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# Negotiating Diversity. Catholic Nuns as Cosmopolitans

Gertrud Hüwelmeier

Despite the fact that transnational migration and the spread of religious diasporas all over the world are challenging anthropological ideas about universalism and humanity, in recent discussions of the concept of cosmopolitanism little attention has been paid to religion. Furthermore, there is a remarkable absence of women within the debate on cosmopolitanism, as if their voices have been lost in the universe of new global orders. Yet women, and in particular women religious, play a crucial role in expressing solidarity to humankind, practicing charity, doing social work, and providing education to the poor and powerless. Nowadays, the Catholic church and women religious as part of the church no longer aim principally to save souls which would otherwise be lost through conversion to Catholicism, but also seek to empower people in the struggle for human rights and dignity.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a transnational religious congregation of Catholic sisters, this paper explores the emergence of cosmopolitanism as a practice or competence from a historical and anthropological perspective.<sup>1</sup> Cosmopolitanism is not just a disposition or an orientation, «a willingness to engage with the Other», but also «a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting».<sup>2</sup> It is a mode of behavior, of «participating in many worlds, without becoming part of them».<sup>3</sup> Nuns' relationships to a plurality of cultures correspond to the new role of the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council, the public role of a global church in world affairs. Although the «centralisation and homogenization of Catholicism by the Second Vatican Council and by the general process of *aggiornamento* to moder-

<sup>1</sup> Steven Vertovec/Robin Cohen, Introduction. Conceiving Cosmopolitans, in: Steven Vertovec/Robin Cohen (eds.), *Conceiving Cosmopolitans. Theory, Context, and Practice*, Oxford 2002, 1–22, here 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ulf Hannerz, *Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture*, in: M. Featherstone (ed.), *Global Culture. Nationalism and modernity*, London 1990, 237–251, here 238–239.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process*, London 1994, here 204.

nity»<sup>4</sup> should not be ignored, openness to other cultures – understood as a *social* process<sup>5</sup> as well as a *historical* process – has transformed the social organization and power relations within congregations of women religious and made them more diverse than ever before. In the 1960s, women from non-western countries began to enter western Catholic religious congregations. In contrast to pre-Vatican times, when uniformity and homogeneity were central themes in female religious orders, there is now a shift to ethnic diversity and divergent cultural experiences, a consequence of migration, frequent travel and encounters with people from different countries. Catholic sisters, in particular those in leading positions, have become cosmopolitan elites, mediating between the local, regional and national loyalties of co-sisters with different ethnic and social backgrounds.

Women religious, who have long traveled between continents, have developed a growing awareness of being transnational over the last ten years. Compared to their activities in the 19th century, this new perspective is challenging their role as actors in the process of rapid globalization. Their mission statements, widely discussed and reconceptualized at the beginning of the 1990s, are now based on a cosmopolitan perspective and focus on global democracy and justice together with human dignity. This, for example, is the «international mission statement», published in 1994, of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ (PHJC), a transnational congregation of women religious:

«As an apostolic congregation, we  
 -minister with and to the poor, the children, the elderly, the sick and the unwanted  
 -use our spiritual gifts, material resources and energy for the mission of the Church in society  
 -advocate for human rights and dignity  
 -work for environmental order and universal peace.»<sup>6</sup>

This mission statement, together with new cosmopolitanist practices such as mediation and dialogue between national and global cultures,<sup>7</sup> raises issues from anthropological and historical perspectives. The first part of this paper outlines the cross-border connections between women religious in the 19th century, highlighting the maintenance of contacts between European and American branches.

<sup>4</sup> José Casanova, *Globalizing Catholicism and the Return to a «Universal» Church*, in: Rudolph Hoebner/Susanne Piscatori/James Piscatori (eds), *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, Oxford 1997, 121–143.

<sup>5</sup> Pnina Werbner, *Global Pathways. Working Class Cosmopolitans and the Creation of Transnational Ethnic Worlds*, in: *Social Anthropology*, 7/1 (1999), 17–36, here 18.

