Katharina Stornig
European University Institute

"You must first come here and wash the black men white." German missionary nuns in colonial Togo, 1897-1918

As mentioned in the introduction to this panel, missionaries were among the first Europeans who established more or less permanent connections to many non-western areas of the globe. Migration on the grounds of religion constituted a significant feature of western expansion in the long run. As Steven Kaplan has pointed out, even though the precise composition of the western communities in non-European settings varied across time and space, "there was rarely, if ever, a European presence without a missionary component".[1] The encounter with Western Christianity also represents a major theme in the history of contact between European and African societies. Recently, scholars have started to focus on missionaries as transnational actors and key players in the diverse cultural projects of colonialism.[2] Nowadays, the study of (the often globally linked) Christian institutions constitutes an expanding field of research; a trend that indicates its integration to mainstream historiographies on globalizing processes, such as colonialisms, migrations, modernization, cultural transfers and the production and circulation of colonial knowledge.

During the last decades, new approaches in the humanities and social sciences have opened exciting ways of thinking about modern mission history. At a moment, when historians of empires and anthropologists have moved away from studying colonial and indigenous societies as two opposed, culturally homogenous, groups to the study of complex interactions (that involved differences of race, class, gender and nation),[3] new research agendas have fuelled the interest in missionary archives. Inspired by postcolonial scholarship, which has introduced the notion of the colonial "encounter" and emphasized the connectedness of all members of colonial society through constant interaction, scholars have

[1] Cf. Steve Kaplan, "Introduction" in Steve Kaplan (ed), *Indigenous responses to Western Christianity* (New York and London) pp. 1-8, p. 1.
[2] Cf. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *On Revelation and Revolution. Vol. 1: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago and London, 1991) and *Vol. 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago and London, 1997); Thomas O. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism. A socio-historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots* (Bloomington, 1982); Fiona Bowie et al. (eds) *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions* (Oxford, 1993); Rebekka Habermas, "Mission im 19. Jahrhundert – Globale Netze des Religiösen" Historische Zeitschrift 56 (2008), pp. 629-679.
[3] Cf. Ann L. Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule" Comparative Studies in Society and History 31 (1989) No. 1, pp. 134-161, i.e. pp. 136-137.

come to see the rich archives of missionary institutions as important spots for the study of colonialisms and cultural change through sources of everyday life.[4]

Yet, notwithstanding the great variety of these records, historians of mission face two interrelated problems making use of them. First, like in most types of colonial archives, women are underrepresented. Consequently, for a long time historians have perceived colonizing and missionizing as male enterprises and only little attention was paid to the agency and experiences of women in the making of the colonial world. This is particularly true for the historiography on German colonialism in Africa, which has tended to conceptualize colonial space as predominantly male space.[5] Second, official missionary reports and publications contain the risk to obstruct our views as regards the diversity that characterized the individual institutions. Although most mission-sending societies must be characterized as what Thoralf Klein has called "transcultural institutions"[6], documents produced by Europeans dominate archival collections. Mostly, it was the pens of missionaries that recorded the voices and activities of indigenous people. These documents thus open up issues of representation and misrepresentation. As Nakanyike Musisi has pointed out, the politics of "seeing" and "writing" in colonial settings" has to be understood as "an interpretative process" which "took place in a historically and socioculturally charged period of unequal power relations".[7] And what applies to missionary knowledge production more generally, is particularly the case for the Catholic Church with its centralized and strictly hierarchic organizational form. After all, it was the heads of the ecclesiastical units who gave report to Rome or to colonial offices in Europe.

