

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Social Sciences
Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

MA THESIS REVIEW

NOTE: Only the grey fields should be filled out!

Review type (choose one):

Review by thesis supervisor Review by opponent

Thesis author:

Surname and given name: Sampson van Haeringen Ana María

Thesis title: From Witnessing Democratic Backsliding to Being a Journalist in Exile: Navigating Journalistic Authority and Professional Safety As a Journalist From an Authoritarian Context

Reviewer:

Surname and given name: Dimitrov Michal

Affiliation: Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, external lecturer

1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND THESIS (mark one box for each row)

		Conforms to approved research proposal	Changes are well explained and appropriate	Changes are explained but are inappropriate	Changes are not explained and are inappropriate	Does not conform to approved research proposal
1.1	Research objective(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Methodology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3	Thesis structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

COMMENTARY (description of the relationship between the research proposal and the thesis. If there are problems, please be specific): Research objectives and thesis structure are in line with the approved research proposal. The smaller data sample resulting from the lower number of interviewed exiled journalists (n=9) than announced in the proposal (n=10-12) does not have a negative impact on the findings of the explorative qualitative study on topic that has not yet been broadly covered in academic research. The data sample was broader with respect to countries of origin of the interviewed journalists (6 countries instead of 3-4 countries announced in the research proposal) which opens an opportunity to enhance the contribution of the study to further research.

2. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS CONTENT

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
2.1	Quality and appropriateness of the theoretical framework	A
2.2	Ability to critically evaluate and apply the literature	A
2.3	Quality and soundness of the empirical research	A
2.4	Ability to select the appropriate methods and to use them correctly	A
2.5	Quality of the conclusion	B
2.6	Thesis originality and its contribution to academic knowledge production	B

COMMENTARY (description of thesis content and the main problems): Based on the reflection of relatively sparse up-to-date theoretical and empirical literature, the author seeks to provide an understanding of "how journalists navigate reporting in non-democratic conditions in their country of origin and whether this aids or hinders them once in exile." (p. 3) She formulates a relevant primary question with subquestions which serve as a fundament for explorative semi-structured interviews with 9 journalists from 6 various countries. The theoretical framework is sufficient, even though a closer alignment to authoritarian theory would be useful. The procedure of data gathering and coding for the thematic analysis and interpretation using Braun & Clarke's guidelines is well described and transparent, including visualisation of three key analysed themes in appendix. The author is able to discuss various aspects of limitations of her thesis including the role of her bias. The method within qualitative approach is used correctly and the interpretation in discussion section

opens new perspectives on understanding the experience and self-perception of exile journalists regarding conditions and standards of their work in the process of gradual restriction of press freedom in the country of origin and after relocation to exile. Since the author presents an explorative and not representative study, formulating a hypothesis/hypotheses for further research based on the findings could be a step towards enhancing the contribution of the thesis to academic knowledge.

3. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS FORM

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
3.1	Quality of the structure	B
3.2	Quality of the argumentation	A
3.3	Appropriate use of academic terminology	A
3.4	Quality, quantity and appropriateness of the citations (both in the theory part and in the empirical part)	A
3.5	Conformity to quotation standards (*)	A
3.6	Use of an academic writing style, and correct use of language (both grammar and spelling)	A
3.6	Quality of the textual lay-outing and appendices	A

(*) in case the text contains quotations without references, the grade is F; in case the text contains plagiarised parts, do not recommend the thesis for defence and suggest disciplinary action against the author instead.

COMMENTARY (description of thesis form and the main problems):

The thesis has a logical structure, however the subchapter 3.4 Analysis and Interpretation is relatively sparse and the title a little misleading as the analysis is mostly conducted in the previous sections of chapter 3 (Findings) and the interpretation in the following chapter (4. Discussion). The argumentation is fine but the interpretation would deserve a closer link to the theoretical and empirical literature presented in the chapter 2. The thesis complies with standards for academic work, including appropriate use of academic terminology, conformity to quotation standards and - last but not least - a overall high quality academic writing style with correct use of language.

4. OVERALL EVALUATION (provide a summarizing list of the thesis's strengths and weaknesses):

The submitted thesis by Ana Maria Sampson van Haeringen is a result of her deep commitment and firsthand knowledge in the field of exile journalism. Her experience and credibility helped her to open valuable new perspectives to relatively extant academic research on the formation of journalists in democratic backsliding or authoritarian context and the impact on their work once in exile, based on 9 semi-structured interviews with journalists from 6 countries. Keeping the eye on the current trends in Hungary or Slovakia, the topic is potentially getting more relevant even in (East)Central European region. The data coding and thematic analysis is transparent and on a high level. There are many interesting findings (e.g. perceived challenges in the bubble of exile, security protocol regarding sources, preference for "slow journalism" due to the distance from the events in the country of origin etc.), however the interpretation could be done with a closer link to theoretical literature; e.g. working with concepts from the field of authoritarian theory could be useful. The recommendations for further research are relatively abstract; based on the findings of this explorative study, a hypothesis/hypotheses for further research would enhance the contribution of the thesis for academic research.

5. QUESTIONS OR TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE THESIS DEFENSE:

5.1	The author discussed the limitations of bias of the researcher. What were the challenges during the research procedure being insider in the community and how did she tackle them? What advantages and challenges did show up during the research?
5.2	The theme of financial foundation for exile journalism was discussed primarily with respect to precarity of the interviewed journalists who try to maintain standards of their work. The topic of the financial capital behind the exile media is more or less missing. Did this issue ("who pays? who benefits? who decides?) not come up in the interviews (e.g. pressure on journalists which topics they should or should not cover and how)? If not, why?
5.3	Could the author try to formulate a hypothesis/hypotheses for further research based on her findings?
5.4	How could journalists from flawed democracies like Hungary or Slovakia (being on the path to become authoritarian states) benefit from the findings of the thesis (experience of the interviewed journalists)?

6. ANTIPLAGIARISM CHECK

The reviewer is familiar with the thesis' score in plagiarism analysis in SIS.

If the score is above 5%, please evaluate and indicate problems:

6.1	The score of 12 % overall similarity by Turnitin does not indicate any problems after a detailed check. The thesis is original, conforming to quotation standards. The antiplagiarism tool of theses.cz identifies just 3 % of overall similarity.
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7. SUGGESTED GRADE OF THE THESIS AS A WHOLE (choose one or two)

- A
- B
- C
- D
- E
- F

If the mark is an "F", please provide your reasons for not recommending the thesis for defence:

-

Date: 8. 9. 2024

Signature:

A finalised review should be printed, signed and submitted in two copies to the secretary of the Department of Media Studies. The electronic version of the review should be converted into a PDF and uploaded to SIS, or sent to the Department of Media Studies secretary who will upload it to SIS on the reviewer's behalf.

Do not upload PDFs with a scanned signature, the review uploaded to SIS must be without signature.