<sup>6</sup> Archives of the provincial house of the PHJC in Bangalore, where I carried out fieldwork in 2004/2005. This paper is based on a research project on «Transnational religion – women's congregations as actors in the process of globalization». It was financed by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) and affiliated with the Freie Universität Berlin, Institut für Ethnologie, in cooperation with Prof. Dr. Ute Luig. Fieldwork was carried out at several sites, in the «motherhouse» in Germany, in the Netherlands and England, and in the «province» house near Chicago, USA as well as in Bangalore, India. A first draft of this article was presented at the ASA Diamond jubilee conference on „Cosmopolitanism and Anthropology“.

<sup>7</sup> Vertovec/Cohen, *Introduction* (see footnote 1), here 17.

The second part deals with the challenges and consequences of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), when women from India and Africa entered «western» women's congregations. In accordance with ethnic, linguistic, and cultural plurality, the last part focuses on the question of how women religious negotiate diversity.

### *Transatlantic connections in the 19th century*

The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ (PHJC) are a transnational congregation of women religious whose motherhouse is located in Germany, with branches in other parts of Europe, the US, Mexico, Brazil, India, Kenya and Nigeria. Founded in Germany in 1851 by a woman from the lower middle classes, the community grew rapidly at that time.<sup>8</sup> From the very beginning, the PHJC were translocal, transregional, and transnational in their perspectives. As a result of the Kulturkampf, political and religious conflicts between the Protestant-dominated German nation state (founded in 1871) and the Catholic Church in Rome, and following the great migration of millions of people from Europe to the US, many sisters left their country of origin in the final decades of the 19th century and became migrants with a religious mission.<sup>9</sup> Although most of them never returned to Europe they maintained strong connections to their motherhouse in Germany, forging social and religious ties across national borders. Despite being divided by the ocean, the elites of the PHJC, the Mother General and her assistants in Germany on the one hand, and the regional superior and her assistants in the US on the other hand, succeeding in building a sense of unity.

These sisters enacted a way of life quite different from middle class ideals of womanhood and motherhood, characterized by adherence to religious rule and by local, regional, and transnational power hierarchies. Each convent had a local superior, the female head of the household. The regional superior, one level up, lived in the province house, the centre for administration and the training of novices. Together with her assistants, the regional superior visited all the convents regularly and made decisions on financial and political matters, such as the closing of convents, the moving of sisters to other places, or the founding of new branches. Furthermore, the provincial superior remained in constant contact with the German motherhouse, mainly through written correspondence. General Superior Catherine Kasper responded to letters from her co-sisters in the U.S., reminding her «daughters» to obey the rule, to pray, and to do their work. Due to the high cost of travel and with her own health problems, Catherine never visited her sisters in the U.S.. Through letters she maintained contact and a sense of col-

<sup>8</sup> For more details see Gertrud Hüwelmeier, *Närrinnen Gottes. Lebenswelten von Ordensfrauen*, Münster 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Gertrud Hüwelmeier, *Ordensfrauen unterwegs. Gender, Transnationalismus und Religion*, in: *Historische Anthropologie*, 13/1 (2005), 91–110; Gertrud Hüwelmeier, «Nach Amerika!» Schwestern ohne Grenzen, in: *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 16/2 (2005), 97–115.

lectivity, a community-consciousness,<sup>10</sup> and a shared imagination. The community was «re-created through the mind»<sup>11</sup>, recalling the common «origin» and pointing to the same religious «roots». In 1886 the Mother Superior wrote to the sisters in America as follows:

«If I could only go once to America, if this were the holy will of the Lord. For me it seems there will not be anything any more. I am so often in America, more often as the days go by. In all my poor prayers I bring together the beloved sisters [...]. We live and work in one religious community. We all have the spirit of a Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ, have one rule. The more we live and work in this one spirit, the closer we are to one another. [...].»<sup>12</sup>

In another letter she wrote (Letter 10.12.88):

«[...] in my mind I travel to America to my beloved sisters several times a day [...].»<sup>13</sup>

Catherine Kasper regretted not having face-to face contact with her American daughters but,

