



Katharina Stornig

# Sisters Crossing Boundaries

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

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht



V&R



Veröffentlichungen des  
Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz

Abteilung für Abendländische Religionsgeschichte  
Edited by Irene Dingel

Volume 232

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

# Sisters Crossing Boundaries

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

by  
Katharina Stornig

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Printed with kind support by the  
European University Institute (EUI).



With 29 figures

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche National-  
bibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-525-10129-2

ISBN 978-3-647-10129-3 (e-book)

© 2013, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen/

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht LLC, Bristol, CT, U.S.A.

[www.v-r.de](http://www.v-r.de)

All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or utilized in any form  
or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording,  
or any information storage and retrieval system,  
without prior written permission from the publisher.

Typesetting by: Vanessa Brabsche

Printed and bound in Germany by ⊕ Hubert & Co, Göttingen

Printed on non-aging paper.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .....	7
Introduction .....	9
Missionary Writing(s) .....	27
The Servants of the Holy Spirit – Foundation and Consolidation ...	34
1. Traveling Nuns .....	47
»Who can describe the Feelings?« – Departure .....	54
Out of the Convent: the Passage .....	67
Debarkation and the Doubts at Arrival .....	83
Mobility and Missionary Life .....	90
2. (Re-)producing religious Structures .....	105
Competing Roles – Togo .....	112
Adapting Concepts – New Guinea .....	129
The Body, Health and institutional Implications .....	149
Individual Strategies and striving for congregational Unity .....	161
3. Transforming Space .....	165
Creating Catholic Landscape .....	172
Women's Convents in colonial Settings .....	185
»Conquering the Heathen Lands«: the Feast of Corpus Christi .....	216
4. Work hidden by Statistics .....	227
Missionary Nursing in colonial Togo .....	231
Nursing in the New Guinean Missionary Context .....	244
Excursus: Missionary Campaigns and Infanticide .....	258
Entangled Concepts: Medical Care, religious Service and social Practice .....	271
5. Refashioning Women, converting Souls .....	277
Catholic Girls' Schooling .....	282
Dress and »Cultivation« .....	303
Missionary Girls .....	323

6. Sexuality and the religious Politics of Diversity .....	341
Embodying Purity .....	351
Sister Virginie and the »Veil of Race« .....	362
Negotiating Difference .....	373
Conclusion .....	381
Bibliography .....	391
Archival Collections .....	391
Printed Primary Sources .....	394
Secondary Sources .....	395
List of Figures .....	407
Index .....	409

## Acknowledgments

This study presents the slightly revised version of my doctoral thesis »All for the greater Glory of Jesus and the Salvation of the immortal Souls!« German Missionary Nuns in Colonial Togo and New Guinea, 1897–1960« that was undertaken at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, where it was defended in the Department of History and Civilization in October 2010. As is always the case with a long-term research project – its completion was only possible due to the support and generosity of a range of people and institutions.

I would like to especially thank Prof. Dr. Giulia Calvi, who supervised my dissertation and has always been willing to discuss my work. Her perceptive observations considerably helped me sharpen my thoughts. I am also deeply grateful to Prof. Dr. Edith Saurer (†), who supported this thesis especially at its early stage, assisted in its progress and acted as a member of the Examining Board. Much to my regret I was not able to present her with the finished book. Sincere thanks are given to the other members of the Examining Board: Prof. Dr. Rebekka Habermas and Prof. Dr. Steve Smith. At the EUI, I gained by the interaction with numerous people, professors and colleagues. Besides I have benefited from the exchange on mission history with a range of scholars. I would like to thank Dr. Kokou Azamede, Christine Egger, Dr. Martina Gugglberger, Andreas Heil and Sabine Hübner, to name a few. Dr. habil. Peter Sebald's commentary on the book manuscript was extremely helpful; he was very generous with his expertise in the history of German Togo and his matchless knowledge about sources. During the phase of revision, I was in the fortunate position to be part of the interdisciplinary Junior Research Group »Transfer and Transformation of Missionaries' Images of Europe in Contact with the Other, 1700–1970« based at the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG) in Mainz and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The revision benefited considerably from discussions within the group and from the various conferences, lectures and workshops organized by the group. I am especially grateful to the group leader, Dr. Judith Becker, for providing me with such an inspiring intellectual environment as well as for commenting on the manuscript from a theologian's and church historian's perspective. The latter also applies to Dr. Rainer Vinke and Dr. Peter James Yoder. I am also grateful to Dr. Yoder and to Roswitha Fraller for assisting me with English revisions. The two academic departments of the IEG provided a wonderful working environment for the revision of the manuscript, and I am thus sincerely grateful to



Prof. Dr. Irene Dingel for accepting the manuscript for publication and honored that this study is appearing as a publication of the IEG. I thank Vanessa Brabsche for her work editing this volume.

