

**A Good Shepherd Makes the Best Sheep: Volunteering in Kalighat Home for
the Dying Destitutes as a Transgression Based Educative Practice**

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Abstract

This paper studies international volunteering in Kalighat Home for the Dying Destitutes run by Missionaries of Charity of Mother Teresa in Kolkata as an experience of liminal transition. I argue that volunteers during their work in the shelter undergo a personal transformation under the influence of transgressive experience of touching dirt, death and body of the Other. Guided by the ritualized flow of daily routine and surrounding examples of self-neglecting service, they embody values of Christian love (*caritas*), which allow them to manage some basic tensions inherent to humanitarian work. Thereby, liminal experience of volunteering in Kalighat Home acts as an educative practice which forms subjects of *pastoral power* prepared to function in the framework of contemporary humanitarianism.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Table of Contents.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Humanitarianism and Pastoral Education.....	5
Between Service and Cultivation.....	6
Humanitarianism and Catholic Christianity.....	8
Volunteering and Liminality.....	11
Embodiment through Ritual and Mimesis.....	14
Caritas and Pastoral Power.....	17
Methodology.....	20
The Field and the Methods.....	20
Limitations and Advantages.....	22
Liminality.....	24
Liminal Phase of Personal Biographies.....	24
Estranged and Surrounded by Otherness.....	26
Fluid Structure of Communitas and Solid Understructure of the Order.....	33
Transgression and Ritual.....	36
Transgressing Dirt and Disease.....	36

Rituals and Rhythm.....	42
The Touch of Transcendental	47
Pastoral Power of Caritas.....	51
Conclusion	55
Bibliography	58
Appendix A.....	61

Introduction

This paper is based on my experience of volunteering and on other materials gathered during fieldwork at the Mission of Charity's (MC) Kalighat Home for the Dying Destitutes in Indian Kolkata (Calcutta) in April 2016. Millions of people follow their unique paths from womb to tomb on the streets of this overpopulated Indian capital of poverty which rots and blossoms on the impressive carcass of the Victorian British colonial metropolis. Hundreds of western and Asian volunteers come every year to this den of bare life and social suffering to devote themselves to humanitarian service. Kalighat Home for the Dying Destitutes run by the Catholic Mission of Charity is one of the core charity institutions in the city. It is a place where the three incompatible worlds meet: the outcasts and forsaken inhabitants of Indian streets on the verge of death, the western educated and rather wealthy volunteers and the international community of nuns living the life of prayer and service. It is the place where borders are transgressed, where dirt becomes just another attribute of sacred life, where young fair skin touches crippled suffering dark body of the Other in a gesture of fraternal support, where death is an everyday routine. This border breaking collision of worlds, languages, cultural borders, bodies and souls under the roof of an old Hindu resort turned into a Home for the Dying in the heart of the 'blessed hell' of Kolkata is a typical, still outstanding case of contemporary humanitarian activity which allows some rich insights into the roots of existing charity practices.

The Mission remains one of the most famous symbols of religious charitable service in the world. For decades it has invoked discussions, being an object of both furious criticism and blind veneration. Kalighat Home for the Dying founded by Mother Teresa in 1952 in a dharmashalaⁱ of the main Kali temple of North-East of India and maintained up to now by her

ⁱ A dharmashala (Hindi: *dharmasālā*) is an Indian religious resthouse (*The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, v. 11, p. 301).

Missionaries of Charity is a key point of the whole volunteering activity in Kolkata. Though relatively small, this institution is known throughout northern India being directly associated with the charismatic figure of Blessed Mother Teresa. It is constantly inhabited by half-dozen of nuns, a few workers who also live there and up to 50 men and 46 womenⁱⁱ in severe health condition brought to the place from the streets of Kolkata.

The Home functions today as a place where the poorest can "die in dignity" - getting necessary supplies and care - and at the same time as a place of residence for a few severe patients with mental and physical issues who cannot manage themselves and need constant care. Predominantly, the house is a transit institution from where majority of the patients leave in the course of a month or two in one of the three ways: either they die, or they recover and go back to the street or to their distant homes, or they get stable but still ill and get transferred to another Home of the Mission which are about ten all over the city. In spite of rather limited capacities to accept people, comparing to the enormous destitute population of the metropolitan agglomeration, MC altogether is a highly influential social institution. Many international humanitarian workers active in the city relate to the Missionaries of Charity in one or another manner: some work in the shelters of the Mission, others had their first volunteering experience with it and later started their own initiative or switched to something else, someone just maintain contacts with the sisters collaborating with them when needed, someone opposes them, perceiving them as hostile opponents who abuse the humanitarian field.

While the institution is basically maintained by the MC Sisters and a dozen of paid local workers, some of which are former patients themselves, volunteers also play a key role in the functioning of the shelter. They look after the residents serving meals and doing laundry, helping those who cannot manage themselves, bringing them to the bathroom, changing clothes feeding and shaving them, helping them to walk and doing exercises and simply communicating. Also

ⁱⁱ According to the information board at the entrance.

volunteers deliver the dead bodies to cemeteries (if the deceased was a Muslim or a Christian) and crematoriums (for Hindus) with an ambulance car of the Mission. Significantly, the most responsible and hard job of picking up the future patients on the streets around train stations is entrusted to scout squads constituted of experienced and emotionally stable volunteers. It might seem that volunteers are playing a secondary role in the MC's charity helping the sisters to do their job, which is the impression accepted and reproduced by some nuns and volunteers themselves. Nevertheless, if one looks deeper at the genealogy of the institution and their role in its dynamics they would see that volunteers are embedded into the very structural core of the MCs. In fact, a volunteer was accompanying Mother in the slums of Kolkata on the very first day, when there was no order and no sisters on her side yetⁱⁱⁱ. Since the very beginning volunteers were fulfilling key roles in the Mission's functioning bringing necessary practical skills which the nuns often were missing. Still at this moment the doctor who prescribes medicines to the residents of Kalighat works there on a volunteer basis, the same is true for the physiotherapist, the accountant and many others.

Both the sisters and experienced volunteers emphasize the warmth of human fraternal compassion, the personal touch which is also the touch of the broad outside world brought by the volunteers to the patients. Neither the sisters nor the paid workers, being essentially estranged from the worldly life in the first case and too familiar in the second case, can bring this kind of authentic sense of compassionate Other into the shelters. Nevertheless, the volunteers play another, structural role, which might be even more important for the functioning of the institution: the role of witnesses. Witnessing is one of the key archetypes of Christian worldview, primarily affirmed by the biblical apostles who were witnessing the way of Christ by following

ⁱⁱⁱ According to the Sisters and the common legend of Mother Teresa, e.g. see Chawla, Navin. 1996. *Mother Teresa*. Element.

him and later witnessing his teaching by following their own ways of service and self-sacrifice. Volunteers are structurally assigned to a similar role of necessary witnesses within the charitable missionary of the MCs. Therefore, the encounter of the three categories of actors: the nuns, the volunteers and the suffering poor - forms *the threefold structural core* of the mission. The nature of Christian missionary action - apostolate - is based on salvation of souls through spreading the word of truth - the teaching of Christ. Such educative activity requires a witness – the one who gets impregnated by the word of truth through evidencing its enactment. Thus, in the threefold structure of the Kalighat every segment is defined by its relation to the two other segments: the missionaries – the witnesses – the victims.

Meanwhile, the witnessing role of the volunteers inevitably subjects them to a peculiar moral education. Encountering shocking experiences of human misery, participation in the densely ritualized life of the shelter and witnessing of the self-neglecting service of the sisters stimulates them to follow a path of individual transformation guided by certain moral principles and patterns of interaction to a large extent suggested by the framing religious institution. The actual contents of such principles is one focal point in the discussions around contemporary humanitarian field. While critics of the concept of charity consistently highlight structures of domination and economic dependence imposed or supported by humanitarian action (Bornstein and Redfield 2011, Muehlebach 2013), they also criticize it as a social field which builds and maintains the discourse of victimization and suffering promoting specific moral attitudes (Bradley 2006; Fassin 2012; Baillie Smith et al. 2013).

With the example of Kalighat Home for the Dying Destitutes founded by Mother Teresa and run by her Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata I will demonstrate how a volunteering practice in a religious organization under the supervision of consecrated Sisters effectively promotes moral values and patterns of social interaction which suggest a solution for the tension between domination and service which lies in the basis of the

contemporary humanitarian field. I will analyze how volunteering in Kalighat framed as a practice of self-cultivation and individual transformation accomplished through ritualized transgression of symbolic and physical borders in the fluid ambience of liminality implants and enforces principles and values of Christian pastoral power into the worldviews of those involved in the humanitarian work thus creating subjects of humanitarian governmentality.

Humanitarianism and Pastoral Education

In this chapter I will develop a multilateral theoretical framework to analyze volunteering at the Missionaries of Charity as a case of a complex educative practice in the broad context of contemporary humanitarianism. It starts with establishment of a primary theoretical basis of the research at the intersection of critical studies of religious charity and theory of cultivation and embodiment through ritual. Then, it contextualizes the case in a historical perspective of relations between doctrines of the Catholic Church and humanitarian discourse. Afterwards, it looks deeper into the theory of liminal transition which constitutes a pivotal part of this study. Finally, it prepares a theoretical ground for an empirical research of the role of rituals and embodiment in the volunteers' experience and suggests an overview of a pivotal Catholic concept of *caritas*, which is crucial for understanding of the principle of *pastoral power* underlying power dynamics in the shelter and defining the educational outcome of the experience of volunteering.

Between Service and Cultivation

The relation between religion and humanitarian activities is a contradictory and multilateral issue studied from various angles. In many cases recent related researches focus on the political dimension of charity, on the power relations created and maintained by religious actors in the humanitarian field. This is the case of the study of Muslim charity in Cairo, which according to Amira Mittermaier creates a rather egalitarian social network under the umbrella of moral prescriptions of Islam (2014). Andrea Muehlebach, in her turn, criticizes Catholic charity in Lombardy for being an agent of neo-liberal order which builds local hierarchies in the framework of Catholic *subsidiarity*, relieving the state from burden of social responsibility (2013). Didier Fassin, on the other hand, on a number of examples from various parts of the world demonstrates how Christian values inherited by the Western humanitarian discourse from pre-modern times, shape charity politics on a global level (2012).

Meanwhile, a significant amount of anthropological inquiries is devoted to religious techniques of self-cultivation and personal transformation. Among those is the article of Saba Mahmood on the relations between embodiment, self-cultivation and individual autonomy in a Muslim practice of prayer (2001). Roy Rappaport points out at crucial role of religious ritual in maintenance of social structure through creation of meanings and establishment of shared conventions (1999). My research studies volunteering practice in an MC's shelter bringing together these two flows of anthropological research to see volunteering in a religious organization as a ritualized educative practice which promotes certain power structures and social relations. The junction of these two previously elaborated approaches promises to be revealing and fruitful when applied to the ethnographic material gathered in the Kalighat shelter in Kolkata.

