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Predatory Publishing

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Who's the "Predator" Again? An Introduction to "Predatory" Publishing

The 'predatory publishing' label is often linked to open access in order to discredit it, evoking as this concept does both vanity and self-publishing. Today, however, more and more critical attention is being paid to how this label has been and is still being constructed. On the one hand, the rise of unscrupulous OA publishers who charge author-facing fees and provide little to no editorial oversight is indicative of the increasing pressure placed on scholars to produce more and more research "outputs" and to increase the citability and indexing of such. Fuelled by various national incentive systems, it is a pressure that can lead to serious violations of traditional publishing ethics: by authors who self-publish or self-plagiarise in order to meet their targets, and by a certain breed of journals that seem more concerned with making a profit than with disseminating academic knowledge, as shown in the essays in this pamphlet by Vaclav Stetka and by Luděk Brož, Tereza Stöckelová, and Filip Vostal, especially relative to the notorious case of Czech scholar Wadim Stielkowski, who at one point boasted of having published 17 monographs and 60 articles in just 3 years and who, even after departing Charles University, Prague under a hail of scandal, continues to teach and publish. Stielkowski's "case," as it were, for which one of the contributors to this volume, Vaclav Stetka, served as chief whistleblower, serves as a somewhat spectacular exemplum of what can happen when two malevolent forces converge: a dishonest scholar hellbent on maximizing their publications and citations and fraudulent, for-profit "fake journals."

On the other hand, do we need to be careful when it comes to accusing *all* those labelled as predatory publishers as being driven exclusively by profit? After all, much the same can be said about commercial publishers such as Elsevier who are perceived to be legitimate if not, indeed, prestigious. They too are involved in extracting exorbitant profits from the academic publishing system while also locking behind paywalls a vast majority of the world's research. And as Kirsten Bell demonstrates in her essay in this pamphlet, for-profit citation indexing companies such as Web of Science are biased in favour of English-language and particularly American sources. Indeed, a closer look at those journals that have been labelled as "predatory," the majority of which are published in the Global South, shows that most of the contributors to these journals are likewise from the Global South. As Reggie Raju, Lena Nyahodza, and Jill Claassen demonstrate, far from being predatory, these journals (to be distinguished from "fake journals" that have no editorial oversight whatsoever) can be considered to provide a critical dissemination channel for their authors, especially given the elitism of journals based in the Global North. In this respect, they could be viewed as a response to the rise in fees-based open access, and the very idea of 'predatory publishing' also plays into (post)colonial discourses of power/knowledge. In which case, the so-called "predatory" publisher may signal a fault line in the authority that traditional forms of scholarly publishing depend on.

Eileen A. Joy
(punctum books)

Battling predators in Prague: A case study in the rise and effects of the predatory publishing model[1]

Vaclav
Stetka

Background of the case: predatory journals

In the spring of 2015, a group of academic staff members (including myself) from the Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism at the Faculty of Social Sciences (hereinafter ICSJ, or Institute) registered a complaint against a large (and growing) number of publication items submitted by some colleagues to the RIV submission. The RIV points scheme (i.e., a centralized R&D information system, which is the Czech equivalent of the REF, or Research Excellence Framework, in the UK) is a tool for incentivizing boosted publication rates and is part of a strategy to increase research production. It is a government incentive system that works by funding (rewarding) universities for published outputs. The RIV points also serve as a tool for academic promotions, and financial awards are given to academics who have made contributions, both nationally and internationally. The largest number of publications was submitted by Dr. Wadim Strielkowski, at that point a junior lecturer at the Institute.[2] His publication list in 2014 generated serious concerns: it included dozens of research articles in international journals, a majority of which were published in outlets of questionable quality and origin. His many monographs were either published at his own expense or by the vanity press Lambert Academic Publishing. (The incomplete list of publications for the year 2015 shows a continuation of this publishing strategy.)

Not only was Dr. Strielkowski being financially rewarded for these outputs, which can be seen as wasting taxpayers' money, but the question also remains as to what extent the Institute subsidised his publications in outlets that charge authors publication fees. Some other staff members of the Institute have also followed these practices, often in publications co-authored by Dr. Strielkowski.

