

INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

SHABBY COMMUNITIES. STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND LESS THAN OBVIOUS MECHA- NISMS THAT SPOIL SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Different social groups functioning as authorities for the masses do not fulfil their roles; they represent wrong, often illegal roles and through manipulation, endeavour to attract others to their side. The ones who reveal these activities are seen as independent media and journalists, however, when confronted by the authorities, are revealed not to always have the desired effect of punishing the guilty. A particular case is a scientific environment that does not implement its worthy cause and even renounces it because of pressure from the authorities and/or work environment or simply to pursue its own ambitions, contrary to the very idea of science it claims to represent. Thus, the independence of a researcher and the objectivity of research results are at stake. Some researchers prove their incompetence in areas that should form the basis of their work, such as the English language, the lack of which makes it impossible to promote results internationally and to further the latest developments outside one's own language area. The elite structures are also often closed, thereby preventing the development of other researchers who could become competitors or alternative opinion holders. The criteria for the evaluation of achievements

by being inconsistent becomes hard to question; the key to entering this closed structure thereby seems to be the submissiveness of a researcher, as institutional violence, because of subjective and trivial reasons, puts the skids under development opportunities. The blocking of development and other pathologies in the scientific community are also common in the local communities that still function in spite of their incompetence.

Keywords: philosophy of science, institutional violence, stress management, social influence, glass ceiling, experts' assessment

INTRODUCTION

The activity of the media and talented investigative journalists reveals a covert backstage of cliques, coteries, and other groups that break the law. Over time, we know the specific influence mechanisms that bond society members with specific ties, as in the case of typical criminal groups: gangs and mafias. These titular „shabby communities” are groups that legally function in a society as parts of bigger societies, sometimes with the established authority, which go so far as to break the law, they cross the borders of moral norms or steamroll and manipulate, forcing others towards amoral and/or illegal activities for achieving their own goals (Judák et al, 2022; Králik & Máhrik, 2019).

Such groups can function in completely different environments, but sometimes, one may get the impression that they operate especially well in totalitarian and quasi-totalitarian authorities (Goffman, 1961). Thanks to journalistic investigation, we have well-documented information about cliques and coteries inside the Catholic Church, army and police units, and state authorities. Their activity is especially destructive when revelations of their wicked practices does not lead to investigations, trials and punishments or at least condemnation and alienation of such groups (Janis, 1972). Decent citizens feel outraged. Honest people become naive and second-class citizens because their moral norms become the obstacles to achieving goals in a fraudulent way, exactly as inviolable people from shabby communities do (Kondrla & Pavlikova, 2016). It can become very depressing (Králik & Török, 2016a, 2016b; Králik, 2017)!

The question arises as to how such communities are possible and why the guilty are never apprehended or punished in any way? What are the social and psychological mechanisms leading to this plight and our subjugation? What are the survival strategies of decent people in such communities, and what are the possible remedies for this moral crisis in our social structure? During the analysis, it is worth referring to the findings in the media space—especially those which show an evident breach of the law (see Woodward, 2020); however, due to the functioning in a specific environment and the need to adopt an autoethnographic perspective, further disputes

and examples concern all the functioning mechanisms of a community of makers and promoters of science in Poland. It is a rather special group, which also creates its own particular rules, procedures and institutions. Mechanisms of influence, manipulation and intellectual corruption are more subtle and can seldom be revealed. Whereas in the case of revealing morally questionable or unlawful activities, environments of shabby communities have a whole range of counter-measures, thanks to which follow denials, corruption and repression.

IDEA OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF A RESEARCHER

Science has a dictum that its creators—researchers and explorers—may work independently (Goćkowski, 1984). In practice, this freedom of research and publication is moderated by the system of grants and reviews. Grant competitions may be a way of making science policy by defining the research in their turn, issues preferred by the awarder of the grant (Jałowicki, 2002). Reviews, have the task of supporting scholars in striving for perfection and at least separating science from pseudoscience.

