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8 Persistent Forms: Catholic Charity Homes and the Limits of Neoliberal Morality

China Scherz, University of Virginia

“Cleaning brushes. I’d say we need ten cleaning brushes and we need to replace them about once a month. So that’s 120 brushes a year. At 700 shillings a brush we need 84,000 shillings a year for brushes.” It was nearly midnight and we were still up working. The six Ugandan, Kenyan, and Tanzanian nuns who had been placed in charge of a home for orphans and children with disabilities were responding to my requests for an accounting of their current annual budget, not with a document but with a late night meeting in which they attempted to align their former mother general’s sparse report with their own remembered accountings. Given this home’s mission of providing care, accommodation, and access to education for around 100 children and adults who have found themselves outside of the networks of care usually made of kin, much of this budgetary conversation took the form of a micro accounting of household items. And on it went into the night. These calculations were accompanied by a good bit of laughter as we were all enjoying the chance to be together and energized by the arrival of Ruth Petersen, a sixty-one-year old Peace Corps volunteer with five years of prior experience working with children with disabilities.

The laughter was also the result of the novelty of the task at hand. The sisters were not in the habit of engaging in such prospective budgeting. Instead, they took the help that came their way and used it to meet the most pressing needs. This trust in divine providence was both a lived tenet of their theology (Scherz 2013) and a matter of necessity, as the few large donors they still had were not interested in providing funds for such quotidian expenses as brushes and soap. Most of the foundations that had once supported their work had moved on to more “sustainable” projects, preferring community-based projects, advocacy, and awareness raising campaigns to the forms of material charity provided by institutions such as Mercy House. In the end, their anticipated income fell short of their anticipated operating expenses (which totaled some 50 million Ugandan shillings, or approximately US\$25,000), by nearly half.

This anticipated shortfall, which was ultimately carried up into a cell marked “other donors” to make the budget balance on faith that God would provide through sources yet unnamed, speaks to the financial difficulties many

charitable institutions face even while private charity is lauded as the solution to the problems created by neoliberal privatization. The clinics, orphanages, and homes for the elderly and disabled that were integral to the architecture of Catholic mission stations in colonial Uganda still shape the built environment of many of Uganda's trading centers, but their varying states of repair and use reflect the divergent trajectories of elements of that earlier charitable assemblage as it has come to interact with new forms of intervention over time. In this chapter I argue that we might think of places like Mercy House as remainders, as places continuing to work within prior assemblages of care, even while elements of those assemblages have been taken up by other actors to do new kinds of work that is often so different that these remainders become impossible to include. The persistence of such places speaks to the incomplete nature of the transformations of charitable aid that have occurred in recent years. The concept of the remainder provides a way to think about these partial transformations that highlight the past's continuance in and relationship to the present.

The Moral Neoliberal

Andrea Muehlebach has recently articulated the increasing importance of private charity and volunteerism as essential elements in an assemblage of concepts, principles, techniques, and practices that she terms "the moral neoliberal," and that she posits operates alongside the market neoliberal so frequently described as central to the contemporary political and economic order (Muehlebach 2012:12). In her writings, she convincingly describes how an "opulence of virtue" has expanded alongside the ravages of austerity (Muehlebach 2013: 455). Muehlebach argues that under this moral neoliberal form the same states that designed the policies that produced so much suffering and dislocation have also called on people to respond to these private sufferings and humiliations through unremunerated acts of voluntarism. Through her research in Northern Italy, she demonstrates the affinities and concrete relationships between Catholic Social Teaching and post-Washington Consensus neoliberalism.¹ Muehlebach shows how elements of each have been recombined to create a form of social assistance premised on the sacralized and unremunerated work of thousands of ethical citizens whose voluntary efforts are motivated by structures of feeling carefully promoted by government trainings, programs, and media campaigns that merge elements of Catholic, socialist, and neoliberal imaginaries (Muehlebach 2012, 2013).

Muehlebach's reflections on the ways political actors bring together a heterogeneous and often unexpected array of elements to generate a response to a problem reflects other recent anthropological writing on assemblages. Building on Foucault's concept of apparatus (*dispositif*), the term assemblage has been used in reference to unstable collections of norms, practices, technologies, and

forms of reasoning that come together in response to a particular problem, but that have not yet stabilized as apparatuses (Rabinow 2003: 56). Despite their differences with regard to questions of stability, as conceptual tools, both the apparatus and the assemblage have the advantage of avoiding an overreliance on the influence of a single coherent logic (Ong and Collier 2005: 12). Rather than focusing on purely cognitive or ideological elements, assemblages and apparatuses allow us to think about the influence of both discursive and material elements, and how these elements are rearticulated and rearticulate themselves in relation to one another over time.