A PhD thesis about Western students volunteering in the shelters of MC in Kolkata recently defended at the University of London by Todd Waller suggests a well elaborated analysis of educational effect of such experience (2011). Considering importance and representability of the qualitative analysis presented in the work, I find the concept of *spiritual development* applied to the empirical data in the paper insufficient due to its blurred evaluative nature and inherent bias towards moral hierarchies of *development*. I will demonstrate in this research that dissection of the issue of volunteering in light of the abovementioned theoretical approaches to social roles of humanitarianism and ritual will provide a deeper insight into the educative nature of international charity. Furthermore, the anthropological concept of liminality (Turner 1967) will provide a necessary framework to see the volunteering as an essentially transforming experience in its complexity. Meanwhile, introduction of the Foucauldian concept of *pastoral power* (Foucault 1982) will reveal some actual principles of interaction within this practice and consequently the values embodied by participants during such an experience. Finally, such a multilateral theoretical framework can be assembled into a proper optical tool to see the Kalighat House for Dying in Kolkata as a quintessential agent of contemporary humanitarianism. Though one popular perception depicts MC as an archaic religious body in a sense opposed to the modern humanitarian practice and discourse of human rights (Chatterjee 2003; Hitchens 2011), this research will demonstrate how volunteering in the Kalighat Home of MC disseminates basic values and patterns of interaction which suggest an effective solution for the contradiction between domination and service which lies at the core of modern humanitarianism.

Humanitarianism and Catholic Christianity

Modern charitable practices on the global level tend to place themselves into the political discourse of humanitarianism, which is commonly recognized "as a justifiable form of moral concern, allowing it to serve as a point of reference and negotiation for a remarkable range of actors: NGOs, social movements, corporations, states, and military forces" (Redfield 2012:452). Charitable practices implemented in the humanitarian field are predominantly based these common moral concerns which constitute the underlying matrix of the contemporary humanitarian politics (Bornstein and Redfield 2011). Though to a large extent commonly shared, these common concerns are quite heterogeneous in their nature and character: "What we see is an interplay of religious and popular development imaginaries, which can reinforce each other in shaping understandings of context, inequality and development, with ideas of service, mission and care articulating with aid mediated notions of charity and giving" (Baillie Smith et al. 2013:131). Such imaginaries define the motivations and ways of acting of the volunteers, shaping certain charity practices and social relations established during their implementation.

Meanwhile, humanitarian volunteering produces a twofold effect: one side of it is the abovementioned shaping of social relations and power structures according to the common moral concerns (Bornstein and Redfield 2011; Fassin 2012; Muehlebach 2013). But on the other hand, active participation in practices of charity also produces an educative effect, promoting various principles of humanitarian morality and corresponding patterns of social interaction among the volunteers maintaining and building up the humanitarian field on global and local levels (Baillie Smith et al. 2013). This ability of conversion makes humanitarian volunteering an important ideological resource on both local and global social processes. Being a specific social field of interaction with all kinds of Otherness, where different social groups meet, humanitarian sphere

continuously produces, affirms and promotes meanings, values and languages in various parts of the world.

The research of the particular educative and ideological effect of such a charismatic religious charitable institution as MC in Kolkata can be valuable for understanding the existing humanitarian field in general. According to various contemporary researches the role of Christian doctrine in contemporary humanitarianism is not limited to particular religiously motivated actors and local charity initiatives: Christian discourse is interwoven into the contemporary humanitarian field, shaping and influencing its structure on many levels, from introduction of local subsidiarity and international charity missions to the religious moral imperatives and imagery of self-sacrifice lying in the roots of contemporary secular humanitarianism (Fassin 2012; Muehlebach 2013). Didier Fassin suggests that Christian worldview plays a subtle but pivotal role in contemporary humanitarianism being the original source of a specific pastoral compassion towards suffering victims (2012). This Christian ethics of love and giving is a political solution which appeals to emotions to cover the basic contradiction between hierarchies of aid and egalitarian ideology of fraternity inherent to contemporary charity. The core tension between assistance to the victims and domination over them, between solidarity with the poor and inequality is one of the basic internal challenges of contemporary humanitarianism (Fassin 2012:3). Religious moral framework channels this generic destructive tension of charity into compassion which is represented as a way to personal salvation. The French anthropologist argues that humanitarian government in such a manner represents the religious aspect of contemporary democratic order, which is based on “the diptych of life as highest good and suffering as redemptive ordeal” (Fassin 2012:251) enrooted deeply into Christian tradition.

Though many actual values of humanism such as the highest value of human life and witnessing through suffering have their roots in Christian religious worldview, the direct

invasion of Catholic church into humanitarian discourse is quite a new thing (Fassin 2012:40). Jose Casanova builds up a recent historical trajectory of the transformations of the Catholic doctrine, which at one point claimed the position of "expertise in humanity" instead of the old claim of "expertise in a divinely prescribed natural law" (2006:27). Catholic Christians who today "continue to play an active role in globalization of the discourse of human rights" (Casanova 2006:24) were at large opposing this modern concept throughout centuries. Since the French and American revolutions the Catholic Church viewed the freedoms and rights discourse as a direct attack on its authority. As late as 1864 pope Pius IX condemned human rights together with other modern freedoms and pronounced them anathema. Only in the second half of the XX century during the *aggiornamento* process Catholic Church theologially justified human rights and adopted them into the official doctrine. Since that time the Church has occupied a major position within the humanitarian field promoting its values worldwide, according to Casanova; "the contemporary role of Catholics in this process is particularly striking and instructive" (2006:24). Significantly, the beginning of Mother Teresa and her mission in Calcutta happened at the very same period of embracement of modern humanitarian discourse by Vatican.

Apparently, the birth of modern *humanitarian reason* in politics, incorporation of humanitarian discourse by the Catholic Church in the course of *aggiornamiento* and public acknowledgement of the new founded Mission of Charity of Mother Teresa happened around the same decade of 1960s. Taking into account the significant resonance produced by Mother Teresa through presence in the global media field which was also rapidly developing at the same period, and the lasting influence of her iconic image and the international institution of MC on the humanitarian discourse, Mother and her congregation can be considered key agents of promotion of Christian charity in the field of the modern period.

Meanwhile, if one looks at the origins of the Missionaries in the broad context of Catholic humanitarianism, compassion towards objectified victims of social injustice seems to be at the

core of these parallel and apparently related processes which built up the new humanitarianism of the late XX century: Didier Fassin suggests one clue to the common axis of those, pointing out the origin of the ethics of suffering inherent to the whole contemporary humanitarian field which he finds exactly in Christian morality (2012). The fascination with suffering as a source of redemption is one of the basic motives of Christianity which derives from the passions of Christ, infinitely multiplied by martyrs throughout the history and geography of Christian world. As the author of *Humanitarian Reason* notes, it was already the observation made by St Augustine in the fifth century that the concept of suffering has got a paradoxical two-level structure: we love to feel pity for others; the spectacle of others suffering produces a mixed feeling of horror and pleasure. (Fassin 2012) Volunteering in the Kalighat Home for the Dying is one case where this twofold effect of suffering can be closely analyzed: the volunteers come to the Mission in search of the encounter with suffering, poverty and death which subjects them to a certain stressful and scary experience of transgression of the regular limits of western life.

Volunteering and Liminality

The case of Kalighat Home for the Dying Destitutes demonstrates how this encounter with the uncovered limits of social reality within the framework of charity works as an educational resource which promotes certain values. In this sense the volunteering practice works as a typical liminal field of social transition when subjects of transformation face the limits and disassembled particles of the social structure to get an essentially new understanding of it: "Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection. In it those ideas, sentiments and facts, that have been hitherto for the neophytes bound up in configurations and accepted unthinkingly, are, as it were, resolved into their constituents" (Turner 1967:105). Departing from the Van Gennep's analysis of rites of passage, which ritualize transitions between fixed social

conditions mainly in small cyclical societies, Victor Turner developed a broader theory of liminality as an interstructural situation of social transition. Liminality is an essentially unstructured social state: it is pre-structured and destructured. According to Van Gennep, the transition has a threefold structure: between the thresholds of *separation* and *aggregation* which part it from the regular social structures of everyday life lies the middle *margin* part where the actual transition occurs through rituals and experiences in the state of liminality (Gennep 1960).

The threefold structure of liminality is realized in the case of Kalighat Home of MC on two levels: the thresholds of separation and aggregation in the case of volunteering in Kalighat are two dimensional: firstly, they are defined spatially by the physical boundaries of the Shelter's building and secondly, temporally - by the daily rituals of beginning and ending of the work. Life in the shelter is framed as a constantly maintained liminal situation. This type of socially regulated destructured liminal zones within the stable social structure which doesn't threaten the whole but serve as necessary transition zones within it is referred to as *structured liminality* (Thomassen 2014). There are three main groups of actors in the structured liminal zone of the shelter with distinctive roles and attributes: the residents, the volunteers and the Sisters. Though being distinctively separated by their functions and attributes, all three engage into a ritualized interaction being simultaneously symbolically and functionally separated from any outside structures of meaning and brought into a liminal state of blurred social identity which enables and stimulates processes of personal transformation.

The residents are put in liminal isolation of in-betweenness between life and death within the shelter from where they have 4 ways out: death; getting in a bad but stable condition and moving to another bigger shelter for chronic patients; getting better and leaving back to the street or to their distant homes; staying in the shelter as a service person, which happens rarely. The patients lead a specific socially stripped existence in the Kalighat home, having no social differences or possessions (everything is stored and given back if they leave or kept if they die),

wearing uniforms, following the daily schedule of the shelter and being completely dependent on the personnel.

Liminality of the nuns is of a more permanent nature that can be called *fixed liminality* (Thomassen 2014). While in case of the volunteers and the residents the borders of liminality are defined by the physical boundaries of the Home, outside of which they can re-aggregate with the outside world, Sisters bear their separation from social world with them wherever they go. Their fixed liminality can be noticed through their minimalized expressions of individuality, constant movements around the world from mission to mission, constant self-cultivation through prayer and self-neglecting service, sense of belonging to God. One sister expressed this attitude in a private dialogue: “if you feel agreed and comfortable with this world, something is wrong”. Another common expression says that Mother Theresa “went back home to the Lord” when she died. All these small but definite signs of temporality and vanity of the earthly being as opposed to the true being in the afterlife point out at the particularly liminal character of Sisters' life. The nuns are forbidden to have possessions, take multiple vows which estrange them from social being which do not let them forget about this essential liminality of righteous being and get swallowed by the illusionary values of tangible world.

