposed to enter the building at all. According to the guidelines put forward by Janssen, the parlor was to be equipped with a grille and a rotary drawer so as to enable missionaries of both sexes to converse and to exchange notes and goods. Apart from being fitted with the grilled window and the drawer, the parlor was to be divided from the convent's residual interior<sup>63</sup>.

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61 Cf. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, pp. 50f.

62 On (gendered) enclosure in European monasticism, cf. EVANGELISTI, *Nuns*, pp. 42–46.

63 Arnold Janssen, in: MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, pp. 93.

The conceptualization of the living and working quarters of nuns as a closed environment reflected the religious ideal of female chastity in European monasticism. In his early considerations about the assignment of nuns to Togo, Janssen insisted that the principles of monastic enclosure were to be observed according to the European paradigm or »even stricter«<sup>64</sup>. His main concern was not related to the moral qualities of both priests and nuns but rather to the image that a free or unregulated contact between the religious of both sexes might convey to European and indigenous observers alike. From founder Janssen's point of view, the architectural configuration of the women's convent in Lomé did not primarily target the nuns' actual living conditions but was first and foremost directed to the visible (and thus »public«) recreation of a particular ecclesiastical culture that was based on rigid regulations for women religious and their segregation from men.

It was only after Janssen had obtained the footprint of the respective building that he eventually agreed upon the first nuns' transfer to Togo. Interestingly, in spite of the extended discussions about the religious accommodation facilities that anteceded the nuns' actual departure, within a couple of weeks after their arrival, male and female missionaries switched their respective convents. The nuns moved from the newly purchased house in the town center to the above-mentioned first missionary building at the outskirts of Lomé<sup>65</sup>. Order »historian« Karl Müller explained this move with the larger chapel that formed part of the second convent as well as the priests' wish to live closer to the town center and thus »among the people«<sup>66</sup>. Sister Perboyre Neuß, the author of the congregation's first history published (1914), in turn, suggested that the relocation of the nuns was necessary because their first house was too small and its location prevented them from taking the required rest at nighttime. According to her, its inhabitants were disturbed by both the building's central location and the indigenous neighbors who »amused themselves by having noisy conversations, games and feasts«<sup>67</sup>. After their quick relocation, however, the nuns stayed in the first missionary building in Lomé for ten years until an eagerly awaited »proper« women's convent was completed whose construction had started in 1906. By then, it already was the explicit goal to erect a regional spiritual and administrative center. From the nuns' point of view, their relocation to a building which might be considered as a »proper« accommodation for religious women – a building that featured the external and internal markers of a women's convent in Germany – was, moreover, important for symbolic reasons.

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64 Ibid., p. 93f.

65 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Lome, p. 1.

66 MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, p. 95.

67 NEUSS, *Die Steyler Missionsschwestern*, p. 95.

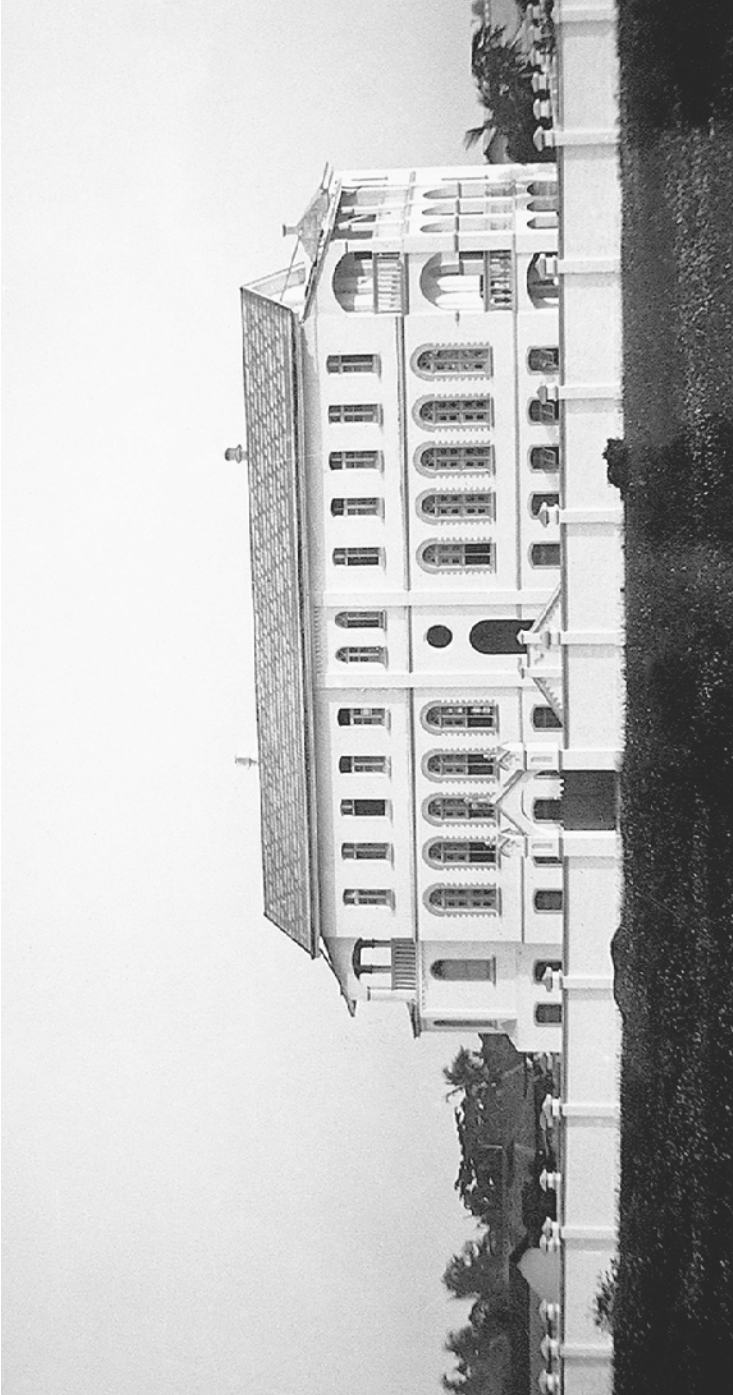


Figure 14: »The sisters' house in Lomé«, after 1908;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, Togo P1010573.

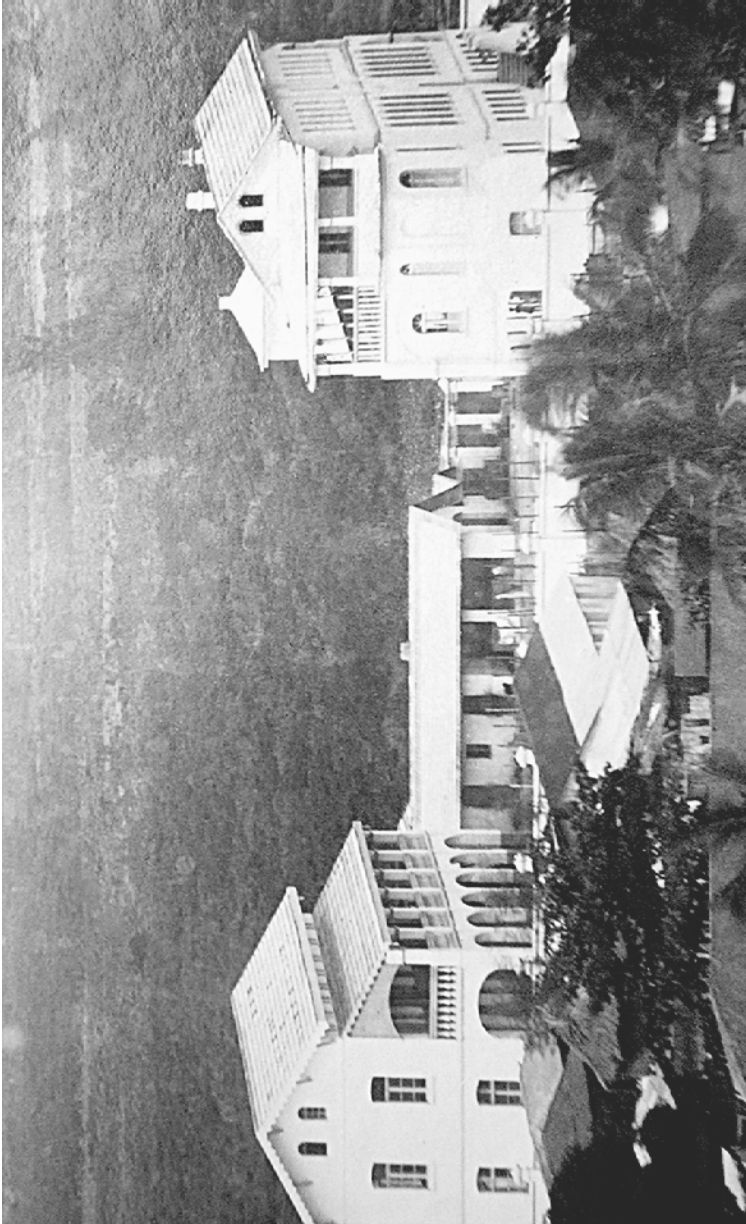


Figure 15: The sisters' house in Lomé, after 1908;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, Togo P1010571.

Superior Provincial Georgia van Oopen stated that the establishment of a new convent in Lomé was approved by the secular Europeans on location because »our current house, as they [the Europeans] tend to say, resembles rather an old warehouse than a sisterhood home«<sup>68</sup>.

Despite the impressive exterior architectural features of the new Loméan women's convent completed at the end of 1907 (Figure 14) its interior configuration led to discussions among the nuns and priests in both Africa and Europe. The local nuns, who were not invited to have a look at the construction plans worked out by the male heads of the prefecture and architect and master builder Brother Johannes Hopfer, followed the construction works with great interest<sup>69</sup>. Obviously, not even the women's congregation's elites in Europe had a decisive influence on the architectural configuration of the convent. Only shortly after the construction activity started in 1906, Mother Superior Theresia Messner, who had received the building plans, asked the Lomé nuns for further details. In particular she wanted to know whether a grille was planned to be established in the convent's parlor<sup>70</sup>. Yet, despite the fact that the majority of ordinary nuns as well as all women superiors wanted a grille to be installed, the priests in charge of the construction works originally neglected that request<sup>71</sup>. They generally countered these demands with pragmatic arguments, expressing doubts as to the usefulness of a grille in missionary settings<sup>72</sup>. Eventually, a compromise was negotiated. In her description of the convent's interior, the local chronicler reported of a parlor which was divided by a window glass established »in the manner of a grille«<sup>73</sup>. However, the question of grilles continued to occupy leading nuns in both Togo and Europe who faced similar discussions whenever a new women's convent was to be built<sup>74</sup>.

Generally speaking, the nuns in missions were more concerned with the convents' interior than with exterior features. This is clearly reflected in the descriptions they forwarded to Europe. While we do have detailed records of room layouts or descriptions of chapels, little is known about the surroundings of the missionary edifices or their concrete locations. However, accounts by nuns in Lomé suggest that the respective surroundings did affect their perceptions of convent space. In 1910, a nun wrote that some of her fellows closed the windows of their cells at night out of fear of centipedes or bats. Another

68 AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 20.11.1907.

69 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 10.9.1906.

70 AG SSpS 0311.2 Tog Briefe von M. Theresia Messner nach Togo, 10.8.1906.

71 Cf. AG SSpS Tg 034 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 10.9.1906.

72 Cf. AG SSpS Tg 034 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 11.8.1910.

73 AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Einrichtung des Schwesternhauses in Lome.

74 Cf. AG SSpS Tg 034 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 11.8.1910.



nun once used the convent's bell »to command tranquility« in response to the sounds from town, which could be heard in the convent at night. The writer herself stated that indigenous neighbors had recommended her to close her cell window »as otherwise the dead living to my side would come«<sup>75</sup>. Obviously, one side of the building faced the Catholic and the governmental graveyard – she reported to have observed a Muslim funerary ceremony from the convent's veranda. In this context, the rich missionary photo archives can be drawn on in order to fill some gaps. Taken by priests or friars, photographs of women's convents show exterior views only. The lateral view of the nuns' missionary compound in Lomé (Figure 15) demonstrates that the convent and its outbuildings were erected in close proximity to other, probably indigenous, settlements. The image, moreover, delivers insight into the architectural configuration of the compound.

Apart from the convent proper (the three-story building on the right hand), the walled space of the nuns' compound accommodated a girls' boarding school (the building on the left hand) and a range of outbuildings (a bakery, two separated kitchens: one for the nuns and another one for the boarders, a laundry and storerooms)<sup>76</sup>. The detailed descriptions of the building's interior show the great importance that the nuns assigned to the inner configuration of convent space. The convent was organized according to the ecclesiastical notion of intimacy and social control: The top floor, accommodating the cells, constituted the cloistered section of the convent to which only local nuns had access. The second floor housed a workroom, the parlor, the chapel and the vestry. It thus accommodated quarters that were mostly used by the nuns but also accessible for visitors (i.e. priests). On the first floor mixed working quarters for nuns and their indigenous housemaids, an apothecary and a store room were located. The convent can therefore be characterized as an in-between solution, at the same time providing for the nuns' seclusion from the men and the secular world as well as their day-to-day engagement with the Togolese people they aimed to convert. The school building housed five classrooms, a workroom and the nuns' library. The loft functioned as the dormitory for the compound's indigenous residents and, moreover, accommodated two cells for the nuns in charge of the former's supervision<sup>77</sup>.

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75 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Eulalia Hewing, 19.2.1910.

76 AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Einrichtung des Schwesternhauses in Lome.

77 Ibid.

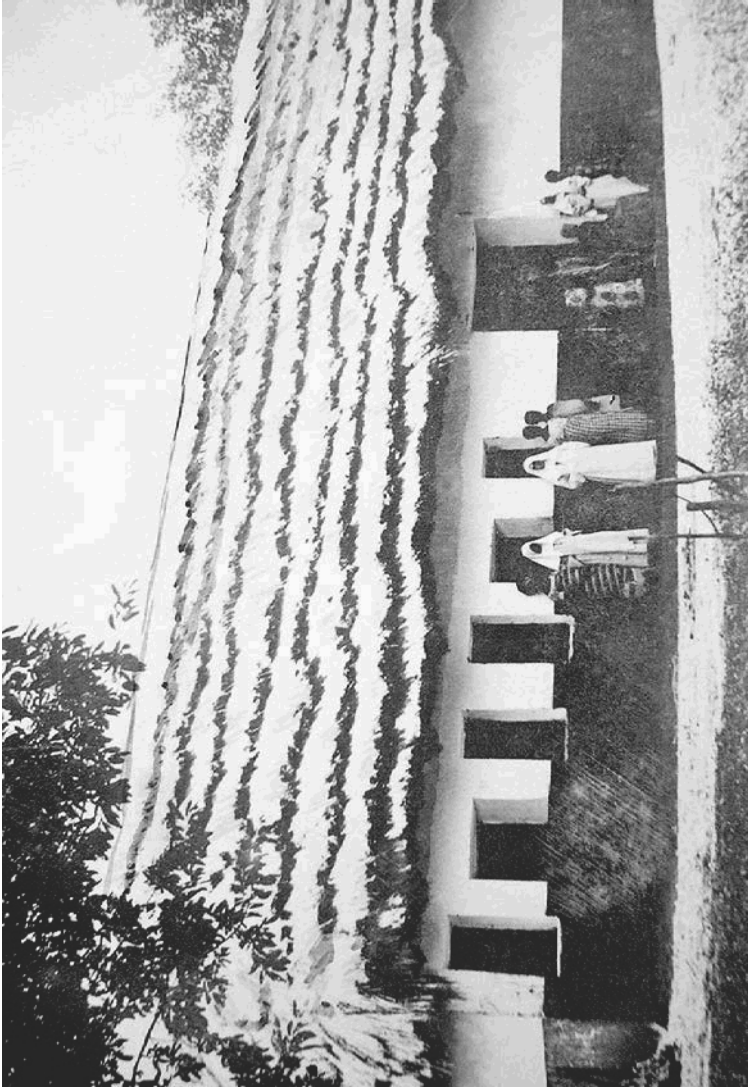


Figure 16: »The sisters' first house in Atakpame founded in 1905«, between 1905 and 1906;  
Archive SSPS Steyl Fotos, Togo P1010596.



Figure 17: »The sisters' new house on the nuns' mountain«, undated;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, Togo P1010597.

The Lomé compound's basic structure can be seen as a model for the other four women's convents which were established in the colony. Like the nuns in the capital, their colleagues in the outpost places, too, had lived in some sort of makeshift building for years. The first community of nuns who settled in the town of Atakpamé in 1905, for instance, was accommodated in a simple one-story building with a thatched roof. The house (Figure 16), which had been rented from an indigenous man was situated in the marketplace. At first, the building surely did not meet the nuns' expectations of what constituted an adequate accommodation for European women religious. Indeed the pioneer nuns in Atakpamé reported about their great endeavors to transform it according to the basic principles of a female monastic culture immediately upon arrival. They adapted one of the rooms as an oratory and turned another one into the parlor and refectory. Apart from one classroom, the nuns also installed their dormitory in a separated part of the building. Both spare rooms were turned into a sewing room and a store room<sup>78</sup>. Interestingly, the local nuns did not complain about inconveniences but, quite the contrary, embraced these living conditions as corresponding to the monastic ideal of poverty. Still, after they had moved all nuns in Atakpamé looked back at this time in the makeshift convent as a difficult time, pointing out the multiple troubles resulting from the building's architecture and its position close to the busy market where at night they would be disturbed by snakes, rats, lizards and frogs as well as by human noise<sup>79</sup>. The nuns in Atakpamé therefore appreciated the rapid completion of the actual women's convent, which sat on the top of a hill called the »Nuns' Mountain« (Figure 17).

While it is impossible to trace the origin of the colonial nomenclature what we do know is that the term »Nuns' Mountain« (»Nonnenberg«) was already used in the contract of sale concluded between the mission and the colonial authorities<sup>80</sup>. Obviously, the district administration and the missionary Church cooperated in the hill's construction development with the district government providing for the construction of the road up to the convent »in return for a small allowance«<sup>81</sup>. Ultimately, in June 1906, a festive procession of priests and nuns mounted the hill chanting a litany. The solemn consecration of the convent and the attached girls' school followed. During the following months, the resident nuns praised their new convent, the fresh air on the hill, the beautiful view over the city and the fertile gardens the Catholic mission was setting up at its bottom<sup>82</sup>. Once again, in their accounts the nuns

78 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 15.10.1905.

79 Cf. SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Die Geschichte unseres Hauses in Atakpame 1905–1907, p. 1.

80 BArch. R 150 F FA 1 / 596, pp. 390f.

81 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 6.2.1906.

82 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Euphemia Schnorr, 20.5.1906.

gave much more room to the characterization of the interior. Like in Lomé, the women's convent in Atakpamé was roughly divided into two parts. The top-floor housed the cloistered section with four cells, a refectory and a store room while the ground floor accommodated the publicly accessible working quarters, the parlor and the oratory. A door was established in front of the stairs that was to prevent stray visitors from entering the cloistered part. In addition, the compound comprised a girls' school, several outbuildings and an external kitchen and chapel<sup>83</sup>.

Religious housing constituted an issue also in colonial New Guinea. As did the first priests in Togo, the pioneer male missionaries who settled in Tumleo Island in 1896 brought the prefabricated timber parts – the basic material for the first local missionary house – along from Europe. In contrast to Togo, in New Guinea the first missionaries could not rely on skilled workers and acquire adequate building materials (e.g. timber, corrugated iron) to be used to construct European-style houses<sup>84</sup>. As a consequence, Prefect Apostolic Eberhard Limbrock decided to engage first of all in the material setup of the mission<sup>85</sup>. Until 1905, when the Catholic mission established its own sawmill in its developing center near Madang, called Alexishafen, priests and friars either had to import timber or search for what they called »bush material« in order to erect edifices<sup>86</sup>. Early in 1899, however, the first priests had already set up a wooden house designated to be the first women's convent on location and thus the dwelling for their first female co-workers who were to arrive from Germany.

As the nuns who arrived in Tumleo Island in April the same year noted, the house that was to become their convent was »much bigger and better furnished« than they had expected. One of them described it to her fellows in Europe as a combination of the well-known with the »new« or »exotic«:

Stretching from east to west the house sits on stilts so high that standing beneath one can touch the floor. There is a veranda to the south and to the north. A second house is attached [which is] similar to the last new building in Steyl, just a bit more rectangular. It accommodates a kitchen and a laundry that are [...] not readily furnished yet. In the corner of these two merging buildings a staircase leads to the northern veranda. Having reached the top of the stairs, to the right one immediately finds the chapel, which

83 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 6.2.1906.

84 What the nuns in New Guinea called »European houses« corresponded to the usual missionary construction method. Due to the earthquake risk in the region, all houses were to be made of wood and roofed with corrugated iron. Before the mission established its own sawmill in 1905, it imported timber from Singapore or Sidney. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 4.3.1902.

85 This is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

86 Cf. Joseph ALT, Introduction, in: ALT (ed.), Arnold Janssen – Letters, p. 51.

is as long as the house, together with both verandas, is broad. [...] Coming out of the chapel and walking straight ahead passing the veranda [...] one passes 5 doors. These are 4 rooms for the sisters, and the fifth is the refectory that is more or less as big as the cells in the old house [the congregation's first convent in Europe]. The rooms of the sisters are a bit smaller. If one passes the second room, one comes to a small door that leads to the parlor and the front veranda<sup>87</sup>.

Despite these first positive reactions, however, religious housing in Tumleo Island failed to fully meet the nuns' expectations. Interestingly, it was not the convent's location only »a stone's throw away from the bush« and in earshot of the indigenous villages<sup>88</sup> that provoked the nuns' objections. Rather, the point of critique was the building's proximity to the male missionaries' house – a fact that contradicted with the ecclesiastical demand of separation of the sexes. The first priests to come to Tumleo had established all residential buildings and outbuildings within one extended missionary compound for practical reasons<sup>89</sup> and this was why the nuns settled within sight and sound of the

87 »Das Haus ist der Länge nach von Osten nach Westen, und steht auf Pfählen so hoch, dass man mit der Hand den Fußboden erreichen kann wenn man darunter steht. Südlich und nördlich ist eine Veranda. Ein zweites Haus ist angebaut und ungefähr in der Richtung wie der letzte Neubau in Steyl nur mehr rechtwinkelig. In demselben befindet sich ein Vorratzzimmer eine Küche und eine Waschküche welche [...] noch nicht fertig eingerichtet sind. In der Ecke dieser zwei zusammenlaufenden Häuser geht eine Treppe auf die nördliche Veranda. Kommt man oben auf den Treppen so hat man schon gleich rechts die Kapelle welche so lang ist, als das Haus mit beiden Verandas breit ist. [...] Kommt man aus der Kapelle und geht geradeaus an der Veranda entlang [...] so kommt man an 5 Türen vorbei. Es sind 4 Zimmer für die Schwestern, das fünfte ist das Speisezimmer welches ungefähr so groß ist wie die Zellen im alten Haus. Die Zimmer der Schwestern sind etwas kleiner. Ist man am zweiten Zimmer vorbei, kommt man zu einer kleinen Tür welche zum Sprechzimmer und auf die vordere Veranda führt.« AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, April 1899.

88 A nun described the proximity to the indigenous villages as follows: »We live only a stone's throw away from the bush and in this bush we find villages. One is located southward and the other south-west to the sea and not far from us at all; you can always hear someone talking and shouting [–] and yes, at night the children crying.« (»Wir wohnen nur einen Steinwurf von Busch und in diesem Busch finden wir Dörfer. Das eine liegt südlich und das eine südwestlich zur See zu und gar nicht weit weg von uns, man kann immer sprechen und rufen ja des Nachts die Kinder schreien hören.«) AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 27.5.1899.

89 Another nun, who belonged to the pioneer community that arrived in Tumleo Island in 1899, described her first impression of the missionary compound as follows: »Here we found two little European houses; they were made of wood and stood on stilts, [they] were surrounded by a veranda and roofed with corrugated iron. The missionaries and brothers lived in one of them and the other one was just being finished for us 4 sisters. A separate church or chapel was not erected yet; each of the houses accommodated a small chapel.« (»Wir fanden hier zwei Europäerhäuschen, selbe waren von Holz gebaut und standen auf Pfählen, waren mit einer Veranda umgeben und mit Wellblech gedeckt. In einem wohnten die Missionare und Brüder und das andere war für uns 4 Schwestern eben fertig gestellt. Eine allein stehende Kirche oder Kapelle war noch nicht erbaut, in jedem Hause befand sich eine kleine Kapelle.«) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 5.1.1900.

priests<sup>90</sup>. Convent space did not provide a materially and socially separated feminine environment. According to a note by Janssen to Prefect Apostolic Limbrock, the nuns in Tumleo had complained to him about the fact that their convent was not totally closed on the side facing the male missionary house<sup>91</sup>. As in the case of Togo, the lack of female seclusion was an issue which Janssen, at that time still the joint superior of all nuns and priests, at least aimed to interfere with. In the case of Tumleo, he invited the prefect apostolic »as a good father« to »come to the aid« of his children and thus to settle by the nuns who wished to live according to European monastic culture in seclusion from men<sup>92</sup>. However, Limbrock's response was harsh: Although he bemoaned the convent's position close to the priests' house and theoretically acknowledged the legitimacy of the wish to move it, he emphasized that the local missionaries had neither the time nor the manpower at their disposal to tackle such a project. From his point of view, the issue of female seclusion in missionary settings was to be subordinated to other, much more urgent matters. The same applied to another proposal, namely the erection of a wall of a height of four to five meters, in order to separate the living quarters for both sexes. Finally, Limbrock added some words directed to the nuns, referring to their prospects concerning accommodation in the »heathen lands«:

Sisters who live in wild areas where they have to make extraordinary efforts just to set up the most basic living quarters, but who nonetheless expect to have the same kinds of convents and conveniences they had in Europe should rather stay home because they are not fit for the heathen missions. To criticize and express all kinds of desires is very easy – but in practice, aren't the given occasion and circumstances also the desire of God<sup>93</sup>?

Despite the challenges that the missionary situation in New Guinea entailed for them, most nuns ultimately shared the mission's official standpoint that geographical expansion had to be given priority over the extension of the missionary compounds according to European Catholic architectural standards. Indeed, the majority of the local nuns actively supported the mission's policy of rapid expansion that partly even antedated the construction of tim-

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90 E.g., one nun wrote that the female community structured collective periods of work and rest according to the bell, which was rung in the male missionaries' house and could be heard well in the nuns' place. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 7.1.1900.

91 Janssen to Limbrock, 4.4.1902, in: ALT (ed.), Arnold Janssen – Letters, p. 85.

92 Ibid., p. 85.

93 Ibid.

ber living quarters<sup>94</sup>. And when the nuns were actually kept from establishing a second women's convent in the region for almost a year due to the delayed completion of a house, a nun wrote to Europe calling upon her colleagues in the Motherhouse to include construction activity in the missionary training syllabi. She stated:

Couldn't you learn to build houses? That would be very necessary here as then we might find many stations and soon many sisters could come over; in Steyl there are so many sisters and they would surely be glad to come over here, wouldn't they? The people here aren't able to build houses and already we don't have enough brothers [friars, who usually performed the material works] available<sup>95</sup>.

Although the erection of western-style timber houses, which the nuns characterized as »European houses« and opposed to what they called »bush houses« (meaning edifices made of local resources), was the declared target of all missionary building activity, the nuns often stayed in provisional houses for years. These were often made of local building materials. Figure 18 shows the women's convent which formed part of the missionary compound called »Regina Angelorum« established in Leming (Walman) on the north coast of the New Guinean mainland. The first three nuns moved into the house in 1908. The image surely appears striking to western observers as it shows

94 For instance, when the first nuns moved to Yakumul in 1916 and thus at a particularly difficult moment for the missionary organization in New Guinea, the nuns' living quarters were not even finished yet. Consequently, the group of four nuns at first moved into the (still open and therefore visible) loft of the building, which had to serve as a temporary dormitory, refectory and working quarters. After having passed the first four weeks in Yakumul, a nun, referring to the difficulties the nuns experienced on the new foundation, wrote: »We live in the loft in an open house without doors and windows. At night you quickly begin to freeze. Well, that's real mission, but I guess it will get better. All of us have lots of work. Later on, when everything will be ordered, it will certainly get better. [...] When we arrived I, soaked through by the water of the sea (dress and stockings), immediately had to go to the kitchen. There was no concealed place for me to change my clothes. We had to create one first.« (»Wir wohnen in einem offenen Hause auf dem Speicher ohne Türen und Fenster. Nachts friert man bald. Das ist echte Mission. Nun, das ist echte Mission; es wird wohl besser werden. Wir haben alle viel Arbeit. Es wird später besser werden, wenn mal alles hier geordnet ist. [...] Als wir ankamen, musste ich gleich, ganz durchnässt von Seewasser (Kleid und Strümpfe), in die Küche. Es war kein verstecktes Plätzchen zum Umkleiden. Das musste erst von uns gemacht werden.«) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Josaphata Baum, 19.10.1916 and, for a similar version of the same story, Sr. Kunigundis Vedder, 19.10.1916.

95 »Können Sie nicht auch Häuser bauen lernen? Das wäre hier sehr nötig, dann könnten wir viele Stationen gründen und es könnten dann bald viele Schwestern zu uns kommen, denn Schwestern sind in Steyl ja viele und Sie kommen doch auch wohl gerne hierhin nicht wahr? Hier können die Leute keine Häuser bauen und Brüder haben wir jetzt schon viel zu wenig.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 25.11.1901. Sister Ursula, on her part, took a serious interest in (missionary) construction activity. She fell back on this topic several times and her letters, moreover, contain detailed descriptions of the missionary construction method.



three German nuns and their indigenous housemaids in a cultural setting that did not display any features of European convent architecture. Still the nuns' mere presence in the image somehow testified to the transformability of the given setting. Indeed, they had immediately started to engage in the creation of what they perceived to be a proper environment for a women's convent. The three pioneers set up a vegetable garden and, assisted by pupils and housemaids, attempted to »give the closest surroundings of the poor house a friendly appearance«<sup>96</sup>. In 1911, the community moved into a small timber house while the local missionary school and the little church were still located in buildings made of local resources<sup>97</sup>.

As did their colleagues in many other New Guinean settings, the first nuns in Leming grappled with the lack of infrastructure. There was no functioning water post and, due to the isolated position of Leming, the mission steamer (carrying the complementary food supply) arrived only irregularly. However, the local nuns never complained about the lack of conveniences. Quite the contrary, many women missionaries embraced the difficult living conditions as part of the missionary apostolate and integrated the circumstances into their narratives of poverty and self-sacrifice. The inhabitants of the Leming convent referred to the poorly equipped house as »their Bethlehem« – in an allusion to the biblical stable of Bethlehem as the first dwelling of Christ. In 1912, a local nun, recounting the history of the community, referred to the materially difficult start as follows:

So we [...] moved into our Bethlehem: a little Atap-house, just as poor and cozy as I had always imagined in the mission back in Europe. Each sister was assigned a room just big enough to fit a bed, a table, a chair and the clothing box, and to provide for a small corridor. As windows we had wooden shutters and we used curtains as doors. [...] To this added that due to the irregular shipping traffic during the first two years we often had a shortage in the kitchen. Yet, despite all poverty and barrenness we were quite happy and content. For us the proverb always proved true: ›Where hardship is most urgent, God's help is closest«<sup>98</sup>.

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96 AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, Regina Angelorum, p. 1.

97 Cf. AG SSpS, Dickerhoff, Missionsreisen, p. 31.

98 »Nun [...] zogen wir ein in unser Bethlehem: ein Ataphäuschen, so schön, arm und traut, wie ich es mir schon früher in Europa in der Mission immer vorgemalt habe. Jede Schwester hatte ein Zimmer, das gerade Platz bot für das Bett, einen Tisch, einen Stuhl und die Wäschekiste. Dann blieb noch ein schmaler Gang übrig. Als Fenster hatten wir Holzläden, und als Türen dienten Vorhänge. [...] Dazu kam noch, daß infolge des unregelmäßigen Schiffsverkehrs wir in den ersten zwei Jahren nicht selten großen Mangel in der Küche hatten. Aber trotz aller Armut und Dürftigkeit lebten wir doch recht glücklich und zufrieden. Und immer bewahrheitete sich bei uns das Sprichwort: ›Wo die Not am größten, da ist Gottes Hilfe am nächsten.« AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, Regina Angelorum, 7.5.1912, pp. 1f.



Figure 18: The sisters' first house in Leming, between 1908 and 1911; Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, New Guinea, Album: PNG 67.

Here, the lack of western-standard accommodation not only matched the Catholic principle of poverty in monasticism but, moreover, functioned as a prime marker of »real« missionary life. Yet, endorsed by their superiors in Europe all nuns on location undertook great efforts to transform the houses into what they understood as »proper« convents, thus a religious community's living, working and praying spaces. Although neither canonical regulations nor the guidelines put forward by male ecclesiastical authorities tackled in detail the configuration of women's convents in colonial settings, the nuns endeavored to establish their houses (at least symbolically) with some of the central architectural features which had marked European women's monasteries since the early modern period. This, again, related to their aims to recreate central features of an ecclesiastical culture that were manifest in the material configuration of those spaces in which Catholic nuns had lived, prayed and worked for centuries.

In the Catholic monastic culture, time and space were closely connected. Convent architecture mirrored the (various stations in) day-to-day life, schedules and liturgical experiences of nuns and reflected the social order within the community<sup>99</sup>. Strict ecclesiastical regulations had long been shaping convent spaces and assigned the nuns' diverse activities to specific sites<sup>100</sup>. Since the period of Catholic Counter-Reformation, female monastic enclosure had gained new relevance and the Tridentine reform of the Church had emphasized the restructuring of convent architecture in this regard. By the late sixteenth century, monastic enclosure had become »the primary obligation for nuns« and was made an »unavoidable requirement for female religious life« across Europe<sup>101</sup>. With regard to architecture, this religious policy was most clearly expressed in the imperative of the cloister (from Latin »clausura« or »claudere«, meaning »to shut up«), which is the material separation of the convent from society with the principle aim to safeguard chastity<sup>102</sup>. Since the Council of Trent (1545–1563), ecclesiastical authorities had increasingly emphasized the nuns' physical and visual separation from the world. Simultaneously, according to Silvia Evangelisti, the gate, the parlor and the church – as the contact zones between the cloister and the secular world that shaped the nuns' interaction with society – gained great importance in the architecture of convents making them »part of the world without being in it«<sup>103</sup>. Al-

99 Cf. Hiltrud KIER/Marianne GECHTER, *Frauenklöster im Rheinland und in Westfalen*, in: Hiltrud KIER/Marianne GECHTER (eds), *Frauenklöster im Rheinland und in Westfalen*, Regensburg 2004, pp. 6–27, here p. 23; HÜWELMEIER, *Närrinnen Gottes*, p. 22.

100 Cf. EVANGELISTI, *Nuns*, p. 46.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

102 Cf. Cloister, in: *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm> (5.5.2010).

103 EVANGELISTI, *Nuns*, pp. 46–53, i.e. 49.

though Canon Law was less strict with regards to women's congregations (as compared with women's orders), a partial cloister was nonetheless established prior to the Second Vatican Council in most European convents<sup>104</sup>. This was equally the case for the Servants of the Holy Spirit's Motherhouse, which certainly constituted the crucial point of reference regarding religious accommodation for the missionary nuns in Togo and New Guinea.

As for Togo, the parlor and the grille constituted frequent subjects of discussion. Similarly, the New Guinea-based nuns strove to shape their convents according to the centuries-old Catholic tradition of the cloister as a way to cope with migration to non-Christian settings and protect their particular way of life. By recreating convent space as known from Europe they aimed to transform what they perceived to be »heathen lands«. Depending on the resources available, fences (either of wood or wire) and walls were often established in order to separate the nuns' living quarters from the environment. Marking the borders between the convent and the (»heathen«) village, town or »bush«, these boundaries were suggestive of women's convents as secluded social and geographical spaces. The nuns appreciated the construction of bricked walls to which they referred to as »monastic walls«. Surrounding walls not only allowed them to regulate the access to the convent but constituted yet another central feature of European convent architecture. The Catholic religious tradition visualized the religious character of monastic space by the erection of walls, which signified its separation from the secular world and jurisdiction. However, in the nuns' eyes it was the interior structure of the convents that mattered in the first place. Despite the often poor external configuration of missionary women's convents, their inhabitants gave much scrutiny to the construction of separated living and working quarters and the formation of designated sections for collective and private prayer and devotion. They provided the buildings with the basic rooms that derived from European monasticism like a reception room, a refectory, working quarters, individual cells for the nuns (which ideally constituted the cloister) and certainly a nicely decorated and well-equipped chapel, preferably with the sanctum inserted.

Generally speaking, the configuration of the convent's (either in-house or nearby) chapel was considered of utmost importance in all locations. The state of chapels was clearly given precedence over the state of living quar-

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104 Canon Law differentiates between women's orders and congregations. While the former were mostly targeted on contemplation and therefore had to observe strict, or the so-called »Papal«, enclosure, the latter's sphere of activity encompassed charitable service and educational activities. This is why the members of congregations were not generally obliged to observe strict enclosure. This, however, did not prevent religious institutions from placing restrictions regarding enclosure on their members out of their own initiatives. Cf. Cloister, in: The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm> (5.5.2010).

ters. The most important question in this context regarded the absence or presence of the sanctum in the tabernacle<sup>105</sup>. In Catholicism the consecrated bread kept in the tabernacle is believed to be the body of Christ, which is why the nuns interpreted having an in-house chapel with the sanctum inserted as »sharing one house« with Christ. The tabernacle functioned as an important focal point for private prayer, devotion and retreat. Those nuns in missions who inhabited convents with fully-equipped chapels tended to oppose this condition, which they perceived as spiritual richness, to the material poverty they experienced. For instance, the nun (whose detailed description of the first women's convent in Tumleo has been quoted earlier<sup>106</sup>) continued the account, turning her attention from the living quarters to the in-house chapel:

Everything looks quite poor and simple in there, because nothing has been unpacked for our chapel except for a big monstrance of very little value. The rev. fathers have lent us chasubles and other church artifacts until our things arrive. [...] Oh yes, dear fellow sisters, let me tell you that in spite of our poverty on holy Easter we have become really rich because the most holy sacrament has been inserted in our chapel by the rev. father prefect. The altar is beautiful if very simple. The tabernacle is decorated with the image of the Divine Heart of Jesus and the Holy Spirit floating above, just like in the rooms in Steyl. In addition, the altar is decorated with candles and some beautiful foliage plants. [...] With the chapel housing just one pew the children all sit down on the blank floor as they cannot yet endure sitting on their knees for long<sup>107</sup>.

The nuns' efforts to adapt missionary convents and chapels to their own ideal and standards of aesthetics were not limited to the buildings. Alongside their male colleagues, women missionaries in New Guinea worked the land, cul-

105 The decision whether the sanctum should be inserted in the individual chapels in women's convents was taken by the local priests. And although the nuns usually accepted their decisions, in New Guinea the question at times led to conflicts. While elite nuns favored the insertion of the sanctum in the nuns' chapels, missionary priests suggested that the nuns rather visit the local churches for (private) devotion. Cf. AG SSpS 034 PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Andreas Puff, August 1917.

106 Cf. quotation 87, p. 196.

107 »Es sieht darin recht arm und einfach aus, denn es ist für unsere Kapelle nichts ausgepackt worden als eine große Monstranz von sehr geringem Wert. Messgewänder und auch andere Kirchensachen erhielten wir leihweise von den ehrw. Patres bis unsere Sachen ankommen. [...] Oja liebe Mitschwestern, darf ich es ihnen verraten dass wir am hochhl. Osterfeste trotz unserer Armut so reich geworden sind. Es wurde nämlich das heiligste Sakrament in unserer Kapelle eingesetzt, durch den hochw. P. Präfekt. Der Altar ist schön, aber sehr einfach. Der Tabernakel ist geziert mit dem Bilde des göttlichen Herzens Jesu und dem darüber schwebenden Hl. Geiste, gerade wie es in Steyl in den Zimmern ist. Kerzen und einige schöne Blattpflanzen ist die übrige Zierde des Altares. [...] Nur eine einzige Gebetbank befindet sich in der Kapelle. Die Kinder setzen sich alle blank auf den Boden, sie können das Knien noch nicht lange aushalten.« AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, April 1899.

tivated gardens and built or cleaned the paths that connected the single units on the compounds. And what applied to all areas of activity was particularly the case for the nuns' engagement in Alexishafen, the missionary complex that was to become the Catholic center in northern New Guinea. The first priests moved to Alexishafen (Doilon) in 1905 and started to set up a missionary station there already with the goal to turn it into the Catholic regional headquarters. The relocation of the headquarters from Tumleo Island to Alexishafen was favored by the head of the prefecture for several reasons. On the one hand, in Alexishafen the mission was able to purchase an area of land and waterfront from the Sek people, who had traditional rights in the area, thus becoming the proprietor of land, deep sea and a natural harbor<sup>108</sup>. Still in 1905, the missionaries founded a plantation of coconut palms and rubber trees. Besides, they established a saw mill and built a church and a school. On the other hand, Alexishafen was of strategic importance because it was situated close to Madang (then »Friedrich Wilhelmshafen«), which was not only the center of the German colonial administration on the mainland but also hosted a regular port of call for ships cruising between Hong Kong, Singapore, Sidney and the German colonial capital Rabaul<sup>109</sup>. At that time, the European missionary personnel arrived at Alexishafen via the port of Madang. Thus, in 1907, when the first four nuns moved to Alexishafen, both a certain religious and economic infrastructure as well as a building designed to be the first temporary convent on location was already put in place. Ultimately, the nuns followed the priests and relocated their regional headquarters from Tumleo to Alexishafen.

One of the pioneers to arrive at Alexishafen described the first transitional women's convent as a »nice little monastery« situated in a »paradisiacal little spot«<sup>110</sup>. Assessing the location with the eye of an experienced missionary nun she, however, added: »The land is very fertile, so with a bit of diligence you will always have fresh vegetables. This is certainly a benefit that should not be despised«<sup>111</sup>. In contrast to other New Guinean missionary settings, the women's convent in Alexishafen was erected a ten-minute walk away from the priests' house and the church. The joint missionary kitchen where a nun, assisted by indigenous housemaids, prepared food for the entire European personnel of the compound was established somewhere in-between the male and female quarters. The meals were transported from there to the respective house by means of a little carriage. Another nun in Alexishafen described the

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108 The harbor facilities in Alexishafen, from where the missionary steamer made trips up and down the coast, were in continual use since 1909, when the mission purchased its first steamship. Cf. LUTKEHAUS, pp. 27f.

109 Cf. COLES/MIHALIC, *Sent by the Spirit*, p. 4.

110 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 6.2.1908.

111 *Ibid.*

local convent as »very beautiful and quiet« also because of its distance from the closest indigenous neighbors<sup>112</sup>. Still, the issue of accommodation continued to concern the nuns since they totally depended on the local priests who managed all missionary construction activities. Hence, it was only in 1914 that the female religious community in Alexishafen moved to the new convent designed to function as the congregation's administrative and spiritual headquarters in the region. This new convent (Figure 19) was constructed around the originally free-standing refectory which had been transformed into a chapel and registry. To it a long wing had been attached that accommodated the »cloister«, i.e. the ten cells for the nuns. A second wing, built across the first one, housed the refectory and two guest rooms. Just like the chapel and registry, this section of the convent was accessible through separate entrances. At first the nuns used parts of their old convent as working quarters because the lack of building materials delayed the construction of the new ones. Besides, some works, such as sewing, were performed outside, usually on the building's broad porches. In the subsequent years the building, which not only housed increasing numbers of nuns but also the different working quarters (e.g. printing press, quarters for the production of soap, dispensary etc.) was gradually expanded.

During the 1920s, the need for a regional headquarters big enough to accommodate larger groups of (both resident and visiting) nuns became an increasingly urgent matter. On the one hand, larger numbers of sick or overworked nuns returned to Alexishafen for physical recreation. This, in turn, required a larger number of resident nuns to engage in their care. On the other hand, congregational elites organized annual spiritual retreats in Alexishafen in which ideally all members of the region were to participate on a regular basis. Throughout the 1920s, elite nuns in New Guinea emphasized the need to construct a regional headquarters in Alexishafen that was adequate for their needs. By the early 1930s, the local priests had obviously come to share their concerns and the missionary construction managers put the replacement of the contemporary women's convent on their agenda. The start of work, however, was delayed. Although the nuns were used to waiting patiently for their male fellows to actually take up the construction works, this time they continued to point out the urgency of the project<sup>113</sup>. They even sought supernatural support in order to speed up the construction works: Once the building site for the new convent was assigned in 1935, in a festive procession and chanting and praying the nuns moved there to establish a statute of Saint Joseph, the patron of workers.

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112 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899-1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 7.8.1908.

113 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911-1975, Briefe von Schwester Philomena Herzog, 27.03.1933.



Figure 19: »The first house of the sisters«, undated;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, New Guinea, Album: PNG 1.



Since then Saint Joseph watched over the construction works and every evening the nuns lit a candle on the building site to implore spiritual support for and to visibly underline their requests<sup>114</sup>. Eventually they succeeded: Still in 1935, two friars together with a number of – to cite the chronicle – »black assistants« took up the building activities<sup>115</sup>. In August 1936 the new regional headquarters (Figure 20) were ready to accommodate as many as the twenty nuns from the New Guinean outposts, who had gathered in Alexishafen in order to participate in the spiritual retreats. All of them expressed their satisfaction with the present situation for, in addition, a new spacious refectory had been completed that allowed the community to take the meals collectively. This indeed matched the nuns' ideal of female religious life as practiced in larger monasteries. This new possibility of religious practice as a result of spatial arrangements was even recorded by the chronicler, who wrote with regard to this first course of spiritual retreats in 1936: »Often you would hear someone remark that now they again feel just like in the Motherhouse«<sup>116</sup>. Subsequent to this event the building was finished and the secular and sacred living and working quarters went into service. In addition to the convent building proper that housed the nuns' living quarters, a refectory, a chapel and the only »appropriate« parlor in the region, some subsidiary buildings were established in immediate proximity. These accommodated the dormitories for housemaids and boarding school pupils, a girls' school and a number of working quarters. This so-called »Holy Spirit Convent« remained the Servants of the Holy Spirit's religious and administrative headquarters until World War II, when large parts of the building were destroyed in bombings. After 1945, a new house had to be erected in order to compensate for the loss.

Figures 20 and 21 not only show the architectural configuration of the convent, but, moreover, demonstrate that the local nuns and indigenous girls actively engaged in the redesign of its immediate surroundings. Right from the arrival of the first nuns in Alexishafen in 1907, all women missionaries started to transform the landscape. They fenced in grasslands, marked plots for chickens and cattle stables to be put up and worked the land. Invariably supported by large numbers of indigenous housemaids, the nuns established gardens, beds and plots with the goal not only to design the landscape according to their own standards of aesthetics but also to grow a variety of vegetables, which were important for the German nuns' diet (such as for instance potatoes, maize and beans).

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114 Cf. AG SSps PNG Chroniken, Regionalhaus Alexishafen, 1935–1936.

115 Ibid.

116 »Oft hörte man die Bemerkung: Man fühlt sich jetzt wieder wie im Mutterhaus.« AG SSps PNG Chroniken, Regionalhaus Alexishafen, 1936–1937, p. 1.

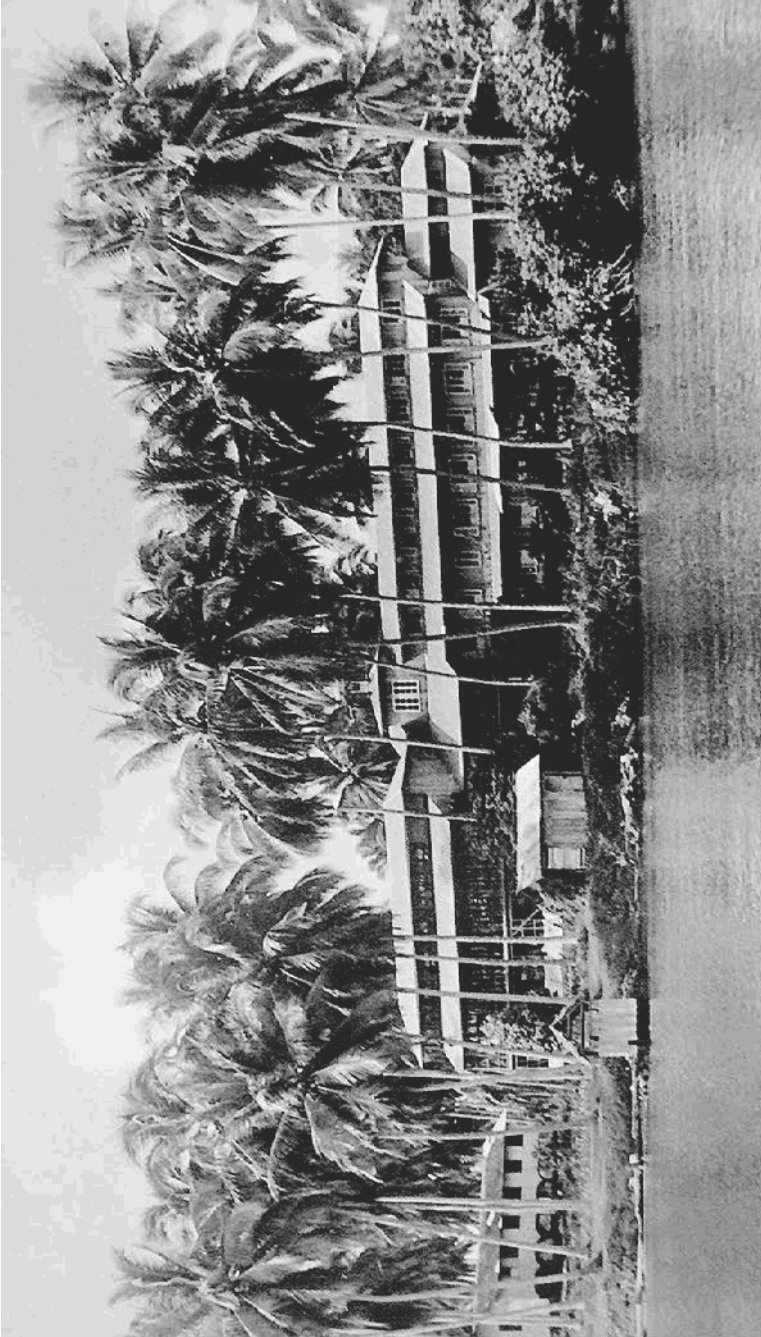


Figure 20: »Holy Spirit Convent in St. Alexishafen (formerly St. Michael, was destroyed in World war II)«;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, New Guinea, Album: PNG 2.



Figure 21: »Holy Spirit Convent on St. Alexishafen«, before 1945;  
Archive SSPS Steyl Fotos, New Guinea, Album: PNG 3.

They planted all kinds of tropical fruits for their own consumption and also grew corn or sago palms, which served as animal food for the mission's cattle and poultry. According to the local chronicler, in 1910 the convent's surrounding area was still »savaged« and overgrown with what she took for weeds. Hence the nuns of Alexishafen worked tirelessly, establishing gardens and engaging in the construction of paths and roads. Using the labor of the resident indigenous pupils and/or housemaids<sup>117</sup>, they transformed the previously narrow paths which connected the single missionary edifices into broad and better accessible ways. Putting in ornamental plants along the paths, the nuns shaped the compound's topography according to their standards of beauty and aesthetics<sup>118</sup>. At the end of 1910, the chronicler recorded with regard to the ongoing works the nuns were performing on the compound:

With our working girls always at our disposal we avidly pursued the transformation of the environment. At first we enlarged and beautified the path leading to the church. Along the path we planted bushes. The headland in the north was cleaned and planted with crops such as pineapples, bananas [and] little fruit trees. Besides, there we also established a number of small paths. [...] Approximately in the middle, a small garden house was erected designed to give the sisters some ease from the tropical heat. So beautifully has the garden been arranged that we have named it ›paradise garden‹<sup>119</sup>.

The nuns' contribution to the recreation of the New Guinean landscape was also noticed by visitors. A German nun, who visited the convent in 1913, expressed her satisfaction with the view of the missionary compound in general and the women's quarters in particular. On her first day in Alexishafen she took a closer look on the »beautifully situated« compound. She described it as follows:

Flourishing luxuriantly and bearing rich fruits, the numerous coconut palms are a most wonderful sight. The buildings are made of timber and located separately from each other. The chapel and the sisters' quarters with an airy veranda form a self-con-

117 In all missionary convents, the resident indigenous women had to collaborate in gardening and other works in return for maintenance expenses. The missionary division of labor is discussed in Chapter 5.

118 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Schwester Philomena Herzog, 21.5.1921 and PNG Chroniken, Regionalhaus Alexishafen, 1907–1913, p. 1–3.

119 »Da uns immer unsere Arbeitsmädchen zur Verfügung standen, so wurde auch eifrig an der Umgestaltung der Umgebung gearbeitet. Zunächst wurde unser Kirchgang vergrößert und verschönert. Am Weg entlang wurden Sträucher angepflanzt. Die nach Norden gehende Landzunge wurde gereinigt und mit [...]pflanzen, wie Ananas, Bananen, Fruchtbäumchen bepflanzt. Auch wurden mehrere Wege dort angelegt. [...] Ungefähr in der Mitte wurde ein kl. Gartenhäuschen errichtet, welches den Schwestern etwas Erleichterung von der schweren Tropenhitze gewähren sollte. Der Garten ist so schön eingerichtet, dass er den Namen Paradiesgarten erhielt.« AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, Regionalhaus Alexishafen, 1907–1911, p. 2.

tained house including a kitchen and the refectory. The house in which the girls sleep is also located separately as are the hall in which the children eat and the little house in which good Sister Barnaba lives with her little fosterlings<sup>[120]</sup>. The property also comprises a big laundry, a chicken house [and] the big stables for buffalos, cows, calves, donkeys, sheep, etc. Wonderful complexes and gardens with vegetables and fruits such as bananas, papayas, soursop, pineapple and others stretch over a large area and the flowers, especially the roses, are flourishing. Here the sisters have worked diligently and made considerable success so sister superior is right saying, we are eating the fruits of our diligence<sup>121</sup>.

The nuns' engagement in agriculture served multiple goals. By working the land and establishing gardens and flowerbeds they created a landscape that corresponded to their own ideas of space and aesthetics<sup>122</sup>. Besides, convent gardens have had a long-standing tradition in European monasticism with nuns having always produced big parts of their own sustenance<sup>123</sup>. In colonial settings, the growing of vegetables and flowers constituted a practical imperative since it provided the nuns with the necessary daily resources they were familiar with from Europe, diminishing their dependence on oversea food supplies. While the rearing of flowers (e.g. roses) was considered indispensable for devotional purposes and the decoration of sacral spaces, the growing of a range of imported as well as local fruits and vegetables ensured the

120 Sister Barnaba Zirkel, the local missionary nurse, resided with the present infants (orphans, etc.) in an extra building on the compound.

121 »Zahlreiche Kokospalmen, die reiche Früchte tragen, stehen in üppiger Pracht und bieten einen herrlichen Anblick. Die einzelnen Gebäude sind aus Holz ausgeführt und liegen voneinander getrennt. Die Kapelle und Schwesternwohnung mit luftiger Veranda bilden ein Haus für sich, ferner die Küche und das Speisezimmer. Das Haus, in welchem die Mädchen schlafen, ist ebenfalls separat, ferner die Halle, in welcher die Kinder essen und das Häuschen, welches die gute Schw. Barnaba mit ihren kleinen Schützlingen bewohnt. Außerdem gehören zum Besitztum noch ein großes Waschhaus, ein Geflügelhaus, die großen Stallungen für Büffel, Kühe, Kälber, Esel, Schafe, etc. Herrliche Anlagen und Gärten mit Gemüse und Früchten wie Bananen, Papayas, Sauersop, Ananas und dergleichen dehnen sich weithin aus. Auch die Blumen, namentlich schöne Rosen, blühen in üppiger Pracht. Die Schwestern haben hier fleißig geschafft, auch schöne Erfolge erzielt, so daß Schw. Oberin wohl mit Recht sagen konnte: Wir essen von den Früchten unseres Fleißes.« AG SSpS, Dickerhoff, Missionsreisen, p. 6.

122 For instance, another nun wrote with regard to the nuns' activities in Alexishafen during the absence of the congregation's head of the region, who had traveled to Europe to attend the general chapter: »We sisters remove mountains and hills and sometimes create new ones, for instance a Calvary in order to be able to stage a procession on Easter morning. Also we make nice paths, so upon her return rev. sister superior may rejoice because it has become even more beautiful in St. Michael.« (»Wir Schwestern tragen Berge und Hügel ab und machen manchmal dazu noch neue, so zum Beispiel einen Kalvarienberg, um am Ostermorgen Prozession machen zu können, und machen schöne Wege, damit, wenn ehrw. Schwester Oberin kommt, sie sich auch mal freuen kann, dass es auf St. Michael noch schöner geworden ist.«) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Genofeva Gordeyns, 19.3.1910.

123 Cf. EVANGELISTI, Nuns, p. 53.

food supply for the missionaries. In contrast to Togo where steamships from Germany arrived on a regular basis and the supply with aliments (e.g. meat, conserves, etc.) was largely unproblematic, in New Guinea the nuns produced most basic food items themselves. In doing so, they experimented with growing all kinds of imported seeds and also maintained fields and gardens growing selected local plants.

Generally speaking, the nuns in both Togo and New Guinea experimented by processing their respective crops by, for instance, producing marmalades, jelly and conserves from local fruits or vegetables. They also shared or exchanged their knowledge with colleagues living in similar climates. The outcome of this kind of experiments at the crossroads of home economics and colonial agriculture mattered not only to nuns and priests in comparable climatic settings, but also drew the interest of secular European settlers. In 1906, for instance, the nuns in New Guinea asked their fellows in Togo to forward the recipe they had invented for making bread of bananas, a plant that was accessible for the nuns in both regions<sup>124</sup>. Apparently on behalf of some local priests, the female convent community in Kpalimé, situated in the Togo hinterland approximately hundred and twenty kilometers northwest of Lomé, had tried to make flour from bananas with the aim to produce (what in their view resembled »German«<sup>125</sup>) bread out of African crops. This was important to the mission for it reduced its dependence on the import of cereals. And in fact, the nuns succeeded. Their so-called »banana bread« not only appealed to the missionaries in Togo but also to the colonial government: On the occasion of the agricultural exhibition set up in Kpalimé in 1907<sup>126</sup>, the originators were awarded the gold medal for it. Quite obviously, the nuns' economical experiments matched political concerns with regard to the supply situation of Europeans in the colony. In 1907, their achievements won them an honorary mentioning in the German colonial paper as well as some public fame at the exhibition<sup>127</sup>. It was the governor of Togo Julius Zech in person who handed them over the medal in the name of the entire committee and »gave them credit for their works«<sup>128</sup>. Ultimately, the news about the suc-

124 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Wunibalda Nick, undated (1906).

125 In the account quoted, the writer compared the bread made of banana flour with »Westphalian pumpernickel«. Cf. AG SSsP 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Paulina Weyand, 18.2.1907.

126 In January 1907, the colonial government staged an agricultural exhibition in Kpalimé with the goal to develop the agricultural production in the colony. On this occasion two nuns submitted their products which were both awarded a prize. Sister Pancratia Tendahl was awarded the gold medal for her banana bread and the silver medal was granted to Sister Ambrosia Hamerts, who had produced conserves out of local fruits. Cf. *ibid.*

127 Cf. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, p. 154.

128 According to the account of the awarding of the medal, a number of colonial elites could not refrain from personally complimenting the nuns despite their reluctance to call the general attention of the public in the course of the awards show. The author, a third nun, wrote:

cessful invention of banana bread also reached the nuns in New Guinea, from where Sister Wunibalda Nick inquired about the recipe<sup>129</sup>.

The New Guinea-based nuns likewise experimented with locally produced aliments, working field crops, fruits and slaughtering cattle. What started with the aim to enrich the missionary diet and to reduce the initial dependence on (food) supplies from overseas became an urgent matter in times of political and economic crises. With the outbreak of the Great War shipping connections collapsed and food supplies failed to arrive<sup>130</sup>. Consequently, the missionary ideal to develop a self-sufficient economy in New Guinea was suddenly enacted by force. The nuns, however, already used to working local crops, reacted with creativity and more than ever made use of their own agricultural products. In 1916, the superior provincial wrote to Europe, referring to the communities' domestic situation during the war years: »We have learned much, very much during these times, we are already [busy] with the compilation of a cookbook that will consider the local conditions. You surely will be pleased when we send it to you«<sup>131</sup>. Yet, their activities were not limited to the realm of food but also included the making of household articles. For instance, in 1920 the nuns sent to Europe a recipe for the cheap production of soap<sup>132</sup>. In this case, the production of soap as a side-product of the copra palm, which was frequent in colonial New Guinea, had started out of material needs but was so successful that it was continued. A decade later, the Servants of the Holy Spirit even established an extra workhouse in Alexishafen where they produced enough soap to meet the entire New Guinean mission's demand<sup>133</sup>.