«although I do not know our American sisters personally, they are very close to me. I feel a great desire to get to know them. [...] In my mind I visit you every day, and more often in prayer.»<sup>14</sup>

Writing letters, sending prayers across the ocean, and participating in the lives of others across international borders can be best interpreted within the framework of a «transnational social field»<sup>15</sup>. This concept focuses on personal social relationships by which migrants continue to be part of the social life in their home countries while they are simultaneously incorporated into activities in their new surroundings. These relationships often encompass immigrants as well as persons born in the country of origin who have not migrated. Transmigrants are persons «who migrate and yet maintain or establish familial, economic, religious, political or social relations in the state from which they moved, even as they also forge such relationships in the new state or states in which they settle»<sup>16</sup>. Members of womens' congregations, like family members who live dispersed around

<sup>10</sup> Steven Vertovec, *Conceiving and researching transnationalism*, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22/2 (1999), 447–462.

<sup>11</sup> Robin Cohen, *Diasporas and the nation state. From victims to challengers*, in: *International Affairs*, 72 (1996), 507–520, here 516.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to America, 18.12.1887, Archives of the Motherhouse, translated by G.H.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from 10.12.1888.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from 1890, Archives of the Motherhouse, translated by G.H.

<sup>15</sup> Nina Glick Schiller/Georges E. Fouron, *Terrains of blood and nation. Haitian transnational social fields*, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22/2 (1999), 340–366.

<sup>16</sup> Schiller/Fouron, *Terrains of blood and nation* (see footnote 14), here 344; Georges E. Fouron/Nina Glick Schiller, *All in the Family. Gender, transnational Migration, and the Nation-State*, in: *Identities*, 7/4 (2001), 539–582.



the globe,<sup>17</sup> participate in the daily lives of their co-sisters in Europe or America. They feel both emotionally and religiously connected though physically separated by the ocean.

The transatlantic connections of German sisters living in the US in the late 19th century were mainly oriented towards the motherhouse in Germany. For this reason the relationship between the US province and Germany can be considered unidirectional. The motherhouse sent German sisters to the US on a number of occasions, particularly in the early years. Prayers were held in the German language, and the chronicle was written in German. A cosmopolitan consciousness in the sense of a disposition or an attitude, «a willingness to engage with the other»<sup>18</sup>, did not exist at that time. The sisters in the US worked mostly with migrants from Germany. Many of the sisters were home-oriented, preserving loyalty to the German state or their cultural identity. As Hollinger has pointed out, «...the cosmopolite or cosmopolitan in mid-nineteenth century America was a well-traveled character probably lacking in substance»<sup>19</sup>. If «substance» in Hollinger's sense referred to «loyalty to a single nation state or cultural identity»<sup>20</sup>, it could be said that German sisters living and working in the US were clearly attached to their country of origin. The young aspirants and postulants who entered the US branch in the early years had German names, had been born in Germany and had migrated to the US with their parents. Shortly after the PHJC settled in the US, a young woman from Ireland entered the group, but she left the next day «probably because of a lack of vocation»<sup>21</sup>. More probably she left because she realized it would be difficult to be the only Irish nun in a group of German sisters.

Throughout the next decades, more and more young American-born women entered the congregation in the US, and slowly a sense of diversity came into the German-oriented, American branch of the PHJC. By the outbreak of World War I, most of the German sisters had been «Americanized». Political loyalties were directed to the US, but Germany was still a point of reference. When America declared war on Germany in 1916, the sisters wrote in their chronicles:

«On 6th April [...] we heard the sad news, that America, our first Fatherland, has declared war on Germany, this is the reason why we are all very much shocked».<sup>22</sup>

All sisters of German origin had relatives in Germany, brothers, cousins and fathers involved in the war. The German sisters belonged to the same congregation as their American co-sisters, their motherhouse was located in Germany, their foundress was German. At the same time, they were aware of the anti-German sentiments in the US. After World War I, sisters of German origin adopted Ame-

<sup>17</sup> Deborah Bryceson/Ulla Vuorela (eds.), *The Transnational Family. New European Frontiers and Global Networks*, Oxford 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Hannerz, *Cosmopolitans and Locals* (see footnote 2), here 239.