Moderating factors should not disturb the scholar's work as their independence is a *conditio sine qua non* of investigating the truth (Kondrla & Török, 2016). Discoveries and findings inspired by sponsors, pressure groups or on the order of politicians are only apparently the truth (Krimsky & Sheldon, 2004). Only researchers who think and create independently can become the real scientific authorities. Standing on the shoulders of giants does not mean blindly following authorities from the past but draws inspiration for one's own creative action (de Solla-Price, 1963).

There is some kind of paradox, as on the one hand, science arises in silence and isolation when the scholars have to fight all above with their weaknesses, limitations, intellectual deficiency, doubts, lack of sleep, exhaustion, lack of time, underfunding, and role conflict. On the other hand, however, research issues solved in the past and answers gained, raise further questions and become a canvas for composing other research issues, new methodologies, and the creation of ever-new research actions. Besides, after the phase of free creation (and mostly before this phase if we have to do with the assessment of the application and research projects in frames of grant competitions) comes the phase of testing conceptions and verifying procedures and obtained results. It takes place at the moment of reporting the results to a wide audience of interested specialists at the conferences (orally) or in the form of monographs and written papers. The advantage of the first form is the possibility of fast confrontation with other experienced researchers interested in resolving the same problem and obtaining immediate feedback regarding the meaning of the presented findings for the academic achievements of a given scientific discipline. The advantage of written communication is the possibility

of reaching the widest community of specialists, as well as those who will be working on similar problems in the future. The condition of effectiveness is publishing in reputable publishing houses, significant journals, open access, and conference languages (in particular in English).

For a reader, it might seem obvious (as reading this text, they are aware of the existence of mentioned imperatives), whereas it is not obvious for the representatives and acolytes of “regional” sciences, practised locally in national languages, supported by local scientific authorities and activities in the area of science policy of “lagging” countries. It refers us to the simple division into science and pseudoscience. Science develops in exchange and confrontation of world authorities; regional science can develop in a particular niche, on a way of inspiration from the world authorities; however, it itself is not able to contribute anything to global resources since it is not able even to communicate in a common language (Sokal & Bricmont, 1998).

Thus, a researcher’s independence does not mean a lack of any influences. Inspirations are most welcome as they develop the science on the basis of Popperian falsification (Popper, 1962) or Kuhnian revolution (Kuhn, 1962). Inspiration becomes the basis for thinking, doubting, replications, and testing. However, we must not accept ordering the results, interpretations agreed on with the sponsors, hiding negative results or bowing to the pressure of scientific schools and trends.

Despite the scientific pathologies well described in the literature, it is worth focusing especially on less-described mechanisms of depreciation and marginalisation of independent scholars. Mechanisms of humiliation and ostracism are little described, as this topic is dangerous for those who undertake to unveil such practices. Not many people want to risk it!

Lack of independence and/or excessive environmental entanglement leads to the ossification of science, the constant repetition of the same theses, intellectual downfall, subservience, and career based not on real recognition of values and scientific authority but on approval of environments and a ruling ‘herd’!

THE PRACTICE OF DEPENDENCIES AND ENTANGLEMENTS

The authorities’ concern for the welfare and future of the citizens is largely reflected in how those authorities treat education and science. Countries that care about the future of their citizens also care about their education and invest in science (Kondrla, 2023). Therefore, investment in science does not mean just translating its findings into material resources but also caring for a high level of research and scientific communication. Societies caring about science try to hammer out the proper criteria for assessment based on measurable, objective indicators, such as involvement in the research of international teams, implementation of research

projects, implementation of innovations and patents, important publications in the form of monographs in reputable publishing houses with an international reach or papers in the best international journals.