This paper pursues a distinct approach, for it discusses mission history in German Togo somewhat from "below" through the sources filed in the general archive of the Servants of the Holy Spirit, a German congregation of missionary nuns. These women played ambiguous roles in the mission venture, taking for granted their privileged position as "white Christians" on the hand but were yet subordinated to male religious and secular power on the other one. I will start by outlining the congregation's engagement in Togo. Then I will turn to a brief discussion of the sources produced by the nuns on location. Ultimately, I will turn to a

[4] Cf. Patricia Grimshaw and Peter Sherlock, "Women and Cultural Exchanges" in Norman Etherington (ed.) *Missions and Empire* (Oxford, 2005) pp. 173-193.
[5] Cf. Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst and Mechthild Leutner (eds), *Frauen in den deutschen Kolonien* (Berlin, 2009).
[6] Cf. Thoralf Klein, "Die Basler Mission in China als transkulturelle Organisation: Der Konflikt zwischen autoritärer Führung 'von oben' und synodaler Partizipation 'von unten' im Prozess der Indigenisierung, 1860-1930" in Artur Bogner et al. (eds) *Weltmission und religiöse Organisationen. Protestantische Missionsgesellschaften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg, 2004) pp. 639-663.
[7] Cf. Nakanyike Musisi, "The Politics of Perception or Perception as Politics? Colonial and Missionary Representations of Baganda Women, 1900-1945" in Jean Allman et al. (eds) *Women in African Colonial Histories* (Bloomington, 2002) pp. 95-115, i.e. pp. 95ff.

discussion of Catholic girls' education in Togo and try to point out how missionary records might help us to understand the multiple ways in which indigenous women engaged with Catholic institutions.

The Servants of the Holy Spirit congregation was established by Father Arnold Janssen, the founder of the first German Catholic mission-sending society for priests and monks (Society of the Divine Word, 1874), in the Dutch town of Steyl in 1889 with the particular goal to assist male missionaries by working towards the proselytization of females. The foundation appealed to many women and candidates from all over Germany and Austria applied for admission. Notwithstanding its strict selection procedure, by the turn of the century the congregation counted 201 members, who already scattered over four continents.[8] In 1897, the Servants of the Holy Spirit's first mission "among heathens", as they called it, was established in the prefecture apostolic Togo, which had been erected by Pope Leo XIII on the territory of the homonymous German colony in 1892. Up to 1912, they founded five women's convents with affiliated girls' schools and dispensaries mostly in the settlement area of what had come to be known as the Ewe-speaking population groups.[9] Two of the convents were situated on the economically important coast (Lomé in 1897 and Anécho in 1901) and three in the country's interior (Kpalimé and Atakpamé in 1905 and Kpandu in 1912). Apart from teaching and nursing, the nuns worked the land, provided the housework for themselves and the priests, acted as sacristans, staged Catholic feasts and processions and interacted with both western and indigenous people on location.

However, officially considered as the mere assistants to priests, the nuns' activities are largely invisible in colonial and Church archives. The colonial historiography on German Togo has done little to challenge this impression. While scholars have acknowledged the presence of Catholic women missionaries, they have either ignored their activities or subsumed their experiences under that of men.[10] In part, this can be explained by their research agendas that were marked by the overarching interest in the missions' impact on the arenas of politics or economy rather than the domains of day-to-day life, daily habits and meaning. Still, due to their distinct form of social organization as well as the importance of

[8] Cf. Salesiana Soete, *Geschichte der Missionsgenossenschaft der Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes* (Vienna, 1953).

[9] Cf. Kokou Azamede, *Transkulturationen? Ewe-Christen zwischen Deutschland und Westafrika, 1884-1939* (Stuttgart, 2010) pp. 22-33; 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: History of the Anlo-Ewe* (London, 1996).

[10] Cf. Andreas Eckl, "Grundzüge einer feministischen Missionsgeschichtsschreibung. Missionarsgattinnen, Diakonissen und Missionsschwestern in der deutschen kolonialen Frauenmission" in Bechhaus-Gerst and Leutner (eds), *Frauen in den deutschen Kolonien*, pp. 132-145.

writing practices to monastic culture, missionary nuns produced a great variety of sources, such as letters, reports, travelogues, chronicles and photographs.

