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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.