Dr. Irena Reifová, at that point Head of Research and a member of the Institute Management Group, referred to these questionable practices at Institute meetings in April and May 2015. Neither the Head of the Institute nor the Management took any concrete initiative to deal with the issue except for a rather general and vague statement regarding "publishing rules and regulations." Reifová resigned from her post in the Management Group in protest against the playing down of the potentially negative effects of predatory publishers, both upon the Institute's research reputation and its ability to treat all researchers equitably according to their scholarly research production. In order to protect the academic reputation of the Institute, our group filed a complaint to the Head of the Institute, Dr. Alice Němcová Tejkalová, on June 15, 2015, copied to the Dean and Vice-Dean for Research of the Faculty, to convince her to take specific action in relation to the potentially unsound publishing practices being engaged in by certain researchers.

In the process of gathering detailed information to document the complaint, we found even more serious issues. For instance, Dr. Strielkowski's texts included full chapters copied from a book written by an author named Emily Welkins (plagiarism: see below), and his publication list included items published twice under similar (yet slightly different) titles by different groups of co-authors but without appropriate reference to such re-use (self-plagiarism). Strielkowski also co-authored a journal article which included unreferenced portions of an MA thesis (ghost authorship).

The Emily Welkins case and the silencing of the critique of questionable publishing practices

In her response to our complaint, Dr. Němcová Tejkalová disclaimed the charge of self-plagiarism and ghost authorship with the argument that "the authors of the respective texts admitted their authorship." She framed the complaint as putting her under "inadequate pressure" incompatible with the Code of Ethics at Charles University. Nonetheless, in her response to the case of chapters by Emily Welkins copied by Dr. Strielkowski, she confirmed that "Emily Welkins" stood in for a non-existing fictitious identity constructed by Dr. Strielkowski, referring to Emily Welkins as Dr. Strielkowski's "registered pseudonym."

In fact, Welkins had co-authored several of Strielkowski's texts, and he presented her name as being affiliated with prestigious academic institutions (University of Strasbourg or University of Cambridge).[3] These practices were most likely intended to generate a legitimisation of Strielkowski's research outputs, to upgrade the reputation of what were, in fact, predatory outlets, and to possibly increase his citations in various indexes.

On August 19, 2015, Němcová Tejkalová issued a document titled "Publishing Rules at the ICSJ," to a large extent based on the (unacknowledged) evidence we had provided in order to document our complaint in June of that same year. In an accompanying letter addressing all staff members of the Institute, she rejected any troublesome issues regarding publishing practices. She concluded that anyone who claimed otherwise "is not telling the truth and will be held liable for discrediting the reputation of the ICSJ." In our view, this was yet another example of bureaucratic-institutional practices incompatible with the principles of academic freedom.

However, despite these declarations in the face of so much evidence, we revealed and reported a number of cover-ups and attempts to conceal evidence of predatory publications (implicated in our initial complaint), including those by Dr. Němcová Tejkalová herself. In fact, she deleted two publication outputs we had identified as predatory on her own official staff profile.[4] What is more, Emily Welkins and/or her affiliations have been withdrawn from some of the online publications, such that Welkins has been erased completely or re-classified as an independent scholar.

Discreet departure of Dr. Strielkowski and the future of Dr. Václav Štětka and his team

Dr. Strielkowski left his full-time post at the ICSJ in October 2015. No explanation was given and the Institute management issued no official statement regarding his academic performance. The Head of the ICSJ, Dr. Alice Němcová Tejkalová, held a meeting with one of the pro-active members of our group and the author of this paper on October 23, 2015. She announced her decision not to extend my employment contract, which was to expire on December 31, 2015.