The liminality of the volunteers, which is one of the key objects of analysis of this paper, is multilayered and can be analyzed in various aspects of their experience, from the specific liminal period of biography which many of them are going through, to the everyday rituals of separation and re-aggregation. Working as a universal solvent of stable assumptions and definite borders it permeates the volunteers' community enabling transgressive experiences and consequent personal transformation of the involved individuals. One of the specific features of liminality as an essentially destructured state is the enormous importance and potential of imitative behavior. In the state of uncertainty and lack of social structures and established meanings which would allow individual rational choice, mimesis and imitation gain a central

position among the modes of interaction (Thomassen 2014) thus serving as key tools of education and liminal transition.

Embodiment through Ritual and Mimesis

In physical dimension, the space of the Kalighat Home is filled with human bodies: those of workers, nuns, novices, volunteers and residents – eight to ten dozens of them at every moment. The life and interaction of these bodies are released from regular rules and restrictions of the outside social life, but still intensively regulated by the cyclical daily rhythm, rituals and moral prescriptions of the religious convent. First of all, there are the sick bodies of victims, subjected to the non-reciprocal gifts of charity and compassion, which constitute one of the core objects of humanitarian imagery (Fassin 2012). All the bodies in Kalighat are at the same time reduced in some attributes and exaggerated in others. Moral restrictions of the Catholic order are aimed at desexualization of all the bodies in the shelter: they are revealed through the restrictions for any kind of nudity above knees and shoulders, prohibition of sexual expressions of any kind, spatial segregation of genders, celibacy of the nuns and their smooth but solid promotion of traditional sexual relations among the volunteers.

Meanwhile, the contact between the intensively different bodies of residents and volunteers reveals a plethora of social tensions between dirt/purity, health/sickness, security/vulnerability, West (North)/East (South), domination/service etc., functioning as a key educative mechanism within liminality of the shelter. The educative transgressions the volunteers happen to exercise in the Kalighat Home are concentrated around the body of Other and its products, mainly – the body of a disempowered, sick and forsaken resident of the shelter picked up from the streets of Kolkata (see fig.1). Distinctively resonating with the basic imagery of

Christianity - including the crucifixes with the suffering body of Christ abundant in the Kalighat and other buildings of the MCs and depictions of various martyrdoms, the suffering bodies are traditionally intensively charged with moral value.

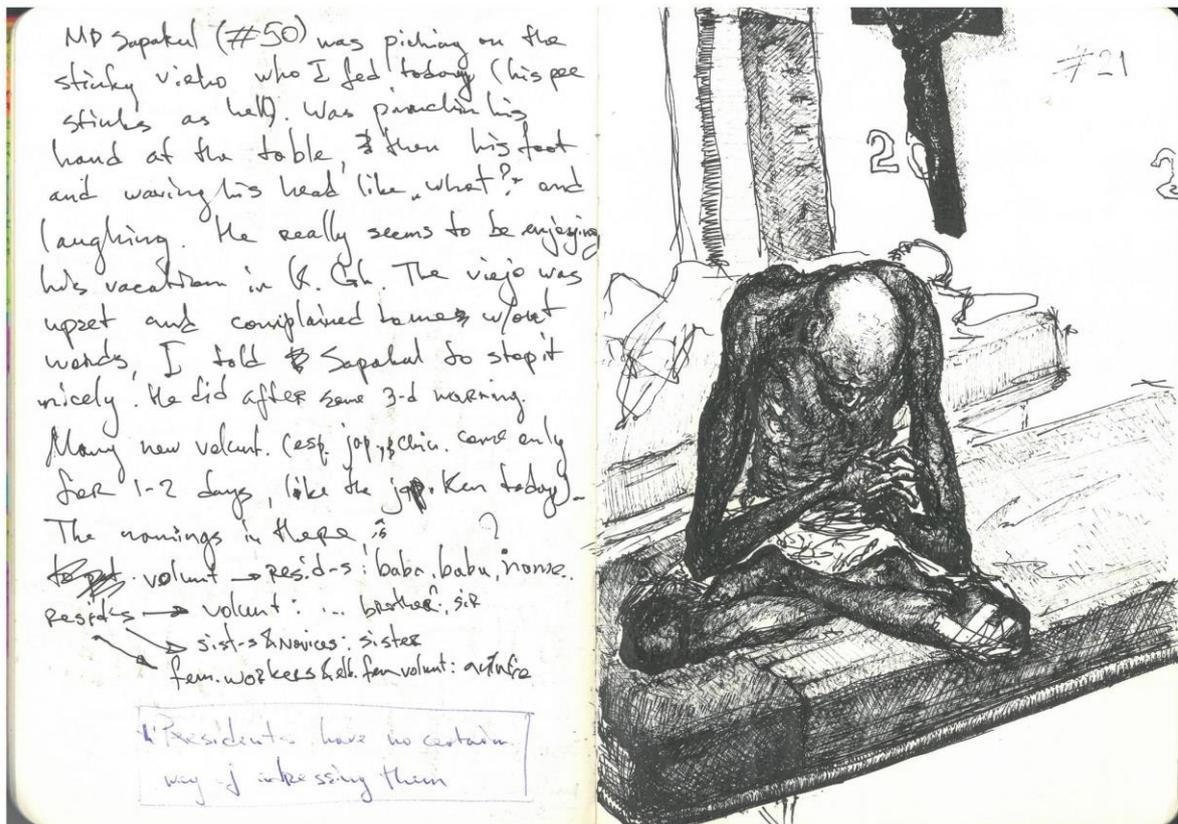


Fig. 1

Today the focus on victimized body is a common point of the humanitarian practices not only in Christian institutions of charity. With the rise of contemporary *humanitarian reason* (Fassin 2012) images of suffering and victimhood obtained an exceptional role in western public discourse: after the decline of the Fordist system of production, the body of the social outsider became useless in political economy of the new era but has found its use in moral economy: the producing body gave place to the body of a victim. Besides being a valuable symbolic resource in humanitarian politics, this disempowered but significant suffering body also serves as a powerful tool of moral education.

The case of Kalighat allows to see how the collision of differently symbolically charged bodies in the liminal setting allows this individual transformation direction for which is suggested by the dominating Christian discourse implicitly imposed by the structure of volunteering practice, rituals and charismatic images. The encounter with the powerless body of the other, which often bears monstrous features of disease and physical deformation is a transgressive act, which requires a special justification which cannot be provided by regular western rationality they volunteers appeal to in everyday life. This stressing situation motivates them to look for a different perception and attitude towards themselves and the Other and this alternative attitude in the form of Christian love is consistently offered to them by the whole ambience of the MC.

The embodiment of personal attitudes and patterns of interaction based on values of Christian humanitarianism is enabled by the high grade of ritualization of volunteering practices in the Kalighat home. The life of the shelter follows a definite cyclical rhythm which ritualizes everyday practices and weaves religious and community rituals into the fabric of liminal being. This ritualization of life allows what Saba Mahmood calls production of *experienced body*: the cultivation technique whose implementation allows all actors in the shelter (though to a different extent) through performance of certain acts "to re-orient their volition, desires, emotions, and bodily gestures to accord with norms of pious conduct"(Mahmood 2001:844). The embodiment of moral values, meanwhile, is an inevitable effect of production of experienced bodies through ritualized practices: as Roy Rappaport pointed out in regard to liturgy, participation in a ritual is an expression of acceptance of the conventions codified into it (1999). Meanwhile, the breach of the obligations established by this convention would be inevitably perceived as immoral, thus "ritual establishes morality as it establishes convention" (Rappaport 1999:463). Hence, the multilayered ritualization of life in Kalighat Home for the Dying Destitutes is another crucial factor of the general educative process of embodiment of Christian values of humanitarianism

which subjects the volunteers to a personal transformation creating subjects of humanitarian power relations.

Another factor of the personal transformation of the volunteers during the liminal experience in the Kalighat Home is mimesis. Having no solid rational ground under their feet facing the transgressions of Kalighat the volunteers are suggested modes of behavior which would allow them to handle the challenging experience. These models are given in the form of charismatic figures of Mother Teresa and Catholic Saints, the Sisters and novices living the life of self-neglecting service and surrounding experienced volunteers, inducing the newcomers to share their attitudes and modes of behavior. Thus, in the case of Kalighat imitation of the surrounding practices and mimesis of iconic images, Christian archetypes and become one of the key didactic tools of personal transformation.

Caritas and Pastoral Power

The theory of *pastoral power* is one critical approach which embraces various aspects of contemporary humanitarianism while finding their roots in traditional religious morality (Fassin 2012). The archetypal biblical role of pastor who leads his flock to salvation being ready to sacrifice himself has become one of the basic patterns of interaction which defines relations between the givers and receivers of humanitarian aid (Fassin 2012:232). Looking at genealogy of modern power Michel Foucault finds its roots in the pastoral control originally introduced by Christian institutions. Among the characteristic features of this form of power which differ from other forms such as sovereignty is perception of rule as a pastoral service to the community which pre-supposes that the pastor's only aim is salvation of the flock for which she is prepared to sacrifice herself. Also this kind of power is directly "linked with the production of truth – the truth of the individual himself" (Foucault 1982:783). It is a kind of power which establishes

regimes of truth and tends to control not only behavior but also thoughts and wishes of its subjects. Michel Foucault declares that in modern state pastoral power has taken a new form. It is distributed among multiple social actors on various social levels instead of being concentrated in the hands of religious organizations (1982:784). Nevertheless, the case of MC in Indian Kolkata as well as other cases such as the Catholic charity in Lombardy researched by Andrea Muehlebach (2013), demonstrate that the power structures imposed by Catholic institutions still play a significant role in humanitarian field.

In Catholic charity the structures of Foucauldian pastoral power have in their basement the concept of *caritas* – unconditional Christian love – the pivot of Christian service and one of the main concepts of the actual social doctrine of subsidiarity promoted by the Holy Throne.

Love—*caritas*—will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbor is indispensable. The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person—every person—needs: namely, loving personal concern. We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need (Benedict XVI 2005).

Andrea Muehlebach insists that the Catholic love of *caritas*, though invoked by compassion is not considered a human emotion but rather an expression of the transcendent

divine will which shapes social relations into a certain hierarchy (2013). Just as God created the being as a free gift of love, the same way humans should take a place in this cosmological hierarchy while mimicking the divine act of giving by providing a gift of love to someone in need. And just as the primary divine gift of creation cannot be reciprocated by humble human beings due to its greatness, the givers should not expect any reciprocity from those in need (Muehlebach 2013:454). As a result, such an attitude provides a moral basis for regular non-reciprocal gifting which is not expected to and often cannot be paid back by recipients of the gifts. The non-reciprocal gifts tend to create social inequality and relations of dependence (Parry 1986). For this reason, Catholic charity tends to create chains of non-reciprocal giving which form networks of dependency and unequal relations between politically active givers and passive recipients, subjected to the charitable aid.

