The exposure of Kataryna: How Polish journalists and bloggers debate online anonymity

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abstract

This article starts with the premise that anonymity is under attack and that we are experiencing the consequences of a slow but steady process of deanonymisation. While we are aware of the ambiguity of anonymity, we want to make an argument in defence of anonymous speech. The social productivity of anonymity will be demonstrated through an analysis of the doxing of Polish blogger Kataryna, whose real life identity was revealed by journalists. Her exposure in 2009 sparked one of the most heated debates in the history of the Polish internet. It triggered a controversy across several newspapers and blogging platforms. Using critical discourse analysis this study investigates how the Kataryna case was constructed, evaluated and interpreted by three traditional daily newspapers and by bloggers on two blogging platforms. The analysis reveals that the debate on online anonymity reflects three underlying conflicts: (1) conflict over the vision of the public sphere, (2) conflict over the professional identities of journalists and bloggers, and (3) conflict over the process of democratisation in Poland.

Kataryna

The events which led to the most heated debate about online anonymity in Poland begun in 2002, when a blogger using the nickname Kataryna started commenting on sport events on one of the online forums, which belonged to Gazeta Wyborcza, a leading daily quality Polish newspaper. Soon she became active on political forums, especially those related to one of the biggest corruption scandals in post-communist Poland, the so-called 'Rywin Affair'[1]. When Gazeta Wyborcza created

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1   'The Rywin Affair' (also known as 'Rywingate') in 2002 was a major corruption scandal in Poland, in which the editor of Poland's major daily newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza,*

its first blogging platform, blox.pl, one of the administrators invited Kataryna to join and she agreed.

The 'Rywin Affair' made Kataryna highly sceptical of the political order that had been established in Poland after 1989. She became critical of both, Polish mainstream media and the political elite. She also joined another blogging platform, salon24.pl, established in 2006 by a group of mostly conservative publicists. On both of her blogs she published in-depth analysis of various political events, revealing inconsistencies in statements made by Polish politicians and mainstream journalist.

Kataryna's observations were widely discussed on new and traditional media platforms, rising questions and speculations about her 'real' identity. However, until May 2009 she managed to keep her legal name a secret. Things changed after she published a blog post on salon24.pl, in which she commented on media reports stating that the then Polish Minister of Justice, Andrzej Czuma, went to United States and met with a high rank official to discuss his personal debts (Stankiewicz, 2009). Although the minister denied the reports, Kataryna stated: 'I'm quoting this, because I'm strangely convinced that the Newsweek's information will soon be confirmed and we will see that the minister departed from the truth again' (Kataryna, 2009a).

This short and seemingly innocent statement provoked one of the most heated debates in the history of the Polish internet. After Kataryna's publication, Igor Janke, the owner of the blogging platform was contacted by the son of the Minister of Justice, who demanded that the entry must be removed (Janke, 2009). He also asked Janke to reveal the real name of Kataryna in order to file a law suit. Otherwise, he threatened to sue salon24.pl's administrators. Janke refused to obey and the conflict was publicised across all major media in Poland.

Initially, Kataryna was not willing to disclose herself, as she thought she was not confident that she would receive a fair trial:

> Unfortunately, I'm afraid that in Poland everything is possible and that I will quickly find out that as a citizen of the state of love I don't have the right to express my opinion about the minister's credibility and trust media reports that are critical of him. Unfortunately, I'm not as rich as the state treasury. I cannot afford paying minister thousands in compensation for the huge damage that I caused with my blog post... (Kataryna, 2009b)

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was offered favourable amendments to a draft of the new Broadcasting Act in exchange for 17.5 million dollars. The scandal involved prominent Polish politicians and media personas.

Eventually she declared that she is willing to reveal her real name and make a lawsuit possible, however, only after receiving official evidence that the minister is really willing to sue her.

Then the case took an unexpected turn. Despite the initial, almost unambiguous refusal of traditional media outlets to reveal Kataryna's name, Dziennik, a conservative daily newspaper, published a story entitled 'We know who Kataryna is', in which the authors revealed the blogger's real-life identity. This article was published on 21st of May in 2009. While the authors did not explicitly mention Kataryna's name, they provided enough details for readers to figure it out. Among other things they mentioned her age, her place of birth, and the fact that she is the head of a Warsaw-based foundation promoting democracy and civil society. The journalists also quoted parts of the foundation's charter, which provided a direct link to the web-site and thus to the legal identity of Kataryna. She was identified as Katarzyna Sadł o, the president of the Foundation for Civic Society Development.

The already controversial case turned even more contentious when Kataryna publicised a personal text message which she had received from a journalist of Dziennik before the public revealing of her identity:

> Ms Kataryna, please consider our proposal seriously. We don't want to ruthlessly reveal your identity and help Czumas. We would prefer that you agree to this 'coming-out' on your terms, which would include us hiring you as our columnist. But please, understand that it is "frustrating to know but not be able to write about it". I know that your identity is known by Fakt [a Polish tabloid newspaper, KT, AW] and they won't treat you so well – please, do not think of this as blackmail. We really don't want to hurt you. (tan, 2009)

However, Kataryna and many other bloggers and commentators did perceive it as blackmail. After all, Fakt belongs to the same publishing company as Dziennik, Axel Springer.

