

Evaluation of the Master's Thesis of Olga Válková Tarasova on "Understanding the European Voluntary Service as Ritual. The case of EU mobility youth projects in the CR", University of Pardubice

Thesis Supervisor: Doc. PhD. Lale Yalçın-Heckmann

Olga V. Tarasova has been a student of mine during her MA studies in Social Anthropology and has taken various subjects with me. She then approached me with her intention to work on the theme of the Organisation of European Voluntary Service (EVS) of which she had been a member and was still taking active part during her studies. She knew a great deal about the organisation and wanted to evaluate this experience in an anthropologically informed way. We have had many discussions on her methodology, what a relevant research question in relation to this 'field' might be and came up at the end with the theme of public ritual and rite de passage as a fruitful framework of analysis.

Olga has been a hard working student yet had difficulties in combining her studies, work and thesis research and writing, which I am aware is a situation which applies to many other MA students. She has nevertheless struggled with all the tasks and has produced a decent, interesting and well composed MA thesis.

In her thesis she illustrates the organisational structure of the EVS at various levels, the specific situation and case of the EVS branch in Hradec Kralove where she lives and works and then analyses her ethnographic material from interviews with and participant observation of the volunteers and mentors she has been involved with. She uses her interviews and observations convincingly to argue that the EVS volunteer work can be seen as 'rite de passage' for young people to become 'adult' and secondly that this is a public ritual which is organised by national and international institutions and it is based on public performances of individuals and institutions as well as shaping the public through their activities.

Her commitment to and enthusiasm for the EVS program has made it at times difficult for her in distancing herself from her role in the organisation and seeing things as an anthropologist. But she has succeeded in being reflective about her own position and experience, even if she could have pushed the theoretical analysis further and had taken the questions she raised at the beginning more seriously. She could have, for instance, differentiated more diligently between employment (or personal development) abroad, living abroad and rite de passage, all of which require and involve periods of transition and adaptation as well as social learning. The question of 'what is different in this case?' would have benefitted from a more theoretically oriented, comparative and thorough analysis. She could have furthermore underlined the relevance of legal and formal framework of the European Volunteer Service (sections 2.1 and 2.2) for its effect on it being a public ritual. At the moment the discussion in these sections are weakly related to the rest of her chapters. I find it most successful sections her discussion of the results and the conclusions (Chapters 4.4 and 5), where she resourcefully and convincingly pulls together her arguments, basing them on her theoretical readings and ethnographic material.

Hence, despite some of the minor shortcomings and due to the impressive progress she has made from the beginning till the end and her commitment to anthropological research and writing I evaluate Olga V. Tarasova's MA thesis work with 2,0.

Nürnberg, 12 August 2016

Lale Yalçın-Heckmann