Epilogue (May 20, 2018)

Following an official complaint submitted by the signatories of the original blog post (see footnote 1) to Charles University's Ethical Committee, the Committee concluded in March 2016 that the activities of Dr. Wadim Strielkowski were in breach of the university's Code of Ethics and that they caused harm to the university's reputation. As Strielkowski was, by that time, no longer working at Charles University, no further actions were taken against him, despite initial pledges by some members of the university's management to sue him. My own contract was not extended, despite a public petition demanding the revocation of this decision, signed by over 150 signatories from Czech academia and beyond. I left the Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism and since June 2016 have been employed as a Lecturer in communication and media studies at Loughborough University in the UK. The research group PolCoRe (www.polcore.cz) that I established at the Institute in 2013 was effectively dismantled. During the following two years, most other staff members from the original group that helped to reveal and report unethical publishing practices at ICSJ have left or were forced to leave the Institute; only two out of the original eight members of the group are still working there.

In September 2017, Dr. Němcová Tejkalová decided to run for the position of the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences. Despite concerns raised both by people from within the Faculty and from the broader public, the Academic Senate elected her the Dean on October 31, 2017. This prompted widespread protests, including a string of resignations of several professors from the Faculty's Scientific Board, and an open letter to the Rector Tomáš Zima (who had to formally confirm the Senate's decision) not to appoint Dr. Němcová Tejkalová to the post, arguing that this would cause serious damage to Charles University's reputation.[5] The open letter was signed by over 300 Czech and international academics, including senior scholars working at prestigious international universities (such as Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, MIT, etc.) and holders of European Research Council research grants. However, all this activity was to no avail, as the Rector appointed Dr. Němcová Tejkalová (who had been a member of the Rector's Council since 2014, entrusted with the task to oversee university's disability policies) on January 7, 2018.

The government system for evaluation of research production (nicknamed "coffee-grinder", for its mechanical transformation of submitted outputs into points and research funding, regardless of publication quality) was supposed to be replaced by a new system by the end of 2017. However, the implementation of the new system has been postponed several times already, and according to latest estimates it will remain in place at last until 2020. In the meantime, despite the growing awareness within the Czech academic community, publications in predatory journals continue to serve as source of funding for research institutions as well as a strategy for boosting individual academic careers.

[1] This text was originally published in November 2015 on the blog *Za eticke publikace* ["For Ethical Publications"], in protest against the handling of the complaint issued by a group of staff members at the Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, who discovered that some of their colleagues had been extensively publishing in so-called "junk" journals, and thereby—due to certain loopholes in the Czech system of evaluation of research outputs—had been securing notable economic benefits to the institution and to themselves individually. The case brought, for the first time in the history of the Czech academia, systematic attention to the problem of predatory publishing, which, as it was revealed, far exceeded this particular case. The original blog post has been edited and augmented lightly for its inclusion in this pamphlet, and the original post can be viewed here: https://zaetickepublikace.wordpress.com/2015/11/17/facts-about-the-critique-of-questionable-publishing-practices-at-the-institute-of-communication-studies-and-journalism-faculty-of-social-sciences-at-charles-university-prague/. It is also worth noting that the original blog post also served as an open letter to the ICSJ as well as the larger academic community in the Czech Republic, and the original signatories were: Roman Hájek, Radim Hladík, Jernej Prodnik, Irena Reifová, Jiřina Šmejkalová, Václav Štětka, Jaroslav Švelch, and Lenka Vochocová.

[2] See Prof. Wadim Strielkowski's personal website, https://www.strielkowski.com/publications/.

[3] To see just one example of a co-authored text with "Welkins" that also quickly reveals the barely-existent editorial and scholarly oversight f a for-profit, predatory journal (in this case, *Applied Mathematical Sciences*), see Strielkowski, Lisin, and Welkins 2013).

[4] Both texts by Tejkalová (Tejkalová 2015 and Tejkalová and Strielkowski 2015) were published by the predatory *Journal of Language and Literature*, the DOI registration for which no longer exists.

[5] See the open letter here: https://reputationindanger.com/open-letter-otevreny-dopis/

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Vampires in Academic Publishing - On the case of Wadim Strielkowski[1]

Luděk Brož,
Tereza Stöckelová,
and Filip Vostal

On the occasion of Jeffrey Beall's list of possible predatory publishers being shut down for reasons presently unknown (Silver 2017), our short text considers the wider context of the story of "academic, researcher, and consultant" Dr. Wadim Strielkowski, which has been debated and disputed in Czech academia since 2015 and led to the organization of a conference in Prague in June 2016.[2] At this conference, Beall gave a keynote speech about how predatory publishers corrupt scholarly communication. We aim to show briefly here the use and usefulness of Beall's list in a local context and, more generally, to contribute to the larger discussions about the global quest for meaningful and responsible academic publishing in today's audit- and productivity-driven culture.