Although Muehlebach does not claim that the moral neoliberal is universal or all encompassing, it may be alluring to see the recombination of elements of Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberal critiques of state-led welfare provisioning into this novel assemblage as showing the compatibility between neoliberalism and all forms of Catholic charity. Yet, as I noted earlier, there remain many strands of Catholic thought and practice that not only oppose neoliberal reforms, but that also prove unrecognizable or even repugnant to neoliberal policy and grant makers, a phenomenon that is also briefly noted in Muehlebach's work. I term these spaces, ideas, and practices "remainders." In using this term I aim to speak of that which is left behind even as other elements of a prior assemblage are taken up to fashion something new. While people who remain connected to these spaces, ideals, and practices may be aware of their separation from more dominant assemblages, their participation in these remainders is not necessarily motivated by an opposition to such assemblages, as in a situation in which a particular religious order's commitments to practices that prove repugnant to neoliberal grant makers are motivated by their own spiritual beliefs and commitments.

In my effort to articulate the relationship between assemblages and their remainders and to explore the boundaries of the moral neoliberal, I draw on a description of one site connected to this order, Mercy House.² Mercy House is a home for orphans, people with disabilities, and the frail elderly run by the Franciscan Sisters of Africa, about which I have written elsewhere (Scherz 2013, 2014). This home is situated in central Uganda, where I conducted ethnographic research over twelve months in 2007, 2008, and 2010. Although Mercy House is an exemplary model of Catholic charity, it has largely been excluded from the influx of development and orphan support monies that have come into Uganda since the end of the 1980s. In this chapter I argue that Mercy House's persistent commitment to programs centered on long-term, materially substantial forms of institutional care, its commitment to an ethic of virtue over an ethic of audit, and its attachment to forms of connection and outreach that fail to correspond to a market logic have made it unattractive to many donors. These elements can be thought of as remainders, as elements of a prior assemblage that have been left behind even as other elements of its practice have

been taken up to fashion both Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberalism. So while I agree with Muehlebach that Catholic Social Teaching helped to shape neoliberal social policy, my goal in this chapter is to explain the perhaps unexpected exclusion of many Catholic charities from the moral neoliberal assemblage. How ought we make sense of the fact that organizations that might be viewed as paradigmatic exemplars of neoliberal social discourse often do not conform to the practices characteristic of neoliberalism and are thus excluded by donors? While some of Catholic charities have undertaken projects of internal transformation, so as to better align themselves with the moral neoliberal, others, such as Mercy House, have failed or refused to do so.

I want to be clear that sites such as Mercy House do not diminish the value of Muehlebach's arguments. Rather, thinking about the reasons why these spaces fall beyond the gaze of neoliberal policy and grant makers may help to provide greater specificity to the precise configuration of the moral neoliberal by exploring its boundaries and exclusions. In turn, this will allow for a more complex understanding of the relationship of neoliberalism to contemporary practices of charity. Such an analysis also warns against quick binary judgments that classify all nonstate activity as compatible with neoliberal prescriptions for a vibrant civil society. In addition, by demonstrating the plurality of perspectives and practices that exist within the Catholic Church, we come to a more complex understanding of the variation that exists even in such a seemingly monolithic institution. Finally, these problems of remainders and recognition not only highlight the simultaneous existence of the same element within multiple assemblages, but also challenge us to find a way to speak about these remainders that avoids what Johannes Fabian has called the "denial of coevalness," a phrase he uses to refer to "anthropology's persistent and systematic tendency to place the referents of anthropology in a time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse" and to instead see them as contemporaries (Fabian 1983: 31).

Catholicism and Neoliberalism

Andrea Muehlebach's writings are among several recent efforts to describe the increasing importance of civil society, voluntarism, and philanthropy under forms of neoliberal governmentality (Foucault 1979; see also Rose 1999; Elyachar 2005; Englund 2006; West 2006; Li 2007; Adams 2013). Muehlebach describes what she terms a "Catholicization of neoliberalism" in Italy and beyond, in which concepts drawn from Catholic Social Teaching have been taken up by neoliberal policy makers to create a sacralized society in which wealth and care can be privately redistributed (Muehlebach 2012: 70). This moral neoliberal regime is distinguished by acts of affectively motivated charity that replace state-sponsored welfare. The Italian volunteers Muehlebach describes are largely opposed to austerity measures and the

retreat of the Italian state, which have endangered the long fought for entitlements at the center of the Italian social contract. Yet, the Italian state has also created a narrative that frames its would-be-opponents' status as good citizens as being contingent on their willingness to volunteer their time and labor to charity, thus replacing the leisure of their retirement with productivity and their opposition with collaboration. This move has also enabled the state to divest itself of some responsibility to the frail elderly and other vulnerable populations.