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»Upon the Governor's signal, the European gentlemen, among them Captain Döring, District Officer Dr. Gruner, the officers and lieutenants of the marine, a number of assessors and other high personalities encircled them [the nuns]. Then his Excellency gave them his credits for their works adding that awarding them the medals was the common wish of the committee.« (»Auf einen Wink des Herrn Gouverneurs bildeten die Herren Europäer, darunter Hauptmann Döring, Bezirksamtman Dr. Gruner, die Offiziere und Leutnants der Marine, eine Reihe Assessoren und andere hohe Persönlichkeiten einen Kreis um sie. Seine Exzellenz sprach ihnen dann seine Anerkennung für ihre Arbeiten aus und erklärte, daß er auf allgemeinen Wunsch des Komitees ihnen die beiden Medaillen überreiche.«) AG SSsP 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Paulina Weyand, 18.2.1907.

129 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Wunibalda Nick, undated (1906).

130 Obviously the question of food supplies continued to be tense for all missionary stations even after the Great War. The nuns therefore transformed their formerly mentioned »paradise garden« into potato and vegetable fields. Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Philomena Herzog, 3.5.1921.

131 »Wir haben viel, sehr viel in dieser zeit gelernt, sind auch schon an der Zusammenstellung eines Kochbuches, das den hiesigen Verhältnissen entspricht. Wenn wir es später auch Ihnen schicken können, wird es Ihnen sicher Freude machen.« AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 2.8.1916.

132 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Josephine Steiger, 28.3.1920.

133 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Sr. Ehrentrudis Diezen, 29.4.1932.

Generally speaking, the nuns' engagement in the creation of the various missionary compounds' material bases rested upon their aspiration toward religious expansion. Women missionaries actively shared the goal of missionary priests, namely to reach an increasing number of non-Christians by establishing new stations and churches. Accordingly, growing numbers of missionaries »opened up« new environs for the missionary Church, established a Catholic infrastructure and transformed the local topography in ways that served their own ends. Material expansion, moreover, symbolized the increasing power of the Catholic Church. In order to reach that goal, the nuns accepted high workloads and other discomfort (e.g. regarding accommodation), governed by the words of a male colleague who had put the basic imperative of all missionary endeavor as follows: »Rather construct 10 new ones [missionary stations] than close down one«, as a nun cited him in 1901<sup>134</sup>. Thus, a linear understanding of time and development formed the basis of missionary thought with regard to Church growth. However, Catholic expansion in the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century colonial context not only competed with indigenous religions but also with other European agents on the market of evangelization. Catholic missionaries aimed to diminish Protestant influence within their prefectures and vicariates, respectively. In New Guinea, the mission's material situation constituted an important component as it allowed priests and nuns to rapidly expand their activities and to open up what they perceived as »new« spaces before their Protestant counterparts managed to take root on location. Already in 1908, a nun added a demand to her description of the missionary compound in Alexishafen which she directed to all nuns in New Guinea and in which she called upon them to work hard for the benefits of Catholic expansion precisely in view of the rivalry with the other denomination:

We need to get started and work bravely, because the Protestants are getting busy like ants. Fortunately, now our mission is getting a firm base thanks to our plantations. Soon they will yield crops and with the blessings of God they will earn us enough financial means to allow us to quickly multiply our stations. By-and-by this place will see a keen competition emerging. Already our rev. father prefect is seeking to secure us the main coastal stretches<sup>135</sup>.

134 »Lieber 10 neue bauen als eine aufheben« AG SSsP 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Dominika Craghs, 2.6.1901.

135 »Wir müssen anfangen und tapfer arbeiten; denn die Protestanten werden so rührig wie die Ameisen. Unsere Mission bekommt aber jetzt eine feste Grundlage durch unsere Plantagen. Sie bringen uns jetzt bald Erträge ein, und wenn der liebe Gott alles segnet, so erwachsen uns dadurch so viele materielle Mittel dass wir unsere Stationen schnell vervielfachen können. Mit der Zeit wird hier noch ein Wettkampf entstehen. Jetzt sucht unser höchst. P. Präfekt schon alle Hauptplätze an der Küste für uns zu gewinnen.« AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 6.2.1908.



Material presence and resources, however, were not the only means by which missionaries aimed to transform what they perceived as »heathen lands«. Missiologist Robert Streit referred to missionary stations as the »centers of light and power«, which, constituted the sites from which a »beam of missionary activity will be sent across the land from continuous sources of light«<sup>136</sup>. Thought of in spatial categories, missionary edifices thus constituted the important junctions in missionary networks. The erection of edifices was done in line with strategic considerations, i.e., it was to ensure that the missionaries could reach as many people as possible and to cover as large as possible a geographic area<sup>137</sup>.

In Streit's view, sacral edifices – as buildings housing divine life – functioned as the »soul« of the missionary stations. The Catholic characterization of churches/chapels as the place of abode of Christ was/is related to the consecrated bread and wine kept in the tabernacle. This relates to the Catholic institution of the Eucharist according to which (the blood and the body of) Christ are/is truly present in the consecrated bread and wine<sup>138</sup>. In Streit's version of the popular representation of the missionary encounter as a battle between light and darkness, the tabernacle (as the dwelling of the Eucharist) constituted the actual source of light and power. At some point, he characterized the totality of the sacral missionary edifices as a »huge Corpus Christi procession in stone, which moves around the globe to the honor of the Eucharist God«<sup>139</sup>. This imagery, in turn, relates to another important aspect of the spatial dimension of the missionary encounter from a European Christian perspective. The »heathen land« became the ideal stage for Christian devotional practice and its public manifestation. Religious ceremonies constituted visible and perceptible events that were inextricably linked with a particular Catholic and European cultural use of space. Public manifestations of religious belief symbolized the growing power of the missionary Church on the one hand and were acts of devotion to the Catholic God on the other. Hence, a Catholic procession through the »heathen land« was often perceived as another site of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century missionary »battle« against »heathendom«. The missionaries' attempt to appropriate space became most visible in the cause of the annual Corpus Christi procession, a crucial event in the eyes of nuns who used to prepare these processions with huge efforts everywhere.

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136 STREIT, *Die Weltmission*, p. 107.

137 Other imageries suggested by Streit were missionary stations as the »elevation of the missionary construction«, »the skeleton of the missionary body« or »the seat earth of the growing Church«. STREIT, *Die Weltmission*, p. 107.

138 Cf. Eucharist, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05572c.htm> (17.2.1910).

139 STREIT, *Die Weltmission*, p. 115.

### »Conquering the Heathen Lands«: the Feast of Corpus Christi

In Catholicism, the feast of Corpus Christi has long constituted an important public display of faith with a festive procession being held on this occasion after the canonical sequence of high mass, communion and prayer. In this procession the worshippers accompany the priest who carries the monstrance with the Eucharistic host to a number of festively decorated, usually outdoor, altars, where he pronounces the blessing. According to canonical regulations, Corpus Christi (or the feast of the body of Christ) is celebrated on a yearly basis in order to honor the institution of the Eucharist<sup>140</sup>.

The historical origin of this feast dates from the thirteenth century, arising during the same period of church history which saw the dogmatization of the doctrine of transubstantiation at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The festival traces back to the visions of a mystic, Saint Juliana of Mont Cornillon (1192–1258), a Belgian nun who had shown great veneration for the institution of the Eucharist throughout her life. Inspired by her visions, she longed for the introduction of a public feast in its honor<sup>141</sup>. Since the High Middle Ages constituted a period in which the Church encountered the pressure of the laity that strove to increase its access to the Eucharist, Juliana of Mont Cornillon's ambition to promote the feast of Corpus Christi had been supported by several other women mystics<sup>142</sup>. Ultimately, in 1264, Pope Urban IV ordered the adoption of the feast and instituted it for the entire Church. The feast of Corpus Christi had gained in popularity throughout the centuries particularly because of the festive and richly decorated processions that framed the public exposure of the Eucharist. It was only after the council of Trent, however, that it gained greater importance from the ecclesiastical point of view. By then, Corpus Christi had become a public manifestation of the anti-Protestant doctrine according to which Catholicism alone honored the Eucharist. During the Counter-Reformation the feast had thus acquired an additional meaning that was linked with the public display of Catholic religious power<sup>143</sup>. Issues of power appear to be equally crucial among the feast's multiple meanings in the hybrid religious and cultural setting of the mission fields. The performance of the processions, which were often carefully staged according to European Catholic tradition, was also designed to respond

140 Cf. Feast of Corpus Christi, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm> (7.2.2010).

141 *Ibid.*

142 Cf. McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 351.

143 Cf. Fronleichnam, in: *Das ökumenische Heiligenlexikon*, <http://www.heiligenlexikon.de/Kalender/Fronleichnam.html> (17.2.2010). Regarding the importance of public ceremonies in Catholic and Protestant missions cf. Helge WENDT, *Die missionarische Gesellschaft. Mikrostrukturen einer kolonialen Globalisierung*, Stuttgart 2011 (*Missionsgeschichtliches Archiv* 17), pp. 180–182.

to the rich variations of indigenous ceremonies and ritual that characterized the »heathen land« from the missionary perspective<sup>144</sup>.

For the nuns the feast of Corpus Christi was of crucial importance. While in Europe the annual holding of the procession constituted an important event in Catholic practice, in the missionary context its outcome (i.e. the grandness of the affair, indigenous participation) was interpreted as a marker for the local state of Catholicism. Due to the great importance of this event in Togo, Rome had even sanctioned its rescheduling from late spring to autumn. In contrast to Catholic Europe, where since the late thirteenth century Corpus Christi has been held on the Thursday next to Trinity Sunday, in Togo it was celebrated in autumn and thus after the end of the rainy season<sup>145</sup>. In the missionary context, Catholic feasts were also understood as means of evangelization. Accordingly, elaborately staged public events attracted non-Catholic people and nourished their interest in the Church<sup>146</sup>. The fact that the festive procession, which the nuns used to refer to as the »triumphal procession of Christ«, actually took place in the »heathen land« even enhanced its religious significance in their eyes. The public manifestation of the power of Catholicism was thereby directed toward both the indigenous people as well as European religious rivals. In particular in Togo, where both Christian denominations worked side by side, the Corpus Christi procession was regarded as the demonstration of Catholic superiority. In 1904, a Lomé-based nun referred to the Corpus Christi procession as an event that the »Protestants were not able to accomplish«. Before closing, however, she emphasized the proselytizing function of the whole affair when she added: »May God conquer as many souls as possible on this day«<sup>147</sup>.

Generally speaking, missionary nuns played a key role in the staging of Corpus Christi processions. They set up and attired (at least one of) the outdoor altars, one of which was always established close to the local women's convent, and decorated the paths connecting them. They wove flower wreaths or arches and produced or painted little banners or garlands, which they attached to trees along the procession routes just as they knew it from Europe. Besides, the nuns appointed and instructed a number of their missionary schoolgirls to become »little black angels« as they called them. For this purpose, the girls were dressed in white clothes and attired with wreaths. In

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144 Some nuns ventured beyond the Christian enclaves of the missionary compounds on a regular basis. Their letters offer rich descriptions of indigenous religious practice and show that the nuns were familiar with the sight (and sound, smell etc.) of it.

145 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Bertholdine Scholz, 26.11.1916.

146 Cf. Johannes THAUREN, *Die Mission in der ehemaligen deutschen Kolonie Togo*, Steyl 1931, p. 21.

147 »Möge der liebe Heiland an diesem Tage doch recht viele Seelen erobern.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Norberta Vaßen, 4.9.1904.

Togo, a set of white clothes and attire, which was either produced by the local nuns or received from European benefactors, was always readily available at the congregation's headquarters and lent to the individual outpost places when needed. According to the nuns' reports, their pupils who formed an integral part of the processions did enjoy dressing up as »angels«. Apart from moving on top of the procession, the white-dressed children also flanked the outdoor altars, a practice designed to honor (the festive entry of) the Eucharist (Figure 22<sup>148</sup>).

In an elaborate description of her first Corpus Christi procession in Lomé in 1916, Sister Bertholdine Scholz mentioned that 170 children that, dressed up in white, attended the procession. In 1916 the mission in Lomé had finally managed to obtain a special permission from a British officer to carry out the procession. This was necessary since this part of the colony had been under British occupation since August 1914<sup>149</sup>. According to Sister Bertholdine, who had arrived in Togo only one week before the outbreak of the Great War in July 1914, the nuns and their pupils had worked day and night in the production of the festive decoration for the procession in 1916<sup>150</sup>. All persons involved in the preparations showed great energy and ingenuity. On the day before the procession, the open air altars were erected and decorated with flowers, candles and statues by the members of the diverse Catholic associations in charge. As usual, the nuns took charge of the decorations of the altar which was established close to their place. The Lomé women's convent once again played a central role in the organization and realization of a public Catholic event. This applied to the procession's performance as well as to its preparation, since, for instance, all articles of clothing and attire needed in the staging of the feast were produced and stored there<sup>151</sup>.

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148 AG SSps, Togo–Fotos, Agome Palime, Tg 119, »Altar Corpus Christi procession in Palime near sisters' home«.

149 German Togo was officially handed over to the British and French occupying powers on August 27<sup>th</sup> 1914. According to the first decision made between the governors of Gold Coast, Hugh Charles Clifford, and Dahomey, Charles Noufflard, the occupied territory was divided into two zones. The British took charge of the districts Lomé, Misahoë, Kete-Kratschi and the south-western part of Mangu. The French, in turn, occupied the districts Anehó, Atakpamé, Sokodé and the remaining part of Mangu. Cf. SEBALD, Togo, pp. 607–609.

150 Cf. AG SSps 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Bertholdine Scholz, 26.11.1916.

151 Cf. *ibid.*

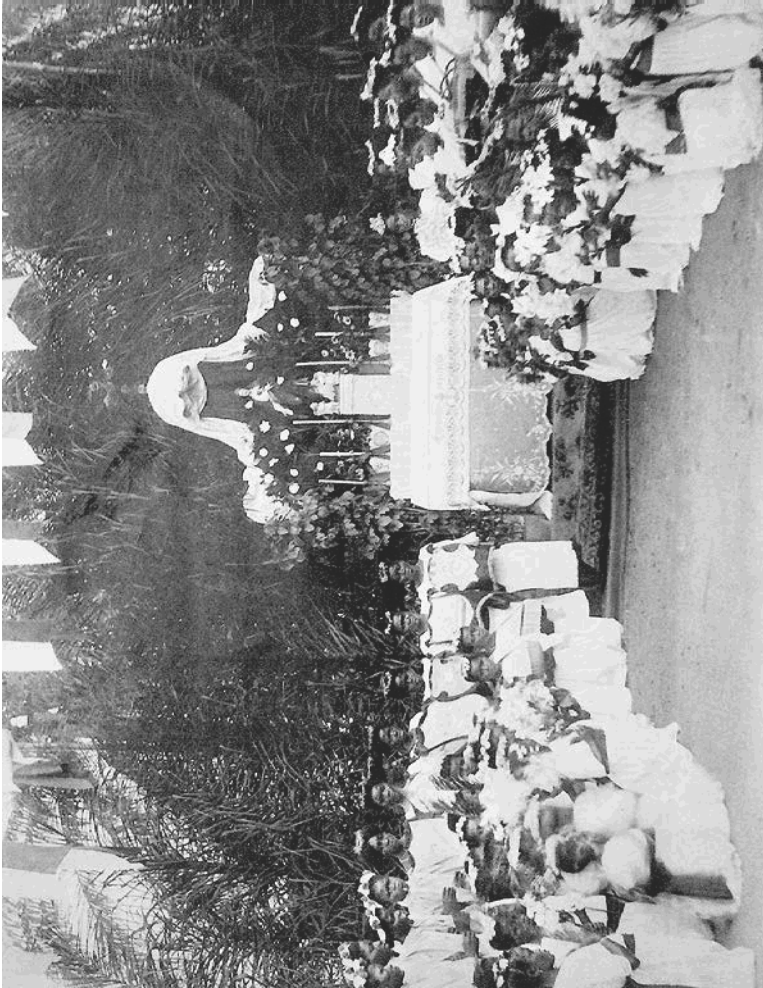


Figure 22: »Altar Corpus Christi procession in Palime near sisters' home«, between 1905 and 1917;  
AG SSpS Togo-Fotos, Agome Palime: Tg 119.

The women's convent also was the place for the indigenous participants of the ceremony to get dressed up in the morning of the feast day. Then the Catholic community assembled on the church square for a festive high mass after which the procession formed up. Sister Bertholdine described in detail the structure of the »triumphal procession of the Redeemer through the town«, as she put it<sup>152</sup>. Headed by a boy who carried a cross, ordered groups of male missionary pupils and around thirty standard bearers formed its top. They were followed by the Catholic town girls. Behind them, the uniformly dressed members of the diverse Catholic associations of females (Congregation of Mary, Women's Association) were arranged just in front of the local Catholic band and choir. Behind the musicians went the white dressed children carrying flags, flowers, palms and cushions with a range of symbols. They were followed by the nursery pupils, who were also clad in white and, moreover, wore yellow sashes and golden diadems. Dressed in this peculiar way they were to symbolize the twenty-four eldest mentioned in the book of Revelation of John<sup>153</sup>. According to Sister Bertholdine, in front of the baldachin »a considerable number of acolytes« were lined up who »announced the arrival of the Lord with bells«<sup>154</sup>. Beneath the baldachin, which was carried by the chronologically first Lomé Catholics, the priests carried the monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament. They were followed by the Catholic association of boys, the male parishioners and ultimately the women Catholics. The nuns, in turn, mingled with the participants of the procession to ensure that all groups of missionary pupils kept the solemn attitude and religious discipline considered appropriate on this occasion<sup>155</sup>. Consequently, the procession moved through the colonial capital Lomé. From Sister Bertholdine's point of view, while the missionary pupils altogether behaved well (meaning that they prayed and behaved similarly to Catholic believers in Germany) the townspeople's behavior, in contrast, gave reason for complaint – which the nun explained by the fact that a number of non-Catholics had joined them. Altogether, however, Sister Bertholdine saw the Corpus Christi procession of 1916 as an extremely important event for the evangelization of Togo. In her description of the people's reaction to this public manifestation of Catholic belief in the streets of Lomé she noted:

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152 Ibid.

153 Cf. Revelation 4:4.

154 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Bertholdine Scholz, 26.11.1916.

155 For instance, when the procession, which was held on a hot day in November, passed a fountain, groups of children stepped out to drink. In such cases, the nuns did their best to rearrange the groups to avert the disturbance of the solemnity of the procession and have the procession proceed. Cf. *ibid.*

On either side of the procession the crowd was standing in eager anticipation. The sick dragged himself out of his bed, the old man [dragged himself] with the aid of his cane in front of the hut to see the procession and to receive the blessing. [...] Devoutly the Christians were sitting on their knees and even many a heathen followed their example. A Mohammedan bowed to the earth during the blessing. Did he sense the presence of God or was it a holy tremble about the power of Catholicism that evoked his reverence? This is why the mission does everything to ensure that the church services are carried out as festively as possible – to win over the heathens for the holy religion by means of external appeal. Surely a beam of grace penetrated many a heathen's soul during the procession, which one day will perhaps let him find the way to true light<sup>156</sup>.

This account highlights the multiple functions Corpus Christi processions had from the women missionaries' point of view. On the one hand, the solemn and visible movement of Christ (in the form of the consecrated bread) through the town of Lomé transformed the event into a »triumphal procession« of the Catholic God through the »heathen land«<sup>157</sup>. Simultaneously, the priests blessed those parts (streets, squares, houses etc.) of the town that the procession actually passed. On the other hand, the staging of the procession was supposed to function as a means for the Church to attract larger numbers of non-Christians (or at least to awe them). Last but not least, the elaborate celebration of high church feasts also mattered to the nuns with regard to their own religious identity as it allowed them to work to the greater honor of God. For the Servants of the Holy Spirit, Corpus Christi belonged to the most important religious feasts because their collective sense of spirituality was closely related to Eucharist forms of prayer<sup>158</sup> and they engaged in the solemn realization of the annual event worldwide. In Togo in 1916, the image

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156 »Zu beiden Seiten der Prozession harrten die Menschenmassen in spannender Erwartung. Der Kranke schleppte sich von seinem Lager, der Greise mit Hilfe seines Krückstockes vor die Hütte, um den Zug zu sehen und den Segen zu empfangen. [...] Andächtig lagen die Christen auf den Knien und selbst manche Heiden folgten ihrem Beispiel. Ein Mohammedaner machte beim Segen eine Verbeugung bis zur Erde. Ob er die Gegenwart des großen Gottes ahnte, oder ob ein heiliger Schauer vor der Macht des katholischen Glaubens ihm diese Ehrfurcht entlockte? Darum bietet die Mission auch alles auf, die gottesdienstlichen Handlungen auf das festlichste abzuhalten, um die Heiden durch den äusseren Reiz für die hl. Religion zu gewinnen. Sicherlich wird manchem armen Heiden bei diesem Umzug ein Strahl der Gnade in die Seele gedrungen sein, sodass er vielleicht später noch einmal den Weg zum wahren Licht findet.« Ibid.

157 For example, Sister Bertholdine concluded her report as follows: »Indeed, the Corpus Christi procession is the triumphal procession of God concealed in the form of bread, the Redeemer of the world [...]« (»Ja, die Fronleichnamsprozession ist der Triumphzug des unter Brotgestalt verborgenen Gottes, des Weltheilandes [...]«) Ibid.

158 Individual and collective adoration of the exposed sacrament belonged to the central religious practices performed by the nuns. On certain occasions the Servants of the Holy Spirit adopted the practice of the forty-hours prayer, i.e. the continuous adoration of the exposed sacrament throughout forty hours, a practice of devotion dating from the sixteenth century.

of a solemn course of the celebration was modeled on the ceremonies held in Europe. However, the account quoted shows that the realization of the feast depended on the collaboration of the indigenous Catholic population, which both engaged in its preparation and was crucial to its performance. And while in 1916 the Togo-based nuns could be pleased with the course of the Corpus Christi procession, this was not the case always and everywhere. The procession described above occurred on the heyday of Catholicism during the Servants of the Holy Spirits' presence in Lomé. The celebration of Corpus Christi, however, also mattered to the nuns established in missionary frontiers.

The first record of a Corpus Christi procession staged in New Guinea traces back to 1902. That year, Sister Philomena Herzog wrote to Europe a letter of twenty-five pages in which she reflected on her first year of missionary experience on Tumleo Island including a detailed description of the Corpus Christi celebrations. The local nuns, assisted by the missionary pupils, also engaged eagerly in both the preparation and realization of a procession. Therefore, the mission's indigenous employees at first constructed a »broad and beautiful path« designated as the main route of the procession. Starting at the missionary compound the procession led to an altar which had been erected close to the women's convent. Then it moved on across the missionary coconut plantations and led to three of the island's villages<sup>159</sup>. The nuns decorated the front side of their convent with colored banners, garlands and palm leaves. They erected a triumphal arch of palm leaves fixing plates with symbols of the Eucharist along the way to the church. In addition, they sewed white suits for a number of male missionary pupils who took a special part in the procession as standard bearers. According to Sister Philomena, the missionary pupils took great joy in the preparation of the event.

Her overall description of the feast suggests that the nuns endeavored to recreate a Corpus Christi procession as they knew it from Germany. Having collected the missionary pupils at the convent and dressed them in festive attire, the nuns sought to arrange the procession according to their own ideal of order and discipline, a task that obviously encountered the resistance of the participants. According to Sister Philomena it was »a hopeless work with this crowd being so unruly at times«<sup>160</sup>. She also complained that the Catholic women who participated in the procession would adopt a somewhat devout behavior only after having been rebuked by the nuns, and the Catholic men could be controlled only by »a stream of slaps«<sup>161</sup>. Ultimately, the procession, which was spearheaded by a carrier of the image of the crucified Christ, con-

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159 AG SSps PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Philomena Herzog, 2.8.1902, p. 17.

160 Ibid., p. 18.

161 Ibid., p. 20.



sisted of a group of male pupils that was followed by groups of female pupils, housemaids and women. Then the standard bearers marched alongside other boys who, by ringing bells, announced the arrival of the elements that Catholics honor(ed) as the Blessed Sacrament. Then came the priest carrying the monstrance, which was covered by a (according to the writer »poor«) baldachin. This was followed by the priests, the friars and the nuns. The Catholic men formed the tail of the procession. Altogether, Sister Philomena described the event as a »poor but beautiful triumphal procession of the divine Redeemer in the sacrament of love«<sup>162</sup>, which – she was convinced – had pleased God no less than any of the magnificent processions held in Europe, considering that in Tumleo »his company was made up of all the newly gained sheep in his folds, all of whom less than 6 years ago had still been deeply held in the abhorrence of heathendom and hadn't even heard about His love in the Blessed Sacrament«<sup>163</sup>.

Yet, Sister Philomena Herzog did not conceal her disappointment about the lack of interest that the procession encountered when it reached the first village. She wrote:

What a sad reception the Blessed Sacrament was given here! Neither wreaths [or] triumphal arches nor little altars could be seen; instead the heathens were lying and standing in front of their huts in their birthday suits watching us with curiosity and puzzlement. How many of them have attended religious instruction or heard many a thing about our belief from their Christian neighbors, and yet they don't want to follow the call of grace. It is too difficult for them to renounce their heathen customs and to attend the Christian duties. If living among these unfortunates already makes you feel like praying for the proselytism of the heathen, in this hour it is a true longing of the heart; indeed you almost can't help crying at the sight of this distress<sup>164</sup>.

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162 Ibid., p. 19.

163 »Nichts desto weniger war es doch ein schöner Triumphzug, an welchem der göttliche Heiland nicht weniger seinen Wohlgefallen gehabt wird als an manchen prunkvollen Prozessionen Europas, bestand seine Begleitschaft doch aus lauter Neugewonnenen seiner Herde zugezählten Schafe, die alle noch vor weniger als 6 Jahren tief in den Gräueln des Heidentums steckten und bis dahin von seiner Liebe im hl. Sakramente niemals etwas gehört hatten.« Ibid., p. 19.

164 »Aber Welch ein trauriger Empfang wurde hier dem Allerheiligsten Sakramente bereitet. Kein Laubgewinde kein Triumphbogen noch Altärchen war zu sehen, dagegen lagen und standen die Heiden an ihren Hütten in ihrem Naturkleide neugierig und verwundert uns zuschauend. Wie viele unter ihnen haben schon öfters dem Unterrichte beigewohnt oder von ihren christlichen Nachbarn doch manches über den unseren Glauben gehört, aber sie wollen dem Rufe der Gnade noch immer nicht folgen. Es ist ihnen zu schwer ihren heidnischen Gewohnheiten zu entsagen und den Pflichten des Christentums nachzukommen. Fühlt man sich jetzt, da man inmitten der Unglücklichen wohnt, im Allgemeinen schon mehr angetrieben für die Bekehrung der Heiden zu beten, so war es einem jetzt in dieser Stunde ein wahres Herzensbedürfnis, ja selbst der Tränen konnte man sich nicht enthalten bei dem Anblicke solchen Elendes.« Ibid., p. 20.

Similar narratives were delivered by many nuns operating in early-twentieth-century New Guinea. According to their depictions of Corpus Christi processions, the nuns perceived the actual presence or movement of Christ in the Sacrament through »heathen« space (the town, village, street, »bush«, home etc.) as a source of religious power that potentially affected the (Catholic as well as non-Catholic) participants and bystanders<sup>165</sup>. In their eyes the non-Catholic cultural setting not only compensated for the lack of festive accessories (as compared to Europe) but – quite the contrary – enhanced the significance of the procession precisely because it involved that »new« Catholics performed Catholic ritual in the «heathen land» and adored the Eucharist<sup>166</sup>. Hence, notwithstanding the high workload that the preparation entailed, Corpus Christi processions were highly welcomed in all missionary settings and would be staged at great expenditure of time and effort. According to the records, the event and its preparations were also welcomed by the missionary pupils who took key roles in its performance. The nuns, in turn, perceived the increasing solemnity the processions adopted over the years as a sign of Catholic advance. In 1932, an experienced nun, who had been living in New Guinea for nineteen years, wrote that the feast of Corpus Christi in Manam Island was celebrated more beautifully every year<sup>167</sup>. Her use of the term »beautiful« in this context related to her understanding of solemnity and aesthetics in Catholic devotional practice. A »beautiful« course of events entailed the behavior and quantity of the indigenous participants, the decoration of the diverse settings as well as the adornment of the diverse outdoor altars.

Descriptions of Corpus Christi processions figured prominently in the chronicles throughout the twentieth century. This again suggests that these events constituted a heyday in the missionary almanac. When the first nuns returned to New Guinea from the Australian exile to engage in the rebuilding of the mission after 1946, they immediately aimed to tie in with this pre-war religious practice. In 1948, the first solemn Corpus Christi procession was held in the regional Catholic center in Alexishafen. According to the chronicler, indigenous Catholics actively contributed to its preparation and attended the feast in considerable quantities<sup>168</sup>. Up to 1960, the central elements of

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165 Similarly, a nun in Monumbo, a particularly difficult place for evangelization in New Guinea, suggested that the grace of God somehow drew them out of their houses and made them watch the procession passing by. Cf. AG SSsP PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Christophora Einzmann, 28.8.1905.

166 For example, in 1954 the chronicler of the Marienberg convent situated in the New Guinea interior wrote with regard to the recently celebrated feast of Corpus Christi: »It was edifying to see the crowds kneeling in the hot sun adoring the Blessed Sacrament.« AG SSsP PNG Chroniken, Marienberg, June 1954–1955, p. 1.

167 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 7.6.1932.

168 AG SSsP PNG Chroniken, Regionalhaus Alexishafen, 20.6.1948, p. 3.

the feast (children dressed in white, outdoor altars, structure of the procession etc.) remained unchanged. The chronicler reproduced the terms of her antecessors when she drew her conclusions from the Corpus Christi procession held in 1948:

Certainly, the dear Redeemer was also pleased about this triumphal procession that was staged for Him here in the heathen country. May the Eucharist sun of grace rise soon over all heathens and lead them to the true source of grace<sup>169</sup>.

Such statements once again emphasize the great importance constructions and imaginations of space and place had for religious encounters. The Catholic venture of evangelization, like colonialism, was a spatializing project. Ecclesiastical authorities remade pre-existing maps of non-European territories by dividing them into ecclesiastical units and establishing new boundaries. Once positioned in the field, missionaries sought to impose their own topographies on these territories. Having gained access to land and local resources, they attempted more generally to refashion colonial space according to their own imagination and their own religious and economic ends. The nuns also contributed to the project of material and symbolic transformation of what they perceived to be »heathen lands« for both religious and secular reasons. Their perception of space was connected to gendered practices and a hierarchical interpretation of aesthetic values closely associated with elements of an age-old feminine monastic culture in Europe.

Catholic ideas of religious expansion were inextricably linked with missionary visions regarding the refashioning of colonial space. This was closely related to construction activity and the establishment of sacred and other Catholic spaces (i.e. churches, convents), which, in turn, were understood as both important sources for and symbols of Catholic consolidation in the respective region. In addition, the creation of »Catholic space« also mattered to individual nuns in that the configuration of, for instance, convents shaped their mission experience. However, the growing density of Catholic edifices constituted but one feature of the missionary program to transform what its proponents called »heathen lands«. Despite the growing symbolic dominance of Catholicism manifest in, for instance, impressive churches or convents, alternative religious practices and belief systems coexisted in the fields. Religious expansion, understood as the material and geographic advance of Catholicism in previously non-Christian areas of the globe, can thus be seen

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169 »Gewiss hat sich auch der lb. Heiland über diesen Triumphzug gefreut, der ihm hier im Heidenland bereitet wurde. Möge die eucharistische Gnadensonne recht bald über alle Heiden aufgehen und sie zur wahren Gnadenquelle führen.« *Ibid.*, p. 4.

as the mere framework that had yet to be filled in. The next chapter therefore turns to the nexus of cultural practice and religious ritual and discusses what missionaries referred to as the »internal« expansion of the Catholic Church.

## 4. Work hidden by Statistics

In parallel to the external (geographic, material and symbolic) expansion of the Church, ecclesiastical authorities also pursued its internal development, striving for what SVD order »historian« Karl Müller called the »spiritual advance« of the missionary venture<sup>1</sup>. Ecclesiastical authorities took the quantitative overview of sacramental practice as a crucial indicator of Catholic advance in the respective ecclesiastical units, and likewise was the (ideally increasing) number of missionary pupils referred to by the heads of the prefectures and vicariates in order to demonstrate positive trends with regard to the consolidation of a Catholic infrastructure in the respective societies.

What remains obscure in these functional reports, however, are the complex processes and activities that lay at the base of social and religious change indicated in the anonymous statistics. Apart from a few obvious turning points, such as times of war or the changing political framework due to military occupation, the statistics do not provide indices that would allow for a more integrating interpretation of religious change in terms of taking into consideration alternative factors to missionary agency. The trend indicated by the official statistics (at least in peacetimes) is clear: Growing numbers of missionaries preached in an expanding institutional framework to growing numbers of indigenous people and administered increasing quantities of sacraments to a rising Catholic community. On the other hand, little room was given to potential setbacks, periods of stagnation or any reflection on the meaning of Catholic practice in the various cultural contexts. Moreover, official missionary reports posted to Rome, being based on the assumption that sacramental practice remained essentially unchanged regardless of the respective cultural setting or social framework, were quite biased. Finally, the statistical assessment of religious expansion tended to obscure the gendered dimension of missionary agency in that it focused on elements that in the Catholic Church were traditionally linked with the agency of priests (i.e. the administering of sacraments<sup>2</sup>). However, a lot of »silenced« kind of work was performed by women missionaries, – a fact that although hardly reflected in the official statistics indeed did contribute to their outcome.

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1 MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, p. 242.

2 Hermann Hiery's published collection of photographs from German New Guinea suggests that the administration of the sacraments (i.e. baptism) also played a role in the visualization of missionary success to home audiences. Cf. Hermann Joseph HIERY (ed.), *Bilder aus der deutschen Südsee. Fotografien 1884–1914*, Paderborn 2004.

Over the last two decades a lively discussion has been taking place among scholars of colonial education in German Togo regarding the value of quantitative records of school enrolment and pupil numbers in missionary statistics<sup>3</sup> with the crucial point of contention being the diverging interpretations of the large (compared with other settings in the German colonial empire) quantities of missionary pupils shown for Togo. While some scholars have interpreted the large pupil numbers recorded as evidence for the comparably good educational situation in the colony<sup>4</sup>, others have pointed out the low educational standards in the quantitatively considerable outpost schools<sup>5</sup> or questioned the value of the statistics more generally. Historian Ralph Erbar, for instance, has emphasized the propagandistic function of official missionary statistics and questioned their value for historical research declaring them as »artificially inflated«<sup>6</sup>. The missionary nuns' daily accounts, however, deliver insight into the learning situation in the classrooms revealing significant gaps between the number of pupils enrolled and average school attendance. In 1905, a teaching nun reported from Lomé that her lessons were attended by an average of forty-five children, although more than ninety were registered in her list<sup>7</sup>. In the Togolese missionary context (girls' and nursery) school attendance must be looked at critically also because much work was performed »behind« the quantitative records, for instance when nuns perambulated the indigenous towns day by day in order to collect (potential) pupils for missionary instruction.

Significantly, the daily practice of collecting pupils for missionary instruction was pursued wherever nuns were active in Togo. Every morning before classes started the nuns either swarmed out or sent the missionary girls, i.e., those girls and young women who resided with them at the convents as employees or boarders, to collect the pupils. Dispatching missionary girls to pick pupils up was a particularly promising method when the former belonged to elite families and enjoyed a good reputation among the local population<sup>8</sup>. Generally speaking, the nuns operating in Togo were convinced

3 The debate has started with educationalist Christel Adick's assessment that compared to other West African colonies the educational situation in German Togo, based on statistically extrapolated pupil numbers, was an exemplary one. Cf. ADICK, *Bildung und Kolonialismus*; Christel ADICK, *Bildungsstatistiken zum deutschen kolonialen Schulwesen und ihre Interpretation*, in: HEINE/VAN DER HEYDEN (eds), *Studien*, pp. 21–42.

4 Cf. ADICK, *Bildung und Kolonialismus*, i.e. pp. 305f; GRÜNDER, *Geschichte*, p. 128.

5 Cf. SEBALD, *Togo*, p. 504.

6 ERBAR, »Ein Platz an der Sonne«, p. 274.

7 Sister Paulina Weyand wrote that although some of her pupils sometimes were absent for »almost a month«, school attendance in the Togolese coast was nonetheless regular. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Paulina Weyand, 23.7.1905.

8 This was the case in Lomé, where Maria, a chief's daughter, used to collect the nursery pupils for instruction. Her social status was explicitly appreciated by the nuns. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Norberta Vaßen, 4.9.1904.

of the necessity »to lure«<sup>9</sup> or »to fetch« their students to school<sup>10</sup>. In 1911 (and thus six years after the opening of the first local girls' school), a teaching nun reported from Atakpamé that every morning she spent between one and one and a half hours on the gathering of her nursery-school pupils in town<sup>11</sup>. And one of her colleagues, who taught a group of indigenous girls aged between two and twenty in the girls' school in the coastal town of Agbodrafo (Porto Seguro)<sup>12</sup>, noted that even though she perambulated about one third of the town during a designated hour every morning before classes started some of her pupils still managed to be absent for weeks<sup>13</sup>. Sister Custodia Engels, another teaching nun, reported from the women's convent in Kpalimé that she collected her pupils for school »because if you want them to attend school you have to collect the little black heads«<sup>14</sup>. However, although these nuns obviously possessed a considerable knowledge of the indigenous town structures and their pupils' lifestyles, the collection of pupils did not always flow smoothly, as shows a comment by Sister Custodia who had to admit that »at times, while you are searching for one, the others would run away again«<sup>15</sup>. Even the nuns established at the regional center of Catholicism in Lomé regularly sent their resident housemaids to collect (absent) pupils for instruction. In addition, they regularly visited the town themselves in the hope to positively impact on missionary school attendance.

The example of school attendance in colonial Togo shows that the study of day-to-day accounts against the material presented in the statistics constitutes a fruitful exercise. This is particularly the case with regard to those data which in the eyes of ecclesiastical authorities indicated religious change. Missionary work performed by nuns was hardly ever reflected in the official reports compiled by male leaders, who tended to subsume the agency of nuns in evangelization as a merely assisting function to the works performed by priests. This particularly applied to any kind of work done apart from the education of girls and women. Thus, while the nuns' commitment to the religious and secular education of girls was gradually acknowledged by ecclesi-

9 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 6.9.1906.

10 AG SSpS Tg 034 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 12.6.1904.

11 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Fidelis Weitkamp, 7.9.1911.

12 This school is referred to as an outpost school because Agbodrafo did not have a women's convent. Consequently, the teaching nun resided in the nearby town of Aného and took a train to what Europeans then called Porto Seguro on a daily basis.

13 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Fidelis Weitkamp, 7.11.1906.

14 »Morgens freue ich mich immer, wenn ich die Kinder für die Schule aufsuchen kann; denn wenn man hier gern was in der Schule hat, muß man erst die kleinen Schwarzköpfchen zusammenholen, und wenn man manchmal die einen sucht, laufen die anderen wieder davon.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Custodia Engels, 8.9.1907.

15 Ibid.

astical leaders, their broad engagement in nursing activities was hardly mentioned, at least in relation to what Church authorities understood as religious advance.

In his book on the global Catholic missionary venture published in the aftermath of the universal missionary exhibition set up in the Vatican gardens in 1925, missiologist Robert Streit named charity as one of the missionary nuns' major fields of work. Streit, who depicted the nuns in missions as the embodiment of selfless Christian charity, specified their activities in this context as the »care for the sick, the poor and the infirm«<sup>16</sup>. A similar assessment was given by a priest in an article published in 1926 in which missionary nuns were characterized, *inter alia*, as »angels of mercy« who »would not stop short of any sacrifice«<sup>17</sup>. According to Father Baltes, they »tirelessly hasted from hut to hut in order to comfort the sick and to cure their wounds, to feed the hungry, to cover their bareness, to bury their dead and all this without seeking remuneration«<sup>18</sup>. In pursuance of this idealizing image of female Catholic charity constructed by priests, the missionary nun, in her selfless manner, engaged in all kinds of caring activity regardless of her own state of health. Yet, even though the missionary nuns, as characterized by Baltes, »gave everything and asked for nothing«, their works of charity remained, to speak in terms of early-twentieth-century Catholic missiology, on the level of »physical works of mercy«<sup>19</sup>. As such, they were subordinated to the religious works performed by priests. This conception of sick-nursing as a peculiarly feminine expression of charity or – to stick to the terminology of early-twentieth-century missiology – indirect method of evangelization<sup>20</sup> not only blurred its gradual professionalization but also masked its potential to directly impact on what was otherwise celebrated as Catholic advance. The invisibility of a direct religious impact of nursing and its subsumption under the (merely complementing) field of charitable activities, moreover, impacted on historical research that, giving prevalence to officially produced missionary sources, hardly ever discussed female interpretations of this peculiar kind of work performed by women missionaries.

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16 STREIT, *Die Weltmission*, p. 103.

17 BALTES, *Der Beruf*, p. 37.

18 »Daher eilt sie unermüdlich in die Hütten, um die Kranken zu trösten, Heilmittel auf ihre Wunden zu legen, die Hungrigen zu speisen, ihre Blöße zu bedecken, ihre Toten zu begraben, und das alles, ohne Lohn zu suchen. Sie gibt alles und verlangt nichts«. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

20 Missiologists conceptualized charitable activities performed by nuns in the missionary context as part of the indirect methods of evangelization. Hence, in contrast to the foundation of missionary stations, catechesis and baptismal practice, all of which constituted the direct methods of evangelization, nursing in their understanding was a »service of love« that primarily helped to establish good and trustful relations between the mission and the indigenous populations. Cf. THAUREN, *Die Mission*, p. 28.



## Missionary Nursing in colonial Togo

While in German colonialism female secular nursing featured a strong patriotic element, the nursing practice of nuns took place under the keyword of Christian charity. In contrast to the activities of secular nurses in German Africa who, as historian Lora Wildenthal has shown, engaged predominantly in the (increasingly professionalized) medical care for colonists<sup>21</sup>, the nuns in Togo exclusively aimed at providing care for indigenous people and fellow women religious. Air dressing and the distribution of western medicine belonged to the central duties of nuns, who from the outset conceived of sick-nursing as both a preferable field in which Christian charity could be realized and a favored means to gain the confidence of their clients.

In Togo, the treatment of sick persons took place at two different sites, the convent and the indigenous home. Up to 1918, when a Catholic missionary hospital was set up, dispensaries were attached to all five of the women's convents. According to an official report by the head of the Lomé-based nuns of 1913, every morning up to thirty persons in need of medical care appeared at the women's convent asking for medicine or the treatment of wounds<sup>22</sup>. Similar statements figured in the concluding report on the Servants of the Holy Spirit's Togo mission according to which every day »many sick persons« showed up at the convents in Aného and Kpalimé asking for the treatment of their wounds. In return for free medical treatment given to both Catholics and non-Catholics the nuns received presents like »yam, chickens, fruits or the like«<sup>23</sup>. More important from the women missionaries' point of view, however, was the relationship based on trust that resulted from their engagement in medical care. The Togo-based nuns proudly reported that the people approached them on their own initiatives seeking for medical advice. This confidence in combination with the intimacy of the caring situation the nuns perceived as a possibility to perform Christian charity and a unique opportunity to »teach the people about God and eternity«<sup>24</sup>.

Missionary nuns thus added a »methodological« component to the conventional religious representation of nursing in the colonial missionary context. This was linked to both the contemporary secular nationalist women's claim of a »uniquely feminine caring role«<sup>25</sup> and a religious concept of nursing as the gendered expression of Christian charity and lovingness. Catholic women

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21 Cf. WILDENTHAL, *German Women*, p. 44.

22 AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Togo 1897–1913.

23 AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 2 1922, Durchführung (Berichte der Territorialoberinnen), Sr. Georgia van Oopen, Bericht über die Togomission, p. 5.

24 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Togo 1897–1913.

25 Lora Wildenthal has discussed secular nursing as a niche in the colonialist movement and the colonial state made by colonialist women. Cf. WILDENTHAL, *German Women*, pp. 13–53, i.e. 38.

writers, however, went beyond this conception of nursing, describing it as a particularly promising, yet exclusively feminine, method of evangelization. In 1914, Sister Perboyre Neuß, a German nun and author of the *Servants of the Holy Spirit's* first history to be published, stated that nursing in Togo was »one of the most effective means to imbue the heathen with veneration for the Christian religion and its representatives«<sup>26</sup> – not only would nursing account for a special relationship of trust between caregiver and patient but the caring situation as such would constitute a particularly promising framework for the former to evangelize the latter. The missionary nurses represented by Perboyre Neuß were agents of religious change.

Similarly, the nuns in the field understood nursing as a favored means to gain credits as women missionaries. According to Superior Provincial Georgia van Oopen, the nuns' engagement in nursing opened up to them social and geographical spaces particularly when it came to the care of the sick in the indigenous domestic environment. In return for this exclusively feminine »service of charity«, as Sister Georgia put it in her retrospective conclusion about women's missionary work in Lomé, the nuns gained rich spiritual awards that enabled them to enter a unique relationship of trust with the indigenous population:

The Lord blessed their [the nuns'] endeavors by granting them the full trust of the natives. Wherever they went they were most welcome, even in those places where no priest would venture<sup>27</sup>.

The passage quoted already indicates the second venue in which nursing took place in the missionary context: the indigenous household. Every afternoon a pair of nuns visited the towns or villages located in the vicinity of the Togolese convents. These so-called »house calls« were scheduled in the nuns' religious order of the day, thus constituting a compulsory component of female missionary practice. Missiologists and missionary priests alike emphasized the importance of regular house calls to the indigenous homesteads as nurturing the mission's relation with its neighboring populations. This way the nuns functioned as the emissaries of the Church and were expected to approach households in order to express general (material) helpfulness and friendliness, to distribute medicine, to inquire about the residents' well-being and to invite people to church and school<sup>28</sup>. Yet, the house

26 NEUSS, *Die Steyler Missionsschwestern*, p. 110.

27 »Der Herr belohnte ihre Arbeiten, da er ihnen das volle Zutrauen der Eingeborenen schenkte, denn überall wohin sie kamen, wurden sie mit Freuden empfangen, ja sogar in jenen Höfen, in die kein Priester hinzugehen wagte.« AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 2 1922, Durchführung (Berichte der Territorialoberinnen), Sr. Georgia van Oopen, Bericht über die Togomission, p. 3.

28 Cf. THAUREN, *Die Mission*, p. 20.

calls, moreover, were an attempt to ensure compliance with a certain social rhythm and Christian cultural patterns, at least in close proximity to the convents. This implied a peculiar, culturally grounded, way of treating sickness in the same ways as other aspects of religious and social practice such as the sphere of work or indigenous domestic arrangements. Sister Perboyre Neuß summarized the aim of the nuns' regular visits to what she referred to as the »Negroes' huts« in Togo as follows:

There it is essential to call on the lost lambs, to lead back those who are at faults, to animate the idle ones, to give strength to the weak and endangered ones, to admonish the errant ones, to care for and comfort the sick and not least to win new souls for the Kingdom of Christ<sup>29</sup>.

In the author's interpretation, the regular house calls paid to the indigenous home by the nuns were aimed at watching over the compliance of central elements of Christian social practice regarding mores, ethics of work, church attendance and the treatment of sickness. The house calls must thus be discussed with a view to their extended function. After all, they served the nuns' aim to impact on the social and religious organization of domestic (family) life and to nurture a relationship of trust between the indigenous people and the mission's representatives. Moreover, the nuns perceived their regular presence in the intimate space of the indigenous homes as a means to watch over the respect for Catholic ritual in relation with sickness and death. Or, to use the words of Sister Perboyre Neuß, who added to her outline of the nun's main task to regularly visit the indigenous homesteads:

And while conversing with the tenants, the sister has to keep her eyes and ears open to possibly espy a poor sick person languishing in a corner, an invalid old man or a weak little child whom she might prepare for holy baptism<sup>30</sup>.

Significantly, the author concluded her remarks on the importance of missionary home visits with a reference to emergency baptism. The inquiries made by nuns about people's state of health indeed functioned as a means to approach the issue of (emergency) baptism in due time. Or, to put it in other

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29 »Da gilt es, die verlorenen Schäflein aufzusuchen, die Irrenden zurückzuführen, die Trägen aufzumuntern, die Schwachen und Gefährdeten zu stärken, die Fehlenden zu ermahnen, die Kranken zu pflegen und zu trösten und nicht zu allerletzt auch neue Seelen für Christi Reich zu gewinnen«. NEUSS, Die Steyler Missionschwwestern, p. 108.

30 »Und während sich die Schwester mit den Hausbewohnern unterhält, muß sie Auge und Ohr recht offen halten, um zu erspähen, ob nicht irgendwo in einem Winkel ein armer Kranker, ein hilfälliger Greis oder ein schwaches Kindlein dahinsieht, die sie auf den Empfang der heiligen Taufe vorbereiten könnte«. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

words, as apostolic workers they aimed to ensure that, at least in close proximity to the convent, nobody deceased without having been administered the sacrament of baptism or, in the case of the death of converts, extreme unction.

The sacrament of baptism in Catholicism constitutes the »door of the Church of Christ«<sup>31</sup>. Baptism designates the entry into a new life for it implies the candidate's becoming a child of God and a participant in all privileges flowing from the redemptive act. The act itself is therefore metaphorically depicted as a person's reception into the body of the Church<sup>32</sup>. Baptism removes all of the candidate's original and actual sins and eradicates all punishment due for past ones. Hence, if newly baptized people die before committing any new sin they are believed to »attain immediately to the kingdom of heaven«. By contrast, all humans who depart from life without baptism are excluded from this vision of God<sup>33</sup>.

Catholic doctrine acknowledges different forms of baptism. In the context under consideration it is important to distinguish between the so-called solemn baptism of infants or adults and emergency baptism. Just like in Europe, the offspring of Catholic parents in the fields of mission could be baptized right after birth. Newborns of non-Catholic parents, however, except in danger of death, could not be baptized because their Catholic upbringing was not guaranteed. Yet, in the missionary context priests often interpreted the parental permission to baptism as the consent to an extended future Catholic education by the mission: The consent of non-Catholic parents to the baptism of their children was often taken as an adequate basis for the administration of the sacrament. In all other cases, however, children and adults were baptized only after a period of religious instruction (catechesis) according to the biblical command of Christ who committed his apostles to teach and baptize all nations. In Togo catechesis usually lasted between one and two and a half years at the end of which the local priest decided about the candidates' admission to baptism<sup>34</sup>.

On the other hand, in case of necessity (i.e., the imminent danger of death due to illness or external threat) according to Catholic doctrine any person is authorized to administer and to receive the sacrament. Theologically, such

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31 Baptism, in: The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm> (7.12.2009).

32 Cf. Conversion, in: The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04347a.htm> (7.12.2009).

33 Baptism, in: The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm> (7.12.2009).

34 Significantly, a discrepancy existed between the duration of catechesis classes in the Togolese coast and the country's interior. While in the coastal settings religious instruction in preparation of baptism lasted roughly one year, in the interior it lasted up to two and a half years. Cf. THAUREN, *Die religiöse Unterweisung*, p. 145.

a deathbed conversion implied the remission of all sin. By baptizing a moribund non-Catholic person, the nuns were thus able to immediately save the candidate's soul for eternity leading her/him to redemption. This already points to the second important feature of emergency baptism in the missionary context. In contrast to the other sacraments (communion, confirmation, confession, marriage, extreme unction and ordination), baptism in the religious form of emergency (or private) baptism is recognized by Catholic doctrine as the only sacrament that (in the absence of a priest) can be administered by any person, irrespective of religion, class or sex. And while in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe for lay people or women the chances to baptize candidates in emergency were rare, the situation was different in the mission fields. In contrast to Europe, where priests were available in the respective places and institutions (e.g. hospitals), nuns in missions often were the only persons on the spot disposed to administer emergency baptism. Consequently, the baptizing nun, who actively saved souls by administering the sacrament to moribund non-Catholic persons, not only constituted a powerful image figuring prominently in female narratives of the missionary encounter but also formed an essential part of female conceptions of nursing in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century missionary context.

Due to the missionary aim to anticipate the death of non-baptized persons, the nuns tried to keep informed about the villagers' state of health. In this regard their indigenous pupils (whether voluntarily or not) played a crucial role as informants. Moving between the missionary stations and the indigenous towns or villages on a daily basis, the pupils were familiar with both worlds and social networks thus being able to mediate between the missionaries and the indigenous population. The transmission of information (or gossip) regarding ill persons from the villages via the missionary pupils to the nuns is a recurrent theme in the correspondence. The sources, however, also show the high potential for conflict (between the mission, missionary pupils as mediators and the villagers) this entailed. Besides, indigenous Catholics of any age informed the nuns about sick relatives or other ill persons in their proximity. Ultimately, the references made by the nuns suggest that they also developed considerable skills in reading indigenous cultural signs related to sickness and its treatment. For instance, a nun who complained about the »misfortune, distress and blindness« that befell her whenever she observed indigenous cultural practice of animal sacrifices in the course of her regular visits to the town of Atakpamé, at the same time noted that animal sacrifices were »usually the best signs for us that a critically ill person is nearby«<sup>35</sup>.

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35 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Ambrosia Hamerts, 17.9.1911.

According to the Atakpamé chronicler the nuns were informed about the whereabouts of ill and needy persons »in private« by indigenous Catholics<sup>36</sup>, whereupon they set out for up to three-hour marches in order to see the ill persons at the circumjacent farms. Significantly, the nuns relativized all physical burdens resulting from house calls to remote farms pointing out the high spiritual awards they derived from the personal administering of emergency baptism<sup>37</sup>. In a summary of female missionary work in Atakpamé between 1905 and 1910 posted to Europe, Sister Didaka Micheel enclosed a quantitative assessment of the emergency baptisms administered by the local nuns<sup>38</sup>. To this »informal statistic« she added referring to the emotions that the nuns experienced when functioning as ministers: »Each day that we were able to snatch another soul from the devil was a day of rejoicing for us«<sup>39</sup>. With the same enthusiasm the nuns in all Togolese settings reported about each occasion on which they were personally in the position to baptize a moribund non-Catholic person. They shared the conviction that the active administration of emergency baptism and the subsequent death of the candidate constituted one of the happiest experiences in missionary life.

The most happy experience I was accorded there – I can't conceal it – was that I was allowed to baptize a little heathen child in danger of death. It died soon thereafter and [is now] a little angel in heaven. I was so glad and deeply thanked God for the amazing grace to allow me to be the tool which opened the way to heaven to this poor little child<sup>40</sup>.

From the nuns' point of view, the missionary settings in the country's interior, where fewer priests were present, held great promise in terms of raising the opportunities for women to actively administer the sacrament of baptism or, to put it in the words of a nun in Togo, to »make a good catch«<sup>41</sup>. Thus,

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36 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Einiges über das Wirken unserer Schwestern in Atakpame, p. 6.

37 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Die Geschichte unseres Hauses in Atakpame 1905–1907.

38 According to this statistic, between October 1905 and April 1910 an average of three nuns baptized 123 critically ill persons in Atakpamé. AG SSpS 034 TOG 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Einiges über das Wirken der Schwestern in Atakpame, p. 8.

39 »Das waren jedes Mal Freudentage für uns, wenn wir wieder eine Seele dem Teufel entrissen hatten.« Ibid., p. 8.

40 »Die größte Freude die mir da zuteilwurde – ich kann's nicht verschweigen – war, dass ich ein Heidenkindchen in Todesgefahr habe taufen dürfen. Es ist schon bald gestorben und ein Engelchen im Himmel. Ich habe mich auch so sehr gefreut und so recht innig dem lb. Gott gedankt für die große Gnade, dass ich das Werkzeug sein durfte, welches diesem armen Kindchen den Weg zum Himmel öffnete.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Ehrenfrieda Scheffers, May 1913.

41 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Rochia Jesenicnik, 16.2.1908.

while in the colonial and Catholic capital Lomé the nuns on encountering terminally ill non-Catholics would call for a priest, their colleagues in the country's interior (just like those in New Guinea) often administered emergency baptisms themselves. Certainly, the possibility to baptize in person constituted an integral part of the nuns' understanding of their engagement in nursing. Sister Rochia Jesenicnik (1873–1949), in her account of a case in which the religious community of Kpalimé took turns in the medical care of a seriously sick woman, preparing her for the reception of emergency baptism, recalled her thoughts en route to the patient's house: »Once, as I walked completely on my own I thought what it would be if I too happened to be as fortunate as to save a soul in danger of death«<sup>42</sup>. Thus, what in her view made the carrying out in person of the baptismal act so crucial was the fact that it constituted yet another level of religious advance in which the salvation of the candidate interacted with her own spiritual progress<sup>43</sup>.

Another important factor with regard to religious salvation due to the administration of emergency baptism was the subsequent death of the candidate. As mentioned earlier, in Catholicism the act of baptism signifies the soul's washing from all sin, an act that is symbolized by the use of water in the baptismal ceremony<sup>44</sup>. The nuns usually appreciated the rapid death of the candidate before being able to commit another sin and thus corrupting the spiritual bond with God established through the sacrament. In 1908, when an escape prisoner was shot by soldiers close to the Atakpamé convent, the local nuns interpreted the incident as a benefit to the escapee, as this way »he had the big fortune to receive holy baptism« before death, and they concluded that his »attempt to escape ultimately has opened up heaven to him«<sup>45</sup>. Such expressions of pleasure on the part of missionaries about the death of a recently baptized person must be understood in conjunction with religious doctrine: Since chances were low that persons who had been baptized in danger of death (and thus often without extensive religious instruction) in case they recovered would lead a life in accordance with Christian mores and commandments, the nuns rather appreciated the rapid death of baptis-

42 »Als ich einmal ganz alleine auf dem Weg dorthin war dachte ich mir, wenn denn auch einmal mir das Glück zuteilwürde, eine Seele noch in Todesgefahr zu retten.« Ibid.

43 In the case quoted, at the moment of his death there was another nun at the patient's side to administer emergency baptism. Pointing out the missed opportunity to function as a minister herself, Sister Rochia wrote: »But it wasn't me who was given the chance. Now you see, dear reverend Mother, that I am not lucky in the mission. Surely I am not good enough.« (»Aber es wurde mir nicht gegönnt. Nun sehen sie, ehrwürdige Mutter, daß ich kein Glück in der Mission habe. Ich bin sicher nicht brav genug.«) Ibid.

44 Cf. Baptism, in: The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm> (7.12.2009).

45 »Er hatte das große Glück vorher die hl. Taufe zu empfangen. Sein Fluchtversuch hat ihm also den Himmel geöffnet.« AG SSs 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 1.3.1908.

mal candidates before they were able to hazard salvation. The situation was all the more complicated when the nuns administered emergency baptism to children of Protestants or other convinced non-Catholics. In such cases, the nun who had administered the sacrament usually felt responsible for the candidate's religious education. This, however, was often contested by non-Catholic parents who sought to prevent the women missionaries from instructing their children in Catholic religion and devotional practice<sup>46</sup>. Generally speaking, whenever Togolese children baptized in emergency recovered the nuns faced a plethora of challenges because as members of the Catholic Church they were committed to respect Catholic religious and moral norms throughout their lives. This explains the surprisingly firm and cruel position they took on the occasion of a baptized indigenous child's immediate death. In 1909, a nun in Lomé referred to this issue by using a racial imagery: »This year the divine friend of children has taken to heaven lots of little black heads, washed white in the bath of baptism. We are always glad when the little ones die soon after baptism because once they are adults, nothing good becomes of them«<sup>47</sup>.

Thus, in the missionary context there was a basic intersection between nursing and baptismal practice. Its implications, however, diverged basically depending on the respective point of view. Their roles as caregivers enabled the nuns to approach physically debilitated people empowering them to perform what they perceived to be a crucial religious service that was connected to Catholic ritual around sickness and death. Visits to the sick were used by the nuns to either attempt to administer emergency baptism or to call for a priest to give extreme unction when Catholics were in mortal danger. In either case the nuns' engagement in nursing implied that they shared intimate situations with the recipients of their care and often accompanied them during their last moments of life<sup>48</sup>. In view of their religious subjectivities this meant that they not only collaborated in, but also *caused* the salvation of souls. This, of course, interacted with the nuns' individual spiritual merits. For the indigenous people, however, the missionary system of care implied

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46 For instance, a nun wrote about a young boy in Atakpamé who had been baptized by the nuns due to critical illness but then recovered. Consequently, the nun who had functioned as the minister of baptism returned to the family's residence to teach the boy the sign of the cross. This, however, was not appreciated by the boy's mother who, according to the narration, reacted fiercely: »As soon as the mother saw [this] she came and took away the child very angrily saying that she had already sacrificed this child to her idol. Well, it will certainly be very hard to win this child for the Lord.« (»Sobald [es] die Mutter sah, kam sie und nahm ganz wütend das Kind fort und sagte, dieses Kind hätten sie ihrem Götzen schon geopfert. Ja, es wird noch sehr schwer halten, dieses Kind für Christus zu gewinnen.«) AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Ambrosia Hamerts, 16.9.1907.

47 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Norberta Vaßen, 12.9.1909.

48 However, in single cases the caregiver-recipient relation was reverted and severely sick nuns were nursed by indigenous converted girls. Cf. Chapter 5, pp. 335 f.



that they were becoming the targets of these religious endeavors. For individuals residing within walking distance to the women's convents this meant that in particularly vulnerable situations of life (such as severe sickness or – as we will see – after childbirth) a nun was likely to drop by and unpack her medication as well as her holy water<sup>49</sup>. Here, Catholic concepts often translated into a coercive framework, for the patients' physical and psychological vulnerability became the initial point for intense attempts at his/her proselytization. This was especially the case with indigenous women, who were affected doubly by this close connection between nursing and baptismal practice.