Actually, nuns started to write almost immediately after they had left the congregation's European Motherhouse. The function of writing was multilayered. Alongside with the regular exchange of prayers, it served to bridge distance and to maintain monastic values such as coherence and congregational unity across continental borders. That way, superiors in Europe kept track of their subordinates' movements, attitudes and routines. Departing nuns, in turn, affirmed their bond to the congregation through writing and shared their mission experiences with home-staying colleagues by sending detailed, reflexive and partly humorous reports, which were read out in the Motherhouse during recreation times. Besides, all missionary nuns who occupied superior positions in the capacity as heads of a convent submitted reports to Europe on a regular basis. Apart from overviews of the development of the respective convent, these reports gave account of many aspects of religious life and local missionary practice during the period covered. In addition, alike in European monasteries, chronicles were written at the Togolese missionary convents.[11]

This paper suggests that an analysis of the missionary encounter through a female dominated archive contributes to our understanding of the workings of religion in colonial Togo, because it opens up a new angle introducing women and gender to the field. According to my starting point, these nuns were significant historical actors. As such, they not only formed part of but actively contributed to the making of the colonial missionary world and shaped and were shaped by its inherent tensions and the new forms of social and racial hierarchies it created. The nuns constituted a considerable part of the missionary personnel in German Togo in particular and of the western settler community more generally. Between 1897 and 1918, 51 Servants of the Holy Spirit moved to Togo, where they lived and worked side by side with 109 priests and monks and thus constituted more than 30% of the Catholic mission's European personnel.[12] In view of the generally small number of European settlers on location, the Catholic missionaries formed an important social group alongside with their Protestant counterparts, administrators, traders and merchants.[13] In January 1907, for instance,

[11] Cf. „Belehrungen und Empfehlungen für die Mission reisenden Schwester" in Arch.Gen.SSpS Tg Varia (1,2,3,5) – Belehrungen für Missionarinnen; 11. Due to the nuns' enforced departure from Togo at the end of 1917, however, only the chronicle of the nuns' regional headquarters in the colonial and Catholic capital Lomé is entirely preserved in the congregation's Roman archive.

[12] Cf. Karl Müller, *Geschichte der katholischen Kirche in Togo* (Steyl, 1958) pp. 503-519.

[13] Cf. Bettina Zurstrassen, *›Ein Stück deutscher Erde schaffen‹. Koloniale Beamte in Togo 1884-1914* (Frankfurt and New York, 2008) p. 49.

colonial administrators recorded 288 "whites" in Togo, only 44 of whom were women.[14] At the same time, 18 nuns stayed in the colony.[15] Besides, also some other facts about their stay in Togo underline the importance of their experiences and perceptions to mainstream colonial histories. Take for instance, their pattern of settlement in scattered missionary convents, the nuns' engagement in girls' education as well as their interaction with the indigenous population on a regular basis in, for instance, their capacity as nurses. Last but not least must be mentioned that the nuns can probably be identified as the group of colonial representatives that interacted closest with Togolese women and children, thus population groups that can hardly be traced in the writings of men. Hence, the sources allow us to address a crucial problem of all mission histories, which is the question of how to study the "other" side of the missionary encounter, namely the local population in general and its female half in particular. Even tough it was the pen of western nuns that recorded the vast majority of the documents in question and missionaries shared a secular discourse on cultural difference and constantly (re)produced the social categories in which these discourse operated, we should not interpret their positions as unambiguously hegemonic. Quite the contrary, the study of ego-documents and day-to-day reports allows us to see the limits of missionary power, when they give us, for instance, account of empty churches or classrooms. In addition, these sources are valuable documents, for they potentially allow us to disclose information about the lives of African girls and women in past times. Let me exemplify this by outlining the shifting path of mission endeavors with regard to girls' education as well as the ways in which Togolese girls and women engaged with the nuns and made use of mission Christianity in its religious and cultural forms.