As with other elements of neoliberal policymaking, these private initiatives do not so much involve a total replacement of the state by the market and private voluntarism, as the state acting as an orchestrator, ensuring that conditions are in place for the existence and optimal functioning of markets and other forms of private initiative (Foucault 1979; Mirowski 2009). In the Northern Italian case, *gratuità*, a conception of free giving inspired by divine grace drawn from Catholic theology, is actively promoted by the Italian state through its inclusion in a 1991 law regulating voluntary activity, through its direct contracting of organizations to provide services to be performed by volunteers instead of by paid state employees, and through its promotion of voluntarism through media campaigns and classes directed at fostering a culture of giving (Muehlebach 2012: 57–58).

The themes of sustainability and community participation so central to neoliberal philanthropy are also well aligned with the value the Catholic Church places on subsidiarity, or the idea that actors and organizations closest to a given problem should be supported in their independent efforts to resolve it (Bevans and Schroeder 2004). This concept has become central to contemporary Catholic thought since it was formally introduced by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*, an 1891 encyclical that became the starting point for the body of writing often referred to as Catholic Social Teaching (Catholic Church 1939). It was further developed by Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, which stated, "It [is] an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do" (Catholic Church 1931: 79). In recent years, numerous neoliberal thinkers have used this element of Catholic Social Teaching to speak about the importance of civil society and the problems of excessive state intervention. Yet, despite the ease with which subsidiarity joins Catholic Social Teaching and post-Washington Consensus neoliberalism, there are other elements of Catholic social practice, including commitments to a kind of quotidian materiality and a certain resistance to visibility and formalization of certain forms of charity, that require Catholic charitable organizations to change before they can be recognized as possible participants in the moral neoliberal.

The coupling of accumulation and charitable redistribution is further sustained by a Catholic "moral style" in which the moral subject vacillates

between states of sin and repentance, accumulation and free gifting. Following Karl Marx, Muehlebach argues that through acts of charitable service the “material opulence” of capitalist wealth is coupled with “an opulence of clean conscience and good feeling” that follows these apparently selfless gifts (Muehlebach 2013: 455). Muehlebach contrasts this with a more Puritan form of moral personhood described by Max Weber in which the subject is judged as a uniform whole who must be constantly on guard against impious actions as he or she is a subject who is incapable of making up for periodic occasions of sin through good works (Muehlebach 2013: 461–462).

In Muehlebach’s writings, religious practice does not so much offer a supernatural escape from the uncertainties of the neoliberal market as it does in the occult economies described by Jean and John Comaroff (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). Nor is it mobilized for enhanced participation in the market, as it is in the spiritual economy described by Daromir Rudnycky (Rudnycky 2009). Rather, for Muehlebach religion provides the raw material necessary to craft a moral salve that some see as capable of healing the wounds precipitated by neoliberal markets.

As Muehlebach argues, the conjoining of market principles and moral sentiments is nothing new. Adam Smith and Karl Marx made similar arguments, albeit with opposing moral valences, but Muehlebach extends these classic analyses by demonstrating the concrete linkages between Catholic Social Teaching and neoliberal social assistance programs in post-Fordist Italy. Like neoliberalism, Catholic Social Teaching provides a critique of *laissez-faire* economics and proposes privately organized initiatives as alternatives to state-sponsored welfare. She describes the involvement of economist Joseph Stiglitz in the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and the centrality of concepts drawn from Catholic Social Teaching in his social prescriptions. Catholic proponents of the benefits of the market have also proffered readings of church documents that point toward the compatibility of church teaching and neoliberal economics (Novak 1993), although other Catholic theologians have critiqued these interpretations of the church’s teaching on economic issues (Whitmore 2001). The Catholic Church’s opposition to embryonic stem cell research has even taken a market-based turn through the Church’s recent investment in the nonprofit arm of a for-profit adult stem cell biotechnology company (Scherz 2013), suggesting that the connection between neoliberalism and Catholicism may also run in the other direction.

NGOs and Neoliberalism in Uganda

Muehlebach’s work can be connected to a larger body of scholarship on the rise of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society. Following

the implementation of austerity measures imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in the global South during the 1980s, highly indebted states found themselves forced to cut public spending, thus endangering the welfare of many of their citizens. As the ravages of the austerity measures became clear, international development institutions began to search for possible ways to fill the gaps left by the retreating state. By the turn of the millennium, civil society came to be seen as a promising replacement for the programs formerly administered by national governments and a diverse range of nongovernmental, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations proliferated.