Societies questioning the value of the objective indicators (and we are only touching the surface here!) or feeling the weakness of the scientific disciplines applied locally use substitutes. At that point, different types of committees and commissions for scientific improvement and evaluations are formed. They use their own criteria, modifying the meaning of universally and globally reputable indicators or just ignoring them. Explanations of this approach are various: specifics of the discipline (e.g. study of local cultures), different criteria for the assessment in different countries, unethical practices of the publishers (in the form of high publishing fees). All of these types of arguments can be easily smashed, but the problem lies in something completely different. In general (omitting a few cases), argumentation against objective indicators for assessing the effects of scientific research is submitted by those representatives of local science who do not have any important international achievements. The English language is a problem for people who do not know this language; publishing in the world's best international journals becomes a problem when one has never published in such journals, a high *h*-index is a problem when one has a low or zero. Therefore, there is a question: how such a situation is possible in a case when societies should care about the high quality of science to win the global race for innovations (Jashapara, 2004)? Inventing different rules of the game of scientific/objective truth and alternatives in regard to those which are used by the most developed countries seems to be counterproductive (García Martín, et al., 2021).

The hypothesis can be formulated that the reason is the cooperation of two types of incompetence: political and disciplinary. The lack of mentioned achievements at the global level in a given discipline must be consonant with the incompetence of science policy—other ministers who do not know how the development of scientific research can be supported. They blindly rely on the opinion of the local scientific elites, who not only do not have experience in research on a global level but, most importantly, have an axe to grind in not changing anything in the evaluation system. If politicians are incompetent and follow the advice of those who become judges in their own case, we get caught in a vicious circle of alleged changes. But this is just one of the numerous problems.

Ossified structures, interested in keeping the status quo of heretofore elites, will not be promoting new science according to their own achievements on the basis of globally acclaimed measurements but just on the basis of their own mysterious criteria in the frames of so-called “expert assessment”. Achievements do not matter much then, just the humility and submissiveness of the rising stars of science. Thus, it means impending the disobedient and independent-thinking people, which is completely against the idea of the independence of a scholar and researcher.

GLASS CEILING, FAILURES, DEPARTURES

Expert assessment based on patchy or sometimes inconsistent criteria (for one expert, something is valuable—for the other one, it is worthless) leads to the fall of the idea of the independent researcher. In this situation, the careers of young researchers depend on the whim of supervisors. The hostile supervisor can block many opportunities for their subordinate: do not endorse the implementation of the grant in a certain institution, deprive subordinates of money for conferences, publications, translations, and trips. Handle mobbing “in velvet gloves” (Hirigoyen, 2001). Academic feuds can deny, but victims of such actions are known or possible to identify. Unfortunately, victims cannot defend themselves. They are helpless against the influence of shabby communities of academic predators who often, in an informal way, set the strategies of blocking and excluding. The conviction that academics can change the game’s rules in science to be fairer is naive. The situation is analogical to the appropriation of state power by the party in the last years in Poland. Thanks to independent media, everyone knew about the moral quagmire, but an appropriated judiciary was paralysed by the party nominees. Only when there was a change of power and citizens expected to hold usurpators to account did the police and prosecutors start to work.

In science, the change also has to be initiated from the outside. Scientific disciplines appropriated by the local authorities—narcisists with the god complex, with fear of losing power and with lack of humility towards their lack of knowledge, are not able to reform themselves on their own. There is also no hope in a generation of younger researchers as they are not socialised in the atmosphere of institutional violence, and they are expected to be submissive—unruly; they have to leave or cope without any institutional support. How can we cope without institutional support? How long can we survive without the mercy of the lords?

Scientific talents, aware of their worth, generally do not stand that for long. Departures can be observed in almost every stage of a scientific career, as the discretionary nature of assessments can be noticed at almost every stage. Unfairly treated students, seeing the university’s downfall and experiencing a lack of support do not think about a doctorate or resign just after being admitted to the third stage of studies. Those who finished the third stage and got a doctoral degree depart disappointed with the level of bureaucracy, dependence and entanglements. Or straight away—declare that they do not want to have anything in common with such ways of doing science or in a few years just after defending a doctoral dissertation when they see fact that they cannot defend the glass ceiling. This shows at best that science in some disciplines can be practised in a dependent way or not at all.