Generally speaking, the Catholic mission in Togo named the sector of education as one of its most promising fields of work. Perceiving local social and religious practices (i.e. polygamy and those forms of animism and spiritualism the missionaries usually called "fetishism") as well as the absence of Christian mores as incompatible with Christian life norms, the missionaries focused on giving a religious education to young generations, who should provide the base for a new Christian society. The nuns established nurseries and girls' schools in all their areas of activity. On the contrary to boys' education which encompassed three types of schools (elementary, normal and craft's schools), Catholic girls' schooling was limited to elementary education and involved the training in a range of housewifery skills. In the eyes of the nuns, girls' schools constituted tools in the aspired creation of Christian family

[14] Cf. "Denkschrift über die Entwicklung der Schutzgebiete in Afrika und der Südsee im Jahre 1906/07" BArch, R 1001/6537, p. 15.
[15] Cf. APF N.S. Vol. 478, 113.

life and the promotion of western domesticity in the Togolese cultural setting. In particular, they promoted some sort of boarding education at their convents, for it allowed them to habituate their students on a day-to-day basis to what western nuns considered as a well regulated life for women. Summing up the Servants of the Holy Spirit'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

> *"instructed in Christian religion and mores, but also trained in housekeeping, sewing, ironing, washing, patching, darning and so force, until they can marry Christian youths, who were in part totally educated at our missionaries or at least visited the school."*[16]

Advancing a conservative, pre-industrial view of society, the nuns attempted to introduce a particular way of performing marriage, family and sexuality. Their ideas of femininity and masculinity related to the nuclear family, based on the indissoluble monogamous marriage and a marital division of labor, which assigned women's roles to the domestic domain. The nuns constructed Christian femininity around the image of the pious mother and housewife who dedicated herself to childrearing and the creation of a Catholic family home. In this vision, women appear as the key to change the moral and religious system in Togo in their capacity as mothers. Somewhat paradoxical, however, it was Catholic nuns, hence women who themselves had rejected marriage and motherhood, who functioned as the role models for indigenous girls to become Catholic wives and mothers.

Life at the women's convents took place in the geographically and socially confined space of the missionary compounds and was regulated by a daily sequence of prayer, study and domestic work. That way, the nuns aimed to control the lives of the converted girls whose labor, in turn, contributed to the mission's economic reproduction. Ideally, the girls' stay at the convents lasted until marriage to a spouse with the same religious and educational background. In the eyes of the nuns, the spheres of work, education and evangelization got blurred, since they understood work *as* education and declared both as implicit to successful evangelization. From the point of view of the indigenous population, however, missionary stations constituted the centers of Western culture whose significance went beyond the religious domain. Apart from being the centers of "parish" life, missionary stations provided access to literacy, western education and languages, medicine, goods, dress, technology and employment.

[16] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS Tg 03.2/1-03; Togo 1897-1913.

Interestingly, even tough the reports and letters contain frequent complaints about the low interest in girls' elementary schooling, the nuns in Togo reported on a stable indigenous demand for boarding education. In a retrospect report about the Servants of the Holy Spirit's activities in Togo (1922), the former head of the province stated that *"partly still heathen"* as well as *"Christian"* parents *"had totally given over"* their children for education at the convents.[17] Besides, the sources suggest that converted man, mostly mission-employed teachers, made use of missionary boarding education inasmuch as they placed their future brides at the convent for some sort of pre-marital training. According to the record, it was the teachers who, often educated or brought up in the social environment of a missionary station themselves, demanded this comprehensive religious and secular instruction of their brides-to-be.