Firstly, the gendered conception of Christian charity and medical caring practice in the missionary context impacted more on female patients, who generally constituted the nurses' primary targets. Secondly, indigenous women got involved with the missionary system of care because of their roles as mothers. Nursing nuns approached indigenous women either as the mothers of ill children or as women giving birth. From the Togo missionaries' point of view childbirth constituted an important event because, firstly, it entailed health risks for mother and child and, secondly, newly delivered babies were seen as potential candidates for the Church. This is why in Togo some nuns paid a visit to women who had just given birth – interestingly, despite the fact that Rome had banned nuns from engaging in gynecological activities and midwifery, which derived from the clerical suspicion that the intimacy of medical work was dangerous to purity<sup>50</sup>. In 1901, one of the founding nuns of the congregation's second Togoese convent in Aného wrote to Europe to inquire about the medical care of women in childbed. As she noted in her letter, it was the local priest who had advised her to visit women in childbed and to care for both mothers and newborns. Unfamiliar with mother and child health care, the nun asked the nurse's trainer nun in Europe to forward instructions »without letting a third sister know«<sup>51</sup>. However, although the medical care for women in childbed posed challenges rooted in religious concepts of chastity and sexual purity, house calls to mothers who had just given birth were nonetheless an important task to be performed by women

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49 For instance, in her report Sister Georgia van Oopen put it clearly when she summarized the most important function this kind of home visits had for the nuns in Togo: »It meant to call on the poor, abandoned and critically ill heathens and Christians in order to give them medication, to buoy them up and to tell them about the divine Redeemer, about baptism, about heaven etc.« (»Hieß es doch die armen verlassenen und schwerkranken Heiden und Christen aufzusuchen, um ihnen Arzneien zu verabreichen, ihnen Mut zuzusprechen und ihnen von dem göttlichen Heilande zu erzählen, von der Taufe, vom Himmel, etc.«) AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 2 1922, Durchführung (Berichte der Territorialoberinnen), Sr. Georgia van Oopen, Bericht über die Togomission, p. 3.

50 Cf. McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 626.

51 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 4.8.1901.

missionaries<sup>52</sup>. And again it was indigenous Catholic women and missionary pupils who, maintaining close relations with the mission, played an important role in that they informed the nuns about cases of childbirth in their home towns or villages. In each case, such information prompted a new attempt at proselytism. Whenever the nuns heard about a woman having given birth, one of them set out to visit the mother and to inquire about the state of health of mother and child so that in case of a life-threatening situation she might administer emergency baptism. Practically, however, the contact established with the indigenous mothers was also used by the nuns to talk them into agreeing on the solemn baptism of their newborns. In contrast to emergency baptism, which took place on the sickbed or deathbed and was often administered by the nurse in charge, solemn baptism was ministered by a priest in the framework of an (ideally festive) ceremony carried out in a church.

For indigenous women this implied that after childbirth a nun was very likely to show up to discuss the issue of baptism in one way or another. In fact, some women missionaries claimed to have changed indigenous attitudes toward Catholic ritual in relation with childbirth at different locations. In 1907, and thus only two years after the first nuns settled in the town of Atakpamé, Sister Didaka wrote that »earlier the number of children brought here for baptism was small, but since we have been here due to our persuasion we have been brought quite a lot, some of whom are not yet 8 days old«<sup>53</sup>. While this suggests that some indigenous parents, if not initiated, at least approved the baptism of their newborns, other examples pointed in a different direction. The following case, for instance, tells us about the social conditions that framed these solemn baptisms and the roles the nuns played in the realization of the ceremony which took place in the local church. According to Sister Didaka, some indigenous mothers »promised« their newborns to the nuns for baptism when they came to see them after they had given birth. In such cases, the nuns sent their indigenous housemaids to pick up the infants for the ceremony, which was to take place a few days later. In the following example Sister Didaka describes what happened when mothers changed their mind on the subject:

This morning another two children were baptized, although actually it should have been three. One arrived in time and the two house girls [we] had sent returned with empty hands, one with the note: »It shall be baptized on Sunday« and the other one:

52 Cf. Relinde MEIWES, *Katholische Frauenkongregationen und die Krankenpflege im 19. Jahrhundert*, in: *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 19 (2008), pp. 39–60, i.e. pp. 48f.

53 »Früher hat man die Kinder wenig zur Taufe gebracht, aber so lange wir hier sind, hat man auf unser Zureden recht viele gebracht, darunter mehrere die noch nicht 8 Tage alt sind.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 10.3.1907.

›The mother doesn't want it. That was indeed bad and so we asked the priest who was already waiting, if he could wait for a few minutes. When he agreed, a sister went off quite confidently because the mother had promised her the child. When the sister arrived at the house, the mother of the five-day-old child was calmly cooking mash. The sister took the mother to task for not letting the girl take the child with her. She answered that according to local custom it [the baby] should not be carried on the back. The sister laughed and told her that she didn't want to bind it on her back either but to carry it in her arms and hold the parasol overhead. Then the woman laughed as well, took a small little cloth and handed the child over to the sister. Half an hour later the sister returned her the little Wilhelm. Now she was full of joy about the little child of God and the thanking wouldn't come to an end<sup>54</sup>.

There are similar accounts relating to the Catholic stronghold on the Togolese coast. In 1909, Sister Norberta Vaßen reported that every Sunday afternoon solemn baptisms of infants were performed in the cathedral as a result of the nuns' regular visits to the young parents to obtain their consent to the christening of their newborns. On the day scheduled for the baptizing, missionary girls were sent to bring the candidates to church. The writer also noted that in 1909 some mothers brought their babies to church themselves<sup>55</sup>.

In Togo, solemn baptisms took place under special conditions with the marginal role assigned to the candidate's parents certainly constituting the most striking feature – this contrasted sharply with the conventional Catholic practice of infant baptism where the biological parents constituted key figures. In Togo the only input necessary on the part of the candidates' biological family was the parents' (or the mothers') consent. The baptismal ceremony as such was carried out by a priest in the local church often in the absence of the parents. The nuns not only paved the way for baptism by detecting the newborns, negotiating the issue of baptism with the parents and arranging their arrival in church but, moreover, cared for a christening robe and chose

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54 »Diesen Morgen wurden wieder zwei Kinder getauft. Drei sollten es sein. Eins stellte sich pünktlich ein und die beiden ausgeschickten Hausmädchen kamen leer zurück; eine mit der Nachricht: ›Sonntag soll es getauft werden‹ das andere: ›Die Mutter will es nicht‹. Das war ein wenig arg und wir fragten den schon bereitstehenden Priester, ob er vielleicht ein paar Minuten warten wollte. Als er bejahte, staffelte eine Schwester los, war sie doch ihrer Sache gewiß, die Mutter hatte ihre das Kind doch versprochen. Als die Schwester im Haus ankam, saß die Mutter des fünf Tage alten Kindes ganz gemütlich beim Breikochen. Die Schwester stellte die Frau zur Rede, weshalb sie dem geschickten Mädchen das Kindchen nicht mitgegeben habe? Da antwortete sie, es dürfe nach Landessitte noch nicht auf dem Rücken getragen werden. Die Schwester lachte und sagte ihr, sie wolle es auch nicht auf den Rücken binden sondern schön auf dem Arm tragen und den Schirm darüber halten. Da lachte die Frau auch, nahm ein kleines Tüchlein und überreichte der Schwester das Kind. Nach einer halben Stunde brachte ihr die Schwester den kleinen Wilhelm zurück. Nun war sie voller Freude über das kleine Gotteskind und ihr danken wollte kein Ende nehmen.« Ibid.

55 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Norberta Vaßen, 12.9.1909.

the (usually German) baptismal names. Hence, the missionaries saw themselves as the main guarantors of the future religious education of the children and assumed power over them and their future lives as Catholics. This is why the Togo mission introduced and adapted yet another element of baptismal practice to the missionary circumstances. According to Catholic doctrine, apart from the parents and the priest, another Catholic person had to function as a sponsor and assist in the ceremonial of the solemn baptism of infants making profession in the child's name. As such, godparents contracted a spiritual bond with the child and (particularly in case of default on the part of the biological parents) took a key role in its future instruction in the Christian faith and morals<sup>56</sup>. While during the early years of female missionary presence in Togo it was the nuns themselves who functioned as godmothers, this task was subsequently assumed by the first and thus most reliable, from the missions' point of view, converts. Indigenous godparents were expected to watch over their godchildren's Christian conduct of life and regular attendance of the church<sup>57</sup>. Practically, however, this religious policy implied that individual converts, who maintained close relations with the missionary Church, were spiritually related with large numbers of godchildren. In 1909 a nun wrote about Maria Ga, an exemplary missionary girl and long-term resident at the Lomé convent<sup>58</sup> that »our Maria Ga has probably more than 100 godchildren«<sup>59</sup>.

Women giving birth were an important target group for the nuns who aimed to establish Catholic ritual in relation with childbirth. Even though the case of Aného suggests that the nuns were also concerned with the physical well-being of mothers in childbed, neither childbirth nor infant mortality constituted prime concerns on their medical agenda. Women missionaries perceived nursing as a charitable service rather than a medical profession. After all, nursing was provided by nuns whose prime field of work was either teaching or domestic labor and who did not see themselves as medical professionals. In Togo the professionalization of Christian mother and child health

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56 Cf. Baptism, in: The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm> (7.12.2009).

57 Cf. THAUREN, *Die Mission*, p. 32.

58 Maria de Souza was a Catholic missionary girl who stayed with the nuns at Lomé for more than a decade. Her exceptional behavior and devotedness were mentioned in several contexts. For instance, in 1908 she gained the respect of Servants of the Holy Spirit in two continents, when she had nursed a nun through seven weeks of tuberculosis until death. She also assisted at school. In 1918, when the last Servants of the Holy Spirit were forced to leave the colony by the British military occupation, Maria Ga promised to continue her teaching activity and was entrusted by the missionaries with the administration of schooling materials and the care of the women's convent. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Thaddäa Brands, 25.7.1908 and Tg 03-3 Kriegserlebnisse/Ausweisung, Sr. Redempta Philips, pp. 7 and 13.

59 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Norberta Vaßen, 12.9.1909.

care started only after the Servants of the Holy Spirit left the colony. Yet, although they did not establish a missionary hospital or obstetrical units in Togo, they nonetheless attempted to introduce European-Christian cultural practice in relation with childbirth (i.e. baptism) and infant care. The fact that (at least according to the nuns) mothers gradually agreed on the baptism of their newborns, moreover, suggests that they took advantage of the medical, material and future educational offers associated with baptism. It is indeed conceivable that for mothers in Togo, where having a large number of children was of great social significance<sup>60</sup>, the value of healthy children impacted positively on the acceptance of the company of nuns after childbirth. Scholars have generally pointed out for the African context that many indigenous women gradually adapted to western social practices around childbirth as promoted by missionaries during the zenith of missionary activity in the interwar years<sup>61</sup>. By the mid-twentieth century, going to the hospital to give birth became part of the overall system of social status for women in many African settings. However, since most of the western hospitals established by then in colonial Africa were managed by missionaries, they simultaneously constituted places of intense evangelization. The close connection between childbirth and Christian attempts to proselytize women in childbed, originally established by nuns out of missionary practice, was eventually formalized. However, as scholars have pointed out, being adapted by African women in the course of the twentieth century, western medical and social practices often took on additional meanings and the possibility of a hospital birth was used by African women to pursue their own fertility strategies<sup>62</sup>. Since in Togo the establishment of western hospitals and the colonialists' promotion of hospital birth in Africa came after the Servants of the Holy Spirit's left the country, the following section discusses the development of missionary nursing of New Guinea.

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60 Cf. SPIETH, *Die Ewe Stämme*, p. 63.

61 Cf. Sean REDDING, *Women and Gender Roles in Africa since 1918. Gender as a Determinant of Status*, in: Teresa A. MEADE/Merry WIESNER-HANKS (eds), *A Companion to Gender History*, Malden 2004, pp. 540–554, i.e. 347.

62 E.g., Sean Redding has discussed the example of hospital births in twentieth-century Belgian Congo suggesting that colonial obstetrics began because the »Congolese sought help in childbirth emergencies«. Cf. REDDING, *Women and Gender Roles*, p. 547. On the case of French West Africa, moreover, cf. Jane TURRITTIN, *Colonial Midwives and modernizing Childbirth in French West Africa*, in: ALLMAN/GEIGER/MUSISI (eds), *Women in African colonial Histories*, pp. 71–91.

## Nursing in the New Guinean Missionary Context

I would be even more pleased if nobody died as a heathen anymore and wouldn't you be, too? If we now ask the people ›Where did the deceased go?‹, they firmly answer: ›to hell<sup>63</sup>.

The question posed by a New Guinea-based nun to her fellows in Europe suggests that there the missionaries equally attempted to establish Catholic sacramental practice with women missionaries functioning as the religious emissaries, carrying Christianity and Christian religious practice from the missionary convent to the indigenous villages and homes. In 1902, a small procession of two nuns and a group of fourteen converted girls visited the villages in Tumleo Island. Saying the rosary, they moved along the paths. Once they reached the first village, they visited ›every single house‹ to look if ›the people are all still fine‹<sup>64</sup>. Similarly to Togo, in New Guinea nursing activities were likewise seen as a very promising possibility to establish a relationship of trust with the local populations, to gain access to the intimate spheres of the homes and to administer emergency baptism if necessary.

However, in the New Guinean colonial frontier missionary nursing soon underwent a gradual professionalization. Unlike Togo, where almost all nuns dedicated some hours per day to house calls, in New Guinea some nuns soon stood out in the roles of nurses. In contrast to their colleagues in Togo, who from the outset had conceived of nursing as (one of) the most promising spheres of women's missionary work, the nuns in New Guinea emphasized the host of difficulties they experienced in introducing western medication<sup>65</sup>. Especially during the early stages of the missionary encounter they complained about the widespread indigenous practice (and fear) of sorcery which kept patients from taking western medicine<sup>66</sup>. However, the nuns considered effectively accomplished medical treatment as important as it taught the people a lesson about the missionary medical scheme and its proponents. According to the nurse active in Monumbo, successfully performed small operations (in the field of air dressing) promoted the establishment of a relationship of trust between the nuns and their patients: ›In particular I thank good God

63 ›Lieber wär's mir noch wenn niemand mehr als Heide stürbe und Ihnen auch, nicht wahr? Wenn wir jetzt Leute fragen ›Wo ist der Verstorbene hingekommen?‹ dann antworten sie fest ›in die Hölle‹. Cf. AG SSsP PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Magdalena Wagner, 16.5.1902.

64 AG SSsP PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Christophora Einzmann, 7.4.1902.

65 This comes out also in the rather anthropological accounts of priests. Cf. Mathias ERDWEG, Die Bewohner der Insel Tumleo, Berlinhafen, Deutsch-Neu-Guinea, in: Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien 32 (1902), pp. 283–288.

66 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 21.6.1900.

when small operations turn out well. This would strengthen people's belief in us and make them see that we have in mind only their best«<sup>67</sup>.

Ulcers and sores were frequent causes of sickness among the indigenous population<sup>68</sup>. Air dressing was thus the prime field of missionary medical work that demanded gradual professionalization, all the more so given the relative isolation of the prefecture from other western settlements that were equipped with a colonial medical scheme<sup>69</sup>. In 1908 a nun, to whom one of her colleagues referred to as the »surgeon of Tumleo«<sup>70</sup>, wrote that within a year she had cleaned the wounds of 2,270 women and children, adding that at times she had to »also use scissors, knives and tweezers«<sup>71</sup>. Similar reports came from Sister Barnaba Zirkel (1877–1944), another nun who chiefly engaged in nursing, according to which every day indigenous people showed up at the convent and asked for the treatment of ulcers and wounds. For Sister Barnaba, who prior to her departure for New Guinea in 1908 had enjoyed only limited training, air dressing was a challenging task: »At times I have to cut and burn for it to get better; I have seen doctors and nurses doing that before, when I was still leading a secular life, in a hospital where my aunt, who unfortunately has already died, was a nurse«<sup>72</sup>.

67 »Ich danke dem lieben Gott besonders wenn kleine Operationen gut vonstattengehen. Dann haben die Leute auch mehr Vertrauen zu uns, und sie sehen, daß man nur ihr Bestes im Auge hat.« AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, fragment, 24.10.1909.

68 This was pointed out by both contemporary anthropologists and nuns. Cf. Camilla WEDGWOOD, *Sickness and its treatment in Manam Island, New Guinea*, in: *Oceania* 5 (1934/35), pp. 64–78, i.e. 72f; AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 21.6.1900. Historian Margrit Davies, moreover, has suggested that in New Guinea skin infections had been among the main causes of sickness and death since pre-colonial times. Cf. Margrit DAVIES, *Public Health and Colonialism. The Case of German New Guinea 1884–1914*, Wiesbaden 2002, p. 2.

69 According to Davies, medical staffing in Kaiser-Wilhelmsland during the German colonial period was limited to one doctor who had been established in the administrative center in Madang since 1902. Additionally, health care was introduced for laborers at the plantations, and both policies and medical services for villagers constituted an increasingly important sphere. However, due to the lack of resources and the reluctance of villagers to make use of medical services provided by the colonial state, only a limited number of indigenous people were treated. In order to persuade villagers to consult colonial medical services and adopt western medical techniques so-called »Heiltutuls« were implemented in 1912. »Heiltutuls« were indigenous men who were trained in basic skills enabling them to deal with the most common health problems in the villages. Pointing out the relatively short period of its operation, Davies has left open whether the »Heiltutuls« system was successful from the colonial political point of view. For the given context it should be added that the nuns never mentioned it at all. Cf. DAVIES, *Public Health*, pp. 38 and 183–185.

70 AG SSsP PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Evangelista Ihler, 31.8.1902.

71 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Christophora Einzmann, 22.8.1908.

72 »Auch muß ich manchmal schneiden und brennen, damit es besser wird, ich habe dies früher, als ich noch in der Welt war, in einem Krankenhause, in welchem meine Tante Krankenpflegerin war, die aber leider jetzt schon tot ist, gesehen, wie die Ärzte und Schwestern es machten.« AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Barnaba Zirkel, 14.4.1909.

Up to 1930 Sister Barnaba Zirkel, whom her colleagues called »our doctor«<sup>73</sup>, was the best-trained missionary nurse in the New Guinean field. Already one year after her arrival, she managed an important part of the nursing activities at the first dispensary established in Tumleo Island<sup>74</sup>. Officially put in charge of the care of the sick by the mission, Sister Barnaba visited all villagers who had fallen ill up to three times a day in order to, to use her own words, »bring them relief and [to arrange that] they were provided with the holy sacraments in case of danger«<sup>75</sup>. Although most of her writing described this peculiar blend of nursing as rooted in Christian charity, a feminine caring role and religious attendance, it also contained medical details. For instance, on the occasion of several fatalities in Tumleo in 1909 she mentioned pneumonia and pleurisy as their prime causes. Sister Barnaba's letters bear witness to the ambiguity that marked the way in which she understood her profession. While she bemoaned the patients' death from a medical point of view, she simultaneously stated that »thank God« all of them died »provided with the holy sacraments«<sup>76</sup>. In her understanding of her profession the theme of »caring for the poor's bodies and souls« (meaning providing physical ease and baptismal service) was just as important as a medical approach, although she also wrote about life-saving operations she had carried out due to the absence of a trained doctor in the field<sup>77</sup>. Ultimately, nursing nuns understood the healing of the body as linked with what they referred to as the »healing« of the soul<sup>78</sup>. This, in turn, was inevitably linked with conversion to Catholicism more generally and the reception of the sacraments, in particular baptism and extreme unction.

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73 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 15.8.1919.

74 Cf. ECKART, *Medizin*, p. 415.

75 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Barnaba Zirkel, 14.4.1909.

76 *Ibid.*

77 »Recently there have been several cases such as that of a boy, who works with the missionaries, nearly bleeding to death. He had cut his leg with an axe severing the vein. Blood was gushing wildly. The poor one was lying in his blood as if he were dead. They immediately came to us sisters to tell us. We went with them immediately and tied his leg above the wound. Then I pressed the vein closely together and the bleeding stopped. I would have liked to stitch, but I lacked needle and silk.« (»So sind vor kurzer Zeit einige Fälle vorgekommen-, auch, daß sich ein Junge, der bei den Missionaren arbeitet, verblutet hätte. Derselbe hieb sich mit der Axt ins Bein, so daß er sich die Ader durchhaute. Das Blut spritzte heftig hervor. Der arme lag wie tot in seinem Blute. Sie kamen gleich zu uns Schwestern und sagten es uns. Wir gingen auch sofort mit und banden ihm oberhalb der Wunde das Bein ab. Dann drückte ich die Ader zu. Das Bluten ließ nun nach. Ich hätte gerne diese Wunde zugenäht, aber es fehlten mir Nadel und Seide.«) *Ibid.*

78 »Often the thought comes to my mind: May God also heal the wounds of their souls.« (»Es kommt mir dabei auch oft der Gedanke, der liebe Gott möge doch auch ihre Wunden an der Seele heilen.«) Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, fragment, 24.10.1909.



From the New Guinean mission's point of view, skilled missionary nurses played promising roles in evangelization, given their ability to instill confidence. Therefore, since the late 1920s increasing emphasis was being placed on their professional formation<sup>79</sup>. Sister Arildis Engelbrecht (1903–1943) was one of two trained nurses who arrived in New Guinea in 1931. Compared with Sister Barnaba Zirkel, Sister Arildis belonged to a new generation of better trained missionary nurses who had spent several years as candidates in one of the congregation's European hospitals<sup>80</sup>. Professionalism was thus crucial to the way in which these nuns understood their vocation. Already during her period of training in the congregation's hospital in the German town of Haan, Sister Arildis had informed her relatives that she was spending most of her working time in the operating room and that sick-nursing had become »the entire world« to her<sup>81</sup>. Similarly, once having arrived in New Guinea, detailed descriptions of her working days as a nurse continued to fill a considerable part of the letters she wrote to her relatives. In 1937, she even sent a photograph of her workplace – a missionary hospital – to her mother in Germany<sup>82</sup>. Yet, despite the medical training she had received in Europe, Sister Arildis was first put up in the New Guinean missionary headquarters in order to study tropical apothecary because »here in the tropics many things are handled differently than in Europe«<sup>83</sup>.

The image of missionary nursing prevailing in the 1930s as outlined by Sister Arildis differed from the earlier depictions of her colleagues insofar as she emphasized the increasingly professional framework. Sister Arildis, who

79 In 1929, when Superior Provincial Imelda Müller asked the European superiors for the appointment of »2 well-trained nurses« for the New Guinean field, she got back to the positive example of (by then fifty-two years old) Sister Barnaba Zirkel. Significantly, the head of the nuns explicitly attached more importance to the training of nurses than to their early arrival: »They better come here a year later if only they are competent. You see, here in the wilderness where no doctor is around, a skillful nurse is of great benefit. In the work of Sister Barnaba we have often seen how much such a sister can achieve for the mission. Certainly the fact that the Protestant Island Riwo in part is already Catholic must to a great extent be credited to Sister Barnaba.« (»Es ist besser, wenn sie tüchtig sind und ein Jahr später kommen. Denn hier in der Wildnis wo man keinen Arzt in der Nähe hat, ist eine kundige Krankenschwester eine große Wohltat. Wie viel eine solche Schwester für die Mission tun kann, haben wir in dem Wirken von Schwester Barnaba schon oft gesehen. Dass die protestantische Insel Riwo schon zum Teil katholisch ist, dazu hat Schw. Barnaba gewiß viel beigetragen.«) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Sr. Imelda Müller, 20.1.1929.

80 The congregation's rapid expansion of nursing activity and medical work in Europe took place in the aftermath of the Great War during which large quantities of nuns had engaged in war nursing in Germany and especially in Austria. While Sister Barnaba Zirkel (1877–1944) was trained during the first decade of the twentieth century and arrived in mission in 1908, Sister Arildis Engelbrecht (1903–1943) studied in Haan in the late 1920s.

81 AG SSpS 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, 16.11.1930.

82 AG SSpS 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, fragment, 1937.

83 AG SSpS 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, 5.11.1931.

explicitly called nursing her »profession«<sup>84</sup>, referred to her workplace as a »hospital« although she had to admit that compared with European standards the equipment of the Alexishafen hospital was »naturally very simple«<sup>85</sup>. Apart from attending the patients in the hospital, Sister Arildis also visited sick persons in the villages. Making regular house calls lent some continuity to the nuns' activities throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In contrast to earlier depictions of her colleagues, however, in the writings of Sister Arildis western medication and medical equipment (e.g. clinical thermometer, injections, instrument case, technical literature etc.) played an important role. This did not change with her transfer to Tumleo in 1932, where no hospital had been established yet. Quite the contrary, Sister Arildis Engelbrecht pointed out the importance of her role as a well-trained nurse and emphasized the social recognition that she received in return from the indigenous population<sup>86</sup>:

Since I have been here the Kanakas often come by to have their wounds treated, to get injections or to call me to sick persons in the village. Here you really need to know how to cut like a doctor. Every morning, when I come downstairs after holy mass, the little ones call me: Sister Rektor ju kam, mi basim sow, that means come over [and] bandage my wound. They can't spell doctor and that's why I am the roktor<sup>87</sup>.

Interestingly, while mutual trust continued to figure prominently in missionary nursing, Sister Arildis' explanation nonetheless diverged from earlier assessments. In contrast to her predecessors, who attributed the indigenous people's trust to their recognition of the nuns' selfless charitable agency, Sister Arildis explained trust as rooted in her professional role as a medical caregiver awarded by society. Thus, when she asked the moribund patient Xave-

84 AG SSpS 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, 21.6.1932.

85 According to her description, the hospital was located in a timber house without beds: »The sick persons rest on a wooden rack; [this] more or less looks like the fruit racks at home, only that they are not one upon the other, a pillow and a blanket constitute their bed, they don't want more. They would refuse a bed proper considering it being too hot.« (»Die Kranken liegen auf einem Holzgestell, sieht ungefähr so aus wie bei uns Zuhause die Obstgestelle, nur nicht übereinander, ein Kopfkissen u. eine Decke ist ihr Bett mehr wollen sie gar nicht. Ein richtiges Bett würden sie ganz verschmähen weil es viel zu warm ist.«) AG SSpS 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, 5.11.1931.

86 For instance, in another letter she wrote that on the occasion of her calls to the indigenous villages the children competed with each other about who was allowed to carry Sister Arildis' instrument case and thus to walk by her side, which was a »big honour«. AG SSpS 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, 21.6.1932.

87 »Seitdem ich hier bin kommen die Kanaken auch sehr viel zum Wunden verbinden, lassen sich Einspritzungen geben, oder rufen mich zu den Kranken im Dorf. Schneiden muß man hier können wie ein Arzt. Jeden Morgen, wenn ich nach der hl. Messe die Treppe herunterkomme, rufen mich schon die ganz Kleinen: Schwester Rektor ju kam, mi basim sow, d.h. komme verbinde mir meine Wunde. Doktor können sie nicht sagen, dann bin ich halt der Rektor.« Ibid.

rius about how he would like to spend his last days on earth he reportedly responded »in full trust«: »I don't know, but if you know you have to tell me, [...] you are a doctor, you know so much«<sup>88</sup>. In another passage she stated that people came to Tumbleo from areas up to ten hours' canoe travel away because they preferred her medical service to that of the government doctor: »They rather have me cutting them open than this doctor. They say that he doesn't do it that well«<sup>89</sup>.

The Servants of the Holy Spirit's third general chapter (1934) confirmed the crucial function of an – increasingly professional – field of missionary nursing<sup>90</sup> in New Guinea. By these separate hospitals for men and women had been established at the missionary headquarters in Alexishafen and small houses for the accommodation of sick persons had been attached to all women's convents in the region. However, the official report submitted by the head of the nuns in New Guinea once again confirmed the missionary conceptualization of nursing as a means of evangelization. On the first page the writer praised the »pioneering impact« of nursing in the missionary context because »not only Catholics but also Protestants and heathens resort to the Catholic mission«<sup>91</sup>.

However, in parallel to these positive assessments of nursing on the part of the nuns, missionary records also show that nursing took place in a cultural framework that was marked by the co-existence and competing influence of indigenous healing practice and western/Christian medical treatment. Like in Togo, in the New Guinean missionary context nursing had been inextricably linked with the religious aim to establish Christian ritual in relation with sickness and death from the outset. Hence, the image of the baptizing missionary nurse figured equally prominent in Sister Perboyre Neuß' section on the Servants of the Holy Spirit's history in New Guinea. In the book published in 1914, the author summarized the local nuns' engagement in nursing since 1899 as follows: »Also in the hour of death heaven's gate was opened up to many a [person] by means of holy baptism that the sisters were able to administer on the occasion of their visits to the houses, especially during the care of the sick«<sup>92</sup>. Yet, indigenous healing practice was likewise embed-

88 »Ich weiß es nicht, wenn du es weißt musst du es mir sagen, ju Doktor, ju sare blandi dumas, du bist ein Doktor, du weißt ganz viel.« Ibid.

89 »Von mir lassen sie sich viel lieber aufschneiden als von diesem Arzt. Er macht es nicht gut sagen sie.« AG SSpS 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, 30.10.1932.

90 Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 3 1934, Durchführung, Sr. Ehrentrudis Diezen, Territorium Neuguinea, pp. 1f.

91 Ibid., p. 1.

92 »Auch in der Todesstunde ist noch manchen ein Himmelspörtlein eröffnet worden durch die heilige Taufe, welche die Schwestern bei ihren Besuchen in den Häusern, besonders bei Pflege der Kranken, spenden konnten.« NEUSS, Steyler Missionsschwestern, p. 201.

ded in the local religious world and linked with the, widespread in Melanesia, practice of sorcery. The New Guinean cultural setting therefore provided a challenging framework for the introduction of Catholic ritual in relation with sickness and death just as the adoption of western medicine was by no means a linear process of increasing acceptance. While missionaries gradually developed a Catholic system of health care, their reports also show that resistance to missionary medicine and emergency baptism was widespread and persistent and at the same time indigenous forms of healing continued to be practiced. The nuns, however, mobilized their joint power of persuasion trying to talk terminally ill persons into emergency baptism.

In 1900, Sister Ursula Sensen told her fellows in Europe of a seriously ill young woman who prior to her illness had attended Catholic religious instruction only sporadically and ultimately absented herself altogether. When she fell ill the local nuns offered her baptism but she refused unhesitatingly. And when the nuns »asked her whether she didn't love God, she gave as an answer: No, I love Satan«. Now the nuns explained the patient that (as a non-baptized person) death would actually bring her to hell, which they sketched as follows: Hell »was a huge fire; in there was Satan and in there she would have to burn forever«. Thereupon, according to Sister Ursula, the girl said that as soon as she would be fine again she would return to school and get baptized<sup>93</sup>.

Resistance to emergency baptism is a frequent feature in the New Guinean missionary reports with much room being given to discussions between missionary nurses and patients lying on their deathbed. Depending on the concrete case, the nuns either managed to convince the patient to agree on baptism by conveying Catholic ideas on heaven and hell, or they did not<sup>94</sup>. The persistent resistance of sick persons to baptism<sup>95</sup> is the more striking given the fact that the nuns' care for terminally ill converts not only involved supplying them with medication but also with food and water and encouraging them. The supply with goods and medicine did not always convince termi-

93 AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, September 1900.

94 For instance, in another case a nun wrote about an old woman who at first refused baptism but obviously changed her mind: »However, after we told her something about heaven and hell, she wanted to go to heaven and asked for holy baptism, which she was administered by Sister Superior.« (»Doch nachdem wir noch einiges von Himmel und Hölle erzählt hatten, wollte sie doch in den Himmel und verlangte die hl. Taufe, welche Schwester Vorsteherin auch spendete.«) Cf. AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Imelda Müller, 12.5.1911.

95 Open resistance to baptism was a frequent experience by missionary nuns in New Guinea: »[...] unfortunately there are still several people who would tell you straight in your face that they want to go to hell [...]«. (»[...] leider sind noch mehrere solche die einem gerade ins Gesicht sagen sie wollten in die Hölle [...]«) Cf. AG SSpS PNG Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Cherubina Frings, 27.6.1911.

nally ill persons to accept baptism. Quite the contrary, several accounts suggest that often it was this very combination of material and spiritual »treatment« that triggered indigenous resistance to missionary health care. In 1911, Sister Cherubina Frings wrote about an »old totally emaciated mommy« lying next to a small fire in a village close to the Leming women's convent<sup>96</sup>. Obviously the woman was stricken by calenture and was »looking quite seedy«. The nun struck up a conversation with the woman who still »didn't want to know anything about holy baptism«. When Sister Cherubina finally reached for a small bottle of holy water and attempted to bless her, the woman reacted fiercely, resisting the unwanted blessing with both hands. She said that her state of health was caused by the spirit of her deceased daughter, which had entered her and was to stay in her for a couple of days<sup>97</sup>. So, what Sister Cherubina rashly dismissed as superstition was obviously rooted in an alternative explanation of sickness.

While an analysis of the missionary encounter with respect to competing healing practices is beyond the scope of this research, the confrontation of ethnographic observations and missionary records in this regard nonetheless is a useful exercise as it sheds light on otherwise obscure cultural and social dimensions of baptismal practice in relation with sickness and death. Therefore, the well-documented case of Manam Island during the 1930s constitutes a particularly interesting example, for it allows focusing on the intensity of these struggles about cultural practice and meaning on the one hand and the parallel existence and interaction of two competing cultures on the other. Manam, a Volcanic Island situated twelve kilometers north of the New Guinean mainland, had been missionized by a priest from the mainland since 1917. In 1925 three nuns and one priest were the first western people to settle on the island<sup>98</sup>. According to Father Ricken, at that time about 1,160 Catholics were living among the 3,150 inhabitants of Manam<sup>99</sup>. In 1933, Camilla Wedgwood, a British social anthropologist, arrived in the island to spend there one year conducting fieldwork. Studying the effects of western influence on Manam social and cultural life, she paid particular attention to women and children<sup>100</sup>. Among other subjects, Wedgwood, who was personally acquaint-

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96 Ibid.

97 Cf. *ibid.*

98 Cf. Lutkehaus, Introduction, p. 30 and AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, H-P.101.h-12 Manam, p. 1.

99 Cf. Wilhelm RICKEN, Die Mission auf dem Manam, in: Steyler Missionsbote (1926), pp. 34–37, i.e. pp. 34f.

100 Cf. Camilla WEDGWOOD, Report on Research in Manam Island, in: *Oceania* 4 (1934), pp. 374–403. Furthermore: WEDGWOOD, Women in Manam, in: *Oceania* 7 (1936/37), pp. 401–439, continued in *Oceania* 8 (1937/38), pp. 170–192; WEDGWOOD, The Life of Children in Manam, in: *Oceania* 9 (1938), pp. 1–29; WEDGWOOD, Manam Kinship, in: *Oceania* 29 (1958/59), pp. 240–256.

ed with the local nuns (who, by the way, even nursed her through illness<sup>101</sup>), also investigated indigenous explanations of sickness and its treatment<sup>102</sup>.

According to Wedgwood, Manam Islanders recognized both natural and supernatural reasons for sickness. While minor and/or endemic illnesses from which patients recovered quickly (e.g. colds, coughs, mild fever) were usually regarded as »natural« or »just sickness«, serious illnesses or abnormalities (e.g. lunacy, physical deformity or bad sores) were believed to occur due to supernatural agency<sup>103</sup>. In the eyes of the Manam people, serious illness was potentially caused by a deceased close relative (parent, grandparent or spouse) having stolen the spirit of the sick person. This, according to Wedgwood, was mostly the case when the ill person was either an infant or an old (widowed) person. In such cases, the patient's defunct relative was believed to be alone in the land of the dead and that was why he/she desired to have the companionship that he/she had enjoyed in life<sup>104</sup>. Apart from the spirit of a close deceased relative, breach of certain taboos was also believed to cause a person's sickness or a physical handicap. If a young or middle-aged person fell seriously ill, however, Manam Islanders usually attributed this to sorcery, thus to all those »ritual practices whose object is to bring about sickness or death«<sup>105</sup>. Camilla Wedgwood distinguished two forms of sorcery recognized by the Manam<sup>106</sup> but, moreover, pointed out that disagreement in the diagnoses of native »doctors« was not unusual but rather common. In addition, the Manam people usually attributed the outbreak of serious epidemics (i.e. a smallpox epidemics in the 1920s) to foreign (types of) death magic<sup>107</sup>. Interestingly, Wedgwood ultimately referred to a recent (from the standpoint of the early 1930s) development in the Manam supernatural explanation of sickness that was initiated by the contact with western Christianity and involved the conception that the mission God sometimes initiated sickness or accidents. Accordingly, Manam Islanders gradually interpreted sick-

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101 Cf. WEDGWOOD, Report on Research, p. 375.

102 Cf. WEDGWOOD, Sickness, pp. 64–78.

103 Other factors, such as the nature of the ailment and the age or concrete circumstances of the sufferer were also taken into consideration by the Manam, who that way identified the type of supernatural agency that was responsible for a serious illness. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 64f.

104 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 65f.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

106 According to Wedgwood, the Manam distinguished between what they called »nabwa« and »dzere«. The former was a very much dreaded, native-to-Manam practice of sorcery that was acted out by a couple of »nabwa« men and which was generally believed to be fatal. The latter, in turn, belonged to the mainland and was increasingly imported to Manam by the colonial system of indentured labor and labor migration. Compared to »nabwa«, sickness caused by »dzere« was usually not that prolonged and less amenable in treatment. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 71f.

107 Wedgwood argued that while a sick person, together with his or her kinsfolk and close friends, was usually fast to blame sorcery for his or her sufferings, his or her antagonists might have held that these resulted from the commitment of an offence or »mere illness«. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 77.

ness or accidents as caused by a sin-punishing God and attributed them for instance to the affected person's negligence in church attendance<sup>108</sup>.

From the missionary point of view, however, there was yet another aspect of Manam spiritual belief that constituted a crucial obstacle to the spread of Catholic ritual. According to the local chronicler, the indigenous fear of baptism hindered many people from accepting the administering of the sacrament in the case of a life-threatening situation. Like in Togo, the nuns were informed about cases of illness in the proximity to the convents by missionary pupils familiar with both village life and the world of the missionary station. Knowing that as soon as the nuns got hold of the information about sick persons they would inevitably drop by, the indigenous population often sought to conceal cases of serious sickness from the missionary personnel. This was the case, for example, with an elite woman in Manam who fell seriously ill in 1929, which all inhabitants of her village tried to hide from the nuns. The nuns, in turn, related this to the people's dread of negative effects of baptism. The local chronicler explained the Manam's negative attitude on this occasion as follows: »If we baptized her she would definitely have to die«<sup>109</sup>. Thus, quite obviously the missionary practice of baptizing fatally ill persons had led indigenous people to the conviction that patients who were administered baptism were inevitably bound to pass away. Consequently, parents prohibited their children, who attended missionary schools and maintained closer relations with the missionaries, to inform priests and nuns about cases of illnesses in the villages. The nuns, in turn, »repeatedly admonished the missionary pupils to never keep quiet about it, because we want to help the people to go to heaven«<sup>110</sup>.

Thus, nursing was taking place under considerable pressure to succeed. While successful medical treatment (in combination with baptism) would get people to trust in the missionaries, the opposite often strained the relations. Sister Hermengilde Simbürger, an exemplary brave missionary nun in New Guinea whose missionary career became closely related to the evangelization of the Manam<sup>111</sup>, tackled this issue in a letter addressed to Sister Florida Sim-

108 Ibid., pp. 78f.

109 »Wir würden sie taufen, und dann muß sie ganz gewiß sterben.« AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, H-P.101.h-12 Manam, p. 12.

110 »Wir ermahnten die Schulkinder wiederholt, uns dies doch nicht zu verschweigen, da wir ja den Leuten helfen wollten in den Himmel zu kommen.« Ibid., p. 12.

111 Sister Hermengilde Simbürger (1891–1934) arrived in New Guinea in 1913. Positioned in Monumbo during the Great War, she was among the three nuns who founded the Catholic mission in Manam Island (1925). In 1929 she was appointed head of the convent. Consequently, she stayed in Manam until her death, probably because of Malaria, in 1934. According to the missionary record she was very popular among the Manam people and the chronicler recorded on her day of death: »As soon as the death drum informed the people about the death of our sister superior, the people flocked to our station moaning and crying loudly. All of them wanted to see their sister, their mother, once more.« (»Kaum hatte die Totentrommel den Leuten den

bürger, her biological sister and fellow Servant of the Holy Spirit in Europe. Rendering the case of an injured four-year old boy, the grandson of a, to quote her, »genuine, utterly heathen man« and »big sorcerer« in Manam, she pointed out the difficulties she experienced when medical treatment did not cause positive effects soon. According to her letter, the boy's parents called on the nuns on their own initiative and asked for the treatment of their son's wounds. But when the patient's physical state at first deteriorated his grandfather showed up at the convent and attempted to take the boy away. When the nuns tried to interfere he threatened them with his own magical powers: »The old man menaced: ›In case that my grandchild dies here at your place, I will take revenge. Then I will evoke a huge volcanic eruption the fire of which shall burn you.«<sup>112</sup>.

Although the writer ridiculed the indigenous belief that Manam sorcerers were able to evoke volcanic eruptions, she could not prevent the boy's parents from taking their son home before he could be baptized. As Sister Hermengilde was not ready to put up with this decision she set out to the family's homestead. There she arrived at the conclusion that the boy was no more salvageable and asked his father for the permission to baptize him. The father, however, out of fear of negative effects refused to agree. Sister Hermengilde then asked for water, apparently to wash the child. She wrote:

The mother, a silent woman, passed me over the bowl of water before the father agreed. I was not allowed to pray or to speak. The father forbade me to do so. Well, God will have heard me speaking anyway. It was only eight days later that the little Josef succumbed. I was glad that he did not die immediately, so nobody could have interpreted it as a result of baptism<sup>113</sup>.

Apart from rendering an instant of secret baptizing this incidence is remarkable as it constitutes a deviation from the Catholic norm. According to Church doctrine, the pronouncing of the baptismal formula and the simultaneous pouring of water on the person to be baptized constitute essential pre-

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Tod unserer Sr. Oberin angesagt, und schon strömten die Leute unter lautem Klagen und Weinen zur Station. Alle wollten sie ihre Schwester, ihre Mutter noch mal sehen.«) Ibid., p. 67.

112 »Der Alte sagte: ›Falls mein Enkel bei euch hier stirbt, dann räche ich mich. Dann beschwöre ich einen großen Vulkanausbruch herauf; das Feuer soll euch verbrennen.« AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 1.8.1926.

113 »Die Mutter, eine stille Frau, reichte mir, bevor noch der Vater zustimmte, eine Schale mit Wasser. Beten, sprechen durfte ich dabei nicht. Das hat mir der Vater verboten. Nun, der liebe Gott hat's schon gehört, dass ich doch dabei gesprochen habe. Nach acht Tagen erst erlag der kleine Josef. Ich war froh, dass er nicht sofort starb, damit man dies ja nicht als eine Folge der Taufe ansehe.« AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 1.8.1926.



conditions for the administration of the sacrament<sup>114</sup>. In the case quoted, Sister Hermengilde, convinced of both the candidate's imminent death as well as the compliance of her own actions with the divine command, transformed these preconditions in order to baptize the boy.

Complaints about indigenous »prejudices against holy baptism« – to use the words of nuns – are a frequent feature in the Manam chronicles<sup>115</sup>. Interestingly, such ideas were also widespread among the local catechumens, i.e., people who were already attending preparation classes for solemn baptism, as the case of Dauri shows. Dauri was an elderly woman whom the nuns not only described as »bright« and »the most arduous catechumen« but, moreover, as »knowledgeable of the truth of our holy religion«. In August 1930, when Dauri had fallen ill, she asked the nuns to wait with christening her until she found herself irrevocably on the deathbed<sup>116</sup>. This is to say that even a »bright« and »well-instructed«, from the missionary point of view, woman who regularly attended Catholic instruction dreaded fatal effects of baptism. This shows that nuns faced considerable difficulties in establishing Catholic ritual in relation with sickness and death. Dauri's wish to be baptized only in the case of her inevitable death provides evidence of the coexistence of competing cultural practice and spiritual belief which, as suggested by Camilla Wedgwood, converged in complex ways. The Manam Islanders, rather than actually »converting« to a new belief system, incorporated elements of Catholic ritual and belief into their own spiritual world.

The missionary attempt to substitute Catholic practice for indigenous ritual also entailed practical challenges. Like their colleagues in Togo, the nuns in New Guinea felt responsible for the religious development of recuperating baptismal candidates. This, however, presupposed a complete record about mission activity in the »parish« or the geographical area assigned to the local missionary station. Still in Manam in 1930, a nun visited a critically ill man in a village close to the convent. Convinced that the patient was a »truly heathen man« who not only rejected Catholicism himself but, moreover, prevented his grandchildren from attending the missionary education, she »advised him of his near end and spoke about holy baptism«. Against the expectations of the nun the man consented. His explanation for that, however, surprised her: »Oh, he said, I am not scared of the washing (baptizing). Just don't pray while doing it. The father has baptized me earlier. He didn't speak either while doing it. And I am still alive«<sup>117</sup>.

114 Cf. Baptism, in: The Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm> (7.12.200) 9.

115 Cf. AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, H-P.101.h-12 Manam, p. 14.

116 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 38.

117 »Ach, sagte er, vor dem waschen (Taufen) bin ich nicht bang. Du musst nur nicht dabei beten.

Two issues can be derived from the case quoted. Firstly, it shows that the nun was totally unaware of the fact that she was facing an (officially) Catholic man. Secondly, it offers further possible explanations for the interpretation of cultural contact in northern New Guinea: Obviously, it was the saying of the baptismal formula which troubled the candidate and not (the Catholic meaning of) baptism as such, the contact with baptismal water or the minister. Since this was not the only case recorded by nuns in which the saying of prayers or religious formulae prompted the indigenous candidate's resistance, yet another aspect of Manam spirituality must be taken into consideration. As pointed out by Camilla Wedgwood, the muttering of spells formed an important part of all indigenous forms of magic and certainly also had a function in sorcery<sup>118</sup>. This may explain why the candidate linked the fear of lethal effects of baptism with the saying of the formula. In the case quoted, however, the nun eventually managed to translate the Catholic message into terms that the man obviously understood. She stated: »So, I said, you are Catholic but you concealed it. This was wrong of you«<sup>119</sup>. His answer is remarkable as it suggests the indigenization of the Catholic message according to which an angry mission God had provoked his sickness: »[.]Yes, he said guiltily, the big spirit is angry with me, and that's why I am sick. As soon as I am better, I will go to church.[.] And indeed, already the next day the hardly recovered man dragged himself to church«<sup>120</sup>.

In contrast, the missionary chronicler in Manam Island also recorded incidents in which indigenous people asked for emergency baptism on their own initiative or in case of critical illness resorted to the convent to seek the nuns' (medical) care. While the former usually was the case with critically ill persons who expected supernatural help and recovery from baptism and/or the mission God, the latter mostly occurred in cases in which old (widowed) women searched for shelter. What probably also contributed to (physically weak) persons' turning to the missionary station in critical situations of life was the comparably good supply situation in combination with the (medical) care and the company of the nuns. So did Oaide, an infirm non-Catholic woman in Manam. According to the chronicle, she showed up at the women's

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Früher hat mich der Pater auch getauft. Aber er hat nichts dabei gesagt. Ich bin nicht davon gestorben.« Ibid., pp. 37f.

118 Although Wedgwood noted that she was not able to find out about the concrete use of spells in this regard, she did point out the certainty of their function in sorcery because the muttering of spells formed an important part of all other forms of curative magic and magic connected with aspects of day-to-day life in Manam. Cf. WEDGWOOD, *Sickness*, p. 74.

119 »So, sagte ich, du bist schon katholisch und hast es verheimlicht. Da hast du aber gefehlt.« AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, H-P.101.h-12 Manam, p. 38.

120 »[.]Ja, sagte er schuld bewusst, der große Geist zürnt mir, und darum bin ich krank. Werde, sobald ich besser bin, zur Kirche gehen.[.] Wirklich, schon am folgenden Sonntag schleppte sich der noch kaum Genesene zur Kirche.« Ibid., p. 38.

convent one day and stated determinedly: »So, now I am here and I won't go home anymore. I want to die here«<sup>121</sup>. And indeed, despite attempts by her children to take her back to the village, Oaide stayed with the nuns at the convent, where she was baptized and deceased two weeks later under the name of Anna.

According to the Manam chronicle, the most prominent type of indigenous requests for the nuns' assistance came from women whose giving birth was expected to be complicated. Childbirth in most Melanesian settings occurred in designated places (often small huts or outdoors) in the bush, to which women retreated to deliver their children and which were prohibited to males. Mothers stayed in these »birth huts« until pollution taboos around childbirth were removed through a ritual of purification<sup>122</sup>. According to Manam tradition, newborns whose mothers had deceased before this ritual of purification had proceeded were buried with the bodies of their mothers. Since other women were prohibited from raising these children, no attempts were made to save their lives<sup>123</sup>. Hardly surprisingly, missionaries, who taught the holiness of all life, campaigned against this practice. According to the records available they did so with success. Wedgwood, who stayed in Manam in 1933/1934, wrote that by then »such an infant is generally taken and reared by the reverend sisters at the mission station«<sup>124</sup>. Thus, the presence of nuns on the island, who ignored indigenous pollution taboos and were equipped with the infrastructure to take in these newborns, put mothers fearing death postpartum in the position to take action for the survival of their babies<sup>125</sup>. The chronicler recorded some cases in which critically ill mothers in childbed »urged« the nuns to care for their newborns<sup>126</sup>.

However, by the 1930s, the nexus of female mission activity and childbirth already had a long standing tradition in northern New Guinea. Right from the arrival of the first nuns, women in childbed had constituted one of their principal targets. Due to the fact that indigenous men (including priests) were prohibited to enter the designated birth places, nuns were the only members of the missionary personnel who were able to work toward the bap-

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121 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

122 Regarding the moment of the ritual in Manam the data available slightly diverge. While Wedgwood wrote about a fortnight, anthropologist Nancy Lutkehaus spoke about a month. Cf. LUTKEHAUS, *Missionary Maternalism*, p. 232; WEDGWOOD, *The Life of Children*, p. 18.

123 Cf. LUTKEHAUS, *Missionary Maternalism*, pp. 221f.

124 WEDGWOOD, *The Life of Children*, p. 18.

125 Practically speaking, however, the chances of survival for these infants were low because the nuns faced difficulties to find indigenous women willing to act as surrogate mothers. In case they survived, the infants were moved and brought up at the Catholic headquarters in Alexishafen.

126 AG SSsP PNG Chroniken, H-P.101.h-12 Manam, pp. 4f; AG SSsP PNG Chroniken, Manam, *Geschichte des Hauses vom Juni 1931–Juni 1932*, p. 1.

tism of the newborns and/or their mothers. Given the generally high infant mortality in the region in combination with indigenous pollution taboos and subsequent infanticide, early missionary practice in New Guinea adapted Catholic doctrine and pursued the baptizing of all newborns (independent of the parent's religious affiliation) in proximity to the single missionary stations<sup>127</sup>. The nuns in New Guinea tried to keep informed about cases of childbirth in the area. From the indigenous mothers' point of view, this meant that soon after birth a nun, equipped with a christening robe and holy water, would show up at the birth place to make them consent to the baptism of their newborns<sup>128</sup>.

### *Excursus: Missionary Campaigns and Infanticide*

Parallel to the endeavor to baptize all newborns, missionaries aimed to abolish indigenous practices of abortion and infanticide, all of which they subsumed under the term of child murder. Forceful missionary campaigns against abortion and infanticide had started already before the first nuns arrived in New Guinea in 1899. In 1900, a nun wrote from Tumleo that in the missionary station's immediate surroundings, cases of infanticide occurred only rarely because the missionaries had already taught the indigenous population that »they must not do such a thing because this would bring them to hell«<sup>129</sup>. And she added: »Still more than hell they dread the punishment they'd receive by the missionaries when they'd be caught doing such an atrocity«<sup>130</sup>. However, high infant mortality and the correspondingly small number of children brought up per woman or couple nurtured the missionary suspicions that infanticide continued to be practiced. With the arrival of the first women missionaries, the Catholic campaigns against infanticide gained in dynamics, because for the first time the mission got access to indigenous birth places.

127 Cf. NEUSS, *Die Steyler Missionsschwestern*, p. 191.

128 For example, in January 1900, nine month after the first nuns' arrival in New Guinea, one of them wrote: »Our rev. sister superior has, I think, already baptized 4 little children and rev. Sister Valeria 3. These two sisters now must visit all new-born children on the island. [...] as soon as we learn about a new-born child, sister superior and Sister Valeria go there to baptize it; the women like it being baptized as it would be given a little dress, rev. Sister Valeria always sees to it that she has a christening robe ready.« (»Unsere ehrw. Schwester Vorsteherin hat, ich glaube, schon 4 Kindchen getauft und ehrw. Schw. Valeria 3. Diese beiden Schwestern müssen jetzt alle neugeborenen Kinder der Insel besuchen. [...] sobald wir erfahren, dass irgendwo ein Kind zur Welt gekommen, gehen Schw. Vorsteherin und Schw. Valeria hin und taufen es; die Frauen haben gern dass es getauft wird, es bekommt dann auch ein Kleidchen, ehrw. Schw. Valeria sorgt immer, dass sie ein Taufkleidchen fertig hat.«) AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 7.1.1900.

129 AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 22.6.1900.

130 »Mehr noch als die Hölle fürchten sie die Strafe, welche sie von den Missionaren bekommen würden, wenn sie bei solch einer Grausamkeit ertappt würden.« Ibid.

The »search for little children«, as the nuns put it, constituted a significant feature of early-twentieth-century female mission activity in New Guinea. Convinced that indigenous mothers would rather dispose of their unwanted offspring secretly than hand them over, the nuns aimed to anticipate infanticide or at least to baptize all newborns as a precaution. Consequently, Sister Valeria Diezen, one of the pioneer nuns in New Guinea, addressed the following appeal to her colleagues in Europe: »Sisters, come all over here, then we will soon perambulate the vast New Guinea and proselytize the poor Kanaka and search for and baptize little children«<sup>131</sup>. Simultaneously, nuns referred to infanticide as the main obstacle to evangelization as well as the main cause of the generally strong (and unexpected) resistance to missionary teaching. In 1901 the head of the nuns in Tumleo, in response to her European fellows' question whether the island's (three-hundred) inhabitants were already proselytized, somehow vindicatory recounted two instances of attempted infanticide<sup>132</sup>. Generally speaking, the nuns' essentially ethical perspective toward the issue of childbirth and infanticide had soon created a climate of omnipresent suspicion whenever newborns died. In such cases, the women missionaries visited the birth place and tried to analyze the dead body in order to assess whether death had occurred naturally or by force<sup>133</sup>.

Whenever the nuns suspected a mother having caused the death of her (usually non-baptized) child, serious conflicts arose. In contrast to other issues in which Christian mores collided with indigenous social practice (e.g. polygamy, divorce), the missionary campaign against infanticide was actively supported by the colonial government, which was alarmed about the demographic development of the colony. Birthrates in colonial New Guinea trou-

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131 »Schwestern, kommt doch alle hierher, dann wollen wir schnell das große Neuguinea durchwandern und die armen Kanaken bekehren und Kindehen suchen und taufen.« AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 16.3.1902.

132 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 601Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 25.8.1901.

133 For instance, a nun described the nuns' reactions to news that a woman had given birth but the baby was dead: »Sr. Valeria and I ran as fast as we could, we wanted to see it [the infant]. When we got there we found it struck dead, split from the back through the front and thickly smeared over to conceal it. We told the women to wash it, but they refused so we did it ourselves and we discovered that it had been killed forcibly. There was nothing we might have done, so we sadly returned home. We couldn't find out immediately who of the women had done that. The women tried to make us believe that it was the God of Tumleo, Baruk. Then the mother herself buried it on the birthplace and went home.« (»Schw. Valeria und ich liefen was wir konnten, wir wollten es doch noch sehen. Als wir hinkamen war es totgeschlagen, heimlich gespalten von hinten bis vorn und drüber dick beschmiert, dass wir's nicht sehen sollten. Wir sagten, sie sollten's waschen, das wollten die Frauen aber nicht tun und so taten wir es selbst und fanden es gewaltsam umgebracht vor. Wir konnten also nichts tun als traurig nach Hause gehen. Welche der Frauen es getan konnten wir nicht gleich ermitteln. Die Frauen wollten uns weismachen dass hätte der Tumleogott getan, der Baruk. Die Mutter begrub es dann selbst auf dem Geburtsplatze und ging nach Haus.«) Cf. *ibid.*

bled planters, colonial authorities and missionaries alike<sup>134</sup>. Yet, unlike the missionaries, other colonial agents emphasized economic rather than moral issues. For them, according to historian Margrit Davies, the fundamental resource of New Guinea was its population whose »survival and growth was crucial for the viability of the colony«<sup>135</sup>. Official charges of infanticide made by the missionaries sometimes led to the arrest of suspect mothers, a fact which, in turn, strained the nuns' relation with the local female population. At times, this culminated in rhetoric or even physical attacks on the nuns, who kept representing themselves as the mobile spirited guardians of the word of the Lord. In 1901, Sister Valeria in Tumleo explained to her European superior the effects of a charge of infanticide made by the nuns against a local woman to the colonial officials:

This made the women detest us. These days I was told to my face that in former times they would have been able to do what they wanted [but] now we would always run around trying to baptize the children. Often we would be scolded by the women; but that doesn't really bother us, as long as we save many souls we are quite content<sup>136</sup>.

And, explaining why she bothered her superior with details »on such subjects« asking for supportive prayers, the writer added: »Please pray for us and our activities. Currently the devil is struggling hard so as not to lose his prey, but we go out there with the cross [as] our buckler on the breast and he has to give way to this«<sup>137</sup>. The sequence quoted was constructed on the imaginary opposition of God and devil that corresponded to the confrontation of missionary Catholicism and indigenous cultural practice. The writer's militarist terminology, moreover, suggests a battle in which the substitution of Catholic ritual, rooted in European/Christian concepts of morality and sense of justice, for indigenous practices around childbirth was a crucial factor. The most heated altercation arose in 1910 between the mission and the indigenous

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134 The German administration sought to commit the mission to actively work against population decline on the New Guinean mainland. Cf. Margrit DAVIES, *Das Gesundheitswesen im Kaiser-Wilhelmsland/Bismarckarchipel*, in: HIERY (ed.), *Die deutsche Südsee*, pp. 417–449, i.e. 445.

135 DAVIES, *Public Health*, pp. 180 and 197, i.e. 180.

136 »Dadurch haben wir uns bei den Frauen verhasst gemacht. Dieser Tage sagte man mir noch ins Gesicht, früher hätten sie tun können was sie wollten jetzt würden wir immer da rumlaufen und wollten die Kinder taufen. Man wird nicht selten ausgeschimpft von den Frauen, doch das stört uns wenig, wenn wir nur recht viele Seelen retten so sind wir zufrieden.« AG SSsP 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 10.11.1901.

137 »Bitte beten Sie doch für unser Wirken. Der Teufel strengt sich gegenwärtig gewaltig an um seine Beute nicht zu verlieren, aber wir gehen hinaus mit dem Kreuze unserm Schild auf der Brust und diesem muss er weichen.« *Ibid.*

population in Monumbo in consequence of the missionary initiation of legal action against what the nuns charged as infanticide.

The Catholic mission in Monumbo, situated on the northern coast of the mainland, was founded in 1899. Due to the persistent resistance to evangelization on the part of the indigenous population in the area it was considered as one of the most difficult spheres of work in New Guinea<sup>138</sup>. The first women's convent on location was set up in 1902 and one of its foundresses was still present in 1910. According to the missionary record, in 1910, following the detention of some indigenous women who had been charged by the colonial government a plan was contrived by the indigenous population to attack the local missionary settlement<sup>139</sup>. For lack of alternative sources it is not possible to reconstruct these events in detail or to assess whether or not the Monumbo missionaries were actually in danger of an attack<sup>140</sup>. However, the resident nuns' letters give evidence of the fact that their relations with the villagers had not only deteriorated considerably but turned openly hostile. Accordingly, early in 1910 the Monumbo people, together with some neighboring population groups, attempted to »assault« the nuns and »to remove them altogether«. Over the months to follow, the convent's inhabitants seriously feared for their lives<sup>141</sup>. Sister Perpetua Hanfeld (1879–1943) referred

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138 Significantly, the mission in Monumbo eventually was abandoned in 1925 and its entire personnel moved to Manam Island. While the official reason was a decline in population, the lack of success in missionary work over two decades certainly was another crucial factor.

139 Cf. AG SSps PNG Chroniken, H-P.101.h-12 Manam, p. 15.

140 In his article on the so-called »Madang Revolt«, Hermann Hiery has argued that rumors about indigenous attacks on European settlements were common in Melanesia and »surfaced again and again in New Guinea [...] without giving real cause for concern«. These rumors, according to Hiery, were rooted in the peculiarities of European thinking processes rather than in actual threats on the part of the indigenous populations. Cf. Hermann Joseph HIERY, *The Madang Revolt of 1904. A Chimera*, in: *Small Wars & Insurgeries* 4/2 (1993), pp. 165–180, pp. 166 and 175. In addition, it must be taken into consideration that the nuns in Kaiser-Wilhelmsland had been informed about the earlier assault of a missionary station in Baining, New Britain. The assault, which had taken place in 1904, involved the homicide of ten missionaries (including five nuns). Cf. AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 23.09.1904. On the occurrences in Baining, cf. Reiner JASPERS, *Historische Untersuchungen zu einem Mord an Missionaren auf New Britain*, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 63 (1979), pp. 1–24.