<sup>19</sup> David A. Hollinger, 1995, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, New York. 1995, 89.

<sup>20</sup> Vertovec/Cohen, *Introduction* (see footnote 1), here 6.

<sup>21</sup> Chronicle PHJC 1869, Archives of the Motherhouse.

<sup>22</sup> Chronicle PHJC 1917, Archives of the Motherhouse.

rican citizenship. Although new generations of novices, American-born but mostly with German backgrounds, had entered the American branch after 1870, few of these came to hold positions of authority. Remarkably, the elite of the US province remained exclusively of German origin until 1932.<sup>23</sup> After World War I the sisters maintained their social and religious ties to Europe by visiting the German motherhouse on a number of occasions. The sisters traveled by steamship, taking about ten days to cross the ocean. They stayed in the German motherhouse for almost two months before returning to the US. Every six years the US elite participated in the General Chapter, but this stopped completely during World War II.

From 1868 until the Second Vatican Council, the American superiors visited all US branches regularly. The chronicles are full of reports about who was traveling from X to Y, from there to Z, coming back and leaving again a few days later. Although there was a conscious idea of belonging to a global Catholic Church, spanning borders from its beginnings, the sisters had little or no consciousness of being cosmopolitan or global in their perspectives. Instead, the elite emphasized the spiritual and cultural unity of the religious congregation, which at that time meant to behave, think, and pray like the sisters in Germany.

### *The Globalization of the Catholic Church*

After the Second Vatican Council an increased internationalization and globalization of Catholicism took place. «The Roman Catholic Church has ceased being a predominantly Roman and European institution. Along with the demographic increase in Catholic population from 100 million in 1900 to 600 million in 1960 and to close to one billion in 1990, there has been a notable displacement of the Catholic population from the Old to the New World and from North to South».<sup>24</sup> In addition the Roman Catholic Church has recognized the principle of religious freedom and changed its attitude toward the modern secular environment. It has also assumed the modern doctrine of human rights, which «implies the recognition that modern democracy is not only a form of government but a type of polity based normatively on the universalist principles of individual freedom and individual rights»<sup>25</sup>.

Many of these changes affected the religious orders, too, in particular with regard to individual freedom. Within the community of the PHJC, tensions emerged and the American sisters discussed separation from the German province. Disagreements arose about a number of issues: many American sisters, particularly the younger ones, strove for modernization, not tradition; they wanted to wear ordinary clothes, not the habit; they preferred curls, not veils. They

<sup>23</sup> Anita Specht, *The power of Ethnicity in a Community of Women Religious. The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ in the United States 1868–1930*, in: *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 19/1 (2001), 53–64.

<sup>24</sup> José Casanova, *Public Religions in the modern world*, Chicago 1994, 135.

<sup>25</sup> Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 24), 136.

asked for democratization of convent life with transparency in decision-making and were no longer willing to submit to the instructions given by the German motherhouse. They were making their own decisions and wearing ordinary clothes long before they received official permission. In this they followed their sisters from the Netherlands, some of whom were much more worldly than their German co-sisters. These tensions should be understood within the context of the transformation of the Catholic Church in America after the Second Vatican Council and the more liberal ideas of American culture and society. American Catholics were affected by «the educational and occupational revolution associated with the coming of postindustrial society, by the youth revolt and the counterculture of the 1960s, and by the anti-Vietnam War movement. There is no doubt that a new and activist intellectual stratum emerged within American Catholicism in the 1960s, whose members were to be found among bishops, priests, nuns, and laity alike and who became the carriers of the new Catholicism»<sup>26</sup>.

### *Women from India*

The 1960s and 1970s had been shaped by struggles about the degree of «worldliness» the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ could bear, and many young sisters left the community, both in the US and in Germany, in a trend evident in all Catholic orders worldwide. At the same time, young women from India came to the German motherhouse asking for admission. They wanted to become Poor Handmaids and began their postulancy, the first stage of becoming a sister, in 1963. In addition to tensions between American and German sisters, the arrival of new members with a different ethnic background had a number of consequences for the power relations among western and non-western women religious and for the negotiation of conflicts among Poor Handmaids of different ethnic and class or caste backgrounds.

