

## **Opponent's Opinion on the Master's Thesis "Role of Dissidents in 1986-1991 Georgia" by Nino Melkadze**

While the role of dissidents in the late Soviet Union has been the subject of considerable scholarship, there remains ample opportunity for fresh perspectives and nuanced analyses. Unfortunately, Nino Melkadze's master's thesis, "Role of Dissidents in 1986-1991 Georgia," fails to capitalize on this potential. The lack of methodological rigor ultimately undermines the thesis's contribution to the field.

The most critical flaw, effectively undermining the author's efforts, is the absence of a clearly defined research design. The student failed not only to formulate and describe the research methodology but also to determine the approach for analyzing the selected corpus of texts. The thesis suggests a lack of understanding of fundamental research principles, particularly the precise use of scientific terminology.

This confusion surrounding terminology pervades the entire thesis. On page 15, for instance, "content analysis" is mentioned as a research method without a clear definition, despite its long and evolving history in academia. While the author attempts to identify coding categories, they deviate from established standards, lack proper development, and are not applied consistently throughout the analysis.

A significant portion of the thesis is unfortunately descriptive. The chapters "Analysis of Articles Published in 1986-1991" and "Content Analysis of Speeches by Georgian Dissidents" (comprising 37 pages, a substantial portion of the work) consist largely of lengthy quotations from rather haphazardly selected articles and speeches by dissidents, followed by their detailed paraphrasing. This descriptive approach is further hampered by the limited and seemingly arbitrary selection of source material. The empirical basis of the research consists of approximately eight articles from various Georgian newspapers and seven speeches by figures associated with the dissident movement, with unclear criteria for their selection. Conducting a relevant quantitative analysis based on such a limited corpus of texts is simply impossible. This likely explains the unexpected emergence of the term "qualitative content analysis" in the methodology chapter. However, this method is merely a variation of "classical" content analysis, and numerous approaches exist for data analysis within this framework. Therefore, it was crucial for the author to clearly define and demonstrate which specific type of content analysis was employed and how it contributed to conceptualizing the obtained results, which unfortunately was not done.

Further confusing the methodological approach, the reader learns on page 23 that a "comparative approach" was employed alongside content analysis. However, the author fails to clarify what or who is being compared. This same sentence mentions "revealing discourse," further muddying the methodological waters. Discourse analysis is not simply a method but a distinct methodological approach encompassing various methods, each with its own design, distinct from content analysis. For example, critical discourse analysis focuses on uncovering power dynamics and ideologies within language, a framework that could have been particularly insightful given the topic of the thesis.

Adding to the methodological confusion, on page 45, the author abruptly introduces the term "Soviet propaganda" without providing any explanation or scholarly justification. While propaganda studies have their own theoretical and methodological foundations, and Soviet propaganda, in particular, has been extensively researched, the author labels an article in the newspaper "Kommunist" as "Soviet propaganda" without any theoretical grounding or engagement with relevant scholarship.

On page 48, the author unexpectedly introduces the intention to conduct a rhetorical analysis. However, the analysis itself demonstrates a lack of familiarity with the theoretical underpinnings of this approach. This is evident in the misidentification of "historical allusions" and "emotional appeals" as "rhetorical techniques" in the "Conclusion and Key Findings" section. A more accurate understanding of rhetorical analysis would involve examining the specific strategies employed by the dissidents to persuade their audience and achieve their political goals. Finally, the text unexpectedly delves into "historical narratives," again without any scholarly justification or theoretical background, leaving the reader perplexed.

This methodological confusion is compounded by a complete absence of a theoretical framework to guide the analysis and interpretation of the findings. A dissertation research project necessitates the conceptualization of findings to facilitate their interpretation and integration into a broader analytical context. However, even the slightest attempt at such conceptualization is absent from this work. This raises a valid question: How does this thesis relate to historical sociology or any other academic discipline? The author fails to develop any theoretical framework concerning the Georgian dissident movement. For instance, the presented empirical material strongly suggests exploring themes of nationalism and national identity. Both concepts have been extensively and diversely studied in academia and could have contributed to a more nuanced and insightful analysis of the Georgian dissident

movement. Engaging with theories of social movements or political change could have provided a framework for understanding the dissidents' strategies and impact.

In my opinion, the lack of a well-defined conceptual foundation for the research led the author to rather superficial and, at times, banal conclusions that hardly warranted the effort of writing a dissertation. While I have identified other, less significant shortcomings in this thesis, enumerating them seems unnecessary given the severity of the issues already discussed.

Considering the aforementioned substantial flaws, I believe this work falls short of the high standards of Charles University and cannot be evaluated favorably.

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