141 A nun wrote with regard to the dreaded attack by the Monumbo: »I never had a better preparation to death than during these months. Also we were not a moment save, neither by day nor by night, because once they wanted to attack us by day and then at night. One time they even planned to set light to our house, and they could have [done] so easily; because right then we had daubed it because of the white ants with carbon fibre, which catches fire easily.« (»Eine bessere Vorbereitung zum Tode wie in dieser Zeit habe ich noch nicht gehabt. Wir waren ja auch keinen Augenblick unseres Lebens sicher weder am Tage noch bei der Nacht, da man uns einmal bei Tag und dann wieder der Nacht überfallen wollte. Einmal plante man sogar, unser Haus in Brand zu stecken, und das hätten sie ganz leicht können, weil wir es gerade in dieser Zeit wegen der weißen Ameisen mit Carboneum angestrichen hatten und dieses leicht Feuer fängt.«) Cf. AG SSps 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Perpetua Hanfeld, 5.3.1911.

to this period as a »time of terror« during which she had a loaded gun positioned at hand in her cell. To demonstrate that the nuns knew how to shoot and in the hope that the missionary pupils would forward this message to the villages she once even fired a warning shot in front of the convent<sup>142</sup>. Eventually, according to the missionary record, the plan was given away by a man from another tribe so the missionaries could take measures for their safety and to forestall it being carried out<sup>143</sup>. Yet, the antagonism between the mission and the population in Monumbo continued. At the end of 1911 a nun reported that the situation was calm only due to the local people's fear of punishment through the colonial authorities<sup>144</sup>.

Interestingly, the three Monumbo-based nuns primarily held the local colonial district officer accountable for the tense situation, because he had »again licensed« the people »to exert all kinds of superstitious and immoral customs against which the mission has worked for years«<sup>145</sup>. More concretely, they complained that the district officer (although a Catholic himself) rather than believe the mission's charges of infanticide would buy into all claims brought up against the missionaries by the Monumbo people<sup>146</sup>. Head of the convent, Sister Philomena Herzog, who had been working on location since its foundation in 1902, complained about what she experienced to be the government's irresolute behavior in this question, pointing out the long-term negative effects infanticide might have on the pupil numbers in missionary classrooms<sup>147</sup>. As an experienced missionary she, moreover, sensed the worsening of the relationship between the local population and the mission; a trend that she regretted seriously. She wrote:

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142 Concluding her account of this event Sister Perpetua remarked: »Indeed one wouldn't imagine what skills are needed in the mission, even shooting!« (»Ja, was man nicht alles in der Mission brauchen kann, sogar auch das Schießen!«) Cf. AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Perpetua Hanfeld, 5.3.1911.

143 Cf. AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Vincentiana Katzfey, 16.6.1911.

144 Cf. AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Philomena Herzog, 25.11.1911.

145 AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Vincentiana Katzfey, 16.6.1911.

146 Cf. *ibid.*; AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Philomena Herzog, 31.3.1911 and Sr. Vincentiana Katzfey, 16.6.1911.

147 »While in the beginning we had around 90 pupils, now we have barely 60. This is mainly due to the frequent infanticide, which the government has done little to prevent. You have to be patient, very patient with the crowd in school, which due to the behavior of the government official becomes increasingly aware of its freedom and knows that nobody can force it to attend school.« (»Während wir anfangs an 90 Schüler hatten, sind es jetzt kaum mehr 60. Schuld daran ist der häufige Kindermord, wogegen die Regierung bis jetzt noch sehr wenig getan hat. Geduld, sehr viel Geduld muss man bei diesem Völkchen in der Schule haben, das durch die Handlungsweise der Regierungsbeamten immer mehr seiner Freiheit bewusst wird und weiß, dass niemand sie zum Schulbesuche zwingen kann.«) Cf. AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Philomena Herzog 31.3.1911.



You can tell by looking at both the adults and the children that our reputation disappears more and more. All we can do is pray and hope that the good Lord will send us better times soon. So far we can take comfort knowing we don't work in vain, even if we don't see any fruits here. Still you can hardly help shedding tears when walking through the villages you see the people lying there so indifferently, not saying a word. During our first years here it was very different. People were always friendly. Whenever we came to the village, everywhere we were stopped and welcomed, although already then they didn't want to know anything about religion. But there was still hope to win them over. This hope indeed has been badly disappointed<sup>148</sup>.

The passage quoted highlights the dilemma that characterized the situation in Monumbo from the missionary point of view: On the one hand, the nuns aimed to exterminate indigenous practices which not only contradicted their own image of Christian womanhood and motherhood but were perceived as the violation of the word of God. On the other hand, however, they were well aware of the fact that any successful missionary work depended on the maintenance of pleasant relationships with the indigenous population. Yet, contrary to Sister Philomena's rather dry assessment of the state of affairs, one of her colleagues described the situation in terms of a battle between divine and evil forces. For Sister Perpetua, the devil was at work in Monumbo. She conceived of missionary martyrdom as the only effective means to eventually bring about the proselytization of the Monumbo: »I am certain [...] blood must be shed before the Monumbo people convert. They are still so obdurate; the devil still holds them firmly in his claws«<sup>149</sup>. In the following, she exemplified the missionary battle against demonic forces by delivering a highly figurative imagery according to which »the devil« dominated the Monumbo people's actions and expressions:

This can be clearly seen when an adult person is terminally ill and we go there and ask if he wants to receive holy baptism. Then they [the people] frequently get so angry that they would foam at their mouths. Even in their deathbed they still would shuffle

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148 »Sowohl den Erwachsenen als auch den Kindern merkt man es an, dass unser Ansehen bei Ihnen immer mehr schwindet. Wir können nur beten und hoffen, dass der liebe Gott nochmal bessere Zeiten schickt. Für uns bleibt ja doch der Trost, dass wir nicht vergebens arbeiten, wenn wir auch hier keine Früchte sehen. Trotzdem fließt doch noch manches Tränchen, wenn man durch die Dörfer geht und die Leute so gleichgültig und schweigsam daliegen sieht. In den ersten Jahren unseres Hierseins war es doch ganz anders. Die Leute waren stets freundlich. Kam man ins Dorf, so wurde man überall angehalten und begrüßt, obschon sie ja auch da noch von Religion nichts wissen wollten. Aber man hoffte sie doch zu gewinnen. Doch in dieser Hoffnung sieht man sich jetzt bitter enttäuscht.« Ibid.

149 »Ich glaube sicher, liebe würdige Mutter, es muss noch erst Blut vergossen werden ehe die Monumbo-Leute sich bekehren. Sie sind noch so verstockt; der Teufel hält sie noch fest in seinen Krallen.« AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Perpetua Hanfeld, 5.3.1911.

together all their force to grasp a fire blight and throw it at us; they always have a fire or a cutlass nearby. They would use anything. Indeed, dear reverend mother, here you can see it clearly with your own eyes how the devil uses all his anger and force in order to get the soul for him<sup>150</sup>.

During the subsequent years only little news from Monumbo reached Europe. Although the altercation as a consequence of the missionary accusation of infanticide had been defused, the situation obviously remained tense and the local missionaries continued to build on the protection provided by the colonial government. In 1915, a nun wrote that the situation in the villages in Monumbo remained calm only due to the agency of British soldiers, who warned the male villagers against attacking the mission<sup>151</sup>. After the Great War, the local missionaries' hopes were increasingly directed toward a new setting – Manam Island, situated twelve kilometers north of Monumbo. Ultimately, in 1924 the entire personnel of the Monumbo missionary station abandoned this particularly difficult field of work and moved to Manam Island.

The abolition of all practices subsumed by the nuns under the term of child murder, however, continued to be a major task also on the missionary agenda in Manam. Apart from the various indigenous methods of contraception and abortion<sup>152</sup>, the missionaries there campaigned in particular against two practices related to childbirth. Firstly, they aimed to change local attitudes to obstetrical death that related to the strong indigenous notion of purity. As mentioned earlier, pollution taboos prevented indigenous women from actively assisting at birth and touching newborns whose mothers had died

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150 »Das sieht man deutlich, wenn ein Erwachsener schwer krank ist und wir dann hingehen und fragen, ob er die hl. Taufe empfangen wolle. Dann werden sie (die Leute) oft so böse, dass ihnen vor lauter Wut der Schaum aus dem Munde herauskommt. Wenn sie schon am Sterben sind, dann rafften sie noch alle Kraft zusammen und greifen nach einem Feuerbrand, um uns damit zu werfen, weil sie das Feuer immer in ihrer Nähe haben, oder auch wohl ein Buschmesser. Da ist ihnen dann ganz gleich, was sie nehmen. Ja, liebe würdige Mutter, hier kann man klar mit Augen sehen wie der Teufel all seine Wut und Kraft gebraucht, um doch ja die Seele für sich zu bekommen.« Ibid.

151 With regard to their function as the nuns' protectors, some writers described British soldiers as »very good«. According to a nun, the British soldiers threatened the indigenous men as follows: »You are not allowed to kill soldiers, missionaries or other people, otherwise we come and kill you.«(»Ihr dürft keine Soldaten, Missionare und keine Leute totmachen, sonst kommen wir und machen euch tot.«) AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 26.3.1915.

152 Missionary efforts to study methods of contraception and abortion are described in the ethnographic field notes of Father Karl Böhm, a SVD priest and Manam missionary from the early 1930s to the end of the 1950s with the exception of two years during World War II. Most of the information about herbs, drinks and practices employed by Manam women for contraception and abortion he, however, obtained from the nuns in general and Sister Cunera Freicks, the local missionary nurse. BÖHM, *The Life*, pp. 78–81.

before the ritual of purification had been performed<sup>153</sup>. Since these infants were considered impure, Manam men and women were prohibited to bring them up and no attempts were made to save their lives. In such cases, the nuns, who were equally banned from attending childbirth by ecclesiastical authorities and the Catholic notion of sexual purity, sought to baptize mothers and children, to take in the newborns and to convince village women to act as surrogate mothers. And even though this endeavor often failed because local women would not touch these babies<sup>154</sup>, the nuns nonetheless succeeded to a certain extent, for the islanders increasingly handed children whose mothers had died in childbed over to the convent<sup>155</sup>. Secondly, the missionaries in Manam campaigned against infanticide practiced actively by the birth mothers. In contrast to earlier interpretations of infanticide by missionaries in other New Guinean settings who saw the main causes in the newborn's sex<sup>156</sup>, potential disability<sup>157</sup>, twin births<sup>158</sup> or larger number of children in the respective family<sup>159</sup>, the nuns in Manam named illegitimacy as the prime reason for the killing of infants.

Interestingly, anthropologist Camilla Wedgwood did not expound on the topic of infanticide. Rather she was concerned with the social consequences of illegitimacy. According to her, illegitimate birth was more common during the 1930s than it used to be prior to colonial expansion, because labor migration and the long-term absence of men from the island brought about the increase of non-marital relationships in Manam. Wedgwood suggested that despite existing social mechanisms to cushion the negative consequences of illegitimate birth (e.g. adoption), the stigma attached to it and the lack

153 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 74f; LUTKEHAUS, *Missionary Maternalism*, p. 221.

154 Sister Cunera Freicks, a missionary nurse in Manam during the 1920s and 1930s, reported on the first case in which the local nuns touched such an impure child. According to her, the people considered the nuns impure as a consequence and many other mothers »begged« the nuns to avoid touching their children in the missionary school. Cf. Sister Cunera Freicks in: BÖHM, *The Life*, pp. 76f.

155 In 1933 (thus eight years after the first nuns settled on the island) social anthropologist Camilla Wedgwood reported that the newborns of mothers who died in childbed were generally delivered to the local nuns. Cf. WEDGWOOD, *The Life of Children*, p. 18.

156 When the nuns referred to the baby's sex in relation with infanticide they either stated that girls were more likely to become victims of infanticide in general or that child mothers did not want to have many children of the same sex. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 25.8.1901.

157 Cf. AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Vincentiana Katzfey, 16.6.1911.

158 Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 5 1960 5–1000 Berichte der Territorialoberinnen: Neu Guinea, p. 5.

159 More precisely, Sister Ursula Sensen at one point held gendered spheres of work in Tumleo society responsible for the infanticide carried out by the mothers. »This [mothers wanting to get rid of their children] happens because the father doesn't work. The woman has to see to it that the man and the children get something to eat.« (»Dies kommt daher, weil der Mann nicht arbeitet. Die Frau muss sorgen, daß der Mann und die Kinder etwas zu essen bekommen.«) Cf. AG SSpS 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, September 1900.

of a biological father's set of kin meant a disadvantage throughout the respective person's life. In pre-colonial times, according to Wedgwood, the (future) mothers of illegitimate children commonly practiced abortion and – in case it failed – infanticide. Yet, although she remarked that by 1932 infanticide was not unknown in Manam, she stated that it occurred only rarely because of the widespread fear of severe punishment through the government<sup>160</sup>.

The missionaries in Manam made use of the possibility to charge infanticide to the colonial authorities. Since Catholic teachings consider infanticide to be a perpetual sin, its abolition constituted a crucial step on the way to the evangelization of the Manam. Still, the issue was a contested one and serious conflicts emerged between the nuns and indigenous women, particularly when Catholic mothers were charged with infanticide. In 1931, the Manam chronicler recorded that »only after several visits, talking and threatening« the nuns managed to »persuade a Catholic girl to keep her baby alive«. The fact that the infant died soon after, however, raised the chronicler's suspicions, and she wondered – had death occurred due to »a natural or violent cause?«<sup>161</sup> Thus, after six years of missionary presence in Manam, suspicion continued to dominate the nuns' relationship with converts when it came to the issue of childbirth. In turn, another incident recorded in 1931 shows that from the nuns' point of view Catholic attitudes to childbirth were part of the normative moral consensus in the island<sup>162</sup>. The case, moreover, demonstrates the nuns' forceful reactions to indigenous women, who had allegedly violated Catholic morals in this regard. The chronicler described in a first person narrative her own response to a mother whom she accused of having »struck dead« her baby after birth:

So I started to harass her. I went to her house. She escaped. I threw all her dishes, pots and bowls out the door, smashing them into pieces. At pitch-dark I returned to her house, accompanied by the [mission] girls. Again, she saw me too soon and escaped. So I gave her birth-hut some strong wrenches until it broke down. [.]Now come and stay in your destroyed house[.] I called after her. All the people were totally subdued. Because they know what is right and what is not. Even if I had burned down the whole village, nobody would have dared to denounce me, because they know very well that they must not kill children. So, due to the grace of God we have already achieved something in this regard. At least 5–6 such poor little creatures have received holy baptism<sup>163</sup>.

160 Cf. WEDGWOOD, *The Life of Children*, pp. 26f.

161 AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, H-P.101.h-12 Manam, p. 51.

162 For another discussion of the sequence quoted, cf. LUTKEHAUS, *Missionary Maternalism*, pp. 221–223.

163 »Ich habe sie aber dafür drangsaliert. Ich ging in ihr Haus. Sie nahm Reißaus. Da feuerte ich ihre Schüsseln und Schalen und Töpfe zum Haus hinaus, daß sie in Stücke flogen. In stock-

The account quoted shows that the nuns attempted to change indigenous approaches to childbirth and infanticide also by force. Yet, that the Manam islanders had acknowledged a universally valid Christian code of morals, as the writer claimed, surely was rather linked to her fear of punishment by the colonial authorities and cannot be interpreted as a general change of local attitudes toward childbirth. Ultimately, her last reference shows that the baptizing of (illegitimate) newborns continued to be the main objective on the missionary agenda. This, in turn, suggests that by 1931 missionary practice in relation with mother and child (health) care emphasized what Catholics interpreted as the babies' spiritual rather than its physical salvation.

Simultaneously, however, change in the nuns' own notion of sexual purity became obvious. While clerics had forbidden the occupation of nuns in obstetrical units with reference to chastity<sup>164</sup>, women missionaries in New Guinea had actually been engaged in the sphere of childbirth from the outset. Ultimately, the gradual shift to an understanding of nursing as a profession provided the framework that allowed them to actively promote their assistance in childbirth. In February 1930, the local congregational elites posted a petition to Europe in which they officially applied for midwifery being included in the syllabus for New Guinea missionary candidates. More precisely, they petitioned for the training and subsequent appointment of a handful of religious midwives to their field of mission, where they should assist in emergency cases of childbirth »in which one or two human lives were in danger«<sup>165</sup>. Interestingly, the petition was marked by a blend of religious and medical arguments and its writers referred to both, high obstetrical mortality and the potential death of un-christened infants due to the absence of qualified midwives and potential sponsors. According to the petitioners, the conventional women missionary strategy, which concentrated on the theoretical instruction of the mothers-to-be, failed for multiple reasons. They expressed their concern that »due to the lack of cleanliness much is damaged«, but they likewise stated that pollution taboos prevented indigenous women from assisting mothers in labor: »Superstition, indigenous custom, fear of men, lack of charity and many other causes prevent [indigenous women] from the exertion

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dunkler Nacht ging ich in Begleitung von Mädchen nochmal hin. Wieder sah sie mich zu früh und entkam. Da gab ich ihrer Geburtshütte ein paar kräftige Stöße, so daß sie am Boden lag. Jetzt komm und schlaf in deinem zerstörten Haus, wenn du Lust hast rief ich ihr zu. Die Leute waren ganz kleinlaut. Sie wissen eben auch, was sein darf und was nicht. Wenn ich ihnen das ganze Dorf angezündet hätte, würden sie nicht gewagt haben, mich anzuzeigen, eben weil sie zu gut wissen, daß sie Kinder nicht töten dürfen. Nun haben wir mit der Gnade Gottes doch schon etwas hierin erreicht. Mindestens 5–6 solch armer Geschöpfchen haben die hl. Taufe empfangen.« AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, H-P.101.h-12 Manam, pp. 51f.

164 Cf. McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 626.

165 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Sr. Imelda Müller, 12.2.1930.

of this service of love<sup>166</sup>. Hence, the petitioners' explanation of indigenous attitudes toward childbirth in terms of indigenous women refusing to assist in labor and delivery referred to superstition in local custom rather than to a generally sinful behavior or evil forces. Indigenous women who had assisted at a birth had to observe complex requirements of purification<sup>167</sup>. The petitioners reminded the congregational elites in Europe that family mothers who had taken part in the delivery of babies were neither allowed to prepare food nor to touch anything in the house and, moreover, ran the risk to suffer reproaches or abuse by their husbands<sup>168</sup>. Although the nuns in New Guinea expressed their confidence that Christianity would introduce change to indigenous attitudes in the long run, they argued that in the meantime only nuns could provide this crucial service. Hence, while at first two strong notions of sexual purity prevented both New Guinean women and western nuns from actually assisting indigenous women in labor, by 1930 the latter emphasized professional aspects of midwifery over concerns for purity and petitioned for the loosening of religious restrictions with regard to mother and child health care.

In view of the persisting ecclesiastical suspicion that the intimacy of medical work and obstetrics was dangerous to chastity, the petitioners added that missionary midwives were to assist at a birth only in the case of emergency<sup>169</sup> and that in the case of a negative answer from the congregation's European leading committee in this question »priests in influential position« had already brought up an alternative suggestion. Accordingly, western secular midwives were to settle in New Guinea and to be employed by the mission. This, however, was strictly rejected by the local nuns who not only disapproved of the prospect of getting secular company in the field but, moreover, dreaded potential grudge and jealousy coming up between secular and religious nurses<sup>170</sup>. Altogether, the arguments brought up by the petitioners obviously convinced the leading committee in Europe, because, according to a note made on the margin of the document, they decided to immediately appoint a nun who was well grounded in midwifery to the New Guinean field.

The 1930s were the period in which New Guinea saw the gradual change of missionary conceptions of nursing in general and mother and child health care in particular. The theme of emergency baptism in the framework of nurs-

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166 Ibid.

167 Cf. BÖHM, *The Life*, p. 74.

168 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Sr. Imelda Müller, 12.2.1930.

169 This point obviously was a crucial requirement for the positive decision taken by the elite nuns in Europe because later Mother Superior Imelda Müller reconfirmed that missionary midwives were to be employed in cases of emergency (meaning danger for life) only. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Sr. Imelda Müller, 18.9.1930.

170 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Sr. Imelda Müller, 12.2.1930.

ing as a charitable service partly gave way to a more integrating approach to missionary health care that related to modern medicine. Missionary nurses like »Sister Doctor« Arildis Engelbrecht gradually came to represent themselves as medical professionals who perceived nursing as their prime duty and only in the second instance pointed out its effect for Catholic advance. In 1937, Sister Arildis wrote to her parents that »with my medical treatment I am, moreover, able to greatly contribute to evangelization« because »the people get attracted to the mission and that way get down to the Catholic faith«<sup>171</sup>. The petition also suggests that the 1930s missionary discourse on childbirth for the first time superordinated medical issues to moral ones, when nuns campaigned to save the lives of mothers and children rather than to administer baptism. Although baptism naturally continued (and continues) to constitute a crucial concern from the religious point of view, some sort of medical ethics was gradually emphasized. In the 1930s several conceptions of missionary nursing coexisted and individual approaches depended on the age of the respective nuns, their professional formation, religious training and sphere of activity.

However, the gradual redefinition of female missionary health care was developed further after 1945. Air dressing was among the first activities to be taken up by the nuns after their remigration to New Guinea from the Australian exile. In the official report submitted to the Servants of the Holy Spirit's general chapter in 1948, sanitary themes were increasingly emphasized as frequent causes of ulcers and sores. In contrast to earlier statements that related skin diseases to New Guineans' allegedly »immoral lifestyle«, the report showed new concerns about cleanliness and hygiene. Besides, the writer introduced issues of nutrition and sanitation to the discussion of frequent sicknesses and resistance to disease in New Guinea<sup>172</sup>. Once again, mother and child health care was represented as the main prospect for women's roles in the reemerging missionary health care system. Alongside their spheres of work the nuns' professional identity was reshaped in the sense that the former image of the baptizing »angel of charity« gave way to that of the professional nurse or midwife. After 1945, the (medical) abatement of high maternal and infant mortality constituted a crucial – and explicit – task on the women missionaries' agenda.

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171 »Auch für die Missionierung kann ich durch Krankenbehandlung viel beitragen, dadurch werden die Leute zur Mission hingezogen und viele kommen dadurch zum kath. Glauben.« AG SSsP PNG 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Arildis Engelbrecht an ihre Familie, fragment, 1937.

172 Cf. AG SSsP 100 General Chapter 4 1948, Durchführung, Sr. Lorraine Becker, Bericht der Region zu den heiligen Engeln, Neuguinea, p. 3.

During the 1950s, a couple of nuns who were trained as midwives were appointed for New Guinea. These missionary midwives acted in different areas of the vicariates. According to an official report submitted to the European religious elites in 1960, obstetrical death declined in these areas and the local priests called for the deployment of a trained midwife at all New Guinean missionary stations<sup>173</sup>. A similar assessment came from Sister Salesiana Soete who stated that the nuns' engagement in mother and child health care was also appreciated by the Australian colonial government<sup>174</sup>. Up to 1960, the nuns established four institutions, called »mother homes«, which actually constituted some sort of maternal clinics. According to the regional head of the congregation, the missionary offer of a hospital birth was adopted by indigenous mothers who partly applied in advance to get a clinic bed<sup>175</sup>. This suggests that once institutions were conceptualized more generally as part of a health service rather than as prime sites of evangelization the indigenous demand for western medical technology in relation with childbirth increased.

Another novelty in the post-war missionary approach to health care was the endeavor to explicitly train and integrate indigenous women. Although converted girls and women had always assisted the nurses, it was only in 1960 that the local head of the nuns arrived at the conclusion that »it would be a big act of love if native girls could be trained in mother and child health care«<sup>176</sup>. Her suggestion implied that meanwhile the indigenous notion of purity/pollution had started to alter and that New Guinean women had expressed interest in becoming midwives themselves. Put into practice, in the late 1950s the nuns established a school attached to one »maternal clinic« in which indigenous women, who by then already had the opportunity to become state-certificated nurses, were trained as midwives. Still, the actual learning objectives in this missionary training program in midwifery must be seen in relation with the actual situation on location. Practically, one nun simultaneously functioned as the local midwife and head of the school and clinic. Notwithstanding many such structural difficulties, the detailed report on female missionary work in New Guinea (1960) concluded the section on mother and child health care by pointing out a positive trend with regard to the development of birthrates. The author stated that in contrast to earlier decades, when families with more than four children were rare, by 1960 several indigenous families counted large numbers (»8–9–11«) of children<sup>177</sup>. The

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173 Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, Sr. Nazaria Albers, Neuguinea: Region zu Ehren der heiligen Engel, p. 5.

174 Cf. SOETE, Geschichte, p. 196.

175 AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, Sr. Nazaria Albers, Neuguinea: Region zu Ehren der heiligen Engel, p. 5.

176 Ibid., p. 5.

177 Ibid.



nuns explained the growing numbers of children per family by the decrease of both maternal death and infanticide. According to the writer of the report this was facilitated thanks to the (medical and educational) agency of the women missionaries. In her obviously lopsided interpretation, it was the over sixty years of religious, material and educational agency of western nuns that had ultimately brought about change in the field of childbirth. To be sure, the writer remained largely silent about indigenous agency as yet another cause for change in indigenous attitudes to childbirth and to missionary medical services. She concluded her report on mother and child health care as follows: »Our missionary work is still pioneer work that can't be expressed in words or in numbers like a statistical survey. All sisters have more or less a part in this missionary work«<sup>178</sup>.

In the eyes of the nuns, the achievements of female missionary work could not be expressed appropriately in the form of statistics. According to the report, the increasing utilization of Catholic mother and child health care was connected to other sub-fields of missionary work such as girls' schooling and education. All factors together would have impacted positively on the decline of obstetrical mortality and the rise of birth-rates. Hence, by then the nuns increasingly emphasized the secular goals of female missionary work with regard to the treatment of sickness and childbirth; a trend that indeed reminds of the general introduction of a terminology of development policy to Catholic missiology after Vatican II<sup>179</sup>.

### Entangled Concepts: Medical Care, religious Service and social Practice

In Togo and New Guinea alike, vulnerable situations of human life were considered as promising starting-points for female missionary activity from the outset. This was inextricably linked with both a gendered understanding of the concept of Christian charity and attempts to introduce Catholic ritual in relation with sickness and death to non-Christian cultural settings. Up to 1918, major significance was given to the religious salvation of patients, thus, one crucial drive behind missionary nursing was the attempt to win patients over for Catholicism on the deathbed. For nuns in both places the intimacy of medical work was a promising framework to achieve a deathbed conversion. The actual outlook and organization of missionary nursing in Togo on

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178 »Unsere Missionsarbeit ist noch immer Pionierarbeit, die sich nicht in Zahlen und Worten statistikartig ausdrücken lässt. Alle Schwestern haben an dieser Missionsarbeit mehr oder weniger Anteil.« Ibid., p. 5.

179 Cf. HUBER, *Constituting the Church*, p. 109.

the one hand and New Guinea on the other, however, differed. This was related to the local missionary organization more generally and cultural specificities in particular. While in Togo nursing constituted an additional occupation in which all women missionaries engaged, in New Guinea single nuns stuck out in their capacity as nurses. Consequently, nursing in New Guinea soon underwent a gradual professionalization. The imperative to appoint better trained medical workers for the New Guinean field at first derived from the need to improve the medical service for the western missionary personnel<sup>180</sup>. In contrast to the missionaries in Togo who consulted government doctors and/or went on home leaves when necessary, their counterparts in New Guinea saw themselves forced to battle sickness within their own institutional framework. In view of the vast absence of a colonial medical scheme in the prefecture apostolic of Kaiser-Wilhelmsland, better training was also required to provide for the health care of the indigenous population. Sister Barnaba Zirkel managed the first dispensary attached to the Tumleo-convent soon after her arrival in 1908.

Apart from sickness, (cultural and religious practices around) childbirth constituted a crucial concern of missionary nuns. As women they were often the only missionaries who were admitted access to women giving birth. In this context missionary activity was guided by the same basic idea in Togo and New Guinea. Accordingly, nuns aimed to achieve the baptism of newborns. However, while women missionaries in Togo reduced their activities to calling upon mothers in childbed and bringing up the topic of baptism, their colleagues in New Guinea dropped by at birth places driven by other urgency. This derived from their fear of those indigenous cultural practices which they subsumed under the term of infanticide. In contrast to New Guinea where missionaries explicitly warned of negative demographical development, the nuns in Togo neither expressed suspicions with regard to indigenous practices of infanticide nor cautioned of population decrease<sup>181</sup>. Quite the contrary, they interpreted the high social significance given to motherhood and large numbers of children as corresponding to Christian familial ideals<sup>182</sup>. Generally speaking, the nuns in Togo did not feel compelled to engage with local cultural practices around childbirth. Indigenous women in Togo gave birth in their houses and under the assistance of other experienced women. According to the Protestant missionary-anthropologist Jakob Spieth (1856–1914), one indigenous »midwife« was always present at the

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180 Cf. ECKART, *Medizin*, pp. 414f.

181 This was equally true for the heads of the Catholic missions in both settings. While the prefect apostolic of Kaiser-Wilhelmsland repeatedly warned Berlin about population decline in the colony, the issue was not brought up by ecclesiastical elites in Togo.

182 Generally speaking, the missionaries considered family ties to be very strong in Togo. Cf. THAUREN, *Die Mission*, p. 10.

birth. She was the one who received the child and cut the umbilical cord. In return for her assistance she was compensated with goods. In Togo, knowledge on childbirth was passed on between generations of women and future midwives were instructed by older and experienced ones<sup>183</sup>. In addition, the early twentieth century colonial medical scheme in southern Togo was also concerned with this field. The government doctor Ernst Rodenwaldt (1878–1965), who had taken up work in Lomé in 1909, sought to battle infant mortality by introducing a western oriented obstetrical unit and trained some indigenous women in midwifery practices<sup>184</sup>. Consequently, childbirth as such never constituted an issue for the nuns in Togo who accordingly concentrated on the period after birth and attempted to reach the baptism of the newborn. Their activity was thus largely compatible with the official Roman standpoint according to which nuns were banned from the field of obstetrics.

In New Guinea, in contrast, two (interrelated) issues dominated the nuns' dealings with childbirth. Firstly, the issue (and fear) of what missionaries called infanticide shaped the Servants of the Holy Spirit's approach to the subject. Secondly, indigenous pollution taboos prevented New Guineans from assisting women in labor. Hence, nuns, who – due to their sex – were the only missionaries to be granted access to birth places, derived need for action. Therefore, they ultimately accommodated their own understanding of sexual purity to the superior goal of assisting in (traumatic) childbirth, donating emergency baptism and battling obstetrical death. The concern with birth-rates brought together religious and secular colonizers both of whom expressed concern with regard to the colony's demographic development. And even though the missionaries expected the government to take rigorous action in this issue, it was precisely European interference with indigenous practices around childbirth that led to the most serious conflicts between the nuns and indigenous women. Altogether, the reading of the day-to-day accounts of nuns in tension with anthropological literature has shown that the introduction of sacramental practice was contested by indigenous peoples. At times and places the Catholic ritual of baptism took on new meanings in the sense that it was reinterpreted by the respective populations.

To conclude, while their works had been hidden by missionary statistics over decades, the nuns actively contributed to the introduction and gradual acceptance of sacramental practice<sup>185</sup>. This again was linked with the trans-

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183 Cf. SPIETH, *Die Ewe-Stämme*, p. 199.

184 Cf. ECKART, *Medizin*, p. 129. According to Knoll, Rodenwaldt was the first German doctor who trained indigenous midwives with the goal to reduce infant mortality in the African colonies. Cf. KNOLL, *Togo*, p. 91.

185 In this sense the missionary nuns' perception of their roles in the missions also diverged from the way in which Sister Sixta Kasbauer, the first woman to graduate in missiology from the University of Münster in 1927, conceptualized them. Kasbauer demanded a holistic approach

formation of what Europeans referred to as »heathen« space because it contributed to the so-called »spiritual advance« that completed the geographic expansion of the missionary Church. The missionary aim to introduce Christian ritual and cultural practice to colonial settings affected both individuals and social patterns. According to Catholic doctrine, an individual's life starts with the establishment of a spiritual bond with God through the ritual of baptism. Keeping up the missionary metaphor of the »heathen land«, the battle between »divine light« and »diabolic darkness« somehow shifted to the (culturally contested) site of the newborn, the ill or the dying body. After all, baptism in Catholicism is the sacrament by which people are made »members of Christ and incorporated into the Church«<sup>186</sup>. While indigenous people in New Guinea perceived other supernatural forces as weakening or polluting bodies, nuns saw the sacrament as an ability to actively battle evil forces: In their eyes, to administer emergency baptism precisely meant to win souls for Christ and saving them from what they feared as the eternal pains of hell.

Besides this supernatural or spiritual function, however, the ceremonial of baptism in European culture also had the ritual function to mark birth. Practically, the baptism of an indigenous newborn implied that the missionary Church claimed power over the candidate's future life. A couple of years later, one of its representatives would show up and demand the baptized child for religious and secular instruction. Catholic missionaries were also likely to be on the spot when a baptized person (who officially figured as a member of the missionary church) came of age, married or deceased. In the culturally hybrid setting of the mission field, the ritual itself became the stage to demonstrate religious dominance. The introduction of sacramental practice at certain stages of human life was to an important extent about the introduction of a Christian social rhythm to non-European societies<sup>187</sup>.

Altogether, the missionaries' efforts at making the indigenous accept emergency baptism shows that rather than attempting to actually »convert« them they aimed to prevent people from dying without baptism. The nuns' activities impacted on what ecclesiastical authorities acknowledged as spiritual advance because growing numbers of baptism implied the rise of the Catholic population in areas of the globe that from the European Christian point of view constituted »heathen lands«. The missions' material expansion

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to female missionary work and focused mainly on cultural work. Cf. SIXTA KASBAUER SIXTA, *Die Teilnahme der Frauenwelt am Missionswerk. Eine missionstheoretische Studie*, Münster 1928.

186 Cf. Baptism, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm> (7.12.2009).

187 Although here the focus is on baptism and its entanglement with missionary nursing, similar patterns could be discussed for other public (religious) ceremonies carried out to mark for instance coming-of-age, marriage or death.

and the introduction of sacramental practice can be seen as two different yet intertwined aspects of the transformation of »heathen« space. On the other hand, it remains open how missionaries endeavored to lead indigenous peoples to actually embrace Catholic faith. The conversion of non-Christian girls and women, understood as the adoption of a Catholic religious identity and internalization of a belief system, was the second big project on the agenda of women missionaries. It will be discussed in the next chapter.



## 5. Refashioning Women, converting Souls

Sister Epiphania Dickerhoff, a German nun and traveling companion of Mother Superior Theresia Messner on her »visitation« of the Servants of the Holy Spirit's branches in Japan, China, the Philippines and New Guinea in 1913/1914, summarized her observations with regard to the issue of conversion in northern New Guinea as follows:

The Kanakas are people of very low morals; tenaciously clinging to their superstitions, they don't want to be told about God and our holy religion. They would accept to get baptized, but they can't bring themselves to give up their heathen customs and mores. [...] Fortunately, the heathens totally agree with the baptism and the Catholic upbringing of their children. For the priests and sisters it is hard missionary work to educate the children from these morally low-standing families and it is absolutely necessary for them to spend a couple of years at the missionary station so as to come out of the heathen environment with its morally corrupting customs and get used to a settled Christian life and diligent work. That's why the priests employ a number of boys and the sisters [employ] girls at all stations, urging them to exercise their religious duties. Once we see more Catholic marriages taking place after a couple of years, the divine heart surely will help Christianity take deeper roots and overcome the darkness of sin and the night of heathendom. Already there are some Catholic families here and the Catholics can easily be recognized; the men wear a waistcloth and the women a complete loose dress, whereas the heathen men and women are dressed poorly and the children run around naked<sup>1</sup>.

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1 »Die Kanaken stehen in sittlicher Beziehung sehr tief, dazu halten sie zäh an ihrem Geisterglauben fest und wollen deshalb vom lb. Gott und unserer hl. Religion nicht gern hören. Taufen lassen würden sie sich schon, aber ihre heidnischen Sitten und Gebräuche aufgeben, dazu können sie sich schwer entschließen. [...] Zum Glück sind die Heiden ganz damit einverstanden, daß ihre Kinder getauft und katholisch erzogen werden. Für die Priester und Schwestern ist es schwere Missionsarbeit, die Kinder aus diesen tiefstehenden Familien zu ordentlichen Christen heranzuziehen, und es ist ganz notwendig, daß sie mehrere Jahre auf der Missionsstation zubringen, damit sie aus der heidnischen Umgebung mit ihren sittenverderbenden Gebräuchen herauskommen und an ein geregeltes Christenleben und fleißige Arbeit gewöhnt werden. Es werden daher auf jeder Station von den Priestern eine Anzahl boys und von den Schwestern Mädchen beschäftigt und zur Erfüllung ihrer religiösen Pflichten angehalten. Wenn nach einigen Jahren mehr katholische Ehen zustande gekommen sind, so wird das göttliche Herz Jesu gewiß auch helfen, daß das Christentum allmählich tiefere Wurzeln faßt und die Finsternis der Sünde und die Nacht des Heidentums überwunden werden. Jetzt sind schon einige katholische Familien da, und man kann die Katholiken gewöhnlich schon bald erkennen, die Männer tragen ein Lendentuch und die Frauen ein vollständiges loses Kleid, wo hingegen die heidnischen Männer und Frauen nur ganz notdürftig bekleidet sind, und die Kinder nackt herumlaufen.« AG SSpS, Dickerhoff, Missionsreisen, pp. 13f.

Sharing the mission's religious goals and ideological underpinnings, Sister Epiphania regarded issues of morality as the main obstacle to the proselytization of New Guinea. Perceiving Christian mores as universally true and absolutely superior, she rejected indigenous social and cultural practice on grounds of morals. Her account provides an insight into Catholic mission policy in northern New Guinea on the eve of the Great War. The lack of success that had attended the missionaries' initial endeavors to proselytize the adult population in the region had led them to change track and focus on providing a religious education to the children upon whom a new Christian society was to be built. Sister Epiphania identified the missionary station as the site at which »conversion« took place. Conversion was to be understood as a process of genuine transformation of the self that involved a moral change and a (conscious) turning to the God and religion as they were represented in the teachings of the Church<sup>2</sup>. To be sure, the Catholic concept of conversion goes beyond a person's formal change of religious confession to include a processual re-constitution of the self and a reorientation of the person's entire conduct in life<sup>3</sup>. According to Church teachings, conversion involves both Divine and human agency: Conversion is the interplay between God's grace and the human response. Furthermore, conversion required a person's agreement to and comprehension of the Church's teachings and his or her long-term obedience to conform to its principles and precepts<sup>4</sup>. The passage quoted shows that, while in the eyes of the author baptism certainly constituted a milestone on the way to conversion, the New Guinean people's transformation to which she aspired, moreover, required a range of changes in behavior and attitude. However, in the social and cultural settings of the mission fields, the issue of conversion held, moreover, wider implications that related to the structure and order of society at large. Acting on the supposition that converted people (as well as converts-to-be) were in need of supervision in their

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2 Benedict GULDNER, Conversion, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 4, New York 1908, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04347a.htm> (25.03.2013).

3 According to Catholic doctrine, conversion has to be understood twofold. While on the one hand it refers to a person's change of confession, on the other hand it describes the comprehensive reconstitution of the individual. Baptism emerges as an important turning point in the former understanding of conversion, but it constitutes only the point of departure in the latter understanding, which views conversion as a part of the life-long process of sanctification. Since the early modern period, there has arisen a variety of understandings concerning »conversion«. With these differing views of conversion came various understandings of sanctification. For example, certain (revivalist) Christian movements, like Pietism, distinguished between baptized (»outwardly converted«) and converted (»reborn«) persons. Cf. Falk WAGNER, *Bekehrung III. Systematisch-theologisch*, in: TRE 5, Berlin 1980, pp. 469–480; David M. LUEBKE et al. (eds), *Conversion and the Politics of Religion in Early Modern Germany*, New York 2012.

4 Cf. Oscar SCHULTZ KRIEBEL, *Conversion and Religious Experience*, Pennsburg 1907, p. 7; WAGNER, *Bekehrung III*, pp. 479f.



day-to-day lives, missionaries targeted the total (ideally boarding) education of indigenous children and adolescents at the convents. These were thought of (as can be seen from Sister Epiphania's remarks) as controllable spaces where a Christian religious and social order defined the moral worlds and social practice of their inhabitants<sup>5</sup>. This time of education was ideally followed by a period of employment designed to last until marriage to a spouse with the same religious and educational background occurred. This reveals the missionaries' endeavors to control the religious, (re)productive and social lives of converts, whose labor, in turn, contributed to the mission's economic reproduction.

In her function as a visiting nun from Europe Sister Epiphania, to be sure, wrote from the limited perspective of an outsider definitely failing (or avoiding) to address the complex and numerous troubles that this comprehensive mission policy encountered from various parties. To name a few, the »total agreement« between parents and missionaries about the Catholic upbringing of the indigenous offspring at the missionary stations was an unfounded assumption. At times the mission's conception of total education conflicted not only with the interest of the indigenous parties involved but also with the ambitions of European planters and the colonial state, both of which competed for indigenous labor. Most importantly, however, the writer's depiction of religious change as a process of total transformation based on a one-way stream of influence from the missionaries and Christianity to the converted individuals in fact contradicts with the day-to-day accounts of nuns that rather suggest resistance and selectivity as the significant feature of indigenous attitudes. Hence, Sister Epiphania's account, while constituting an idealized narrative of the religious encounter that missionary strategies and imaginations, has no scholarly value for the historical study of the missionary encounter – it gives no insight into the ways in which indigenous people made use (or sense) of mission Christianity in its religious and cultural forms.

From the point of view of the indigenous populations in Togo and New Guinea, missionary stations were the centers of a foreign culture whose significance went far beyond the religious domain. Depending on time and place, they were familiar, to varying extents, with aspects of European material and intellectual culture through their contacts with colonial administrators, traders, travelers or Protestant missionaries assigning them different values. Missionary stations provided access to literacy, western education and languages, medicine, goods, dress, technology and employment. Yet, none of these aspects was accessible separately from the others, and all involved the instruction in the Catholic faith. For indigenous people, the contact with the

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5 For the missionary station as the specific site where the missionary program of conversion was to be implemented cf. PAKENDORF, *Mission als Gewalt*, pp. 239–240.

mission in general and education or employment at the missionary station in particular implied that they were expected to conform (at least temporarily) to a set of external attributes, social patterns and codes of behavior. Sister Epiphania depicted conversion to Catholicism as an observable process that featured a set of markers on both the individual and social level. On the one hand, she referred to the nuclear family, based on Catholic marriage, as the social unit in which converted women and men were organized. On the other hand, she pointed to the reshaped appearance and attitudes of the indigenous Catholics – their specific work habits, bodily practices and dress codes – which enabled her to identify converts. In any case, contact with the mission inevitably meant getting acquainted with a philosophy of life based on Christianity and western cultural norms. Emphasizing continuity over time, scholars have pointed out the decisive role of Protestant missions in introducing a »new mode of being« to non-European societies that was linked to their (often invisible) power over everyday meaning and regular activities in the indigenous day-to-day world and evolved around issues such as aesthetics and religion, bodily representation and daily habits<sup>6</sup>.

As Patricia Grimshaw has noted, »missionaries presented Christianity to indigenous people as a gendered faith«, because men and women were expected to serve the Church in different ways<sup>7</sup>. The first nuns arrived in both missions with concrete ideas about how Christian girls and women were to be like and to behave in society. Deeply rooted in western culture and family forms, these ideas naturally contrasted with the ways of social organization in New Guinea and Togo. Propagating a conservative, pre-industrial model of society, the nuns not only countered practices like polygamy and divorce but promoted a particular way of performing marriage, family and sexuality. The nuns' ideas of femininity and masculinity clustered around the nuclear family, the indissoluble monogamous marriage and a marital division of labor that recognized the male breadwinner and assigned women's roles to the domestic domain. Femininity, in this respect, was associated with the image of the pious mother and housewife who dedicated herself to the upbringing of her children and the creation of a Catholic family home. As a consequence, missionary girls' education was one-sided insofar as it corresponded to this ideal of gender relations in marriage and society as well as of gendered spheres of work within the family. Somewhat paradoxical, it was nuns, hence women who themselves had rejected marriage and motherhood, who functioned as the role models for indigenous girls in the Catholic missionary context to become wives and mothers.

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6 Cf. COMAROFF/COMAROFF, *Christianity*, p. 2.

7 GRIMSHAW, *Missions*, p. 3.

Performing the housework at the missionary stations, nuns not only conveyed domestic skills to the girls present but concomitantly exemplified an important lesson about Christian ideals of gender. From the point of view of ecclesiastical leaders and missiologists it was not the women missionaries' labor as such that was irreplaceable in the mission fields, but rather its extended implication of gendering work. Even though, according to Prefect Apostolic Hermann Bücking, indigenous domestic workers were »three times cheaper«, the Catholic mission had to ensure that there were »sisters for that to teach it to the girls, who after all have to know how to do it as Christian mothers«<sup>8</sup>. For missiologist Robert Streit, the crucial function of missionary nuns was rooted in »the power of the personal example«, for their ideal behavior taught the people about the »immaculate, selfless and all-transcending love to God« as well as »Christian charity, self-renunciation and self-denial but above all the example of virginity«<sup>9</sup>. Streit listed a set of gendered Catholic virtues the cultivation of which had been constitutive to the religious identities of nuns over centuries and which, moreover, served the Catholics to distinguish their missionary practices and organizational forms from that of other confessions. In contrast to the Protestant case – in which the missionary couple's domestic and sexual arrangements were meant to give an »object lesson of a civilized Christian home«<sup>10</sup> – Catholic missionaries invested the paradigm of female celibacy with the transformative power to introduce a gendered understanding of what they promoted as the virtue of virginity. This point Streit emphasized when he concluded that »the odor of this lily [female virginity] exerts a wonderful charm« that »renews womankind, sanctifies family life, ennobles the female sex and transforms the heathen country into a field of lilies«<sup>11</sup>.

In their endeavors to proselytize women, missionary nuns, drawing on their own conceptions of moral self and discipline, aimed at refashioning indigenous women through dress, domestic work and education<sup>12</sup>. By estab-

8 »Das Waschen und Kochen wird uns durch einen Waschmann und Koch dreimal billiger als durch Schwestern. Aber wir müssen Schwestern haben, damit selbe es auch den Mädchen bringen, die es ja später als christliche Mütter können müssen.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Hermann Bücking, 23.1.1903.

9 Cf. STREIT, *Die Weltmission*, pp. 101f.

10 Cf. LANGMORE, *Missionary Lives*, pp. 65–81; Diane LANGMORE, *The Object Lesson of a civilised, Christian Home*, in: JOLLY/MACINTYRE (eds), *Family and Gender*, pp. 84–94. On Togo cf. Rainer ALSHEIMER, *Zwischen Sklaverei und christlicher Ethnogenese. Die vorkoloniale Missionierung der Ewe in Westafrika (1847–ca. 1890)*, Münster/New York/München/Berlin 2007, pp. 65–73.

11 »Der Duft dieser reinen Lilie übt einen wunderbaren Zauber aus. Er erneuert die heidnischen Frauenwelt, heiligt das Familienleben, adelt das weibliche Geschlecht und wandelt das Heidentum um zum Lilienfeld [...]« STREIT, *Die Weltmission*, pp. 103.

12 For similar approaches to mission history all of which have focused on the body as a contested site of cultural and religious tension, cf. ROUNTREE, *Re-Making the Maori Female Body*; Pat-

lishing control over the indigenous female body they not only attempted to initiate moral change in individuals but to introduce into society a Christian social and moral order. The nuns endeavored to discipline the gendered indigenous self in the sense of spiritually and sexually purifying colonized women through the external regulation of their bodies. Put into practice, their conceptions of self and moral agency involved the attempt to introduce the idea of human sinfulness (and of original sin) and resulted in the rejection of indigenous social and sexual practices on precisely these grounds. One important site where these changes aspired should be realized was the missionary classroom.

### Catholic Girls' Schooling

In both areas of interest, formal girls' schooling was exclusively delivered by Christian institutions. While in Togo there was a limited extent of state schooling for boys<sup>13</sup>, in the prefecture apostolic of Kaiser-Wilhelmsland western education was provided by missionaries only<sup>14</sup>. It was not before 1946 that the area of education in what was then called the Territory of Papua and New Guinea was placed under the supervision of the (since 1918 Australian) colonial administration<sup>15</sup>.

In southern Togo, Protestant, Catholic, Wesleyan and governmental schooling coexisted side by side. Wealthy Africans, moreover, attended the educational facilities in the French and British colonies of Gold Coast, Lagos or Dahomey. The co-existence of different education providers entailed competition and the upgrading, at least to a certain extent, of formal learning opportunities. Scholars of colonial education in Togo have pointed out the extended (compared with other settings in the German colonial empire) local training system<sup>16</sup>. Yet, this applied only to boys' schooling along the West African coast. The educational offers in the interior, just as the sector of girls'

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ricia GRIMSHAW, *New England Missionary Wives, Hawaiian Women and »the Cult of Womanhood«*, in: JOLLY/MACINTYRE (eds), *Family and Gender*, pp. 19–45; Peggy BROCK, *Nakedness and Clothing in early Encounters between Aboriginal People of Central Australia, Missionaries and Anthropologists*, in: *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 8/1 (2007).

13 For a discussion of state schooling for boys in German Togo cf. e.g.: ADICK, *Bildung und Kolonialismus*, pp. 183–193; KNOLL, *Togo*, pp. 102–112.

14 The only governmental boys' school established in the territory politically constituting German New Guinea was in Namanula, situated close by the governmental headquarters in Rabaul (New Britain) and thus far beyond the prefecture confines. Cf. Hermann Joseph HIERY, *Schule und Ausbildung in der deutschen Südsee*, in: HIERY (ed.), *Die deutsche Südsee*, pp. 198–238, i.e. 212.

15 Cf. Patricia LYONS JOHNSON, *Education and the »New« Inequality in Papua New Guinea*, in: *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 24/3 (1993), pp. 183–204, i.e. 185.

16 Cf. ADICK, *Bildungsstatistiken*, pp. 21–42.

schooling, by contrast, were limited to either Protestant or Catholic instruction. The introduction of higher educational facilities, as were available in the neighboring colonies, was largely suppressed by the German government which feared the creation of indigenous intellectual elites.

The Catholic mission established its first schools in Togo in 1892 – at a favorable historical moment, when a considerable part of the indigenous population had not only become familiar with western education but also come to consider it useful for social and economic advance<sup>17</sup>. Birgit Meyer has noted that the enduring desire for western education in southern Togo was embedded in the Ewes' general openness to change since the second half of the nineteenth century<sup>18</sup>. During the 1890s, the coastal society had undergone broad socio-economic transformations. A new social division of labor had started to challenge the indigenous subsistence economy which was based on a familial organizational framework of production and kinship solidarity<sup>19</sup>. This trend proceeded and the growing indigenous appreciation of missionary education for young men gained momentum in the first decade of the twentieth century, when German Togo was increasingly becoming accessible by railway lines. Scholars of colonial education in Togo have not only emphasized the indigenous people's high interest in western forms of learning but also suggested links between the expansion of the educational system and infrastructural as well as colonial-economic transformations<sup>20</sup>.

However, in contrast to boys' education, which encompassed three types of schools (elementary, normal and craft's schools), girls' schooling was limited to elementary education and always involved instruction in a range of housewifery skills. From the missionary point of view, girls' schools constituted important tools in the promotion of western domesticity in the Togolese cultural setting as well as the most promising means to successfully battle polygamy and what missionaries characterized as fetishism, meaning the form of animism or spiritualism that prevailed in West Africa<sup>21</sup>. While girls' schools were more or less formally affiliated to all five women's convents, some additional facilities were maintained in the respective town centers designed to recruit larger pupil numbers. In addition, the missionaries established so-called outpost schools across southern Togo, which they increasingly extended to the north toward the limits of German colonial rule. These outpost schools were managed by indigenous teachers and were usu-

17 Cf. ADICK, *Bildung und Kolonialismus*, p. 171.

18 Cf. Birgit MEYER, *Christian Mind and Worldly Matters. Religion and Materiality in Nineteenth-Century Gold Coast*, in: *Journal of Material Culture* 2 (1997), pp. 311–337, i.e. 315.

19 Cf. Ansa ASAMOA, *On German Colonial Rule in Togo*, in: HEINE/VAN DER HEYDEN (eds), *Studien*, pp. 114–125, i.e. 120; GREENE, *Gender*, pp. 136–155.

20 Cf. ADICK, *Bildungsstatistiken*, pp. 32 and 38.

21 Cf. KNOLL, *Togo*, pp. 113f.

ally open to pupils of both sexes. The teaching nuns went there on a regular basis in order to provide religious instruction. Generally speaking, a girls' school's location considerably shaped the learning opportunities it provided. Depending on the setting, different numbers of teaching nuns instructed smaller or larger groups of pupils of different ages and educational levels. Apart from the indigenous demand for western learning opportunities, the variety of subjects offered was affected also by the local development of Protestant girls' schooling.

In southern Togo, mission activity was characterized by a fierce denominational competition with pupils being wooed by Protestants and Catholics alike. Representatives of either denomination settled down in all major towns and erected outpost places throughout the area. In 1912, the future director of the Protestant North German Missionary Society, Martin Schlunk (1874–1958), stated that nowhere in the German colonial empire Catholic and Protestant missionary stations were »mixed up together like in the south of Togo«<sup>22</sup>. Perceived as an unwanted competition on the part of the mission-sending institutions, for the indigenous population the parallel existence of educational systems of both denominations, however, entailed the possibility to compare and to choose between religious and secular learning opportunities. Both missions had to consider the rival's organizational development in order to attract pupils and to meet local educational demands. In the context of girls' schooling this was most obvious with regard to the most popular subjects such as sophisticated stitchery or music classes. In Lomé, the denominational competition gained momentum in 1902 when rumors came up in the Catholic mission that well-trained Protestant deaconesses with a good command of the Ewe vernacular and supported by indigenous assistants were about to move over from Keta in order to open a girls' school<sup>23</sup>. As a consequence of the arrival of the unwanted rival, the nuns saw themselves forced to expand the learning opportunities to prevent pupils from switching to the local Protestant school. This is how in 1904 a teacher in Lomé justified her request for new teaching materials: »We have to do everything in our little power to prevent the schoolgirls from walking out on us«<sup>24</sup>. The second sphere of intense competition between Catholic and Pro-

22 Cf. Martin SCHLUNK, *Die Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft in Togo*, No. 2, Bremen 1912, p. 166.

23 In particular the Lomé-based nuns observed the activities of the Protestant women missionaries with heightened attention. (Cf. AG SSps 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 16.2.1902). Interestingly, the nuns' main »rival«, diaconess Hedwig Rohns (1852–1935), who spent almost twenty years among the Ewe in West Africa, and whose steps were closely watched by the Catholic missionaries, did not even mention the nuns in the book she published after her return to Germany. Cf. Hedwig ROHNS, *Zwanzig Jahre Missions-Diakonissenarbeit im Ewelande*, Bremen 1912.

24 »Wir müssen alles aufbieten, was in unseren schwachen Kräften steht, daß uns die Schulmäd-

testant women missionaries were the preschool classes or nursery schools<sup>25</sup>. In Togo, Catholic nursery schools were started out of teaching practice and served mainly two purposes. On the one hand, by separately instructing the pre-school age children, who often joined their older siblings that attended the elementary schools, the nuns kept track of Togo's youngest generation on a daily basis without hazarding the quality of the lessons or the order aspired in the classrooms. Behind that was the nuns' deep conviction that the children were better off in the Catholic environment of the convent than with their families and in their home villages. More importantly, however, the missionaries perceived nursery schools as a promising means to introduce western concepts of religious, moral and bodily discipline to pupils from an early age on as well as to get them acquainted with the German language. Apart from (usually German) children's games, the nursery schoolchildren were instructed in Catholic devotional practice (i.e. the sign of the cross) and trained in the memorization of prayers, chants and quotations in German and Ewe. From the nuns' point of view, the most challenging task for the instructor, who was not necessarily a trained »teaching nun« but might have been a »working nun« or – after 1908 – an indigenous woman teacher, was to maintain quietness. In 1902, the nursery teacher in Lomé stated: »I'm quite fond of the kids. Getting along with them doesn't require great wisdom, just lots of patience«<sup>26</sup>.

Convinced of the superiority of their own pedagogical background, nuns understood obedience as a key value in education. Hence, strokes were a common means of disciplining and establishing what they called order in the classrooms. Also, casual comments were voiced about the inappropriate softness of newly arrived women missionaries who would hesitate to exercise physical punishment on pupils – teaching nuns agreed on corporeal punishment being an essential means to shape the children's behavior from an early age onwards; an educational principle that was largely shared by both their local superiors and European readers. Significantly, teachers legitimated physical punishment in Togolese (as well as in New Guinean) classrooms by pointing out the pupils' non-Christian cultural and ethnic origin. Their

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chen nicht davon laufen.« AG SSps 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 6.7.1904.

25 As mentioned earlier, in Togo the practice of collecting pupils in the villages on a daily basis was usually pursued by women missionaries. With regard to nursery pupils who were considered of utmost importance by both denominations, this gave rise to notions according to which Protestant women missionaries »took« or even »snatched away« (potential) candidates from Catholic instruction. Cf. AG SSps 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Schwester Hubertine Jung, 9.10.1908 and Schwester Ambrosia Hamerts, 6.12.1910.

26 »Ich habe die Kleinen ganz gerne. Große Weisheit brauch man bei diesen nicht zu besitzen, nur viel Geduld.« AG SSps 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Ludgera Hölkemann 1.4.1902.

notions of strokes being of high educational value in fact resembled the rhetoric of secular colonists in Togo who had instituted and legitimized corporeal punishment on behalf of the civilizing mission<sup>27</sup>. In response to a slightly critical remark of one of her colleagues about the »severe use of the stick« in the Togolese girls' schools, Sister Pancratia Tendahl assured the superior general: »There is no need for you to be shocked, but things simply won't work without the stick. And we are confident that the young tree can still be bent«<sup>28</sup>.

Generally speaking, problems experienced in the classrooms were usually traced back to the pupils' lack of disciplined behavior while other sources of troubles as faced, for instance, by teachers who were just beginning and often had received inadequate training, were largely silenced. Up to 1918, teacher training in the congregation's Motherhouse consisted of studies and theoretical instruction and did not involve any kind of internship. The (initial) lack of language skills surely constituted another decisive factor. In Togo, newcomers took up teaching immediately which meant that inexperienced nuns, having spent in Togo only a couple of days and being far from fluent in the vernacular, were thrown in at the deep end. Other factors, such as the large pupil numbers of diverging educational levels or the lack of resources (e.g. books) posed a challenge to a focused teaching structure. And yet, teaching nuns would neither reflect on their own training nor on their educational ideal they derived from elementary education in Germany. Instead, they explained all troubles they experienced by what they perceived as the pupils' misdirected patterns of behavior, continuously emphasizing patience as the missionary teacher's primary skill. After having stayed in Togo for barely two weeks and without command of Ewe, Sister Theodosia Groten-dorst (1884–1941) wrote about her teaching experience in Lomé, where she, assisted by an indigenous girl who acted as her interpreter, was to instruct between thirty and forty pupils in reading and arithmetic. Totally oblivious of the obvious shortcomings in her own training she stated:

Here, first and foremost you need patience, patience and once again patience. After all, the difference between European and African children is huge. If earlier I thought I could never beat a child, I have come to realize that without a stick you won't get along<sup>29</sup>.

27 Cf. ZURSTRASSEN, »Ein Stück deutscher Erde schaffen«, pp. 164f. On corporeal punishment in Togo, moreover, cf. TRUTZ VON TRÖTHA, »One for the Kaiser«. Beobachtungen zur politischen Soziologie der Prügelstrafe am Beispiel des »Schutzgebietes Togo«, in: HEINE/VAN DER HEYDEN (eds), Studien, pp. 521–551.

28 »Erschrecken Sie aber nicht darüber; ohne Stock geht es halt einmal noch nicht. Wir denken, das Bäumchen lässt sich noch biegen.« AG SSs 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia, undated (End of 1903).

29 »Was einem hier am Besten zustatten kommt ist Geduld, immer wieder Geduld. Man findet doch einen großen Unterschied zwischen den europäischen und den afrikanischen Kindern.



Many (newly arrived) teaching nuns were surely not up to their jobs. As mentioned earlier, in Togo (just as in New Guinea) missionary nursery schools also employed working nuns, whose »professional« training had been limited to the casual study of European languages and domestic works<sup>30</sup>. As nursery workers, they had to deal with large numbers of preschoolers to whom they attempted to instill what German nuns understood to be an appropriate classroom behavior. In the nursery school in Lomé, more than one-hundred children were supervised by Sister Ludgera and her assistant Maria, an indigenous graduate. Newly arriving nuns often shared their first impressions of their teaching environments with their fellows in Europe – as did, for example, Sister Paulina Weyand who described her first visit to the nursery school in 1904 as follows:

Sister Ludgera's classroom probably offers the most interesting picture. She has perhaps more than 100 nursery schoolchildren. The youngest are seated on their little sisters' backs. They can hardly walk. One of the little girls had another on her back that was almost bigger than the bearer. It had fallen asleep and wouldn't let bother itself even when the sister set in singing with might and main: ›Freut euch des Lebens‹. Sister Ludgera's assistant, black Maria, always holds the stick in her hand to keep the gaggle in line. Quite a piece of work<sup>31</sup>!