Nevertheless, the Catholic concept of *caritas* is not only responsible for recreation of the chains of dependency. According to Didier Fassin, the tension between service and domination is one of the core structural contradictions of humanitarian field in general, not only of Catholic charity (2012). And Catholic doctrine of *caritas* suggests an effective solution for this contradiction by turning the relations between the givers and the recipients into the mode of *pastoral power*. The power of pastor over the flock based on *caritas* is based on self-neglecting service of the former to the latter in their common pursuit of shared *truths* such as the salvation of soul or restoration of human dignity. Thus, *caritas* turns the contradiction between service and domination into a self-reproducing cycle where domination is achieved through self-sacrifice and is exercised as service which again produces power. The study of volunteering practices of Kalighat Home can reveal the actual process of embodiment of the concept of *caritas* by volunteers which results in promotion of the patterns of Christian pastoral power throughout the humanitarian field.

Methodology

The Field and the Methods

My first visit to the Mission of Charity in Kolkata happened in year 2013. I spent over a month working in the Motherhouse doing predominantly artistic jobs for the sisters while the volunteers in shelters were abundant as it often happens in summer months when many European volunteers come for their vacation period. Nevertheless, I had learned the place well enough to evaluate its potential for an anthropological study of volunteering practices. The Kalighat Home for the Dying Destitutes is the first Home of the international order of Mission of Charity, founded by Mother Teresa in 1952. After over a half-century of existence it has become one of the icons Catholic charity. I found it being a valuable case for an ethnographic study of volunteering for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is an influential and charismatic institution with abundant resources^{iv} and contradictory reputation, at the same time venerated and hated. Secondly, it is a border case of religious and secular volunteering where the two meet and even to an extent merge: though many volunteers are religiously motivated, majority of them are not practicing Catholics^v. Still, most of them participate in rituals, recite prayers and apparently to a large extent share the attitudes towards their service promoted by the nuns. Thirdly, being spatially separated from regular established social structures familiar to the volunteers, Kalighat represents a perfect study case: on the distinctive background of concentrated Otherness of Kolkata the social dynamics of the shelter stand out in undistorted thick and vivid features.

^{iv} While haters of the MC regularly point out at hidden financial wealth of the institution, which according to them could be used much more effectively (Chatterjee 2003, Hitchens 2012), experienced volunteers, supporters of MC and the Sisters do not neglect the abundant resources possessed by the Order either. Nevertheless, they decline the requests for financial transparency and silently spend the resources on basic supplies and facilities, as well as on necessary surgeries and therapies for their patients in accordance with their religious worldview and Christian moral values (according to my own experience at the shelter and evidences of Sisters and experienced volunteers).

^v According to the data collected from interviews with thirty volunteers

The methods I applied in the field were semi-structured interviews, participant observation, analysis of written prescriptions and texts of regularly recited prayers and hymns and visual documentation. About thirty semi-structured interviews with the volunteers and a few more with Sisters and workers were held in shape of informal conversations in the Kalighat Home during the periods of rest of relaxed work such as hanging the washed clothes at the rooftop, in the main building of the congregation *Motherhouse* during the morning reunions or out at the hostel during evening meetings over a beer or fresh fruits. During these conversations besides learning about their general attitudes and reflections on current affairs I stimulated the interviewees to identify their religious alignment if any, reflect on their motivation to participate in the work of MC and their immediate past before volunteering, their origin and backgrounds, future plans and their understanding of their current experience and purposes of the volunteering.

I worked in the Home as a volunteer for 3 weeks, staying in one of the cheap hostels in the neighborhood where many volunteers stay, communicating with them and sharing their lifestyle and activities 24/7. While living a life of a volunteer myself I was constantly carrying a journal taking notes and writing observations about the life in the shelter. In addition to the written notes I was gathering visual evidences which I could use for my further research by means of sketching and photography. One reason for applying the visual method was high density and impressiveness of visual images on the streets of Kolkata and in the shelter. The vivid and frantic kaleidoscope of Indian streets makes a striking contrast with the minimalistic interiors and passive inhabitants of the shelter – though absolutely different, both are seen by western volunteers as concentrated Otherness. As experiences of the volunteers are to a large extent defined by the visual perception of Other, of exotic landscapes and monstrous images of suffering, the use of media was a way to make the research thicker and clearer for readers.

I informed the co-volunteers about my role of researcher for both ethical and practical reasons and asked for a permission from the sister in charge of volunteers to carry out my

investigation. Though I had a good personal contact with the Sister since the previous visit, she gave me permission to do it only after she had discussed it with other sisters in accordance with the ethics of the monastic sisterhood. Though the Mission of Charity has been an object of severe criticisms and suspicions for decades (Chatterjee 2002, Hitchens 2012), the sisters don't actively respond to the criticisms reacting to it with humbleness and stating that their enemies are also their friends. Nevertheless they apparently don't mind sharing their position and showing everything that should be shown taking it as a part of their missionary work and a way to counter the accusations with openness and humbleness in accordance with some basic principles of Christian ethics.

Limitations and Advantages

The blessing for the research from the sister in charge still didn't allow me to take photographs in the shelter. A few years ago the sisters introduced a ban on photographs in the shelters on the pretext of protecting human dignity: "...our patients are not animals"^{vi}. Apparently, this was a reaction to the development of a touristic approach to volunteering.^{vii} One way or another, in the Kalighat shelter the ban for cameras is strictly followed, thus I was making sketches of inhabitants of the Home and their daily life taking advantage of every opportunity to at the minutes when there was not much work to do. The use of sketches came out to be an effective method of research for a few reasons. Besides being useful illustrative materials they also gave me a reason to stay for a longer period focused in one direction, which doesn't happen usually with the volunteers who mainly spend their working time in constant

^{vi} As written on one of the signs which warns about the ban on photography in Kalighat Home

^{vii} A couple years ago Sisters had found out that a Japanese tour operator even included 3 days of volunteering at MC into tour packages. The sisters do not restrict such short term visits which might have a certain didactic impact and induce the visitors to come back one day, but do not encourage them either refusing to work as a commercialized tourist attraction.

movement, and thus pay attention to details and see the slow life of the patients and their interactions with Sisters, volunteers and each other in a temporal progress. Finally, the sketches allowed me to gain certain respect among the nuns and the volunteers consequently involving them into my research. And the most certainly the drawings allowed me to establish a more intimate contact with the residents. For these disempowered forsaken inhabitants of social bottom such a recognition from a western stranger often was an apparently strong experience. At some cases upon seeing their portraits usually apathetic people came out of their desperate indifference and showed strong emotions which were so unusual that seemed almost frightening.

Though taking into account my personal feelings and discoveries during the period of volunteering, in this paper I rather rely on the observations and dialogues of other participants which reveal their attitudes and experiences. The reason for this is the inevitable distortion of my view due to the researcher's position. While immersing myself into this challenging liminal ambience of the volunteering service I felt unconsciously comfortable to lock myself into the tricksterish role of an observing ethnographer, which to a big extent relieved me from the necessity to undergo a personal transformation and build up a new own framework of relationships with the surrounding reality and transgressive practices: performing a researcher I already had an outside purpose to justify, explain and build priorities. At the end it seemed to me that the sisters felt it quite clearly and they became more alienated from me compared to the last time when I volunteered doing art work for them three years ago – the armor of an outer purpose is never accepted by them and they even almost explicitly state that refusing to give recommendations to volunteers or participate in any outside projects.

Liminality

Liminal Phase of Personal Biographies

Volunteering in Kalighat is an essentially liminal experience throughout various layers. Though, as I said all three groups of actors of the threefold structure of the Kalighat Home go through one or another kind of liminal experience I will focus only on the volunteers who were the main object of my research. Most of the volunteers interviewed in the MC's shelters were in a liminal phase of their lives when they arrived to the shelter, as they already finished one period of life but haven't yet started the next one: many of them were in a "traveling" state when they took a year off work or after graduation or after a personal or family crisis to go and find out something about themselves. That is how Ken, an American long term volunteer who was involved in maybe the most responsible and psychologically hard work being a part of a scouts' team which selects, retrieves and introduces the dying people into the shelter from hectic surroundings of the Howrah railway station, describes his current social state: "I am like in between. I finished my major a few years ago, now I think I might go for a master's, but I don't hurry to go home to the States". This kind of self-reflection is very common among the volunteers, most of those interviewed by me expressed similar feeling of in-betweenness, often accompanied with a feeling of necessity of change and search of self-identity. The Japanese/French volunteer Romain who was raised in Catholicism and now has left his stable job to engage in active search of personal development and religious revival in a conversation about it in the context of the experience of volunteering says: "I don't know where I am going" and "I am open to trying things". Another former volunteer who is now running her own small NGO with other former MC's volunteers says: "People come from very different backgrounds, but here they are like blank paper." These expressions clearly reveal the liminal educative nature of the

volunteering experience, characterized by "creation of a tabula rasa, through the removal of previously taken-for-granted forms and limits" (Szakolczai 2009:148).

Such an explicitly conscious liminal position of openness for an undetermined transformation is even more typical for the phase before the volunteering period or during the first days, while in the aftermath volunteers often tend to rationalize the experience post-factum presenting it as caused by outer reasons of social and moral duty. As it comes out of interviews and my own experience the search for a fertile liminality which allows a transforming experience of encounter with unknown usually precedes the actual volunteering experience. As one sister^{viii} wrapped it up: "The volunteers come here for a life changing experience. Many of them come after meeting another volunteer. For most it is the joy of serving what they find here, for many – encounter with God. Many volunteers join the prayers. While for some of them it is their first experience, for others it is a revival of Christian background received by them in childhood but forgotten". Meanwhile, fresh volunteers themselves describe the same search of a special experience as young Chinese volunteer Hengnan Sun said: "Experience here is more meaningful. I was traveling for a long time, seeing many places but not remembering them really, and here I stayed for longer".

Other volunteers are on religious mission as Catholic Christians like the middle-aged French male Alain for whom half a year volunteering in Kalighat is the last stage of two years long pilgrimage from Western Europe to the Holy Land. Alain is certain about the uncertain motive he is led by in his search: "[I am on the pilgrimage] for God! I know that God wants me, but I don't know where and when, so I went to find him!" Others are in spiritual search traveling around India, like the anonymous older female volunteer from New Zealand who was studying meditation practices in various ashrams for a few months before coming to Kolkata. On top of it,

^{viii} The Sisters usually agree to share opinions only anonymously, no names allowed. One obvious reason for it is of moral and social nature, related to the anonymous character of monastic sisterhood and Christian ethics of humbleness.

the whole institution of volunteering in the Mission of Charity can be seen as a pilgrimage on its own with an egalitarian ambience of *communitas*, everyday travels through unknown, abundant rituals, strange exotic “Indian” outfits which these persons don’t wear back in their countries and apparent religious attributes such as rosary beads worn over shirts. Meanwhile, informal conversations with the volunteers and observations of their contrasting roles during the service in the shelter and in their free time out of it reveal multiple tensions in their uncertain being: the tension between the selfish motivation of personal development and the self-neglecting idea of service to the poor, that between the role of ascetic pilgrims and the role of hedonistic tourists, and between the exotic surroundings and familiar communities of compatriots or at least westerners in which they spend most of the time. Though to a different extent, all the volunteers face these internal contradictions produced by their uncertain liminal position during the volunteering period.

