

## Ways of Departing: First German Candidates to the Congregation Catechists of Boroa (Araucania, Chile, 1932-1934)<sup>1</sup>

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**SUMMARY:** This work analyzes the discursive strategies of the first German candidates who, between 1932 and 1934, applied to be missionaries of the Catechist Congregation of Boroa in the Araucanía Region. From a gender perspective and through the systematization and cross-referencing of historical archives (calls, letters, autobiographies, questionnaires), we will analyze the encoded interaction between Capuchin priests and candidates. Focusing on the analysis of the candidates letters, we will argue that exceptionalism and the tricks of the weak constituted paradoxical strategies of women whose desires for recognition and autonomy were legitimized through the civilizing vocation of Mapuche pagans.

**KEYWORDS:** Travel; discourse; religion; women; writing.

### Formas de partir: primeras aspirantes alemanas a la congregación Catequistas de Boroa (Araucanía, Chile, 1932-1934)

**RESUMEN:** Este trabajo analiza las estrategias discursivas de las primeras aspirantes alemanas que entre 1932 y 1934 postularon a ser misioneras de la Congregación Catequistas de Boroa en la Araucanía. Desde un enfoque de género y mediante la sistematización y cruce de archivos históricos (convocatorias, cartas, autobiografías, cuestionarios), analizaremos la interpelación codificada entre sacerdotes capuchinos y aspirantes. Focalizándonos en el análisis de las cartas de las aspirantes, sostendremos que el excepcionalismo y las tretas del débil constituyeron estrategias paradójicas de mujeres cuyos deseos de reconocimiento y autonomía se legitimaron a través de la vocación civilizadora de paganas mapuche.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Viaje; discurso; religión; mujeres; escritura.

**TRASLATION OF SUMMARY:** Carolina Andrea Trivelli Díaz / Verona University

#### HOW TO QUOTE

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### **Missionaries in the Araucanía region**

The construction of female citizenship is read as a paradox by Joan Scott when she points out that “the history of feminism is the history of women who have only paradoxes to offer” (Scott, 2012, p. 21). Insofar as Western democracies constructed citizenship based on the equivalence between individual and masculinity, Scott points to the paradox involved in simultaneously defending the importance and irrelevance of sexual difference when demanding rights such as voting or education.

This key paradox in the construction of equality and difference in modern times also marked the gendered character of both national and civilizing projects, largely articulated by the sexual division of labor and by a family-focused and domestic iconography that differentiated roles, discourses, and practices in sex-gender terms (McClintock, 1993). As Yuval Davis and Anthias (1989) point out, although women who participated as civilizers in the architecture of these projects often faced the same or more risks as their male counterparts, they have been represented from a pre-political conceptualization of affects, in a relationship of love or support towards conquerors, soldiers, or missionaries. Thus, once the war was over, the discourse of national sentimentalism calls upon these civic mothers to build peace among all those who were previously enemies, that is, to embody “the gentle hand of power” in order to construct a society (Vera, 2016).

The first decades of the 20th century in Chile correspond to a period of rhetoric of national unity that advocated for the need to integrate social and ethnic sectors which had been explicitly excluded since colonial times. This period also coincides with the significant unfolding of female professionalism (midwives, social workers, nurses, teachers), which Lavrín conceptualizes as “scientific motherhood”: women who were key for social change as they would be in charge of “sanitizing and moralizing the sexual sphere in order to build a healthy and strong nation” (Lavrín, 1995, p. 88; Illanes, 2007; Vera, 2016). This period was also defined by alliances between the Catholic Church and elite women’s philanthropy (Yeager, 2005), the feminization of education (Egaña *et al.*, 2003), and, globally, the feminization of missions (Haggis, 1998; Semple, 2003; De la Fuente, 2023).

We propose paradoxical strategies as a key approach to interpreting the discourses of a subject who is little or problematically integrated into the reflection on female and eventually feminist genealogies in Chile: religious women (Haggis, 1998; Vera & Valderrama-Cayumán, 2017). As Haggis points out, such genealogies have generally tended to consider religiosity as “an unfortunate conservative influence” in women’s history (Haggis, 1998, p. 173). In the case of Chile, Yeager argues that religion was a key tool for integrating women into modernization processes. Far from secular feminism, religious women who were in charge of the education of girls and teachers since the late nineteenth century fostered, however, a female self-awareness. This would have allowed to politically intend the idea of female moral superiority in order to form “guardians of national morality” (Yeager, 2005, p. 243). One of the subjects that emerges from this reading, against the grain of women’s histories and feminisms, are the missionaries.

Haggis’s work on British evangelical missionaries points out that within the intertwined discursive framework of religion and empire, “rather than an emancipatory struggle to break through the bounds of convention, it was precisely convention which enabled the making of the female missionary (Haggis, 1998, p. 172). Through this “flexible and subtle reordering of existing norms and values”, the author asserts that missionaries achieved a result quite similar to that of the feminism of the time: “professional women living independent lives outside the prescriptions of filial or marital dependency for women provided by Victorian middle-class culture.” (Haggis, 1998, p. 172).

Alongside what we could broadly term as the patriarchal nature of monotheistic religions, the discourses and practices of missionaries also prove problematic due to the obvious power asymmetry from which their relationship with the pagans to be “civilized” and evangelized gains meaning. Both the historical-political context and the passionate nature of faith frame what may have been a genuine conviction that pagans would be “happier” upon converting to “the true religion” (Stornig, 2013). However, it is clear that the figure of the infantilized Other who needs to be “helped” and “saved” was the rationale that enabled the rhetoric of sacrifice and, to that extent, legitimized these women’s quests and practices for autonomy (Haggis, 1998).

In the case of the Araucanía Region, Serrano argues: “public education was practically nonexistent in the area that comprised the province of Arauco until the 1850s” (1995, 451). The State chose to entrust educational work to Catholic missions that had accumulated experience since the conquest. After the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 and the prosecution of the Franciscans who resisted the independence cause, in 1848 President Bulnes negotiated with the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (FIDE) for the sending of the Capuchin order. These had the greatest impact on the education of Mapuche children at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries (Azócar, 2014; Serrano *et al.*, 2018). Thus, after a long history of missionary efforts organized successively by Jesuits, Franciscans, and Capuchins, the military occupation of Araucanía in 1883 resulted in the Mapuche people being decimated by policies of settlement and reduction,<sup>2</sup> leading them to practice subsistence agriculture, similarly to peasants. In this context, the State perceived schools as instruments of civilization, but they also represented a strategic literacy opportunity for the Mapuche, offering them some leverage in negotiating land dispossession.

From here, the education of Mapuche girls and boys would work towards a new cultural and racial (mestizo) pact, which would redefine gender relations in the Araucanía Region. This redefinition will determine the strategic role of Mapuche girls as future biological and cultural reproducers, and to that extent, it will also delineate the call for Catholic nuns, Protestant missionaries, and female teachers as educators and evangelizers.

Interestingly, the role of women in the educational and civilizing projects of Araucanía has been scarcely studied. Most research on this matter has focused on the alliances and influences among men: priests, missionaries, state agents, chiefs, and Mapuche leaders (Azócar, 2014; Donoso, 2008; Menard & Pavez, 2007; Montecino & Foerster, 1988; Serrano, 1995).

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<sup>2</sup> It entailed the consolidation of the mobilization of Mapuche communities from their vast territories of origin to smaller and less productive lands delimited by the State.

The present text will focus on analyzing the discourses of the first German candidates who applied to the emerging congregation of Catechists of Boroa between 1932 and 1934. Our hypothesis is that in these women's discourses we can identify paradoxical strategies which were deployed in the pursuit of recognition and autonomy.

In methodological terms, the systematization and cross-referencing work of archives located in the Araucanía Region -Historical Archive of the Diocese of Villarrica (AHDV); Archive of the Catechist Congregation of Boroa (ACB)- and *Eichstätt* -Magazines *Ewige Anbetung* and *Altöttinger Franziskus Kalender*, *Eichstätt*-Ingolstadt University, Germany- included letters, magazines, calls, and other documents in three languages<sup>3</sup>. These were organized into Excel spreadsheets, transcribed, translated, coded in Atlas.ti, and analyzed from a gender perspective as culturally coded "texts", bearers of discourses that coexist and mutually address each other (Rojo, 2001).