In response to Kataryna's decision to make the text message public, Dziennik published a series of articles defending its decision to reveal Kataryna's identity and condemning online anonymity. In one of its commentaries Dziennik's editor-in-chief described anonymous Internet users as losers and cowards and asked them to "kiss his ass" (Krasowski, 2009). The series of Dziennik's articles provoked a number of responses from other mainstream media, as well as bloggers, politicians and various public figures. The debate escalated into a serious conflict around different visions of the public sphere, the role of bloggers and journalists, and the place of anonymity in a democratic society.

The minister has never filed any lawsuit against Kataryna. Instead, Kataryna decided to bring Dziennik to court for the infringement of her personal interests.

The first hearing took place in January 2010 and attracted much media attention. There was a widely shared expectation that the court's decision would clarify the status of anonymous online speech in the Polish public sphere. However, in October 2010 the case ended in an out-of-court settlement between Kataryna and Dziennik, the terms of which remained undisclosed.

While these events took place eight years ago, the issues discussed in the context of the 'Kataryna case' are equally relevant today. Perhaps they are even more relevant, as it becomes increasingly obvious that online anonymity is being pushed to the margins by a culture of openness, transparency, self-disclosure and self-promotion (Bollmer, 2012; Lovink, 2012). It is in this context that the debate deserves a more in-depth analysis.

Deanonymisation

The outing of Kataryna by Dziennik took place in a very specific cultural, political and social context. However, this is not an isolated case. There are numerous examples of what might be called 'media doxing' – instances in which mainstream media outlets published identifying data of previously anonymous internet users. These examples include the disclosure of a British blogger, Girl with a One-Track Mind, who was writing about her sex life in London. Her real identify was lifted by the Sunday Times. They also include the disclosure of NightJack, a blogging policeman from Lancashire, by The Times. In all these cases, journalists made their decisions on the premise that disclosure serves the public interest more than the internet users' anonymity.

To understand the real relevance of this case we need to look at the wider context within which anonymity has been attacked. The Kataryna case is part of a much broader trend towards the elimination of anonymity from online spaces and the promotion of the legal identity. Only recently, in the context of increasing internet surveillance and an exponential rise in micro-drones, Bauman (2011) importantly posed the question if this marks the 'end of anonymity'. While such a prediction might be slightly exaggerated, there can be no doubt that we are in the midst of a severe process of deanonymisation.

As van Zoonen (2013) observes, people's online identities are increasingly expected to be harmonised with their offline, 'real' ones. The culture of identity play and exploration, typical for the early years of the internet, has been substituted with the culture of self-promotion and transparency (Lovink, 2012). Similar tendencies are also described by Bollmer (2012: 2):

> The freedom to speak the 'true' self while remaining hidden is replaced with the belief that liberation comes from the 'complete' revelation of self, fully connecting to the totality of the network, defined by the limits of social technologies. The ability to speak truth and have that truth recognized politically depends on one's willingness to fully reveal one's fixed and totalized identity.

Commentators attribute the marginalization of online anonymity to various factors. Drawing on Lessig's (2006) framework we argue that anonymity on the internet is challenged by four forces, by (1) legal regulations (see Froomkin, 2015; 2003; Mansell and Steinmueller, 2013), by (2) commercial interests (see Campbell and Carlson, 2002; Edwards and Howells, 2003; Fuchs, 2013; Wallace, 2008; van Dijck, 2013), by (3) technological developments (see Bodle, 2013; Grosser, 2014), and finally by (4) social norms (see Baym, 2010; boyd, 2012).

The ability of internet users to remain anonymous on the internet is heavily influenced by the law. One of the most extreme examples comes from South Korea, where in years 2007-2011 the law forced every website with over 100,000 visitors per day to verify the identity of its users (Lee, 2011). More often, however, online anonymity is legally restricted in more indirect ways, such as via chokepoint regulations or data retention (Froomkin, 2015). Market opportunities and constraints are another force which limits anonymity. What some authors call 'radical transparency' (Bollmer, 2012; boyd, 2012; Dibbell, 2010) is a raison d'etre of most social networking sites, which achieve financial profit by 'tailoring advertisements to the consumption interests of the users' (Fuchs, 2013). The third force mentioned by Lessig is technology. This is about the design and code of web sites. Some of them safeguard anonymity (4chan and T.com), others limit it. The architecture of Facebook, for example, very much fosters a real name policy (Grosser, 2014). Finally, the fourth force with an impact on anonymity, are changing social norms. Two decades ago anonymity – often in the form of pseudonymity – was the norm. As Turkle observes, thinking about one's identity was dominated by the images of 'multiplicity, heterogeneity, flexibility and fragmentation' (1995: 178). With the rise of social media platforms social norms shifted to favour transparency, or what Lovink (2012: 38) calls a 'culture of self-disclosure'.