Uganda is arguably the African nation that most wholeheartedly embraced neoliberal economic and social reforms (Wiegratz 2010). It thus comes as little surprise that in Uganda NGOs took an even more pronounced role. Following the end of the civil war in 1986, President Yoweri Museveni's government promoted national and international civil society organizations as central for the development and reconstruction of the country (Dicklitch 1998; Bornstein, Wallace, and Chapman 2006). The importance of civil society organizations was also confirmed in their role in responding to Uganda's AIDS epidemic, where civil society organizations actively facilitated the open discussion and engagement critical to Uganda's successes in slowing the spread of HIV (Hunter 2003; Epstein 2007; Boyd 2015).

As years went on, NGOs "mushroomed" in response to the large numbers of orphans left behind after their parents passed away. By 2009, there were nearly 8,000 registered NGOs in Uganda (Uganda National NGO Forum 2009), many of which are faith based. As I have written about in detail elsewhere (Scherz 2014), the majority of interventions being implemented by both faith-based and secular NGOs in Uganda are at least formally committed to principles of sustainability, accountability, and community participation in and ownership of the development process. The focus on these principles has led NGOs to eschew programs that involve direct service provision and the distribution of material goods. Instead, they have focused on nonmaterial interventions such as trainings, workshops, and the creation of small self-supporting community institutions. Many in the development community think of these less materially intensive interventions as being less likely to create dependence where recipient communities rely on donor organizations for continual support. Members of local and international aid communities also view trainings and community institutions as capable of providing benefits into the future far beyond the initial, funded implementation period. These are trends that find resonance in many places in the world, but they are especially important in Uganda, given that the World Bank selected the country as a target for the implementation of participatory development exercises in the late 1990s (Mallaby 2004).

Persistent Forms

“We were doing this work before the donors came, and we will continue doing it even if they leave.” – Sister Amelia Namukasa

Despite the shifts many charitable institutions have made to align themselves with neoliberal practices, some institutions have remained committed to older redistributive forms of charity, different styles of management, and other modes of interacting with potential donors. These institutions are awkward matches for foundations seeking to promote the sort of sustainable, participatory development that is constitutive of the neoliberal development assemblage. The difficulty such organizations face in seeking funding demonstrates a striking counterpoint to the organizations described by Muchlebach, and an acknowledgment of their persistence allows for a more specific and complex definition of the moral neoliberal.

Mercy House, a Catholic charity home for more than 150 orphans, children and young adults with disabilities, and the elderly, is one such organization.³ Mother Mary Patrick, an Irish Franciscan nun, established Mercy House in 1923 to rehabilitate people who had been discharged from a small hospital, also operated by her Catholic missionary order, but who were still in need of nursing. In 1928 Mercy House was moved from its original site near the hospital to its present location in Namayumba so that the newly professed Ugandan nuns who were the first Franciscan Sisters of Africa might be able to better learn their Franciscan charism of service.⁴ Today, it is one of the sites where the Ugandan, Kenyan, and Tanzanian women seeking to join the order receive their most intensive training as part of a nine-year process of religious formation. As I describe elsewhere (Scherz 2013, 2014), the Franciscan Sisters of Africa envision Mercy House as a “school of charity,” a place where the virtue of charity can be learned and practiced. Through the daily work of tending to wounds, escorting children to the national capital for medical consultations, managing the gardens that provide food for the home, and seeking the resources necessary to send the children to school, the sisters understand themselves to be engaged in acts that simultaneously confirm their love of God and neighbor and allow for opportunities for self-transformation. The role that this particular form of charity plays in their religious training and in their daily lives highlights the fact that it is not only about serving the poor, but is in many ways also an end in itself.

Recognition

Given the disjuncture between the sisters’ commitments and trends in international aid that have rejected these forms of direct charity and service, and the fact that they received no regular support from the order or from the Catholic

Church, the sisters who ran Mercy House were constantly struggling to meet the costs of running the home. In 2008, the total operating budget came to just 35.7 million Ugandan shillings.⁵ The sisters raised nearly half of this sum through small income-generating activities including a poultry project, a piggery, and a bakery; the other half came in bits at a time in the form of sponsorships from a Dutch foundation for a small number of children with disabilities and from a range of individual donors. Many of these individual donors were less interested in contributing to ongoing operating expenses such as food, medical debts, and school fees, preferring instead to support large one-off projects such as a new dormitory. In 2008, the sisters received a new double-cabin truck and a beautifully designed, universally accessible playground, but were unable to find a donor willing to provide the soap and washbasins necessary to prevent a scabies outbreak.