Estranged and Surrounded by Otherness

On the level of immediate experiences and everyday life, the city itself is the first liminal experience for many of the volunteers. That's how Lucia who worked in one of the shelters of the mission for about a month describes her daily route from the hostel to the home where she works:

The trip is neither easy nor pleasant. The life in Calcutta passes on the street and 24 million of population is a lot of people. Crows, cats and dogs trying to tear off parts of scattered animal corpses, bloodstained sidewalks, garbage covering every centimeter of every and each street, tram rails full of kids who put their arms forth begging for food but happy to get just a tickle, a smile, or a little sympathy. Rows of buildings never end and

the stench of decay which haunts the city enfolds us as minutes pass. On top of that 42 degrees heat with 90% of humidity doesn't make anything easier at all. Meanwhile, the deafening traffic noise keeps all our senses alert without even a second of relief. Countless homeless citizens make their way among overloaded trams, buses, cars and rickshaws. Forty minutes of a permanent kaleidoscope of feelings ultimately ends up when we arrive to Prem Dan.^{ix}

The daily trips through aggressive, noisy and smelly ambience of the overpopulated Bengal capital is an essential part of the volunteers' experience. Many of them start their day by taking a twenty minutes walk through a Muslim neighborhood early in the morning, when they go from their cheaper hostels on Sudder Street to the main building of the MCs known as the Motherhouse for the morning reunion before going for apostolate. Though the streets are still not that crowded at this time and the weather is quite fresh while the temperature still hasn't risen above 35 degrees, the landscape of the awakening Muslim neighborhood of Kolkata is anything but relaxing. While stepping over bodies of people sleeping on the pavement (fig. 2), the volunteers pass by smelly butcher shops and piles of garbage (fig. 3, 4), half-naked men washing themselves in special open basins or just huge puddles (fig. 5), beggars, steaming tea-stalls, barbers, rickshaw carts on huge wooden wheels and all the diverse and unimaginable pavement life of northern India.

^{ix} My translation from Spanish, original retrieved 7/5/2016 with a generous permission of the author from the Facebook page of Lucia Valenzuela at <https://www.facebook.com/luvabu/posts/10153622375692337?pnref=story>



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

After the trip through the streets of Kolkata, the solemn morning Mass where over a hundred of sisters and novices sing and pray aside the full size sculpture of praying Mother, feels like an island of clearness and harmony. This impression is enhanced by regular intrusions of city life into the standard flow of the Mass. One time, a loud barbaric beat of drums gradually approaches to the House covering voice of a priest preaching into a small conference microphone. After a minute the rumble moves further down the street and the priest continues his daily lesson of God's wisdom. Another time a deafening thunder of old Kolkatan tram completely covers the "Halleluiah" hymn sang by the flock accompanied by a harmonium. A few seconds later, the tram passes on and the sound of the hymn gradually reclaims its dominance in the chapel. The noise of city life brakes into open widows every now and then, but at the end it always drifts back like sea foam leaving the solid surface of religious community of the convent intact.

This underlying firm religious core of the congregation makes a strong contrast with the sense of risk and fluidity which soaks volunteering practices in the Kalighat and other Kolkatan homes of the MC, appearing an attractive oasis of certainty in the surrounding ocean of uncertainty. Distant and pretty much isolated from the familiar rational western life the volunteers are thrown into the turmoil of concentrated Otherness which doesn't leave any of their senses intact and relaxed. Being exposed to all these experiences without a firm psychological armor provided to the sisters by the religious institution and certain imperatives based on its regulations and religious morality, volunteers spend their days in an essentially uncertain liminal being.

Significantly, MC homes in India and Nepal are often located next to Hindu religious centers: Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu, central Ghats used for cremation of deceased Hindus 24/7 in Varanasi and the crowded surreal and frightening biggest Hindu Kali temple complex where daily animal sacrifices are performed next to the Kalighat Home for the Dying

Destitutes in Kolkata. These belts of concentrated otherness function as symbolic thresholds of transition, revealing the spiritual transition through spatial, in accordance with the Arnold van Gennep's idea of the spatial origin of rites of passage: "A rite of spatial passage has become a rite of spiritual passage" (1960:22). As soon as they reach the doorway of the shelter, the volunteers enter a different world: the space of liminal safety where the laws of the intensive outside social world cease to work (fig. 6). The ancient man in spectacles who was brought to this limbo on a verge of death and remained here for years finds their names in a thick copybook and marks the dates with his crooked brown fingers, slightly waving towards the hall: "Pass..." (fig. 7), marking their entrance into the liminal space.



Fig. 6

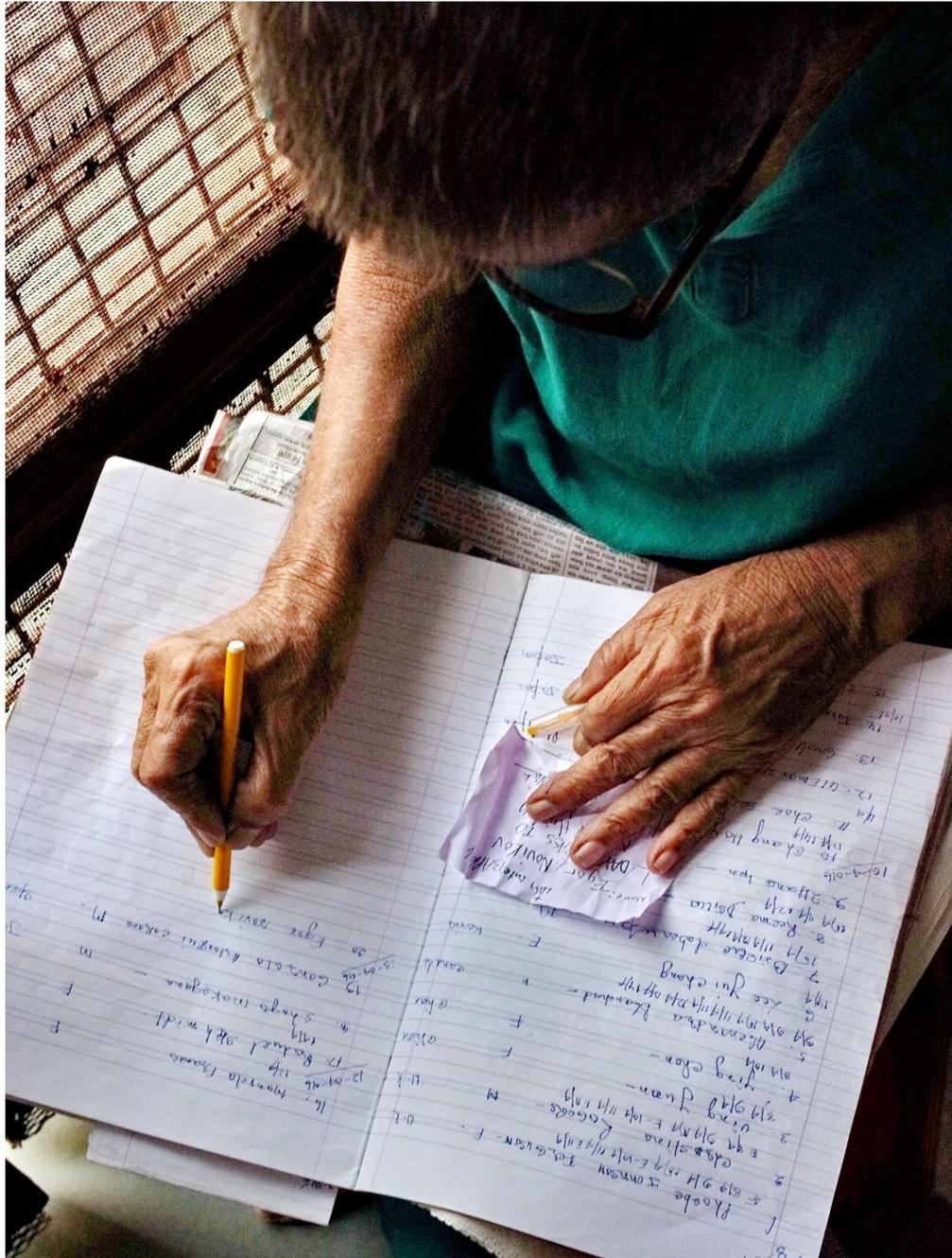


Fig. 7

The Sisters who live in the shelter and novices of the order who make their way here from the Motherhouse every day gather under a statue of Virgin Mary surrounded with posters with inscribed prayers and start reciting and singing. At times some of the volunteers join them to pray and sing the words of Christ: "...whatsoever you do to the least of thy brothers, that you do unto me...", but most of them go directly upstairs to the volunteers hall, put their belongings

into lockers and get to work. The active separation from regular social life and at the same time introduction into the "apostolate" of the shelter starts when they put on aprons and gather around stone basins to do the laundry under the silent gazes of surrounding male residents of the shelter who are already brought out of their beds and seated in the hall dressed in fresh clean uniform pajamas. The first thing the volunteers have to do is dip their hands into soapy water with antiseptic, grab a dirty wet piece of cloth and start rubbing it celebrating their immersion into the fluid ambience of liminality enriched with dirt and suffering of the sick bodies on the one hand, and with the detergent of *caritas* which turns this filthy solute into a sacralized educative resource on the other.

Fluid Structure of Communitas and Solid Understructure of the Order

Egalitarian ambience of communitas specific for liminal states defines the attitudes of all actors towards each other in spite of certain hidden social tensions and sublime but inevitable power relations which structure daily life of the shelter. Communitas can be defined as a fraternal unity of human being stripped from social structures and bound together by a shared experience of liminal transition (Turner 1967). The de-structuring effect of liminality leaves the differences of social and material status of the volunteers behind the threshold of the shelter, where everyone, starting with the most powerful actors - the nuns – is equaled through the reduction of their material status to the lowest common level of poverty and leveling of their social status to the basic shared level of fraternity of human beings. In this context it is interesting to see how on this lowest level of material difference even a small outstanding detail – such as my journal with sketches – already makes a big difference in status granting the owner a significant symbolic surplus value. Hence, the general rules of the shelter prevent such potentially destructive symbolic imbalances within the communitas of the Kalighat Home by

forbidding any material gifts between the actors and any personal possessions for the nuns and the residents except for religious attributes. Even for the volunteers, the major social differences are kept out of the borders of the Home; a veteran volunteer once told me an anecdote about a western man who was coming to work in the shelter regularly and only after a long while did someone accidentally discover that while volunteering he was staying in one of the most expensive luxurious hotels in the downtown.