Although there is enough evidence to conclude that a process of deanonymisation is indeed on its way, it must also be noted that the future of anonymity is not yet determined. The internet is still a rather young technology and the result of a mix of 'competing layers of meaning and functions that combine different affordances of the medium for different purposes' (Feenberg, 2014: 117). The way online identities are constructed is not yet fixed. As Stryker suggests, we will continue to see a warfare, in which a 'primary battleground will be the identity space' (2012: 16).

One of the areas of this battleground, which has so far received little academic interest, is discourse. Studying the discourses around anonymity is crucial, since anonymity is characterised by what Feenberg (2014) calls 'interpretative flexibility'; it is filled with different meanings by various social, political, and commercial players. Taking the Kataryna case as an example we will now explore and identify some central discursive struggles which dominated the debate on the meaning of anonymity, its ethics and politics.

The social productivity of anonymity

Before we examine the outing of Kataryna more carefully, we need to explain our own position. We consider the process of deanonymisation to be problematic and indeed dangerous for the social fabric in digital capitalism. As academics we want to participate in the debate on anonymity and initiate a defence. In close alignment with the overall concern of this special issue we want to argue that anonymity is strongly needed for a healthy public sphere. Indeed, anonymity is socially productive. Let's be clear what this means. If something is socially productive it produces the social. We want to make a case that anonymity is a specific condition within the realm of the social that can create and does create communication and social interaction.

The first and most obvious point to make is that anonymity, as Ponesse (2013) insists, is not a subjective but a relational category. This is what distinguishes privacy from anonymity. Privacy refers to identity and subjectivity, while anonymity is always relational. Therefore, it needs to be considered in a broader social context. Ponesse develops a concept of anonymity which rests on the claim that anonymity is the result of a specific exercise of control, in which some information about a person is concealed from others.

> Understood in this way, anonymity is interpersonal and relative to particular networks or contexts of knowing (i.e., there is no anonymity simpliciter), and therefore should be understood derivatively in relation to the ways we standardly come to know other persons. (Ponesse, 2013: 343)

We want to go one step further however and demonstrate that anonymity is not just a social category, but a category that has the potential to create the social. We want to make three arguments why anonymity is socially productive. Firstly, it is a category that produces communication and interaction which otherwise might never have occurred. Anonymity as a condition opens up possibilities which otherwise might not be explored. Without the possibility for an anonymous blog there would not have been a 'Kataryna case', there would not have been a conflict between various parties, there would not have been debates between journalists

and bloggers about their respective roles or debates on the legitimacy of online anonymity. Anonymity is socially productive in that it increases communication and social interaction.

Secondly, it is socially productive on a deeper and more qualitative level. Online anonymity eliminates the context of conversations. In other words, it cuts out any information beyond that what is being said. It eliminates social categories such as age, gender, ethnicity or class. It flattens hierarchies and relationships of power and therefore enables conversations across race, age, gender, and class. This needs to be applauded as it enriches the public sphere. It can function as a social glue, as a bridge enabling dialogue between different parts of society. However, there is more to this. It is also about power and agency. Anonymity empowers. Those who criticise anonymously people in powerful positions do not have to fear repercussions such as being taken to court (Hogan, 2012). It is for this reason that boyd (2012) argues that real names' policies are an abuse of power. Anonymity is socially productive in that it flattens hierarchies and relationships of power.

Thirdly, anonymity works on an affective level. Dean (2010) develops a theory of social media that is significantly shaped by the notion of affect. For Dean blogs are affective networks and circuits of drive. It is this affective dimension of blogs, the anxieties as well as the enjoyments which blogs and their feedback loops produce that are so crucial for their understanding. We agree with this perspective but would add that anonymity can create a condition that makes these affective networks even more intensive. This affective intensity can be observed on both sides, on the side of the reader and on the side of the anonymous blogger. It produces an additional stimulation to the relationship between writer and reader. Anonymity is socially productive in that it intensifies the circuits of drive.

To summarise this, we want to argue that anonymity is socially productive in three ways. It enhances the social, in that it increases interaction and communication. Furthermore, it creates a platform that brings people together from all segments of a society, facilitates connections across class, age, gender, and ethnicity, and eliminates formal hierarchies. Last, but not least, it accelerates the debate and adds intensity to conflict in affective networks. As we will see all these points play a significant role in the following analysis of the debate on the outing of Kataryna.

Aims and method

The main aim in the empirical part of our article is to investigate the conflicts and power struggles that were activated in the debates on online anonymity in the

context of the 'Kataryna case'. As the issue of anonymity is in fact one of control and power (boyd, 2012), we want to show how this struggle is being articulated.

