

Jury Report

KHMW Jan Brouwer Thesis Award 2024 – Communication and Media Sciences

Ester Bovard BA, University of Amsterdam

Hierarchies of Visibility: Mapping El Salvador's Audiovisual Archives in the Digital Landscape

It is a great pleasure to be able to announce the first winner of the newly installed KHMW Jan Brouwer Thesis Award 2024 for the best master thesis in the area of Communication and Media Sciences. The jury, consisting of Prof. Patricia Pisters (University of Amsterdam), Prof. Ionica Smeets (Leiden University) and myself, Prof. Paula Fikkert (Radboud University) and scientific secretary Prof. Wim Drees, has read the 12 nominated master theses and unanimously chosen to award the prize to Ester Bovard for the thesis entitled: 'Hierarchies of visibility: Mapping El Salvador's audiovisual archives in the digital landscape'.

This well-written and highly original thesis is a detailed case study of the visibility of audiovisual materials from El Salvador on the internet, with far reaching consequences.

Most of us probably assume that if we want to find for instance a documentary online, we have to use the right search engine and the right key words, and if it has been archived on the net, we will ultimately find it, making assumptions on completeness and accessibility of information in the digital age. Ester Bovard convincingly demonstrates that these assumptions may hold for certain audiovisual materials, particularly from the global north, but that the situation is far more complex when considering the global south, particularly in the context of decolonization and adverse political circumstances.

The study is both theoretically grounded in relation to digital epistemologies, memory studies and decolonial discourse on power structures as well as firmly based on empirical research, using various search engines, and on a rigorous analysis of the geopolitical context, which allowed Ester Bovard to unveil the complexity of the digital architectures, which ultimately leads to the invisibility of many of the archived audiovisual materials.

This empirical research of the archiving of El Salvador's audiovisual materials has brought to light a much larger problem with global digital archives particularly with respect to the divide between the global north and the global south, and the role of archival decolonization.

"This thesis is an outstanding contribution to the field of audiovisual archival studies. Her research not only advances our understanding of the complexities of digital archiving but also calls for meaningful change in how we approach and engage with global audiovisual heritage".

Prof. dr. J.P.M. (Paula) Fikkert, hoogleraar taalverwerving en fonologie Radboud Universiteit
Prof. dr. P.P.R.W. (Patricia) Pisters, hoogleraar film- en mediastudies Universiteit van Amsterdam, oud-directeur Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA)

Prof. dr. ir. I. (Ionica) Smeets, hoogleraar wetenschapscommunicatie Universiteit Leiden

The meeting of the jury took place on December 19th, 2023 via Zoom. Also present at the meeting was Prof. W.B. (Wim) Drees, academic secretary for the social sciences and humanities of the KHMW.