Many volunteers use the word 'family' when referring to the atmosphere in the shelters and their relations with fellows. This sense is supported not only through status equality and community building rituals, but also through the conventional ways of referring to each other and between various actors. These words predominantly are those used between relatives: sister, brother, auntie, baba^x. Nevertheless the sense of *communitas* supported within the shelter doesn't dissolve the underlying threefold structure: all the groups of actors are different in their attributes, roles and grades of political agency.

The liminal *communitas* of Kalighat is characterized by absence of certain order and regulations: there is no direct management and hierarchy on the place – the shelter self-regulates on the basis of traditions, moral imperatives and basic rules, allowing everyone to find a place for him/her. The volunteers face the necessity to find a place in the fluid liminal collective and a job to perform, as there are no certain positions or assignments. Also the volunteers have to define the grade of participation in rituals and start performing at least some of them though they didn't intend to or are not used to.

Being run by the female monastic order, Kalighat Home for the Dying has got complicated relations with sexuality and gender. On a formal level, the desexualization of the social space of Kalighat Home is apparently produced by subtle but constant presence of the rules of religious community. No sexual behavior is tolerated within the institutions, male and

^x Baba - Bengali, Hindi and Marathi: father; grandfather; wise old man; sir - Platts, John T. *A dictionary of Urdu, classical Hindi, and English*. London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1884.

female wards are strictly separated and volunteers are obligated to wear closed dress covering their shoulders and knees. Significantly, under the formal religious surface the atmosphere among volunteers is highly sexualized, which seems to be the inevitable other side of the puritan rules which frame the field of liminality. Volunteers quite often get involved into short term relationships among themselves or with other persons in their free time out of the MC's institutions. Besides the short term relations volunteers also create long term partnerships. But significantly enough, as soon as volunteers get married they rarely come back to volunteer again: the most long-time volunteers who stay for years or come year after year are usually single, living a liminal life of strangers and travelers. People with a defined social status, traditional families are few among the volunteer teams. Thus, the active volunteers are in general people of undefined marital status (in search, in free relations, widows, young or temporal couples) while established families (and even those created of volunteers) don't actively participate in volunteering.

The abovementioned sex related taboos of the Mission of Charity in Kolkata is just one category of the strict restrictive structure which underlies the unstructured liminal life within the shelters. There is a whole system of intransgressible rules and borders which frame the liminal field where the daily transgressions of symbolic, social and physical borders take place. Such are the spatial restrictions of entrance to the inner rooms of the congregation, unpronounced but obvious prohibition of touching the bodies of the Sisters, prohibitions of loud expressions of fun or anger, swears and blasphemies, etc. The solid understructure of the convent based on severe religious moral regulations is a necessary counterpart which balances the liminal fluid practices of charity within Kalighat Home making them possible. Beside these strict taboos (mainly related to the religious restrictions of the monastic order of MC), daily routine timetable, persistent repetition of rituals, and definite division into the three categories of actors with

different functions and attributes form the solid understructure of the shelter, the carcass on which the flesh of daily liminal improvisation dwells and blossoms.

Transgression and Ritual

Facing constant transgressions of regular symbolic, physical and psychological borders the volunteers dismantle solid structures which define their perception of surrounding reality. Such an experience enables a personal transition in the state of liminality opening them for education and conversion. Meanwhile, intensive ritualization of volunteering practice balances the de-structuring experiences of transgression by framing them into a temporal and spatial structure at the same time serving as a sublime didactic mechanism inducing the volunteers to embody values and techniques of Christian self-cultivation through service.

Transgressing Dirt and Disease

In the entrance hall of the Kalihgat Home stands a jar labeled 'gloves' which was empty whenever I looked into it except for the last days when I put there the remains of my own disposable gloves inherited from another volunteer. The only occasion in which the sisters told us to put gloves on is when applying benzyl of benzoate ointment on those residents infected with scabies, though it did not make much practical sense as those often were the very patients we carried around and changed dress every day without any protection. Only a few people protected their hands from contact with dirt and disease with polyethylene gloves. One of those was Stefano who used to work on an ambulance back in Italy and had a more medical approach to work and whose sense of the structural division of dirt and purity wasn't as blunted as it was with the majority of the volunteers. Once he told me that another volunteer washes butts of the

residents after toilet without gloves and jokingly warned me about shaking hands with him. Still, Stefano definitely was not too sentimental, he easily talked about the most terrible things and handled dead bodies but always used gloves and washed his hands thoroughly. Another thing which differed him from the majority of volunteers and which might explain his persistence in avoidance of direct contact with dirt is the outside purpose he had: just like I was gathering material for my research (and I also used gloves more often than others) he was investigating the cause for a magazine article.

Meanwhile, the prevailing practice among volunteers, sisters and workers is direct, not medically formalized warm contact with bodies and their waste products. Day by day newcomer volunteers learn to touch dirt and sickness without hesitation, starting from the abovementioned morning laundry basins. Interviews with volunteers and observations of daily work in the Kalighat Home demonstrated that people perceive such transgressions as attractive and frightening at the same time. The two main imperatives that initially prevent 'western' people from such contacts are to a certain extent intertwined. First is the rather rationalized fear of disease and contagion: in the highly medicalized worldviews of contemporary westerners direct contact with patients with indefinite complex diagnosis is related to a certain risk. Second is the avoidance of dirt and waste products related to the structural division of world into the binary oppositions of pure/impure and sick/good. Religious framework imposed by the MCs in their institutions suggests certain ways to deal with both of these social taboos.

Though basic hygienic standards are followed in the shelters, sisters apparently avoid medical formalization of their practice. Veteran volunteers evidence that once there was a Catholic female physician from UK who tried to introduce hygienic education and requirements for the volunteers (wearing masks and gloves, regularly washing hands measuring time with the Hail Mary prayer, etc.) but her attempt apparently was not that effective and for a reason: the Kalighat Home is not a medical institution but a space of liminal transition built around the

transgressive touch to the suffering body of the Other. It is hard to gather any kind of statistics on the matter but according to majority of informants the cases of contagion even with scabies are quite rare. Religious volunteers and sisters explain it, as they do with many other things, with the presence of Holy Spirit in the Homes. Nevertheless, they acknowledge the risk and deal with it predominantly according to the dominating attitude of self-sacrifice which is pivotal for the internal structure of the Mission. As one of the sisters says: "Risk of contagion is not big, it is often exaggerated. But it exists and taking it, being ready to suffer for another is a part of this [Christian] love".

Contact with a sick body is multilateral and challenging in many ways: perceived as an image of self it invokes fear caused by the projection of the illness on the body of oneself. Besides, the touch of sick body is a touch of impurity in two senses: beside the obvious material side of sickness revealed through specific smells, fluids and deformations which are seen as dirty, disease is also traditionally perceived as contagious social impurity which fatally diminishes social status of the diseased with attached underlying connotations of moral failure which are rooted deeply into archaic sources of structural divisions of sick/healthy and dirty/pure. The fear of transgression of the symbolic border between dirt and purity is one of the basic structural social mechanisms. It is the mechanism of filtration of feelings which allows humans to build culturally sensible experiences meanwhile making the outside borders and internal structure of the society visible and tangible for the individuals (see Douglas 2003). And this mechanism consists of rather rigid categories which can be revised on an individual level, though such revision might need an essential outer justification in a form of a different system of values:

Culture, in the sense of the public, standardized values of a community, mediates the experience of individuals. It provides in advance some basic categories, a positive

pattern in which ideas and values are tidily ordered. And above all, it has authority, since each is induced to assent because of the assent of others. (Douglas 2003:40)

And the charismatic order of MC enriched with the symbolic authority of Mother Teresa is an institution which has enough weight to suggest such an outer justification under a different system of values. Within their own liminal space the sisters force themselves and their flock of sheep to become shepherds to play with the borders of dirt/purity for the sake of self-cultivation and liminal transition into a new status. The defiling by mixing of dirt and pure constitutes the very core of the most important religious and social rituals. *Pure* sacred object is a result of differentiation of reality, which is originally born out of non-differentiated primary sacred matter. Thus, in the retrospective of a ritual the binary oppositions of dirt and purity meet in the primordial homogeneous matter which is seen as a sacred source of genesis (Douglas 2003). In this framework, the dirt of the suffering profane Other is sacralized through the reference to its primordial unity with the pure in the divine source. Rituals of transition and re-establishment of order constantly appeal to this primary impurity conjoining dirty elements with pure ones. Being a product of structural differentiation, "purity is the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise" (Douglas 2003:163), thus, dirt can be used as a powerful symbolic resource for self-cultivation which effectively overcomes the rigidity of order. Meanwhile, the liminal ambience of the Kalighat Home provides a perfect ground for such communion with sacred through the touch of dirt and sin. Dirt and uncleanness are structural attributes of everything unclear, undefined and contradictory (Douglas 2003). Being driven out of defined social categories of regular life, the volunteers descend into blurred, contradictory state of liminality and this transition is confirmed every morning when they start their day dipping their hands into the muddy water and washing pants and sheets with stains of feces and pus. That's how one of former volunteers describes her first transgressive experience:

When one of the sisters asked me to wash this woman I thought there is no way. I just couldn't. [...] So she said, "Alright, come with me," and she picked up this little bundle of bones, because that's what this lady was, and took her into the bathroom. Even now it makes me cry – there wasn't a lot of light in the room and I was still absolutely catatonic. Then all of a sudden the whole room just lit up! One minute I was saying "I can't" and the next I realized, of course, I could.



Fig. 8

It suddenly struck me, seeing one of those religious pictures they have on the wall – it was the body of Christ – that anybody, whoever they are, can be Christ. It wasn't just that old

little lady who was covered with scabies, it was the whole world that was the body of Christ"
(Vardey 2011:143)

Touch is the point of collision, the moment of truth on which many volunteers reflect in private conversations. Over the obvious fear and rejection of touching the body of Other or waste products, volunteers express striving for such a touch which would allow them to build an experience of witnessing, a feeling of superior reality more real than their everyday life back home. The reality of poverty and suffering which they touch comes in the shape of deformed bodies, monstrous bodies with missing or swollen limbs, rotting wounds, open fractures, skin and nervous disease, enormously attenuate or crooked (fig. 8, 9).