The sample of texts was compiled according to their relevance to the discussion of online anonymity and their engagement with the 'Kataryna case' in a way that balances the voices of traditional media and bloggers. Using purposive sampling (Krippendorff, 2004), we selected 25 stories which were published by three traditional newspapers with online editions: Gazeta Wyborcza (gazeta.pl, wyborcza.pl), Rzeczpospolita (rp.pl) and Dziennik (dziennik.pl) and two blogging platforms (salon24.pl and blox.pl). These 25 articles were published within 5 days, between 22nd and 26th May 2009, which was the most crucial period in the development of the 'Kataryna case'. We selected only those texts which explicitly discussed the issue of online anonymity. Due to the large number of blog posts in this period we have used an additional criterion for the posts we have selected. The 10 blog post we have chosen have attracted the highest number of comments.

We employ Fairclough's (1993; 2003) model to analyse this debate at the level of text, discursive practice and socio-cultural practice. Our analysis focuses mainly on the representations of social actors, events and relations. We have identified three conflicts that dominate the debate:

1.   the conflict over the role of anonymity for a democratic public sphere;

2.   the conflict over the status of journalists and bloggers;

3.   the conflict over the democratisation process in Poland.

All of these conflicts make a strong case for the social productivity of online anonymity as outlined above.

The role of anonymity for a democratic public sphere

The outing of Kataryna by Dziennik triggered a heated dispute across Polish media, which went far beyond the issue of online anonymity itself. Our analysis of this dispute helps to identify dominant conflicts involved, some of which set journalists and bloggers up against each other, while others ran along different lines. It also shows that discourse surrounding online anonymity is influenced both by global changes of the media related to the popularisation of the internet, as well as the local social, cultural and political context.

In the Kataryna case the discourse on online anonymity can be regarded as part of a struggle for control over the production of discourse in society. Journalists and

bloggers expressed competing visions of the public sphere, which referred to distinctive rules of access, terms of participation, and conditions for being heard and respected.

For many traditional journalists who covered the Kataryna story one of the most important rules of participation in the public sphere is transparency. The articles in Dziennik and Gazeta Wyborcza in particular indicate that anonymous statements cannot be considered respected contributions to the public sphere, since it is impossible to argue with authors who refuse to disclose their real names. Moreover, anonymity is perceived as creating asymmetric power relations, putting an anonymous person in a privileged position and limiting her accountability.

> Kataryna is always hidden behind a pseudonym, which doesn't allow any serious polemic by the authors she attacks. Her entries shape internet users' opinions about journalism and particularly journalists, and she doesn't take any responsibility for it. (Czubkowska and Zieliński in dziennik.pl, 21.05.2009)

The argument that anonymity is at odds with accountability and responsibility is repeatedly brought up by journalists. Accountability, often presented as an indication of civil courage and freedom, is portrayed as a fundamental element of democratic deliberation. Only accountable individuals deserve to be heard:

> Civil courage in democracy requires that we express our own views with an open visor. This is a key condition of credibility and respect (...). (Czuchnowski in wyborcza.pl, 24.05.2009)

Similar claims are made by American journalists (Reader, 2005; 2012) who also assigned a considerable value to authorship, claiming that it makes texts more credible. Accountability is therefore a key justification for authorship being a defining criterion of legitimate participation in the public sphere.

At the same time, Polish bloggers and some journalists, particularly those from Rzeczpospolita, contest the necessity of a by-line. Repeatedly they argue that content matters, not authorship:

> Dziennik authors assume that one argues with a surname. I thought you argue with an argument. That's why I don't mind that someone wants to remain anonymous as long as he behaves in a decent way. (Wildstein in rp.pl, 23.05.2009)

The calls for transparency and real names are seen as an attempt of powerful groups to retain their influential status built on the polarisation of Polish society, and the ease with which one can dismiss any critique by discrediting its authors, presenting them as agents of the oppositional group. Anonymity, however, distorts this picture. Kataryna's identity was disclosed because her anonymity had disrupted the traditional order of the public sphere, and as a result, the traditional

relations of power. In challenging the value of transparency of the author, bloggers and some journalists advocate for a debate that involves less dogmatism and more critical thinking.

The debate about characteristics of the public sphere has hierarchy and quality pitted against equality and inclusion. The analysis shows that journalists prefer a hierarchical public sphere, in which hierarchy guarantees quality of news and comments. In an interview published by the online edition of Gazeta Wyborcza, a journalist makes a telling statement: 'If everyone can write everything on the blog, then gossips and slander become equal to facts' (Jędrysik in wyborcza.pl, 26.05.2009).

The quote above reveals the journalist's concern that if everyone was allowed to contribute to the discussion, without pre-selection and established ways of verifying information (for example by professional journalists), the quality of the public discussion would drop and it will be difficult to identify valuable content. Such rhetoric, implicitly suggesting that public expression, or at least blogging, should be restricted, resonates well with Keen's appraisal of expertise in 'The cult of the amateur' (2008). In the dystopian reality depicted in the book, the lines between 'traditional audience and author, creator and consumer, expert and amateur' are blurring (2008: 2).