When their novitiate was over, Indian sisters were trained as nurses, midwives, and doctors and returned to India to found hospitals, boarding schools, and leprosy treatment centers. The Indian sisters also worked in girls' and women's education. In the 1990s, many years after they had first entered the community, they asked for more independence from the German motherhouse. They wanted their own novitiate in India; their own government, that is, their own provincialate and leadership team, their own candidates and elections in India. The Generalate in Germany decided to give them full autonomy.

In the 1970s, separation of the US province from the German Motherhouse did not occur because of a special event in Rome, the beatification of the foundress of the PHJC.<sup>27</sup> Some US sisters have said that if the beatification had not taken place at that time, they would have split from Germany. In 1978 many sisters from America traveled to Europe to attend the beatification ritual in Rome.

<sup>26</sup> Casanova, *Public Religions* (see footnote 24), 186.

<sup>27</sup> Hüwelmeier, *Närrinnen Gottes* (see footnote 8).



Before this, with their co-sisters from the Netherlands, England, and India, they visited the motherhouse in Germany, where many of them met for the first time. The sisters visited the small chapel where the foundress had her first visions and walked along the paths she had walked along a hundred years before. The Poor Handmaids were looking for «roots and routes».<sup>28</sup> Seeing and touching the shrine of their spiritual mother and forging personal relationships with sisters from different countries and cultures helped to overcome tensions.

In Rome, at the center of the universal Catholic Church, the sisters consciously became aware of themselves as an international group. From 1980 on, the General Leadership, the elite of the PHJC, held new annual meetings with provincial teams and delegates of all the different countries. A group of thirty to forty sisters started to meet regularly to discuss the future of their community and draft a new mission statement. They prayed together and established personal contacts. A new collectivity and a community consciousness emerged, together with an awareness of being a transnational group. English was introduced as the main language for meetings and travel became commonplace for many members, no longer a privilege of the elite of the PHJC. Ordinary sisters also began participating as delegates. During the meetings and as a consequence of personal encounters, the sisters came to understand their cultural differences and started talking about class, history, ethnicity, and caste. They negotiated new perspectives on their general leadership and decided to make it a more international group.

### *Dealing with diversity*

Until 1983, the elite of the PHJC, the Generalate in the German Motherhouse, was German. Membership in the Generalate changed after the American sisters claimed equal rights: two of the four assistants in the general leadership group should be American sisters. This was rejected but one American sister was elected in 1983. She moved to the German motherhouse, though she spoke little German. Debate continued in the following years and in 1995 the first American sister was elected General Superior. Her assistants came from the Netherlands, the US, India, and Germany. In 2001 a Dutch sister assumed office as General Superior, and she also works in an «international» team, as the sisters call it. The responsibility of the General Superior and her assistants is to preserve and to develop the spirit of the PHJC in all branches of the community and to prepare the conference topics for the meetings of the superiors and delegates from the different countries. Questions about the consequences of globalization, in particular the growing poverty in all parts of the world, together with issues of peace and justice are now on the agenda of the PHJC. Increasing consciousness of political crises all over the world, violence, war, conflicts among religious groups, trafficking, migration and other cross-border problems has contributed to a global view and to new concepts in the daily work of the sisters. These concepts differ from country to country. In Germany the work focuses on the elderly. In India

<sup>28</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London 1993.

the sisters have built new schools in remote areas to provide education to Christian, Muslim and Hindu children. Special programs have been developed to support women's self-help groups in the most neglected areas in various parts of India. Indian sisters are also engaged in HIV/AIDS-awareness programmes. In the US new projects have been created to support drug-addicted African-American single mothers. In Chicago sisters are working with Hispanics, most of whom live in the very poor regions of the town, where youth gangs from rival neighborhoods fight against each other. In Brazil sisters organize soup kitchens in the poor neighborhoods of large cities. In Kenya much help is needed to support people suffering from Malaria and HIV/AIDS. With their life and work in different parts of the world, and their debates about globalization, increasing poverty, war, and political and religious conflicts all around the globe, the PHJC nowadays are true cosmopolitans in the sense that they exhibit «a culturally open disposition and interest in a continuous engagement with one or the other cosmopolitan project».<sup>29</sup> They have a sense of «commitment to belonging to the world as a whole».<sup>30</sup>

