



June 2024

Charles University Ph.D Evaluation, Marketa Kocmanova: Large Defence

Dear Ph.D Award Panel,

I deem this thesis to be complete. It makes a novel and significant contribution to scholarship in the field of terrorism and security studies. I recommend that it is defended.

I appreciate the opportunity to review this very successful PhD thesis, and look forward to seeing it defended at the large defence. I benefited, and very much enjoyed, reading the results of the interesting and important research that has been conducted over the past years. The thesis demonstrates strong expertise in the ethnographic study of the Romani, and dedication to the ethical and inclusive engagement with Romani communities. It is guided by a well-conceived research question, and conducted through the application of an appropriate method and novel theoretical perspectives. As a result, the research findings carry significant theoretical implications as a well-studied and articulated negative case of radicalisation to political violence. This is a growing area of academic investigation, to which this thesis makes an important scholarly contribution. I look forward to seeing it published.

The project extends beyond being a mere case study by reflecting techniques of positive research engagements methods with a marginalized community that is usually and predominantly associated with negative connotations and stereotypes. The thesis demonstrates from the researcher a reflexive and thoughtful analysis of a sensitive and difficult problem, and the candidate should be congratulated on conducting research and writing their PhD thesis in such a reflective and creative manner. As such, I am sure that this research will serve to benefit the Romani people as well as generate significant interest among the community of academics studying radicalisation and political violence.

The thesis addresses a significant research problem and gap in what we know about 'non-radicalisation' and 'resilience to radicalisation'. The use of constructivist grounded theory is justifiable in supporting a non-generalisable theory-generating examination. The loosely formulated research questions are appropriate and useful in guiding the research. I was impressed that they do so without constricting the iterative research method and the overall research findings, but instead allowing them to encompass a wider spectrum of possible results and knowledge creation. In terms of the theoretical orientation of the research, I was particularly struck by how the researcher intentionally flipped the findings to report a positive case of resilience-building against radicalisation, rather than a mere non-occurrence of political violence.



However, on first reading the thesis was not without its gaps and areas that were in need of clarification and expansion. However, I am happy to say that these gaps identified by myself and the other examiner have been addressed to my satisfaction. In particular, the candidate has:

Clearly stated the research aim/hypothesis in a single sentence in the opening chapter of the work. This now makes the later discussion of the three guiding research questions more relevant and well contextualised. Clearly outlining these towards the very start of the thesis better allows the reader to orient themselves from the outset.

I was glad to see that some better orientation about the structure of the thesis has been included in the opening sections of the thesis, explaining at the outset why the chapters are arranged as they are.

The updated sections dealing with key definitions are a significant improvement. This is particularly the case for the discussion around the conceptualisation and definition of 'radicalisation', 'Romani', and 'resilience'. The thesis does a good job in discussing the complexities of conceptualising and defining key terms, as well as giving the author's own definitions that are adopted throughout the work.

The contested concept of radicalisation has been given a more wide-ranging conceptual discussion in the early chapters. This thesis is quite unique in that it explores 'group' or 'cultural' radicalisation of an ethnic group *en mass*, rather than the radicalisation of individuals. Terrorism and radicalisation studies have been dominated by psychological approaches that result in a very individualistic and psychologically privileged perspective in the field. This thesis is more ethnographic, looking at a cultural group, and so the findings are more akin to an anthropological (cultural) rather than a psychological (mental) study. For this reason, I was glad to see that the author acknowledges this complexity and unique significance in research design.

I was originally concerned that there needed to be a more substantial introduction to the Romani and to Romani studies somewhere in the early part of the thesis. The thesis does touch on important issues of marginalisation and prejudice faced by the Romani in Europe. However, the expansion that has been made in the text now fully addresses my earlier concerns. This helps orient the thesis, and clarifies how the research and findings fit into the wider realm of Romani studies, in particular criminological accounts of Romani crime and/or criminal subcultures.

In terms of thesis' method and data collection, I was glad to see added to the method section a discussion about what the interview questions were and how they were formulated. Giving the reader some account in the body of the method chapter of the types of interview questions used, how the author devised them, and how they ran the focus groups is very helpful for future researchers. This includes the additional rationale about how the author selected these questions, how they changed as the



research progressed, problems encountered during interviews and focus groups and how they were overcome.

The thesis presents an excellent first section dealing with the complexities and problems of any constructivist or ethnographic-style grounded theory inductive research. I was very glad to see the extra emphasis on reflection on the researcher you built trust within the communities they interviewed, how they dealt with any issues that arose when working with participants, and how they bracketed themselves and their own emotions and subjectivity from your interaction with participants. This is excellent work and one of the significant contributions made by the thesis.

The thesis presents fascinating research about the lack of group radicalisation among the Romani, and highlights a series of very interesting cultural factors that help explain this. However, there is a danger – as with all ethnography – in exoticizing and essentialising the culture of the Romani so that it appears to be timeless, unchanging, homogenous etc. Because of this, I was very glad to see some changes made to the thesis that acknowledge these dangers and discuss how they were mitigated. The ways that the researcher mitigated essentialising the submits and ignoring processes of deculturation, the effects of drugs, the internet, the possible breakdown of the extended family model etc., are impressive. The discussion about how these issues of cultural dynamism and diversity (particularly among Romani youth) challenge the method and findings are appropriate and well-articulated.

My final point is about language and structure. The thesis is written in impeccable academic English, is well set out, highly readable, and demonstrates sophisticated command of academic English.

I commend the research student, her supervisors, colleagues, and supporters in the creation of a very good piece of research. The research represents a significant academic accomplishment. I look forward to seeing the thesis transitioned into an academic book and perhaps some future research projects. I look forward to engaging with the PhD candidate and the other examiners during the upcoming large defence.

Best regards,

Julian Droogan, Ph.D. (U.Syd)

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