Regarded as important markers of western-style education and formalized learning, the establishment of order and peace in the classrooms was considered as a challenging yet indispensable task by the nuns who often headed more than one class simultaneously. The large numbers of pupils and irregular school attendance were seen as the main obstacles to a methodic teaching approach and systematic advance. The missionary teaching staff basically agreed on the notion that »running an African school is much more difficult

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Wenn ich früher glaubte, ich könnte kein Kind schlagen, so sehe ich jetzt schon ein, dass man ohne einen Stock gar nicht fertig werden kann.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Theodosia Grotendorst, 11.10.1909.

30 For instance, with a view to her tasks a working nun in New Guinea significantly put it like this: »I am a precentor without musical skills, a headmaster without study and a doctor without education.« (»Ich bin Vorsängerin ohne Kenntnis, Schulmeister ohne Studium, Arzt ohne Bildung.«) Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Veronika König, 11.10.1904.

31 »Schwester Ludgeras Schule bildet wohl das interessanteste Bild. Sie hat wohl über 100 Bewahrschützen. Die Allerkleinsten sitzen auf dem Rücken des Schwesterchens. Sie können wohl kaum laufen. Eines der kleinen Mädchen hatte ein anderes auf dem Rücken, das fast größer war als die Trägerin. Dasselbe war in Schlaf geraten und ließ sich auch nicht stören, als die Schwester aus Leibeskräften das Lied sang: ›Freut euch des Lebens‹. Schwester Ludgeras Gehilfin, die schwarze Maria, hat immer den Stock in der Hand, um die Schar in Ordnung zu halten. Ein ganzes Stück Arbeit.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Paulina Weyand, 26.12.1904.

than one might think in Europe«<sup>32</sup>. In contrast to published (and thus highly self-serving) missionary sources which tended to oppose the teacher's authority and (intellectual) superiority to the pupil's inferiority and lack of subordination, the analysis of daily accounts indeed leads beyond such biased representations. In fact those accounts suggest that teaching initially did struggle with the task to adapt or to bridge cultural difference. Recounting her first classroom experience in the missionary girls' school in Aného, Togo, Sister Immaculata Göcke wrote in 1903:

There you stand in front of the little black crowd without understanding a word of what they're saying and without being able to tell them anything. To imagine how alien and eerie one feels among the children, you must have seen it with your own eyes<sup>33</sup>.

Apart from the dominant missionary narrative that celebrated the superiority of western knowledge, unpublished sources also indicate in which ways the instructors' capacities were challenged by the pupils. Teaching nuns definitely experienced the need to assert themselves in order to exert authority. In 1903 one of them stated: »The blacks are so smart that they will quickly find out whether the sisters are well-versed; [and] if not, they would make a fool of them«<sup>34</sup>. And, referring to the general validity of this principle, she added: »That's equally true for school as it is for work«<sup>35</sup>. In the same year, Prefect Apostolic Bücking directed a long letter to the European head of the congregation in which he called for the dispatch of better educated nuns. Among the nine women who operated in Togo in 1903 there were only two to whom he attested that they »(except for a couple of imperfections that they and I better didn't have) cope with the local conditions«<sup>36</sup>. Bücking demanded better trained teachers for his prefecture, but simultaneously he emphasized that they should also be skilled domestic workers. Ultimately, he linked issues of education and training with the degree to which women teachers were able to command the respect of pupils. He wrote:

If the children e.g. know that the sister is able to read German and to calculate but unskilled with the needle and thread, she will hardly be given much respect. In addition, a little singing and playing the violin or the harmonium might likewise be useful for

32 AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Immaculata Göcke, 6.8.1904.

33 »Da steht man vor den kleinen schwarzen Schar und versteht kein Wort, was sie sagen und man kann ihnen auch nichts sagen. Um eine Vorstellung zu haben, wie fremd und unheimlich man sich dann unter den Kindern fühlt, muß man es mitgemacht haben.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Immaculata Göcke, 6.12.1903.

34 »Die Schwarzen sind so pffiffig, daß sie sofort merken, ob die Schwestern tüchtig bewandert sind; wenn nicht, dann wird man lächerlich gemacht.« Ibid.

35 »Das gilt sowohl von der Schule als auch von der Arbeit.« Ibid.

36 AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Hermann Bücking, 23.1.1903.

the teaching sisters to know. In general, the sisters who come here simply can't know too much<sup>37</sup>.

Bücking's comment gives evidence of his gender-biased educational ideals according to which religious instruction, elementary education, music classes and needlework constituted the central contents of learning for girls. Apart from reading, writing and calculating, advanced students memorized religious and secular (German) poems and chants and studied geography<sup>38</sup>. According to a report from 1906 about the best girls' school in the colonial capital Lomé, students in their final year learned to compose letters and dealt with German history (i.e. the German-French War 1870/1871 and the last three emperors)<sup>39</sup>. In response to some doubtful inquiries from Europe regarding the methodic advance in the Togolese classrooms, Sister Georgia van Oopen, somewhat in self-defense, stated: »Although we face savages, we don't act like savages«<sup>40</sup>. Subsequently, she pointed out the formal framework that the nuns had introduced to local missionary girls' education. Accordingly, the teachers followed written syllabi, recorded the subject matters discussed, kept attendance lists and read out the marks at the end of the year<sup>41</sup>.

Apart from preschool classes, missionary girls' education in Lomé, depending on the number and age of pupils present, lasted up to six years, which corresponded to the six courses available. Due to the limited number of teachers, however, most teachers supervised several classes simultaneously<sup>42</sup>. Besides, the missionary teaching staff in Lomé and Aného was backed by a handful of indigenous assistants whom the mission started to employ officially in 1910. Usually these were unmarried Catholic women graduates who resided at the convents. The school in Lomé, the only state-subsidized Catholic girls' school in the region, moreover, enjoyed a special status with government officials (usually the governor himself) inspecting them on a regular basis and holding (or at least supervising) the annual examinations<sup>43</sup>.

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37 »Wenn die Kinder z.B. wissen, daß die Schwester wohl deutsch lesen und rechnen kann, aber keine gute Handarbeit mit der Nadel, dann ist die Achtung gar nicht besonders hoch, die eine solche genießt. Auch etwas Gesang und Violine oder Harmonium wäre für die Lehrschwestern gut. Überhaupt kann man sagen, die Schwestern, die hierher kommen, können nie zuviel.« Ibid.

38 According to the teaching instructions recorded, geography classes started out with the study of the town of Lomé, then moved on to German Togo as well as neighboring German Cameroon to eventually cover the study of Europe in general and Germany in particular. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg Varia 5, Notizen und Anweisungen für die Schule, pp. 5–12.

39 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Thaddäa Brands, 22.1.1906.

40 AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 13.2.1903.

41 Cf. *ibid.*

42 For instance, even in 1910, at the heyday of girls' schooling in Lomé, altogether only eight nuns were active on location.

43 Starting in 1905, colonial officials were present at the final exams in the Catholic girls' school in Lomé.

The political interest in missionary schooling in Togo was largely restricted to two elements. Firstly, colonial politicians understood the spread of the German language (and the parallel suppression of English as the most popular medium of communication in the West African coast) as a means to ensure the loyalty of subject people<sup>44</sup>. Accordingly, the use of German as the only European language of instruction was the prerequisite to apply for state subsidies. Hence, while missionaries insisted on giving religious instruction in the vernacular, all secular training was increasingly provided in German. Secondly, the colonial state aimed at the creation of a reliable and skilled indigenous workforce. In that sense the government's interest corresponded to the mission's educational ideal, which was based on the conviction of the complementarity of intellectual training and manual labor and propagated what German missionaries called the indigenous population's »education to regulated work«<sup>45</sup>. In Togo, all Catholic boys' schools maintained an affiliated farm to ensure that pupils continued to dedicate themselves to manual labor. At the so-called industrial school in Lomé, male students were trained in several professions needed in the colonial economy such as carpentering, blacksmith's work, printing, bookbinding, tailoring, bootmaking and painting<sup>46</sup>. By contrast, due to the absence of extended European settlement in Togo, girls were not needed in the colonial labor market (e.g. as domestic servants). Practical instruction in the missionary girls' schools targeted the students' future roles as housewives and focused on laundry works, cooking, sewing, ironing and needlework. As mentioned earlier, state interest in girls' education was limited and the exams held by the governor focused on the evaluation of the progress made in the knowledge of German. Significantly, these »exams« were followed by an exhibition of the needlework produced by the students which, according to the nuns, always encountered the great admiration of the colonial officials and their German wives, who usually purchased some of the pieces.

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44 The language question regarding German colonial educational policy is well researched and consequently does not constitute a topic of this book. Cf. e.g. SOKOLOWSKY, *Sprachenpolitik*; ADICK, *Muttersprachliche und fremdsprachliche Bildung*.

45 The SVD priest Friedrich Schwager classified the mission's educational work into three subsections, namely, religious-moral education through religious instruction, intellectual training through schooling and industrial education through what he called regulated physical work. Cf. FRIEDRICH SCHWAGER, *Die Bedeutung der Arbeitserziehung für die primitiven Rassen*, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 4 (1914), pp. 278–298, i.e. 278.

46 Cf. HANNS VISCHER, *Native Education in German Africa*, in: *Journal of the Royal African Society* 54/14 (1915), pp. 123–142, i.e. 126–128.

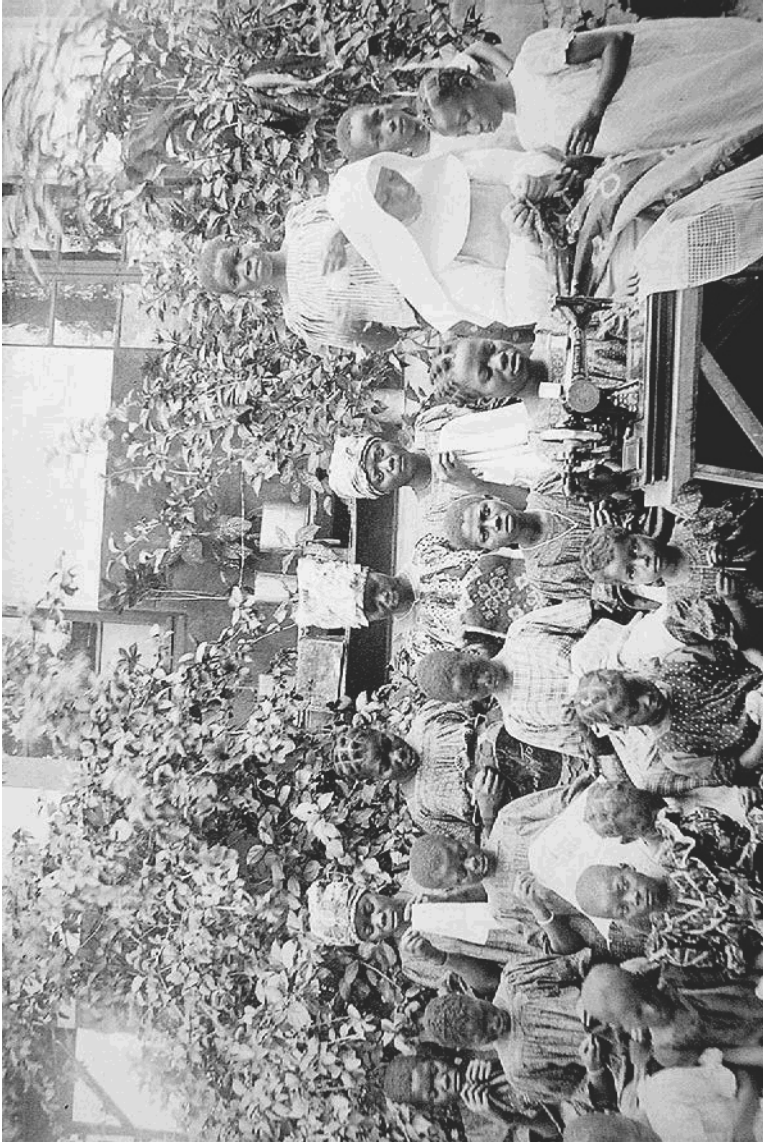


Figure 23: Needlework at a women's convent in Togo, undated;  
Archive SSpS Steyl|Fotos, Togo P1010603.

Yet, while the indigenous demand for boys' education at times even exceeded the western educational facilities in Togo, (the prospect of) girls' schooling was judged ambiguously. Despite the common practice described earlier to collect students every morning before classes started, the nuns failed to achieve regular school attendance. The main reason for the empty classrooms most teaching nuns saw in the women's traditional involvement in trade and they largely agreed that the marketplace was the greatest barrier to girls' schooling<sup>47</sup>. Writers complained that »as soon as the girls are strong enough to carry a calabash« they would accompany their mothers to the markets and trade goods rather than hit the books<sup>48</sup>. Although the women missionaries acknowledged the various economic advantages that a formal education brought about for the sexes in German Togo, they failed to question the limited economic prospects it provided for females. Interestingly, it was Prefect Apostolic Nikolaus Schönig who in 1910 entertained the idea to introduce what he called an industrial school for girls. Such an institution was thought to provide graduates the opportunity to derive an income by tailoring dresses for the growing number of European women in Lomé on the one hand and to improve the mission's relations with the German settlers on the other<sup>49</sup>. However, while the nuns shared the prefect's considerations in theory and approved his plan, Superior Provincial Georgia van Open immediately made it clear that no teaching material was available for its implementation. Ultimately, the idea disappeared from the missionary agenda and gender-biased elementary education continued to be the only type of schooling available for African women in German Togo.

Educationalist Sena Yawo Akakpo-Numado has argued that missionary girls' education in German Africa generally produced what he has called the »housewiferization« of educated women<sup>50</sup>. Accordingly, mission education weakened the social position of women in relation to both educated men and non-educated women. Christian marriage in combination with the scarce chances offered by colonial labor markets entailed that educated African women did not (or could not) engage in their traditional activities (e.g. in agriculture or trade) anymore. As a consequence, they increasingly depended on their husbands economically. Non-educated women, in turn, continued to engage in trade and partly also managed to profit from upward movements

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47 Cf. Ortrud STEGMAIER, Die alte Togomission der Steyler Schwestern 1897–1918, in: Kurt PRISKATY/Horst RZEPKOWSKI (eds), Verbi Praecones. Festschrift für Karl Müller zum 75. Geburtstag, Nettetal 1993 (Studia Instituti Missiologici Societatis Verbi Divini 56), pp. 220–244, p. 228.

48 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Immaculata Göcke, 6.12.1903.

49 Cf. STEGMAIER, Die alte Togomission, p. 230.

50 AKAKPO-NUMADO, Mädchen- und Frauenbildung, p. 233.

in the colonial economies<sup>51</sup>. Interestingly, even though some nuns traced the limited interest in girls' schooling back to both women's traditional engagement in trade as well as the lack of formal education's economic advantage, they kept emphasizing what they conceptualized as the main goal of girls' education, namely the preparation of students for their future roles as Catholic mothers and housewives. Thus, Sister Didaka Micheel, an experienced teacher in Togo, after complaining about the low indigenous demand for girls' education, noted: »After all, we are content; once all these pupils would get married in a Christian way, this would be a big turnaround«<sup>52</sup>.

However, indigenous women in Togo adopted elements of western education and cultural practices and used them in ways their teachers neither expected nor encouraged. There is reason to believe that indigenous women made economic use of the skills (i.e. sewing skills) they acquired in the missionary classrooms. Women's historian Kathleen Sheldon has argued that scholarly criticism on the gender bias of missionary educational programs in colonial Africa has ignored the fact that thanks to instruction in domestic science many women managed to enter new work arenas<sup>53</sup>. In the case of girls' education in Togo there is much to suggest that some pupils in fact valued the skills they acquired in the missionary classrooms. According to the nuns' reports, their students showed particular interest in stitchery and needlework. At times, the indigenous ambitions in this regard even exceeded the teachers' expectations. Thus, a teaching nun in Aného forcefully urged her European superior to send her new books with embroidery designs to enable her to offer something new in the lessons. Otherwise, she said, the enthused embroideresses might join a Protestant girl, who owned such books, on their own initiatives. And allowing the girls to associate with people from other denominations – taking in »the Protestant spirit« – was something that had to be avoided at any rate<sup>54</sup>. As the published narrative of the life of Magdalena Gbikpi (1886–1974), a graduate from the Catholic girls' school in Aného, testifies, the sewing machine played a prominent role, allowing Magdalena to supplement her husband's income through the production and marketing

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51 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 251f.

52 »Wir sind ja zufrieden, denn wenn diese Schulkinder mal alle christlich heiraten, so ist das ja schon ein großer Umschwung.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Didaka Micheel, 16.10.1907.

53 Cf. Kathleen Sheldon, »I studied with the Nuns learning to make Blouses«: Gender Ideology and Colonial Education in Mozambique, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 31 (1998), pp. 595–625, i.e. p. 595.

54 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Immaculata Göcke, 25.03.1905.

of clothes<sup>55</sup>. Starting in 1908, the first mission-educated, unmarried young women, moreover, managed to enter the Catholic teaching staff in Lomé<sup>56</sup>.

Colonial education in New Guinea, by comparison, was less formalized. As Hermann Hiery has pointed out, the colonial state's possibilities to impact on local missionary schooling were marginal<sup>57</sup>. Quite the contrary, the individual mission institutions largely acted at their own discretion. In response to a government initiative to standardize missionary schooling across the territories that in 1914 constituted German New Guinea, the ecclesiastical heads of the various units resisted the introduction of normative syllabi arguing that the varying conditions which characterized the linguistically and ethnically fragmented colony, notably the native peoples' diverging »level of civilization«, did not suggest the introduction of a standardized educational framework. As other decisive factors shaping the local outlook of educational programs they mentioned the single mission stations' different stages of development, the degree of western influence, the presence of colonial institutions or the quantitative share of boarding education. The rejection of the government plan in 1914 highlights the reluctance of ecclesiastical authorities to accept state interference with the sector of education. While they did concede the right of colonial officials to visit their schools, they simultaneously insisted on the continuation of the status quo according to which it were the priests who defined the standards of missionary schooling on a local basis and independently<sup>58</sup>. On the other hand, however, in view of the absence of compulsory education, missionaries did expect the active support from colonial administrators regarding the advance of school attendance.

Yet, whether politically supported or not, the missionary endeavor to advance school attendance on the New Guinean mainland often failed. In contrast to coastal Togo, where the Catholic mission arrived at a moment when the indigenous population was already familiar with the principles of western education and many appreciated its potential for economic advance, in New Guinea the contact with western forms of knowledge occurred through the mission. After all, it had been the translation of the Bible that had marked the beginning of literacy in the region<sup>59</sup>. In Kaiser-Wilhelmsland, formal education, as the exclusive domain of the mission institutions, kept emphasizing religious over secular contents of learning. Catholics and Protestants operated in geographically separated areas on the mainland vir-

55 Cf. Immaculata GÖCKE, *Eine christliche Hausfrau im Heidenlande*, in: *Missionsgrüße der Steyler Missionsschwester Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes* (1923), pp. 38–44, i.e. p. 41. For a detailed discussion of Magdalena Gbikpi's involvement with the nuns cf. Chapter 6, pp. 342–348.

56 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 *Chronicles 1897–1918*, Lome, p. 27.

57 Cf. HIERY, *Das Deutsche Reich*, pp. 155–160; HIERY, *Schule und Ausbildung*, p. 202.

58 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 552, 74–75.

59 Cf. HIERY, *Schule und Ausbildung*, p. 201.



tually until 1945. This implied that, in contrast to Togo where several types of schooling coexisted, in northern New Guinea the German Catholic mission enjoyed a monopoly on western education for several decades during which the missionaries were free to create syllabi according to their own educational ideal or demand of skilled workers.

Up to 1945, religious instruction and the training in manual skills lay at the heart of missionary education in New Guinea. As regards elementary education, the greatest significance was attached to the study of German, which was considered necessary first and foremost in view of the linguistic fragmentation of the mainland. The missionaries introduced German as a medium of instruction with the goal to establish it as a common means of communication. Given the fact that in Tumleo pupils increasingly came from different areas and diverging linguistic backgrounds, German was taught already in the first Catholic school. In addition, the mission also employed the Boikin vernacular as a *lingua franca*<sup>60</sup>. In New Guinea, linguistic efforts constituted an important aspect of Catholic mission activity from the outset with individual nuns translating the catechism into indigenous languages for religious instruction, which, like in Togo, was ideally given in the vernacular<sup>61</sup>. Although the colonial administration in Kaiser-Wilhelmsland did not pursue an explicit policy of Germanization, the mission institutions nonetheless received state subsidies for their engagement in the spread of German. Language instruction was mostly provided by the nuns who managed an important part of the elementary schools<sup>62</sup>. In New Guinea the elementary schools were not separated in terms of sex, a fact that can be explained by the constant shortage of teaching staff. In 1912, out of 25 missionaries whose principal occupation was teaching at least seven were nuns<sup>63</sup>. Prefect Apostolic Limbrock insistently lauded the nuns' aptitude of being able to »dedicate themselves more to education, for which they have more patience and perseverance, prepare themselves with more zeal, and so achieve more and better results than most priests do«<sup>64</sup>.

With the exception of German classes<sup>65</sup>, elementary education was largely neglected in New Guinea. Great importance was attached to religious instruction and the memorization of prayers and chants in German, native languages and Latin. Newly arrived missionaries expressed their surprise about

60 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 204.

61 E.g., teacher Sister Hermengilde Simbürger (1891–1934) was conversant in several indigenous languages and even translated parts of the Bible. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 27.12.1924 and 5.9.1926.

62 Cf. Paul STEFFEN, *Die katholischen Missionen in Deutsch-Guinea*, in: HIERY (ed.), *Die deutsche Südsee*, pp. 343–383, p. 366.

63 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 367.

64 Limbrock to Janssen, 19.5.1906 in ALT (ed.), *Arnold Janssen – Letters*, pp. 342f.

65 Cf. HIERY, *Schule und Ausbildung*, pp. 204f.

the quantity of song texts known by rote by the pupils, who also contributed to the musical support of church services and public ceremonies. Since many students were illiterate, constant repetition was the prime teaching method for religious instruction and students were expected to memorize basic prayers and catechism passages by continuously reciting them aloud<sup>66</sup>. Even though the missionary ideal envisaged the rendition of Christian beliefs in the vernacular, prayers were also taught in German. This derived from the lingual multiplicity, the nuns' lack of language skills or potential difficulties in the translation of Catholic terms (in which case they were often substituted by Latin terms). Altogether, the learning success of such catechism classes must be called into question. In the following report drawn up by Sister Valeria Diezen, in which she relates her first teaching experiences in Tumleo Island six months after her arrival in 1900, the issue of language skills is not even mentioned. Interestingly, she obviously judged her own results in the women's religious instruction by those of the local priest in the instruction of men:

At first I sometimes got discouraged during the lesson; it was so difficult to teach the women anything. To this added that reverend Father Erdweg told me: ›Now I want to see whether you get further with the women than I did with the men. I have been praying with the men for 18 months and so far there isn't a single one who could say a single line from the Lord's Prayer on his own.« [...] Dear reverend Mother, you certainly can imagine what encouragement this was for me. Up to then, the women hadn't enjoyed any instruction; now I have already 20 persons who know to say the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary on their own. Now we are dealing with the creed and the necessary religious truths. [...] Last week he [Father Erdweg] told me that probably at Christmas some of the adult girls and some women can be baptized. Oh what a joy<sup>67</sup>!

The passage quoted shows that with regard to women all educational efforts at first targeted the indoctrination of students with religious texts. The explicit goal being to obtain the candidates' admission to baptism by the local

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66 Cf. THAUREN, *Die religiöse Unterweisung*, p. 153.

67 ›Die erste Zeit bin manchmal in der Stunde mutlos geworden, so schwer war es am Anfang den Frauen etwas beizubringen. Zudem sagte mir der hochw. P. Erdweg, Ich will doch einmal sehen ob Sie mit den Frauen weiter kommen als ich mit den Männern. Ich habe jetzt schon 18 Monate mit den Männern gebetet und habe bis jetzt noch nicht einen einzigen der allein auch nur eine Bitte vom Vaterunser beten kann. [...] Sie, ehrw. Mutter können sich denken, welche Aufmunterung das für mich war. Bis dahin hatten die Frauen noch keinen Unterricht genossen; jetzt habe ich schon 20 Personen, welche das Vaterunser u. Gegrüßest seist du Maria jede alleine beten können. Jetzt sind wir am Glaubensbekenntnis und an den notwendigen Glaubenswahrheiten. [...] Vorige Woche sagte er mir Weihnachten können wohl einige erwachsene Mädchen und auch einige Frauen getauft werden. O welch Freude!« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, July 1900.

priest, students had to know basic elements of Catholic doctrine (the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments and Creed), to manage the sign of the cross and to familiarize with confessional practice and communion. And with a view to indigenize social and sexual practices (e.g. polygamy, divorce) and the widespread belief in supernatural agency (i.e. sorcery), much attention was given to the moral commandments and the Christian doctrine of God as the master of life and death<sup>68</sup>. Like in Togo, religious instruction was a daily subject for all (baptized as well as non-baptized) pupils.

In New Guinea, elementary education, which ideally lasted between four and eight years, was largely restricted to the study of written and spoken German. According to the teachers, literacy classes were popular subjects. Although they generally complained about irregular school attendance, they commented positively on the eagerness of students when it came to reading and writing. The nuns, moreover, contentedly reported on the progress made by their regularly attending students (i.e. the boarders) in German<sup>69</sup>. However, due to the lack of teachers and large pupil numbers of diverging educational levels, collective learning progresses were described as slow, making constant repetition the main feature of instruction. Attempting to achieve better results, the nuns in all settings promoted boarding education and sought to send their best pupils to the most advanced Catholic school in the prefecture, which was established at the mission's regional headquarters in Alexishafen in 1909.

Boarding school pupils and children to whom the nuns referred to as »orphans«<sup>70</sup> were brought up in the so-called »central school« in Alexishafen where they received a more sophisticated religious and secular training. There, boys and girls of all ages lived, studied and worked under the close supervision of priests and nuns, respectively. Life at the compound was strictly separated for the sexes and oriented toward explicitly gender-biased educational goals. Priests and brothers attempted to train a pool of male school leavers who were either to be employed as skilled workers (i.e. in carpentry, blacksmithery, locksmithery, printing, woodcutting etc.) or as catechists<sup>71</sup>. The former were needed in the mission's economy and worked on its plantations and in crafts enterprises whereas the latter were appointed to outpost places where they engaged in religious instruction in the capacity as lay ministers. Hence, although boys' education in Alexishafen centered on

68 Cf. THAUREN, *Die religiöse Unterweisung*, pp. 154f.

69 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Philomena Herzog.

70 In some cases the nuns called those children whom they felt went without sufficient parental support »orphans«. It is also important to note that the western definition of »orphan« related only to the biological parents and did not make much sense in a society where child-caring duties were shared by kin.

71 Cf. STEFFEN, *Die katholischen Missionen*, pp. 367–386.

manual labor and/or religious contents, it also involved literacy, administrative skills and the prospect of payment and professional employment. Girls' education, in turn, mostly focused on the training in domestic skills, for it targeted the girls' preparation for their future roles as mothers and housewives. The only prospect of employment for women graduates was to stay with the nuns as housemaids until marriage. In this case, the young women were paid with food and dresses and once they got married they received a dowry. Apart from this unsalaried form of service, it was only in 1924 that the first (and only) woman catechist was officially employed in northern New Guinea. At that time, she was facing fifty-four male colleagues<sup>72</sup>. The personnel records from the subsequent years confirm this trend of male-gendered employment. Up to the end of the accessible record (1930), the numbers of religious lay workers roughly doubled. In 1929, the mission's report to Rome recorded the employment of 111 male and two female catechists<sup>73</sup>.

The switchover from the German to the Australian colonial administration after the Great War at first changed little in the organization of missionary education because it was not before 1945 that Australia assumed responsibility in this field<sup>74</sup>. The only crucial issue after 1918 concerned the question of the medium of teaching, when the new colonial authorities demanded the substitution of English for German. It must be doubted, however, that a change of language did actually occur given the fact that most of the teaching nuns were not well grounded in English. As a matter of fact, some nuns in outpost schools rather resorted to the respective vernacular as the medium of instruction<sup>75</sup> and the so-called central school in Alexishafen even had to be closed down temporarily due to the lack of Anglophone teachers. Assistance ultimately came from the congregation's branch in the United States: Seeking to keep up teaching as well as to improve the English skills of the local community, in 1922 congregational elites appointed the first group of four native North American Servants of the Holy Spirit for New Guinea<sup>76</sup>. Beyond the question of the language of instruction, however, strikingly little had changed in the outlook of mission education. The learning opportunities still reflected preference of religious instruction over secular contents of learning and promoted an explicitly gendered agenda of training in practical

72 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 847, 764–765.

73 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 1070, 638f. In turn, the report by the prefecture apostolic of central New Guinea referred to 48 paid catechists without mentioning their sex (which indeed suggests that they were males). Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 1071, 196.

74 Cf. LYONS JOHNSON, *Education*, p. 185.

75 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 15.8.1919.

76 The demand for English native speakers was also stressed by the male ecclesiastical leaders of the prefecture apostolic, who even threatened the Servants of the Holy Spirits to establish another women's congregation. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1910–1975, Sr. Philomena Herzog 3.5.1921.

skills. Marnie Bassett (1889–1980)<sup>77</sup>, an Australian traveler who visited Alexishafen in June 1921 described her observations during her stopover at the women's convent and affiliated girls' school as follows:

The head of the order met us, a little shy blue-eyed elderly woman who could hardly speak English. [...] She was very pleasant to us and showed us the awful clothes that the Marys [the female students] are thought to make and the garden where they grow vegetables and the kitchen where they cook for the whole community. There were two other sisters there, one quite a young woman with a merry laugh. They were all shy but not a bit »nunnish«. I really can hardly bear to think of the waste of their lives spent teaching natives the mere skin-surface of a religion alien to their own temperament and traditions. They teach them other things too, of course, for the use of the mission, cooking and sewing for the Marys, printing (prayers, etc.) for the men, reading for them all. The missions have demonstrated that natives can be taught various trades such as printing and carpentry, [...] but they have never taught more than the missions can themselves absorb<sup>78</sup>.

It was only after the mission's reconstruction after 1946 that the Servants of the Holy Spirit developed a distinct approach to girls' schooling in New Guinea. At that time, their strategies started to be shaped by the idea of women's advance through education and access to employment. As congregational records from the late 1950s reveal, the nuns for the first time actively contested the educational models put forward by ecclesiastical authorities. They complained that many priests explicitly favored boys' over girls' education and expected them to actively support this policy<sup>79</sup>. Consequently, the nuns, who, in contrast to their fellow sisters elsewhere still depended economically on the missionary Church, faced considerable difficulties in providing the girls' schools with teaching staff and the basic equipment. Even so, they continued to do their best to improve the Catholic learning opportunities for girls. The congregation's regional leaders, arguing that only higher education and state certificates would allow female students to get access to employment (i.e. as teachers or nurses), withdrew teachers from a boys' school with

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77 Lady Flora Marjorie (Marnie) Bassett was an Australian writer and historian. As a young woman she met the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), who was to become her brother-in-law. In her early twenties, Bassett attended lectures in history and focused her studies on French colonialism. In »Letters from New Guinea« (1969) she described her travels as a woman in her early thirties. Cf. ANN BLAINEY, Bassett, Lady Flora Marjorie (Marnie) (1889–1980), in: Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bassett-lady-flora-marjorie-marnie-9448/text16613> (20.02.2013).

78 Marnie BASSETT, *Letters from New Guinea 1921*, Melbourne 1969, pp. 66f.

79 Cf. AG SSps 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, Sr. Nazaria Albers, Neuguinea: Region zu Ehren der heiligen Engel, p. 3.

the goal to upgrade the facilities in the girls' school in Alexishafen. The New Guinean situation during the late 1950s calls to mind an argument developed by feminist scholar of religion Ann Braude suggesting that in the second half of the twentieth century Catholic nuns were perceptive to concerns of justice for women precisely because they were intimately familiar with »patriarchal authority in its most overt form«<sup>80</sup>. Up to 1960, the New Guinea-based nuns were not able to equip their educational institutions corresponding to their own ideas, because most decisions concerning aspects of missionary life and practice were still taken by priests. In the report forwarded to the general chapter in 1960, the Servants of the Holy Spirit complained about the difficulties they were facing in providing girls' schools with qualified teachers and granting graduates the possibility to take a state-approved school leaving qualification. State-approved qualifications, they emphasized, were the precondition for graduates being admitted to professional training that would enable them to find employment as teachers or nurses<sup>81</sup>.

This shift in educational strategies during the 1950s resulted from both internal as well as external changes. On the one hand, the post-war community of nuns in New Guinea was for the first time fragmented in terms of nationality, age, training and professional experience. World War II had led to a significant rupture in the congregation's local development. Out of 85 nuns only thirty, exiled in Australia, survived the bombings, injuries, sickness and executions occurring during the war, and only twenty-four were in the physical state to return to New Guinea after 1946<sup>82</sup>. They were backed by fifty-four Servants of the Holy Spirit who by 1960 had come from Europe (Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Hungary and Slovakia), the United States, Argentina and the Philippines in order to rebuild the mission. In addition, a number of former China missionaries, who had been forced to leave their field of work due to the rise of communism in 1954, were transferred to New Guinea. Hence, by the mid-1950s, the congregation's New Guinean branch consisted of nuns who had received their religious and secular training in various locations and/or gained experience in religious life elsewhere. By 1960, the quantitative share of »new« nuns was clearly higher-than-average<sup>83</sup> and we must assume that these had brought along novel ideas about the gendered organi-

80 Ann BRAUDE, *A religious Feminist: Who can find her? Historiographical Challenges from the National Organization for Women*, in: *The Journal of Religion* 84 (2004), pp. 555–572, i.e. p. 563.

81 The first state exams took place in Alexishafen in 1960. Yet, nuns still complained about the lack of appropriate teaching staff for a girls' high school. Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, Sr. Nazaria Albers, Neuguinea: Region zu Ehren der heiligen Engel, pp. 3–6.

82 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 1. For a literary description of these occurrences cf. Sixta KASBAUER, *Die aus großer Drangsal kommen. Kriegsschicksale der Steyler Missionsschwestern in der Südsee*, Steyl 1953.

83 Between 1954 and 1960 New Guinea witnessed the arrival of twenty-nine nuns; by 1960, alto-

zation of missionary communities as well as about women's place in society more generally. While pre-war mission policies in New Guinea had largely ignored shifts in European ideas on gender and forms of social organization, the nuns from different cultural background who had moved to New Guinea after 1946 brought along gradually diverging conceptions. Besides, the lack of personnel resulting from the fact that the majority of the experienced nuns had either died or grown old, probably entailed that this new generation of women missionaries encountered the chance to climb the congregational hierarchy and thus to give shape to mission policies.

On the other hand, the shifts in the nuns' approach toward girls' schooling must be interpreted in the context of social and political change in the region. While in pre-war New Guinea the commercial sector and the colonial administration had been weak, after 1945 the government engaged in public works, and business ventures provided new services in transport, trade and construction<sup>84</sup>. These new developments had a crucial effect on the sector of education in terms of growing state interference. Although much of the instruction was still taking place in missionary schools, the government demanded that the emphasis be placed on secular, rather than on religious education<sup>85</sup>. New political guidelines (e.g. the demand for state-approved teachers) obliged the mission to improve the training of its teaching staff. The beginning of governmental schooling in the region, moreover, entailed the introduction of competition to the sector of education. As a result, the nuns saw themselves forced to refashion their own learning ideals in order to enhance the attractiveness of Catholic schooling for indigenous girls in a rapidly changing society and an expanding school system. Most importantly, however, the indigenous population, increasingly resolved to actively participate in the modern world, showed new interest in and openness to formal education.

Anthropologist Mary Taylor Huber has noted with regard to post-war northern New Guinea that the indigenous population as known from pre-war times »could no longer be taken for granted« on the part of the missions<sup>86</sup>. Thus, the surviving missionaries who had returned to the mainland in 1946 often »found it hard to recognize those they had known before«<sup>87</sup>. Many indigenous people in the region actively sought to get access to modern life. They did so not only by collaborating with colonial officials or priests but through business ventures as well as the involvement with one of the newly arriving evangelical or millenarian missions. What was most disturbing from

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gether sixty-five nuns were established in the region. Cf. the list of nuns in COLES/MIHALIC, *Sent by the Spirit*, pp. 50–53.

84 Cf. HUBER, *Constituting the Church*, p. 119.

85 Cf. LYONS JOHNSON, *Education*, p. 185.

86 HUBER, *Constituting the Church*, p. 117.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

the point of view of the Catholic mission was the rapid expansion of syncretic movements such as the so-called cargo cults<sup>88</sup>. In 1960, the nuns complained about the fact that the shortage of teaching staff prevented them from complying with the rapidly increasing indigenous demand for the expansion of the Catholic educational system. According to the official report posted to the sixth general chapter, the opening of a Catholic school was the first choice of many village leaders who aimed at introducing western education to their community. When the nuns were not able »to comply with their legitimate desires«, however, the people immediately called for one of the Christian »sects« (e.g. Cavanists, Seven-Day Adventists) operating in the region that equally attracted people by providing education<sup>89</sup>. Besides, the novelties in formal education directly concerned women, who had gained access to higher governmental education and, moreover, were needed on the labor market as teachers or nurses. In post-war New Guinea, the sector of girls' education expanded rapidly and the nuns saw themselves forced to compete with other religious and secular education providers. In 1960, the author of the report therefore warned of the effects that a secular formation had on indigenous girls stating that »those [girls] who are educated by the government are lost for us«<sup>90</sup>.

Thus, missionary education cannot be considered in isolation from the overall goal to create a particular kind of Christian individual in either setting. This is particularly the case for elementary schooling, which during the first half of the twentieth century was the only type of formal girls' education established in Togo and New Guinea. While these schools certainly provided indigenous girls and women the unique opportunity to get access to formal education and literacy, the mission endeavor to proselytize was nonetheless constitutive to their existence. A historical assessment of missionary schooling can therefore not be satisfied with the discussion of learning contents but

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88 E.g. Father Karl Böhm, a German priest and head of the missionary compound in Manam Island during the 1930s, wrote with regard to the new situation that he and the three nuns encountered after returning to Manam from the war exile: »Worse than the damage to the buildings done by the war was the damage to the behavior of the people. During our two-year absence they had experienced bad influences from the various troops they had come into contact with: Japanese, Australians and Americans. But the greatest problem was the so-called »Cargo-Cult«, about which many words have been written. It is assumed that this cult will not last very long.« (Cf. BÖHM, *The Life*, p. 218.) Similar voices were raised from other missionary stations, with nuns claiming that during the war the indigenous population had become »quite spoilt« and »demanding«. For instance, the chronicler of the woman convent in Ali also explained the changing indigenous relation to the mission by the years of the war during which »the natives had seen and heard far too much.« AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, Ali, 9.10.1947. On the spread of cargo-cults in the Sepik region cf. HUBER, *Constituting the Church*, pp. 119–121.

89 Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, Sr. Nazaria Albers, Neuguinea: Region zu Ehren der heiligen Engel, pp. 4–6.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 4.



has to highlight the broader purposes of religious educational institutions. Roy Porter has noted that a history of education that concentrates exclusively on skills such as reading and writing misses out one of the central functions of elementary schools in the past, namely »instilling physical obedience, or education as a process of breaking children in«<sup>91</sup>. Anthropologist Wayne Fife has interpreted early Protestant missionary education in early British Papua as a technology of power imposing social discipline and providing the context in which »a person learns how to think and act in order to know how to fit« within the increasingly colonial situation and changing forms of social life<sup>92</sup>. Missionary schools had an extended function because over decades the nuns perceived educational institutions first and foremost as sites where indigenous femininity could be re-made according to their own image through dress, domestic work and bodily control.

### Dress and »Cultivation«

In the eyes of the missionaries, schooling constituted an (»indirect«, to speak in missiological terms) method of evangelization. The establishment of educational institutions in colonial settings was not understood as an end in itself but conceived of as a means to achieve the religious goal of conversion<sup>93</sup>. Being aware of the fact that indigenous people made use of Catholic educational facilities for their – often secular (i.e. social or economic) – ends, missiologists have emphasized the religious motivations of all missionary schooling. In his book on Catholic mission methodology (1935), SVD missiologist Johannes Thaurén (1892–1954) clarified that the missionary does »not aim to be a schoolmaster, but a catechist; he wants to find entrance to the heart of his pupils in order to implant the seed of divine doctrine«<sup>94</sup>. Missionary schooling was thus conceptualized rather as a means of upbringing than an element of formal education<sup>95</sup>. Behind that was the conviction that, irrespective of the concrete learning opportunities in the respective schools, indige-

91 Cf. ROY PORTER, *History of the Body*, in: BURKE (ed.), *New Perspectives*, pp. 206–233, i.e. p. 219.

92 Paralleling Foucault, Fife has argued that missionary education imposed »particular forms of social discipline upon individuals« that provoked the individual's preference to become part of institutional relationships (in favor of Christianity and colonialism) over indigenous forms of life. WAYNE FIFE, *Creating the moral Body. Missionaries and the Technology of Power in early Papua New Guinea*, in: *Ethnology* 40/3 (2001), pp. 251–269, i.e. p. 252.

93 Cf. THAUREN, *Die Mission*, p. 22.

94 »Der Missionar will aber nicht Schulmeister sein sondern Katechet, er will den Weg finden zum Herzen seiner Schüler, um den Samen der göttlichen Lehre hineinzusenken«. Cf. THAUREN, *Die religiöse Unterweisung*, p. 4.

95 Cf. ECKL, *Ora et Labora*, p. 142.

nous children were best off in the custody of Catholic missionaries, who, in turn, were given the chance to impact on the formation of a society's youngest generations.

The nuns in both Togo and New Guinea were emphatic critics of indigenous forms of child care and instruction. Convinced of the superiority of European forms of upbringing, they sought to extract pedagogical significance from any indigenous form of child socialization they encountered, which were often shared with kin<sup>96</sup>. In their eyes, the Catholic environment of the convents with their religiously oriented social rhythm constituted the only adequate setting for future Christians to be brought up. The nuns emphasized the importance of schooling as it involved the pupils' regular stay at the convents and their escape from the control of non-Catholic kinship and village elders, and they contrasted the pupils' well-regulated stay in the missionary schools to the »free life« the children enjoyed »in the bush«. At the core of this opposition of European-Christian and indigenous-»heathen« ways of upbringing lay the nuns' conviction that, in view of the absence of Christian household education in indigenous social practices, the missionary station was the only institution where pupils could be disposed to conversion; a view that corresponded to that of early-twentieth-century theologians. Although, according to Thaurén, all peoples were held to be ultimately able to assume Christianity, the missionary at first had to set the stage for what he called the »spiritualization of the entire human«<sup>97</sup>. To be sure, it was a most secularly informed concept of discipline on which he based his understanding of »spiritualization« as a process of transformation:

As the Holy Scripture explicitly testifies, the divine word does not take root in every soil. Thus, the missionary catechist, through patient work, at first has to dispose the souls in a way which seemingly has nothing to do with his duty as the religious teacher of a people such as to teach them cleanliness, industriousness [and] to keep order in the whole organization of life<sup>98</sup>.

Thaurén's conception of conversion related to the implementation of a broader cultural agenda and western notions of social discipline. In his eyes, reli-

96 For Togo cf. the discussion on Ewe forms of education in: Adick, *Bildung und Kolonialismus*, pp. 103–110. For New Guinea cf. Margret MEAD, *Growing up in New Guinea. A Comparative Study of primitive Education*, New York 2001, i.e. pp. 5–72; HIERY, *Schule und Ausbildung*, pp. 198–200.

97 »Gottes Wort schlägt ja nicht in jedem Erdreich Wurzel, wie uns die Heilige Schrift ausdrücklich bezeugt. So muss der missionarische Katechet oft erst in geduldiger Arbeit die Seelen disponieren, in einer Art, die mit seiner Aufgabe als religiöser Lehrer des Volkes anscheinend nichts zu tun hat wie z.B. die Erziehung zur Reinlichkeit, zur Arbeitsamkeit, zum Ordnung halten im ganzen Lebensbetrieb«. THAUREN, *Die religiöse Unterweisung*, p. 6.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

gious change required cultural change and the adoption of a Christian sense of (moral) propriety and ethics of work. Conversion is understood here as a visibly observable process going beyond the transformation of the religious self, one that tackled social practice more generally and involved a set of external markers. These markers, again, refer to certain cultural norms and the European notion of »civilized« behavior<sup>99</sup>.

For missionary nuns, European societies, as the product of Christianity, stood invariably at the top of the global hierarchy of civilizations they constructed. Although they did criticize many aspects of modern European social and political developments (e.g., secularism, urbanization, consumerism, socialism etc.), they conceived of European culture as shaped by the historical influence of Christianity and hence as being superior to the cultures they encountered in Togo and New Guinea, respectively. The nuns in both settings perceived local cultural practices as rooted in and produced by what they called »pagan idolism« and the historical lack of contact with Christianity, which figures as the decisive evolutionary force in the missionary conceptions of civilizational development. Naturalizing ideal Christian moral and social arrangements, the nuns construed alternative marriage practices (i.e. polygamy, divorce) as symbols of what they called »heathendom«.

According to this way to pattern the world, Togo and New Guinea had achieved different »levels of civilization«, for coastal Togo had encountered Christian European traders since the sixteenth century<sup>100</sup>. Besides, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a certain number of Afro-Brazilians, some of them former slaves and many of them Catholics, returned to West Africa in search for new economic opportunities and/or in response to disfranchisement and the increasingly restrictive Brazilian policies toward people of color. Some of them also settled in coastal Togo, where they created a community mirroring that of Brazilian upper classes, establishing trade businesses and plantations, maintaining large households, giving importance to the formal education of their children and celebrating religious feasts<sup>101</sup>. Individual members of these Afro-Brazilian families, such as the successful businessman and prominent citizen of Lomé, Octaviano Olympio (1860–1940), had welcomed the first Catholic missionaries in German Togo in 1892 and immediately asked them to establish a school<sup>102</sup>. Hence, even though many

99 Cf. also the chapter on Christian missions in: Ross, *Clothing*, pp. 83–102.

100 This argument has been repeated several times. In 1906, for instance, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's general director, Hermann auf der Heide, explicitly opposed the indigenous population in Togo as a »cultivated people« to that of New Guinea. Cf. AG SSs 000 Gründungszeit 0006.2, P. auf der Heide to P. Girard, 17.01.1906; MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, pp. 22–24.

101 Cf. Alcione M. AMOS, *Afro-Brazilians in Togo. The Case of the Olympio Family, 1882–1945*, in: *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 162 (2001), pp. 293–314, i.e. p. 296.

102 Cf. AMOS, *Afro-Brazilians*, p. 299; SEBALD, *Togo*, p. 62.

Afro-Brazilians had adopted polygamy – which is why Catholic missionaries would refer to them derogatorily as »merely Christians by name«<sup>103</sup> – the latter appreciated the former's religious roots as well as their generally friendly attitude toward the mission. Karl Müller, the Society of the Divine Word's order »historian«, notes that their historical encounter with Christian culture in Brazil and intermarriage with Europeans had turned Afro-Brazilians into educated people and leading elites on the West African coast who were willing to »make many a sacrifice for Christendom«<sup>104</sup>. To sum up, although generally considered as truly »heathen lands« by European missionaries precisely because of their familiarity with the Christian West, the people that settled along what was then called the Slave Coast were at times awarded a higher »civilizational« status.

In the eyes of the Servant of the Holy Spirit Perboyre Neuß, early-twentieth-century New Guinea – as a country that had been »far from intercourse with the educated peoples over millennia« – was on the »lowest level of civilization«. Its inhabitants, according to Neuß, were »savages in the truest sense of the word«<sup>105</sup>. In 1910, the Prefect Apostolic of Kaiser-Wilhelmsland, Eberhard Limbrock, described New Guinea as a place truncated from the rest of the world and hence having remained »in the deep darkness of heathendom« over centuries<sup>106</sup>. This kind of Christian evolutionary thought can also be found in the nuns' writings which reflect their sense of cultural hierarchy that built on the comparison of early twentieth century New Guinea with a pre-Christian Germanic past<sup>107</sup>.

Newly arriving nuns would fill their letters with descriptions of what they called the »savage« customs of the New Guineans. Eating habits, housing, the treatment of sickness, emotional expressions and the handling of death or dead bodies were all referred to as evidence of the indigenous populations' low »level of civilization«. In particular, German nuns vehemently disapproved of indigenous forms of social organization (e.g. marriage, sexuality and the family), which they considered to be a major obstacle to the »cultivation« of New Guinea, and which were to be replaced by the western Christian social order as a prerequisite of the country's proselytization. »Savageness«, as constructed in this context, was first and foremost inscribed in the indigenous body, and »cultural inferiority« was most visible in areas such

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103 By »merely Christians by name« missionaries meant baptized persons who referred to themselves as Christians but whose lifestyle did not fully correspond to Christian norms.

104 Cf. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, p. 24.

105 NEUSS, *Die Steyler Missionsschwestern*, p. 178.

106 Eberhard LIMBROCK, *Fortschritt unserer Mission in Deutsch-Neuguinea*, in: *Steyler Missionsbote*. (1912), pp. 71–74, i.e. p. 73.

107 This was, for instance, the case when nuns interpreted New Guinean warfare or hunting practices. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 601 *Korrespondenz 1899–1917*, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 25.1.1904.

as working behavior, sexuality and bodily practices. Consequently, it was the body in its abstract and representational forms that became the main target of missionary educational policies aimed at changing local religious and moral orders.

The first nuns in Tumleo immediately concerned themselves with the external transformation of their pupils' bodies by cleaning and clothing them. In their eyes, it was the youngest generations among the indigenous population that were the most susceptible to their own ideas of cleanliness and practices connected to personal hygiene. Nursery education in New Guinea was closely associated with the missionary ideal to instruct children in certain bodily practices. In 1901, a teacher, speaking of the great hopes that the missionary Church attached to the expansion of Catholic nursery education in the region, pointed out what she considered as the crucial aspect of this institution:

The first thing to be thought of when the little ones come is the toilet. To the Kanakas it's totally alien to wash themselves [...] In front of the school a basin with water has been put up. For the time being we don't need comb and mirror<sup>108</sup>.

To wash oneself before entering the school building was obligatory in all Catholic educational institutions in northern New Guinea<sup>109</sup>. However, considering the frequent descriptions of the, almost ritualized, daily washings upon entering the classrooms, it seems to have been the introduction of particular bodily practices around cleanliness rather than the promotion of washing as such which concerned the missionaries. This assumption is suggested also by the numerous accounts in which the nuns (in part quite admiringly) talk about the indigenous girls' ability and passion for swimming in the sea. Missionary complaints about the lack of any form of personal hygiene indeed contradict with accounts by anthropologists who have emphasized the central importance ritual washings had in New Guinea<sup>110</sup>. In an article published in a Viennese anthropological journal in 1902, the German priest and New Guinea missionary Father Mathias Erdweg remarked that

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108 »Das erste woran beim Kommen der Kleinen gedacht wird ist die Toilette. Es ist den Kanaken gänzlich fremd sich zu waschen [...] Vor der Schule steht ein Becken mit Wasser in Bereitschaft. Kamm und Spiegel brauchen wir vorerst noch nicht.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 7.3.1901.

109 According to teacher Sister Philomena of Monumbo, the students conformed to the missionary guidelines with respect to cleanliness without difficulty, starting their morning greeting with the words »Sister, I have washed myself!« to continue with the obligatory »Praised be Jesus Christ!« (Note the sequence!) AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Philomena Herzog, 16.02.1907.

110 Cf. Camilla WEDGWOOD, Girls' Puberty Rites in Manam Island, New Guinea, in: *Oceania* 4 (1933/34), pp. 132–155, i.e. pp. 139–143.

Tumleo mothers bathed their children on a daily basis<sup>111</sup>. In the nuns' understanding, washing practices had both religious and secular implications and related to both a Christian concept of purity and bodily discipline as well as western modern concerns for personal hygiene in day-to-day life. Relaying her conversation with indigenous schoolgirls in Tumleo, Sister Ursula resorted to terms of race and related European concepts of personal hygiene to »whiteness«: »Moreover, sometimes they ask whether people in Europe were all as white as we. They say we are so beautiful, whereas they aren't. I told them that in Europe children wash themselves thoroughly, and that's why they are so white; now they also wash themselves [...]«<sup>112</sup>.

Apart from »cleaning« the bodies of indigenous children, the first activity the Servants of the Holy Spirit in colonial New Guinea engaged in was clothing them. In contrast to coastal Togo, where in the late nineteenth century European-style clothes were popular among adolescents and adults, in northern New Guinea, where capitalist commerce and textiles were introduced through Christian missionaries, the adoption of western dress was contested. At the moment of arrival of the Catholic mission, people usually produced all items of dress from local resources. Indigenous forms of clothing constituted a social marker of age and grouping. New Guineans started to dress around the age of twelve<sup>113</sup>. Depending on the sex, the clothes consisted of a more or less elaborate bark-cloth belt that hid the genitals. Girls' clothes, which anthropologist Camilla Wedgwood described as a short petticoat, in addition, covered the buttocks. In most New Guinean settings, women's petticoats got longer and fuller with the increasing social age of their wearer, which was determined by, for instance, the development of her breasts, her first menstruation, initiation rites, childbirth or menopause<sup>114</sup>. Apart from this standard kind of dress, New Guinean peoples, moreover, used complex sets of attire on ritual occasions<sup>115</sup>.

Significantly, the New Guinea-based nuns wrote little about traditional ways of clothing, largely disregarding (or being unaware) of the complex meaning of dress and attire in ceremonies or for the socially recognized status of individuals or groups. Rather, they considered people's »nakedness« (meaning the »insufficient« covering of the body) one of the biggest challenges to their own adaptation to the local cultural setting. In the eyes of the

111 Cf. ERDWEG, *Die Bewohner*, p. 280.

112 »Auch fragen sie manchmal, ob die Leute in Europa alle so weiß seien wie wir. Wir seien aber schön, sie seien nicht schön. Ich habe ihnen gesagt, in Europa würden sich die Kinder so gut waschen, darum seien sie so weiß, sie waschen sich jetzt auch [...]« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 17.9.1899.

113 Cf. BÖHM, *The Life*, pp. 88; ERDWEG, *Die Bewohner*, pp. 307–310; WEDGWOOD, *Girls' Puberty Rites*, p. 132.

114 Cf. WEDGWOOD, *Girls' Puberty Rites*, p. 133.

115 On attire in Tumleo cf. ERDWEG, *Die Bewohner*, pp. 317–324.

nuns, the introduction of textile clothing indeed reduced difference as »once wearing dresses people look so much more normal«<sup>116</sup>. While such statements emphasize the representational significance of European-style dress (in the widest sense), its centrality to missionary concepts of »civilization« and its relation to social practice, the issue of clothing in the missionary context surely went beyond that. Christian communities had used clothing to veil the shape of the body and to ensure its discipline<sup>117</sup>. To date, particular (gendered) items of dress continue to play important roles in Catholic rituals and spaces<sup>118</sup>. The interaction with scarcely (if at all) dressed people not only challenged the missionaries' concepts of social and moral order but opened up issues of (religious and personal) morality more generally. In a letter to her fellow sisters in Europe, Sister Firmina Janzig (1888–1940) admitted that on some days she did not feel comfortable in New Guinea, and this she explained by pointing out questions of dress and morality: »If only they [the New Guineans] had more sense of shame to get dressed more properly! How much better life would be among the natives. Alas, this is what they lack completely«<sup>119</sup>.

In relating indigenous ways of clothing to the Christian code of morals, in which the experience of »shame« took a central position, Sister Firmina referred to a Christian tradition that linked a person's external appearance to the state of her or his soul<sup>120</sup>. Here, »shame« or rather, the »lack of shame« which the writer considered immoral manifested itself notably in the not-covering of certain parts of the body (and the not-veiling of its shape, respectively)<sup>121</sup>. However, as Aileen Ribeiro has noted, clothes are never »immoral« in themselves<sup>122</sup>. Indeed, what was historically considered as immoral dress was a result of social disapproval and, in the given context, related to a particular European-Christian construction of the gendered body, the acknowledgement of its sinfulness and its control through dress. The nuns' complaints about the scarce dress of indigenous women and children (significantly they

116 »Die Leute sehen doch gleich ganz anders aus, wenn sie ein Kleid anhaben [...]« AG SSsP PNG Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 7.1.1900.

117 Cf. ROSS, *Clothing*, p. 83

118 For a discussion on dress, gender and religion cf. Anna-Katharina HÖPFLINGER, »Mehr verschandelt als verwandelt«. Kleidung als Medium der Geschlechterkonstruktion in religiösen Symbolsystemen, in: Anna-Katharina HÖPFLINGER / Ann JEFFERS / Daria PEZZOLI-OLGIATI (eds), *Handbuch Gender und Religion*, Göttingen 2008, pp. 243–255.

119 »Wenn sie nur mehr Schamgefühl hätten und sich etwas besser bekleiden würden! Dann wäre es bei den Eingeborenen schöner. Aber dieses geht ihnen ja leider ganz ab.« AG SSsP 034 PNG Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Firmina Janzig, 8.2.1920.

120 Cf. RIBEIRO, *Dress and Morality*, p. 13.

121 Similarly, the construction of a direct connection between »shame« and »nakedness« (or, more precisely, between women's use or not-use of skirts) can also be found in Father Böhm's account of Manam. Cf. BÖHM, *The Life*, pp. 94f.

122 Cf. RIBEIRO, *Dress and Morality*, p. 12.

barely mentioned nakedness in relation with male bodies at all) invariably meant that they found indigenous dress styles and the display of (certain parts of) the body sexually disturbing. Efforts at introducing textile clothing were thus part of the larger missionary endeavor to establish control over the indigenous body.

In New Guinea, the nuns' prime mission was to clothe the local population. For women and girls, missionary dress consisted of a full-length loose dress, which simultaneously veiled the shape of the body and was to express simplicity. For male workers and students, by contrast, a »tidy« waistcloth was considered proper. The textiles produced and distributed by the nuns thus neither corresponded to contemporary European clothing nor to the dress style of Europeans on location. Rather, the nuns produced these articles of dress according to their own ideal of Christian mores and propriety. In order to comply with the self-imposed task to dress the people among whom they worked, all local nuns, irrespective of their training and actual sphere of work, moreover, engaged in the production, distribution and repair (patching) of clothes. Dresses, fabrics, sewing machines and flat irons belonged to the most important goods they received from Europe. Apart from donations by European benefactors, dresses for the European missionaries on location as well as the indigenous Catholics were produced by the women missionaries. In New Guinea, missionary workers and housemaids were usually paid with articles of clothing<sup>123</sup>. A letter written by one of the first nuns in Tumleo Island six months after they had established the first local women's convent in 1899 testifies to their commitment to refashioning the island's female population: »Now most of the women and girls who live on this island already have one dress, which, however, they wouldn't always be wearing. Sister Valeria has often chased off women who had come to school without dress«<sup>124</sup>.

Although the Catholic missionary compound constituted a space in which a particular dress code was implemented, the introduction of mission-fabricated clothes was contested. At times, the nuns complained about their pupils'

123 The nuns' writings testify to the huge demand the New Guinean Catholic mission had for dress in order to clothe the nearby residents as well as to pay employees. In 1906, a nun wrote about the occasional »rushes to the sewing room«: »Recently we received a whole pile of workers' trousers. All these had to be made narrower and shorter. With the remark that soon they [the male missionaries] would need hundred [trousers] for workers that had to be paid off.« (»So brachte man uns vor kurzen einen ganzen Haufen Arbeiterhosen. Diese mußten alle enger und kürzer gemacht werden. Mit der Bemerkung, dass sie bald schon hundert haben wollten für Arbeiter, welche ausbezahlt werden mussten.«) Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 27.8.1906.

124 »Die meisten Frauen und Mädchen, welche auf dieser Insel wohnen haben jetzt schon ein Kleid, aber die Frauen ziehen es nicht immer an. Schwester Valeria hat die Frauen schon oft weggejagt, wenn selbe ohne Kleid zur Schule kommen.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 17.9.1899.



irregular use of textile dress and at some places, indigenous parents actively opposed their children's use of textiles. In 1903, a nun reported from the Monumbo area that the pupils' clothes were stored at the women's convent, where they got dressed every morning before school or church. This was necessary as otherwise the textiles would have been »stolen« or »burned« by the adults in the pupils' home villages<sup>125</sup>. Apart from such acts of open resistance to mission-fabricated dress, the treatment of the clothes formed the frequent subject of complaints, for the people obviously used them in ways the nuns found objectionable. Concerned with the external appearance of their students, women missionaries urged European superiors to avoid sending used textiles and to ship to New Guinea only the toughest fabrics available, because both children and adults would quickly walk around »in rags«:

The way they walk around is often appalling – holding their rags together at the front and the back of their bodies. And this they manage to do to a dress within a couple of days! Well, they are savages, and therefore it would be good if dear reverend mother could send us some of the toughest fabric you have<sup>126</sup>.