The common stereotype of cosmopolitans suggests «the privileged, bourgeois, politically uncommitted elites», among others «wealthy jet-setters, corporate managers, intergovernment bureaucrats, artists, tax dodgers, academics and intellectuals»<sup>31</sup>. Catholic sisters, often seen at international airports, are not at all wealthy jet-setters, nor do they belong to a new global economic elite of cosmocrats.<sup>32</sup> They are on the move for religious reasons. They are not cosmopolitans because they participate in a global consumer culture, but because their perspective entails «relationships to a plurality of cultures»<sup>33</sup>. Moreover they are very much aware of questions of nationalism, globalization, and trans-border activities. At their transnational meetings in Germany, the US, Mexico or India, these are the topics of the day.

The Indian sisters in particular are experiencing nationalism, interstate and cross-border migration and religious fundamentalism. Comparing their activities in India with those of the German and American sisters, Indian sisters claim to be truly «international». They talk about the diversity of cultures in their home country: 28 different states, more than 400 languages and dialects, long distances between north and south India. Within India, sisters travel by train, not by air, and very often it takes three to five days to reach the convents of co-sisters in remote areas of the northern regions. With this in mind they pose the question: Who is really thinking in a global perspective? Who is crossing cultural and linguistic borders all the time? And who is working with the poor? Practicing the «real internationality» that is so much on the agenda of the PHJC, Indian sisters experience a different cosmopolitanism compared to their western co-sisters.

<sup>29</sup> Hannerz, *Cosmopolitans and Locals* (see footnote 2).

<sup>30</sup> John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, Cambridge 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Vertovec/Cohen, Introduction (see footnote 1), here 6.

<sup>32</sup> John Micklethwait/Adrian Wooldridge, *A Future Perfect. The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalization*, London 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Hannerz, *Cosmopolitans and Locals* (see footnote 2), here 239.

This may be labeled an «Indian cosmopolitanism», a cosmopolitan humanism, that transcends religious, ethnic, caste and class differences and that is, like post-colonial Africa, off the «cosmopolitan map for Kant or the Stoics»<sup>34</sup>.

Besides the self-perception of the Indian sisters of being genuinely «international» in the way they practice their social work in many of the Indian states and in the way they live their convent life by mixing sisters from different Indian cultures, they are aware that they are financially dependent on their western co-sisters. Without this financial support for living and working in India, for founding new branches, buying land, building new houses, and creating social projects for the poor, sisters in India could hardly survive. Although the Indian province is politically independent of the Generalate in Germany in the sense that they began electing their own provincial leadership team in 2001, the Indian sisters need remittances from the sisters in Germany, the US, the Netherlands and England, money that is sent to India via the Generalate. It will be a long time before these postcolonial structures disappear.

Within their convents, the PHJC try to enact a «cosmopolitan practice». The Generalate, the members of the elite, have constituted themselves as «cosmopolitans», promoting tolerance and diversity within their daily life, their prayers, and their work for the future of the congregation. The term cosmopolitanism recognizes «worldly, productive sites of crossing; complex, unfinished paths between local and global attachments» and «presupposes encounters between worldly historical actors willing to link up aspects of their complex, different experiences»<sup>35</sup>. In this way, Catholic sisters as female elites are cosmopolitans: coming from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, they live, work, and pray together, travel a great deal, visit all the branches of their congregation around the globe, write reports, and create new spiritual perspectives with future projects that take into account the changing world.

