

The internationalisation via parochialisation by a ministerial anonymous

Zbigniew Rykiel

gniew@poczta.onet.eu

In recent years, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education has declared its idea of the de-peripheralisation of Polish science. The way to achieve this goal is through the internationalisation of Polish scientific journals. In the autumn of 2018 the Journals Support Programme was opened, intended to financially support Polish scientific journals on the international market. The editors of the *Przestrzeń Społeczna* (*Social Space*) journal prepared an application for this competition. On 1 March 2019, an anonymous evaluation of our application appeared in the IT system of the competition.

The evaluation refers to the opinion of 'both reviewers', although only one was available on the system. The reviewer, whom we will henceforth call Anonymous, dislikes the editor-in-chief of this journal for reasons that will become apparent. Anonymous' assessment is not substantive; it is based largely on innuendos and even slander. The innuendos replace a substantive analysis and unbiased assessment of facts, because Anonymous apparently did not get acquainted with the journal under review, including its procedures. Instead, Anonymous limited his assessment to the content of 'one of the articles' which raises 'concerns' for him. The reading of this article was certainly cursory, because Anonymous apparently read this text without understanding it. It can be assumed that Anonymous found himself in a painful conflict of interest situation, being one of the authors criticised in the editor-in-chief's incriminated article. In such circumstances, instead of foregoing evaluation of the journal, following the principles of scientific ethics, Anonymous decided to express his frustration, replacing substantive arguments with a rather weak assessment. This is indicated by Anonymous' statement, replete with misprints, that he 'met the evaluat-

ed journal only now'. Such a statement is unprecedented in reviews, and therefore surprising, the more so that – as the present author has grounds to believe – Anonymous' statement is not true.

In Anonymous' opinion (complete with misprints), the journal was rated thus 'with superficial overview does not look serious'. Although he did not explain why this was the case. Unfortunately, Anonymous chose not to elaborate this view. Anonymous evaluated the 'level of editorial work' on an unknown basis. He also grants the editor the 'full right' to write editorials 'and only them', even though the COPE ethics principles, which are referred to by Anonymous, are much more favourable for editors. It is an oddity that Anonymous grants himself the right to determine the length of the aforementioned articles, and thus to edit the journal.

Turning to the analysis of the above-mentioned editor-in-chief's article, Anonymous insinuates that the author accuses 'virtually all commentators and investigators of Poles' electoral behaviours of stupidity for emphasizing the nineteenth-century origin of these behaviours', even though the text in question was completely unrelated to this thread. Therefore, Anonymous not only reviews the article instead of evaluating the journal but also shows a lack of reading comprehension skills.

Anonymous also insinuates that the editor-in-chief has 'accepted his own article for print'. Anonymous has no evidence of this, nor does he see that he refers to an online journal that does not use any 'print'. Here Anonymous cites the COPE guidelines, which indicate the obvious need to avoid conflicts of interest by chief editors publishing in their journals by subjecting themselves to anonymous assessments and not making decisions on their own matter, which we have been doing in the assessed journal. Anonymous either was not able to read it on the journal's website or questions this fact, believing, instead of checking, that 'it does not seem that this principle was perceived'. Rather, it seems that Anonymous judges others by their own standards, without noticing that in our journal in each published text we give the date of its submission and another date of its revision. This practice also applies to the texts of the editor-in-chief (in the incriminated article written by the latter the difference from submission to acceptance was three and a half months). At the same time, Anonymous himself violates the principles of COPE ethics. He has a clear conflict of

interest, being the criticised author and reviewer at the same time. On this basis, Anonymous loses not only something which is necessary to every scientist – suitable detachment from the subject of the assessment – but also professional courtesy. He accuses the author of ‘excesses’ (in the plural on the basis of one article!), and – as can be seen – common sense. For while his is violating the rules of scientific ethics himself, he accuses the editor-in-chief of the evaluated journal of this.

Further on, the Anonymous tries to assess, although it is not clear on what basis, which texts are, and, especially, which are not, related to the issue of social space, the subject of the journal’s interests (even though this assessment is traditionally reserved for editors). In this context, Anonymous attempts again to play the role of an editor of the journal. He does not notice, however, that the text criticised by himself regarding ‘language mistakes made by various researchers’ is a review essay of an important book by a prominent sociologist.

Anonymous regrets that foreign authors ‘who do not know the Polish language can [...] not be fully aware of what is happening in the “Polish” part of the journal, in particular in the texts’ by the editor-in-chief. Unfortunately, Anonymous did not read the structure of the journal and the texts published there, because if he did, he would know that there is no ‘Polish’ part of the journal, and the Polish texts have extensive English-language abstracts. Anonymous ‘would blame himself’ if he published his text in the assessed journal, which should be interpreted, however, in the context of the fact that Anonymous withdrew his text from our journal after blind reviews and the author’s (and now Anonymous’) statement that he was unable to write his text in the expected high enough Polish standard. It is thus doubtful whether Anonymous could get through the sieve of strict reviews in our journal if he included such bizarre material errors as in his article criticised by the editor-in-chief. On this basis, Anonymous believes that ‘many other serious researchers [as serious as himself, I understand] could have the same approach to this issue’, although it is not sure on what basis he thinks so. The modesty of Anonymous can be seen in his every sentence; but even more so, his frustration.