The distinctions donors made between NGOs that embraced sustainability, community participation, and accountability and charity homes like Mercy House, between donations that would ideally create sustainable change and donations that would be consumed as operating expenses, and often with little formal record of their impact, illuminates the ways in which the moral neoliberal assemblage privileges charity over justice (Muehlebach 2013: 462) while simultaneously excluding some of the most basic forms of charity. The ways in which Mercy House's efforts were seen by potential donors as incommensurable with neoliberalism centered on the home's commitment to materially substantial forms of assistance, the awkward position of nuns who are neither employees nor volunteers, the sisters' resistance to practices of audit, and their insistence on a model of personal relationship rather than marketing as a method to attract potential donors.

Through their persistent commitments to other elements of the earlier charitable assemblage described in the text that follows, the sisters found themselves inhabiting a somewhat paradoxical situation. On one hand, the form of charity practiced at Mercy House was a prototype for the forms of private voluntary giving central to the moral neoliberal assemblage; on the other, the sisters' resistance to certain forms of neoliberal organizational transformation ultimately excluded Mercy House from the flows of money animated by the ascendance of that same assemblage.

Materiality

Given the ways that particular forms of materially mediated charity figured into the sisters' understanding of their charism and their own ethico-religious formation, they were unable and unwilling to abandon these forms of care to make their work more appealing to a neoliberal philanthropic field that sought to combine the private nature of charity with a commitment to promoting a

vision of sustainable development and autonomous individuals and communities (Rahnema 1992; Stirrat and Henkel 1997; Green 2000; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Paley 2001; Kremer and Miguel 2007; Li 2007; Swidler and Watkins 2009).

Sister Reginald Gonza, a leading member of the Franciscan Sisters of Africa, explained the importance of embodied forms of charity and service by pointing me to a passage for a lesson plan for the novices on Franciscan spirituality where she wrote⁶:

The nature of Francis and Clare's religious experiences can be said to be embodied. Whatever belongs to our human condition (joys, sorrows, weaknesses/failures, limitations, sickness and rejection) can lead us into an experience of the divine because of Jesus...Francis's compassion for the marginalized (the lepers and the poor) led him to have compassion for the crucified Christ...Thus the human experience with the lepers led him [Francis] to experience the divine.

In this passage, she speaks to the relationship between embodied forms of direct service and the sisters' aims of experiencing and understanding the divine. With this in mind, we can start to see that the sisters see their service work as an extension of the more contemplative work of worship they undertook each day in the chapel.

Sister Elizabeth Nagayi, a young sister who was working at Mercy House while still under temporary vows, explained how these embodied acts of service had been central to her own formation process, explicitly relating the story of St. Francis's personal transformation to her experience. She said,

[Early in his life] St. Francis could not meet a man with leprosy and greet him...But [later] he was a friend of the lepers and could embrace them...When you have just come to this home and you have been somewhere else, you may even get scared of eating food in this place...When I had just come here, this boy Charles was sick and had sores all over the mouth and he was having a certain smell. I was giving him food and [the sisters] told me that his disease is contagious, [but] he couldn't take the food in the hands, you [had to] put it in the mouth. So I washed my hand and fed him and the boy ate and got satisfied... Before I joined, I had a lot of mercy, [but] would not [have] come back [to] eat with my same hand. But that [day] I ate and did not use a fork. I just thanked God because it is not easy.

Sister Elizabeth saw this moment of affective transformation as a gift of Divine grace a central turning point in her efforts to model her life on that of St. Francis (Scherz 2015). Feeding Charles was thus not only a good in itself or something that needed to be done on account of its necessity, but was also central to Sister Elizabeth's understanding of her own spiritual transformation.

These acts of charity also figured into the sisters' understanding of a Catholic economy of salvation that relies on both God's grace and one's good works. Referencing an oft-told passage from the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 25:31–40),

Sister Roberta Namuyiga referred to the testimony of the poor before the throne of God as a “visa into eternity” in her contribution to a self-published magazine celebrating Mercy House’s platinum jubilee.

The residents of Mercy House are the true riches of the church in Uganda... [T]hey will pass on into eternity with us when we come before the throne of God for judgment. He will point to them, saying to us ‘[W]hen I was hungry, sick, naked, lonely ... you did it to me.’ The poor will be our visa into eternity. They are a treasure we must care for very well.

