



**Supervisor's Evaluation of the M.A. Diploma Thesis of  
Savanah Catalina:**

***When Reproductive Rights are Criminalized: Cross-Border Abortions  
and a Case Study of the Ciocia Collectives***

The submitted M.A. thesis of Savanah Catalina is a noteworthy accomplishment of student scholarship. It is a theoretically and methodologically sound, conceptually mature, analytically convincing and last, but not least, eloquently written piece of work. A critical review of the thesis is the task of the opponent so in my evaluation I will focus on the process of preparing and writing the thesis, the strong and positive aspects of the text, and the overall academic contributions of Savanah's work.

First, I must mention the extraordinary independence and maturity, with which Savanah worked on her thesis throughout the entire process. From coming up with the topic, through studying the relevant scholarship and preparing the research design, the conceptual anchoring and methodological questions, to the analysis of the collected material itself, most of the time Savanah was able to work independently and responsibly by herself. Formally, the work is polished, articulate, with correctly referenced citation apparatus and adequate bibliography. The thesis is satisfactory in all formal requirements, including structure and length, there is a minimum of omissions or mistakes and the text as a whole is conceptually and analytically fluent. Making sure the analysis is frequently referenced back with the concepts used in the theoretical part, Savanah manages to connect the theoretical and empirical parts in a seamless way. Needless to say, this is often very hard to do, especially for students. (It should be also noted, however, that this conceptual cross-referencing is not supported much by actual cross-citing of the scholarship from the theoretical chapter again in the analytical part of the thesis, which is unfortunate because linking the interview analysis with theoretical concepts through explicit citation references would further enhance the main arguments of the thesis).

It was an honor and joy to work with Savanah, as she always came ready and prepared to our consultations and was always willing and able to enact promptly suggestions and changes I proposed and shared in my commentaries. Especially at the conceptual beginning of the process, when we were working on research design and interview questions, Savanah was actively engaged in thinking through all potential problems and obstacles she could encounter in the field. Later on, she exhibited an exceptional ability to transform ideas drafted in her research plan into action enacted in the field. At the same time, she did not hesitate to disagree with me and stand her ground when she wanted to keep her own approach or solution to a particular issue. In the last

weeks before the submission of her thesis, Savannah was able to work completely on her own as my time-demanding duties as the newly elected dean of the faculty prevented me from continuing to consult with her and support her writing process in the way she would deserve.

In her thesis, Savannah works with the concepts of embodiment and, mainly, reproductive justice. Key terms could have been introduced in a greater depth (with broader literature review) but Savannah revisits these terms again in the theoretical section when discussing reproductive justice and contextual framing of abortion organizing and activism. The methodological section is well informed and sufficient (the interview sample is small but Savannah does account for that in explaining the limitations of her study at the end of the work). Importantly, Savannah's thesis is the strongest where it matters most – that is, in her focus on and the treatment of the Ciocia feminist collectives and interviewed activists themselves. Savannah treats the members of the collectives as real partners and co-authors of her research study, which is apparent not only from the text itself but also from the explicit, touchingly expressed gratitude to them in the acknowledgements of the thesis. In Savannah's work, I value her commitment and recognition of the courage and tremendous energy of these women, which they put forth for other women. She correctly notes that abortion support networks often stay in the background as majority of research endeavors focuses primarily on women who seek abortions. Given the nature of their work, the Ciocia collectives must remain strategically invisible, which consequently makes invisible also their work and impact of their involvement in the support networks on their personal lives and mental health. In her careful and empathetic interviews and writing about the collectives, Savannah offers a remarkable understanding of what feminist project should mean.

I see as one of the main (and most profound) contributions of Savannah's thesis its focus on the concept of feminist solidarity as a tool of inspiration, collaboration, agency and empowerment among women, both cross-nationally and intersectionally. The way Savannah works with this concept in her thesis is reminiscent of Veronica Gago's concept of women's strike, which, both as a concept and collective experience, explores the conceptual and geographical boundaries of feminist action and in so seeks to overturn social mores and repressive legislation. Savannah touches upon this concept already in her positionality section when she declares her emotional ties to the issue of reproductive freedom and expresses her regret, guilt and sense of helplessness in being in the Czech Republic in times when criminalization of abortion legislation is being institutionally intensified in both United States (her home country) and Poland (the country of her family descent). By supporting the Ciocia collectives through conducting research interviews with them, making their work visible and writing her thesis on this particular topic, Savannah herself thus personally engages in feminist solidarity and in doing so quite literally embodies and performs its reach and impact.

From the interview analysis it is clear how important the issue of safety, security and trust is for this particular type of work. Savannah's thesis convincingly narrates why volunteering is a crucial (and sometimes the only) way to engage in abortion access networking. And not only that. Strategic invisibility is an integral and required part of the

volunteering work, which carries a lot of risk, as well as emotional labor and stress. Savannah's analysis ties all of these aspects of abortion activism nicely together to build a powerful argument that what drives these women to engage in this laborious, dangerous and emotionally exhausting work is precisely their sense of feminist solidarity on many interconnected levels; feminist solidarity as a tool to carry out life-important activism, feminist solidarity as a mental and emotional reward, feminist solidarity as a way to reduce violence and oppression, feminist solidarity as a mechanism of support and for change, and feminist solidarity as "a conceptual innovation of the traditional ways of looking at geopolitical regions" (73), an intriguing argument especially relevant in the context of Central and Eastern Europe.

To sum up, I would like to reiterate the importance of the topic, the difficulty of carrying out research interviews in a field where invisibility is of decisive value, and the overall high quality of the submitted thesis. I formally recommend the thesis for the defense procedure and suggest to evaluate it with grade 1, "excellent", depending on the course of the actual defense.

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