

Nomin Orgil

Weltwärtsfreiwillige

25. November 2019

# 1. Interim Report

## Laos - Lao Youth Union Vocational Training Centre

After 3 months, without being distracted by all the excitement of the newness and by the curiosity about the unfamiliar, I can say that I feel good here. "Good" as in comfortable, welcome and safe. You can tell that the community is built on trust and a sense of unity by the fact that almost all of the town is at eye level and by how the homes, stores, hair salons, spas etc. use transparent glass so people walking by could see what massage the customer is getting. People have insight to what color their neighbor's underwear is, with their laundry hanging for any stranger walking by to see or/and take.

Recently, we took a trip to Thailand. We took a bus from Vientiane to Udon Thani, Thailand and from there, we flew to Phuket. During that bus ride we had to step out twice at some border checkpoint. We were rather skeptical about leaving our bags in the bus, so seeing Lao/Thai people walk out without any hesitation was quite interesting. Then, as expected, we as non-Lao/Thai citizens were inspected a bit differently, which evidently took longer. I remember us panicking enough to think of asking the officials to hurry, since we did not receive any sort of receipt that would guarantee us some safety like compensation, in case the bus driver decided to just drive away. But fortunately, the bus driver was waiting. And as we stumbled our way back to our seats, a weird feeling of safeness emerged within me. The strangers in that bus who once seemed whatever I associated strangers with, suddenly felt much more familiar.

Of course, we experience incidents like this, which confirm this assertion, everyday. Still, the above described experience was key to that realization, and thus seemed worth-mentioning. And as one could assume by the statements I make here, I have not been disappointed, yet.

But as someone who believes that a considerable amount of egoism, greed and a sadistic tendency is in the human nature, the option that all residents are reliable and are capable of coexisting through mutual trust seemed and still seems unreal. But since this sample of Lao people indicates otherwise, I will stop being so quick to exclude that possibility.

Thus, I find it equally remarkable to see that a society does not necessarily require a fully-functioning executive authority to maintain peace and order; that it actually seems like it is possible to go through everyday life without any issues while solely relying on the faith that your fellow human beings are trustworthy and "decent".

Another rather striking understanding that my stay until now has encouraged, was that of racism.

There were things that I had learned about racism in theory, some even being during the preparation-seminar, which LKJ had set up for us. And some of the theories, I could validate with my own experiences as I am an Asian, who grew up in Germany. But I had not been quite able to pinpoint anything I had experienced to those rather specific concepts of racism that I had also learned of.

Like the thesis that white people, meaning people benefiting from racism or/and people who experience white privilege, will under no circumstance experience racism. This thesis called for confusion and slight outrage in the room as one volunteer identified her experience involving some verbal abuse in a refugee home as racism. The specialist settled that heated discussion by clarifying that her experience, if at all, would concern other disciplines of discrimination, like sexism. And that it is assuredly not a question of racism, for she is still a member of the white community and thus will remain privileged.

At the time, I acted like I totally understood and agreed with that specialist's point, mainly because I found it slightly preposterous that she as someone who is "white", and therefore as a fact, regardless of whether or not it was wanted, benefits from the existence of racism, would even think of comparing her experience to something called racism, which I have been struggling, dealing and living with throughout all my upbringing. But because one can only speak from own experience, and mine were limited to Germany, it was hard to verify that particular thesis, until this opportunity to see more of the world arose.

So yes, tourists, especially white people, do get looked at differently because of their skin color. But no, not the way "non-white" tourists or/and residents are treated in a Western country. The people of Laos, Thailand and presumably every developing country intuitively associate prosperity, intellect, high social ranking and everything nice and fine with white skin, and thus treat them accordingly.