Fig. 9

Encounter with monstrous is an essential feature of liminal experience. Rearrangement of reality into monstrous patterns allows the symbolic deconstruction of social structure providing an insight into its matter. (Turner 1967) The monstrous deformations of bodies and minds encountered by volunteers in Kalighat serve didactic purposes creating an impression of vulnerability and vanity of corporeal life which is opposed to the true and reliable spiritual life in God promoted by the religious doctrine of the congregation. Proximity of physical death enforces this impression of elusiveness of physical being disturbing the most sensitive strings in the volunteers' psyche. Meanwhile, as it is obvious from the quoted account of a female volunteer, the psychical force which allows one to make this transgressive touch and consequently enjoy it and strive for it is the attitude of fraternal love, compassion, which is suggested to the volunteers by the dominating religious discourse in a form of Catholic *caritas*.

Rituals and Rhythm

Naturally acting as agents of entropy the abovementioned self-regulated transgressive practices provide a possibility for individual transformation at a cost of dissolution of structural order. Societies same as physical bodies tend to gradually slide towards chaos and disorder, "dissolve into error, nonsense, nonsense, ambiguity, vagueness, hypocrisy and meaninglessness unless continually clarified, corrected and re-established" (Rappaport 1999:461). Religious rituals are some of the techniques effectively used to counter such centrifugal social tendencies and renew the ties of social structure. As Rappaport writes regarding the basic Christian practice, "liturgy does not simply remind people of the orders which usage – behavior and history – violates and dissolves. It establishes and re-establishes these orders [...]" (Rappaport 1999:461).

Individual transformation of the volunteers in the liminal space of the shelter is achieved through striking transgressive experiences balanced by existence of a solid homogeneous ideological core of the religious convent, enforced by a high grade of ritualization of everyday life.

There are at least three levels of ritualization of life in the Homes of MCs. Firstly, the daily work of volunteers is framed with small rituals such as specific ways of referring each other, the daily schedule, the order of rotation of jobs, many of which bear a ritualistic component. On the second level, multiple rituals emphasize separation of liminal being within the period of volunteering, which starts with receiving a temporal and then a permanent pass to the shelter and concludes with a special farewell ritual which reincorporates the volunteer back into the world with a package of small religious gifts from the sisters (fig. 10).



Fig. 10

Another layer of rituals is aimed at those being rather fundamentally incorporated into the Christian practices. These cyclical rituals such as the liturgy, confessions and discussion groups on a daily basis reinforce the main ideological framework which holds the institution together: communication with God and practice of Christian fraternal love. While the rituals of the first kind are rather practical, supporting the structural tissue of daily routine, those of the second kind are predominantly childish and simple making a strong contrast with the severe reality of poor injured bare life which the volunteers have to encounter in their daily work, the essentially religious rituals of the third kind are much more formalized, deeply spiritual and solemn. The three layers of rituals can be approximately categorized according to the three levels of commitment demonstrated by the volunteers: The most committed ones who come to the morning Holy Mass in the Motherhouse at 6 AM, those less incorporated into the church but incorporated into the community who come for breakfasts and morning rituals at the Motherhouse at 7 AM and finally those who come at 9 AM directly to the shelters – predominantly experienced and thus independent but not religious volunteers. Many of latter apparently don't feel the need for the superficial rituals of the second kind as they have already adapted to the transgressive experience of volunteering by embodying the basic principles of *caritas*, at the same time they avoid participating in the profound rituals of third type for various reasons abstaining from religious life.

The rituals of the first "light" type are mainly held during the daily morning meetings before work in the Mother House. The volunteers gather after 7AM in a meeting hall where they have a simple breakfast of bananas, white bread and sweet milk tea. The receiving of the free gift of breakfast already tunes the volunteers into the state of a "flock" ready to follow the further instructions of the shepherds in course of preparation to the service in the shelter where they are expected to practice in performing shepherds themselves towards the flock of the residents. After the breakfast around seven thirty everybody in the hall (usually about forty men and

women of various ages and nationalities) stands up to greet the sisters and simultaneously turns in one direction to the crucifixes and posters with prayers hanging on the walls. After a meditative pause they join the rhythmic declamation of prayer asking Virgin Mary to pray for them, sinners and the Lord to give them humbleness, meekness and ability to perfectly serve their suffering fellow men. After the two short prayers read from the posters on the walls everyone sings: "We have our hope in Jesus and all things will be well in the Lord". Though more than a half of the volunteers are not practicing Catholics, I could hardly ever find anyone present in the hall who would completely abstain from participating in this explicitly Christian ritual. Then the sister in charge of volunteers gives a short speech and invites those for whom it is the last day of service to come into the middle while everyone starts clapping and singing: "we thank you/ we love you/ we'll miss you from our heart". Finally, the newcomers are symbolically accepted when they receive their temporal passes to the shelters and at 7:50 AM the gate opens to let everyone go to their destinations. Wrapped into an easy, playful foil these rituals induce everyone to participate in it without demanding for a serious commitment, representing them as a community building game. These simple rituals certainly demarcate the points of separation and reincorporation which frame the liminal transgressive situation of volunteering at the same time reinforcing the sense of *communitas* incorporating new members into the egalitarian community and saying goodbye to those leaving it for the outer world. Meanwhile, these rituals in a subtle manner induce the volunteers to embody the basic attitudes and notions of Christian pastoral service encoded into powerful prayers *Hail Mary* and *Before Leaving for Apostolate* (see Appendix 1). Such public participation in a lighter version of religious ritual mixed with secular community building rituals bears an important educative function: though it doesn't require belief, it asserts acceptance of the conventionally accepted values. While belief is a deeper private matter, "acceptance, in contrast, is not a private state, but a public act, visible both to witnesses and to performers themselves" (Rappaport 1999:454). While the general convention

publically accepted by the participants of the rituals already contains the seeds of pastoral values of Caritas, also "ritual performance often possesses perlocutionary force, and the private processes of individuals may often be persuaded by their ritual participation to come into conformity with their public acts" (ibid.).

The rituals of the third kind require a much more serious commitment and a deeper understanding of Christian doctrine. Though not even a quarter of the volunteers attends it daily still at least seven to fifteen of them wake up at five am to walk to the congregation and pray with the sisters and novices at the Mother's tomb or in the main chapel of the Motherhouse. The Sisters avoid proselytizing^{xi} and don't induce anyone to participate in those, still some of the volunteers follow the trajectory from the light rituals of the second type to the profound ones of the third type. These Christian rituals maintain and daily reestablish the firm ideological core of the MC which holds it together allowing the transgressive practices of the liminal surface. On the individual level, the voluntary subjection of the volunteers to the conventional rituals of the convent works as a certain *practice of freedom* aimed at a conscious transformation of the *architecture of self* (Mahmood 2001). The mode of action embodied through the rituals "endows the self with various kinds of capabilities that form the background of moral and political judgment" (Mahmood 2001:845). Thus, the religious rituals serve them a resource for self-cultivation during which they embody power of *caritas* turning themselves into subjects of pastoral power – the best sheep which makes a good shepherd.

^{xi} From my own experience and evidences of experienced volunteers it is not that easy to get baptized or converted in the convent even if one asks for it.

The Touch of Transcendental

In accordance with the classical theory of liminality by Victor Turner, the interstructural situation of liminality which makes the transition possible is produced and maintained by symbolic proximity to an infinite deity or other superhuman power (Turner 1967). The presence of God, Saints and the charismatic figure of Mother are constant backgrounds of life in the shelter (fig. 11). Nevertheless, there is also an immediate, corporal representation of the transcendent, which is related to another deity – Kali - the Hindu goddess of time, change and destruction worshiped in the famous Kalighat temple next door.



Fig. 11. A small shrine at the windscreen of the MC's ambulance.

It is the proximity of the ultimate limit of death, which is a strong transgressive experience the volunteers have to deal with. Regular deaths of the patients personally known by the volunteers often produce a strong psychological impact. The necessity to wash and dress, carry and deliver the dead bodies to crematoriums and cemeteries also forces the volunteers to establish a certain closer relationship with death which is one of the strongest and most dreadful taboos in life of contemporary western citizens. The proximity of life and death in this case is not only physical but also symbolical: according to Victor Turner death and growth yield together in the peculiar unity of liminal (1967). Situation of liminality is a structural death of the social subject which is necessary step in the transformation process. The structural death is symbolically equalized to the physical death as liminal existence is approximated to the posthumous existence.

The first day of fieldwork in Kalighat home for the Dying and Destitute started for me with accompanying two deceased human beings to a Muslim cemetery (fig. 12). Stefano, the ambulance driver and I were their only company in their last trip across Kolkata, while we never even saw their faces. The only thing we knew about them beside their religion was the insignificant weight of their apathetic bodies.



Fig. 12

Significantly, almost three weeks of work in the shelter ended up with departure of two other residents. This time, I knew one of them and saw him faintly showing gratitude for giving him one of the last relieving moments in his life when Fabio and I washed him, cleaned his bedsores, sprinkled him with talc and placed under a fan on a wheelchair a couple of days before (fig. 13). This experience invoked a complex feeling: fear of the ultimate limit of life mixed with hope for deserving forgiveness of the transcendental powers, satisfaction of fulfilled moral duty and a worm of pride for the tiny self-sacrifice of service and for the significant role of the performed gesture in the life of another human being who is already imprinted into eternity.



Fig. 13

That is how 22 year old Italian Fabio described his impressions after delivering bodies to a crematorium:

It is a strange feeling because they are alone, they have nobody close to them and even you don't know their names usually. But for me it felt good to go with them, be their last companions. It is a complex feeling hard to describe. Part of it is the respect to the dead that you have. Also it seems good to me that the person finally stopped suffering and feeling pain. Probably, the shelter is the best place they could get to before death but still it is like a prison where you are just waiting for death.

Though apparently torn between contradictory feelings, Fabio perceives it as a positive experience of encounter with something essential and important, at the end in a

simple way reducing his attitude to the feeling of compassion towards suffering human brothers in accordance with the conventional idea of Christian love.

Pastoral Power of Caritas

Though the commonly reproduced purpose of the Home is: "a place where poor people can die in dignity", as it comes out from the interviews, some sisters do consciously perceive Kalighat as a *classroom*, where all three categories of the actors coming from completely different social realities transform in encounter with one another interpreted through the concept of Christian love - *caritas*. The volunteering practices of Kalighat which bring together such different actors are based on complicated social tissue rich of structural tensions. The Christian concept of love is the method which turns the tensions into an instrument of self-cultivation and pastoral education.