In light of these understandings of embodied prayer and the role of direct service in this particular economy of salvation, concretely ministering to the bodies of the poor was not something that could be left behind, as doing so would mean abandoning their Franciscan charism.

This commitment to embodied, materially substantial forms of charity made Mercy House an awkward match for donors looking to support programs where a time-limited intervention might yield sustainable benefits. Recent attempts to avoid dependency and material gifts are exemplified in Vincanne Adams’s ethnography of the role of for-profit corporations involved in the recovery of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Adams describes how even the formaldehyde-ridden FEMA trailers that people had been living in for years could not be given as gifts, but were instead offered as commodities that consumer citizens could purchase for \$25,000 on the assumption that to give the trailers out freely might turn people into passive and careless subjects of aid (Adams 2012: 195). In a different register, Britt Halvorson has written of the difficulties an American Lutheran mission faced as it attempted to incorporate the handmade bandages characteristic of a previous ethic of charitable caregiving into a more professionalized bureaucratic form (Halvorson 2012). Thus while Christian charity may serve as a motivating force for volunteers drawn into the moral neoliberal, classic forms of redistributive charity are excluded on the grounds that they will produce dependent subjects at odds with the empowered consumer citizens and resourceful self-provisioning communities that are also part of the neoliberal philanthropic imaginary. The sisters’ insistence on continuing to provide materially intensive forms of care to the children and adults in the form of housing, food, clothing, medical care, and school fees thus positions them outside of this ethic of care, which denigrates material charity as productive of dangerous forms of dependency.

Volunteerism

Mercy House is further separated from the moral neoliberal by the position of its workers, who are for the most part not volunteers but nuns.⁷ A large cadre of volunteers who give their time to the frail elderly populates Muehlebach’s

ethnography. These volunteers, formerly at risk of being denigrated as the unproductive unemployed (Muehlebach 2012: 151–159), are now interpellated by this new form of ethical citizenship. The nuns of Mercy House, in contrast, are neither employees working under a specific contract in exchange for a wage, nor are they volunteers providing uncompensated labor with carefully defined limits, temporal or otherwise; rather, they are professed religious women who have taken solemn vows. Whereas many of the volunteers within the regime of the moral neoliberal work on a temporary basis, contributing a few hours a week or a few weeks a year, the sisters have committed to this form of life on a permanent basis. Although the order may grant them some time away from their work for further schooling or a period of retreat, under the vow of obedience they have permanently consigned control over their lives to the order. Although they each joined the order after a long process of discernment and deliberation, their participation in any given post cannot be said to be voluntary. Further, given the lifelong nature of these commitments, we cannot speak of them as rendering the unproductive productive, of turning retirements, vacations, and periods of unemployment into opportunities for productive work, as was the case of the retired workers in Muehlebach's account. In many cases, a woman's decision to join an order actually removes a productive person from the workforce. Although some of her time will be spent in active service, much of it will be spent in prayer. Finally, the subjectivity achieved through this labor is not that of the ethical citizen participating in a sacralized and affectively saturated public sphere, but is rather oriented toward the sacred itself. Through their extensive training process and ongoing participation in works of charity and mercy, the sisters do not confirm their place within the public sphere through publicized acts of voluntarism. Rather, their acts of charity are the means through which they foster an ever-more intimate bond with God.

Audit

The difficulties Mercy House faced in attracting funders were also shaped by the sisters' resistance to developing auditing and reporting systems. During my fieldwork I watched as donors and volunteers accustomed to working with more conventionally managed organizations struggled to make sense of the sisters' lack of formal reports, budgets, plans, and resident files. Volunteers often initiated events such as the one described at the opening of this chapter to solicit budgets, resident lists, and long-term plans under the assumption that these absences had been created by problems of technical competence. These "capacity building" attempts were generally met with enthusiasm and good cheer, but the resulting documents were rarely used again. The sisters' lack of interest in maintaining these systems after these volunteers left Mercy House

stems from their participation within an alternate system for ensuring ethical accountability that placed a premium on the achievement of moral subjectivity through an elaborate and ongoing process of ethical work. In a situation in which time was always in short supply, the sisters generally prioritized their obligations to attend a series of daily services in the chapel, including daily mass, adoration of the Eucharist, and the morning and evening offices of the liturgy of the hours. Although these services required a great deal of time, the sisters considered them to be important obligations and essential to their spiritual nurturance and development, as evidenced by the efforts they made to get up before dawn to attend them. Given the demands of their religious practice and the work required to keep Mercy House running, there was little time or energy left for maintaining paperwork. This did not worry the sisters, as their efforts were oriented primarily toward pleasing a Divine auditor who did not depend on technical accounting and saw their own religious training as a better method for ensuring moral accountability. Given this training, formal auditing and other “rituals of verification” (Power 1997) seemed superfluous. It is not so much that the sisters were opposed to these forms, but rather that these efforts seemed redundant given their existing practices. Their faith in the workings of Divine providence made them similarly ambivalent about long-term planning exercises and made them question donors who attempted to move them away from what they experienced as a providentially determined mission.