This book would have been impossible without the generous assistance of archivists in several European countries, such as the archivists in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde and in the Propaganda Fide Historical Archives in Rome. I am deeply grateful to all Servants of the Holy Spirit, who have shared their archives with me. Research on this project began in St. Koloman in Stockerau, Austria, and was fueled by the interest that Sr. Heliéna Krenn developed for the project. I am especially grateful to the archivists in Rome, Sisters Benedicta Schrötel and Regina Rupprecht, who gave their time generously to facilitate my work. Meeting them has been an enriching experience beyond research purposes. I also sincerely thank all sisters in Rome for their hospitality. The same applies to the Servants of the Holy Spirit in Steyl, who granted me access to their fascinating collection of photographs. In 2012 I had the opportunity to visit the Roman generalate of the Society of the Divine Word. I especially benefited from the talks with missiologist and former New Guinea missionary Dr. Paul Steffen, SVD, who not only has a thorough knowledge of mission history but also has experienced parts of this history first-hand. Ultimately, I would like to express my gratitude to the Servants of the Holy Spirit's actual Mother Superior, Sr. Maria Theresia Hörnemann, for her consent to publish this study and to print selected photographs.

The realization of this book was facilitated by the support of various funding sources. My dissertation was funded through grants I received from the University of Vienna, the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research and the EUI. Its revision has been undertaken during my time as part of the Junior Research Group »Transfer and Transformation of Missionaries' Images of Europe in Contact with the Other, 1700–1970«, which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) within its research program »Europe seen from the outside«. This book has been published with a financial subsidy from the European University Institute.

Last but not least, I would particularly like to thank my family and friends for their loving support. I am deeply grateful to my parents, Elisabeth and Helmut Stornig as well as to Thomas Stornig, Annamaria Ladinig, Sigrid Simoner, Ingrid and Rudolf Krenn, Peter Nöst, Eva-Maria Eigenstiller, Sandra Schett and Michaela Pschierer-Barnfather for their friendship and the genuine interest that they have developed for my work.

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

---

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'Euvre 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

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

---

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>.

---

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

---

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, BAArch, R 1001/6537, p. 15.

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

30 Cf. Denkschrift, BAArch, 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. Josefine 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 Gregorianae) 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>.

---

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'

---

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 KUMARADROSS/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-

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-

---

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 PRODOLLIET, »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 Missionare 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

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 Weiblichkeiten. Konstruktionen von »Rasse« und Geschlecht im deutschen Kolonialismus*, Bielefeld 2007; BECHHAUS-GERST/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 Südseekolonien des Kaiserreichs, in: BECHHAUS-GERST/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

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

---

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 Hüwelmeier 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-

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 HÜWELMEIER, »Global Players – Global Prayers«. Gender und Migration in transnationalen religiösen Räumen, in: *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 100 (2004), pp. 161–175; Gertrud HÜWELMEIER, »Nach Amerika!« Schwestern ohne Grenzen, in: *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 16/2 (2005), pp. 97–115; Gertrud HÜWELMEIER, *Ordensfrauen unterwegs. Transnationalismus, Gender und Religion*, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 13 (2005), pp. 91–111; Gertrud HÜWELMEIER, *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 HÜWELMEIER, *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

---

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

---

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.

The last third of the nineteenth century witnessed a considerable increase in the active participation of women in the various Christian missions. Katharina Stornig focuses on the Catholic case, and particularly explores the activities and experiences of German missionary nuns, the so-called Servants of the Holy Spirit, in colonial Togo and New Guinea in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. Introducing the nuns' ambiguous roles as travelers, evangelists, believers, domestic workers, farmers, teachers, and nurses, Stornig highlights the ways in which these women shaped and were shaped by the missionary encounter and how they affected colonial societies more generally.

#### **The author**

Katharina Stornig is a research fellow at the Leibniz Institute of European History; currently she holds a scholarship from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research at the Austrian Historical Institute in Rome.

ISBN: 978-3-525-10129-2



[www.v-r.de](http://www.v-r.de)