Further on, Anonymous returns to the insinuation that the editor of the assessed journal ‘will himself accept his own texts for print [!] and also demand remuneration’.

neration from public funds'. I understand that it would be more reprehensible than to take public money for presenting one's frustration instead of commissioned journal evaluation, as Anonymous seems to do. In conclusion, Anonymous insinuates that 'the journal does not actually comply with COPE's ethical standards' and 'is used [...] by its Editor for quite indiscriminate attacks on other researchers', i.e. – as I understand it – Anonymous as the author of the text with material errors. In our journal, however – unlike the opinions for the Ministry – we do not allow the publication of texts attacking people, but we support – according to the standards of the core of the world science – substantive criticism of these texts, including substantive and linguistic errors, which – as can be seen – Anonymous dislikes very much. As a result, we have a different understanding of the 'standards [...] in a civilised scientific discourse', based precisely on scientific criticism rather than on an allergy to it.

Anonymous' frustration with the only article he read (though did not understand) in the reviewed journal is made clear in every paragraph of his review. Anonymous claims, with misprints and orthographic errors, that 'a sample of the Editor's of the journal work, even if is not a pseudo-science, is certainly a very poor science' (because it is critical!). Anonymous 'does not believe' that 'a serious scientist with recognised achievements has recommended this kind of text for publication'. Instead of basing his assessment on facts, Anonymous prefers faith, measuring – as one can suspect – others by his own standards.

Anonymous took the trouble to check the scientific achievements of scholars publishing in the reviewed journal and came to the conclusion that 'the vast majority of them are not exaggeratedly outstanding scientists'. Note Anonymous poor evaluation of those who publish in our journal, including two of the three most frequently cited Polish sociologists – Zygmunt Bauman and Bohdan Jałowiecki – not to mention John Eyles and Hermanus Geyer. In so doing, Anonymous not only reveals his incompetence, but also exposes himself to ridicule.

Anonymous' incompetence also reveals itself in the fact that, according to him, the editors planned the actions for the purchase of the software quite well, but the 'project refers to DOI identifiers (although not to ORCID)'. It can therefore be concluded that Anonymous believes that the ORCID number can be bought, when in

fact it is voluntarily attributed to a given scholar at his/her request and in accordance with his/her individual needs.

On the other hand, Anonymous exposes himself to ridicule, stating about the evaluated journal 'that we are dealing here with internationalisation, but extremely shallow, because the low standards that the editorial board cherishes are an indisputable fact'. Unfortunately, Anonymous did not point to the 'indisputable fact' that articles published in our journal were quoted, among other places, on popular websites: Mother Nature Network - mnn.com (<https://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/energy/stories/how-to-we-plan-for-a-future-with-more-blackouts>), Science Daily.com (<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/01/140127093033.htm>) and Phys.org (<https://phys.org/news/2014-01-world-blackout.html>). If Anonymous knows of Polish journals in the field of humanities and social sciences which can boast similar achievements, both in the publication of content in recognised western media with reference to the source, and the indication of places in the popular media space in which Polish journals in the respective field are quoted, I would be grateful to know of them.

To sum up, Anonymous did not perform the task assigned to him. In the first place he presents his suffering and expresses his frustration, in the second he assesses the 'wickedness' of the editor-in-chief who dares to be critical, while the evaluation of the journal is only a by-product of two other actions. Anonymous does so on the basis of an inattentive reading of one article in which - as all signs indicate - he was criticised, and from which he suffers painfully. Therefore, Anonymous writes mainly about himself, which is perhaps interesting for neuropathologists, but is much less so for students of social space. This results in a conflict of interest, as a result of which Anonymous imputes his own mentality to the assessed editor, which makes it difficult or even impossible for Anonymous to assess the journal factually. Writing that 'the level of editorial work and standards in the reviewed journal is so low that no[,] even the most sophisticated[,] activities are able to help here', Anonymous does not notice that he writes about a journal which is indexed in Scopus and ERIH+ databases, by which he exposes the ridiculousness not only himself, but - even worse - his principal. Fortunately, however, in the opinion of Anonymous, 'the source of [...]

these low standards is clearly the Editor-in-Chief of the journal', if therefore the journal could be edited by Anonymous, perhaps it would have a chance. Unfortunately, Anonymous was a member of the journal's Editorial Board for years, he seems, therefore, to share responsibility for the journal's standards. Astonishingly, he did not resign his membership of the Board of Reviewers, in which he still is included. Oddly, his assessment of the journal's application is written so emotionally that the person of Anonymous is no longer anonymous.

Unfortunately again, Anonymous' entire creative effort was in vain, because – after the inclusion of our journal in the Scopus database – it is automatically not considered in the Journals Support Programme simply because journals with a position such as ours on the international publishing market do not require such support, at least according to the Ministry. Even less do they need the insignificant comments of Anonymous.

Of course, the slanders contained in the available review of our application may be of a sufficient basis for the editors and publisher of the journal to take legal steps against the slanderer, even if anonymous, and against his principal. We do believe, however, that discredit in the scientific community via extra-judicial forms of polemics is the better way to proceed as it exposes the ridiculousness and parochialism of the 'reviewer'. How ironic given that Anonymous claims his review serves to inform the international readership what is happening in the 'Polish part' of the journal, if not the Polish scientific market. Embarrassingly therefore, we must announce that parochialism is the mainstay of the power and durability of the periphery that dreams about worldliness.

Wpłynęło/received 21.05.2019; poprawiono/revised 25.05.2019