The sisters’ lack of interest in practices of audit has also been central to their ability to maintain their commitment to more intensive interventions. As foundations have become increasingly focused on developing strong monitoring and evaluation practices, they have pushed organizations toward interventions that will yield large numbers of quantifiable beneficiaries. Within this framework, material interventions are not only conceived of as counterproductive because they are thought to produce dependency, but are also unattractive because they do not yield high beneficiary numbers (Adams 2012; Scherz 2014). The sisters’ lack of interest in producing public accountings and reports has left them unable to participate effectively in a funding market that has become increasingly reliant on such reports as indicators of future organizational effectiveness.

Brand

While branding has long been a tool for marketing products to consumers, under neoliberalism an increasing array of things, including charitable organizations and the stories of those assisted by them (James 2010, 2012), have become marketable commodities. Organizations marketing these charitable experiences seek consumer loyalty by “invoke[ing] a particular imaginary of fidelity, standardization, quality control, and trustworthy distribution”

in much the same way that Costas Nakassis has written about nineteenth century trademarks (Nakassis 2013: 114). In this way, these organizations have increasingly sought to use the idea of the brand to attract and maintain consumer-donors. These practices are highly recognizable to these consumer-donors as they resemble their experiences of other branded commodities. Consumers of poverty, who are asked to click “add to cart” to purchase training for a microfinance group member or a community pit latrine, have already learned to attach themselves to, trust in, and define themselves through their relationships to commercial brands and are thus primed to respond to these sorts of overtures.

Documents produced by Catholic Relief Services, one of the largest charities in the United States, provide a helpful contrast to Mercy House in their articulation of this aim of achieving better “global brand management” (Catholic Relief Services 2014: 15, 18, 21) in their 2014 “From Hope to Harvest: Agency Strategy 2014–2018” publication. They define this process as “an initiative to strengthen our ability to communicate a coherent and consistent picture of who we are, what we do, how we do it and the results we achieve” (Catholic Relief Services 2014: 21). This agency-wide exercise is aimed at maintaining consistency in terms of values, quality, integrity, and staff commitment and better distinguishing the organization in the marketplace for global philanthropy. Analogous to the establishment of commercial brands, Catholic Relief Services hopes to cultivate this image to foster positive connections with Catholics in the United States and thus “encourage them to become more deeply involved” (Catholic Relief Services 2014: 21).

Catholic Relief Services’ awareness of the need to fashion itself into a coherent and easily recognizable brand reflects the transformation of an increasingly wide array of things, including charities and the recipients of charity (James 2010, 2012; Adams 2013) into goods to be advertised on the market under contemporary neoliberalism. With potential donors conceptualized as consumers, Catholic Relief Services seeks to project its unique constellation of values and “signature program areas” as a brand with which these consumers can form a stable affective bond.

By contrast, most of the donations that Mercy House receives are motivated by personal relationships of trust with the sisters or with other individuals who have personally volunteered at Mercy House in the past. While Catholic Relief Services is conscious of the need to transform itself into an effective player in the highly competitive market for philanthropic donations and contracts, the sisters have yet to conceive of Mercy House as a participant in a market, let alone as a commodity capable of being stably branded. While they remain highly attuned to possibilities for seeking out patrons, their outreach is oriented primarily toward people and organizations they might be connected to by those who already trust them.

What Remains

The differences that set Mercy House apart are not only differences in scale and form, but rather represent more fundamental distinctions in terms of their perspectives on what can be accomplished through human agency and planning, how right action can be ensured, and what the goals of charitable action should be. In this chapter, I have argued that despite the very real Catholicization of neoliberalism that promotes certain kinds of charity as an alternative to state-sponsored welfare, longstanding sites of Catholic charity like Mercy House do not conform to these new configurations of care. This is partially due to the ways in which these sites continue to support forms of materially substantial charitable giving and ongoing relations of dependence, both of which are foreign to the practices of charitable giving intrinsic to the moral neoliberal. The difficulty these charitable sites face also stems from their refusal to engage with neoliberal managerial practices and their failure to market their activities successfully to potential donors.