By contrast, from Togo the nuns reported that the indigenous people were attracted to western textiles from the outset. In fact, by 1897 the coastal people were already familiar with European clothes through colonial commerce and the activities of the Protestant North German Missionary Society which had promoted specific dress styles since the mid-nineteenth century. Besides, southern Ghana and Togo constituted a region that featured its own rich tradition of textile production of woven colored and patterned strips sewn together. Ewe men and women wore these large, so-called »Kente« cloths draping them about their bodies in different ways. In parallel to their efforts to persuade women to wear more than such a cloth wrapped around their hips (and especially to cover their breasts), the first Protestant missionaries on location introduced western-style suits (black coats, white shirts and ties) among the indigenous teachers they employed<sup>127</sup>. With colonialism, missionary presence, the increase of capitalist commerce and an ongoing social division of labor, »adequate« dress increasingly depended on imported goods and marked not only religious affiliation but also social status. The popularity of imported clothing among the indigenous populations along the West

125 AG SSps PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Philomena Herzog, 7.8.1903.

126 »Es ist oft ganz schrecklich wie sie daher kommen. Hinten und vorne halten sie mit beiden Händen die Fetzen zusammen, und so etwas bringen sie an einem Kleid in nur wenigen Tagen fertig. Es sind eben Wilde, und darum ist es gut wenn lb. Ehrw. Mutter uns vom stärksten Stoff den sie haben schicken lassen.« AG SSps PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 20.9.1902.

127 Cf. Ross, *Clothing*, p. 98.

African coast soon exceeded the expectations and endeavors of religious and secular Europeans. Finally, the appropriation of western dress styles by the people in Togo contributed to the blurring of boundaries between colonizers and colonized<sup>128</sup>. Notwithstanding the colonizers' concerns, European-style clothes (i.e. suits) had become, to borrow from Birgit Meyer, »the symbol of the new time, which stood for the alliance of Christianity and ›civilization‹«<sup>129</sup>.

The nuns tied in with the indigenous demand for imported textiles from the outset. The prospect to receive garments was an important impulse for the popularity of the Togolese missionary schools. Teachers distributed dresses, which they had either received from Europe or produced out of imported materials, among their most diligent students and in reward for regular school attendance. The writers of letters constantly appealed to their readers to supply them with textiles and fabric remnants from which they crafted large quantities of clothes that were distributed preferably on Christmas Eve. Characterizing their pupils as overall lazy, materially oriented and lacking the sense for spiritual perfection, women missionaries considered the distribution of dresses as a promising means to teach the girls a particular lesson about German notions of diligence and material reward. In December 1907, a teaching nun reported from Kpalimé that school attendance had increased remarkably during the pre-Christmas period. She explained this with the pupils' hope to receive garments and noted that »this way these lazy children, who have missed school throughout the year, quickly want to earn a little dress«<sup>130</sup>. At the same time, Sister Pancratia explained the educational goal that missionary nuns pursued by controlling the access to western clothes: »At Christmas we will make it clear to them that the Christ child does not bring any gifts to the idle children«<sup>131</sup>.

However, while the nuns emphasized the attractiveness of textiles to adolescents and adults across Togo, they complained about the external appearance of younger children. Attempting to instruct them to show up at church and school dressed cleanly and neatly, women missionaries took the youngest generation's external appearance as a marker of local Catholic influence. In particular during the mission's early years on location, teachers complained about the children's state of dress and the fact that pupils frequently

128 Cf. Joachim ZELLER, *Weißer Blicke, Schwarze Körper. Afrikaner im Spiegel westlicher Alltagskultur*, Erfurt 2010, p. 18.

129 MEYER, *Christian Mind*, p. 324.

130 »Da wollen sich die trägen Kinder, die das ganze Jahr die Schule versäumten, auch noch schnell ein Kleidchen verdienen.« AG SSps 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 1.12.1907.

131 »Weihnachten werden wir es denen aber doch noch klar machen, dass das Christkindchen für die trägen Kinder keine Gabe bringt.« Cf. *ibid.*

undressed at school. »There one always has to keep one's eyes closed and open at the same time«, as one nun in Lomé put it describing the need for action deriving from the potential nakedness of schoolchildren<sup>132</sup>. The children in Lomé, in turn, obviously associated the presence of nuns with the imperative to be dressed. According to the reports, the latter's visits to the indigenous living quarters usually caused a hurried search for clothes<sup>133</sup>. In this context, indigenous mothers also became targets of mission endeavors. Although the nuns seem to have respected the mothers' reluctance to clothe infants, they attempted to convince them to dress their youngest children »properly«. Certainly, in the eyes of western nuns good Christian women were skilled needlewomen who closely watched over the state of dress and the external appearance of their children.

Sewing classes were central to Catholic girls' education in Togo. While young students were instructed to keep their own dresses »in order«, older ones, moreover, assisted their teachers in sewing and patching the former's clothes. The promotion of needlework as a feminine occupation corresponded to the mission's gender biased educational ideal and ideas of separated spheres of work. While in pre-colonial southern Togo the stitching of the woven cloth strips had been done by men, in the missionary context needlework became a female occupation. The sewing machine was an indispensable item to be found in all women's convents; it was an imported good that local Christian women were ideally familiar with. A sewing machine also figured prominently in the published account of the life of Magdalena Gbikpi (Figure 24), an exemplary woman convert. Emphasizing Magdalena's exceptional qualities as a Christian mother and housewife, the author of the article, Sister Immaculata Göcke, explicitly referred to her skilled use of the hand sewing machine. The author noted admiringly that Magdalena, who paid much attention to the orderly appearance of her children in general, had developed a particular belt mechanism that prevented her younger children from ridding themselves of their clothes »making it impossible to these little children of nature to make do with their birthday suit«<sup>134</sup>.

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132 »With most of the children being draped with a cloth only one has to pay constant attention to the little ones; often they aren't able to leave it on for even five minutes, but rather cast it off again and again.« (»Die meisten Kinder haben nur ein Tuch um und da muß man bei den Kleinen stets achtgeben, sie können es oft noch keine fünf Minuten umlassen, sondern werfen es immer wieder ab.«) AG SSps 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 20.11.1897.

133 In their reports of the regular visits they paid to the indigenous quarters of Lomé the nuns stated that the children, in view of the approaching nuns, darted off to get dressed. Cf. AG SSps 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Dominica Craghs, 3.3.1901.

134 Cf. GÖCKE, Eine christliche Hausfrau, p. 42.



Figure 24: Magdalena and Georg Gbikpi with their children, before 1922;  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, Togo P1010618.

The neat, clean and uniform appearance of her children features prominently in the family portrait that Magdalena Gbikpi had probably sent to Europe to the former Togo missionary nuns in the early 1920s<sup>135</sup>. In 1923, the photograph, captioned »A Christian teacher's family in our former Togo mission«, was published in illustration to the article quoted. For the photo session, the Gbikpi family had attached great importance to their clothing and hairstyles. The monogamously married couple forms the center of the image and is framed by their orderly grouped, nicely dressed and combed children. While Georg Gbikpi's suit, chemise and tie as well as his sons' suits resemble western-style clothes, Magdalena's beautiful garment and attire rather correspond to a European understanding of West African women's dress. In her narrative of Magdalena's biography, Sister Immaculata expressed her appreciation of Magdalena's preference for »traditional costume«, meaning the elaborate garb and, most importantly, the head cloth worn by Togolese women. She interpreted the adherence to West African women's dress style as their wish to remain true to local customs and to simplicity instead of using imported fashion. The author lauded Magdalena for rejecting fashionable western dress for practical reasons<sup>136</sup> and for not wearing shoes in day-to-day life. In her family portrait, however, Magdalena did wear leather shoes, also the couple decided to pose on chairs with straight backs, both items either imported or modeled on imported goods. Thus, the Gbikpis' family portrait did feature signs of European modernity, a phenomenon that was increasingly criticized by Catholic missionaries in early-twentieth-century Togo<sup>137</sup>.

The nuns understood clothing not only as a means of bodily control but also as a visual sign by which a person communicated his or her gendered religious identity with its strong moral underpinnings at the crossroads of self and society. The Lomé missionaries established the so-called Association for Catholic Women and Virgins whose associates wore a blue belt as the external sign of their membership<sup>138</sup>. Another important Christian ideal performed through dress related to the visual expression of humility and simplicity and involved the disregard of a person's concerns for fashion. The nuns thus criticized all practices around secular dress and attire that went beyond

135 The photograph is filed in the Servants of the Holy Spirit's archive in Steyl. Since Magdalena maintained correspondence with Sister Immaculata after the last German nuns had left Togo early in 1918, it is likely that she added the group portrait to one of her letters. The fact that on the original image the children are numbered serially also points in this direction.

136 According to Sister Immaculata, Magdalena renounced Western dress because it did not allow her to carry her children on her back in the customary way. GÖCKE, *Eine christliche Hausfrau*, p. 42.

137 On objects in colonial West African portrait photography cf. Christraud GEARY, *Portraiture, Authorship, and the Inscription of History. Photographic Practice in the Banum Kingdom, Cameroon (1902–1980)*, in: ALBRECHT et al. (eds), *Getting Pictures right*, pp. 141–163.

138 Cf. AG SSpS Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 05.10.1902.

the control of the corrupting body and the achievement of a »proper« appearance. They opposed vanity, for instance, and countered modern fashion by promoting the Christian virtues of morality, simplicity and humility. »Clothes are only to cover ourselves; they are mementoes of the fall of mankind a[nd] of our own sinfulness«, as one nun put it in 1906<sup>139</sup>. Sister Immaculata's praise of Magdalena Gbikpi's resistance to western-style clothing can thus be read as a message to Catholic women in 1920s Germany. Accordingly, Christianity involved the rejection of »worldly« concerns for dress and ideally a religious person's external appearance provided testimony that he or she spent only little time and energy on the adornment of the body<sup>140</sup>. However, this anti-materialist theoretical approach to dress neither matched missionary practice (invariably exploiting the attractiveness of imported goods) nor the nuns' own use of textiles (think of, for instance, the religious habit or the use of dress in Church services or processions). This is why the issue of clothing constituted a frequent matter of tensions.

Robert Ross has shown that change in fashion came along with social change in its various forms<sup>141</sup>. In Togo, people rather than sharing the mission's religion-centered approach to dress attached an alternative (and often worldly) significance to the new fabrics and dress styles available. Realizing that people desired new articles of clothing for reasons other than religious ones, the Catholic missionaries started to criticize the people's concerns with fashion. They ridiculed »jackets and trousers« and other (false, in their eyes) signs of social advancement as symbols standing in the way to »reak« (meaning Christian) civilizational progress<sup>142</sup>. For the people in southern Togo, however, where Christianity, western education and new clothes had come to imply each other, dress (and consumption more generally) served as tools for the construction of »civilized« and modern identities<sup>143</sup>. The increasing presence of secular German women in Lomé, moreover, introduced novel ladies' fashion; also, local traders offered new consumer goods and imported fashionable items (e.g. attire, sequins). Missionary sources reported of a rapidly growing demand for ladies' hats (e.g. with floral ornaments) in the early twentieth century. The nuns watched this development with some concern as it involved a secular-oriented use of clothes and desired goods (i.e. fabrics, ropes of pearls, hats) that they rejected as fashion and related to sinful extravagance. In 1906, Sister Pancratia Tendahl advised her European

139 »Die Kleider sind nur, um sich damit zu bedecken u. sind ein Erinnerungszeichen an den Sündenfall unserer Stammeltern u. unserer eigenen Sündhaftigkeit.« Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 9.7.1906.

140 Cf. RIBEIRO, *Dress and Morality*, p. 14.

141 Cf. ROSS, *Clothing*.

142 E.g. cf. Jahresbericht der Katholischen Mission, in: Barch R1001/6538, p. 61.

143 Cf. MEYER, *Christian Mind*, pp. 329–331.

fellows to stop sending ladies' hats to the Kpalimé convent, pointing out the great popularity that the hats had gained among the girls in town: »The children like them even more than a dress but we should not start such fashions here in the bush. Already hats have started to show up more often at the coast, especially in Lomé«<sup>144</sup>. Alert to the secular significance the new dress styles had to the people in colonial Togo, missionaries sought to gain control over clothing by, for instance, delaying the distribution of certain articles across the interior where the mission still constituted a major source for imported cloth<sup>145</sup>.

In northern New Guinea, by contrast, where the Catholic mission was a main source for cloths well into the twentieth century, the nuns invariably linked the significance of textiles to bodily discipline. Emphasizing the irrelevance of the color or state of the fabrics they used to produce the typical dresses that the missionaries distributed in the region<sup>146</sup>, they kept insisting that the only thing that mattered was the material – they disapproved of silk and used tough fabrics only<sup>147</sup>. We may thus conclude that the crucial drive behind the missionary politics of dress was not the endeavor to westernize clothing in colonial settings or to transform Africans or New Guineans into German Christians. After all, dress styles, colors, fabrics and accessories were among the clearest markers by which the colonizers distinguished themselves from the people they attempted to control<sup>148</sup>. Rather, the nuns' great concern with dress must be seen as part of a larger Catholic body politics that made particular gendered practices around clothing and cleanliness (clothing, washing, bleaching, sewing, ironing etc.) constitutive to moral agency (Figures 25 and 26).

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144 »Die Kinder haben sie gerne noch lieber als ein Kleidchen aber wir dürfen solche Moden hier im Busch doch noch nicht anfangen. An der Küste, besonders in Lomé, werden schon mehr Hüte getragen.« AG SSsP Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Pancratia Tendahl, 9.6.1906.

145 Cf. STEGMAIER, *Die alte Togomission*, p. 228.

146 For example, in 1907 Sister Eustachia Wirtz wrote with regard to the textiles the nuns in New Guinea preferred to be sent: »The color does not matter as long as it is fabric.« (»Hier kommt es nicht auf die Farbe an, wenn es nur Stoff ist.«) Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Eustachia Wirtz, 3.1.1907.

147 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 7.6.1901.

148 Cf. Ross, *Clothing*, p. 73.

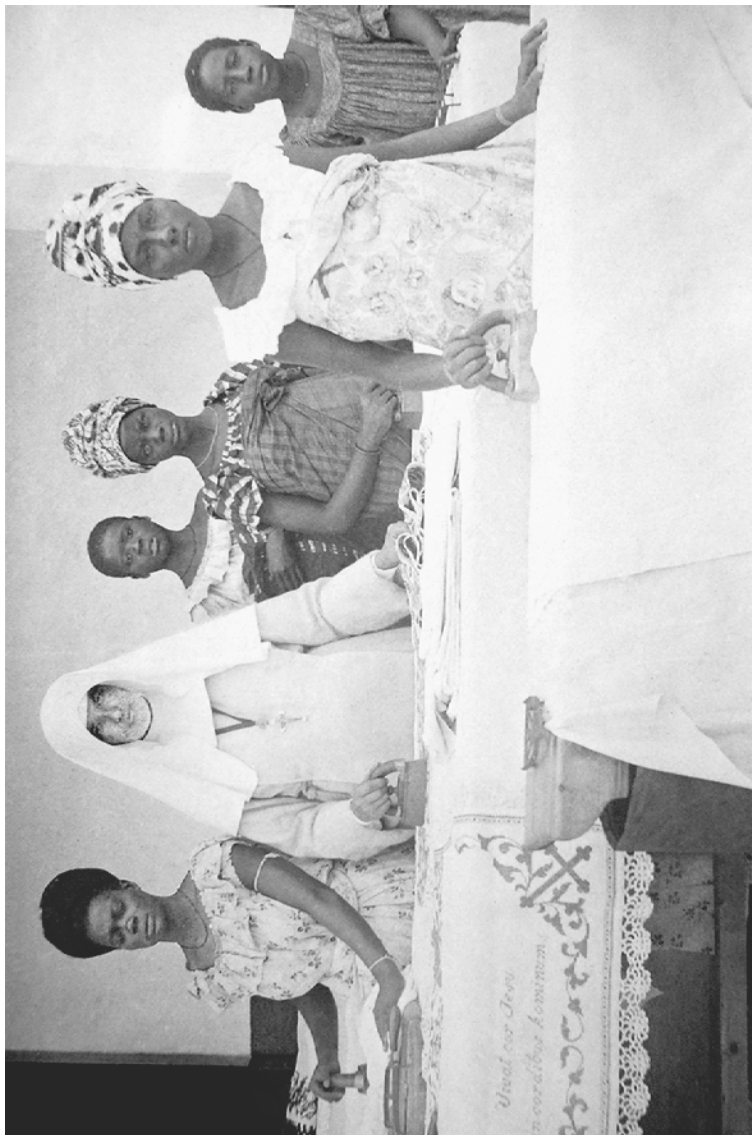


Figure 25: »Sr. Anastasia Wagner« (Togo, before 1916);  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, Togo P1010605.



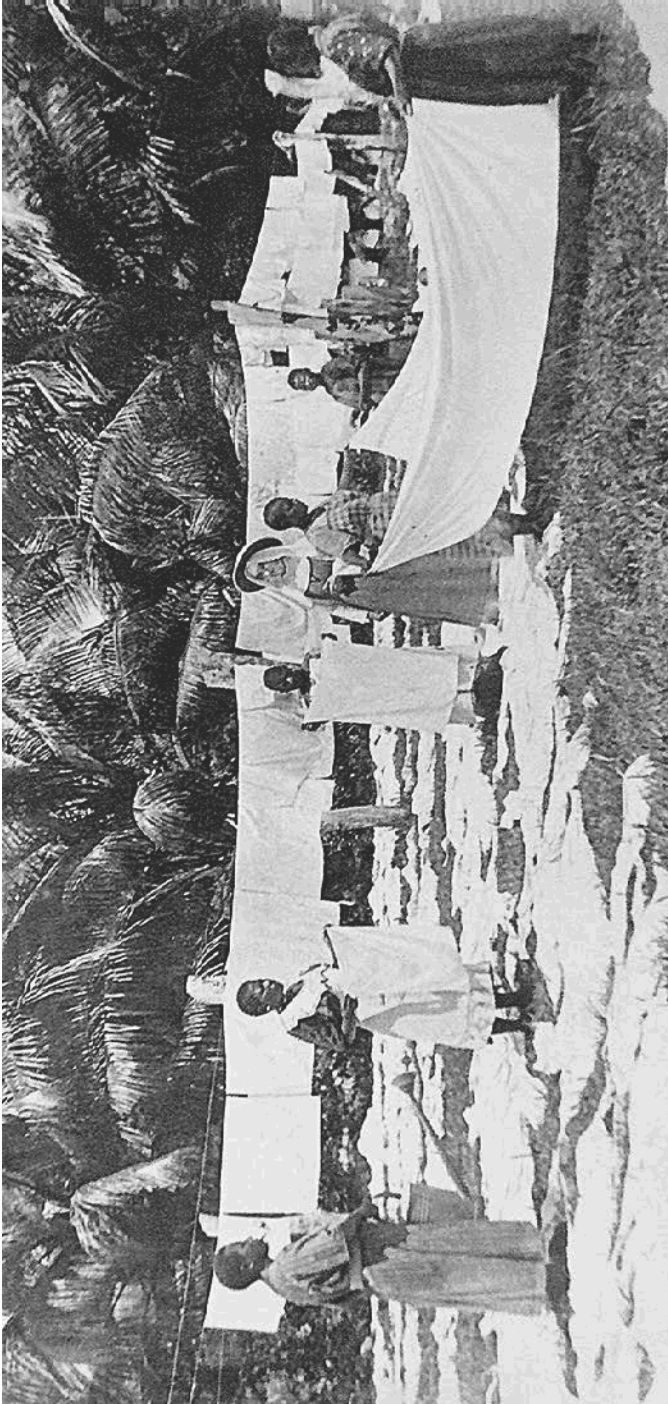


Figure 26: »On the washday« (New Guinea, before 1914);  
Archive SSpS Steyl Fotos, New Guinea, Album: PNG 95.

The missionary body politics saw the re-fashioning of the gendered body through dress as a necessary step on the way to establish a Christian social and moral order. The introduction or promotion of textile clothes was inextricably linked with the attempt to define and to advance the gendered values of modesty and shame. The significance of dress in this context went beyond the superficial covering of particular parts of the body or the veiling of its shape, because it meant the visible expression of the gendered religious values and moral codes that were intrinsic to the Christian construction of the body. Hailing the »cultivating effects« of Christianity in New Guinea and in particular the impact of baptism on indigenous children's behaviors and attitudes, a German priest stated: »They become obedient, humble, devoted. But, first and foremost, they develop a sense of modesty. They are ashamed to appear totally naked as they previously did«<sup>149</sup>. Here, the use of dress is directly linked to an individual's experience of modesty and shame while indigenous practices of »not-dressing« or rather, »dressing in traditional ways« are essentially related to immorality and sin.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the New Guinea missionaries interpreted an individual's choice of dress as a major means for expressing religious identity. While individuals dressed in textiles were visibly linked to the Christian mission, those wearing traditional costume were considered to be lacking interest in (or resisting) Catholicism. Change in dress was understood as a pre-condition for religious change. In the eyes of missionaries, the adoption of textile dress signified to some degree the wearers' recognition of the body's sinful potential, and missionaries sometimes integrated stories about the substitution of indigenous dress for mission-produced clothing in their narratives of apostasy. This was particularly the case when boarding school girls absconded from the controlled environment of the women's convents and returned to their home villages. In these narratives, the taking off of the dress designed and produced by the nuns was cited as a sign of the abandonment of Christian morality and religion as well as an indicator of what the nuns called a »relapse« into indigenous customs. In 1904/1905, the nuns in Monumbo reported of the case of Anna, the first girl from the region that had moved to the women's convent where she was baptized and stayed with the nuns for about one and a half years. Six months later the head of the convent reported that Anna

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149 »Sie werden folgsam, bescheiden, anhänglich. Vor allem aber wächst in ihnen die Schamhaftigkeit. Sie schämen sich, ganz nackt, wie früher zu erscheinen.« Fr. Vormann, in: VOLPERT, Ein Rebenhang, p. 52.

ran away without any reason. Now she took an old fellow who already had a wife. How sad, isn't it? The poor child had been with us for more than one and a half years and always wore dresses and now she put away everything and walks around in a little dress of reed like the heathen women. She doesn't come to church anymore and, moreover, does everything to prevent the other Catholic girls from doing so<sup>150</sup>.

In the writer's eyes, Anna's apostasy was marked by a set of interlinked factors. On the one hand, she had run away »without any reason«. This probably meant that the nuns were unaware of particular issues that had strained Anna's relationship with them. The reference made to her marriage with a polygamous (and thus non-Catholic) man, in addition, highlights the writer's essentially moral perspective on the case. The substitution of »Christian« dress for indigenous costume symbolized Anna's return to non-Catholic mores. For the nuns, Anna's marriage to a non-Catholic polygamist opened up serious issues, because, according to Catholic doctrine, well instructed converts bore full religious responsibility for all sins, in this case a sexual relationship beyond the Catholic sacramental marriage<sup>151</sup>. On the other hand, Anna had not only left the spatially and morally confined world of the women's convent and cut the visible/symbolic ties with mission Christianity, but, moreover, turned into the mission's opponent by preventing other girls from attending church and school.

The mission politics of dress inevitably involved a moralizing dimension. Promoting a model of society in which the notion of purity and the control of female sexuality constituted central moral values, the nuns perceived indigenous sexuality as dangerous and socially unregulated. In their eyes, scarcely dressed indigenous girls literally embodied a model of sexuality that was free from regulations and in sharp contrast to a Christian approach to female sexuality, which was covered and controlled either through vows or sacramental marriage. The introduction of textiles thus also aimed at indicating sexual inaccessibility, which was, moreover, safeguarded by the nuns' endeavor to place converted girls within the confines of the convent until marriage

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150 »[...] dass nämlich unsere Anna, das älteste Mädchen das wir von Monumbo hatten ohne irgendeine Ursache durchgebrannt ist. Sie hat jetzt einen alten Kerl genommen der schon eine Frau hatte. Wie traurig, nicht wahr? Das arme Kind ist 1 1/2 Jahre bei uns gewesen und hat immer Kleider getragen und jetzt hat sie alles fortgetan und geht wie die heidnischen Frauen mit einem Schilfkleidchen herum. Zur Kirche kommt sie auch nicht mehr und gibt sich auch noch Mühe die anderen katholischen Mädchen davon abzuhalten.« AG SSs PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 2.5.1905.

151 Founder Janssen had always warned the prefect apostolic in New Guinea of expanding the area of activity too fast without securing the conversion of the native population: »Consider also the following point: people who have not had the Gospel preached to them are only bound to observe the dictates of the natural law. But once the Gospel is preached to them, they will become more culpable if they sink back into paganism.« Arnold Janssen in: ALT (ed.), Arnold Janssen – Letters, pp. 76f.

to a Catholic spouse. Attempting to control the sexual lives of converts, the missionaries advised young Catholics in their choice of a spouse and opposed marriages to non-Catholics in general and polygynous or divorced (by indigenous custom) candidates in particular. Yet, the bodies of indigenous Catholics were not easily controlled. Throughout the period of research the nuns in New Guinea continued to complain about moral transgressions which they often interpreted as the rejection of Catholicism as a whole. In 1911, a nun wrote a letter to Europe in which she told about the elopement of some girls from the Monumbo convent as a reaction to the punishment by the local priest for the commitment of »severe offences«:

Now, instead of improving they turned the medicine into harmful poison; they ran away from the station into the bush where they stayed during the day and at nighttime they went to the heathen villages. This had been their plan for a long time; they only waited for an occasion. But actually this was to be expected, because they hated praying, working and obeying. Instead, in spite of all supervision, they would search for opportunities to satisfy their sensual desires. Now that they are free they savor to the full the poison of bad lust. Again they smear and adorn themselves like the heathens and at their so called »sing-sings« (heathen dance) they take off their dresses and put on little grass-skirts; and all of them Catholic girls who have been provided profound training and received Holy Communion several times a week<sup>152</sup>.

Significantly, the writer not only mentioned sexuality as the driving force behind the girls' elopement, but, once again, related a set of bodily practices (around dress, adornment) to moral decay. It was the giving-in to bodily desires that eventually triggered off the girls' turning away from Catholic mores and life at the missionary station. The abandonment of textiles again symbolized apostasy. However, the writer's reference to the girls' regular participation in Catholic sacramental practice prior to their elopement suggests following Patricia Grimshaw who has discussed the nexus of piety and sexuality as an interrelated pair of categories in the concepts of women missionaries<sup>153</sup>.

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152 »Anstatt sich nun zu bessern, verwandelten sie die Arznei in schändliches Gift und liefen von der Station weg in den Busch, blieben dort über Tag, und nachts ging's in die heidnischen Dörfer. Dies hatten sie schon lange vor, nur warteten sie eine Gelegenheit ab. Man konnte es ihnen aber auch gut anmerken; denn beten, arbeiten und gehorchen waren ihnen zuwider. Dagegen suchten sie trotz aller Aufsicht gelegenheit auf, um ihre sinnlichen Gelüste zu befriedigen. Jetzt, wo sie nun frei sind, trinken sie den Giftbecher der bösen Lust in vollen Zügen. Sie schmieren und schmücken sich wieder wie die Heiden, legen bei ihrem so genannten »sing-sing« (heidnischem Tanz) ihre Kleider ab und ziehen Grasröckchen an, kommen nicht mehr zur Schule und zur Kirche, und das katholische Mädchen, die sehr gut unterrichtet sind und mehrere Male in der Woche die hl. Kommunion empfangen«. AG SSpS PNG 6201Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Vincentiana Katzfey, 16.6.1911.

153 Patricia Grimshaw has argued with respect to American Protestant women missionaries in

Taken as a whole, the account quoted suggests that the nuns, emphasizing purity on the one hand and sexuality on the other, constructed their gendered identities vis-à-vis the women they had come to proselytize. The missionary project of re-making indigenous women thus went beyond the issues of dress and cleanliness but rather targeted missionary constructions of the body and the management of its meanings more generally.

### Missionary Girls

In both Togo and New Guinea the nuns saw co-residence as the most promising means to dispose unconverted women to the Catholic faith, and therefore they endeavored to gather boarding school girls and housemaids at all their convents. Since these girls and women were legally bound to the mission through contracts of education or employment the nuns referred to them as »our girls«, »house girls« or »missionary girls«, claiming legitimate authority over them in the capacity of employers and educators. They represented themselves as the moral and religious authorities for the girls whom they ideally expected to stay at the convents until marriage to a Catholic spouse.

Significantly, the nuns never scrutinized the legitimacy of these politics, which challenged not only indigenous forms of upbringing but also the authority of parents and systems of kinship relations. Rather, they felt responsible for the moral education and, according to their religious conviction, salvation of the female populations in both fields. Characterizing newly arrived girls as »free children of nature« in the best and »savages« in the worst case, they established the objective to introduce their ideal of »order and discipline«<sup>154</sup>. The nuns opposed the girls' stay at the convents to what they called a free life in the bush. Life at the women's convents was regulated by a strictly defined rhythm of prayer, schooling and domestic work. Representing this lifestyle as well-structured and purposeful, the nuns set it in sharp contrast to village life which they rejected as driven by free affections, desires and moods<sup>155</sup>. Sum-

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mid-nineteenth-century Hawaii that it was the »essential thrust« in their strategies to »substitute piety for sexuality«. Cf. GRIMSHAW, *New England Missionary Wives*, p. 29.

154 Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 2 1922, Durchführung (Berichte der Territorialoberinnen), Sr. Georgia van Oopen, Bericht über die Togomission, p. 1.

155 For example, reporting about the second Catholic marriage contracted in Tumleo in 1901 between a missionary girl and a Catholic man, a nun wrote: »Now we still have 14 girls, who in general are doing quite well and outside school hours are of great help in our work. Some others consider it beneath their Kanaka dignity to work at our place and would rather run around in the woods or roll around in the sand.« (»Wir haben jetzt noch 14 Mädchen, welche sich im Allgemeinen ziemlich gut schicken und uns ausser der Schulzeit ziemlich bei der Arbeit helfen. So manche andern halten es unter ihrer Kanakenwürde bei uns zu arbeiten, sie laufen lieber im Wald herum oder wälzen sich im Sand.«) Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 24.11.1901.

ming up the congregation's educational works in Togo in 1913, Superior Provincial Georgia van Oopen reported that the indigenous girls who resided at the women's convent in Lomé were being

[...] instructed in Christian religion and mores but also trained in housekeeping, sewing, ironing, washing, patching, darning and so forth, until they can marry Christian youths who had been either educated by our missionaries or at least visited the school<sup>156</sup>.

The sources do not tell much about the precise circumstances of the missionary girls' arrivals at the convents. As mentioned earlier, the first nuns sent to New Guinea explicitly spoke of the »search for children«<sup>157</sup>. Missionary writers often represented the children's transfer to the mission for education as some sort of trade. »Some of the little ones totally belong to us, because their relatives have transferred them to us«, one priest explained in 1905<sup>158</sup>. In her account of an inland trip on the Sepik River, Sister Philomena Herzog stated that a number of parents »voluntarily brought four little boys« on board of the mission's steamer, which moved them to the central boarding school in Alexishafen. Significantly, she added that in return »every father received an axe [...] with which they moved home beaming with joy«<sup>159</sup>. In other cases, writers simply stated that the missionaries »were given children« by parents or relatives<sup>160</sup>. What all accounts had in common were the authors' depictions of the children as passive goods that were exchanged between their guardians and the mission in a rational manner. The sources, however, also show that the missionaries did not hesitate to employ coercion when parents or relatives refused to hand them children over for education.

A well-documented case occurred in 1903 in the Monumbo area, where many people distrusted the missionaries and did not agree with their children's Catholic boarding education. The story of Agnes and Johanna, as the first two local missionary girls were called after their Christening, was mentioned by all nuns on location. In this case, the nuns and priests had taken in both

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156 »[...] die bei ihnen nicht nur in der christlichen Religion und Sitte, sondern auch im Führen des Haushaltes, im Nähen, Bügeln, Waschen, Flickern, Stopfen usw. unterrichtet werden, bis sie sich mit christlichen Jünglingen, von denen manche auch bei unseren Missionaren ganz erzogen oder doch die Schule besucht haben, verheiraten können.« AG SSsP 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897-1918, Togo 1897-1913.

157 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899-1910, Sr. Ursula, 25.11.1901.

158 Friedrich VORMANN, Die Mission in Monumbo, in: Steyler Missionsbote (1905), pp. 117-119, p. 118.

159 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911-1975, Briefe von Sr. Philomena Herzog, 22.12.1923.

160 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899-1910, Sr. Chrysostoma Wehner, 7.10.1906.

girls against the emphatic veto of their mother<sup>161</sup>. Significantly, the writers referred to the sisters (aged about twelve and between three and six, respectively) as »orphans« even though they admitted that their biological parents were still alive<sup>162</sup>. In the same year, the local chronicler recorded another case in which the nuns »were given« two children by the workers of the German New-Guinea-Compagnie who had »stolen« them from their parents in the course of a dispute<sup>163</sup>. The authors of letters narrated such incidents without any serious attempt to legitimize such actions. This must be explained by the common religious and ideological mindset of the nuns in both the missions and in Europe, all of whom shared the conviction that New Guinean girls were better off in the custody of the mission than with their families. Indeed it was precisely the children's separation from their native and non-Catholic environment that constituted the main objective of Catholic boarding education<sup>164</sup>. However, the practice to (dis)place children and adolescents at the mission stations was met with resistance not only on the part of so-called orphans, boarders or housemaids but also contested by relatives, indigenous authorities or western planters, who competed for indigenous labor. When the colonial government realized the potential for conflict inherent to such missionary practices it demanded legal regulation of these arrangements in the form of contracts of education or work (also in order to avoid charges of child abduction or slavery<sup>165</sup>).

161 According to the chronicle, the local priest »had found« both girls in the village »deserted and totally starving« and offered them to take them to the women's convent. Since the girls were indecisive the priest decided that they should stay overnight, which made one girl »start crying bitterly«. Two days later, the girls' mother showed up at the convent and demanded the return of her daughters. The nuns, however, following the priest's directive, refused to let them leave. AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, Monumbo, Gründung und Geschichte des Schwesternhauses in Monumbo (1902 bis 1912), p. 3 und PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Christophora Einzmann, 18.1.1903.

162 »We already have two little orphans, even siblings, in our house. Actually they still do have parents, but you can easily imagine what sort of [parents].« (»Zwei Waischen haben wir schon in unserem Hause sogar Geschwister. Sie haben zwar noch ihre Eltern aber was [...] können Sie sich leicht denken.«) AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Christophora Einzmann, 18.1.1903.

163 AG SSpS PNG Chroniken, Monumbo, Gründung und Geschichte des Schwesternhauses in Monumbo (1902 bis 1912), p. 6.

164 In his standard volume on Catholic mission activity in the German colonial empire (1913), theologian Joseph Schmidlin (1876–1944) stressed the great importance of boarding education in Alexishafen for evangelization, pointing out that there »hundreds of orphan boys and some girls were isolated from the corrupting influences of the heathen environment«. Joseph SCHMIDLIN, *Die katholischen Missionen in den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, Münster 1913, pp. 166f.

165 The connection between child abduction and slavery was brought up in a dispute between the Vicar Apostolic of New Pomerania, Bishop Louis Couppé (1850–1926), and the governor of German New Guinea, Albert Hahl (1868–1945), with regard to the mission's practice to collect what the bishop used to call »neglected children«; a practice that was temporarily forestalled by the government. Cf. BArch, R 1001/2574, pp. 11–15.

In both Togo and New Guinea, these contracts were concluded between the mission and a minor pupil's parent or the major candidate in person. Catholic boarders received education, food and dress largely without payment<sup>166</sup>. In return, they contributed to the missions' economic reproduction through their labor in domestic work, gardening and farming. The contracts of education licensed the missionaries to claim reimbursement in case that parents removed their children prior to the expiry of the contract. In 1914, the ecclesiastical heads of the Catholic missions operating across German New Guinea directed a petition to the colonial government in which they suggested to substitute the legal option to employ coercion in response to attempted withdrawals from contracts for the right to claim compensation<sup>167</sup>. The sources show that, although Governor Albert Hahl did not meet this demand, coercion did constitute a means by which missionaries at times attempted to enforce the candidates' stay.

Missiologist Paul Steffen recently has associated Catholic boarding education in colonial New Guinea with the indigenous practice of child adoption<sup>168</sup>. Yet, while anthropologists have indeed pointed out that the (temporary) upbringing of children by members of kin or related groups was common in early-twentieth-century Melanesia, they have equally emphasized that the adoptees' absconding and subsequent return to their biological families was generally accepted<sup>169</sup>. Hence, the use of coercion on the part of the mission as well as the system of close control it established (e.g. through the locking up of dormitories at nighttime) in order to enforce the boarders' stay added a novel dimension to such arrangements. Missionaries also used corporal punishment on elopers<sup>170</sup>.

In 1901, Sister Ursula Sensen wrote that in Tumleo boarders who had escaped were »fetched back and then whacked«. She disapproved of such methods because they entailed that many people who dismissed the use of corporal punishment on their children dissociated themselves from the mission<sup>171</sup>. The obviously excessive violence exercised by individual nuns on children also led to severe frictions in the religious community in Tumleo. While some nuns (like Sister Ursula) questioned the »beatings«, those under critique emphatically defended their disciplining practices, referring to the Prefect Apostolic Limbrock's respective directives. One teaching nun, trying

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166 Tuition fees were only mentioned in relation to the offspring of European men and indigenous women.

167 Cf. *Stellungnahme der genannten Missionare zu rechtlichen Stellung der Erziehungsverträge*, APF N.S. Vol. 552, 115–118, i.e. 117.

168 STEFFEN, *Die katholischen Missionen*, p. 363.

169 Cf. WEDGWOOD, *The Life of Children*, pp. 22–25.

170 Cf. AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 22.6.1900.

171 Cf. AG SSps PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, 7.1.1900.



to explain her actions to her readers, even forwarded to Europe Limbrock's written instructions according to which corporal punishment ultimately led to the child's redemption: »Don't withhold correction from a child, for if you strike him with the rod, he will not die. If you beat him with the rod, you save his soul from hell«. And the prefect adapted this biblical proverb<sup>172</sup> explicitly to the nuns' educational work in Tumleo: »The same applies equally or perhaps even more to daughters, who are hardly mentioned in the Holy Scripture«<sup>173</sup>. The missionaries legitimized corporeal punishment by referring to notions of order and discipline<sup>174</sup> and, moreover, criticized the absence of these practices (and values) in indigenous forms of parenting<sup>175</sup>. Altogether, the accounts make clear that the missionary often responded to (attempted) elopement with violence. To escape and to join one's family unauthorized, in turn, must be interpreted as an act of what anthropologist Christine Choo has called everyday resistance<sup>176</sup>. Yet, attempting to anticipate elopement, the mission promoted the transfer of boarders to other stations distant from their respective point of origin.

Starting in 1909, the nuns and priests in northern New Guinea moved orphans and boarders from across the prefecture to the newly established Catholic headquarters in Alexishafen, where they maintained children's homes for both sexes. There the candidates were instructed in Catholic doctrine and lived according to a Christian social rhythm. The missionaries pinned great hopes on these children, who, brought up in this closed and strictly regulated environment, were to become the base of a new Christian society. These endeavors were contested, though. Missionary accounts show that boarders were not easily recruited because many people resisted their offspring's move to Alexishafen. The following example, taken from the letter of a teaching nun in Leming, shows that the children from the north coast associated displacement with the arrival of the »Gabriel«, the mission's steamer that connected Alexishafen with the outpost places. She wrote that,

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172 Cf. Proverbs 12:13–14.

173 »Entzieh dem Knaben die Züchtigung nicht; denn wenn du ihn mit der Rute schlägst, wird er nicht sterben. Schlägst du ihn mit der Rute, so wirst du seine Seele von der Hölle erlösen. [...] Dasselbe gilt natürlich auch oder vielleicht noch mehr für Töchter, deren nur selten in der hl. Schrift Erwägung geschieht.« Cf. The paper by Limbrock filed with: AG SSPS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 11.12.1902.

174 In western countries, the Christian doctrine of original sin had long served as a rationale for corporeal punishment. Cf. Edmund HERMSEN, *Faktor Religion. Geschichte der Kindheit vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2009, pp. 124–134.

175 The German priest and New Guinea missionary Mathias Erdweg noted that parents in Tumleo hardly ever had »the heart to give their offspring a beating« given their weakness. Besides, he wrote that he had never come to witness any case of child maltreatment: »even when the father is enraged such a thing does not occur«. ERDWEG, *Die Bewohner*, p. 281.

176 Choo has adapted James Scott's paradigm of everyday resistance to the missionary context in twentieth-century Australia. Cf. CHOO, *Mission Girls*, pp. 11f.

although she had some »quite capable« pupils, they persistently refused to move to the around 500 kilometers distant boarding school in Alexishafen, and added: »Recently, when ›Gabriel‹ was approaching our station for a stop-over the children who were just on their way to school ran home or into the bush and would not show up again all day«<sup>177</sup>.

Apart from a girls' home, the nuns established a separate building in which they cared for infant orphans from all over the prefecture. Besides, they engaged in the education of the illegitimate offspring of German men and New Guinean women. According to the sources, it was the fathers who enrolled their children for a western-Christian upbringing, whereas the mothers were not even mentioned. When the new Australian colonial administration expelled all secular German citizens, the education of those children whose fathers left the colony was assumed by the nuns. In 1919 a nun reported that the mission's steamship had »brought us 12 such poorest of the poor, 6 boys and 6 girls«<sup>178</sup>. Once again, the writer concealed the circumstances under which these children arrived at Alexishafen and did not mention the roles of their mothers at all. She was, however, clear about the educational goal, stating that »all of them want to become good Catholics, to eat well and to be dressed well«<sup>179</sup>. In New Guinea, the »half-whites«, to reproduce the common mission terminology, were brought up (and accommodated) separately from the »brown Papua«. Under the constant supervision of a nun, they were expected to cook, to wash and to sew in order to provide for themselves<sup>180</sup>. The so-called »half-whites« were taught and trained in handicrafts (e.g. crocheting, knitting) and drawing. Contrary to the other students who were instructed in English and/or indigenous languages, they continued to study German and English<sup>181</sup>.

The education of the offspring of German fathers in separation from the rest resembled the ideology of assimilation that dominated the sexual and racial politics in colonial Australia. So-called »half-caste« children were forcibly removed from their Aboriginal mothers and handed over to western missions for education in several parts of Australia. This policy was based on the convergence of evangelizing practices instituted by missionaries and racial assumptions according to which it was the duty of the »whites« to ensure that the children of »white« men grew up following European princi-

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177 »Als neulich der ›Gabriel‹ auf unsere Station zukam, um in der Nähe der Küste etwas zu halten, liefen die Kinder, welche gerade auf dem Weg zur Schule waren alle nach Hause oder in den Busch und ließen sich den ganzen Tag nicht mehr sehen.« AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Kunigundis Vedder, 22.8.1909.

178 AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Humilis Klöckner, 30.12.1919.

179 Ibid.

180 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Philomena Herzog, 28.9.1919.

181 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Philomena Herzog, 21.7.1921.

ples and in separation from their native communities<sup>182</sup>. Missionary practice thus also testifies to concerns with race and »Germanness«. Sister Constantina Krämer, who was in charge of the so-called »half-whites« during the 1920s, described the children's status as something in between »Germans« and »New Guineans«. She explained to her brother in Germany that »they are really poor children, half-children we could say. They are able to study and behave well as long as they are being well taken care of, but they are tempted very easily as the experience has shown«<sup>183</sup>. The nuns considered a strict and Catholic upbringing as the adequate educational means to teach them precisely those European (or German) cultural principles that colonial societies had constructed around particular ways of housekeeping, clothing, cleanliness and discipline<sup>184</sup>. However, whenever the children challenged their educators' ideals, the latter resorted to terms of race. In 1932, when the nun who had long been in charge of their education petitioned for dismissal from office, she explained her request by characterizing the children as »thoughtless and fickle children« that »can't be accustomed to orderliness and cleanliness« and showed »no interest at all for their own domestic works«<sup>185</sup>.

In Togo, by contrast, the daughters of German men were educated (and accommodated) together with the other boarders. Apart from some German surnames which were recorded in the chronicle, their »white« fathers appear in the sources only in casual remarks. Generally speaking, the Christian missions in Togo acted as emphatic critics of official colonial morality and demanded public support for the illegitimate children of German men<sup>186</sup>. When in 1909 Governor Zech recognized this plight he decreed that these children were to be left with their mothers until the age of six. From then, boys were to be enrolled in the governmental boarding school and girls placed at the missions at public expense<sup>187</sup>. As for southern Togo, where Protestant and Catholic boarding education existed side by side, it is conceivable that Protestant fathers favored the former over the latter. In one of her

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182 Cf. CHOO, *Mission Girls*.

183 »Es sind wirklich arme Kinder, halbe Kinder können wir sagen. Sie können gut lernen und sind brav, solange sie unter guter Obhut sind, lassen sich aber sehr leicht verführen wie die Erfahrung gezeigt hat.« AG SSpS 6204 Briefe, Briefe von Schwester Constantina Krämer an ihre Familie, 11.1.1921.

184 For constructions of race and gender in German colonialism cf. Anette DIETRICH, *Rassenkonstruktionen im deutschen Kolonialismus. »Weiße Weiblichkeiten« in der kolonialen Rassenpolitik*, in: BECHHAUS-GERST/LEUTNER (eds), *Frauen*, pp. 176–187, i.e. p. 186.

185 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Schw. Philomena Herzog, 23.1.1932.

186 Some estimated numbers regarding illegitimate children from interethnic relationships are available for Togo. Peter Sebald has suggested doubling the official number of 263 so-called »half-castes« recorded for 1912/1913 in order to get closer to actual numbers. By then, 368 Europeans resided in the colony. Cf. SEBALD, *Togo*, p. 266.

187 Cf. KNOLL, *Togo*, p. 101.

rare remarks on the subject, the head of the nuns in Lomé stated that out of the thirty-six girls who stayed at the local convent in 1907 seven had »white« fathers and »black« mothers<sup>188</sup>. On the whole, the women missionaries characterized boarding schooling as their major contribution to evangelization with their educational institutions being in great demand. In a retrospect report on the Servants of the Holy Spirit's activities in Togo (1922) Sister Georgia van Oopen stated that the nuns in Lomé constantly housed around forty missionary girls who were committed to them for education by »partly still heathen« and »partly Christian parents« sometimes at the early age of three or four<sup>189</sup>.

Interestingly, it was also young Catholic men who made use of girls' boarding schooling: According to the chronicle from Lomé, several mission-employed teachers who had been educated in the social environment of the missionary station themselves, enrolled their brides-to-be at the convents for a period of comprehensive training. Apart from religious instruction and elementary schooling, this type of education centered on the training in domestic skills. The indigenous demand for this educational form, which was most popular in the political and commercial capital Lomé, relates to both social change and traditional forms of social organization (i.e. childhood marriage betrothal). Placing their brides at the nuns' convent before marriage enabled western-educated Catholic men to marry their betrothed girls without hazarding social status or violating religious rules (according to which Christians had to marry Christians). What remains unclear, however, is whether the nuns, who generally disapproved of childhood marriage betrothal, also accepted Catholic in-laws or fiancés to place child brides at the convent. In any case, the availability of Catholic girls' boarding education allowed mission-employed teachers to choose unbaptized individuals as spouses. The nuns tended to consider their relations with the grooms as some sort of complicity based on the shared aim to prepare the brides for their future roles as Catholic (house)wives. The contracted period of training varied greatly in duration lasting between a couple of months to years. In February 1903, a nun noted about such a case in Lomé: »When one of our teachers recently handed us over his bride for education he told me to keep her at the mission for 2–3 years, because he didn't want to have such a stupid woman«<sup>190</sup>. According to the chronicle, teacher Andreas placed his Catholic bride Elisabeth at the convent for »further education« in January 1903. Another entry record-

188 Cf. STEGMAIER, *Die alte Togomission*, p. 236.

189 AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 2 1922, Durchführung (Berichte der Territorialoberinnen), Sr. Georgia van Oopen, Bericht über die Togomission, p. 1.

190 »Als neulich einer unserer Lehrer seine Braut uns zur Erziehung übergab, sagte er mir, sie müsse 2–3 Jahre in der Mission bleiben, denn ein so dummes Weib wolle er nicht haben.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 13.2.1903.

ed the couple's nuptials in August 1905. Thus, Elisabeth had indeed stayed at the convent for two and a half years before getting married. The nuns did not question the passive roles assigned to women in these contexts<sup>191</sup>. Quite the contrary, they appreciated the initiatives of Catholic grooms, for these men obviously valued (at least some of) the mission's gendered religious-cultural goals<sup>192</sup>.

The German priests also enrolled candidates for boarding education. In such cases, the circumstances of the girls' arrival were generally not recorded but it can be assumed that this happened when the missionaries feared for the moral integrity of Catholics. Katharina Loho, for instance, was sent to Lomé by the priest of her home village to »escape the seduction of an old fetish priest«<sup>193</sup>. What missionaries called »fetish schools« were powerful cultist orders that informed Ewe political and social order and impacted day-to-day life in many respects (e.g. parenting, healing, gathering of the harvest, etc.). As Sandra Greene has shown, for the Anlo Ewe, these religious orders also constituted an important non-kinship-based source of support for women, allowing them to challenge the control structures within their families and established patterns of gender relations<sup>194</sup>. Missionaries combated these institutions mostly on grounds of morals for they viewed the engagement of girls in these orders as promiscuous<sup>195</sup>. Whenever priests suspected a so-called »fetish priest« of having turned his attention on individual Catholic school-girls they attempted to transfer the respective girls to a distant women's convent. Ultimately, the Lomé chronicler also recorded several cases in which girls, some of whom hailed from other areas, applied for admission to boarding education on their own initiatives. Still, when parents refused to give their consent to their daughters' move they had to be dismissed again due to the colonial legal arrangements<sup>196</sup>. On the eve of the last missionaries' expulsion from Togo in January 1918, the nuns in Lomé, Aného and Atakpamé reported of several young women who had already completed their formal period of education but continued to reside with them by choice.

191 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Lomé, pp. 10 and 19 respectively.

192 The nuns appreciated the groom's pressure for boarding education particularly in case their brides were not baptized yet. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 20.11.1897.

193 AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Lomé, p. 48.

194 Accordingly, by joining these orders, married women could gain greater influence within both sides of their extended families as well as increase their leverage in decisions concerning their own marital affairs (e.g. to whom they would be betrothed). Cf. GREENE, *Gender*, i.e. pp. 6 and 152f.

195 Cf. KNOLL, *Togo*, p. 114.

196 In January 1909, for instance, the chronicle reported of five »bush girls« (unfortunately their age is not mentioned but the problem certainly was that they were under age) applied for admission to the women's convent in Lomé. Four of them had to be dismissed soon since their parents refused to assent. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 Chronicles 1897–1918, Lomé, p. 30.

Unlike their colleagues in New Guinea, the nuns in Togo hardly complained about the low indigenous demand for, or persistent resistance to, boarding education. Quite the contrary, they used dismissal as a disciplinary means whenever missionary girls challenged the social and moral order of the compound<sup>197</sup>. Obviously, boarding education and residence at the convents appealed to some Togolese parents and young women alike. Sister Georgia van Oopen, the long-term head of the nuns in Togo, characterized girls' boarding schooling as a successful undertaking and the training of indigenous females for Catholic marriage through co-residence she considered as the nuns' prime contribution to evangelization. She explained the attractiveness of this educational model by pointing out the girls' prospect of a Christian marriage. For Sister Georgia, indigenous forms of marital relationships were based on female suppression and therefore less desirable than the Christian sacramental marriage, which she characterized as marked by the spouses' partnership. This argument was in line with a European discourse that constructed indigenous women as the victims of non-western men to be »rescued« by Europeans<sup>198</sup>. Secondly, Georgia van Oopen, recognizing the social and economic change taking place in the region depicted missionary boarding education as a tool for female social mobility. In her eyes, boarding school graduates enjoyed better chances on the marriage market. Obviously referring to the pool of marriageable, mission-educated converts who constituted the emerging intellectual and professional elites in the rapidly changing society in coastal Togo<sup>199</sup>, Sister Georgia stated that Catholic boarders »were the most wanted brides of the educationally advanced black gentlemen«. She went on, explaining her statement as follows:

For it was commonly known and widespread that the girls educated at the sisters' place enjoyed a solid education; after all, they were able to read, to write, to calculate, to wash, to iron, to cook, to sing, to stitch, to sew, to darn, to patch etc. Some were

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197 The head of the Lomé convent explained the dismissal of two missionary girls in 1903 as follows: »Today we received two new girls but dismissed two others because they were always impertinent and would not listen to reason. We were afraid that they would contaminate others as well.« (»Heute haben wir zwei neue Mädchen im Hause erhalten, zwei andere aber entlassen, weil sie immer so frech waren und sich nichts sagen ließen. Wir fürchteten, sie würden die anderen sonst auch noch anstecken.«) Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 9.1.1903.

198 Cf. GRIMSHAW/SHERLOCK, *Women*, p. 185; WILDENTHAL, *German Women*, p. 1. The idea that mission activity improved women's status in non-western societies for it acquainted them with their »true vocation as proper Christian women« was widespread in modern missionary thought and advertising. SILL, *Encounters*, p. 16.

199 In Togo, the demand for male education often exceeded supply since it constituted the key to enter business or government service. Alumni of higher missionary boys' education either worked for the mission as teachers or ended up working for the governments or merchants. Cf. KNOLL, *Togo*, pp. 104–107.

even skilled in stitching pretty paraments. Some, moreover, received piano or reed organ lessons, naturally in return for extra payment<sup>200</sup>.

Birgit Meyer has contextualized the desire for mission education in southern Togo and Ghana by pointing out the indigenous general openness to change on the one hand and by relating education alongside other aspects of European culture to modernity and the evolving nexus of »civilization« on the other<sup>201</sup>. When the first nuns arrived in Togo, the »long conversation«, to borrow the Comaroffs' famous term describing the dialectical »exchange of signs and substance« between the colonizers and the colonized, had already long begun<sup>202</sup>. The presence of Protestant missionaries, colonial administrators, Afro-Brazilian returnees and (European) traders since the mid-nineteenth century had not only led to multiple material manifestations of aspects of European culture in the coastal regions but also introduced novelties that many Togolese people had appropriated through the dynamics of the encounter and valued in the context of modernization. Emphasizing particularly the material aspects of religion in the Ewe's encounter with Christianity, Birgit Meyer refers to the crucial roles that some of these objects played as vehicles for the construction of »a new, modern and ›civilized‹ identity«<sup>203</sup>. Starting in 1897, the Catholic women's convent emerges in this process as an institution through which many of these things (e.g. education, skills, employment, clothes or Christian names) became accessible in a novel context. Indigenous women, moreover, made use of the Catholic gender arrangements.

Scholars of African Christianity have argued that the Christian message of human equality and the missionary form of social organization instilled in converts in general and women in particular a »sense of freedom, of a co-operative effort in which men and women were strenuously engaged«<sup>204</sup>. This idea is, moreover, connected with another theme emphasized by historians and anthropologists who have pointed out the missionary station's significance as a space of protection for women or social dropouts seeking shel-

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200 »Denn allbekannt und weitverbreitet war es, dass die bei den Schwestern erzogenen Mädchen eine gründliche Ausbildung genossen hatten; konnten sie doch lesen, schreiben, rechnen, waschen, bügeln, kochen, singen, sticken, nähen, stopfen, flicken usw. Einige waren sogar imstande, hübsche Paramente zu sticken. Auch erhielten einige, natürlich gegen eine besondere Vergütung, Unterricht im Klavier oder Harmoniumspielen.« AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 2 1922, Durchführung (Berichte der Territorialoberinnen), Sr. Georgia van Oopen, Bericht über die Togomission, pp. 2f.

201 Cf. MEYER, *Christian Mind*, pp. 315f.

202 Cf. COMAROFF/COMAROFF, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, p. 11; MEYER, *Christian Mind*, p. 316.

203 Cf. MEYER, *Christian Mind*, p. 330.

204 Adrian HASTINGS, *Were Women a special Case?*, in: BOWIE/KIRKWOOD/ARDENER (eds), *Women and Missions*, pp. 109–125, i.e. p. 111; Elizabeth ISICHEI, *Does Christianity empower Women? The Case of the Anaguta in Central Nigeria*, in: BOWIE/KIRKWOOD/ARDENER (eds), *Women and Missions*, pp. 209–228.

ter from unwanted (polygynous) marriage arrangements, kinship obligations or violent relationships<sup>205</sup>. In Togo, the establishment of Catholic women's convents created a new type of female-dominated space. The nuns' way of life as they displayed it to indigenous observers involved a high degree of autonomy and was based on female self-organization. Notwithstanding the propagated missionary ideology of gendered domesticity, the nuns certainly defied the conventional models of European domesticity in their day-to-day lives; instead, they engaged in work arenas beyond the domestic sphere and appeared as agents of colonial modernity. Residing in partly impressive western-style buildings, the small groups of women enjoyed a good supply situation thanks to imported food and commodities and stayed in relative independence from men. Building a celibate community, they lived as some sort of social support group for women and engaged in a set of activities that they and (at least some of) their students valued for religious and secular reasons. Recent feminist scholarship on nuns has related the history of gendered monasticism to the emergence of a feminine self that set women beyond the relational terms of the family<sup>206</sup> and started to explore the resonance of the celibate way of life in non-western cultural contexts<sup>207</sup>. Accordingly, European nuns, whether wanted or not, have introduced new cultural definitions of femininity to non-European settings merely through the example of their own lives<sup>208</sup>.

In German Togo, residing at the women's convent obviously appealed to a small but stable number of young women, some of whom even rejected marriage proposals by Christian men and, although discouraged by the missionaries who rather preferred to marry them off, decided to stay with the nuns even after their formal period of education was over<sup>209</sup>. The sources in part suggest understanding these extended convent communities as social support groups for women that, although basically structured by the asymmetry that mirrored the colonizer-colonized social and racial divide, were also marked

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205 Cf. HASTINGS, *Were Women a special Case?*, pp. 111f; Tabitha KANOGO, *Mission Impact on Women in Colonial Kenya*, in: BOWIE/KIRKWOOD/ARDENER (eds), *Women and Missions*, pp. 165–186, i.e. 176f. For New Guinea cf. LUTKEHAUS, *Missionary Maternalism*, pp. 224–227; Herman Joseph HIERY, *Germans, Pacific Islanders and Sexuality. German Impact and indigenous influence in Melanesia and Micronesia*, in: HIERY / MCKENZIE (eds), *European Impact*, pp. 299–323, pp. 314f.

206 Cf. EBAUGH, *Patriarchal Bargains*, pp. 400–402; SULLIVAN, *Visual Habits*, pp. 12f; McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 6.

207 Cf. Esther SHEBI, *A Nigerian Sisterhood in the Transformation of Female Identity*, in: Eva ROSANDER (ed.), *Transforming Female Identities. Women's Organizational Forms in West Africa*, Uppsala 1997, pp. 123–135; Ulrika BAMIDELE ERLANDSSON, *In Search of Women's Dignity and greater Freedom. Fieldwork on Women and Identity among the Catholic Fatima Sisters in Jos, Nigeria*, in: ROSANDER (ed.), *Transforming*, pp. 136–147.

208 Cf. LUTKEHAUS, *Missionary Maternalism*, pp. 227f.

209 This theme is, moreover, discussed in Chapter 6.



by companion relationships, affection and mutual efforts. As letters testify, individual nuns maintained the contact with former missionary girls who, in turn, kept in touch with their past educators<sup>210</sup>. Some missionary girls contributed significantly to the functioning of the individual religious communities, particularly in times of crises. It was a missionary girl who nursed the inhabitants of the Aného convent throughout a yellow fever epidemic in the spring of 1905 due to which all local nuns were confined to their beds and the whole area was put under quarantine<sup>211</sup>. In 1907, a nun in Atakpamé, who had contracted blackwater fever and consequently was forced to undertake the five-day trip to Lomé by hammock, expressed her gratitude for the assistance of two indigenous girls who gave her company on the long and demanding journey<sup>212</sup>. Some writers related the missionary girls' disposition to assist the nuns during sickness to their affection for individual women missionaries. When in 1908 Sister Ludgera Hölkemann (1872–1908), the obviously popular nursery teacher in Lomé, was on her deathbed after having contracted tuberculosis, it was again a long-term missionary girl who cared for her at night during her seven weeks of painful sickness. The local nuns called upon their colleagues in Europe to »rejoice« this girl by giving her something in reward, for she »was able to come to terms with the patient just as well as a sister« and had provided the whole community a substantial relief<sup>213</sup>. In this case, the writer clearly related the respective girl's concern for the patient's fate to the latter's high popularity among the women of Lomé. She described Sister Ludgera's death as follows:

Some women were present when she died. They had been very quiet, but when they realized that the good sister was dead they moved downstairs and started to cry heart-breakingly together with the house girls. Immediately almost the entire town gathered in our court and joined the dirges. ›O Sr. Ludgera, why have you left us? Come back and teach us. You have shown us so many things. Now you are leaving us. What

210 Cf. AG SSpS 034 TG 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Immaculata Göcke, 11.1.1909.

211 Cf. AG SSpS 034 TG 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Immaculata Göcke, 9.2.1905 and 25.3.1905.

212 ›I was so sorry for the poor girls, yet I was genially glad to have them with me. For even though the reverend father was very considerate and did everything he could, in the course of such a sickness there are moments in which one favors the assistance of a black girl over that of a priest, as you, dear reverend Mother, may well imagine.« (›Die armen Mädchen taten mir doch so Leid, dennoch freute ich mich recht herzlich, sie bei mir zu haben. Denn, obwohl der hochwürdige Herr sehr besorgt war und alles tat, was er nur konnte, so gibt es – wie Sie, liebe würdige Mutter, sich doch denken können – bei solch einer Krankheit Augenblicke, wo man die Hilfe eines schwarzen Mädchens lieber hat als die eines Priesters.«) AG SSpS 034 TG 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Euphemia, 10.9.1907.