The first part of the text describes the context in which the congregation arises and analyzes documents that show how the Capuchin mission summoned and constructed the missionaries' profile. The second part analyzes letters from the candidates, highlighting different codifications and self-discursive markings that show exceptionalism and the tricks of the weak as paradoxical strategies. We will conclude with a reflection on the limits and possibilities of these strategies, which constitute part of female genealogies.

### Summoning the Candidates

The origins of the Catechists of Boroa Congregation can be traced back to 1928 and 1931, after the proposal of the Capuchin missionary Wolfgang Emslander von Kochel to Guido Beck, Apostolic Vicar of Araucanía. The foundation of this congregation responded to the lack of pastoral personnel, explained by Beck using a military metaphor:

[...] the officers are in their respective posts [...] but we lack junior officers and combat troops, which are indispensable in a mission territory [...] [We need] a handful of missionaries and a legion of catechists (Nogglar, 1972, p. 179).

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<sup>3</sup> Spanish, German and *Sütterlin* (calligraphy popularized in German elementary schools between 1920 and 1941). All translations are our responsibility.

In this regard, von Kochel argued that the religious instruction of the Mapuche people could not yet be fulfilled “by the children of the same race” and even less by the “indigenous catechists” who were trained and between twenty and thirty-years-old, because “at that age they are already married and have a family, and thus they no longer move from their hut” (Noggler, 1972, p. 183).

The history of the Catechists was also linked to the Swiss congregation that had until then focused its work on the education of Mapuche girls and boys: the Sisters Teachers of the Holy Cross of Menzingen (HSC). This congregation had settled in Río Bueno in 1901, deploying its work as prestigious pedagogues across Araucanía. Such prestige earned them two formal invitations from Santiago to direct Normal Schools and a dispute between the hierarchies of the Church: Ángel Jara (bishop of the Diocese of Ancud) and Bucardo de Röttingen (apostolic prefect of the missions at the time) (Noggler, 1972).

At the request of the Vicariate, the HSC agreed to train the Catechists both in religious life and in apostolic activity until 1936. By 1923, Von Kochel was the spiritual director of Elsa Metzler, originally from Munich and a lay catechist in the Boroa Mission. The Capuchin highlighted Metzler’s “on-the-ground” style in instructing and evangelizing children and adults “from hut to hut”, a factor from which his proposal would emerge (Noggler, 1972).

In 1932 Teresita Klumpp Streck (daughter of German settlers), Bertina Dachs (Sister Cecilia), María Baumert (Sister Isabel), and the Chilean Juana Norambuena (Sister Bernardita) joined the first formation of the congregation and took charge of the first school in Las Dichas.<sup>4</sup> In 1937, Sister Teresita would take the role of superior of the Catechists (Noggler, 1972). The congregation was quickly joined by Chilean and also

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<sup>4</sup> Located in the south of the Araucanía region. Although it did not appear in our archive review, Noggler also mentions a woman with the surname Calfian as one of the first catechists.

Mapuche<sup>5</sup> women, who evangelized, taught literacy, cared for the sick, and administered emergency sacraments both in Araucanía and on Easter Island.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1.



Note: From "Catechist Missionaries in Boroa, Chile. On the right, their Teacher: Father Wolfgang". *Ewige Anbetung*, April Issue, 1933, p. 148. Library of the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt.

Meanwhile, in the devout city of Altötting, a stable relationship had been forged between the Provincialate of the Bavarian Capuchins of St. Anne's Convent and the Kreszentia Mission House of the HSC. It was named in honor of Kreszentia Löffler (1828-1910), a benefactor widow of the HSC who bought the land on which the mission house

<sup>5</sup> Based on our systematization of archives of the first half of the twentieth century, we have identified: Rosa Baeza Huenteleo (at 23 years old professes as Sister Agueda in 1935); Candelaria Manquepán Santi (at 24 years old professes as Sister Verónica in 1935); Sofía Lespay Manquepán (also appears in archives as Manquean or Manquián, at 20 years old professes as Sister Margarita in 1936); Rosa Cayún Huenchunao (at 25 years old professes as Sister Juana in 1947); Elena Rupailaf Hualamán (at 22 years old professes as Sister Paulina in 1946); Luisa Lenan Licancura (at 25 years old professes as Sister Sofía in 1950); Sofía Huircán Pichihuínca (at 27 years old professes as Sister Dominica in 1954) (AHDV).

<sup>6</sup> In 1937, the island had come under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Vicariate of Araucanía (AHDV).



was built. Löffler would spend her final years there (*Ewige Anbetung*, March Issue, 1910, p. 96).

Before departing by ship from Hamburg or Antwerp to the Port of Corral-Valdivia, the candidates received their initial training at Kreszentia House in tasks directly related to what would be their work in the mission: horticulture, dressmaking, handicraft, and Spanish classes (*Ewige Anbetung*, May Issue, 1924, p. 145). In this same house the first candidates selected to join the emerging congregation were received between 1932 and 1934. In Boroa, Nueva Imperial, they would be welcomed at the Elisabethinum house (“¡Hacia los ideales de San Francisco y de Santa Isabel!”, n.d., AHDV), led in its early years by the Sister of the Holy Cross, Sister Hildegardis (Historical Archive of the Diocese of Villarrica - AHDV).



Figure 2.



Note: From "Forward!" HSC candidates departing from Kreszentia House. *Ewige Anbetung*, December Issue, 1910, p. 46. Library of the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt.

Figure 3.



Note: From "In the missionary school at Kreszentia House", *Ewige Anbetung*, May Issue, 1924, p.145. Library of the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt.

### What was expected of future missionaries?

The young German women learned about the Mission in Araucanía through writings that Capuchin priests addressed to the faithful in Bavaria (Noggler, 1972). The document "The Congregation of Catechists of Boroa as leaders for Christ" ("*Die Kongregation der Katechistinnen in Boroa als Führerin zu Christus*", n/d, AHDV), dating around 1932, was addressed to "the benefactors of our beautiful mission in Araucanía". This document outlined what was expected of a catechist, the tasks to be carried out and the living conditions in Araucanía:

From the Secular Third Order of Saint Francis has arisen a new, ideal and beautiful flower [...] *it cannot and should not be a monastic foundation with narrow limits and nuns in the proper sense of the word* [...] It is the Congregation of Catechists in Araucanía, *something new of its kind* [...] Everything is arranged [...] the Elisabethinum in Boroa, the home where these *spiritual troops* are trained. *It is located in a marvelous place [...] with a panoramic view of the snowy Andes' volcanic range [...] a delightful terrain of cultivated fields, shrubs, and trees, with peaceful indigenous huts and herds of grazing cattle* [...] Here they mainly study the *two missionary languages, Spanish and Araucanian, catechism, and biblical history* [...] they are instructed on how to teach both in schools and in huts [...] Educated in this manner, *they become educators of the simple and poor people* around them [...] *Their humility must bend the upright pride of the Araucanian man and straighten that of the downhearted Araucanian woman* [...] *Their apostolate should not be loud and strident, but silent and hidden, like that of a mother in the home, where she never rests* [...] There are already two catechists in the beautiful *paradise area* of Lake Ranco [...] one alongside a second lay teacher in Molco, which is very much disputed by the *Protestant sects* [...] On Sunday [...] *Mass is celebrated at a distance* [...] Weekdays are dedicated to the education of *the men and women of tomorrow, to the children*. They are the most receptive [...] I only wish to add that [the catechists] *actively participate in the administration of all the sacraments* [...] They are even involved in the sacrament of Holy Orders, as they seek authentic vocations everywhere [...] In the chapel, they faithfully care for beautiful folk singing, *keep the sanctuary clean and orderly, and take care of the cleaning* of the church. In the cabins, the sick and dying are prepared to receive the sacraments and eternal life. *A sacred fire burns in these religious women* consecrated to the service of God in the world, *a fire of blissful joy*, [...] When the awareness of saying "*I am a missionary, I am at the service of the struggling, suffering, and triumphant Church, I must fight and suffer for God's cause, even if only as a poor and weak instrument in the hands of the Almighty*" [...] sinks deeply into the soul, it becomes clear that one must forget, so to speak, personal demands, *homeland and mother tongue, comfort, and local customs* [...] in order to *gain the trust* of those whom one wishes to bring to the beloved God. *Chileans and Mapuches are especially easy to win over when they see that one is like them* [...] German girls should not believe that they can simply walk around the cabins [...] *It is not that easy* [...] *they must show concern for the care of the sick, set a good example, perform acts of love, be receptive to the desire for religion, and, without*