Apart from religious instruction and elementary education, this type of missionary boarding education focused on the training in domestic skills. I suggest linking the indigenous demand for this educational form, which appears to have been most popular in the colonial capital and commercial center Lomé, to both social change and indigenous social practice (e.g. childhood marriage betrothal). Ultimately, it enabled converted western-educated men who had managed to make use of the emerging social division of labor in colonial Togo to marry their betrothed girls without hazarding social status or violating religious rules (according to which Christians had to marry Christians). Boarding education allowed Catholic men to choose non-converted spouses. The period of training varied greatly in duration and lasted between a couple of months and some years. In February 1903, for instance, a nun wrote with regard to one case in Lomé: *"Recently, when one of our teachers handed us his bride over for education he told me that she would have to stay at the mission for at least 2-3 years, because he won't like to have such a stupid broad."*[18] According to the chronicle, missionary teacher Andreas placed his Catholic bride Elisabeth at the women's convent in Lomé for *"further education"* in January 1903. Another entry in August 1905 recorded the couple's nuptials. Hence, Elisabeth had indeed stayed with the nuns for two and a half years previously to getting married.[19] Significantly, missionary writers did not question the passive roles assigned to women in this context but rather appreciated such initiatives by future Catholic husbands, for these men obviously valued (at least some of the) the mission's

[17] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 100 General Chapter 2 1922; 2-1000; Berichte der Territorialoberinnen: Togo.
[18] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS. 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz; Sister Georgia van Oopen, 13.2.1903.
[19] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 034 Tg 03.1/1a Chronik des Schwesternhauses in Lomé; p. 10 and p. 19 respectively.

religious-cultural goals that evolved around Christian ideas of gendered household organization.[20]

Apart from parents or future husbands, also the priests in Togo enrolled candidates from other parts of the country for boarding education in Lomé.[21] In such cases, the concrete circumstances of the girls' arrival were largely not recorded. Besides, the chronicler registered cases in which girls, who partly hailed from other areas, applied for admission on their own initiative.[22] On the eve of the nuns' expulsion from Togo in January 1918, the nuns in Lomé, Aného and Atakpamé reported on several young women who resided with them by their own choice and also after their school years were over. Generally speaking, (and this is not to neglect the often also coercive character of such arrangements) the record suggest that residence at the women's convents appealed to a considerable number of parents and young women, some of whom came from prominent coastal families. Even tough the chronicle tells us that several women also left the convents on their own initiatives, the nuns in Togo hardly complained about the lack of indigenous demand for boarding education. Quite the contrary, they used dismissal as a disciplinary means when missionary girls challenged the social or moral order of the compound.[23] The long-term head of the nuns in Togo characterized girls' boarding schooling as a truly successful undertaking and saw in the training of indigenous females for Catholic marriage the nuns' prime contribution to evangelization. She explained the attractiveness of this educational model by pointing out the prospect of a Christian marriage. For Sister Georgia, indigenous forms of marital relationships were based on female oppression and therefore less desirable than Christian marriages, which she characterized as based on the spouses' partnership. Therewith, she referred to a western discourse of cultural difference and hierarchical cultural comparison that linked women's fate to the Western civilizing mission.[24] Secondly, Georgia van Oopen recognized social and economic change in the region and depicted missionary boarding education as a tool for female social mobility. In her eyes, boarding school graduates enjoyed better chances on the marriage market. Thereby, she obviously referred to the pool of mission-educated converts who formed part of the newly emerging intellectual and professional elites in the rapidly changing society in coastal Togo.[25] According to Sister Georgia, Catholic missionary girls *"were the most wanted brides of the educationally advanced black gentlemen."* She went on, explaining her statement as follows:

[20] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS. 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz; Sister Georgia van Oopen, 20.11.1897.
[21] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 034 Tg 03.1/1a Chronik des Schwesternhauses in Lomé; p. 48.
[22] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 034 Tg 03.1/1a Chronik des Schwesternhauses in Lomé; p. 30.
[23] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS. 034 Tg 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz; Sister Georgia van Oopen, 9.1.1903.
[24] Cf. Laura Wildenthal, German Women for Empire 1884-1945 (Durham and London) p. 1.
[25] Cf. Knoll, *Togo under imperial Germany 1884-1914* (Stanford, 1978) pp. 104ff.