213 Cf. AG SSpS 034 TG 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918, Sr. Thaddäa Brands, 25.7.1908.

shall our children do? O Sr. Ludgera! We were unable to calm them down. Our house girls cried worst. [...] I have never seen something like that. When Sr. Luisa [died] everything was quiet; surely because they had not known her that well. But here the contrary was the case<sup>214</sup>.

Some missionary girls also actively engaged in the mission venture. They visited the towns and villages on Catholic behalf and mediated between the nuns and the local people. Besides, several unmarried graduates who had decided to stay at the convents beyond their formal period of education assisted their former teachers in the classroom or engaged in nursing. However, when Prefect Apostolic Schönig increasingly employed former missionary girls as indigenous woman teachers in Lomé with the major aim to cut costs, Superior Provincial Georgia van Oopen at first reacted with reservation<sup>215</sup>. Significantly, she explained this by stating that these woman were still »inexperienced girls« themselves and thus in need of supervision. Notwithstanding her dismissive reaction, in January 1908 Lina Quist became the Catholic mission's first indigenous female teacher and others soon followed her example<sup>216</sup>. The joint efforts of both nuns and missionary girls were most pronounced at the end of 1917, when all German citizens were forced to leave the colony. According to the reports, almost everywhere there were some indigenous Catholics who supported the German missionaries<sup>217</sup> while the missionary girls were described as sad and desperate – many of them had decided against returning to their relatives during the war but opted to stay with the last nuns until their actual departure<sup>218</sup>. Most importantly still, it was them who perpetuated missionary work after the last nuns' return to Europe. They kept up teaching and administrated the resources. Ultimately, it was

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214 »Einige Frauen waren beim Tode zugegen. Sie waren ganz ruhig, aber sobald sie merkten, dass die gute Schwester tot sei, begaben sie sich nach unten und begannen dort im Verein mit den Hausmädchen ein herzerreißendes Geschrei. Im Nu war beinahe die ganze Stadt in unserem Hof versammelt und stimmte in den Trauergesang ein. ›O Schw. Ludgera, warum hast du uns verlassen? Komme doch wieder und lehre uns. Du hast uns so viel gezeigt. Jetzt gehst du von uns. Was sollen unsere Kinder machen? O Schw. Ludgera! Wir konnten gar keine Ruhe halten. Unsere Hausmädchen schrien am schlimmsten. [...] Ich hatte so etwas noch nicht gesehen. Bei Schw. Luisa war alles ganz ruhig, sicher, weil sie dieselbe nicht so kannten. Aber hier war ganz das Gegenteil.« Ibid.

215 Cf. STEGMAIER, *Die alte Togomission*, pp. 237–239.

216 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 6302 *Chronicles 1897–1918*, Lome, p. 27 and 034 Tg 01 *Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917*, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 11.8.1910.

217 The exception was Kpandu, from where the nuns reported that even the local Catholics at first openly expressed their satisfaction with the end of German colonial rule and welcomed the British, respectively. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 03/3 *Kriegserlebnisse/Ausweisung*, Sr. Sophia Heifort, undated.

218 E.g. the quotation in Chapter 6, p. 365.

also three long-term missionary girls who took charge of the women's convent in Lomé after the last nuns had departed for Europe<sup>219</sup>.

In Togo, the missionary conception of boarding education, however, also produced social and legal conflict, which often derived from the attitudes of missionaries who attempted to talk parents into contracting the boarding education of their daughters. At times, parents contested the nuns' authority regarding the education of their children or questioned the legitimacy of contracts. Once a contract of education was signed, the nuns sought to regulate the boarders' contact with the world beyond the compound's confines<sup>220</sup>. Some guardians who attempted to withdraw from contracts appealed to the colonial government. In 1905, a mother called on the colonial district authorities in Atakpamé to cancel the three-year contract over the boarding education of her daughter. According to the petitioner, the nuns had not only forestalled the contact between mother and daughter but, moreover, advised her »not to call the child her daughter« anymore<sup>221</sup>. In 1911, John Byll, the father of a boy and a girl who stayed at the priests' and nuns' respective convents in Lomé, during his absence due to business, asked the government to release both contracts of education and to hand the children over to his relatives. He explained his appeal by stating that a priest had baptized his son against his emphatic veto and in awareness of the fact that Byll himself was a member of the Wesleyan Church. Moreover, the resentful father complained that the priests had instructed his son to disobey his uncle, the boy's interim guardian. His daughter, on the other hand, had learned nothing at the nuns', but, to cite Byll, »begging money from her uncles because she is not getting good feeding [food] in the mission«<sup>222</sup>. Below the line, John Byll demanded the termination of both contracts since they were »all in favor of the Catholic mission« and against the interests of his family<sup>223</sup>. Although the scarce archival record does not allow tracking Byll's dispute with the Catholic mission,

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219 Still, Sister Georgia van Oopen invited a married, »good Christian man« to move in as well, since she was concerned about the three young women staying on their own »in the huge building at day and nighttime«. In March 1918, the first French Sisters Notre Dame des Apôtres moved to Lomé and took over the convent. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 03/3, *Kriegserlebnisse/Ausweisung*, Sr. Redempta Philips, pp. 10f.

220 For instance, they regulated the girls' visits to relatives and accompanied missionary girls from distant areas on trips to home villages. Sometimes they admitted that parents tried to prevent their daughters from returning to the mission or that missionary girls at times eloped. E.g. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 *Briefe der Schwestern 1908–1918*, Sr. Beda Schwöppe, 17.09.1911.

221 In turn, the local nuns, who disavowed the second part of the accusation, responded that it was the father who handed over the girl for education. Therefore, from the official point of view the case became a question of custody and with the father being currently out of town, officials did not interfere. Cf. BArch, R150F/FA3/1308, p. 3–7.

222 Cf. BArch, R 150F/FA 1/511, pp. 309–312.

223 Cf. BArch, R 150F/FA 1/511, p. 310.

the case shows that parents made use of missionary educational institutions on explicitly secular grounds and that conflicts arising in this area were also rooted in contradictory expectations as regards learning agendas.

To conclude, the nuns' early endeavors to convert girls and women in both Togo and New Guinea followed strikingly similar patterns, for in both settings boarding education formed the core of their strategies. The hierarchy promoted at these extended female convent communities was rather simple insofar as it largely reproduced the asymmetric colonial social order based on ethnic division. The nuns not only commanded over the resources but also portrayed themselves as substitute mothers, employers and educators while the missionary girls they depicted as infantilized servants, trainees, students or children in need of supervision. This hierarchy, however, was contested, which is why the nuns' complaints about the behavior of missionary girls never ceased. Open resistance (e.g. elopement) was more frequent in New Guinea than in Togo, where residence at the convent, in contrast, attracted some young women who consciously chose to stay with the nuns. The comparably lesser demand for boarding education in New Guinea can partly be explained by the diverging living conditions prevailing at the convents. In Togo, the overall supply situation with imported goods (food, textiles, technology) was good and, once the actual women's convents were completed, the nuns and girls resided in imposing western-style buildings which they managed themselves and organized as secluded female environments independent from men. Apart from providing housework, indigenous women in Togo also collaborated in evangelization and engaged in schooling and nursing. In New Guinea, in turn, convent life was exhaustive and much of the communities' daily efforts related to supporting themselves. The economic ideal promoted by the mission was self-sufficiency and the nuns depended on priests in many respects of day-to-day life, for it was they who managed the corpus of resources. Often residing in poor buildings for years, the nuns and boarders engaged in hardest works such as gardening, cattle breeding and domestic work under difficult conditions. In New Guinea, labor was given precedence over elementary education and one may reasonably ask if boarding education, apart from the oppressive environment created through the disciplinary regime at the convents, offered the girls activities other than the ones that New Guinea women traditionally engaged in (e.g. farming).

The diverging response to Catholic schooling in both settings, moreover, related to the general attitudes toward the missionary Church. On the Togolese coast, Christianity was associated with social mobility and the growing Christian community offered new ways of socialization. Official reports of 1922 recorded 23,523 living Catholics for Togo<sup>224</sup>. At the same moment,

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224 Cf. APF N.S. 773, 507.

Father Andreas Puff spoke of 7,500 Catholics that resided in the prefecture Kaiser-Wilhelmsland. In contrast to Togo, where Christianity disproportionately affected the southern part of the colony, the converts in New Guinea rather settled in Catholic enclaves created around the individual missionary stations, which constituted largely self-sufficient entities that, only loosely connected, were dispersed on the northern coast of the mainland<sup>225</sup>. In addition, a historical evaluation of missionary education in New Guinea would be made impossible without considering the complex tensions that sometimes strained the mission's relations with the indigenous population. Rather, the people's attitudes toward Catholic girls' education shifted alongside the other social, economic and political factors explored in the previous chapters. An important question emerging from the context of conversion of a first generation of Catholics relates to the roles of indigenous converts in the consolidation of the missionary Church. The next chapter takes on the theme of re-making women, exploring constructions of race and gender in religious community building. The tension between a politics of exclusion and Catholic universalism became particularly obvious once the first missionary girls started to apply for admission to the congregation.

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225 Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 847, 714.



## 6. Sexuality and the religious Politics of Diversity

Although the establishment of a novitiate in Ghana had been suggested by the local head of the province already on the occasion of the general chapter held in Rome in 1960<sup>1</sup>, it was not before 1988 that the Servants of the Holy Spirit's first investment ceremony on the African continent took place. In China, by contrast, the opening of a candidature had been sanctioned by Mother Superior Theresia Messner in the course of the »visitation« in 1913<sup>2</sup>. And despite the constant lack of missionary personnel in the region it was only in 1984 that the first two New Guinean novices were invested with the Servants of the Holy Spirit's religious habit<sup>3</sup>. Thus, notwithstanding the early admission of European, Asian (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Javanese) and American (»white« North-American, Argentinean, Brazilian and Chilean) women and the raising awareness of national and cultural diversity within the congregation at least since the general chapter of 1948<sup>4</sup>, African and New Guinean women were granted admission only after a significant delay<sup>5</sup>.

Scholars have suggested that the new role defined for the Catholic Church in Vatican II be taken as the starting point of a novel religious discourse

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- 1 Superior Provincial Defensora van Gogh, head of the congregation's Ghanaian branch, did so in the course of her talk she gave at the chapter. Emphasizing the legal difficulties faced by western nuns to enter the country in combination with the constant lack of missionary workforce, she demanded the training of native sisters. She added that the establishment of a novitiate was sanctioned and appreciated by Joseph Oliver Bowers (1910–2012), Bishop of Accra. Bowers hailed from the Caribbean island of Dominica and was black-skinned. After moving to the United States, he studied theology and entered the Society of Divine Word. Bowers was ordained priest in 1939. In the 1940s he became a missionary in Gold Coast, where he was appointed Bishop of Accra in 1953. Cf. AG SSpS General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, Sr. Defensora van Gogh, Ghana: Region zu Ehren des unbefleckten Herzens Mariae, p 1.
  - 2 Cf. VOLPERT, Ein Rebenhang, p. 183.
  - 3 Cf. COLES/MIHALIC, Sent by the Spirit. p. 40.
  - 4 The transcripts of the talks given on the occasion of the general chapter of 1948 show that nationalism was perceived as a threat to congregational unity. E.g. cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, M. Margarethis Bischopink, Über den Geist der Genossenschaft, pp. 6f and 19f.
  - 5 Since in South America the Servants of the Holy Spirit's mission activity focused on the creation of a Catholic infrastructure (i.e. girls' education and medical service) for European settlers in general and German immigrants in particular, the first novices came from a Catholic and often German background. These women were granted admission almost immediately after the nuns' arrival. In North America, on the other hand, admission was granted to women of European descent only, and African Americans, who were the explicit target of local mission activity, were admitted only after 1960. By contrast, the novitiates established in China (the first entries dated from 1920), Japan (1926) and Java (1936), all of which were considered »genuinely heathen countries« were explicitly opened for the admission of indigenous candidates. Some enjoyed great success. In Japan, for instance, in 1936, and thus only ten years after the

on the plurality of cultures in western women's congregations. According to Gertrud Hüwelmeier, the late 1960s witnessed a shift to the acknowledgment of divergent cultural experiences and ethnic diversity, thus challenging earlier conceptions of religious sisterhood that had emphasized cultural homogeneity and spiritual unity<sup>6</sup>. Yet, while such an approach is crucial to the understanding of the transformation of social relations and hierarchies within women's congregations, it neither serves as an explanation of the considerable geographical deviance in the establishment of novitiates nor does it question the gendered dimension of religious policies of integration<sup>7</sup>. What is more, focusing on the shifting power structures within religious communities one runs the risk of missing the very premises of integration and segregation in the context of Church expansion. In order to fully understand how constructions of race and gender intersected in religious community building, one also has to focus on those who were not invited to participate and to examine the possibility for »non-white« Catholic women to take vows. Or, to put it in other words, before turning to the question of democratization within women's congregations, some consideration must be given as to where and when the establishment of indigenous nuns, as both women of color and women religious, was imaginable.

It was in 1905 that the nuns in Togo first mentioned that individual missionary girls had expressed interest in religious life<sup>8</sup>. One of them was Magdalena Afiavi Kponton Quam-Dessou (1886–1974)<sup>9</sup>, an exemplary missionary girl. Educated at the women's convent in Aného, she obviously was closely attached, both emotionally and religiously, to the nuns in general

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novitiate was opened, the indigenous nuns already outnumbered their German counterparts. Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, pp. 117f., 145f., 157f. and 179f.

- 6 Cf. HÜWELMEIER, *Negotiating Diversity*, p. 106. Regarding the importance of Vatican II for the renewal of Church policies in South Africa cf. HIGGS/EVANS, *Embracing Activism*, pp. 504f.
- 7 According to Patricia Grimshaw and Peter Sherlock, indigenous women leaders followed the emergence of an indigenous clergy with about twenty years delay (cf. GRIMSHAW/SHERLOCK, *Women and cultural exchange*, p. 190). The delayed integration of »non-white« women (as compared with that of men) can also be observed in the Servants of the Holy Spirit's case. While the Society of the Divine Word established its first seminary for African-American priests in 1920, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's novitiate in the United States was targeted exclusively to women of European decent (cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 118). Similarly, in Togo no indigenous nuns were admitted, but the Society of the Divine Word had already started to train a candidate in Latin who was to become the first indigenous priest. Anastasius O. Dogly was ordained in Cape Coast in 1922. Cf. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, p. 342.
- 8 Sister Rosalia Falkner in particular reported of one girl who absolutely wanted to go to Steyl and almost got »desperate« whenever nuns departed for the Motherhouse without taking her with them. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Rosalia Falkner, 24.9.1905.
- 9 Born under the name of Afiavi, she was baptized in 1900 at the age of fourteen and received the baptismal name Magdalena. Cf. *Biographie de Magdalena Afiavi Gbiki Benissan (née Kponton Quam-Dessou)*, in: AG SSpS 034 Tg 3.02.



and those located in her »home convent« in Aného in particular. Magdalena, whose mother had also converted to Catholicism, decided to stay with the nuns even beyond her graduation. The nuns in Aného talked about her frequently, proudly referring to her as »our Magdalena« and describing her as a »good« and »well-behaving« girl who was an important support in terms of both community life and evangelizing works<sup>10</sup>. Magdalena visited out-post schools, assisted in teaching and cared for the sick. The record suggests that she was particularly devoted to Sister Immaculata Göcke, the head of the Aného convent, who in turn spoke of Magdalena in glowing terms only. Letters point out a long-term relationship established between both women that survived the Servants of the Holy Spirit's departure from Togo in January 1918<sup>11</sup>. It was Sister Immaculata who in 1923 published an article about Magdalena in the congregation's periodical. In this article entitled »A Christian housewife in the heathen country«, she provided a detailed narration of Magdalena's life including her childhood, her training period at the convent, her marriage and her giving birth to nine children. Sister Immaculata praised Magdalena's exemplary status as a truly Christian woman (and thus wife and mother) in Africa, stating that her positive example »shone as a bright light in the darkness of the heathen country, where particularly marriage and family conditions are lamentably underdeveloped«<sup>12</sup>. Magdalena's initial life plan, however, had rejected marriage and motherhood. Quite the contrary, she had aimed at dedicating her life to God and becoming a nun herself.

Sister Immaculata opened her text with a circumstantial description of Magdalena's exceptional behavior during her days as a missionary girl which, in the author's eyes, resulted from both her exemplary character and the education she had received from the nuns. Accordingly, Magdalena behaved well, was reliable, assisted at school and in the management of the younger missionary girls. Besides, she backed the nurses and was, moreover, skillful and diligent in sewing and needlework. Eventually, according to Sister Immaculata, her »efficiency and virtuous character« drew the attention of an indigenous teacher employed by the mission who asked for the local missionaries' support in proposing to her. And while the nuns and priests approved of his intention, Magdalena nonetheless declined teacher Georg Gbikpi's proposal. Sister Immaculata explained Magdalena's attitude as follows:

10 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Immaculata Göcke, 10.12.1905.

11 One letter by Magdalena to Sister Immaculata Göcke dated from 1929 (which was eleven years after the last nuns had left Togo and the year of Sister Immaculata's death) is filed in the archive. The letter shows that both women maintained at least irregular contact. Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg Varia (1,2,3,5), 3.02, Magdalena Gbikpi, 30.12.1929.

12 »Das Beispiel ihres von wahrhaft christlichem Geiste durchdrungenen Wirkens und Wandels strahlte immer [...] als helles Licht in das Dunkel des heidnischen Landes, wo gerade die Ehe- und Familienverhältnisse so beklagenswert darniederliegen«. Cf. GÖCKE, Eine christliche Hausfrau, p. 38.

Day after day witnessing the example of the nuns consecrated to God and having a receptive heart for the noble ideal of religious life, the pious virgin felt attracted to the virginal state. The lily of virginity is a rare flower in the heathen country; and yet Magdalena's long-conceived decision seemed to be true and deep. It was her high goal to become a nun, a bride of Christ<sup>13</sup>.

However, with entry into the congregation being impossible in Africa and the nuns reacting with reserve to her appeals for mediation Magdalena petitioned to Europe. She presented her request to founder Arnold Janssen in person, who still headed the congregation and was in charge of all major decisions. Supposedly, Janssen responded to Magdalena by sending her a book on virginity, which, for unexplained reasons, she never received. Eventually, after Magdalena had declined another proposal by teacher Georg Gbikpi, the head of the missionary station in Aného concerned himself with the matter. His advice (as recorded by Sister Immaculata) is indeed noteworthy. He stated: »Magdalena, if you enter a Christian marriage, I promise you heaven in the name of God; but if you want to remain unmarried, under the perils of heathendom, I can't promise you heaven«<sup>14</sup>. And Sister Immaculata, explaining the impact of the priest's advice on Magdalena – she eventually gave in and agreed to the marriage proposal –, added: »Eventually, these decisively spoken words were the crucial factor in her decision and her filial obedience to God's representative prevailed«<sup>15</sup>.

Sister Immaculata's narrative strikingly demonstrated the rigid limits set out for the project for re-making early twentieth-century Togolese women. Although Magdalena had stayed at the Catholic environment of the convent for the better part of her life and was largely brought up by the nuns who explicitly lauded her exemplary virtue and piety, ecclesiastical authorities prevented her from taking vows. From a theological point of view this decision was problematic in two ways. First, in Catholic tradition the experience of a religious vocation was thought to derive from the divine will and involved that nobody, whether relatives or clerics, was entitled to defy a woman's sacrosanct decision to live a life of chastity<sup>16</sup>. Second, virginity and

13 »Die fromme Jungfrau, die täglich das Beispiel der gottgeweihten Ordensfrauen vor Augen hatte und für die hehre Schönheit des Ordenslebens ein empfängliches Herz besaß, fühlte sich zum jungfräulichen Stande hingezogen. Wohl ist die Lilie der Jungfräulichkeit eine seltene Blüte des heidnischen Landes; doch Magdalenas längst gefaßte Meinung schien echt und tief. Ihr schwebte das hohe Ziel vor, Ordensschwester, Braut Christi zu werden«. Ibid., pp. 39f.

14 »Magdalena, wenn du eine christliche Ehe eingehst, verspreche ich dir im Namen Gottes den Himmel; wenn du aber unverheiratet bleiben willst, kann ich dir unter den Gefahren des Heidentums den Himmel nicht so sicher versprechen.« Ibid., p. 40.

15 »Dieses entschieden gesprochene Wort gab zuletzt den Ausschlag, und der kindliche Gehorsam gegen Gottes Stellvertreter trug den Sieg davon.« Ibid., p. 40.

16 Cf. MEIWES, »Arbeiterinnen des Herrn«, pp. 220f.

marriage were defined as pertaining to each other but did not relate to each other in equal terms. Rather, the former was considered the superior life form for Catholic men and women as it involved a person's strength to resist bodily urges, and consecrated virgins awaited a special heavenly reward<sup>17</sup>. In that sense, the priest's advice to Magdalena as well as the matter-of-course attitude by which Sister Immaculata narrated the incident demand further explanation.

By pointing out the dangers to her virtue deriving from the non-Christian cultural setting the priest somewhat legitimated the imperative for Magdalena to get married. Yet, European nuns had been present in the »heathen land« since almost a decade, living and working unspotted by what was perceived to be a morally threatening environment. This, again, points at the firm sense of difference between »white« European and »black« African women that guided the Catholic policies in this context and raises issues of race, gender and the body. In the eyes of missionaries, while »black« women's bodies were prone to the moral corruption of the non-Christian setting, »white« nuns, incorporating morality, safeguarded purity. The priest's reply to Magdalena's appeal shows that ecclesiastical leaders restricted the roles for African women in the Togolese Church to marriage. Similarly, the local nuns approved the priest's decision and likewise emphasized marriage and motherhood as the only life tasks accessible to indigenous girls.

The missionary attempt to wed graduates to indigenous Catholics as soon as possible was inextricably linked with the endeavor to establish control over the sexuality of converts. In view of social practices like polygamy, divorce or concubinage, the nuns in both colonial Togo and New Guinea saw unmarried Catholic women under the constant threat of moral corruption. Approaching sexuality from an essentially moral perspective and relating local sexual and domestic arrangements to the Catholic idea of sin, they attempted to instill guilt in the converted individuals. Besides, the missionaries emerged as strong critics of official morality in both settings. Even though Janssen in person had instructed the nuns to avoid commenting on social or moral nuisances<sup>18</sup>, their occasional comments show that they took offence at the living conditions of colonists which often involved sexual relationships with indigenous women. In Togo, the Catholic mission campaigned against what the local missionaries called the moral misconduct of colonial administrators in general and concubinage between German colonists and converted

17 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 222; Anke BERNAU, *Virgins. A Cultural History*, London 2007, pp. 40f.; John MELODY, Chastity, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 3, New York 1908, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03637d.htm> (10.09.2011).

18 According to Janssen, the nuns should leave these issues to the priests. Cf. *Empfehlungen und Belehrungen für die in die Mission reisenden Schwestern*, AG SSsP 034 Tg Varia (1,2,3,5) – *Belehrungen f. Miss.*

girls in particular. Arguments over sexual violence, concubinage and official morality constituted central issues in the court battles that had emerged between the Catholic mission and some colonial administrators in Togo between 1903 and 1907<sup>19</sup>. Media reports and their reception in Germany turned these occurrences, which had flared anew when the missionaries charged an administrator of having abused a minor African girl, into the so-called scandal of Atakpamé<sup>20</sup>. Ultimately, it was only after all individuals involved on both sides were forced to leave the colony that the state and Church relations returned to normality<sup>21</sup>. In the eyes of the missionaries, extramarital sexual relationships and the diverging sexual mores in Germany and the colonies constituted the main obstacles to the major endeavor to establish a Christian social and moral order on the mission fields<sup>22</sup>. The nuns in Togo and New Guinea complained about the absence of mechanisms of social control and, as a consequence, they adopted the roles of moral guardians for female converts. They locked missionary girls up at night and supervised them closely in order to preserve their sexual purity until marriage to a Catholic spouse.

The two major issues preoccupying the nuns with regard to indigenous marriage practice were polygamy and divorce. Basing their decisions concerning social and sexual coupling off an invariable moral perspective, Christian missionaries often failed to understand the complexity of African marriage practice and to recognize the moral, social and economic values from which African marriage derived its strength. Instead they used monogamous marriage as the ideal for a healthy society and rejected polygyny invariably along with those practices that were associated with it<sup>23</sup>. The missionaries,

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19 The centrality of the issue of official morality can be seen most clearly in SVD order »historian« Karl Müller's account of the case. Cf. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der Katholischen Kirche*, pp. 169–171.

20 Much has been written on the case, which is mentioned in most histories of German Togo. Cf. Rebekka HABERMAS, *Der Kolonialskandal Atakpame – Eine Mikrogeschichte des Globalen*, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 17 (2009), pp. 295–319; ZURSTRASSEN, »Ein Stück deutscher Erde schaffen«, pp. 203–250; Frank BÖSCH, *Öffentliche Geheimnisse. Skandale, Politik und Medien in Deutschland und Großbritannien 1880–1914*, München 2009, pp. 291–293; Horst GRÜNDER, *Kulturkampf in Übersee. Katholische Mission und deutscher Kolonialstaat in Togo und Samoa*, in: *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 69 (1987), pp. 453–472; KNOLL, *Togo*, pp. 56f; VON TROTHA, *Koloniale Herrschaft*, pp. 164; SEBALD, *Togo*, pp. 476–478 and 537–54; ERBAR, *Ein »Platz und der Sonne«?*, p. 256.

21 In 1907, all colonial administrators under critique as well as the missionaries involved were dismissed from service in Togo. This also involved Prefect Apostolic Hermann Bücking who was transferred to Europe. Significantly, the Roman Propaganda Fide discounted the local priests' suggestions as regards Bücking's successor but, quite the contrary, appointed the government's candidate Nikolaus Schönig Prefect Apostolic.

22 On sexual mores in Togo, cf. ZURSTRASSEN, »Ein Stück deutscher Erde schaffen«, pp. 78–95. For other German colonial contexts, cf. WILDENTHAL, *German Women*, pp. 3f.

23 Based on the example of Cameroon, Fiona Bowie has argued that polygyny survived in spite of 150 years of Christian missionary presence. Cf. BOWIE, *The Elusive Christian Family: Mis-*

moreover, interpreted polygyny in generalist terms as an enslaving experience for women. Scholars have shown that polygyny, which (junior) wives might find oppressive, could also be desired by some African women and men as a social practice that provides companionship, economic support and enhanced social status (i.e. to senior wives)<sup>24</sup>. Historian Tabitha Kanogo has noted that the conflicts over the marriage of converted girls in the missionary context included wider social concerns relating to the control of women by men or older women and to the threat that established structures of authority might be destroyed<sup>25</sup>. The nuns' endeavors to forestall customary marriages of converted women with non-converted men, moreover, related to the issue of Catholic reproduction. The Togo-based missionary, Sister Athanasia Görtz (1877–1945), evidenced this attitude when she stated that »only through Christian marriages we get Christian children«<sup>26</sup>. Since the Catholic household was considered the prime site of Catholic reproduction, indigenous women were awarded key roles. In their capacity as mothers and homemakers, they were to bring up a second generation of Catholics. Magdalena ultimately seemed to have accepted this ideal of religious progress through motherhood, since in Sister Immaculata's account she is quoted as follows:

»Well, when I should get married, then I will bring up twelve apostles for good God, all of whom should work for the holy faith.« (She meant as catechists or teachers; the dignity of a priest appeared out of reach to her)<sup>27</sup>.

The emphasis on Catholic reproduction suggests a slightly diverging explanation for the exclusion of non-western women from choosing celibacy over motherhood. Anthropologist Mary Taylor Huber has pointed at the centrality of the clerical profession in pre-Vatican II times<sup>28</sup>. According to her, the conversion of women mattered to priests in missionary settings because they were the only ones who were able to create the particular familial and domestic environment in which future generations of indigenous priests could be brought up. Yet, while the focus on the (social) reproductive function of converted women certainly constitutes an important angle offering an explanation for the often delayed integration of women compared to the creation of

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missionary Attempts to define Women's Roles. Case Studies from Cameroon, in: BOWIE/KIRKWOOD/ARDENER (eds), *Women and Missions*, pp. 145–164, i.e. 145f.

24 Cf. HASTINGS, *Were Women a Special Case?*, p. 116.

25 Cf. KANOGO, *Mission Impact*, p. 174.

26 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 03 Chronik 1897–1918, Atakpame, Sr. Athanasia Görtz, 22.6.1913.

27 »»Wenn ich doch heiraten soll, dann will ich auch zwölf Apostel für den lieben Gott erziehen, die alle für den heiligen Glauben arbeiten sollen« (Sie meinte als Katechisten oder Lehrer; die Würde eines Priesters erschien ihr als viel zu hoch)«. GÖCKE, *Eine christliche Hausfrau*, p. 40.

28 Cf. HUBER, *The Dangers*, pp. 183f.

an indigenous clergy in many non-European settings<sup>29</sup>, Magdalena's example shows the importance of contemporary constructions of race and sexuality to this issue.

In the previous quotation, Sister Immaculata added in parenthesis an explanation for Magdalena's commitment to Catholic reproduction according to which the racially grounded boundaries that fixed the subordinate status of indigenous people in the missionary Church were finally accepted by the Togolese Catholic woman. Although her sons were the offspring of Catholic parents who had collaborated in the evangelization of Togo for years, their entry into the clergy appeared inaccessible to her. At any rate, Sister Immaculata's narrative shows that constructions of race informed not only Catholic colonial policies but also the expectations of their readers at home and, moreover, provided the ground on which those in charge negotiated the issues of integration and exclusion.

As recent studies on the Christian missionary movement in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries have pointed out, despite the Christian missionaries' various cultural, confessional and social backgrounds, there is one important aspect that many of their representations of non-European people shared: the simultaneous (and seemingly) contradictory emphasis of a universal humanity and a difference between humans seen in markers<sup>30</sup>. During High Imperialism, ideas of racial and cultural differences formed just as much of the missionary discourse as they did the powerful imaginary of all human beings as children of God. Although the Church's claim to transcend all differences between humans had constituted an essential feature of Catholic doctrine<sup>31</sup>, the missionaries in Togo and New Guinea tended to translate ethnic and religious differences into terms of race, referring to »white Christians« and »black heathens« in hierarchical terms. While religious difference could be overcome by conversion, race continued to constitute a social category in the missionary Church, as, for instance, Magdalena's story clearly reveals. The tension between Catholic universalism and the interpretation of difference also concerned early twentieth-century missiologists. Emphasizing the common descent of humankind (symbolized as »one big human family«), they relied on a universalist discourse

29 Anastasius O. Dogly had started his theological studies during the Society of the Divine Word's presence in Togo, at a moment when indigenous girls had no hope of taking vows. Cf. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der Katholischen Kirche*, pp. 342–344.

30 Cf. Hilde NIELSEN/Inger Marie OKKENHAUG/Karina HESTAD SKEIE, Introduction, in: NIELSEN/OKKENHAUG/HESTAD SKEIE (eds), *Protestant Missions*, pp. 1–22, 8–10; Marianne GULLESTAD, *Picturing Pity. Pitfalls and Pleasures in cross-cultural Communication. Images and Word in a North Cameroon Mission*, New York/Oxford 2007, pp. 15–17.

31 This is deeply rooted in the Church's theoretical conception as a »single, worldwide society embracing all races«. George JOYCE, *The Church*, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 3, New York 1908, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03744a.htm> (16.5.2010).

also in order to legitimize mission activity. Simultaneously, however, they used a secular language of racial and cultural difference arguing that different (usually »white«, »yellow« and »black«) »races« had prevailed throughout human history<sup>32</sup>. Christianity appeared in these writings as an evolutionary force as it alone had introduced to humanity what the German priest and leading missiologist Robert Streit called a »true« concept of culture, with its moral underpinnings. In his book »The world mission of the Catholic Church«, which was published in several European languages in the aftermath of the Vatican mission exhibition (1925)<sup>33</sup>, Streit referred to the »white race« as the most important »race«, because »divine providence had assigned to it a particular role in humankind«, namely to function as the »custodian and educator of its brothers«<sup>34</sup>. He not only defended inequality and asymmetric relations but explained European political, economic and cultural hegemony by the historical impact of Christianity and, vice versa, related evangelizing activities to European secular power<sup>35</sup>. The nuns (and priests) in both missions shared this evolutionary discourse of (cultural, racial) difference that constructed a hierarchic stratification of humankind and recognized the position of »white« Christians at the top end.

Viewed pragmatically, this stratification meant that the missionaries projected the creation of a Catholic community of equal believers into a distant future, while in their day-to-day lives they reproduced »blackness« not only as a social category but also as a racial prejudice. In the given context it was notably the lack of success that the nuns experienced in their efforts at establishing Christian mores which led to the gradual imposition of indigenous social practice in racial terms. Writers spoke of the »innateness« of »bad characteristics« (e.g. »laziness«, »immorality«) in the »black heathens«, with »heathen« and »black« functioning as interchangeable attributions and, moreover, serving as the (quite stable) markers of what the missionaries perceived as indigenous inferiority. By now, attentive readers will certainly have noted that the attribution »black« occurs in virtually all quotations in which the nuns referred to the subjects of their mission. Hence, while »blackness« for the missionaries symbolized »heathendom«, the peoples' »black« legacy, meaning the societies' historical (non-)development apart from Christian impact, reconfirmed »white« superiority, dismissing the (officially aspired) creation of equality among all Catholic believers in a globalized

32 Cf. STREIT, *Die Weltmission*, p. 29.

33 Apart from German, the book also appeared in Italian, English French and Spanish.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31.

35 More precisely, Streit deduced the missionary imperative to convert the non-Christian world also from Europe's secular power. Opposing 70% of what he called Christian (meaning European secular) world power to »only« 39,57% world Christians, Streit directly linked political hegemony to religious domination. Cf. STREIT, *Die Weltmission*, pp. 28–31.

Church. This hierarchic interpretation of intersecting cultural and racial difference was not (fully) disrupted by the growth of the indigenous Catholic communities. In the Togo-based nuns' point of view, even the converted people had considerable difficulties to respect Christian life norms due to their »black« legacy. Most writers articulated their perceptions of transgressions of Christian mores on the part of the indigenous population through discourses of racial and sexual difference partly evoking the racist stereotype of »blacks« as libidinal people without virtue in opposition to »whites« as self-controlled individuals with superior moral standards<sup>36</sup>. For example, a nun closed her report about mission activity in Atakpamé as follows: »Everything that makes you suffer here and what annoys you most is related to black vice and polygamy«<sup>37</sup>.

As a consequence of this hierarchic interpretation of entangled cultural, racial and sexual categories, the vision of »black« women in the religious habit of the Servants of the Holy Spirit exceeded the nuns' imagination. They even remained suspicious about the moral qualities of exceptional converts like Magdalena who had been brought up by themselves at the convents. Calling upon her European fellows to pray for the stability of the recently contracted marriage of a missionary girl in Aného, an experienced missionary nun emphasized the importance of the emergence of exemplary Christian families in Togo. Simultaneously, however, she pointed out the potential damage that marital failure entailed for the entire venture of evangelization. And in 1907 (and thus close to the moment when Magdalena got married), referring to the, in her view, theoretically crucial yet practically infeasible project of educating Togolese nuns, she added: »For the time being, this is out of the question; if only we could bring about a greater number of capable women and Catholic families!«<sup>38</sup> Hence, the question emerges what, from the writer's point of view, disqualified indigenous women from taking the religious habit of Catholic nuns and thus, from embodying the intrinsic values?

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36 Cf. Diane BATTIS MORROW, *Persons of Color and Religious at the same Time. The Oblate Sisters of Providence 1828–1860*, Chapel Hill 2002, pp. 1–3; DIETRICH, *Weißer Weiblichkeit*, p. 183. For a wider history of the degradation of black womanhood, cf. Bell HOOKS, *Ain't I a Woman. Black Women and Feminism*, Boston 1984.

37 »[...] was man hier zu leiden hat und was einem den meisten Verdruss macht, dreht sich alles ums schwarze Laster und Vielweiberei.« AG SSsP 034 Tg 03 Chronik 1897–1918, Atakpamé, p. 8.

38 »Daran ist hiermal noch nicht (zu denken); wenn uns erstmal recht zahlreiche tüchtige Frauen und kath. Familien entstünden!« AG SSsP 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900–1907, Sr. Rosalia Falkner, 22.8.1907.



## Embodying Purity

Missionaries perceived Catholic conceptions of virginity and chastity as values largely alien to the indigenous (and colonial) culture and society in both settings. There was a notion of several levels of difference existing between Catholic Europe and the fields of mission (e.g. demographic patterns, ways of regulating gender relations in private and public spheres, or diverging definitions and ways of regulating sexuality), which partly got blurred with other categories. With celibacy and the rejection of social coupling and biological parenthood as a life norm being practically unknown in the family-centered societies in Togo<sup>39</sup> and New Guinea<sup>40</sup>, the missionaries first had to introduce the concept of a celibate way of life through their own example. Founder Janssen continued to remind the priests in the field to closely observe the spatial separation from the nuns in general and to strictly regulate the entry to the missionary women's convents in particular because »only with the greatest strictness in this respect you will be able to make the blacks and the traders understand that the sisters are not your wives«<sup>41</sup>.

In Catholic tradition, the interlinked concepts of virginity, chastity and celibacy formed important cornerstones of female religious institutions. In her substantial work on the history of Catholic nuns, feminist historian Jo Ann McNamara has argued that the status of celibacy in monasticism, originally conceptualized as a mere vehicle to liberate time and energy for spiritual service, historically shifted and consequently impacted the gendered conception of monastic life: Virginity had been gendered female by early Church fathers who simultaneously extended their admiration to its proponents and bemoaned male incontinence and failure to preserve purity<sup>42</sup>. Priests and monks, according to McNamara, had been inclined to emphasize the legal aspect of celibacy (that is, the unmarried state) rather than its spiritual virtues – as it was in the case of nuns, in which chaste celibacy »tended to be promoted as an end in itself«<sup>43</sup>. Accordingly, preserving their virginity was of particular importance for the so-called »brides of Christ«<sup>44</sup>. It is important to note that conceptions of chastity and virginity were constitu-

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39 Cf. THAUREN, *Die Mission*, pp. 10f.

40 For instance, anthropologist Camilla Wedgwood has stated for the island of Manam that all (healthy) women considered marriage as normal and therefore desirable. Wedgwood, who conducted one year of fieldwork in Manam a decade after the first nuns settled on location, stated in her report that she met one adolescent girl who declared that she was not going to ever marry; Wedgwood explained this by the influence of the presence of the nuns and the girl's particular admiration for one of them. Cf. WEDGWOOD, *Women in Manam*, pp. 411f.

41 Cf. Arnold Janssen in: MÜLLER, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche*, p. 94.

42 Cf. McNAMARA, *Sisters in Arms*, p. 4.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 3–6; cf. moreover: BERNAU, *Virgins*, pp. 36f and 57f.

44 Cf. EVANGELISTI, *Nuns*, p. 42f.

tive to the identity of (congregations) of women religious because they also framed their politics of inclusion or exclusion. The Servants of the Holy Spirit congregation explicitly emphasized chastity over the two other vows of poverty and obedience. Already the first constitutions accentuated the vow of chastity as to be held particularly holy by its members<sup>45</sup>. Throughout the twentieth century, leading Servants of the Holy Spirit kept reminding their subordinates of chastity as founder Janssen's »favorite vow«. Congregational concerns with regard to virginity (as the particularly rewarding form of chastity) even grew until 1960, when a talk on (»the dignity of«) virginity was included to the series of presentations given on the general chapter held in Rome<sup>46</sup>.

One way to control female sexual purity was the seclusion of women. Considering the contact with men as a general threat to purity, religious institutions had for a long time relied on the placing of women behind the cloister. Even in the cultural settings of the mission fields, where day-to-day life demanded social interaction with men and communication between nuns and priests on a regular basis, the rationale of the separation of the sexes was propagated and maintained. Yet, neither in Togo nor in New Guinea did the indigenous populations traditionally place comparably rigid restrictions on the movements of their women or provide for the social regulation of the interaction between the sexes in ways that were obvious to the nuns. Unlike, for instance, in China, where Confucian tradition (at least as interpreted by foreign Catholics) appreciated female seclusion and demanded the strict segregation of women from all men who were not their immediate relatives<sup>47</sup>, in Togo and New Guinea indigenous women were not subjected to such restrictions. Quite the contrary, in Togo and New Guinea women moved around rather freely through villages and the countryside and were thus less (if at all) exposed to mechanisms of social control.

China provides a valuable point of comparison in this context, given that there the Servants of the Holy Spirit's narrative of missionary work was inextricably linked to the idea of female advance by opening up a celibate way of life for indigenous women. Congregational »historians« represented the introduction of female celibacy to Chinese society as a liberating impulse which

45 Cf. the discussion on the »spirit« of the three vows in general and chastity in particular, in: AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 4 1948, Durchführung, M. Regis Fastabend, *Stand des Geistes in der Genossenschaft*, pp. 10–13.

46 Twentieth-century concerns with virginity related mostly to what religious authorities understood as the nuns' purity of the mind. Congregational leaders perceived the spread of popular culture as a threat to purity and therefore demanded stricter regulations with regard to the access to movies, novels, journals, etc. and propagated practices of self-mortification (e.g. fasting). Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Protokoll, pp. 63–65.

47 Cf. Sue BRADSHAW, *Religious Women in China. An Understanding of Indigenization*, in: *The Catholic Historical Review* 68 (1982), pp. 28–45, i.e. p. 29.

they set in sharp contrast to their interpretation of Confucian patriarchy that ostracized women from public life and centered their roles exclusively on the family and motherhood (preferably to sons)<sup>48</sup>. Sister Salesiana Soete, pointing out the concessions made by the missionary Church to indigenous gender proprieties and the Chinese demand for the rigid separation of the sexes (e.g. through the establishment of curtains or walls in churches), wrote in her history of the congregation (1953): »But by enabling the girls to remain virgins, which had been unheard of in China until now, they [the missionaries] brought to womankind a touch of Christian freedom«<sup>49</sup>.

Even if we acknowledge the distinctive and long-term ecclesiastical policies with regard to the creation of an indigenous clergy in China since the seventeenth century, the rapid integration of Chinese women into Catholic congregations seems nonetheless striking<sup>50</sup>. According to Roman directives, priests in China were free to admit indigenous Catholic women over twenty-five years of age to take a temporary vow of chastity that had to be renewed every three years. In 1883, the Propaganda Fide instructed the local prefects and vicars apostolic to gather these so-called »virgins« in religious communities, which should be affiliated to or at least be based on European congregations. Catholic virginal life was thus institutionalized for Chinese women and adapted to the norms of the European monastic tradition. Accordingly, while Chinese women were not all discouraged from rejecting biological motherhood and taking the vow of chastity, only those »virgins« who resided in controlled sisterhood were allowed to wear a distinctive religious garb as the external sign of their state<sup>51</sup>. Besides, it was already in 1910, and thus only five years after the first Servants of the Holy Spirit had arrived in the vicariate apostolic of South Shandong, that the local bishop, SVD missionary Augustin Henninghaus (1862–1939), applied to Rome for the establishment of an indigenous women's congregation. The Propaganda Fide immediately gave its approval and in the same year Henninghaus founded the so-called Oblates of the Holy Family in the canonical form of a diocesan institution<sup>52</sup>. Local Servants of the Holy Spirit headed the indigenous congregation and engaged in the spiritual religious and secular training of its members. Mother Superior Theresia Messner, moreover, sanctioned the establishment of a local novitiate already in the course of her »visitation« to the Chinese field of mis-

48 Cf. NEUSS, *Die Steyler Missionsschwester*, p. 124; SOETE, *Geschichte*, pp. 144f.

49 »Einen Zug christlicher Freiheit brachten sie aber in die Frauenwelt dadurch, dass, daß sie es den Mädchen freistellten, Jungfrau zu bleiben, was in China bis dahin unerhört war«. Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 145.

50 Cf. BRADSHAW, *Religious Women*, p. 29.

51 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 32; THAUREN, *Die religiöse Unterweisung*, pp. 68–70.

52 APF N.S. Vol. 496, 69–74.

sion in 1913<sup>53</sup>. Sister Perboyre Neuß's history of the Servants of the Holy Spirit published in 1914 already presented its readers with a photograph of the congregation's first two Chinese candidates<sup>54</sup>. Yet, presumably due to the ruptures produced by the Great War, it was not before 1921 that the first investment ceremony to be seen in China took place<sup>55</sup>.

The Chinese example provides some important insights to better understand the social and cultural conditions for the integration of non-western women to religious institutions. Firstly, it shows that minor obstacles (e.g. non-Catholic or illegitimate birth, the issue of dowries) could be solved when it finally came to deciding upon integration or exclusion. Secondly, it suggests that the missionaries in China somehow assumed a shared understanding of gendered ideals of sexual purity and its moral underpinnings. That is to say, the confrontation of the rapid integration of Chinese women with the long-term exclusion of Togolese and New Guineans from the Holy Spirit Congregation suggests that *in the interpretation of western religious authorities* Chinese ways of regulating gender relations and sexuality corresponded to the Catholic ideal of female chastity (if not to the Catholic appraisal of gendered virginity)<sup>56</sup>. This, in turn, was reflected in the arena of institutional policy. Or, to put it in other words, for male and female western religious authorities the Chinese social and moral order provided appropriate conditions in which the Catholic ideal of feminine chaste celibacy could be realized. Hence, notwithstanding diverging demographic patterns in China and Catholic Europe and the centrality of marriage and motherhood to indigenous constructions of femininity, the rigid separation of the sexes in Chinese society ultimately constituted the framework in which Catholic elites admitted indigenous women to the vow of chastity. However, having in mind the Servants of the Holy Spirit's way of reasoning the policy appears somewhat paradoxical, for it were the very conditions created by what the nuns had interpreted (and criticized) as Chinese patriarchy that constituted the precondition (or social conventions) for the opening of an alternative way of life for indigenous women beyond marriage and motherhood or, to recall the words of Sister Salesiana Soete quoted earlier, to bring »a touch of Christian freedom« to Chinese womanhood<sup>57</sup>.

Ultimately, the example of Catholic policies in China reveals the complexity of the Christian ideal of chastity in the context of gender. Situated at the crossroads of the self and society, chastity was not only constitutive

53 Cf. VOLPERT, Ein Rebenhang, p. 183.

54 Cf. NEUSS, Die Steyler Missionsschwester, p. 136.

55 Cf. SOETE, Geschichte, p. 200.

56 E.g. Sister Perboyre Neuß wrote in 1914 that in China »even the heathens appreciate chastity and virginal life«. NEUSS, Die Steyler Missionsschwester, p. 134.

57 Cf. quotation 49, p. 353.

for professed religious identities but also featured centrally in the conduct of pious women. In its original understanding, the Christian virtue of chastity was not restricted to virginity or celibacy but related to the interdiction of carnal pleasures more generally and thus encompassed the moderation of sexual desires<sup>58</sup>. Marital chastity, for instance, targeted the way of performing sex within marriage and involved the centrality of procreation as well as the rejection of sexual intercourse outside marriage<sup>59</sup>. In the nuns' understanding, chastity was not restricted to the state of the body but also implicated the purity of the mind. While it was first and foremost the mind that should control bodily desires, religious practices (e.g. self-mortification) and the careful regulation of a woman's contact to men and the secular world should ultimately protect her purity individually and collectively. Western missionaries considered the introduction of feminine celibacy easier to those non-Christian settings which also had mechanisms of social control designed to limit the movements of their women for two main reasons. Firstly, there it was easier to control chaste celibacy and secondly, the missionaries interpreted such social practices as a shared cultural concern with regard to female purity. In contrast to China, where (again from the European point of view) the social implications of female conduct in public and private spheres favored the religious politics of chastity, the colonial societies in Togo and New Guinea were perceived as environments particularly hostile to the enactment of such policies. The very presence of western nuns in both places and their ongoing representation as unspotted by what they perceived to be a morally corrupting environment already shows the sense of difference as regards the capacity for self-control and moral disposition of western nuns on the one hand and indigenous women on the other. Indigenous and Christian notions of sexuality and ways of performing sex formed the core of what western nuns perceived to be a prime marker of difference between »white« and »black« femininity in the early twentieth century.

Complaints about the »un-chastity« and »depravity« of the indigenous population were a characteristic feature of the letters from New Guinea over long periods. Compared to their colleagues in Togo, the New Guinea nuns even more emphasized what they called the »moral misery« in society and by which they meant all kinds of transgressions of Christian mores. Complaining about the marriage of Catholic girls to men who refused to convert, Sister Martha Sieverding referred to the »vice of un-chastity« as the major obstacle to the proselytization of New Guinea<sup>60</sup>. Framing indigenous social

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58 Cf. MELODY, Chastity.

59 Susan L'ENGLE, *Depictions of Chastity: Virtue made visible*, in: Nancy VAN DEUSEN (ed.), *Chastity. A Study in Perception, Ideals, Opposition*, Boston 2008, pp. 87–126, i.e. p. 107.

60 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 601 Korrespondenz 1899–1917, Sr. Martha Sieverding, 31.3.1903.

practices (in this case childhood marriage betrothal) in terms of Christian life norms, the nuns charged them as sinful. In New Guinea, the choice of a spouse depended on social status, kinship networks and often involved economic considerations. Practices like polygamy, divorce or remarriage occurred frequently and were socially accepted<sup>61</sup>. Largely blind to the economic and social significance of indigenous marriage patterns, the nuns linked what they perceived to be moral disorder to the opposite construction of western and indigenous femininity embodying piety, modesty and self-control on the one hand and unregulated desire on the other. Especially at moments of disappointment or frustration about the lack of success in controlling the sexual lives of converted girls, the writers of missionary reports gradually resorted to racial explanations stating that »vices« were »rooted into humans deeper« than they had ever expected<sup>62</sup>. Trying to find an explanation for the persistence of the »moral misery« in the local society, Sister Valeria suggested that »the vice of fornication is innate« to indigenous people<sup>63</sup>.

Scholars have pointed out the diverging notions of sexuality in Melanesian and European contexts. Although he acknowledged the variation of behavior toward sexuality in the various regions of Melanesia (which at places included a strict ban on sexual intercourse previous to marriage), historian Hermann Hiery has argued that »restraint in sexual behavior was the exception rather than the rule«<sup>64</sup>. And it was first and foremost the liberal handling and notions of sexuality among missionary pupils on which the nuns constructed this kind of racialized concept of »moral failure« as an inherent characteristic of those who they subsumed under the term »Kanakan« people. The degree of generalization is indeed striking in this context – with all indigenous people being denounced as morally deprived and both ethnic background and social status, which in fact constituted important elements of distinction with regard to indigenous sexual codes, being ignored<sup>65</sup>. As a consequence of this discursive deprivation of any sexual codes in New Guinea, the only distinction made as regards sexual mores was between the impact of mission Christianity at Catholic centers and outpost places, where one would be able to observe the so-called »life of depravity«<sup>66</sup>. Obviously, the nuns' conception of moral agency that built on the tabooing of the theme was challenged already by unrestrained notions of sexuality. Thus, to her characterization of the New Guineans as »alienated from God and virtue human beings« and her first impressions on location as a »nameless misery«, a nun added:

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61 Cf. WEDGWOOD, Report on Research, p. 388.

62 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Perpetua Hanfeld, 18.1.1909.

63 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, November 1901.

64 Cf. HIERY, Germans, p. 299.

65 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 305f; MEAD, Growing up in New Guinea, pp. 119–124.

66 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Imelda Müller, 12.5.1911.

»Often, five-year old children ingenuously talk about things we have never heard of before and can only be horrified about«<sup>67</sup>. Similarly, seeking to highlight how »deep the Kanakas stand in relation to morality«, a teaching sister circumscribed the activities her pupils had engaged in after having escaped her supervision:

It won't be necessary, dear reverend mother, to describe everything in minute detail, suffice it to mention that one of our reverend fathers told me that by what they are doing they are committing 5 serious mortal sins at the same time<sup>68</sup>.

And the same writer, somewhat defending the lack of success in changing the moral regime by referring to the corrupt »nature« of her pupils, added:

What a misery! How well will our efforts and endeavors be spent if we succeed in saving these souls from eternal destruction. I do all I can, but you can't avert everything. To the heathens this moral decline has already become a second nature<sup>69</sup>.

The antagonism between diverging notions of sexuality extended to ways of doing sex within marriage. Contraception, abortion and infanticide constituted major issues in the New Guinean mission field. One significant feature of the Catholic campaigns was the subsumption of all indigenous practices of demographic control under the term of »child murder«, which involved emphasizing the moral dimension of actions (i.e. the people's intentions) over the activities as such. Ethnographical texts published by priests give account of the missionary efforts to explore the natural (e.g. smoking or eating herbs, carrying heavy loads or staying in the sea over a lengthy period) and supernatural practices (e.g. spells) by which women attempted to avoid or abort pregnancy and to cause (temporary) sterility<sup>70</sup>. Altogether, this created an omnipresent suspicion as to the people's and especially the women's morality. That young marriages often remained childless for years or that, despite the early

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67 Ibid.

68 »Es ist nicht nötig Ihnen, ehrw. Mutter alles haarklein zu erzählen denn dieses eine glaube ich genügt; einer unserer hochw. H. Patres sagte mir das, was sie taten und zwar auf einmal seien 5 schwere Todsünden.« AG SSs PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, 1.8.1902.

69 »Welch ein Elend! Wie gut ist unsere Mühe und Anstrengung angewandt wenn wir diese Seelen vor dem ewigen Verderben retten. Ich tue was ich kann, aber alles kann man nicht verhüten. Dieses Sittenverderbnis ist den Heiden schon gleichsam in Fleisch und Blut übergegangen.« Ibid.

70 Cf. ERDWEG, *Die Bewohner*, pp. 282f. Cf., moreover, the long and detailed list Karl Böhm provided according to the information that Sister Cunera had managed to obtain from the women in Manam. Cf. BÖHM, *The Life*, pp. 78–81.

age of marriage, families counted »1, 2, 3, at most 4 children only«, made the nuns convinced that there was something essentially wrong with indigenous wives who (at least according to the missionary logics) actively attempted to avoid motherhood<sup>71</sup>. And although the nuns' explanations for the low number of children varied and at times also questioned the roles of fathers, economic considerations<sup>72</sup> or illegitimacy, what they all had in common was the representation of New Guinean women as »cruel«<sup>73</sup>, »merciless«<sup>74</sup> and certainly »unnatural mothers«<sup>75</sup>. To sum up, in the eyes of western nuns indigenous sexuality was essentially immoral in that social coupling and sexual intercourse were not aimed at procreation.

To be sure, the missionaries' moral campaigns were troubled also by the contradictions inherent to European expansion and social change introduced through colonialism in the region. On the one hand male western settlers often rejected the Christian sexual rigorism and disregarded the European moral system, and on the other hand labor migration, economic success and the introduction of a plantation economy favored the spread of polygamy, homosexuality (which in ritualized form was not unknown in Melanesia) and prostitution. Hiery has suggested that in colonial New Guinea particularly around the large plantations an increasingly sexually permissive society arose which he has described as »a blend of suppressed Melanesian and European-German taboos and desires«<sup>76</sup>. Hardly surprisingly, the nuns took great efforts to separate themselves from secular Europeans by emphasizing chaste celibacy as the basis of monastic life. Adding to this situation was that the Catholic missionary way of life was (and continued to be) suspicious to indigenous observers, as the following quote, taken from a letter by Sister Hermengilde Simbürger dated from 1921 (and thus sixteen years after the pioneer nuns took up work on location) shows:

What sickens me sometimes is that many of the Kanaka consider us as – to say it straight out – very bad, although the missionaries, unlike the other Germans, have given them neither an evidence nor an example of any such thing. Well, these poor low-standing people can't grasp virginal life, and that's why they pass such wretched judg-

71 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Valeria Diezen, November 1901.

72 For instance, one nun explained infanticide by the men's reluctance to work and the women's high workloads that resulted from their responsibility to supply their families with food. Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Ursula Sensen, September 1900.

73 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Vincentiana Katzfey, 16.6.1911.

74 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Christophora Einzmann, 22.8.1908.

75 AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1899–1910, Sr. Fridolina Vökt, 24.11.1901.

76 HIERY, *Germans*, pp. 303 and 308.



ment on us. I have repeatedly responded to such comments by telling the children and elders right in the face: »Listen, had I wanted to marry, I would have stayed at home instead of coming to your hot country. I have come here to teach you so you can become Catholic and won't go to hell but to heaven<sup>77</sup>.

The confrontation of western-Christian morality and indigenous-heathen sexuality could not be bridged entirely through conversion. Even though the topic had been raised by the local nuns already earlier, the issue of bringing indigenous women into the novitiate started to be seriously discussed only in the 1950s.

In 1930, Sister Ehrentrudis Diezen (1884–1944)<sup>78</sup>, an experienced New Guinea missionary and head of the so-called Association of Mary, a union of unmarried Catholic girls who regularly met for joint prayer and needlework, reported of some members of the association who had expressed interest in religious life and the celibate state. Sister Ehrentrudis' approach to this question is marked by the ambiguity between missionary interpretations of difference and a conception of joint womanhood that derived from the integrating message of Catholic universalism. In her eyes, Catholic girls, whom she characterized as absolutely capable of joining religious institutions, should be provided a more integral training. Sister Ehrentrudis criticized Catholic policies pursued in the vicariate claiming that the local missionaries and superiors tended to underestimate the New Guinean Catholic youth. She wrote:

Already people begin to wonder why we don't have black sisters here as yet; no, this will not happen anytime soon as we are still not doing enough for the children. We could do it but there is no interest from above. [...] I very much enjoy reading about the other missions as it strengthens my resolve in my work because they do much more for

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77 »Was mich manchmal auch anekelt, ist, daß viele von den Kanaken uns für sehr schlecht – grad herausgesagt – halten, obgleich sie ja bei den Missionaren noch keinen Beweis und kein Beispiel in dieser Hinsicht haben im Gegensatz zu den anderen Deutschen. Diese armen, tiefstehenden Menschen können eben das jungfräuliche Leben nicht begreifen, und aus diesem Grunde fällen sie so ein erbärmliches Urteil über uns. Auf solche Äußerungen hin hab' ich Kindern wie Alten schon wiederholt ins Gesicht gesagt: »Hört, wenn ich hätte heiraten wollen, wäre ich zu Hause geblieben und nicht in euer heißes Land herübergekommen. Ich bin gekommen um euch Unterricht zu geben, damit ihr katholisch werden könnt und nicht in die Hölle, sondern in den Himmel hinaufkommt.« AG SSpS PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Sr. Hermengilde Simbürger, 21.4.1921.

78 Sister Ehrentrudis Diezen (1884–1944) was the biological sister of Sister Valeria, the first superior provincial in New Guinea. Trained as a teaching nun, she arrived in New Guinea in 1913 and in the course of her missionary career occupied influential positions. She functioned as head of the province from 1935 to 1938.

the children than we do. The people who have been in the missions for a long time always think that everything has to proceed following the old patterns. The old patterns are still good, but you have to look ahead as well<sup>79</sup>.

Notwithstanding the official neglect of the subject, some influential New Guinea-based nuns propagated an alternative concept of mission activity that envisioned the integration of indigenous women. Three years later this theme was taken up by Sister Philomena Herzog, another experienced Servant of the Holy Spirit and influential member of the local congregational elites. She informed the mother superior about four missionary girls who had »confided that they wanted to become sisters«<sup>80</sup>. Giving her own assessment of the subject in general and the candidates in particular, Sister Philomena added:

As it seems they are good, willing children, of whom much can be expected indeed. We invoke the grace for these children to remain true to their decision and not let fear of man deter them. Already they are exposed to many mockeries and scolding on the part of some girls and they are going to suffer even more from their relatives. We are all very pleased that these children already have had the courage to express that wish; we will sacrifice and pray that the grace will continue to work on them and they will pursue it faithfully<sup>81</sup>.

This passage raises three important themes. First, individual indigenous women aspired to join the congregation. Second, the standpoint of leading nuns in this regard remained cautiously restrained – they remained caught in their peculiar paternalistic attitudes and their self-representation as the professed spiritual superiors toward indigenous women. Third, it brings up the

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79 »Man spricht hier schon, dass man noch keine schwarzen Schwestern hat, nein so bekommen wir noch keine, dafür tun wir noch viel zu wenig für die Kinder. Wir könnten es tun aber von oben herunter hat man nicht das Interesse dafür. [...] Ich lese sehr gern von den Berichten aus den anderen Missionen. Das bestärkt mich immer in meinen Arbeiten denn die tun viel mehr für die Kinder wie wir. Die Leute, die schon lange in den Missionen sind meinen, es muß immer nach den alten Schablonen weiter gehen. Die alten Schablonen sind noch immer gut, aber man muß auch voran arbeiten.« AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Schw. Ehrentrudis Diezen, 20.12.1930.

80 Cf. AG SSsP PNG 6201 Korrespondenz 1911–1975, Briefe von Schw. Philomen Herzog, 27.3.1933.

81 »Es sind wie es scheint gute willige Kinder von denen man schon etwas erwarten kann. Wir beten um reiche Gnade für diese Kinder dass sie ihrem Entschlusse treu bleiben und sich nicht durch Menschenfurcht davon abhalten lassen. Schon jetzt sind sie vielen Spötteleien und Schimpfereien vonseiten mancher Mädchen ausgesetzt und was werden sie erst von ihren Angehörigen zu leiden haben. Wir freuen uns alle dass diese Kinder schon mal den Mut hatten diesen Wunsch zu äußern, wir wollen opfern und beten, dass die Gnade in ihnen weiter wirke und sie derselben treu folgen.« Ibid.

issue of the social reception of celibacy in a family-centered social and cultural setting<sup>82</sup>.