*emphasizing their superiority, they must humbly and with caution and kindness immerse themselves in the new environment [...] And surely it would be a sublime, longed-for, and radiant grace for centuries to win over for the humble faith and Christian life the proud and self-sufficient Araucanian people. Their conversion would be worth the sweat of the noblest* (“Die Kongregation der Katechistinnen in Boroa als Führerin zu Christus”, n/d, AHDV).<sup>7</sup>

Although it is not possible to identify the author of this call or exactly how it circulated in Germany, it was most likely drafted or at least reviewed by Beck himself. It should be noted that secondary sources describe Beck as an extremely detail-oriented man (Noggler, 1972; Umbach, 2017). In any case, this first call, drafted by Capuchin missionaries, envisions for this “new in its kind” work women who are not necessarily nuns. They were to be women of faith who had to be willing to “forget” their homeland, language, comforts, and customs, who had to tolerate “Mass at a distance”, learn two languages, and work diligently for the pagans and the Church. The call also offers a whole series of proposals for identification, from the “marvelous landscape with a panoramic view of the snowy Andes volcanic range”,<sup>8</sup> to a model of feminine epic (“struggling, suffering, and triumphant”) that articulates sacrifice and humility but also power (administrators of sacraments, evangelizers of a proud people, soldiers fighting against Protestant sects).

Stoler (2004) argues that concerns about the distribution of sentiment (its excess and its lack), by control techniques and affective modulations, characterized (post)colonial European administrations. Such concerns were not only aimed at the subjects to be civilized, but also at the most vulnerable representatives of European power: poor whites, “mixed-race” children, and women. By making cultural and gender expectations explicit, the call outlines a whole series of “correct feelings” for the future missionaries. This way, it is expected that they will organize, clean, sing, and care “like a mother who never rests” but in whom also burns “a fire of blissful joy”. Through a female apostolate that is “silent,

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<sup>7</sup> Our emphasis.

<sup>8</sup> Considering that the women addressed in this call are German, the mention of snow-capped mountains is not random as a proposal for identification. Travel chronicles and letters from the HSC account for the effect of snow-capped mountains as imagery of the homeland, producing a certain sense of familiarity with *Araucanía*.



hidden, humble, cautious, and kind” that does not “emphasize their superiority”, the missionaries must “earn the trust” of the pagans, “show concern” and “be receptive”.

Considering the strategic racial and cultural place held by these women as symbols and models of “good femininity” in the missionary project, the call outlines the norm of legitimate femininity: the domestic ideal is articulated with the rhetoric of female moral superiority through modulations of what constitutes correct feelings, of what is shown and what is hidden to convert the pagan Other. From this “silent” and “loving” female superiority, great rewards could be expected: the conversion of the “proud and self-sufficient Mapuche people would be worth the sweat of the noblest”.

On the other hand, the document “Greetings from God!” (“*Gott zum Gruss!*”, n/d, AHDV) drafted by the Missionary Secretariat of the Capuchins of the convent of Santa Ana in Altötting, mentioned that “once their *vocation has been clearly understood through fervent prayers and mature reflections*”, a series of certificates should be sent: medical, birth, baptism, confirmation, completion of primary and/or secondary school, of *singleness*, of “*release*, officially sealed by the convent superiors, in case they have belonged to an order or congregation as a postulant, candidate, novice, or sister. *The certificate should also indicate the reasons for their exit*”, a “*certificate of good conduct enclosed by the corresponding parish priest*”. And also a “handwritten autobiography”, “attached questionnaire, completed truthfully, and a photograph”.<sup>9</sup>

The document also requested covering at least part of the travel expenses (800 marks) and “*depositing any owned property (at least 3,500 marks) in Chile*. However, given the *current uncertain circumstances*, (“*Gott zum Gruss!*”, n/d, AHDV)<sup>10</sup> we advise not to make any arrangements in this regard without consulting with the Apostolic Vicariate first”. Likewise, it was suggested to maintain “insurance in case of illness or disability, at least during the two-year probationary period”. The document specified that Bishop Guido Beck would be responsible for the admission decision: “the final notification will be received, along with detailed instructions for traveling to Chile, in approximately three

<sup>9</sup> Our emphasis.

<sup>10</sup> He was referring to the economic and socio-political crisis that Germany was undergoing during those years, which would bring Hitler to power in 1933.

months. Until then, *spiritual preparation for the missionary vocation should be the most priority and important task* (“*Gott zum Gruss!*”, n/d, AHDV).<sup>11</sup>

Some of the questions from the questionnaire attached to the application are also interesting to highlight: “What are the reasons that lead you to want to be a catechist?”, “Physical disabilities (myopia, deafness, etc. Do you suffer from nerves? Or have you suffer from them previously?)”, “Mental illnesses or others (epilepsy, nervous diseases, tuberculosis) of direct family members”, “Current or future dependence on your parents” (“*Fragebogen für Bewerberinnen zur Katechistinnen-Kongregation in Araukanien (Chile)*”, n/d, AHDV).

In the “Declaration”, signed by their own handwriting, candidates affirmed their voluntary entry into the congregation, whose main task was “the pursuit of *personal sanctification*” as well as “teaching religion to young people and adults”, adhering to “the Rule of the Third Order of Saint Francis of Assisi, together with the *simple vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity*” and submitting to “*a trial period of two years, consisting of one year of postulancy and one year of novitiate*, and after that time, making annual vows for six years to finally making perpetual vows”. They also agreed to “*cover the travel expenses to the mother house in Boroa*” and in case of “*leaving the congregation before making perpetual vows*”, “*to reimburse, to the best of my ability, the expenses incurred by the congregation on my behalf for the journey to Chile and back*” (“*Erklärung*”, n/d, AHDV).<sup>12</sup>