The importance of discourse quality was also visible in the way journalists described internet users' contribution to the public debate:

> Many times I read insults (because it is not possible to call it polemic) that anonymous internet users wrote under my own and my colleagues' texts. [...] This is a form of direct democracy, but because of anonymity it inevitably takes the shape of denunciations and insults. (Michalski in dziennik.pl, 22.05.2009)

The lack of quality in the argument is often supplemented by accusations of a so-called lack of civility or rationality. Since all these notions are highly subjective, these claims serve as a powerful tool for delegitimising and undermining the importance of diverse voices. In the Kataryna case journalists use this argument to challenge critical assessments of their work voiced by bloggers.

For bloggers, however, the hierarchical structure of the public sphere, with journalists serving as the only gate-keepers to controlling news and information is a relic of the past. Bloggers on salon24.pl for example perceive the public sphere as a pluralistic space where different views and opinions should be promoted and no voices should have a monopoly on the truth.

> The blogosphere is necessary to assure the pluralism of opinions in the public space. Only pluralism, and not a monopoly of one of the sides, allows getting closer to the

> truth and expressing the interests of various parties involved in a debate. (Kataryna in salon24.pl, 25.05.2009)

For bloggers, anonymity can be a guarantor of inclusion, which is depicted as more important than discourse quality. Three groups of authors are often mentioned as those who are in particular need of anonymity online: LGBTQ bloggers, watchdog bloggers, and women. In all these cases anonymity is perceived as a condition that makes the public sphere more inclusive and accessible to those who would otherwise not participate. Some bloggers are concerned that by disclosing Kataryna's identity, Dziennik sent out the message that everyone else can also be 'outed', consequently prompting self-censorship in the blogging community.

Journalists and bloggers also differ in their perceptions of the link between anonymity and freedom of speech. The dominant view among journalists is that the two have nothing in common. According to a Gazeta Wyborcza journalist anonymity constitutes an antithesis of democratic free speech, which requires transparency and courage:

> In a democracy, the anonymity of a participant in a public debate is not a value and has nothing to do with freedom of speech. It is a caricature of this freedom. Implying otherwise means brainwashing and spoiling the idea of democracy. (Czuchnowski in wyborcza.pl, 24.05.2009)

Such a statement seems to support Reader's (2005) observation that professional journalists have a 'blind spot' preventing them from recognising the important role of anonymity in enhancing freedom of speech. While Reader does not offer an explanation of this phenomenon, describing it as 'knee-jerk biases against anonymous opinions' (2005:64), it seems reasonable to assume that for the majority of Polish journalists, anonymity is not part of their vision of a good public sphere. Their vision favours professional journalists, since in most cases they are protected by the media institutions that employ them.

In stark contrast many bloggers see a close link between anonymity and free speech, reflecting what Trytko (2012) describes as an 'instrumentalist' and 'essentialist' approach. Firstly, they view anonymity as a tool to ensure freedom of speech because it helps to limit political and societal pressure on the speaker and protects alternative voices from retaliation or from being exposed to social stigma. Secondly, an author's decision to withhold their identifying information is seen as an inherent part of protected speech. Kataryna for example insists that people should have a right to choose their form of participation in the online public sphere:

> Free people decide for themselves in what form they want to participate in the public debate. Some do it for the MP's allowance, some do it for the salary in the

> newspaper, and some do it for free wherever they want. (Kł opotowski in salon24.pl, 26.05.2009)

Overall, the debate surrounding the Kataryna case and online anonymity is in fact a struggle over the rules of access and participation in the public sphere. In this conflict journalists attempt to assume the role of the gatekeepers and 'symbolic elites' (van Dijk, 1989), who try to retain their traditional power over public discourse.

In situations when access to the public sphere has been democratised by the internet, journalists engage in what Foucault (1970) calls 'discursive policing' – they construct rules which need to be obeyed if one is to become a rightful member of the public sphere. Giving up on anonymity is clearly one of these rules.

Bloggers position themselves as representatives of the public and defend online anonymity as a means to create a more inclusive, equal and less hierarchical public sphere. By stressing the importance of content rather than authorship they effectively challenge the established authorities and divisions in Polish society.

Conflict over the status of journalists and bloggers

While arguing over the rules of legitimate participation in the public sphere both journalists and bloggers were in fact negotiating their own status within it. The debate about Kataryna's anonymity became a pretext for both sides to construct their identities and define their role in public debate. Our analysis of (self)representations of journalists and bloggers demonstrates that online anonymity is an important element in a struggle over rights, responsibilities and the status of both groups.

However, this struggle took place in a very specific context. During the last quarter of the 20th century, Polish journalists had to come to terms with two important and profound changes, one of them political and the other technological. Both of these transitions had a significant influence on their profession. When Poland's communist regime fell, journalists stood at the forefront of the democratic transition, setting the standards for public deliberation. They exerted pedagogical roles, leadership, and guardianship in their dealings with audiences, seeing the audience mostly as passive pupils.