Even habilitation in the Polish system does not give real, full independence. Observing the functioning of scholars after habilitation in pedagogy, one may get the impression that the vast majority is still afraid of something, showing far-reaching dependence and sometimes subservience towards academic predators, who once took

power and now perfidiously, unremorsefully abuse the system. Those scholars become the silent majority assenting in mobbing, marginalisation, voting the disobedient out and losing scientific talents. Most likely, the experience of “luxation of the spine” at a certain stage of a scientific career taught them that it is not worth being disobedient and that in the environment, one can survive only by showing humility, settling for erroneousness, keeping a permanent state of “reversal” which consists of denying the existence of scientific pathologies or pretending that the problem does not exist and nothing is visible.

Not only weakness of the local science environment is a problem but in conjunction with other negative phenomena, things such as lust for power, ego inflation, god complex, mobbing, moral harassment, career blocking, wasting the intellectual potential of young-disobedient people. As an effect, there arises a workspace in which only those loyal to the academic predators can survive or, at most, those “reversed”, who maybe even do not agree with those destructive practices but are unable or do not have the moral courage to turn this situation for the better. The passivity of the majority, which washes its hands of those actions, with the fear of negative assessment and blocking the residual possibilities of development (or semblances of possibilities), supports the activity of academic predators and completes the picture of shabby communities/moral quagmire.

The described mechanisms of promoting humility and eliminating the independent ones has two effects that are important for inhibiting the development of science. The first one is brain drain. Those who have seen their vocation in scientific work and at the same time refuse to be constrained by doubtful authorities have to leave the world of science completely, as the weakness of the discipline touches not only one seat of learning but all in the country. The alternative is to emigrate and practice science in another part of the world, where the rules are healthy. In general, however, in the third stage of studies, young people start their families and raise children, so emigration is a hard choice, so not to say—very unlikely. Thus, they most often choose to drop science in favour of the private sector, and they use their knowledge beyond universities: in corporations, private companies, foundations, leading their own businesses. Observation of such careers gives food for thought that talented young people will do well beyond scientific environments and they are easily able to get up and running.

However, much greater losses accumulate in local science—in this way, weak scientific disciplines limit the development potential in themselves. It is not just blocking the innovations and inflow of young people. Weak local science is not able to go beyond the level of local authorities, who force their worldview and their standards on the entire environment. In the case when those local authorities do not want, cannot or do not have the competencies to enter the global circulation of ideas, local science is sentenced to ossification, with no chances of a breakthrough. The environment which is dominated by them can just copy and paste under dictates.

EPITAPH

The aforementioned considerations concern primarily so-called “parallel sciences”—disciplines appropriated by scientific predators of low intellectual competencies without any significant achievements. They drag everybody down to their own level, disposing of their environment from talented people who could “outshine them.”

The described, strongly pathological mechanisms may concern the functioning of science in a particular country or just certain disciplines. The autoethnographic perspective lets us formulate conclusions only as regards its own discipline, although some residual information can also be obtained on certain regularities in other specialities. Therefore, we can venture a guess that the described pathologies may also function beyond the scientific world—everywhere we have to do with money and power combined with a lack of responsibility arising from a lack of control and sanctions mechanisms (Roubalová, Hlad, et al., 2023; Roubalová, Judák, et al., 2023). Hence, the reference to the world of irresponsible Polish politics, in which the great slogans had to cover the appropriation of the country and simply stealing of public funds.

During the analysis, possible solutions were suggested to the problem of weak science and shabby communities exercising sovereign control over it. A good change can come only from the outside through the change of scientific policy. In the environments of a weak science, those who could be initiators of change—do not have any interest in doing so, and those who notice pathological mechanisms—neither have influence nor civic courage. This in turn sends us to the world of politics. The proper changes can be made by a smart legislator and minister. These, in turn, as political representatives, will be smart only if they are chosen by smart and aware citizens whose decisions depend on the level of formal and informal education.

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