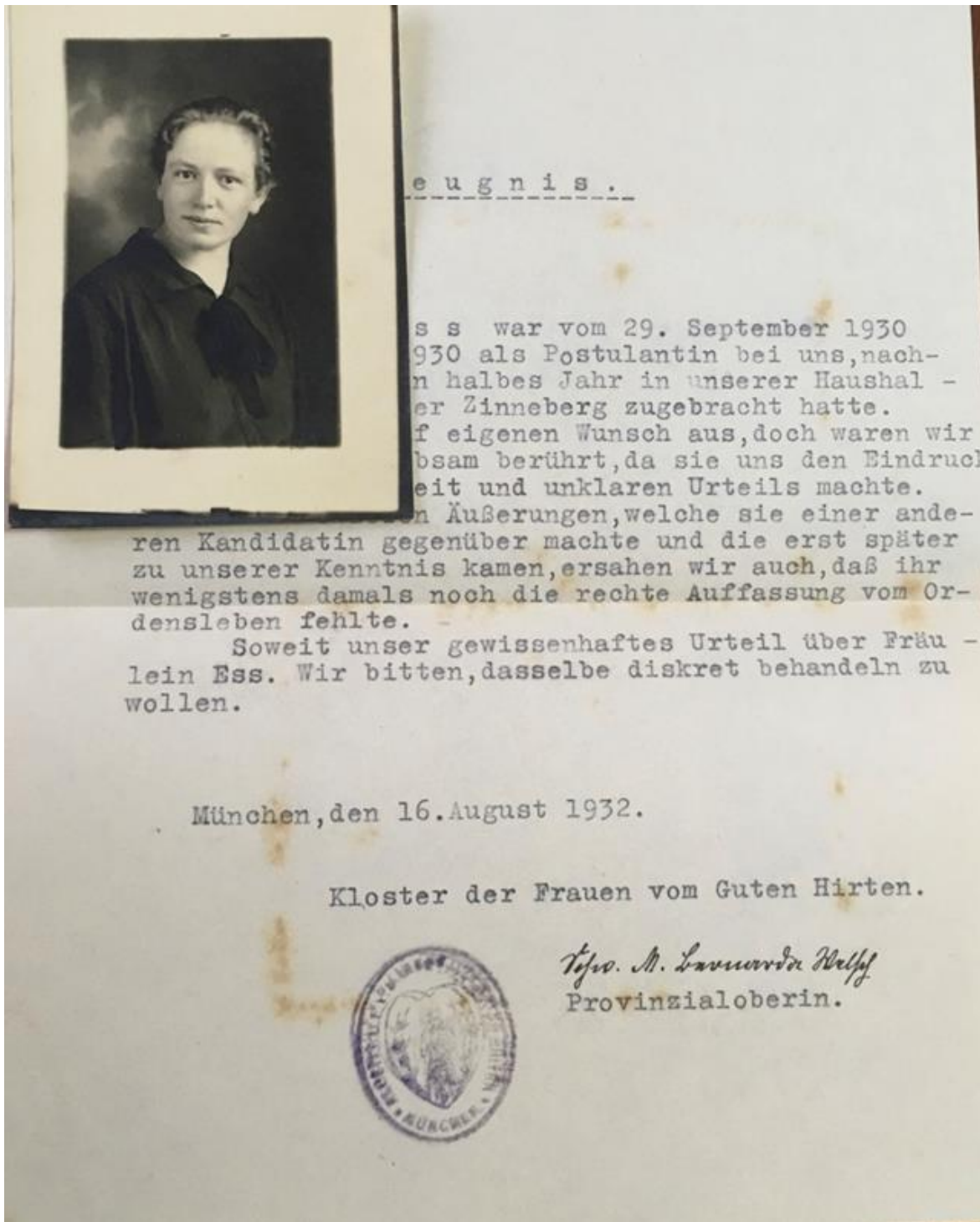
Other key documents included in the application dossier were the “references” that accredited work or pastoral experience and the “certificates of moral conduct”, usually provided by the parish priest from the town where the aspirant resided. Here, it is possible to identify common institutional codes regarding the candidates’ character, judgment, or disposition, highlighting characteristics such as: “very apprehensive”, “unclear judgment”, without “adequate understanding of religious life” (Sister Superior Leonarda Welsh, 1932, AHDV), “conscious and with character” (Sister Superior Engelmann, 1932, AHDV), “solid, mature, and firm character qualities” (Father Räglau, 1933, AHDV).

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<sup>11</sup> Our emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> Our emphasis.

Figure 4.



Note: From "Certificate" of Mother Superior Leonarda Welsh with attached photo of Maria Ess, August, 16, 1932 (File: "Catequistas de Boroa: First applicants [1932-1934]", AHDV).



Priests and nuns also emphasized, when applicable, the aspirant's participation in Catholic women's organizations such as: the "Institute of English Ladies" (Sister Superior Engelmann, 1932, AHDV), the "Association of Catholic Domestic Workers" (Father Rāglau, 1933, AHDV), or the "Association of Marian Virgins" (Pastor K. Arnow, 1932, AHDV). Reputation was also a relevant indicator, highlighting the quality being an "exemplary virgin" (Parish office of Saarbrücken, 1932, AHDV), of "impeccable reputation", deserving of "the trust of her superiors" (Father Caedilian, 1933, AHDV) or the "lack of inclination" towards "worldly pleasures", nor "contact with persons of the male sex" (Pastor K. Arnow, 1932, AHDV).

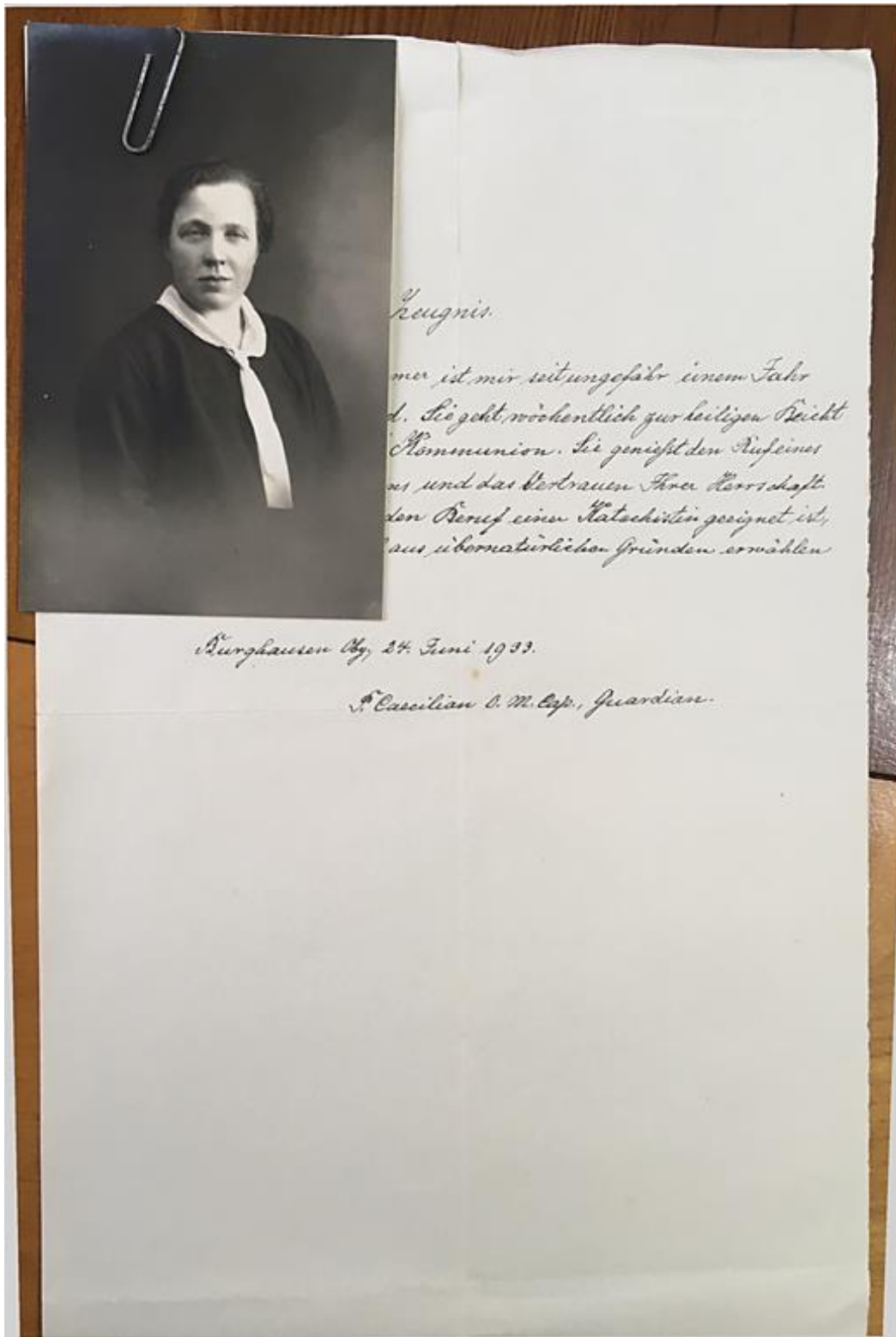
Figure 5.



Note: From "Reference" from Father Rägla, with attached photo of Lina Koch, September 3, 1933 (File: "Catequistas de Boroa: First applicants [1932-1934]", AHDV).

Finally, the “guarantee of a true vocation” (Parish office of Saarbrücken, 1932, AHDV) in the candidates was identified based on a “weekly” or “daily” frequency of confession and communion (Father Caedilian, 1933; Pastor K. Arnow, 1932, AHDV), the presence of the “longed-for missionary ideal” (Sister Superior Engelmann, 1932, AHDV), their election “of supernatural reasons” (Father Caedilian, 1933, AHDV), the potential to “accomplish much in honor of God and for the salvation of souls” (Father Rāglau, 1933, AHDV) or the “chaste, constant, and serious pursuit of perfection” (Parish office of Saarbrücken, 1932, AHDV).