Once the Generalate in Germany, the elite of the PHJC, had conceptualized their way of living as cosmopolitan nearly ten years ago, other branches followed their example. New convents emerged in which sisters from Europe, India, Kenya, and Brazil lived and worked in one group, whether in Latin America, in Africa, in India, or in Europe. They are willing to experience and to share cultural difference and, simultaneously, a common heritage, that is, the charisma of their foundress. For example, a sister from India is working as a novice mistress in Kenya, and a sister from the US as a novice mistress in Brazil and Mexico. US sisters have been working in refugee camps in Thailand and Cambodia, as nurses in India and Africa, and sisters from India are working with migrants from Sri Lanka in the Netherlands as well as with residents in homes for elderly people or with handicapped people in Germany.

<sup>34</sup> Carol A. Breckenridge/Sheldon Pollock/Homi K. Bhabha/Dipesh Chakrabarty (eds.), *Cosmopolitanism*, Durham/London 2002, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Vertovec/Cohen, Introduction (see footnote 1), here 8; James Clifford, *Mixed Feelings*, in: Peng Cheah/Bruce Robbins (eds.), *Cosmopolitics. Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, Minneapolis 1998, 362–70.

Part of these cosmopolitan practices are the «culture exchange programs» that were set up by the Generalate in 1994 in order to increase awareness of being an international congregation. Sisters who do not assume office can participate in these programs. With members from various countries, each group travels around the globe for six weeks to visit their co-sisters, to live and to pray together, to cook and to eat as well as to experience community life in Mexico or in Brazil, in India or in the US. These programs are very expensive, but without knowing each other personally and without the knowledge of each other's cultures, the sisters would hardly be able to live and to work in a global setting.

One of the future cosmopolitan projects is a common training program for the novices. Nowadays, there are no more novices entering the congregation in western countries, but there are many in India and Africa, some in Brazil and Mexico. Novice mistresses of all continents meet regularly in the German motherhouse or elsewhere to discuss the new program. Part of the idea is to bring the novices together in a common place for some time, whether in the bush in Kenya or remote areas in India. Young women from Africa, Latin America, and India must experience the cultural background of the others and will later be able to live and work in different countries. The sites of transition and the meeting places of the sisters are the airports of Bangalore, Delhi, Chicago, Mexico City, London or Frankfurt, the destination is the bush, and the aim is to become aware of belonging to a transnational congregation of women religious.

After election as a member of the elite, sisters have to leave their «home» convents and their jobs as social workers, nurses or teachers and settle in the appropriate «places of power». They become transnational migrants. What happens when a member of the Generalate or the provincialate is no longer part of the elite? Sisters assume office for only six years and can be reelected for another six years, but then they must leave office and will become an «ordinary» sister again. One of the superiors told me the greatest problem for her was to remove all the knowledge and the power she had accumulated for many years. Going back to the «roots», to the charisma of the foundress, working with poor and marginalized people, is perceived as a great challenge after traveling for so many years and having spiritual responsibility for the congregation for such a long time. Interestingly, the former General Superiors, after working in the Generalate in Germany, did not return to their countries of origin but started working on different continents. The German General Superior went to Brazil to serve the poor in the soup kitchen and the American General Superior left for Kenya to teach children in the bush.

### *Conclusion*

Although the Catholic Church was global from its very beginnings, its public role in the world changed after the Second Vatican Council. As a result, the Catholic Church became more political than ever before, engaging in the expansion of a global civil society. The opening up to the world affected not only the



laity and the priests, but also the religious orders, in particular the congregations of women religious. Most of them were founded in the 19th century, mainly oriented toward serving the poor in Europe and the US. At that time and up until the Second Vatican Council, their perspective was not cosmopolitan.

A cosmopolitan view among Catholic sisters emerged after the Second Vatican Council, when the Catholic Church globalized itself in a new way, when people from non-western countries were encouraged to participate in the Catholic Church, when conversion to Catholicism was no longer one of the main interests, and when tolerance towards others' religions was on the agenda. Starting in the 1960s, women from Africa, Latin America, and Asia began entering the western congregations of women religious and made them a transnational group. Sisters began to transform Christian humanism from charity into a more active engagement in the world. The cosmopolitics they are engaged in include an awareness of class and caste problems within and across nation-states, of the growing poverty in the world, of cultural differences, of diversity and unity, and of racism. Through education, self-help groups, and awareness programs for all they try to contribute to «a civilization of love».<sup>36</sup> By negotiating diversity within their own congregations as well as contributing to global justice and human dignity in their social work in various parts of the world, they practice a cosmopolitanism from below, thus transcending ethnic and national boundaries.