For Polish journalists the political changes and the technological changes are not harmonious. The status of journalists as guardians of a new democratic Poland sits awkwardly with technological changes that enable many people to produce and disseminate news. Bloggers, citizen journalists and other internet users could

now, at least theoretically, get their voices heard without traditional media as intermediaries. Clashes were unavoidable when some bloggers and journalists started producing similar content and competing for similar audiences.

As Lowrey (2006: 478) observes, both groups started to 'claim some jurisdiction over the tasks of selecting events and issues for audience attention, commenting on these issues, and, to a lesser degree, gathering information for reports'. We focus our investigation on the (self)representations of journalists and bloggers by examining those expressions in the texts which define and describe the roles, qualities, values and resources of both groups (van Dijk, 1995).

Our analysis shows that journalists use the issue of anonymity to question the value of bloggers' participation in the public discourse and to clearly distinguish them from the traditional press corps. On the other hand, bloggers describe anonymity as a tool that gives them independence and protection. The conflict, which in its essence concerns the professional status of journalists and bloggers, has four main aspects.

Firstly, journalists claim that bloggers have the same rights and responsibilities as journalists, and they should therefore act in a similar way and give up on anonymity. According to some authors, publishing content without disclosing its author's identity is only acceptable in non-democratic countries. While some acknowledge that journalists are better protected from lawsuits (e.g., they have access to lawyers and media companies' financial resources, they have some protection guaranteed by the press law), the general message toward bloggers is this: If you want to be considered as journalists, if you want credibility and respect, you need to abandon anonymity and take full responsibility for your words.

Yet, most bloggers reject such an approach. They do not seek to have the status of journalists. As Kataryna states in one of her posts, they do not expect respect. Neither do they expect that blogs should be seen as credible. Instead they want to be left alone and to be able to separate their blogging activity from other areas of their lives. Anonymity is necessary for them to avoid what Marwick and boyd (2011) describe as 'collapse of context' – the situation in which internet users lose control over social contexts in which they act online.

 A second way in which journalists use anonymity to discredit bloggers is by claiming that transparency and courage gives journalists a privileged position in the public sphere. They construct their self-image by frequently using words such as 'watchdogs' and 'heroes' in order to establish the differences between themselves and bloggers and to justify their dominant role in shaping public debate. They repeatedly point to anonymity in order to delegitimise bloggers'

contribution to the public sphere and to highlight the importance of traditional tenets of journalism, such as accountability, credibility, and authority. In one of the most controversial commentaries, written by Dziennik's editor-in-chief, Robert Krasowski, the author describes the status of journalists as follows:

> You say that we don't have the right to out Kataryna. Well, we do; we didn't do it[2] only because we didn't want to act like allies of the government. But if we want to, we can out anyone. We are journalists, and not teddy bears like you. We have the right to enter every corner of the public sphere. (Krasowski in dziennik.pl, 24.05.2009)

For Krasowski, the power to decide who can or cannot be anonymous ultimately lies in the hands of journalists. They are portrayed as powerful members of the public sphere, with the right to control other participants. While social media widen the number of news producers, those who make use of the new possibilities to be part of public discussions have become an object of journalistic scrutiny. The quoted extract also shows strategies of identification and exclusion which are frequently used by journalists to construct boundaries around their professional practices. By creating strong polarisations between journalists (us) and bloggers (them) journalists claim superiority and explicitly degrade the value of bloggers. The most extreme example of such superiority can be observed in the opening sentence of the Dziennik's editor-in-chief commentary mentioned above. He opens his piece with the following rather vulgar words: 'Kiss my ass.' This statement is not only a clear demonstration of power but also serves as a perfect example to highlight the affective intensity with respect to blogging.

As Lisowska-Magdziarz (2006) points out, the freedom to communicate directly and sometimes impolitely often depends on the social status. The use of offensive, rude language is strongly related to power struggles and might indicate that the speaker is aware of his privileged position. For bloggers, the attempts of journalists to emphasise their privileged status in the public sphere demonstrates that journalists are not willing to be criticised. In the blog post 'A tiny letter to Krasowski' the author hits back at the editor-in-chief and ridicules the small readership of Dziennik's blogging platform redakcja.pl.

> Because we few people on Janke's platform [Igor Janke, the founder of salon24.pl, KT, AW], have a few million visits per week. And we don't do it professionally. How many visits do blogs on redakcja.pl have? (galopujący major in salon24.pl, 24.05.2009)

2　Dziennik's staff consistently refuted accusations of doxing Kataryna, stating that her 'real name' was not published by the newspaper. However, by publishing the extract from the statute of the foundation she led provided a direct link to Kataryna's offline identity.

Bloggers believe they are part of a technological and social transformation which journalists refuse to acknowledge. This transformation challenges what Lowrey (2006: 478) calls the 'journalists' reign of sovereignty'. As a consequence, journalists turn to values such as transparency and accountability in order to distinguish themselves from the new participants in the public deliberation.