Figure 6.



Note: From "Certificate" from Father Caedilian, with attached photo of Theresia Pommer, June 24 (File: "Catequistas de Boroa: First applicants [1932-1934]", AHDV).

The application of the young women was closely monitored by Father Eduard<sup>13</sup> from the Convent of Santa Ana in Altötting and by Vicar Guido Beck in San José de la Mariquina. Concerns about money and the socio-political crisis permeated that exchange of letters.

Father Eduard expressed his concern about the candidates' economic and health conditions, considering what National Socialism could mean for the funding of missions:

It is important to clarify *how sisters are cared for in case of illness or old age* [...] *We expect terrible things from the Third Reich* [...] *our well-informed sources predict devaluation under Hitler* [...] *I beg* [...] *to return all certificates, as people may also need them to obtain authorization for exit or entry* (Letter from Father Eduard to Guido Beck, 1932, AHDV).<sup>14</sup>

Beck responds rather more concerned about the funding of travels:

I wish you to take as a general rule that *nobody will be able to come until they have at least half of the travel fare*. If people have to pay for themselves, *there is already some guarantee that they will take the matter seriously and stay*. *What costs is more valued* (Letter from Guido Beck to Father Eduard, 1932, AHDV).<sup>15</sup>

Two years after this exchange, we find ourselves in 1934 with a distressed Father Eduard proposing to reevaluate the relevance of continuing to offer German candidates to the congregation:

Is it really necessary to hire German girls *after abandoning the previous plan of forming a congregation of sisters without vows*? [...] *Couldn't local forces try to be recruited with the considerable sums that must be spent on transportation and care of German girls, especially after enough Chilean women have already shown up and considering that there are already German sisters who can balance the situation*? [...] The current mode of accepting people is completely unsustainable. We have only been spared by a fortunate coincidence of *avoiding transporting someone with tuberculosis, mental illnesses, or divorced with questionable backgrounds* (Letter from Father Eduard to "his Reverence", 1934, AHDV).

<sup>13</sup> It was not possible to identify the surname of this priest.

<sup>14</sup> Our emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Our emphasis.

In this exchange of letters, we also identify examples of Beck's criteria for selecting candidates: "has talent. Knows a foreign language. Has very good recommendations. Has 500 marks", "pious", "years in a girls' education school [...] Firm character. Good age: 24 years. Has resources". And also, his elimination criteria: "she is very poor and does not have much education or talent", "she is too old (41 years)", "she was already with the Good Shepherds. She couldn't handle it" (Letter from Guido Beck to Father Eduard, 1932, AHDV).

Beck's missionary profile implied the twenties as the ideal age, health, good certificates, ideally not having been and/or left other congregations, and possessing some education. His insistence on the issue of money for the trip seems justified not only by the constant struggle for Mission funding but also as a show of solidity in the candidates: "what costs is more valued".

On the other hand, in the critical context of Hitler's rise to power, we can identify a sense of responsibility from Father Eduard for the economic fate of the candidates in old age and illness and also for concrete details such as the cost and practical value of certificates. However, his reluctance to continue sending German candidates was also justified by a certain distrust in the selection process, whose vulnerability could lead to problematic choices of young women "with tuberculosis, mental illnesses, divorced with questionable backgrounds". Probably to reassure Beck (with whom he seems to share a certainty about the cultural superiority of their common homeland), the priest adds that "recruiting local forces" would not be a bad idea considering that "there are already German sisters who can balance the situation".

Based on the systematization, cross-referencing of files, and secondary sources, ("First candidates to the Catechists of Boroa 1932-1934", AHDV; "Date of birth and religious profession of the missionary catechist sisters", ACB; Noggler, 1972) we have generated the following summary table of the candidates' profile (Table 1):

**Table 1.** Profile of the first german candidates to the Catechists of Boroa Congregation 1932-1934

<b>Name</b>	<b>Year and city of origin of applicarion</b>	<b>Age at the time of application</b>	<b>Occupation at the time of application</b>	<b>¿Does she profess in araucanía?</b>
<b>1. Aichetshammer, Maria</b>	Altötting, 1933	26	Domestic worker	Yes. Professes on February 22, 1937 as Sister Lucía.
<b>2. Böddeker, Maria</b>	Todtmoos, Baden, 1933	–	–	–
<b>3. Czechtizky, Johanna</b>	Lambach, 1932	24	Educator	–
<b>4. De Gernsheim, Mengele</b>	Mainz, 1933	–	Salesperson	–
<b>5. Eckstein, Gisela</b>	Mammersreuth, 1933	29	Agriculture worker	–
<b>6. Ess, Maria</b>	Liegersdorf, 1932	26	Seamstress	–
<b>7. Graf, Katharina</b>	Mindelheim, 1932	28	Teacher	–
<b>8. Graf, Anni</b>	Regensburg, 1932	28	Salesperson	–
<b>9. Koch, Lina</b>	Baden-Baden, 1933	31	Domestic worker	–
<b>10. Maier, Margareta</b>	Bamberg, 1934	–	Office worker	–
<b>11. Meißner, Minna</b>	Pfaffendorf, Reichenbach, 1932	34	Domestic worker	–
<b>12. Mergler, Klara</b>	Mainz, Gernsheim, 1932-1933-1934	34	Salesperson	–
<b>13. Pommer, Theresia</b>	Burghausen, 1933	31	Cook	–
<b>14. Renninger, Maria</b>	Bamberg, 1933	–	-	–
<b>15. Schmid, Franziska</b>	Bamberg, 1932	37	Nurse	–
<b>16. Schneider, Elisabeth</b>	Saarbrücken, 1932	22	Part-time employee	–
<b>17. Stretz, Cäcilia</b>	Kirchaich, 1933	23	Domestic worker	–



<b>18. Waldmüller, Betty</b>	Munich, 1932	–	Nursing student, former salesperson	–
<b>19. Wintermaier Edbauer, Ottilie</b>	Untermühlbach, 1934	30	–	Yes. Professes on February 22, 1937 as Sister Rafaela.

Note: Developed by the authors. Fondecyt 1220271.

### Paradoxical strategies

#### *Exceptionalism and border crossing*

Mobility as a force of identity transformation holds a gendered history that speaks of practices that open and close possibilities for creativity, agency, and autonomy (Ahmed, 2017; Dorlin, 2003; Stornig, 2013; Vera & Sáez, 2022). Stornig (2013) asserts that missionary nuns’ (self)representation as “essentially mobile figures” demonstrates how the practice of crossing geographical borders through travel also transforms into a crossing of gender borders.

Young candidates responded enthusiastically to the promise of being “mobile ambassadors of an expanding Church [...] bringing faith to non-Christian peoples” (Stornig, 2013, p. 94) invested by a “fighting, suffering, and triumphant” Church.

The dossier’s “autobiographies” were young women’s presentation letters, in which, along with facts from their lives, we could identify desires, silences, and self-representations that we propose to read under a strategic discourse framework.

As we can see in Table 1, those who write are Catholic women living in a predominantly Protestant country, residing in rural areas, from poor or impoverished families, single, with basic levels of education, and limited prospects for stimulating employment. Their country had recently experienced a war in which some relatives had already perished, and was undergoing economic, political, and social crises, moving towards the Nazi regime.

Lina Koch, for example, tells us:

In 1910 [...] I still had three brothers and four sisters. *My older brother died in 1913 in the novitiate of the Capuchins in Bolzano at the age of 19 [...]* In 1917, my second brother died in the war [...] Then, I spent a year in Switzerland working in a large farm. However, *as the entire region was Protestant, I suffered greatly [...]* My second sister also got married, so I had to take over the household chores [...] I got a job in Baden-Baden, as I wanted to learn to manage a high-class home. A year later, my mother fell ill, and I returned home to take care of her [...] I still couldn't leave my home (Lina Koch, 1933, AHDV).<sup>16</sup>

The letters reveal a difficult time in which death, war, poverty, caring for sick family members, and hard work define these women's life experiences. In that context, and similarly to the Capuchins, the women express concern about the costs of the journey:

*For a long time, I have had the desire to serve beloved God in a convent as a nun [...]* My parents are very poor, they have six children and all of them are still young [...] they depended on my income. But when God calls, He also clears the way. Two of our dear little ones are already in heaven and now it is more possible for me to enter [...] I do not have a high school education, but that should not be so necessary, I believe I have enough knowledge and the beloved Savior has provided me especially with courage and sacrifice. But I must repeat what I mentioned at the beginning, *we are poor, and my parents can't give me more than what is necessary in terms of clothing* (Elisabeth Schneider, 1932, AHDV).