#### *Negotiating Diversity. Catholic Nuns as Cosmopolitans*

In the 19th century members of Catholic female orders were already crossing local and national frontiers, even though they were not members of missionary orders. They maintained ongoing contacts with their fellow sisters in other lands and travelled between the distant branches of their community from Europe to the US and vice versa. But it was only long after the Second Vatican Council, and after many women from Asia and Africa had joined European-based orders that these sisters started to develop a trans-national and cosmopolitan consciousness.

This paper examines the transnationalization of women religious from a historical and anthropological perspective using ethnological field study in a women's order with branches in Europe, the US, Latin America, Africa and Asia. The study focuses on the negotiation processes arising from ethnic and cultural diversity together with the practice of a bottom-up cosmopolitanism.

#### *Ethnische und kulturelle Vielfalt. Katholische Ordensfrauen als kosmopolitische Akteure*

Bereits im 19. Jahrhundert überschritten katholische Ordensfrauen lokale und nationale Grenzen, selbst wenn sie nicht Mitglieder von Missionsorden waren. Sie hielten kontinuierlichen Kontakt mit ihren Mitschwestern in anderen Ländern und reisten zwischen den verstreuten Zweigen ihrer Gemeinschaften in Europa und den USA hin und her. Doch erst lange nach dem zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil, nachdem viele Frauen aus Asien und Afrika in Europa gegründete Ordensgemeinschaften eintraten, entwickelten Schwestern ein transnationales und kosmopolitisches Bewusstsein.

Auf der Basis ethnologischer Feldforschung in einer weiblichen Ordensgemeinschaft mit Dependancen in Europa, den USA, Lateinamerika, Afrika und Asien untersucht dieser Artikel die Transnationalisierung von Ordensfrauen in historischer und anthropologischer Perspektive. Im Zentrum stehen die Aushandlungsprozesse von ethnischer und kultureller Diversität sowie die Praxis eines Kosmopolitanismus von unten.

<sup>36</sup> PHJC, Provincial directory, India 2003.



*Les négociations de la diversité. Religieuses catholiques cosmopolites*

Au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle déjà, des religieuses catholiques franchissaient les frontières locales et nationales, même sans faire partie d'ordres missionnaires. Elles maintenaient des contacts continus avec leurs consœurs d'autres pays et voyageaient pour visiter leurs communautés ramifiées de par l'Europe et les USA. Ce n'est cependant que longtemps après le second Concile du Vatican, alors que de nombreuses femmes d'Asie et d'Afrique avaient rejoint les ordres religieux fondés en Europe, que des sœurs développèrent une conscience transnationale et cosmopolite.

Sur la base d'une recherche de terrain ethnologique dans un ordre religieux féminin ayant des dépendances en Europe, aux USA, en Amérique latine, en Afrique et en Asie, cet article analyse la transnationalisation de religieuses d'un point de vue historique et anthropologique. Les processus de négociation de la diversité ethnique et culturelle, ainsi que la pratique d'un cosmopolitisme d'en bas, se trouvent au centre de cette analyse.

*Schlüsselbegriffe – Mots clés – Keywords*

Transnationalismus – transnationalisme – transnationalism, Migration – migration – migration, Globalisierung – globalisation – globalization, transatlantische Verbindungen – connections transatlantiques – transatlantic connections, Kosmopolitanismus – cosmopolitanisme – cosmopolitanism, Vielfalt – diversité – diversity, Ordensfrauen – religieuses – women religious, Zweites Vatikanisches Konzil – second Concile du Vatican – Second Vatican Council, Anthropologie – anthropology – anthropology, Geschichte – histoire, history

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