

Bachelor thesis review

Anna Caterina Vaccari “The body in the palliative care context: an ethnographic study”, Charles University, Faculty of Humanities, 2019, pages: 47.

An ethnographic study submitted by Anna Caterina Vaccari, as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for a B.A. degree, deals with difficult topic of the body in a context of palliative care. The ethnographic research in such a field is a quite demanding one, therefore the fact that it was successfully carried out should be much appreciated. Besides emotional demands of the research on the terminally ill, the study was also challenging, both physically and in a sensorial way. It required a great deal of a personal effort to overcome these obstacles, which needs to be highlighted.

Judging by the submitted thesis, the author was able to approach all the difficulties with grace. Having been highly reflective, she was able to cope with structural problems that prevented her from working on the topic she originally intended to pursue and to change the research questions into the researchable ones. The author was also able to reflect the field influence on one's own perspective, and this is something that should be praised, as well.

On the top of being able to carry out an ethnographic research in such a demanding setting on a demanding topic, she did a good job in preparing theoretical framework for the subsequent analysis. Employing theories of “medical gaze” (Foucault), “body as a symbol” (Douglas) and “bounded and unbounded body” (Lawton), the author was able to provide a reader with understanding of the role of a body in palliative care and to show how it is the very body that serves as a central point in patient-staff interactions. She did it in a distinctively ethnographic way by presenting excerpts from her field notes illustrating her claims which were done quite skilfully.

However, there are also some flaws of the thesis, which needs to be mentioned. The structure needs some refinement – I would prefer description of the setting (4.4 Description of the ward) and its actors (4.4.1 The Staff and 4.4.2. The Patients) before the presentation of a typical daily routine (4.3 A typical day at the ward). I would like to get to know, why the author chose to do it the other way around.

While some topics are described in great detail and interpreted with a remarkable insight (particularly chapter about hygiene, p. 32-36), others seem to be rather underdeveloped (chapters about nutrition and medication, p. 36-38 and p. 38-39). Similarly, the chapter “4.3 A typical day at the ward” (p. 21-24) gives an impression of an unfinished work, as if some parts are being missed. There is no information on what usually happens between breakfast and lunch or between lunch and a night shift. Or is it so insignificant that it is not worth mentioning? What also makes me wonder is that while the hospital is run by a congregation and the author mentions that some staff members are also convent members (p. 32), the nuns are almost completely left out from the description and analysis. Or does everything that applies to staff members applies to nuns as well? Consider this, along with the fact that nutrition is somehow being missed in the conclusion part, it all makes me feel like the author does not have enough time for finishing the thesis in a way it should have been finished.

This feeling is also strengthened by abundance of grammar mistakes, misspellings, punctuation mistakes, editorial mistakes like missing quotation marks or use of quotation marks instead of apostrophes. There is also a problem with footnotes - numbering does not match numbers in the text. What is more, I am not certain when it comes to the choice of some wording, particularly the word “structures” in describing hospices, LDNs and hospitals (p. 3, 5, etc.). The term facilities might be a better one, perhaps? Even if these formal flaws are of

lesser importance than the content of the thesis itself, the mistakes definitely does not improve the reader's overall impression.

I am of the opinion that the bachelor thesis by Anna Caterina Vaccari definitely meets the requirements placed on the studies of this type, however, I have mixed feelings regarding the grade. On one hand, the author did a great job by carrying out research in really difficult field on a very demanding topic in a reflective way, skilfully applying adequate theories on the empirical data, and came with interesting conclusions. On the other hand, the structure of the thesis needs some reworking, certain themes are underdeveloped and the thesis as such needs editorial work. Due to the issues described above, and despite of my respect for all the work the author have done, I recommend to decide between an excellent (1) and very good (2) grade, based on the outcome of the defense.

Prague, 19th September 2019

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