*I want to go on the mission with all my heart and soul, to win many immortal souls [...]* It is said that each candidate should strive to cover half of the travel expenses. Unfortunately, I cannot ask my parents, after all they have done for my education, to give me now 400 marks [...] *They can barely make ends meet and cannot save any money* (Maria Renninger, 1933, AHDV).<sup>17</sup>

*I may have some difficulties with the travel expenses, if they must be covered at the time of entry. We do not have cash and my father is a war veteran with a very low pension* (Gisela Eckstein, 1933, AHDV).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Our emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> Our Emphasis

<sup>18</sup> Our Emphasis

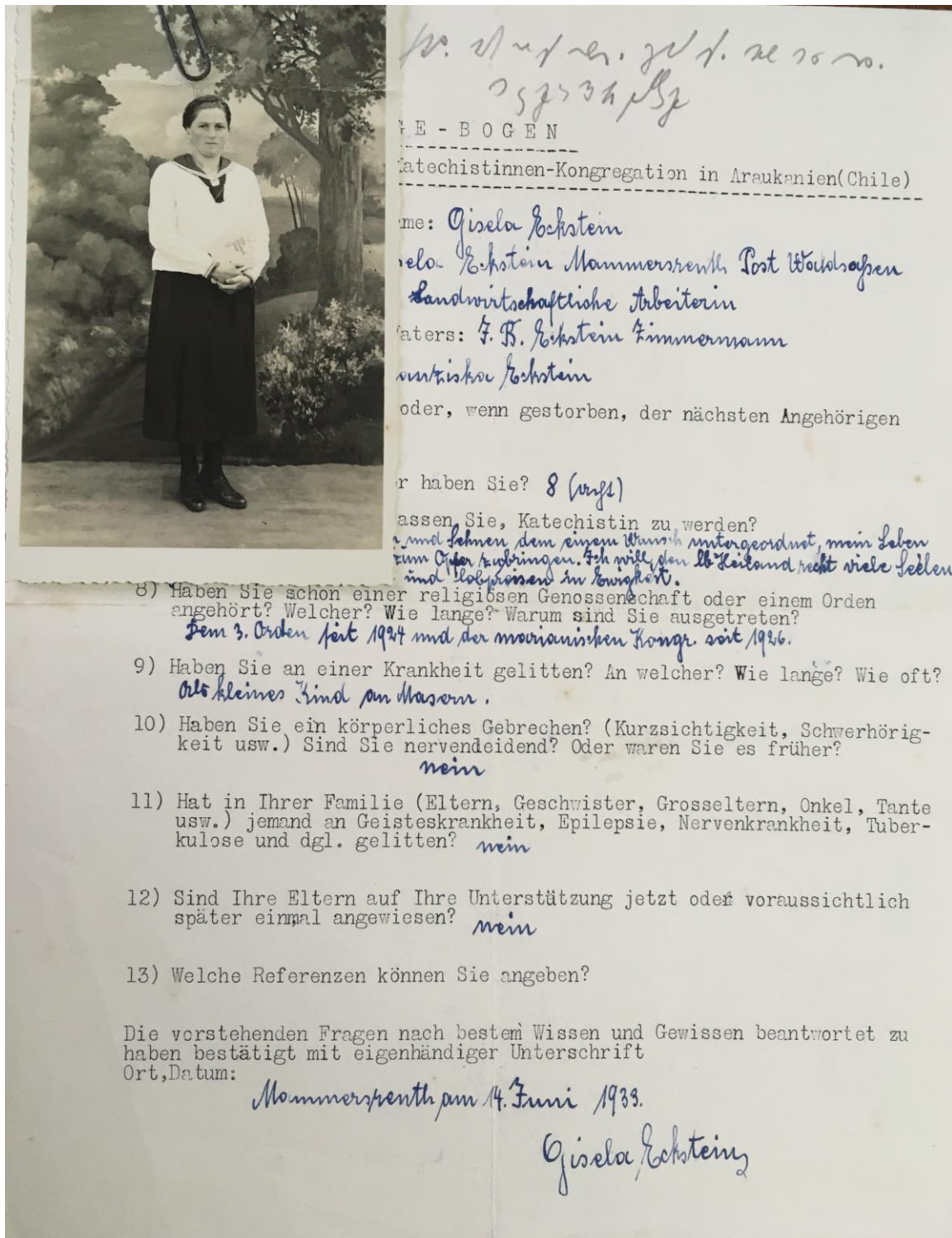
These experiences emerge as background to the manifestation and modulation of the desire to depart to a country they do not know, probably never to see their homeland or family again. In this context, the magazines *Ewige Anbetung* and *Altöttinger Franziskus Kalender* play the important role of enabling the imagined projection of another life, an illusion that takes the form of a missionary vocation expressed vehemently:

*I wanted to be a missionary nun or join a contemplative order [...] I read in the new Altöttinger Franziskus Kalender the call to healthy and generous girls who wish to serve the beloved Savior in the indigenous mission. This seemed to me a sign from God, as I immediately felt a great desire to follow this vocation. And now I am turning to you with trust, asking to be admitted to the newly founded Congregation of Catechists. I am 22 years old, healthy and strong (Elisabeth Schneider, 1932, AHDV).*

*A few weeks ago, I received the latest issue of Ewige Anbetung and found the article about the Catechist Missionaries in it. I only have the desire to become one of them as soon as possible. I also firmly believe that I am suitable for it [...] Ever since my childhood I have had the desire to enter a convent and at the age of 14, the missionary vocation awakened in me [...] I am full of energy and enthusiasm to work. [...] I beg you, please, to shorten the waiting time for a response and write to me as soon as possible. They have already given me all kinds of appetite stimulants, but I know that I will not be able to enjoy food or anything if I do not find a place soon [...] I am willing to give everything a young woman can give (Maria Renninger, 1933, AHDV).*

The reverend told me that if I had such lofty ideals, I should wait patiently, pray much to recognize God's holy will and not hesitate to respond [...] When I received the brochure from *Ewige Anbetung* in February, I was immediately excited and could not keep still. I have only one desire [...] to be able to dedicate myself to this noble vocation [...] After careful reflection and fervent prayer, I have decided to embrace the profession of catechist [...] May the Sacred Heart of Jesus grant me the strength and grace to assume with great courage this difficult life of sacrifice (Lina Koch, 1933, AHDV).

Figure 7.



Note: From Questionnaire and photo of Gisela Eckstein, June 4, 1933 (File: "Catequistas de Boroa: First applicants [1932-1934]", AHDV).

Passionately so, the young women say they are “excited”, “unable to stay still”, “feel a great desire to pursue this vocation”, want to depart “with all their heart and soul”, “cannot even enjoy food or anything” until they have the certainty of being accepted, asking for the “waiting time for a response to be shortened”. Even the end of family dependence that hindered their departure is interpreted as part of divine design: “two of our dear little ones are already in heaven, and now it is more possible for me to enter”.

To the historical and political conditions that may have shaped the desire to depart, it is also important to add that Catholic young women seem to have been attracted by the proposal of epic identification offered in the calls, therefore producing the corresponding self-representations: “to bravely take on this difficult life of sacrifice”, “the beloved Savior has provided me with special courage and sacrifice”, “I want to win many immortal souls”.

With insight, the young women read between the lines that the desire to depart should not be presented in their letters as mere anxiety, and to that extent, they make sure to point out that such desire has been the product of discernment, of “careful reflection and fervent prayer”, of “praying much to recognize God’s holy will”.

In a coded language of sacrifice, courage, vocation, discernment, character, and absolute commitment, the candidates’ letters constitute a moving example of a paradoxical strategy in the quest for recognition that we propose to read as exceptionalism.