Even rare exceptions, where "appropriate treatment" regarding white people is not positively connotated, like that unpleasant experience of a fellow volunteer in a refugee home, can not be seen as racism. Because when attempting to distinguish racism the focus should be on how the person is perceived. Whereas in her case, although she was not treated "accordingly", it is undoubted that her white skin was a constant and indisputable reminder of her superior social status, for racism has been of enormous importance for humanity since the very beginning.

So I have been seeing white people walking around like they are the kings and queens of this place, which is understandable considering how much they are admired, respected and worshipped for their race.

Frankly, I believe this kind of place is the perfect hideout for people, who can not keep up at home, so they come here to boost their ego. So I am a little worried that my so-called "confidence", which I believed to be the result of everything that I had seen, experienced and had to deal with for the last few months, might be stationary. But what I think is most relevant is that I am inarguably learning a lot, both intentionally and not intentionally, seeing a lot, sometimes things I would have been happy to not have seen.

And I am having the time of my life. Details will kindly remain none of your business.

Nomin Orgil  
Weltwärtsfreiwillige  
30. Januar 2020

## 2. Interim Report

### Laos - Lao Youth Union Vocational Training Centre

I am certain that I could easily reach a thousand words by scarcely covering the events of our New Year's Day in Bangkok or any other of our many eventful days at that. But personally, I am not too excited to read anything cursorily written nor would I be if I did so myself. So in the following you will read a not so "cursorily written" report about my stay in Laos by a pretentious Nomin.

If you read my first report and got yourself a rough idea of Laos, you would know there is no such thing as privacy, and strangely it does not seem to bother Lao people.

It was the first thing that I noticed. I learned on Galileo, that the eye has the capacity to focus only on the outlines of the contrasting colors and some other striking objects, which is ideal because otherwise a person would lose their sanity from the immeasurable amount of information.

Just like that, what first caught my attention was something that was contrary to what I was used to. People here get married on the sidewalk, while where I come from, people avoid hanging out their laundry on Sundays, because the neighbors would see. And as much as I would like to argue that I am not that dramatic, I hate to admit that I am also not quite able to empathize with Lao people's take on privacy. Or rather, their nonexistent take on their nonexistent privacy. So initially, I questioned their rationale behind the comfort despite the lack of privacy, since people only bother to question what appears abnormal to them and forget that their idea of "normal" stems from what they grew up seeing and hearing. What amplifies the effects of our experiences even more is a young age, at which a child naturally absorbs and internalizes everything without the critical filter.

Thus, I started wondering why even the thought of giving access to watch me in simply any kind of act made me sick, almost literally. I thought about what it could be that was enabling these people to feel comfortable and safe while others were watching. And on the

other hand, what it was that prevented people like Daranie and me from feeling the same way. So logically, I thought about what distinguishes these people from us. Our origin. Upbringing and socialization are specifically relevant here, although their causal relation is not clear, yet. I'd like to assume the impacts of our upbringing to be self-explanatory. If someone, who walked in shoes ever since they could walk, was to walk barefoot all of a sudden, I doubt that someone would feel comfortable.

But what's interesting is the indirect message an upbringing in a German family and a Western society with such specifically strict regulations concerning privacy, delivers the child. Indirectly telling a child that we live in a society, in which these regulations are needed to guarantee safety for its citizens, is not exactly what generates a feeling of comfort and safety within a society, let alone a feeling of comfort when there's no privacy.

But when I used the word "safety", I wasn't merely referring to the physical safety, but also the equally relevant assurance of mental health. Vulnerability makes a person extremely susceptible to harm, at least in the society I grew up in. Or at least I and perhaps many other people feel that way. In case clarification is needed, the kind of rawness and vulnerability that comes with doing the things, we would prefer doing alone or with the people we trust, in public is an easy target.

To put it bluntly. it is a viscous circle. Children being taught by their parents not to trust others, and thus having a bunch of people, who don't trust each other, taking desperate measures, like harming others in some way or another, in the name of protecting themselves. And then saying, "Oh, they were right! People are not to be trusted." and later on protecting their parents' legacy by producing more sceptical but equally untrustworthy humans. So much for the reasoning behind our discomfort with the lack privacy.