However, the reports from the early 1930s suggest that these four girls were not considered as serious candidates. At that time, the idea of providing concerted training and the admission of indigenous women did not affect mission strategies nor did it enter the inner-congregational discussions. Quite the contrary, in her talk given on the general chapter in 1934, the New Guinean superior provincial emphasized those »traditional« gender-biased educational policies outlined earlier when she stated »The main goal is to free the older girls from the dangers of village life and the often pernicious influence of the elders, and to educate them to become good housewives«<sup>83</sup>. The four indigenous applicants disappeared from the record again as did the issue of establishing a novitiate<sup>84</sup>. Despite the urgent lack of missionary personnel in post-war New Guinea and an increasing awareness of cultural plurality within the congregation, not even the general chapter held in 1948 tackled the question. Rather, congregational elites reacted to the (post-)war developments by enacting the foundation of a novitiate in Australia, which was explicitly aimed at training workers for the New Guinean field. To put it in other words, while they kept silent on the question of indigenous integration, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's leaders called on western »white« women in Australia to engage in the salvation of New Guinea<sup>85</sup>. In the eyes of western nuns, a long-term and cross-generational impact of western Christianity was needed in order to successfully re-make New Guinean womanhood.

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82 Scholars have pointed out the complex tensions that accompanied the introduction of female chaste celibacy to societies which traditionally linked women's role exclusively to marriage and motherhood. The nun and anthropologist Joan Burke has argued that with the training of indigenous nuns in matrilineal cultural settings in Africa shifts occurred in the popular perception of religious life, which increasingly centered on the nuns' social roles as »mamas for all the people«. Such an interpretation of celibacy in terms of maternity, in turn, means a paradoxical, from the western point of view, reinterpretation of the concept. Cf. Joan BURKE, *These Catholic Sisters are all Mamas! Celibacy and the Metaphor of Maternity*, in: BOWIE/KIRKWOOD/ARDENER (eds), *Women and Missions*, pp. 251–266, i.e. pp. 255–264.

83 »Der Hauptzweck ist, die großen Mädchen vor den Gefahren des Dorflebens und dem so oft verderblichen Einfluß der Alten zu befreien, und um sie zu guten Hausfrauen zu erziehen.« AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 3 1934, Durchführung, Sr. Ehrentrudis Diezen, Territorium Neuguinea, p. 1.

84 In 1952 the congregation published an article about two New Guinean »virgins« who had taken private vows of chastity about twenty years ago. Unfortunately, the record available does not allow identifying them as belonging to the candidates mentioned or tracing their (religious) life trajectories. Cf. *Der Geist Gottes weht wo er will*, in: *Missionsgrüße der Steyler Missionsschwesterinnen Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes* 26 (1952), pp. 105–110.

85 Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 4 1948, Durchführung, Sr. Epiphania Dickerhoff, *Äußere Entwicklung der Genossenschaft 1934–1948*, pp. 3f.

The congregational policies toward this question shifted only due to external impacts. Beginning in the early 1950s, the Roman ecclesiastical authorities had called on the prefects and vicars apostolic to promote the reinforced collaboration of the indigenous populations. As a consequence, both bishops who headed the (two by then) vicariates apostolic on the mainland established separated congregations for indigenous nuns in the canonical form of diocesan institutions in 1954 and 1955. The first native girls who took religious vows were the daughters of former missionary girls and thus belonged to the second (blood-related) generation of converted women who had been educated (and brought up) by the nuns<sup>86</sup>. The Servants of the Holy Spirit's religious habit, however, was still inaccessible for women of a certain ethnic background. Rather, religious policies in post-war New Guinea promoted two separated institutions for a »colored« and a »white« sisterhood, which, as will be seen, related to each other in unequal terms.

However, as shows the exceptional life-trajectory of Julia Althoff (1898–1984), an Ewe woman who was to become both the first Africa-born Servant of the Holy Spirit and the pioneer »nun of color« appointed for overseas missionary work, individuals transgressed these racially grounded boundaries already during the 1920s. Brought up by the Servants of the Holy Spirit in Lomé, twenty-three year old Julia Althoff appeared in the Steylean Motherhouse in 1920 and applied for admission as a candidate, which she achieved in December of the same year. Three years later she became a novice and in 1925 Julia Althoff took her first vows and became Sister Virginie (note the choice of name!).

### Sister Virginie and the »Veil of Race«<sup>87</sup>

Julia Althoff was born in 1898 in the town of Keta, British Gold Coast, to an indigenous mother and the German trader Hermann Althoff. At the age of four, she moved to the women's convent in Lomé, twenty-eight kilometers away from her hometown. Although the circumstances of Julia's arrival at the convent are not recorded, there is much to suggest that this happened due to her father's intervention: Thus, she was brought up by German nuns in the capital of the German colony notwithstanding the fact that a French

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86 Cf. AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, Sr. Nazaria Albers, Neuguinea: Region zu Ehren der heiligen Engel, p. 6.

87 Here the notion of the »veil of race« refers to the similarly named concept suggested by scholar of religion Tracy Fessenden. Cf. Tracy FESSENDEN, *The Sisters of the Holy Family and the Veil of Race*, in: *Religion and American Culture* 10/2 (2000), pp. 187–224. For other approaches to the concept of the veil and practices of veiling cf. HEATH (ed.), *The Veil*.

women's congregation was operated in her mother's hometown. Also, the nuns enrolled Julia under the surname of her father and, once placed at the convent, she stayed there without interruption until the Servants of the Holy Spirit's expulsion from Togo in January 1918. According to the data recorded in her personnel file, from 1918 to 1920 Julia studied at a British elementary school in Keta that was also managed by the French nuns. Besides, her later journey to the Servants of the Holy Spirit's European headquarters required funding as well as strategic considerations and she might have been supported by her father in preparing the move. By the time of her move in 1920, Julia was surely fluent in German and had taken the firm decision to take the vows herself, a goal she had already communicated to the Servants of the Holy Spirit in Lomé several years earlier.

In 1914, some seven years after Magdalena Gbikpi had eventually got married in Aného, Superior Provincial Georgia van Oopen reported of some recent betrothals between Catholics in Lomé. And referring to Julia, who had declined a proposal of marriage, she added:

We also found a husband for our Julia, who now is probably 16 years old, out of which she spent 10 years in the sister's house. However, although she had been thoroughly examined by one of the reverend fathers who was much in favor of the marriage, she decisively insisted on remaining a virgin and to become a sister if she were allowed to. Julia's confessor approved her intention and even the reverend father prefect, who was informed about it, had nothing against it<sup>88</sup>.

Subsequent to this (cautious yet) positive assessment by three priests (whose judgment obviously was decisive as regards the girl's possibilities to reject marriage), Sister Georgia van Oopen instructed Julia to carry on praying for the fulfillment of her goal. In addition, she advised her of the prospect to personally propose her request to the congregation's mother superior at the expected »visitation« in Togo (which, due the outbreak of the Great War, never took place). In contrast to their negative reaction in the earlier case of Magdalena, now the local religious authorities carefully sanctioned a Catholic young woman's request to reject marriage. Although the sources available allow only assumptions as to the diverging attitudes in either case, Julia's

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88 »Für unsere Julia, sie wird jetzt 16 Jahre alt sein, davon hat sie 10 Jahre im Schwesternhaus verlebt, hatte man auch einen Bräutigam gefunden. Sie aber, obwohl sie von einem der hochw. H. Patres, welcher sehr für die Heirat war, hart geprüft wurde, sagte entschieden, dass sie Jungfrau bleiben wolle und falls es ihr ermöglicht würde, auch Schwester werden wolle. Julias Beichtvater hat ihr Vorhaben gebilligt, selbst der hochw. H. P. Präfekt, dem es mitgeteilt wurde, war nicht dagegen. Habe nun der Julia gesagt, sie solle einstweilen fleißig fortfahren zu beten, so hoffen wir, unsere gute würdige Mutter nach Togo kommen wurde, dann könne sie persönlich ihren Wunsch vortragen.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896–1917, Sr. Georgia van Oopen, 10.3.1914.

exceptional treatment nonetheless demands further explanation. On the one hand, the cleric's considerations might have been influenced by her young age as well as her upbringing exclusively by the nuns. On the other hand, Julia's German (and probably also Catholic<sup>89</sup>) father must be taken into consideration as well, particularly in view of the fact that she was to become the only »African« Servant of the Holy Spirit until 1988, when Sister Cecilia Boateng took her first vows in Ghana<sup>90</sup>.

Religious scholar Tracy Fessenden has introduced the operative metaphor of the »veil of race«, calling to mind the reality of race-based segregation and integration in Church policies in late-nineteenth-century United States. Discussing the struggle of a colored sisterhood (the Sisters of the Holy Family) for the veil, she has pointed out the enforced ecclesiastical (alongside the social and legal) invisibility imposed on these women who attempted to establish and articulate »their distinctive identity at once, women of color and women religious«<sup>91</sup>. Fessenden's concept of reading the veil, moreover, refers to the tension between social homogenization by race and the potential of veiling to »hide« one's »true« (or »non-white«) racial identity<sup>92</sup>. It thus provides a useful tool for looking at Julia's/Sister Virginie's representation by her (later) colleagues with the goal to understand if and when her (inter-) ethnic origin came into play and to explore both the social significance and the (shifting) frontiers of race in religious community building. Interestingly, apart from her surname which implied her decent from a German man, the nationality/ethnicity of Julia's father was not explicitly mentioned during her stay in Lomé as a missionary girl. This had to do with the overall German colonial practice in Togo according to which all children of interethnic relationships were considered as »blacks« denying them the chance to claim any rights of their fathers. Between October 1913 and the German capitulation in July 1914, children born of the union of German men and African women were even denied to use their fathers' surnames by a legal ordinance issued by Governor Adolf Friedrich (1873–1969) who endeavored to make them invisible by having them absorbed into the indigenous population<sup>93</sup>. Julia's birth to a Ghanaian mother and a German father was first recorded in her congregational admission sheet. During her years as a missionary girl, it seems to have been Julia's long-term stay with the nuns rather than her ethnic background that marked her somewhat exceptional status.

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89 Particularly the fact that Julia was entrusted to the Catholic nuns in Lomé for education suggests that her father was Catholic as well, since Protestant girls' boarding education was also available on location.

90 Cf. [http://www.worldssps.org/pages/where\\_africa/ghana/ghana.htm](http://www.worldssps.org/pages/where_africa/ghana/ghana.htm) (27.4.2010).

91 FESSENDEN, *The Sisters*, i.e. 202.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

93 Cf. SEBALD, *Togo*, pp. 267–269.

Julia was certainly closely attached to the sisterhood in Lomé. In their written memoirs about their last days in town, the nuns not only referred to a general feeling of sadness that had overcome the local female Catholics but also spoke of the great despair that had burst out among the convent's residents. Sister Redempta Philips (1885–1946) described the missionary girls' reaction to the departure of the last but one group of Togo-based nuns creating a series of powerful images. She, who stayed behind for another couple of weeks, wrote:

They [the missionary girls] tore up their clothes, tore their hair, punched their fists and cried: »Maku, maku, I am dying, I am dying.« Our Maria slid from one corner of the room to the other screaming and lashing out with hands and feet, as if she had lost her mind. Others rolled around on their mats. Again it was our Victoria who couldn't forget her grief. Our Julia was sat on her resting place crying silently. She had come to us already in her early youth and had been living in the sisters' house for twelve years. She had a good heart and was attached to the sisters with all her soul. After I had admonished the children to stop crying and to pray for the sisters instead so good God would bring them back to them, it became quieter. But then suddenly I heard loud crying and mourning down from the courtyard. There lay our Paulina, one of our best and most affectionate children rolling herself in the sand. I moved toward her in order to console her and calm her down. But she told me: »How could I not cry when wherever I look I see the Sisters.« [...] In one corner sat our faithful Maria Ga, a good and noble soul, the oldest of our housemaids, who had done much for the mission through her assistance and filial piety. We moved toward her in order to comfort her, but as she continued to cry that bitterly we could not hold back our tears anymore either<sup>94</sup>.

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94 »Sie zerrissen sich die Kleider, rauften ihre Haare, schlugen sich mit den Fäusten und schrien: »Maku, maku, ich werde sterben, ich werde sterben.« Unsere Maria rutschte von der einen Ecke des Saales zur anderen und schrie und schlug mit Händen und Füßen um sich, als hätte sie den Verstand verloren. Andere wälzten sich auf ihrer Matte. Da war es an erster Stellen wieder unsere Viktoria, die ihren Schmerz gar nicht vergessen konnte. Unsere Julia saß auf ihrem Lager und weinte still. Sie war schon in ihrer frühen Jugend zu uns gekommen und war bereits zwölf Jahre im Schwesternhaus. Sie hatte ein gutes Herz und hing mit der ganzen Seele an den Schwestern. Nachdem ich die Kinder ermahnt hatte, doch das weinen zu lassen und anstatt dessen für die Schwestern zu beten, damit der liebe Gott sie wieder zu ihnen zurückführe, wurde es etwas ruhiger. Doch da hörte ich plötzlich unten im Hof lautes Weinen und Jammern. Da lag unsere Paulina, eines unserer bravsten und anhänglichsten Kinder und wälzte sich im Sand. Ich begab mich zu ihr, um sie zu trösten und zu beruhigen. Aber sie sagte: »Wie soll ich nicht weinen, denn überall wo ich hinschaue sehe ich die Schwestern.« [...] In einer Ecke saß unsere treue Maria Ga, eine gute, edle Seele, das älteste unserer Hausmädchen, die durch ihre Mithilfe und kindliche Frömmigkeit vieles für die Mission getan hat. Wir begaben uns zu ihr um sie zu trösten und als sie so bitterlich weinte, konnten auch wir uns der Tränen nicht mehr enthalten.« AG SSpS 034 Tg 03/3, Kriegserlebnisse / Ausweisung, Sr. Redempta Philips, undated, pp. 3–5.

The account quoted forms part of a body of writings consisting of belated (and mostly undated) memoranda that former Togo missionaries wrote down after their eventual return to the Motherhouse in 1918. These texts were written from geographical and chronological distance and with the explicit aim to record a particular period of the Servants of the Holy Spirit's history. Since the author depicted Julia using the past tense, it may well be assumed that the piece was recorded before 1920, when Julia returned to the nuns' lives. Still, her representation somewhat diverged from that of other missionary girls.

Contrary to her fellows who were described as being overwhelmed by despair and losing control over their emotions and bodies, Julia was represented as behaving in a dignified way. Describing her reaction as »crying silently«, the writer emphasized at once both Julia's attachment to the nuns as well as her rational attitude. Or, to put it in other words, if the expression of sentiments constituted an important marker by which European nuns »measured« difference, Julia's representation clearly calls to mind the European ideal of self-control while her tears (just as the nuns' tears) emphasized the tragic component inherent in the course of events<sup>95</sup>. Simultaneously, the writer underlined Julia's attachment to the nuns, which she explained by her early arrival at the convent. Her affection and loyalty toward her educators, who somehow functioned as a substitute family, according to the account, also came to the fore when Julia's biological mother, who had obviously been informed about the nuns' forthcoming departure, arrived from Keta in order to pick up her daughter. Unlike most other missionary girls, who eventually returned to their relatives, Julia at first decisively refused to join her mother. According to Sister Redempta, Julia decidedly declined to leave the convent before the very last Servant of the Holy Spirit had departed<sup>96</sup>.

The sources available do not provide details about Julia Althoff's life during the two years following the nuns' expulsion. There is, however, evidence that she continued her education at the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles' English elementary school in Keta. Significantly, she did not seek admission to this French congregation, which worked in her (mother's) Ghanaian hometown and had taken over the Servants of the Holy Spirit's convents in Togo. Instead, Julia had decided to leave Africa and in 1920 she moved to Steyl where she gained admission as a candidate. She entered the novitiate in 1923 and was admitted to take her first vows two years later. Apart from

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95 Jane Haggies and Margaret Allen have introduced emotions and what they call »structures of feeling« to the imperial missionary context. Drawing on Barbara Rosenwein, they have pointed to the fact that these structures of feelings were raced, classed and gendered and argued that – for the missionaries – the perceived appropriateness or inappropriateness of emotional expression served as an important marker of difference and status. Cf. HAGGIS/ALLEN, *Imperial Emotions*, pp. 692f.

96 Cf. AG SSpS 034 Tg 03/3, *Kriegserlebnisse / Ausweisung*, Sr. Redempta Philips, undated, p. 11.



her comparatively long-term status as a candidate (particularly in view of her advanced age and previous experience in a monastic environment), the record does not indicate any extraordinary treatment as regards institutional processes because of her ethnic origin. Julia Althoff (now Sister Virginie) completed her education in the Motherhouse's internal secondary school. In addition, she was trained in arts and stitchery<sup>97</sup>. Yet, contrary to her earlier stay in Lomé as a missionary girl, now her ethnic background was recorded in the congregation's personal data form<sup>98</sup>. It was Julia's position as a candidate, however, that eventually led to her promotion to the novitiate. The Servants of the Holy Spirit's religious habit had thus somehow veiled her ethnic identity.

In August 1932, Sister Virginie Althoff (Figure 28 and magnified in Figure 27) was appointed for the congregation's field of work in Argentina. With the assignment, she was not only the first »African« Servant of the Holy Spirit but also the first non-western member of the congregation to go overseas in a religious function. Leaving Europe in the capacity of a *missionary*, Sister Virginie occupied a position that had for a long time been reserved for men (and women) of western origin. Still, the date of her appointment in combination with some particularities about her departure for Argentina suggests that the congregational elite's decision to send her abroad was linked to the political situation in Germany in general and the election victory of the NSDAP in July 1932 in particular<sup>99</sup>. If we do consider her mission assignment for Argentina as the congregational elite's response to the larger social, political and legal developments in Germany, however, we have to interpret her move abroad as yet another facet of an, »externally« in this case, enforced invisibility.

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97 AG SSpS Personnel Files, 311.02334.

98 In the personal data form, she indicated the dates of her parents and also mentioned one younger brother who bore a different surname and was resident in Keta. Besides, she referred to one sister of her mother and stated that she had no information about her paternal grandparents. Cf. AG SSpS Personnel Files, 311.02334.

99 There are some indications of Sister Virginie's being appointed rather hastily: First, she was not listed together with the six other nuns who were dispatched to Argentina in June 1932. According to the congregation's journal, she was appointed belatedly (on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1932). Subsequently she joined another group of nuns bound for Brazil and from there she traveled on to Argentina. A somehow hasty and belated mission appointment initiated through political developments and growing racism in Germany would, moreover, explain her exceptional representation in the group photograph (cf. figure 28). Similar group photographs were taken and recorded especially of nuns who left for the individual fields of mission. Cf. *Ausreisen in die Missionen*, in: *Missionsgrüße der Steyler Missionsschwestern Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes* 5 (1932), p. 80 and 6 (1932) p. 96.



Figure 27: Sister Virginie Althoff previous to her departure for Argentina in 1932.



Figure 28: Group of nuns that departed for Argentina in June 1932;  
AG SSpS Album Schwestern S.S.S. Argentina, 24.06.1932.

With Sister Virginie's arrival in Argentina the archival records once again become scarce. According to her obituary, she studied Spanish, obtained a diploma in arts and subsequently worked as a teacher and educator in one of the congregation's boarding schools<sup>100</sup>. Having no evidence of any correspondence it can only be assumed that during her time in Argentina Sister Virginie did not occupy any superior position but lived rather unobtrusively in one of the congregation's convents until 1946, when the congregation's leaders appointed her for Ghana<sup>101</sup>, where after several years of preparation they had finally managed to open their first local convent<sup>102</sup>. Since German citizens had been barred from entering the country, it was nuns from the United States by whom the pioneer works were performed in which they finally received backing by a pair of nuns arriving from Argentina, one of whom was Sister Virginie Althoff.

Once in Ghana, Sister Virginie was explicitly addressed as an »African«. Both congregational histories published during the early 1950s refer to her as a »native Togolese« who was received by »her people« in Accra<sup>103</sup> almost as a hero: According to Sister Assumpta Volpert in her history of the congregation (1951), she »was given a triumphant welcome by her fellow countrymen«<sup>104</sup>. Interestingly, Sister Virginie, who was born in the British Gold Coast and featured as Ghanaian in the personnel records, had come to be regarded as of Togolese origin. This can be explained by her agency in establishing a link between the Servants of the Holy Spirit's past in Togo and the congregation's return to neighboring Ghana in 1946. Sister Virginie belonged to the Ewe population, the ethnic group that had settled along the West African Coast in Togo and Ghana, among which the Servants of the Holy Spirit had been most active before the Great War. In both congregational histories published, her ethnic background (as a member of the Ewe population group and native speaker) was indeed referenced as working in favor of evangelization: According to Sister Salesiana, her work »among her tribe« was most successful<sup>105</sup>.

By contrast, the congregational records from Ghana (e.g. chronicles or reports) did not reference Sister Virginie's ethnic background but represented her as one nun among others. It seems as if ethnicity did not matter much in her particular case and that due to her exceptional personal life path Sister

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100 AG SSpS Personnel Files, 311.02334, E 4-11-1984.

101 Ibid.

102 In 1938, the delegate apostolic assigned a mission field in Ghana to the Society of the Divine Word which, in turn, invited the Servants of the Holy Spirit to collaborate. However, World War II forestalled the departure of the nuns. Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, pp. 131–133.

103 Ibid., p. 132.

104 VOLPERT, *Ein Rebenhang*, p. 362.

105 Cf. SOETE, *Geschichte*, p. 132.

Virginie indeed was considered »white«. She was, however, part of an increasingly international sisterhood which still refused admission to women of color<sup>106</sup>. In Sister Virginie's case, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's religious habit indeed veiled ethnic difference in the same way as other (e.g. class, national) differences between the congregation's members<sup>107</sup>. Generally speaking, the post-war Catholic policies in Ghana resembled those being pursued in New Guinea: While refusing admission to native women, the Servants of the Holy Spirit at the same time collaborated in the build-up of separated institutions for African women, which were established by the local bishops and managed by European nuns. Thus, Sister Virginie assisted in the formation of the Ghanaian Handmaids of the Divine Redeemer (1957), but officially never occupied any superior position. While it seems problematic to link her stable position in the lower ranks of the congregational hierarchy directly to her ethnic background, it nonetheless appears striking – in view of her qualifications (as an early professed, teacher-trained and multilingual nun) – that she was never promoted. Her role in the congregation was first and foremost characterized by ambiguity. On the one hand, she occupied a place on the margins of the congregational hierarchy while on the other hand, beginning in the 1950s she was highly praised for her exceptional pioneering role<sup>108</sup>.

Sister Virginie Julia Althoff's career certainly was remarkable in both religious and secular terms. Her life trajectory testifies to a great deal of mobility, cross-cultural engagement and transnational experience. Born in the British Gold Coast, she grew up in German Togo, and moved to the Netherlands where she lived in a German religious community. Seven years later she moved to Argentina via Brazil, and eventually returned to the Gold Coast in 1946. Apart from a couple of years in the mid-1950s which she spent in Germany for medical treatment, until her death in 1984 Sister Virginie lived in what in 1957 became Ghana, where she taught art, engaged in boarding

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106 At that time, the community of nuns established in Ghana encompassed nuns from North America, Argentina, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, however, in spite of the explicit proposals of the Ghanaian superior provincial at the congregation's general chapter in 1960, the first indigenous women were admitted only in 1988.

107 For a discussion of the religious habit's potential to erase difference cf. KUHNS, *The Habit*, pp. 1f; MEIWES, »Arbeiterinnen des Herrn«, p. 144.

108 For instance, today the homepage of the Servants of the Holy Spirit states with regard to its indigenous members: »The African woman has a deep sense of the sacred, and the call of God to a life of consecrated chastity, poverty, and obedience has been well received. In 1925, our first Ghanaian Holy Spirit Missionary Sister professed her first vows in Steyl, the Netherlands. After receiving her mission assignment to Argentina, Sr. Virginie Althoff returned to her home country of Ghana in 1947. She worked in schools and in pastoral care. She was asked by Bishop Joseph Bowers, SVD, to assist in the formation of a woman's congregation for the Diocese of Accra.« [http://www.worldssp.org/pages/where\\_africa/ghana/ghana.htm](http://www.worldssp.org/pages/where_africa/ghana/ghana.htm) (7.5.2009).

education, nursing duties and parish work and assisted in the formation of an indigenous women's congregation. Most importantly, she pursued a professional career that was based on a religious vocation. In this sense, she actually embodied this pioneer figure as which she was later depicted in the historical accounts of western nuns. By taking the veil Julia Althoff had crossed (colonial) boundaries, which had been constructed along racial lines and would constitute the ground for the congregation's politics of exclusion well into the twentieth century<sup>109</sup>. Through her choice of life she had opened up new vocational spaces for indigenous women both symbolically and materially. In 1929, Magdalena Gbikpi, who by then had given birth to twelve children (one of whom was to become the first native bishop in Togo), wrote to Steyl and, obviously well informed about Julia's departure for Europe nine years earlier, asked: »Please tell me – where is our own reverend Sister Julia?«<sup>110</sup>

Still, the flexibility with which Sister Virginie was represented throughout the years contrasted with the regular treatment of indigenous women by Catholic authorities in Ghana and New Guinea. The Catholic strategies adopted in both places after 1945 centered on the establishment of separated and, as will be shown, visually distinguishable congregations for indigenous nuns in the canonical form of diocesan institutions. Sister Virginie's case was exceptional also in that the (visible) consecration of her body overcame its »racial« codification at least to a certain extent. Significantly, it was precisely in those two areas of mission in which the nuns kept lamenting about the »low level« of morals as a main obstacle to evangelization and in which the religious habit at first emphasized racial division and ethnic identity. For the first women who joined the respective new congregations, their distinctly cut and colored garb and veil – as the outward signs of an indigenous sisterhood – symbolized both religious affiliation and ethnic identity.

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109 While the record generally shows that the issue of the integration of »black« women was brought up from time to time, it likewise demonstrates that with regards to integration the firm ideas of race and cultural difference held by the nuns in charge prevented the introduction of change. For instance, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's fifth General Chapter (1960) dealt with the question briefly due to the petition made by a non-member of the chapter. The explanation for rejecting the petition, which can be found in the protocol of the meeting, is noteworthy: »The fact that no black sisters were accepted so far was explained by the bad health that the mixing of races often causes and the obstacle [the miscegenation] thus creates. In the US some have already been accepted, but no one has had success. Only one novice will make a profession in the near future. [...] One cannot accept natives of low cultures.« (»Daß noch keine schwarzen Schwestern aufgenommen wurden wurde damit erklärt, daß die Rasenvermischung oft schwache Gesundheit zur Folge hat und damit ein Hindernis bildet. In USA wurden schon welche aufgenommen, man hatte aber keinen Erfolg, nur eine Novizin macht bald Profeß. [...] Einheimische tiefstehender Kulturen kann man nicht aufnehmen.«) AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, Protokoll, p. 72.

110 »Bitte, wo ist unsere eigene ehrwürdige Schwester Julia?« AG SSpS 034 Tg Varia (1,2,3,5), 3.02, Magdalena Gbikpi, 30.12.1929.

## Negotiating Difference

The foundation of congregations for indigenous nuns in Africa and the Pacific was initiated after 1945 following Roman directives. This move toward the institutional integration of »non-white« women was thus embedded in larger shifts in the official Catholic strategies of evangelization that increasingly built on indigenous participation. Missiologists have suggested taking World War II as the watershed dividing the »old from the new era« as regards Catholic mission policies in New Guinea<sup>111</sup>. Accordingly, the beginning of political decolonization also heralded the end of »Church colonialism«, which is to be understood as the establishment of missionary Churches headed by western authorities. Certainly, the vast changes in the theology of missions that occurred in the Catholic Church in the second half of the twentieth century were inspired by the political processes of decolonization, the foundation of independent nation states (e.g. Papua New Guinea in 1975) and, most importantly, the rapid spread of Catholicism in Africa and the Pacific. Vatican II surely constituted a milestone as regards the Catholic discourse on cultural plurality, inter-religious dialogue and, most certainly, of missionary activity.

For New Guinea, the 1950s were a decade of significant transformation witnessing the foundation of two congregations for indigenous nuns in the New Guinean Catholic centers Wewak and Alexishafen by the bishops in charge (both priests of the Society of the Divine Word). Change was thus introduced to the local religious policies of integration from the top of the Catholic hierarchy. This strategic approach to the issue of indigenous integration shaped the ways in which western nuns perceived these events. The Servants of the Holy Spirit's reports depicted the new foundations rather as novel means of evangelization initiated by ecclesiastical leaders than the outcome of the religious claims made by the potential candidates. In 1950, the chronicler of the women's convent in Wewak, bishop's see and the Catholic headquarters of the vicariate of Central New Guinea, referring to the newly-built house for missionary girls on location, stated: »On the most assertive demand of the bishop, this new building should serve as a place of residence only for those girls who show interest to become a sister. A letter was circulated to all reverend fathers in the vicariate to search out such girls«<sup>112</sup>.

111 Cf. Ennio MANTOVANI, *Traditional Religions and Christianity*, in: Ennio MANTOVANI (ed.), *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions. A Handbook for Church Workers*, Goroka 1984, pp. 1–23, i.e. p. 3.

112 »Auf ausdrücklichsten Wunsch des Bischofs soll dieses neue Gebäude nur solchen eingeborenen Mädchen als Aufenthalt dienen, die Interesse zeigen, Schwester zu werden. An alle hochwürdigen Patres des Vikariates erging ein Schreiben, solche Mädchen ausfindig zu machen.« AG SSps PNG Chroniken, Wewak, 13.8.1950, p. 5.

Even though missionary writers gave only marginal room to the calling narratives of indigenous women and the subsequent opening up of vocational spaces, the events of the 1950s nonetheless testify to their active involvement in religious community building. Still in the same year, the first five candidates arrived at Wewak, where they were joined by another young woman who had already stayed at a women's convent in the vicariate for some time. Notwithstanding this rapid configuration of a pioneer group of postulants, the chronicler failed to acknowledge any indigenous agency in the sisterhood's formation process. Quite the contrary, characterizing the new foundation as a »meaningful endeavor« in terms of proselytization, she produced a mission narrative that recognized western agency only. Accordingly, missionaries were the key figures in the establishment of the Little Sisters of the Rosary, as the vicariate's first indigenous women's congregation was named by the bishop<sup>113</sup>. In the Rosary Sisters' narrative of foundation as recorded by western nuns, the pioneer candidates appeared as the largely passive and partly unknowing objects of ecclesiastical policies. Reviewing the congregation's early days, a Servant of the Holy Spirit wrote about the bishop's first talk in front of the candidates, representing the latter as totally unaware of their future roles as women under vows:

Having been here for only a few weeks, it was a great shock for them to hear about leaving parents and place and they got very upset and wanted to leave. The ›storm‹ calmed again under the wise direction of the sisters<sup>114</sup>.

Together with the bishop, the Servants of the Holy Spirit acted as the indigenous candidates' educators, advisors, supervisors and novice mistresses. In short, they functioned as the latter's superiors in most matters of their religious and secular lives. Interestingly, western nuns tended to represent the status of indigenous postulants, novices and later professed nuns (all of whom they usually referred to as »our native sisters«) as somehow in between the position of »ordinary« missionary girls (that were either housemaids or boarders) and the Servants of the Holy Spirit's senior status as missionary nuns »proper«. Residing in a separated building that was affiliated to the Wewak convent, the Rosary Sisters studied and worked side by side with the local missionary girls and lived under the close supervision of western nuns. They assisted the Servants of the Holy Spirit in many respects and through their labor contributed to the mission's economic reproduction. In the eyes of contemporary chroniclers, the formation of indigenous sisterhoods in New Guinea resulted from western mission activity in what they characterized as

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113 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 5.

114 AG SSs PNG Chroniken, Wewak, 8.7.1951, p. 1.



»heathen« parts of the globe. The Servants of the Holy Spirit's superior provincial referred to the Rosary Sisters' first investment ceremony as follows:

An important event! A joyful day for the whole mission! The fruit of many sacrifices and prayer by so many missionaries and sisters, many of whom have already gone to eternity<sup>115</sup>.

Western writers interpreted the successful formation of the first Catholic sisterhood as the outcome of the spiritual and secular works of generations of European missionaries. They ignored the roles of indigenous women in the founding processes; also, they kept silent about the religious concepts which informed these women's life choices and activities. Instead, the members of the western congregation repeatedly related the emergence of indigenous Catholic institutions to their own missionary past. Explaining the Rosary Sisters' consolidation during the 1950s they pointed out the spiritual agency of both the living and the deceased Servants of the Holy Spirit emphasizing their historical engagement in Catholic girls' education. In 1960, the superior provincial outlined the western nuns' contribution to the foundation of the indigenous congregation as follows:

Firstly, as I mentioned, almost all vocations [of indigenous candidates] apply to children of those mothers who once lived with the sisters as their housemaids. Secondly, all of them are graduates from our schools whom we instructed in religious life<sup>116</sup>.

The historical and institutional ties between the Servants of the Holy Spirit and the New Guinean congregations were, moreover, emphasized symbolically in the religious naming of the first generation of Rosary Sisters. The seven pioneer members of the congregation were given the German monastic names of the Servants of the Holy Spirit's first seven mother superiors. By adapting precisely the names of those German women who had been formative figures in the congregation's transnational past, both institutions used the occasion of the Rosary Sisters first investment ceremony to emphasize their close association and entangled histories<sup>117</sup>. The investment ceremonies were celebrated festively and also attracted the attention of the indigenous

115 »Ein grosses Ereignis! Ein Freudentag für die ganze Mission! Die Frucht von vielen Opfern und viel Gebet von so vielen Missionaren und Schwestern von denen schon viele in der Ewigkeit sind.« AG SSps PNG Chroniken, Regionalhaus Alexishafen, 1952–1953, p. 1.

116 »Erstens wie ich sagte sind fast alle Berufe von Kindern jener Mütter, die früher bei den Schwestern Hausmädchen waren. Dann sind sie alle aus unseren Schulen hervorgegangen und haben wir ihnen die Anleitung zum religiösen Leben gegeben.« AG SSps 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, Sr. Nazaria Albers, Neuguinea: Region zu Ehren der heiligen Engel, p. 6.

117 Cf. AG SSps PNG Chroniken, Regionalhaus Alexishafen, June 1952.

population. For the New Guinean Catholics, the significance of these public celebrations lay in the fact that native people disrupted ethnic exclusive systems and entered the Catholic hierarchy. In their capacity as indigenous nuns, New Guinean women became officially acknowledged members of the religious state and the missionary body, both of which had been exclusively assigned to »whites« for a long time. Throughout the 1950s, stable numbers of indigenous candidates entered the ecclesiastical institutions thus negotiating the boundaries of race. Describing the moment in the Rosary Sisters' first festive investment ceremony in which the new nuns took on the habit, a nun wrote:

In his sermon the bishop expressed his own pleasure and that of all missionaries about the grace God had given to New Guinea, namely, to choose among millions of souls some who wish to consecrate their lives to God and to the salvation of souls. The people too like it and are proud of it, because they always thought that it was for the white people only<sup>118</sup>.

Unfortunately, missionary sources provide little information about the ways in which these pioneer indigenous nuns experienced their entry into religious life and biased European archives hardly ever contain their voices. What, however, can be seen from the record available is that during the 1950s small but stable numbers of New Guinean women chose a monastic life form. All seven novices who had been invested with the religious habit in 1952 (Figure 29) were admitted to take their first vows<sup>119</sup>. This, in turn, implies that convent life appealed to some women and, moreover, suggests that their entry into the religious state fulfilled the expectations on both sides. Others followed their example. Figure 29 represents the extended female religious community in Wewak on the day of the Rosary Sisters' first investment ceremony (1952) together with the latter's founder Bishop Leo Arkfeld (1912–1999). The photograph, which is filed in the Servants of the Holy Spirit's Steylean archive and seems to have been produced for a European audience, strikingly visualizes the non-Christian cultural setting. Posing against the background of the uncultured landscape without any sacred building in sight, the seven indigenous novices form the center of the image. Flanking the groups of novices and postulants, the white-dressed western nuns and priests appear to figure as the primary agents of religious change. The main ordering principle as represented in the image appears to be constituted by ethnicity and dress, rather than by gender. The Servants of the Holy Spirit's veils and habits contrasted sharply with the dress used by the indigenous women represented.

118 AG SSps PNG Chroniken, Wewak, June 1953, p. 1–3.

119 Cf. AG SSps PNG Chroniken, Wewak, 26.7.1955, p. 1.



Figure 29: »The first novices and postulants of the native congregation, Wewak, New Guinea. After the first investment 1952.«;  
Archive Steyl Fotos, New Guinea, Folder 8 / 4, Rosary Sisters Wewak.

In the image, clothing and positioning marked differences. In the center we see the founder, Bishop Arkfeld, flanked by five western priests. In the front row, four postulants are seated, representing the indigenous congregation's future growth. Behind them, the newly invested novices are lined up. The image is marked by the tension between integration and separation: While uniformity certainly constitutes the most striking feature in the representation of the individual members of the three »types« of women depicted in the photograph (western nuns, indigenous novices and postulants), what is likewise striking is the visually emphasized difference between the groups.

The visual representation of the Rosary Sisters must be interpreted in correspondence with their in-between status as well as the ambiguity that characterized their position. On the one hand, they had taken vows and wore the veil and the habit as the outward signs of Catholic consecration. Simultaneously, however, their visual representation contrasted with that of their western counterparts who, in comparison, appear as fully-fledged nuns. Even though the Rosary Sisters formed part of the Catholic hierarchy and not only engaged in the spreading of the gospel but did so in an official function, their sphere of activity was restricted to the boundaries of the vicariate and directly subjected to the bishop's authority. Although the limitation of the New Guinean congregations through diocesan ties made sense from a missionary point of view that aimed at establishing an indigenous Church, at the same time it significantly limited their scope. This again raises the issue of the Catholic politics of inclusion. After all, separated congregations for indigenous nuns in the ecclesiastical form of diocesan institutions prevented indigenous women both from joining transnational (and well-equipped) religious orders as well as from going abroad in a religious function. In short, the Rosary Sisters were not able to follow the example of the pioneer German nuns who had traveled to New Guinea in order to spread the Gospel in a cultural context other than their own.

This institutional disadvantage remained unchanged notwithstanding the fact that the late 1950s witnessed the blurring of racial boundaries in several spheres of activity<sup>120</sup>. Obviously, the promotion of New Guinean (and, for that matter, Ghanaian) Servants of the Holy Spirit was still beyond the congregation's imagination. The western nuns in New Guinea who headed and trained their native colleagues practically understood the indigenous sisterhoods as some sort of subordinated branches. According to the contemporary western understanding, the Rosary Sisters somehow reproduced the

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120 For instance, when they were not able to attend the spiritual exercises held for their communities, the indigenous nuns participated in the Servants of the Holy Spirit's religious retreats. Besides, they increasingly collaborated in missionary work and native sisters functioned as teachers or nurses.

Servants of the Holy Spirit's historical experience and religious engagement. Visual sources and written accounts alike highlight the ongoing negotiations of segregation and integration accompanying these processes. Both institutions were clearly and visibly distinguishable (the former's dress and veil were shorter and simpler while the latter's habit was white, indigenous nuns are often represented barefoot, etc.). Difference continued to be interpreted hierarchically. Many European nuns still conceived of their indigenous counterparts as needing supervision, even though the latter became increasingly better qualified for missionary work (e.g. regarding language skills, cultural knowledge and state-recognized teacher training). In the official report submitted to the Servants of the Holy Spirit's general chapter in 1960, the writer once again argued for the western nuns' indispensableness precisely in view of what she described as the indigenous sisters' shortcomings. Accordingly, the native nuns were »hardly able to work independently yet«. And, explaining her opinion of the indigenous nuns' minor position in the New Guinean missionary Church, the writer added: »I certainly do not want to put our sisters in the shade, but considering their background, how could things be different?«<sup>121</sup> Thus, while the term »our sisters« in fact referred to a concept of universal Catholic sisterhood, the quotation also shows that, even though most of the indigenous sisters were the biological daughters of mission-educated girls (and thus second-generation Catholics) and members of a Catholic congregation under vows, western nuns still tried to restrict their position to subordinate roles.

If equal roles for Catholic women in the Church, irrespective of skin color and ethnic origin, are considered as the goal of female mission activity, by 1960 the nuns in New Guinea were still far from having achieved that objective. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, it was only in 1986 that the first two New Guinean women were invested with the Servants of the Holy Spirit's religious habit. And it was not before 1993 that the congregation's missionary commitment in New Guinea »went full circle«, as a nun put it in an anniversary publication (1999), because only then the first native Servant of the Holy Spirit was appointed for overseas missionary work. On July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1993, Sister Agnes Lisban from the village of Tambanum, situated along the Sepik River in the mainland's interior, received her missionary appointment for Ghana. The published description of the bystanders' reaction to the communication of the assignment highlights the largely invisible yet firm boundaries that had continued to restrict the prospects for non-

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121 »Ich will damit unsere Schwestern nicht in den Schatten stellen, aber wie kann es denn anders sein, wenn man bedenkt aus welcher Umgebung sie kommen.« AG SSpS 100 General Chapter 5 1960, Durchführung, Sr. Nazaria Albers, Neuguinea: Region zu Ehren der heiligen Engel, p. 6.

western women and contributed to the reproduction of the missionary system of inequality. Describing the reaction of the candidate's relatives and fellow missionaries to the announcement of her appointment, the writer stated: »Sister Agnes was to go to Ghana in Africa! On hearing this, the audience was first stunned into dead silence and then reacted with thunderous applause. Fr. Joe Sakite, SVD, a native Ghanaian who was concelebrating at the Mass, broke out into a spontaneous dance right in the sanctuary«<sup>122</sup>.

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122 COLES/MIHALIC, *Sent by the Spirit*, p. 41 [emphasis in the original]. For a discussion of the religious politics of integration in the second half of the twentieth century from a transnational perspective, cf. Katharina STORNIG, »Sister Agnes was to go to Ghana in Africa!« Catholic Nuns and Migration, in: Glenda Tibe BONIFACIO (ed.), *Feminism and Migration. Cross-cultural Engagements*, Dordrecht 2012, pp. 265–282.

## Conclusion

›Go into the world and teach all nations!‹ That's what our divine Savior said to his apostles before ascension. And like the obedient disciples who joyfully followed the directives of their master, numerous followers have gone into the heathen countries to spread the gospel of the crucified. The call of the Lord has also sounded to us through the voice of our dear superiors: ›Go out to Africa and work for the salvation of immortal souls!‹<sup>1</sup>

On a steamship headed towards Togo, enterprising neo-missionary Sister Eulalia Hewing chose these words to open the letter she addressed to her fellow sisters, who had remained behind. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many Catholic women in Germany (just as in other European countries) participated actively in the revival of the Catholic missionary movement and responded enthusiastically to the growing admission of women to the mission fields. One important result of this was the foundation of several missionary congregations for nuns that, in the long run, caused the feminization of the Catholic missionary forces. In contrast to many priests and missiologists, however, who conceived of the nuns' move abroad as contributing to the evangelizing work of priests, many of them, like Sister Eulalia, claimed to travel in an apostolic function. Missionary nuns in fact transcended the Catholic gendered notion of what it meant to be a disciple; for, they – as women religious – appropriated apostolic ideas to their own ministry.

Certainly, the subjects of this book had no doubts about the goal of their mission. Notwithstanding the frequent setbacks, misunderstandings and (sometimes life-threatening) troubles they experienced on the field, they never challenged its *raison d'être*. On the other hand, not even when missionizing took coercive or violent forms, did the nuns bring up the question of its legitimacy. Hence, for the Servants of the Holy Spirit abroad and in Europe, the mission venture was meaningful in a self-explanatory and matter-of-fact

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1 »›Gehet hin in alle Welt und lehret alle Völker!‹ So sprach unser göttlicher Heiland vor seiner Himmelfahrt zu seinen geliebten Aposteln. Wie nun unsere gehorsamen Jünger des Herrn freudig dem Befehle ihres Meisters folgten, so zogen nach ihnen noch zahlreiche Nachfolger in die heidnischen Länder hinaus, um die Lehre des Gekreuzigten zu verkünden. Auch an uns erging das Wort des Herrn durch den Mund unserer guten Obern: ›Zieheth hinaus nach Afrika und wirket für das Heil der unsterblichen Seelen!‹« AG SSps 034 Tg 00 Reiseberichte 1899–1914, Sr. Eulalia Hewing, 12.8.1905.

kind of way. Missionizing for them related to their deep belief in God and Church teachings as well as to their conviction of the universal applicability of Catholicism. Spreading the faith, working for the expansion of the Church and tending to the spiritual well-being of others constituted a religious and ethical imperative for them. The nuns considered the active participation in mission work also a very auspicious way to work for their own salvation. Without question they were deeply convinced that they had something truly valuable to offer the people in Togo and New Guinea.

The merits they aimed to spread in both areas not only involved Catholic teachings but also more general aspects of European »civilization«. Their deep belief in the superiority of both Christianity and European culture witnesses to the historical context of the long nineteenth century, which, to paraphrase Jürgen Osterhammel, compared with other epochs could be termed a »European century«. European influence was at its peak and many societies in other parts of the world used Europe as an example and benchmark of civilization, modernization and what later came to be called »development«<sup>2</sup>. For the nuns, »Europe« and European culture was the product of its Christian past. It was precisely these two interrelated aspects of perceived religious and cultural superiority that, notwithstanding the nuns' relative powerlessness with regard to European men, permitted them to act as the confident representatives of the missionary Church we encountered throughout this book. As missionaries, they actively participated in what they understood to be the salvation of non-Christian peoples. A firm sense of superiority over a degraded (and racialized) »heathen« Other was constitutive to their self-conception. For, it was their experience (and sense) of belonging to both the (much-quoted) »army of Christ« and a group of European colonizers that shaped their behavior toward the communities with which they worked. The analysis of the day-to-day accounts has shown that, in some cases, this sense of superiority (and the moral consequences the nuns derived from it) also found expression in the implementation of coercive and violent practices. These practices have largely remained hidden in the gender bias of published texts, which tended to refer to »love« and »compassion« as the Christian woman's primary »weapons« against »heathendom«<sup>3</sup>.

Without doubts, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the nuns' missionary lives were marked by tensions and contradictions. They were »white« women in a male-dominated Church and colonial society. As

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2 Cf. Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, München 2009, pp. 19f.

3 Cf. Kathrin ROLLER, »Statt dessen schwang sie eine andere Waffe«. Gewalt und Geschlecht in Texten der Berliner Mission aus der Zeit um 1900, in: VAN DER HEYDEN/BECHER (eds), *Mission und Gewalt*, pp. 301–326.



Catholic nuns, they identified with a centuries-old gendered religious tradition that celebrated values like simplicity and community and praised an ascetic spirituality that emphasized seclusion. As missionaries, however, they lived lives most uncommon for women of that time: They expressed a great deal of mobility and sometimes defied contemporary religious and secular conventions of appropriate behavior. Ambiguity, moreover, characterized the nuns' roles with regard to colonial space and colonized people. Although their positions were marginal in relation to male religious and secular power, they were all the more important when it came to the encounter between women; an encounter that was likewise marked by basic contradictions. Propagating Catholic universalism on the one hand, the nuns reproduced colonial asymmetries of race within their own institutions, on the other. Using a religious language of seclusion and unsociability, German nuns largely represented themselves as marginal to colonial relations. In their capacity as teachers, however, they proved that they knew how to interact with the colonial state and its representatives. Last but not least, it were the institutional background and the Catholic organizational apparatus which also entailed conflict. Belonging to a women's congregation that acknowledged strict hierarchies, organizational unity, obedience and the following of religious rules as a way to sanctification, individuals and small communities in the fields of mission experienced (and sometimes also voiced) the need for self-initiatives in their day-to-day lives. Negotiating their position between the roles assigned to them by the Church, the congregation and society, missionary nuns ultimately developed their own religious concepts and imaginations that, again, inspired their activities. Yet, the religious culture that emerged in Africa and the Pacific left only limited room for the successful implementation of self-initiatives, which were often suppressed by both religious authorities and fellow nuns. And it was not until the process of renewal that the congregation's leaders initiated in response to the reform of religious life introduced by the Second Vatican Council that any fundamental change was brought about in this respect.

In New Guinea, the nuns' vast dependence on the male missionary Church was not resolved until 1960. Unlike the Servants of the Holy Spirit's leading committee in Europe, who had assumed full self-administration during the 1920s, in its New Guinean branch the nuns neither owned the convents they lived in nor were they in charge, legally or economically, of the schools and hospitals they worked in. Even though the Servants of the Holy Spirit's dependence on the Society of the Divine Word had repeatedly led to struggles in the entangled histories of both institutions, it was only after the re-establishment of the Catholic mission in New Guinea in 1945 that the local nuns started to openly question its organizational apparatus. The teaching nuns' efforts to implement female-centered educational strategies during

the 1950s clashed with those of priests who gave precedence to the training of boys. Ecclesiastical power structures prevented the women missionaries from acting according to their own ideas. Being denied the right to administrate themselves, the Servants of the Holy Spirit in New Guinea were forced to negotiate with the priests the funds, resources and personnel available. This was even more the case for the indigenous congregations which started to be established in the 1950s. Unlike the western nuns, who formed part of a transnational institution that in many respects was able to call on the support of its oversea branches, the indigenous congregations were accorded the ecclesiastical status of diocesan institutions. This implied that they were directly subordinate to the authority of the responsible bishop and depended on his patronage.

Mission experience could nonetheless be a liberating experience. In both Togo and in New Guinea individual nuns found for themselves new and rewarding spheres of activity. In the capacity as teachers, nurses or local leaders of growing religious communities of women they cultivated self-esteem through professionalism and qualified achievements. The majority of women missionaries, however, engaged primarily in hard labor and domestic works. This was particularly true for New Guinea where working nuns together with their indigenous employees provided a considerable part of the food supply for the missionary communities. In both Togo and New Guinea, missionary life entailed hardship that went beyond demanding working duties and hot climates. Over a long period of time, the nuns were strained both physically and psychologically by high mortality rates and frequent fevers. At places, the lack of religious infrastructure and services fundamentally challenged their understanding of religious life. Still, all nuns would frame their stay abroad in terms of a religious *mission*, thus as the realization of a divine call within an institutionalized framework. Migration and the experience of mobility in a non-European cultural context empowered the nuns in an essentially religious way, first and foremost because it made them into *missionaries*. Their institutional involvement with the well-connected missionary Church, in turn, enabled them to consider themselves as active participants in a global missionary community with a long-standing religious tradition working for the salvation of the world.

The missionary nuns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century certainly escape any attempt of an easy categorization. They appear to be all at once contained *and* enterprising, controlled *and* determining, sympathetic *and* imperious, humble *and* proud. They were positioned at the margins *and* at the center of the colonial societies in Togo and New Guinea. In addition, the missionaries emphasized conservative social values and rejected many accomplishments and symbols of what they called »worldly«, and by doing so the nuns were able to avoid labeling (or thinking of) themselves as

modern<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, however, their lives featured much of what historians have come to associate with the notion of modernity. They were women who thought and acted on transregional, transnational and transcontinental scales. The nuns traveled the world largely on their own; they were employed and organized their day-to-day lives in relative independence from men. Some of them certainly conceived of themselves as professionals. Through the congregation's channels the nuns circulated personnel, news and goods. The Servants of the Holy Spirit congregation's rapid and worldwide expansion since 1889 depended on its members making use of a set of modern technologies (e.g. advances in navigation, transportation, medication, communication, print etc.), and the nuns had skills and up-to-date knowledge in several of the fields mentioned. Furthermore, it has become evident that both the direction of vocational hopes for the people of Togo and New Guinea as well as the congregation's institutional establishment in both settings relied on the imaginations, connections and structures created by colonialism. This is not to suggest, however, that the nuns' relationship to colonialism was one of outspoken support. Instead, it was rather ambivalent. While they took the legitimacy of European hegemony and dominance in Africa, Asia and Oceania for granted, appreciated the German empire as an important space of action, and expected the protection of their activities and properties by the colonial state, they also distrusted the aspirations of secular colonizers and critiqued colonial politics whenever it failed to conform to their vision of colonial society. In view of these multiple tensions, it is appropriate to draw attention to the most characteristic feature of these women's lives: the repeated crossing of boundaries.

Here the theme of boundary crossing is proposed mainly to emphasize three aspects. First, it heightens the agency of the subjects of this book. They had become missionary nuns precisely because they desired to venture beyond the borders of what is often termed the Catholic milieu, the state and the continent. At some point in their lives these women decided to act in specific ways in the world (or – to be more precise – in areas of the world that the Catholic Church has conceptualized as mission fields). Their boundary crossings were neither passive nor incidental. Rather, opting for the missionary life meant stepping beyond the well-known and moving into cultural areas that were perceived to be radically different from Christian Germany.

Second, the theme of boundary crossing accentuates the fact that missionary nuns constantly passed what many contemporaries (and historians) conceived of as bounded or separated spheres of action. While the life trajectory

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4 Christopher Bayly has argued that one crucial mark of being modern is found in thinking of oneself as modern. Cf. Christopher BAYLY, *Die Geburt der modernen Welt. Eine Globalgeschichte 1780–1914*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2006, p. 25.

of missionaries was based on the crossing of political, geographic and cultural borders, for the nuns it also involved the crossing of the real and imagined boundary between the secluded space of the cloistered women's convent and the public sphere of colonial society associated with men. Generally speaking, gender, race and religion emerged as the most important categories in the formation of their communities. Racial borders, moreover, determined the possibilities of individuals within those communities on a structural level. On the other hand, by living in close contact with Catholic girls and women in both settings while at the same time withdrawing from any heightened interaction with men, they also crossed the (imagined) boundaries of race that often separated colonizers from the colonized. By cohabiting with indigenous girls and women, the nuns also developed a sense of female community and established relationships for mutual support. They were well aware of the fact that the running of a missionary women's convent always depended on the collaboration of the local indigenous communities. Of course, this type of boundary crossing ran in both directions. It depended on the willingness and interest of local women to engage with the nuns; a situation that was not always consistent. Moreover, when faced with disappointment or gripped by fear some nuns turned to violence and crossed what readers, and sometimes also fellow nuns, perceived to be ethical boundaries.

Lastly, the theme of boundary-crossing also points to the fact that, by and large, the nuns refrained from questioning the gendered and racialized boundaries they crossed as well as kept from challenging the inequalities that were involved. Often they confirmed (or heightened the visibility of) the existence of the boundaries. This was the case when they used racial constructions to mark the limits of their community. Similarly, life trajectories like that of Magdalena Gbikpi, a Togolese woman who unsuccessfully attempted to cross the congregation's boundary of race, shift the focus to the nature of that very boundary as well as to the persons, assumptions and ideas that supported it. Yet, through their transboundary activities and movements, which made the relative permeability of the boundaries obvious, the European nuns and the non-European women like Magdalena Gbikpi or the first native African Servant of the Holy Spirit Julia Althoff also challenged or qualified, regardless of intentionality, the meaning of the very boundaries they crossed.

The evaluation of the missionary encounter becomes even more complex when the attention is shifted to the indigenous women. Generally speaking, initially the women in both settings had received their German visitors benevolently. The missionary encounter between women had started off on friendly terms and, to a certain extent, was marked by mutual interest. However, while in Togo this »friendly« start and the indigenous demand favored the rapid establishment of formalized girls' (boarding) schooling, the interest of New Guinean women in the Catholic missionary offers ebbed away soon.

Some of the nuns who had come to Tumleo first explained the empty classrooms and the local women's turning away from the mission by the violent teaching methods employed by their colleagues. The collaboration of indigenous women, however, would have been crucial to any form of successful female missionary activity. Indigenous girls acted as the nuns' informants, interpreters and guides. Missionary pupils, who were familiar with both the missionary and the indigenous world, were the indispensable mediators between the nuns and the nearby villagers. Effective nursing would have been impossible without the information about sick or parturient women forwarded to the nuns by their pupils. After all, their selective engagement with the nuns suggests that Togolese and New Guinean women used missionary offers in a conscious way and according to their own motivations and goals.

While in colonial Togo Catholic girls' schooling in general was quite successful, regional differences (e.g. between the coast and the interior) highlight the importance to study such phenomena on the local level. Certainly, the colonial economy at the coast and the social status that indigenous people attached to formal education and Christianity favored the development of girls' education. The colonial capital Lomé was the only place where the nuns did not complain about the lack of interest in girls' schooling. Quite the contrary, they assured the need to expand their educational facilities there in order to meet the indigenous demands and to keep up with the Protestant schools. Obviously, in Lomé there were a stable number of indigenous women who were attracted by the prospect to reside and work with the nuns. Despite the women missionaries' reservation in this respect, the first indigenous woman gained employment in the girls' school in Lomé in 1908, an achievement that would have been impossible without her active engagement. Generally speaking, not even the most promising (from the nuns' point of view) converts acted in the way in which the missionaries expected them to. Although discouraged by the nuns, a group of young Catholic women rejected marriage proposals, stayed at the convents instead collaborating in evangelization and assuming official roles in the emerging parishes. Some asked for admission to the congregation, and one of them even followed the nuns to Europe on her own initiative. In the Togolese interior, by contrast, girls' schooling never became comparably successful. There it was rather nursing and the prospect to administer emergency baptism which the nuns referred to as the most rewarding sphere of work.

However, the fact that at all Togolese convents the nuns continued to complain about what they called the girls' »laziness« not only testifies to the centrality of work to their notion of moral agency but – read against the grain – also signs of resistance to an oppressive environment. At the end, even the resident girls never fully adapted to the nuns' working pace but kept working according to their own rhythm. Similarly, irregular school attendance sug-

gests that indigenous people themselves decided whether or not they or their children would attend classes. Not all missionary girls behaved in ways the nuns could understand or appreciate. Some of them left without permission or provoked their dismissal before completing formal education.

As for New Guinea, a central feature characterizing the nuns' endeavors and also dominating their letters to Europe over a long period of time was disappointment. Disappointment manifested itself in the narratives of setbacks, which usually consisted in the mission-educated and converted girls' and women's transgressions of Christian mores. New Guinean women made use of the gendered missionary offers in ways the nuns were unable or unwilling to understand. Converted girls who had resided with the nuns for a while and were referred to by them as »exemplary«, »suddenly« left the convents and/or married non-Catholics or polygamists. From the nuns' point of view, such incidents could be explained only by the girls' uncontrolled sexual desire and by what they called »moral depravity«. Obviously the contact with mission Christianity was not the defining experience for these girls or women. Rather, they seem to have moved back and forth between the worlds of the mission and the villages as well as their respective offers, possibilities and advantages. The omnipresent struggles over the nexus of sexuality, contraception, abortion and infanticide caused deep and mutual mistrust between the nuns and indigenous women for a long time. While the nuns were extremely suspicious of the moral configuration of indigenous women, their aggressive attitudes against indigenous social practices involved the rapid deterioration of mutual relationships. In contrast to Togo, where the experience of »fear« was marginal to day-to-day missionary life, for their colleagues in New Guinea it was at times defining in that they temporarily not only had to fear for their lives but frequently were met with hostile reactions or assaults.

From the Servants of the Holy Spirit's institutional point of view, missionary activity in Togo and New Guinea was a successful undertaking also because in both settings they managed to establish their congregation. Although the nuns, alike all German citizens, were forced to leave Togo for political reasons in 1918, the former Togo missionaries never abandoned their hope to return. Yet, as members of a transnational institution which worked on a global scale, the healthy among them were soon deployed elsewhere. Of the 39 Togo missionaries, who were still alive in 1918, one went to China, two to Brazil, two to the United States, one to Argentina, two to Indonesia, three to India and one to the Philippines<sup>5</sup>. In fact, it was not before 1946 that the Servants of the Holy Spirit were able to return to West Africa by starting a mission in what was then the British Gold Coast. Their »second« arrival

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5 Cf. MÜLLER, *Geschichte der Katholischen Kirche*, pp. 515–519.

to what had become the nation state of Togo (1960), in turn, occurred only a century after the »first« one had taken place: In 1989 the Servants of the Holy Spirit founded a women's convent in H elota, situated in the North, and, within a decade, they opened branches in Bassar (1992) and Lom e (2000). In contrast to Togo, the Servants of Holy Spirit were able to continue their work in New Guinea throughout the twentieth century without respite.

Yet, by the chronological end of this study, the congregation was facing many challenges. On the one hand, the Servants of the Holy Spirit had created a transnational institution that maintained a world-wide network of branches which promoted cross-cultural interaction. On the other hand, the congregation still featured German leadership and excluded women of certain ethnic backgrounds from joining. Even though a profound process of renewal was initiated as a consequence of Vatican II, issues of hegemony and the question of integration and exclusion have kept occupying the nuns over the decades. Ever since, they have been confronted with the growing diversity in their own communities and have struggled to redefine their roles in a globalized world as, to cite one of the main themes that was brought up in the general chapter in 2002, »prophetic women reflecting the feminine face of God«<sup>6</sup>.

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6 Cf. AG SSpS PNG 6106 Province Chronicles, Prophetic Women in Mission 2002, Open Session, Session 9.





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### *c) Interviews*

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### *d) Internet Pages*

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