Riot-Sarcey and Varikas affirm that this strategy “lurks in female and feminist writings” and is often “at the origin of the paths taken by self-affirmation” (Riot-Sarcey & Varikas, 1988, pp. 79-80). Thus, “insofar as the free human being is from the outset and by definition situated at the antipodes of being a woman, access to this status is only possible through a constant and systematic effort of differentiation in relation to the gender of women ... : “I am not like all women” [...] dissociating oneself from members of one’s gender is the “guarantee” [...] that the exceptional woman seems to owe to patriarchal society” (Riot-Sarcey & Varikas, 1988, pp. 82-86).

Elisabeth Horán argues that in the hostile sociopolitical framework of national fraternity in which the body is the obstacle to recognizing women as citizens, the rhetorics

of female exceptionalism will strive to appeal “to the importance and value of women outside the sexual sphere” (Rosa, 1996, p. 98). Comparatively analyzing the use of this strategy and its self-markings (habit, mask, armor, uniform) in the “rhetorics of sanctity” of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and of Gabriela Mistral, Horán affirms that exceptionalism is usually configured by a series of “carefully coded” masks in which suffering, persistence, humility, self-denigration, and sacrifice allow for the representation of female heroism and victory over one’s own flesh.

In the case of the missionaries, the quests for recognition and autonomy through the material and symbolic crossing of borders depended on investing a racial, cultural, and gender hierarchy *among* women. Differentiating oneself from “women in general” by sacrificing oneself for “the pagans” seems to be, then, the double movement of this heroic saga. Like the uniform and armor of celibacy, the habit and veil that would clothe them when taking their vows would constitute “the social skin” of celibacy, the key to Catholic female exceptionalism (Stornig, 2013).

### *Tricks of the weak*

The careful modulation of what is said, what is not said, and how what is said is said emerges as a crosscutting anxiety in the letters of the candidates. We propose to interpret this anxiety in light of what Ludmer - analyzing Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s “Reply to Sor Filotea” – refers to as tricks of the weak:

Knowing and saying, demonstrates Juana, constitute confronted fields for a woman; any simultaneity of those two actions entails resistance and punishment [...] In this double gesture, the acceptance of her subordinate place (women should keep their mouths shut) and her trick combine: *knowing but not saying, or saying she doesn't know and knowing, or saying the opposite of what she knows*. This trick of the weak, which here separates the field of saying (the law of the other) from the field of knowing (my law), combines, like all tactics of resistance, submission and acceptance of the place assigned by the other, with antagonism and confrontation, withdrawal of collaboration (Ludmer, 1985, pp. 48-52).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Our emphasis.



The modulation and negotiation of anxiety, however, did not always succeed. Such was the case of Klara Mergler,<sup>20</sup> who despite applying in 1932 with recommendations that highlighted her “solid character”, that she is “hardworking and deeply religious”, “modest”, of “noble discretion”, that she “attends daily Mass in our church” (Father Johannes, 1932, AHDV), that her “reputation”, “behavior”, “moral and religious conduct were always excellent” (Father Feuerbach, 1932, AHDV), is not selected. Mergler will write letters from 1932 to 1934 requesting explanations and insisting on her admission. The priests involved in the process interpreted this as “extravagant” stubbornness, emphasizing “how little can be trusted in recommendations and references, even from confessors” (Letter from Father Eduard to ‘His Excellency’, 1933; Letter from Father Eduard to Guido Beck, 1934, AHDV). Somewhat more indulgent, Father Suitbertus explained:

[...] *the good girl already had many hopes placed in her work as a catechist among the pagans [...] I could hardly understand her rejection [...] I would like to ask you to write her a few lines personally and clarify to her why, according to your assessment, she can no longer be considered suitable for the mission* (Father Suitbertus to Father Eduard, 1933, AHDV).<sup>21</sup>

Mergler’s remarkable determination is interesting to think about as one of the forms that the desire to depart acquires:

In response to your esteemed letter, Your Excellency, most worthy sir, I cannot allow myself to make any judgment, as *I am not allowed to know* in what sense it is to be understood [...] Also in my homeland I want and can do much good, and I have shown it; but *I do not love half measures; I want to devote myself completely to the beautiful missionary vocation. However, I am not given that opportunity here [...] I have great self-esteem and willpower [...] with the grace of God and my own effort, I will overcome this obstacle indeed [...] I have reflected my spiritual state of mind in a simple and modest way; I am not a saint [...] I repeat [...] I wish to be admitted as a candidate to the Congregation of Missionary Catechists [...] My last confession [...] I have failed in the love of God by not preventing the diversion of my disorderly thoughts [...] I had especially intended to break my own will and master my self-*

<sup>20</sup> In some certificates she appears as ‘Clara’, however, she signs as ‘Klara’.

<sup>21</sup> Our emphasis.



love [...] *Mercy, my Jesus. I ask for repentance and absolution* (Letter from Klara Mergler to 'His Excellency', 1934, AHDV).<sup>22</sup>

In this letter addressed to "Your Excellency",<sup>23</sup> Mergler tries to navigate a fluctuation of emotions. Strategically, Klara does not directly question the decision and instead confirms that she would not be qualified to pass judgment or "know". Klara "knows" but says "does not know". There are also things she does not "say" but "knows", she "knows" there is something unfair about her situation, and while she accepts the suggestion to deploy her apostolate in her own country, she also emphatically marks her will and identity: "I do not love half measures", "I am not a saint", "I want to devote myself completely", "I have great self-esteem and will", "with my own effort, I will overcome this obstacle". And while those gestures of self-affirmation "say" her strength, simultaneously, Klara denies it. She submits, repents, asks for forgiveness: "I had intended to master my self-love", "I have failed to avoid the diversion of my disorderly thoughts", "I ask for repentance and absolution".

This fluctuation shows the helplessness in the face of the denial of "an opportunity" to embody the proposed epic, an injustice experienced turbulently. In what is evidenced as an internal battle against this helplessness that has lasted at least two years since her application, Klara closes her letter admitting defeat.

Paradoxically so, the "weakness" of these "tricks" that avoid direct confrontation coexists with the candidates' great confidence in their strength, courage, and capacity for work:

Regarding the learning of the two languages, I suppose *it won't cost me my head. If others can do it, why couldn't I also achieve it? And I am not scared of work either* (Gisela Eckstein, 1933, AHDV).<sup>24</sup>

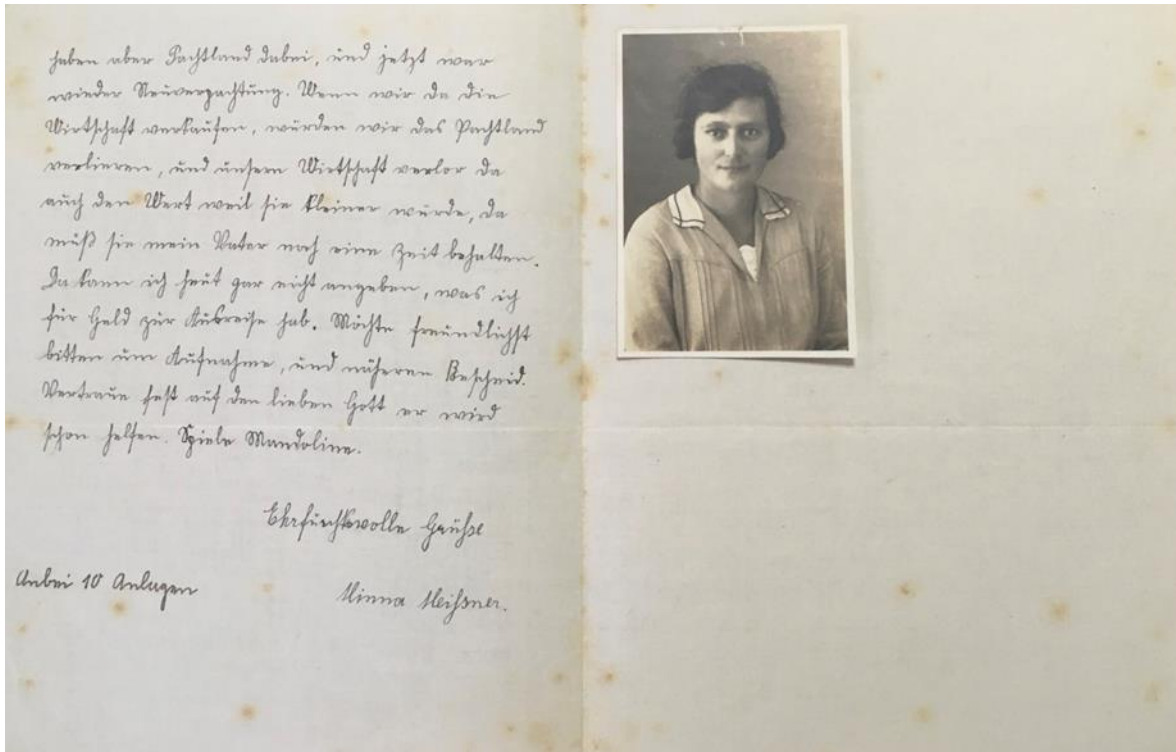
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<sup>22</sup> Our emphasis.