And as for how these people do on the contrary feel comfortable in the company of strangers, the answer must lie in the optimal social conditions that enable a lifestyle like that. Again, it's a circle. Just not a viscous one, in my opinion. They are born into families that live in these transparent houses. And unless they are rich, they often share rooms. They socialize in that community. It works, because everyone socialized the same. So they stick with it. Then the kids inherit their way of life. I don't know. Maybe even the circle described previously, isn't viscous. It is what it is. Both of these lifestyles, create downsides and upsides. Oops. That sounded quite cynical.

No, I just feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to observe and learn.

But I guess I can accept more of that privilege.

# Abschlussbericht

## Teil 1

1. Ich hab am Vorbereitungsseminar als auch am Zwischenseminar teilgenommen.
2. Das Vorbereitungsseminar fand vom 9. Juli 2019 bis zum 20. Juli 2019 in Halle (Saale) in der Villa Jühling statt. Somit dauerte das Vorbereitungsseminar zwölf Tage. In diesen zwölf Tagen haben wir unter Anderem unsere Mitfreiwilligen näher kennengelernt und uns auf den Einsatz mental so gut wie möglich vorbereitet. Dies wurde hauptsächlich durch die Aneignung von sämtlichen entwicklungspolitisch-relevanten Wissen erzielt.
3. Wenn ich mich recht erinnere, haben wir nicht viel zum Sicherheit in Laos gemacht, da dies auch tatsächlich nicht wirklich nötig war. Laos ist ein recht sicheres Land. Eventuell sind die üblichen Sicherheitsmaßnahmen, die überall gelten, zu realisieren.
4. Ja. Zwar gab es keine richtigen „Notfälle“, aber ich wusste an wen ich mich wenden könnte im Falle eines Notfalls.
5. Die Verpflichtung einer Voruntersuchung und einer tropenmedizinischen Beratung für einen Einsatz in Laos deckt meiner Meinung nach das Nötigste ab. Ansonsten wurde der Rest bezüglich gesundheitlicher Sicherheit, beim Vorbereitungsseminar ausreichend behandelt. Sonst fällt mir nichts ein was ich mir noch an Informationen dazu gewünscht hätte.
6. Ja, ähnlich wie bei Notfällen.
7. Eine weitere Ansprechperson, die einheimisch und von außerhalb meiner Einsatzstelle war, hatte ich nicht. Dabei hat die Sprachbarriere den Aufbau einer engeren Beziehung/Freundschaft zu den Laoten oft erschwert. Trotzdem hatten wir zu ein paar gut-englisch-sprechenden Laoten länger Kontakt. Sich nicht verständigen zu können, obwohl der Drang die Kultur in ihrer authentischsten Form erleben zu wollen besteht, war schon recht frustrierend.
8. Das Erlangen einer Arbeitsgenehmigung hat die Lao Youth Union problemlos geregelt.

9. Ich hatte pro Semester zwei Klassen, die ich drei mal in der Woche für je 90 Minuten (alleine) unterrichtet habe. Ich habe mich hauptsächlich auf deren mündliche Fähigkeiten, Leseverständnis, Aussprache und Kulturaustausch konzentriert. Die restlichen Tage haben laotische Lehrer praktischerweise Grammatik o. Ä unterrichtet. Mir wurden zwar Themen und Textbücher vorgeschlagen, aber nichts richtig vorgeschrieben. Dazu wurde auch oft nach meinem Feedback zu unterschiedlichen Themen wie Unterrichtsgestaltung und Klassenaufteilung gefragt, was ich sehr wertgeschätzt habe.
10. Praxisbezogene Freiwilligendienste ermöglichen im Globalen Süden Lernerfahrungen, die relevant für die Entwicklung von individuellem Bewusstsein und Handlungskompetenz in der global vernetzten Weltgesellschaft sind.