"Because it was commonly known and widespread that the girls educated at the Sisters' place enjoyed a solid education; as 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 even capable to stitch pretty paraments. Moreover some, naturally in return for extra payment, received piano- or reed organ lessons."[26]

While socio-economic arguments serve to explain the favorable attitudes towards missionary schooling in general, however, they hardly deliver a satisfactory explanation for the popularity of residence at the women's convents. Hence, I rather suggest looking at the way in which indigenous people made use of missionary gender arrangements. Adrian Hastings has suggested that the Christian message of human equality and the missionary form of social organization in Africa communicated converts in general and women in particular a "sense of freedom, of a co-operative effort in which men and women were strenuously engaged".[27] This connects to another theme that has been emphasized by scholars of Christian missions, who have pointed out the missionary station's significance as a space of protection for women or social dropouts.[28] Sandra Greene has argued that, whereas colonialism generally weakened the economic positions of Ewe women, it enhanced their possibilities to manage their marital affairs for instance with regard to better possibilities to divorce their husbands.[29] In our case, however, we must acknowledge that missionaries firstly objected to the marriage of Catholic women to non-Catholic men and secondly emphatically opposed divorce. Still, the records show that a stable number of Togolese women consciously favored life at the convent over getting married or returning to their families.

In order to explain this I suggest considering the nuns' way of life in form of a celibate community in which they resided, free from worries about husbands and children and in relative independence from men. This is precisely the point where recent feminist scholarship on nuns has tied in for it has related female monasticism to the emergence of a feminine self that set women beyond the relational terms of the family.[30] Accordingly, whether wanted or not, the nuns have introduced new cultural definitions of femininity to missionary settings merely through the example of their own lives. In German Togo, residence in the female dominated space of the women's convent obviously appealed to young women, some of

[26] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 100 General Chapter 2 1922; 2-1000; Berichte der Territorialoberinnen: Togo.
[27] Cf. Adrian Hastings, "Were Women a Special Case?" in: Bowie et al., *Women and Missions*, pp. 109-125, i.e. p. 111.
[28] Cf. Hastings, "Were women a special case?" pp. 111ff; Tabitha Kanogo, "Mission Impact on Women in Colonial Kenya" in Bowie et al. (eds) *Women and Missions*, pp. 165-186, i.e. pp. 177ff.
[29] Cf. Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity and Social Change*, pp. 156-158.
[30] Cf. Rose Helen Ebaugh, "Patriarchal Bargains and Latent Avenues of Social Mobility: Nuns in the Roman Catholic Church" Gender and Society 7 (1993) pp. 400-414; Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sister in Arms. Catholic Nuns through two Millennia* (Cambridge and London, 1996) i.e. pp. 6ff.

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 also after their formal period of education. The nuns' letters partly suggest discussing these extended convent communities as social support groups of women that, although basically structured by the colonizer-colonized social (and racial) divide, were also marked by companion relationships, affection and mutual efforts. We know that the nuns attended the marriages of their former "house girls" (as they used to call the girls who resided at the convents), who in turn maintained contact during their marital lives.[31] Individual missionary girls moreover stood out in the correspondence, for writers emphasized their important contribution to the functioning of the respective community. In 1905, it was a Togolese girl who nursed the entire community of nuns in Aného through a severe yellow fever epidemic due to which the whole area was put under quarantine.[32] In 1907, a nun in Atakpamé, who had contracted blackwater fever and was consequently forced to undertake the fife-day trip to Lomé carried in a hammock, acknowledged her genial gladness about the assistance of two indigenous girls who gave her company on the demanding journey.[33] Some writers related the missionary girls' disposition to assist the nuns during sickness to their affection for individuals. When Sister Ludgera, the obviously popular nursery teacher in Lomé, died from tuberculosis in 1908, it had again been a long-term "house girl" who had cared for her during her seven weeks of painful sickness. In return, the nuns in Lomé invited their colleagues in Europe to *"please"* the girl in question, for she "*was able to come to terms with the patient as well as a sister"* and provided the local community a substantial alleviation.[34] Interestingly, the nuns also related her concern for the patient's fate with the latter's popularity among the women of Lomé. A nun wrote, describing 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 heartbreakingly 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 shall our children do? O Sr. Ludgera!' We couldn't get a quiet moment. 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."*[35]