<sup>23</sup> Since he was normally referred to in this way and his power in the final selection was explicitly stated in the call, it is most likely that the recipient is Guido Beck. Alternatively, Father Eduard.

<sup>24</sup> Our emphasis.

Figure 8.



Note: From Letter from Minna Meißner, 1932 (File: "Catequistas de Boroa: First applicants (1932-1934)", AHDV).

The candidates are convinced of "being fit", being "qualified", being "healthy and strong", "not being afraid of work", being "full of energy and enthusiasm for work", "willing to give whatever a young woman can give".

However, the sharpness with which the candidates identify and shield their applications' weak points also reflects a strategic awareness marked by ambivalence. For example:

*I do not want to hide that I was already a candidate at the home of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Altötting [...] I was dismissed from there for once expressing that I had insomnia at night. They took that statement so seriously [...] I still regret very much today having made that statement in my sincerity at the time [...] My most fervent desire is to be able to work soon in foreign missions and I will not stop praying for this great grace (Margareta Maier, 1934, AHDV).<sup>25</sup>*

<sup>25</sup> Our Emphasis.

I intended to join the Sisters of Mary. I sent the required documents, but they were returned to me with the observation that they do not accept people who have been in another convent before. *It hurts so much to hear that. If I had committed any offense, I could understand it* (Maria Renninger, 1933, AHDV).<sup>26</sup>

I am 37 years old. For 14 years, I have been a nurse [...] *I was in Sofia, Bulgaria, also in Romania and Turkey from 1923 to 1927* [...] I wanted to enter a monastery [...] but *unfortunately my father and brothers did not allow it* [...] *I am aging and the thought of completely surrendering to God and offering my strength and health to others does not leave me in peace.* My spiritual guides tell me that I should not lose hope, since *there are also late vocational priests, so why wouldn't God take me as a nun in my more mature years for his service?* [...] *My current work is very unsatisfactory and boring,* as I am taking care of a young lady who suffers from spinal cord disease and also taking care of the whole household (Franziska Schmid, 1932, AHDV).<sup>27</sup>

My grandfather had a brewery [...] where supposedly my mother's brothers would have spoiled themselves with a cold drink in the summer [...] My mother has always been healthy [...] as well as my brothers and I [...] Therefore, *it seemed to me somewhat insignificant and I did not mention anything about it when I was with you,* because all that happened ten to fifteen years before I was born [...] *I even spent money and had an X-ray examination to make sure,* with a very competent and sought-after surgeon [...] I can even *send you the X-ray that I took if you want to check it* [...] *Please forgive me, I did not want to hide this matter* [...] *I just ask you not to reject me immediately.* Please let me know if I can still be admitted (Otilie Winter Maier, 1934, AHDV).<sup>28</sup>

It is quite clear that the candidates are aware that they are not only object of examination but also of suspicion. We propose that the candidates identified in the incisive questions of the questionnaire and the requirement for information about belonging to other congregations, their dependence on parents, health, and illness; the institutional codes against which they had to armor themselves, explicitly stating that they did not want to "hide" information such as the illness of a family member's or having been in another

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<sup>26</sup> Our Emphasis.

<sup>27</sup> Our emphasis.

<sup>28</sup> Our emphasis.

convent before. The attempt to ward off suspicion and become worthy of trust would be to be sincere, apologize, show oneself.

Otilie Winter, who will finally profess in Araucanía as Sister Rafaela, not only apologizes but also offers the evidence of her body (an X-ray) as proof of sincerity and repentance. This gesture of self-exposure could be read through what Rivière called “femininity as a masquerade”. Faced with the terror of being discovered and punished for believing to possess or know something that dominant masculinity does not possess or know, women can manage the anguish “by pretending to be castrated women or innocent and harmless creatures [...] *just as a thief empties his pockets and asks to be searched to prove that he has not stolen anything*” (Rivière, 1929, p. 221).<sup>29</sup>

Other candidates show some disagreement with the standards that would negatively label the fact of having belonged to and left other congregations: “I regret my sincerity back then”, “if I had committed any offense, I could understand it”.

Meanwhile, faced with the urgent requirement of paying for the trip, Margareta Maier turns the age standard to her advantage: it would not be convenient to wait longer “due to my advanced age”. In turn, aware of her aging, the globetrotter Franziska Schmid requests equity by appealing to the institutional authority of her spiritual guides who would have encouraged her “since there are also late vocational priests”. Even more astonishing, and we dare to speculate that precisely because she has already crossed geographic borders (Sofia, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey), Schmid crosses gender boundaries and “says” what should not be said: boredom and personal dissatisfaction also represent motivations to leave.

In a framework of gender relations that distributes suspicion in a generalized and class-based way, the awareness of fault is presented and modulated through a strategic back and forth of strength and weakness. Thus, submission or repentance coexist with rebellious interpellations that - very carefully - evidence the contradictions of the gender norm.

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<sup>29</sup> Our emphasis.

## Final reflections

In this work, we set out to reflect about the missionary efforts in the Araucanía Region, a political subject that has been scarcely researched as a constitutive part of the history of missions, education, and women. Specifically, we worked with the application dossiers of young German women who, in the context of the establishment of the Third Reich (1932-1934), applied as candidates to the newly formed congregation of Catechist Missionaries of Boroa.

Thus, we analyzed the calls for applications and requirements set by the Capuchins who directed the Mission, identifying how these documents outlined the missionaries' profile through specific requirements (money for the journey, independence from parents, health, youth) and a subtle modulation of behaviors and "correct feelings" (character, humility, sacrifice, vocation). We concluded that these documents displayed proposals of identification for the candidates which involved everything from the "paradisiacal landscape" of southern Chile to a feminine epic that articulated the domestic ideal with the discourse of female moral superiority.

On the other hand, we conducted an in-depth analysis of the documents written in the first person by the candidates (autobiographies, letters). This allowed us to identify both exceptionalism and the tricks of the weak as two paradoxical strategies that sought to respond to the expectations of the "missionary" profile and its implicit promises of recognition, autonomy, and mobility.

These Catholic, rural German women, impoverished amidst a severe sociopolitical crisis, encoded various presentations of themselves that included desires, silences, masks, ambivalences, and rebellions with the strategic aim of shielding themselves from suspicion and having an opportunity to start a new life.

We therefore conclude that exceptionalism and the tricks of the weak were responsible, on the one hand, for presenting strength (both physical and of character), youth, courage, and a vocation for sacrifice as guarantees of the candidates' triumph over their own flesh, a matter that would invest their cultural and racial hierarchy with the pagans. On the other hand, in parallel with this demonstration of strength, the candidates outlined a series

of simulations of innocence, harmlessness, and submission that - in their attempt to avoid possible conflicts with the priests - confirmed the gender binary and hierarchy: childish and suspicious femininity versus rational and self-controlled masculinity.

However, for some candidates, this paradoxical and careful encoding between strength and weakness achieved the feat of crossing gender boundaries. An achievement in autonomy and recognition legitimized through a hierarchy *among* women. The traces of these discursive juggling acts as ways of departing towards a new world, run through women's stories: stories that are never evident, and always problematic.

### Acknowledgements

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