This leads to a third argument brought up by journalists, namely that the anonymity of bloggers leaves room for abuse. They argue that bloggers might represent interests that are contradictory to what they state in their texts.

Bloggers counter this argument by stating that it is important for them to separate their blogging activity from other areas of life. This does not mean, however, that they see anonymity as a tool to avoid responsibility. In fact, they consider themselves to be more accountable than journalists. As one of the bloggers explains:

> Unlike journalists in all those weeklies and dailies, we are being constantly assessed. Non-stop and in many places. Everyone can comment on our post, show its weaknesses and simply compromise it. (...) Journalists are not subjected to this kind of quality control. (anie in rp.pl, 26.05.2009)

Accountability as understood by bloggers stems from the inherently social and interactive nature of blogs. Since the validity of posted content can be easily verified by others, the identity of the author becomes irrelevant. Furthermore, they argue that anonymity might be even more dangerous if abused by journalists. In one of her posts Kataryna suggested that journalists have double standards when it comes to anonymity.

> Maybe then, in the name of total transparency of the public debate, we should prohibit using anonymous sources in journalistic articles, where the potential impact and possibilities of manipulation are much bigger compared to even the most popular blog. Criticising someone's anonymity, while at the same time using anonymous sources in every article, is slightly inconsistent. (Kataryna in salon24.pl, 24.05.2009)

Like other bloggers Kataryna argues that journalists use anonymity in a highly instrumental way. They would criticise it only when it serves their interests or threatens their privileged position.

Finally, some journalists make a fourth claim on anonymous bloggers. As the following quote of a Gazeta Wyborcza journalist shows, they acknowledge that anonymous bloggers do have a certain level of influence:

> [Kataryna, KT, AW] went far beyond the role of an anonymous commentator and got lost on the way between blogging and influencing politics (Węglarczyk in gazeta.pl, 22.05.2009).

While this journalist does not clearly explain the boundary between comments and influence, there is obviously some envy shining through. There is an acknowledgement that bloggers are a threat to journalists, that they are competitors.

All four arguments described above demonstrate that journalists are determined to keep their privileged position as opinion leaders. They use anonymity as an argument to fight their cause.

Conflicting visions of the democratisation process in Poland

The two conflicts described so far – one on the perception of the public sphere, and another on the status of journalists and bloggers – demonstrate significant differences in the way bloggers and journalists perceived the value of online anonymity. Although some journalists showed support for anonymity, and some bloggers opposed anonymous communication, the lines of conflict were mostly rather sharp.

Finally, our sampled texts refer to a third topic, to different opinions about the state of democracy in Poland and to conflicting assessments of the process of democratisation in Poland – something that Nijakowski (2008: 113-114) describes as 'the collective memory and debate about the past'. The analysis of the Kataryna case shows that in order to justify their respective positions on anonymity, both journalists and bloggers often refer to Polish history, in particular to the post-war period of communism.

In order to explain these influences, it is useful to draw on Polish sociologist Kowalski (2010), who identifies two dominant groups in the Polish public discourse. The transition optimists believe that democratisation in Poland was successful and that Polish citizens enjoy all important democratic rights, including unrestricted freedom of speech. In contrast, the transition pessimists, he argues, assume that the process of democratisation has mostly benefited the liberal elite and that Polish democracy is built on a murky cooperation between old communist elites, current political elites, and the mainstream media. The optimistic version of this transition process is often associated with Gazeta Wyborcza, while the pessimistic one is associated with more conservative media such as Rzeczpospolita and Dziennik.

A similar division exists with respect to the two blogging platforms. While bloggers on blox.pl, the blogging platform owned by Agora (the publisher of Gazeta Wyborcza), reflect a mostly positive attitude towards the state of Polish democracy, bloggers on salon24.pl are often quite sceptical.

It is interesting to note that attitudes towards the condition of Polish democracy strongly correlate with perspectives on online anonymity. The optimistic view is visible mostly in texts published in Gazeta Wyborcza and the related website gazeta.pl, as well as, occasionally, in blog posts on blox.pl. It is important to recall that Gazeta Wyborcza was founded in 1989 as an outcome of the Polish Round Table Agreement between the workers' Solidarity Movement and the communist government. The newspaper's founders took an active part in influencing the state of Polish democracy. Therefore, it has been promoting the optimistic view on the transition. Moreover, in May 2009 when the Kataryna case took place, the government was led by Platforma Obywatelska, the party which Gazeta Wyborcza had endorsed.

The optimistic discourse perceives Poland as a successful, prosperous country, characterised by a consolidated form of democracy and a satisfactory level of freedom for its citizens. This view leads some Gazeta Wyborcza journalists to conclude that in the Polish public sphere there is no place for anonymity, because democracy and freedom of speech requires accountability:

> Civil courage in democracy requires that we express our own views with an open visor. This is a key condition for credibility and respect (...). Civil society is a society of free individuals, therefore people who are not afraid to take responsibility for their words. (Czuchnowski in wyborcza.pl, 24.05.2009)

Here journalists of the mainstream newspaper exclude those from the democratic discourse who choose to stay anonymous. The implied message here is that if someone is afraid of the consequences of speech, then he or she should not speak at all.