## Teil 2

I once joked about wanting to volunteer in every country for a year each, for the rest of my life. And to my surprise I found out that that is in fact possible. There are all kinds of ways I could live my life and still be able to provide for myself. Throughout my stay in Laos, I met many people who were doing just that. I'm not sure yet if that is how I want to live, but it's nice knowing that I have the possibility. This system is a lot more free than I thought. And I honestly think we are relatively privileged to have a government that is not only allowing but actually supporting this way of living.

It's been a while now, since I got back. So needless to say, except a few very significant images, the memories have become blurry. And as more time passed by, I've grown to cherish those memories of Laos greatly. Just like it's, only after the moment is long gone, that photographs gain their sentimental value. I honestly miss my home of 7 months quite a bit. I miss the noodle-soup shop near our place with the kind lady, who always trusted that I would return when I occasionally forgot my wallet at home. She wasn't by any means well off, even in Lao standards. And yet I still remember her beaming face, implying that she's a lot more satisfied and content with her life than the people here I walk by, each day.

Then there's our beloved "Kung's café" with its delicious vegetarian food and the best coconut-coffee shake there is. Another thing I adored about that place was the setting; it's kind of outside but it has a ceiling with all sorts of wooden crafts hanging, a mixture of greens, wood, colorful benches, calming silence and good food. I never knew I could get so attached to a culinary place. In Germany, I barely eat at the same place twice. I guess that mainly had to do with the Lao restaurants being family-

businesses which created a more personal/wholesome feeling for me. Eating-out in Laos, was actually one of my favorite activities. I ate well and a lot, although it took me quite some time to transition to actual, local, street Lao food. Because we stayed in the capital city, we had the opportunity to choose from a variety of restaurants. So naturally, we stuck to what we were comfortable with, at first. It wasn't until much later, that we realized how expensive (in Lao standards) we were eating the first few months. As time went on, we became more comfortable with everything. I liked that we weren't forced into anything, because it meant that anything we did was our choice. I have learnt a lot about self-management in general; about managing my finances, about taking care of myself, physically as well as mentally. Whereas the motivation to take care of myself derived from my overall healthy mental state during those 7 months in Laos. Whether or not Laos and everything that came with my stay in Laos was the key catalyst to my stable mental health is something I still, to this very day, don't know the answer to.

But the biggest takeaway for me, I'd say would be what I learnt about relationships and myself through the friendship to Daranie.

The unusually close friendship, the almost-marriage-like-companionship that Daranie and I had for 7 months was, I must say, what I learned from the most. The truth is we were kind of stuck with each other, which meant we were stuck with each other's imperfections and the conflicts/misunderstandings those flaws consequently resulted in. Our circumstances wouldn't allow us to just sweep things under the carpet, ignore them, or walk away when we were starting to get on each other's nerves. I mean if there's no immediate need to deal with things, then it's reasonable to take the easy way out. But in our case, we had no other choice than to deal with each other. Well, we did have a choice. We could've also just gone through those 7 months separately, much like the volunteers before us did. But when we were starting to see beyond each other's endearing qualities, she was already too important for me to give up. Plus, she is just simply "geilomat". When we weren't clashing, we would have a blast, really. I had so much fun. I laughed a lot because of her and I learned a lot because of her. There will never be more, I would want out of a friendship/relationship. I genuinely wish her all the happiness that is attainable and I will cherish the memories of the many crazy nights, only the two of us (and some random strangers) know of.

I want to thank everyone who made this experience so extraordinary with all my heart; the other volunteers - my dear friends, my lovely students, the school staff, both of our mentors (one official, one unofficial) who cared for us and every single kind person we met along the way. And last but not least, I want to thank my mother, .lkj)

Sachsen-Anhalt, Lao youth union and BMZ for making this even possible. I am incredibly grateful for having had this experience.