Leaving aside complicated power relations with the sisters, the volunteers systematically adopt a certain position of power towards the residents of the Home. First of all, the need to perform physical manipulations with sick bodies hit the volunteers with an immediate and usually unfamiliar feeling of power over live body and direct influence which burdens them with a feeling of responsibility which they have to find a way to deal with. This introduction to power is typically accompanied with an initial power struggle: fresh volunteers come charged with the idealistic attitude of self-sacrificing compassionate helpers which is expressed through a strong commitment and readiness to provide all possible assistance and express sympathy. Residents try to take advantage of it, manipulating the rookies to get an extra attention. Considering that there are usually only four to seven volunteers for about fifty residents in the male department, such attitude soon proves to be ineffective. The new volunteers are thus pushed to transform their brotherly serving attitude into a more dominant one. That's what experienced volunteer Alain

says about it: "They [the residents] play tricks with you, they just need attention or want their clothes changed. Especially when you're new, they trick you. Then you learn to see when they trick". In a similar manner Sister E. once instructed me not to give shower to the disabled residents after I bring them to toilet (some volunteers were regularly doing it out of compassion, taking in account the exhausting heat) so they stop asking for toilet every now and then. As a result, at the end volunteers learn to read the intentions of the residents, ignore some of them as inappropriate and to some extent to discipline the patients in order to be able to build functional priorities and get the more important job done, thus exercising their pastoral power over the disempowered flock of the residents in the liminal, safe reservation of the Home.

Such sublime power struggle is an evident symptom of a "tension between inequality and solidarity, a relation of domination and a relation of assistance", inherent to the image of a victim throughout the contemporary humanitarian practice (Fassin 2012:3). The contradictory composition of service and domination over the disempowered is something volunteers of Kalighat have to learn and it is not an easy lesson. The shocking transgressive experience of encounter with monstrous images of disease and mayhem and proximity to the limits of social reality apparently help with adoption of a position of power over the initial attitude of service: the extreme experience provide the volunteers with an emotional justification for executing power, bringing a hint of a state of exception into the social ambience of the shelter. Still, this power does not fall into disciplinary form. The disciplinary carcass of social structure of the Kalighat home expressed through functional and gender division of the space and cyclical division of time defining the periods of sleep, meals, treatments and migrations of the residents from one hall to another doesn't totally define human relations in the shelter and is not supported by punitive measures. The bones of this carcass are held together by the flesh of relations between the actors which are indefinite, non-formal, and highly personalized. The volunteers have to shape these relations themselves, and the only key suggested to them by the whole

ambience of the institutions is the pastoral service resting on the Christian ideological foundation of *caritas*.

The multiple tensions of volunteering experience are channeled into non-reciprocal, unconditional Christian love - *caritas* – through the concept of *human dignity*. The word *dignity* is always present in texts and speeches describing the mission of the MC and the meaning of the volunteering. Nevertheless, the *dignity* the nuns and the volunteers are talking about is not a dignity of a free capable man of Renaissance or Enlightenment. In her Noble Prize speech Mother Teresa talked about one of the first residents of the Home, who was dying half eaten with worms, when he said: “I have lived like an animal in the street, but I am going to die like an angel, loved and cared for” (Mother Teresa 1979). And that is the dignity they are talking about – the dignity of a loved God’s creature. The core of this idea of dignity is the concept of *Imago Dei* – human being as an image of God. Sisters and volunteers are encouraged to feel love towards the image of God which can be seen in any human, simultaneously restoring their own *Imago Dei* through mimicking the divine act of God’s love towards his creatures and invoking victim's *Imago Dei* by seeing and loving God in her dirty suffering body. Application of this concept of dignity in an authoritarian manner draws the object of compassion into the pastoral relations reducing her body to the role of a divine copy, making the love to the image of God projected on a human being an ultimate instrument of power.

With the introduction of the universal method of compassion based on the idea of *dignity* defined through a reference to transcendental, the contradiction between service and domination gets solved by the recursive circle of pastoral power where domination is achieved through service and is used for service in an eternal circulation of *caritas*. Foucault describes pastoral power as that one which needs a platform in a form of conventional truth and thus creates and proclaims certain regimes of truth. The sense of truth is what the volunteers get through the touch, through the direct contact with Otherness: the feeling of having encounter with the real,

which cannot be easily described but can be experienced. That is how Romaine post-factum describes his motivation to get involved into the Mission of Charity: "I felt like my soul was dying while working in the office. I had to touch some real life, feel it, *touch it*". And the interpretation of this powerful but indefinite feeling of truth typically follows the path of the dominating religious framework suggested by the whole ambience of the Mission which sees the occurring personal transformation as a revealing the hidden capabilities of the soul of the individual. That's how Romaine talks about discovering Christ in himself: "I realized that it was always inside, it's very simple, you just need to acknowledge it". His words apparently correspond with the discourse reproduced by the nuns: "We often need someone to draw out the tremendous capacity for good hidden inside – the poor can do that. The shock of encounter with poverty makes us question many things, they [the volunteers] don't leave Kolkata the same". As they follow the words of Mother Teresa: "We are not born bad: everybody has something good inside them. Some hide it, some neglect it, but it is there" (Vardey 2011:69). Such motives of spiritual healing and self-cultivation are quite common among the sisters and the volunteers such as Linda who describes her discovery of this imperative in herself in emotional terms: "I was doing it because something inside me needed to be helped. I was giving something in me that needed healing, and that was the need I had for love" (Vardey 2011:136).

As a result of the experience in the Kalighat Home the volunteers tend to embody this firm platform of truth to stand on. Through the proximity of death, through transgressions of the borders, through experiences of power and humility, through the touch to suffering and concentrated Otherness the liminal experience stimulates them to embody the new principles of action based on the sense of *caritas*. Backed by the life changing experience this new attitudes are perceived as an essential truth of life. This acquisition of new conventional truth ultimately makes the experienced volunteers independent subjects of pastoral power: the good shepherds who make the best sheep.

Conclusion

A home for dying people stuck in a liminal state between life and death is not a unique case of Kalighat Home for the Dying Destitutes. There are institutions serving a similar purpose in India, including the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service and other similar places in Varanasi designed to let devoted Hindus die in peace in the holy city, thereby breaking free from the cycle of birth and death (Chatterjee, Patnaik, and Chariar 2008). Homes for Dying (Comfort Care Homes) also exist in the United States where they work on a secular commercial basis. Nevertheless, what differs Kalighat Home from other apparently similar institutions is a very different social role. Instead of keeping suffering of death out of sight, hidden and intimate, this institution exposes it to sight and touch of the witnessing volunteers for the sake of education and self-cultivation thereby producing a specific social impact.

In this paper I demonstrated the chain of liminal transition imposed on the volunteers in the womb of Kalighat Home: from searching for a life changing experience, through the immersion into liminality, transgression of symbolic borders of dirt and Otherness, touch of transcendental, embodiment of the principle of *caritas* through ritual and mimesis, and finally to shaping the self into an ambivalent subject of pastoral power. While reproducing this route again and again for the new coming and returning volunteers the Home functions as a safe liminal training playground for the social shepherds.

The secular rationalist discourse often depicts religious charity as being essentially different from and in a way opposing to the broad secular humanitarian field (Radest 1990; Hitchens 2011). Nevertheless, deep theoretical studies reveal an innate interrelation of religious morality and humanitarian reason: shared values, shared contradictions and shared tools to work through them (Fassin 2012; Redfield 2012). One such shared zone is the core tension between service and domination inherent to both humanitarian charity and religious apostolate. The

complex apparatus of pastoral power (Foucault 1982) is one effective way to channel this destructive tension of charity into a sustainable social dynamic. The contradiction is relieved through the concept of unconditional love - *caritas* - which navigates it into the self-reproducing circle of pastoral rule where power is exercised in the form of self-neglecting service which in its turn produces power by establishing domination over objects of service through subjecting them to non-reciprocal giving. Embodiment of the principle of non-reciprocal service in framework of *caritas* shapes the volunteers as universal subjects of pastoral power which can exchange roles of domination and submission within this system of pastoral values based on belief in the universal truth of fraternal love and knowledge of the power of giving. Such a universal method of navigating structural tensions of charity shapes the former volunteers of Kalighat as effective actors in various branches of the broad humanitarian field where pastoral power remains one of the key factors of social relations. While channeling internal tensions of volunteering into the riverbed of *caritas*, the threefold social structure of the Home – which embraces the volunteers, the Sisters and the residents - forms a complete self-reproducing system of pastoral power.

In this text I focused on the transformative experience of the volunteers while leaving out of the scope many other factors of life in the shelter which even on the surface reveal intense hidden dynamics of Kalighat Home. One of those is the embodiment of pastoral power by residents of the shelter occurring in the context of their own liminal experience at the verge of death. Such personal transformation can be clearly seen in the workers-once-residents or former and longtime residents who often tend to convert into Christianity and participate in the service of the Home, and even in some fresh patients who after a while leave their aggressive self-protective habits and as volunteer Alain said, become “like an angel”.

Another important dimension left out of the scope of this paper is the gender aspect of pastoral power of MC. Power in the Kolkatan shelters of the order has a distinctively female

face: the Sisters, about two thirds of the volunteers and even majority of the paid workers are women. In the contemporary context of transformation of structures of patriarchy and progressing empowerment of women appropriation of pastoral power through compassionate service can be studied as an influential factor of gender politics.

Finally, the oversaturated intercultural symbolic field of Kalighat Home has also been left out of the brackets. Nevertheless, the study of it might be the most valuable for understanding the internal dynamics of the Home. As I mentioned above, shelters of MC often tend to be located next to the most powerful centers of other religions. Being multiethnic and multireligious, Indian culture has got ancient multilateral relations with images of death and suffering. The building of Kalighat Home before it was taken over by MC used to be a part of the famous Kalighat Hindu temple, which attracts never ceasing flows of admirers of goddess Kali bestowing luscious smoke of incenses, piles of fresh blossoms and blood of beheaded goatlings to their divine mistress. Though visual images of Christ and especially of Virgin Mary totally dominate the inner space of the Home, invisible presence of the Hindu goddess of destruction, time and - in a sense – death, is almost palpable in the halls of the Home. Sisters repeat after Mother that their aim is not to convert, but “to make Hindus good Hindus and make Muslims good Muslims”, but this claim doesn’t mark a passive position of acceptance, it marks a position of irreconcilable Christian struggle for *truth* exercised through service and humility – the struggle of pastoral power. Meanwhile, Kali has got her own *truth* and is not a kind of deity capable of evading a challenge. Kalighat Home is a place where Kali meets Virgin Mary and maybe the experience of participation in this irresolvable clash of saturated cultural archetypes is the deeper truth which every volunteer unconsciously carries away from Kolkata.

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Appendix A

Prayers of the Daily Morning Reunion

1. Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace.

Our Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb,

Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

pray for us sinners,

now and at the hour of our death.

Amen.

2. Prayer Before Leaving For Apostolate (by Mother Teresa)

Dear Lord, the Great Healer, I kneel before You,

Since every perfect gift must come from You.

I pray, give skill to my hands,

Clear vision to my mind,

Kindness and meekness to my heart.

Give me singleness of purpose,

Strength to lift up a part of the burden
Of my suffering fellow men,
And a true realization of the privilege that is mine.
Take from my heart all the guile and worldliness
That with the simple faith of a child,
I may rely on You.

Amen.

3. We Have Our Hope In Jesus

We have our hope in Jesus (x2)

And all things will be well (x3)

In the Lord.