Another tendency in the optimistic discourse in relation to online anonymity is to compare the current situation in Poland to the times of the oppressive communist regime.

> Hiding behind pseudonyms brings to mind communist times, when slandering the government using guerrilla methods was in itself a courageous act. But today we have a free country, freedom of speech. This kind of activity is therefore an expression of plain cowardice. (Kurtnovotny in blox.pl, 23.05.2009)

The author implies that – in contrast to the communist period – citizens now have nothing to fear, so that there is no more an 'us' versus 'them' situation. Now the

state is us and there is no reason to be afraid of it anymore. People can openly express their views without fear of prosecution. As a Gazeta Wyborcza author stated, anonymity is only needed in non-democratic regimes, where freedom of speech is restricted. Moreover, some authors argue that the right to openly state one's views was one of the objectives in the fight against the communist regime. In the context of the optimistic discourse about online anonymity, concealing one's name is expressed as at odds with the achievements of the democratisation process in Poland.

The remaining two platforms, Rzeczpospolita and salon24.pl, represent significantly different positions on the condition of Polish democracy, and thus on online anonymity. The pessimistic discourse also appears sometimes in texts published by Dziennik, where journalists occasionally try to attenuate their harsh criticism of anonymous online users. The critical position towards the Polish political system is closely connected to the fact that all these media outlets were sympathetic to the conservative party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), which at the time of the Kataryna case was in the opposition.

For conservative journalists and bloggers the 'us' versus 'them' division did not disappear in the post-communist era. Most of them believe that the country is ruled by the elite (dominating the political institutions, mainstream media and judiciary) that emerged at the early stages of the transformation. According to Kataryna, anonymity should be preserved in order to protect citizens from the media and politicians. She stated that the disclosure of her identity by Dziennik was clear evidence that Polish citizens do not enjoy freedom of speech.

> There is one thing I envy them – this undisturbed belief that we live in a normal country. A country where there is no problem with expressing unpopular opinions, because our politicians and media are so painfully ethical that nobody would even think of prosecuting others for their views. As if Dziennik hasn't just proved how much beating one can get only for their views. (Kłopotowski in salon24.pl, 26.05.2009)

However, in Kataryna's view, the need for anonymity is not limited to situations when expressing certain views might be problematic to the author. For her, one of the main benefits of Poland's democratic transformation is citizens' autonomy. Unlike supporters of the optimistic perspective, she argues that the freedom won by the communist opposition manifests itself in the right of citizens to decide about their form of participation in the public debate.

Overall, the disagreement between the optimists and the pessimists boils down to power relations in Polish society. In the context of the Kataryna case, anonymity is

seen as a weapon of the weak and powerless, while those in positions of power argue that anonymity is not needed since there is nothing to be afraid of.

Conclusion

The exposure of Kataryna has started a very intense debate on the legitimacy of online anonymity. It is perhaps not surprising that this debate has created sharp divisions between journalists and bloggers, with bloggers defending it and journalists mostly developing a more ambiguous position toward online anonymity. While most journalists agree that anonymous publishing should be protected in a democratic society, they are keen to point out the dangers that come with it and even defend the doxing of Kataryna.

Furthermore, our discourse analysis has produced more results. Firstly, it confirms that anonymity is usually not debated in an abstract zone. It is likely to be debated in very specific conditions, historic conditions, national conditions, and other context-dependent conditions. We have highlighted three themes of these debates. One referred to visions of a healthy public sphere and to the conditions for meaningful participation. The other debate concerned the role and status of both, journalists and bloggers. The third debate was about competing visions of Polish history, Polish identity and the democratic process in Poland since the fall of the Berlin wall.

Another important result refers to the concept of anonymity as a condition of communication and interaction that is socially productive. Much of the conflicts we have analysed are struggles for power and struggles for a legitimate position within the public sphere. Anonymity empowers those who chose to take part in public debates. It empowers them as they cannot personally be held accountable for their claims and opinions. Anonymous speech liberates those who take advantage of it. Those who are in positions of weakness can use anonymity with great effect. Those who are in positions of strength have different objectives. They will try to tame those who threaten their position. They will try to make anonymous speech illegitimate. While non-accountability comes with great dangers and has the potential to produce severe negative outcomes it does open up the social. It creates new possibilities. In a world where economic and political inequality is on the rise such an opening up of possibilities needs to be welcomed.

The conflicts we have analysed were heated and therefore meaningful for all participants. As such they have enriched the Polish public sphere and forced all sides involved to reflect on their respective identities and their place and role in

the public sphere. The Kataryna case exposes the power mechanisms behind anonymous and non-anonymous interactions.

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