Sites such as Mercy House constitute remainders in the sense that they represent both the continuation and differential evolution of prior forms of practice. Despite the ways in which elements have been drawn from older forms of charity to create new assemblages of governance and care, these older forms persist in sites like Mercy House. Acknowledging the existence of these remainders is important not only for its own sake, but also for what it can teach us about how to theorize assemblages. We can think of an assemblage as an emergent collection of heterogeneous elements, both discursive and nondiscursive, that are in the process of being rearticulated in relation to one another, many of these elements are borrowed from elsewhere and deployed to solve new problems (Rabinow 2003; Ong and Collier 2005). However, although elements may be borrowed, it is a duplicate that is borrowed, allowing a copy to stay in place. This does not mean that the original assemblage or apparatus remains static and unchanging, for it too may shift and transform along its own trajectory. A concept like free giving or subsidiarity may be operationalized in different ways, and in ways that may prove incommensurable to the people using them. Thinking about the coexistence of these multiple assemblages pushes us to think about their simultaneity. Mercy House is not “in the past,” nor is it a foregone conclusion that more neoliberal forms of aid will supplant it in the future, as a progressive model of history might have us believe. Rather they exist alongside one another, sometimes interacting, sometimes not, in ways contingent on particular circumstances. In central Uganda, where indigenous ethics of interdependence align easily with personal, material forms of charity, the form of charity practiced at Mercy House remains a robust (if underfunded) presence across the region, often located just down the road from the field offices of other local NGOs that have refashioned their programs and funding

solicitation strategies to better align themselves with the expectations of neoliberal development institutions.

Attention to the persistence of apparatuses from which certain elements have been copied and incorporated into emergent assemblages such as the moral neoliberal allows us to see how some charitable institutions might both fail to conform to the logic of neoliberalism to the point of being unrecognizable as legitimate partners while at the same time serving as points of origin for some of the most important features of neoliberal morality. Other authors have made us aware of the existence of charities and NGOs that have been created in response neoliberal preferences for decentralized service provision (Pfeiffer 2013; Whyte et al. 2013), governance through the responsabilization of individuals (Rose 1999; Zigon 2011; O'Neill 2013), and the possibilities for profit that exist in newly created markets of sorrow (Adams 2012). Other organizations, such as Catholic Relief Services, are engaged in an ongoing process of re-creating themselves in an attempt to court individual and institutional funders. Still other organizations are sought out by larger organizations in an attempt to co-opt their labor and credibility (Adams 2012). Coming to an understanding of the multiple ways in which organizations interact with emergent moral assemblages such as the moral neoliberal not only allows us to see the contingent futures of any given assemblage, but also warns us against the tendency to see any global form, no matter how powerful, as all determining.

Notes

- 1 Post-Washington Consensus neoliberalism refers to a modified form of neoliberalism that took root at the end of the twenty-first century. As the World Bank came to realize the human costs of the austerity measures promoted in previous decades, it sought to mitigate the effects of dismantling of state-managed social programs through the promotion of private charity, voluntarism, and community involvement (World Bank 1998; Li 2007; Muehlebach 2012: 93–94).
- 2 Mercy House, and all of the names given to the people and places associated with it, are pseudonyms.
- 3 I conducted fieldwork at Mercy House from November 2007 through April 2008 and in May 2010 as part of a larger study on orphans support NGOs in Uganda (Scherz 2014). During this period, I traveled to Mercy House on a regular basis, generally staying for a week at a time in the sisters' guesthouse or in a room attached to the boys' dormitory. At Mercy House, I spent my days observing activities and talking with the sisters, the residents, and the steady stream of volunteers who came to donate their time through an array of self-defined projects. I have stayed in regular contact with the sisters and residents of the home since that time and have also conducted interviews with many of Mercy House's donors.
- 4 The term *charism* in this context refers to the beliefs, commitments, and mission of a particular order.
- 5 This is approximately \$21,000.

- 6 Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) founded the Franciscan order – the Friars Minor – in the early thirteenth century after giving up the lifestyle he had enjoyed as the son of a wealthy Umbrian cloth merchant. Saint Clare’s request to follow a similar life in 1211 prompted him to found the order of Poor Ladies, a contemplative order now called the Poor Clares. Francis was also involved in founding a third order of lay confraternities and religious institutes that follow similar rules based on poverty, obedience, and chastity while taking up a more active role in the world.
- 7 With the exception of occasional foreign volunteers, who are arguably participating within the moral neoliberal, the other workers at Mercy House are employees. These employees are often underpaid, but cannot be conceptualized as volunteers.

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