[31] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 034 TG 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908-1914; Sister Immaculata Göcke, 11.1.1909.
[32] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 034 TG 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900-1907; Sister Immaculata Göcke, 9.2.1905 and 25.3.1905.
[33] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 034 TG 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900-1907; Sister Euphemia, 10.9.1907.
[34] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 034 TG 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908-1914; Sister Thaddäa Brands, 25.7.1908.
[35] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 034 TG 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1908-1914; Sister Thaddäa Brands, 25.7.1908

Togolese girls and women moreover played active roles in the mission venture. They visited the towns and villages on Catholic behalf and mediated between the nuns and the nearby populations. Some graduates assisted their former teachers in the classrooms. However, when Prefect Apostolic Schöning suggested employing a former missionary girl as the first indigenous woman teacher in Lomé, Superior Provincial Georgia van Oopen reacted with reserve. Significantly, she explained this by stating that the woman in question was still an *"inexperienced girl"* in need of supervision. Notwithstanding the nun's reserve, Lina Quist became the Catholic mission's first indigenous woman teacher in January 1908[36] and other unmarried graduates, who usually continued to stay with the nuns, soon followed her example.[37] Between 1908 and 1918, s stable number of Togolese women taught at the Catholic girls' school in Lomé. Joint efforts or mutual affection between the nuns and their co-residents could moreover be observed at the end of 1917, when all German citizens were forced to leave the colony. According to the reports, the house girls, many of whom had decided against returning to their relatives but to stay with the last nuns until their actual departure, were sad and desperate. More importantly still, it was them who attempted to keep the nuns' work going after their departure. They continued to teach and administrated the resources. Ultimately, it was also three long-term missionary girls who kept staying at the women's convent after the last missionaries had departed for Europe.[38]

However, the missionary record also allows us to analyze the axes of race along which religious community were built. In the case of Togo, these became particularly obvious when the first indigenous women expressed interest in religious life. After having rejected the marriage proposal by a Catholic teacher in 1905, Magdalena, a graduate from the girls' school in Aného who had stayed the better part of her life at the convent, applied for admission to the congregation. Even tough the local nuns, who proudly called her "our Magdalena", described her as a "good" and "well-behaving" girl and important support,[39] Magdalena was not granted this desire. Rather she was encouraged to get married.[40] We may thus conclude that in early 20th century Togo, the image of the missionary nun was a "racialized" image, for she obviously was a "white" woman of western origin. Hence, missionary practice was built on an almost contradictory premise: Although the conversion of women was given great importance by the nuns who saw them as key figures causing moral and religious change, they refused

[36] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS Tg 034 01 Offizielle Korrespondenz 1896-1917; Sister Georgia van Oopen, 11.8.1910.
[37] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 034 Tg 03.1/1a Chronik des Schwesternhauses in Lomé; pp. 27, 34 and 54.
[38] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS 034 Tg 03/3: Kriegserlebnisse/Ausweisung; Sister Redempta Philips; undated; pp. 10-11.
[39] Cf. Arch.Gen.SSpS. 034 Tg 02 Briefe der Schwestern 1900-1907; Sister Immaculata Göcke, 10.12.1905.
[40] Cf. Immaculata Göcke, "Eine christliche Hausfrau im Heidenlande" in Missionsgrüße der Steyler Missionsschwestern Dienerinnen des Heiligen Geistes (1924) pp. 38-44,

Africans admission to their own institution. Even though the claim to transcend difference in the Church has constituted a crucial feature of Catholic doctrine from the outset, western missionaries interpreted ethnic diversity hierarchically and in terms of race. As indicated in the title of this paper, missionary writers developed the metaphorical depiction of conversion as an act of "washing white" African people (or simply "blacks" as nuns used to put it), an expression that obviously did not demand any further explanation. Therewith, they referred to a European discourse of difference that related "white" and "black" hierarchically and moreover defined "whiteness" as the norm and constitutive to western Christian identity.