Strielkowski, then a junior lecturer at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, first attracted the attention of colleagues in early 2015, when it was discovered that he had published 17 monographs and more than 60 journal articles in just three years. It is probably not surprising that a number of these texts were published in a rather unconventional way: Strielkowski's monographs, with one exception, were in fact self-published and self-illustrated, even though each appeared to have been published by the Faculty of Social Sciences. A substantial amount of his articles were published in journals that could be described, following Beall's terminology, as "potentially, possibly or probably predatory." Since many of his articles were skilfully placed in dubious journals that were indexed in SCOPUS or even in the Web of Science's (WoS) databases, they were recognised by the Czech evaluation system as research outputs. As a result, Strielkowski's employer was awarded the increased funding, and Strielkowski himself received bonuses to his salary as a result (Novotný 2015b).

As the majority of Strielkowski's publications are open-access, they remain accessible to anyone who wishes to scrutinise their quality, or at least their academic rigour. Alongside the apparent recycling of sections of texts, Strielkowski has a high number of co-authors. Moreover, very similar texts are sometimes co-authored by different people, a practice reminiscent of authorship trafficking as uncovered by Hvistendahl's (2013) investigation of questionable publication practices in China.

Some articles are even rather entertaining. In one of them—published in *Economics and Sociology* and co-authored by Strielkowski's superiors (de Beer et alia, 2015), the vice-dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and the head of the faculty's Communication Studies Institute—the authors claim several times that South Africa and the Czech Republic are "formally authoritarian countries." The fact that no one noticed the authors' misspelling of the word "formerly" beautifully illustrates the quality of the review and editing processes in such journals, as well as the fact that they have hardly any readership to speak of who would notice such a statement in the first place.[3] It should be noted that these journals feature in the Web of Science's Emerging Sources Citation Index and the SCOPUS database, respectively.

In addition to being a prolific author, Strielkowski also happens to be a globetrotting entrepreneur. Through his companies, he has offered courses on how to publish in academic journals, with special emphasis on being indexed in SCOPUS and the Web of Science (Novotný 2015a). Participants primarily hailed from the countries of the former USSR; if they paid conference fees, they were guaranteed publication of their text(s) in one of the journals that Strielkowski himself (used to) publish in and which Beall monitored until January 2017 (such as *Czech Journal of Social Sciences*, *Business and Economics*, and *International Economics Letters*). For those ready to pay €3,000, Strielkowski, referring to himself as "professor" and "Vice-Chancellor," even offered academic degrees. His Prague University of Social Sciences and Humanities Ltd. offered not only MBAs (apparently without an accreditation in the Czech Republic) and postdoctoral positions one had to pay for, but also a "MAW" degree, which stood for "Master of Academic Writing."

As more people within Czech academic circles and beyond began to pay attention to Strielkowski's activities, it transpired that not only did he run a profitable "moonlighting" job, but that he was—and perhaps remains—able to juggle multiple identities. To make his publications look more serious and attractive, some of Strielkowski's pieces were co-authored by Emily Welkins, allegedly affiliated with the University of Strasbourg and/or the University of Cambridge but in reality a false identity of Strielkowski himself. Interestingly, Strielkowski and Welkins "co-authored" several pieces on vampires, and when the Czech media eventually scrutinised the case, he was characterised as a vampire "sucking millions of public money" (Novotný 2015b). Since vampires are romanticised parasites, perhaps the whole category of predation in academic publishing as coined by Beall would be better described by metaphors of symbioses (between inventive publishers and inventive authors) and parasitism (on taxpayers). Since Strielkowski acted as both prolific author and publisher, the symbionts in these scenarios are often so close that it can be almost impossible to distinguish between the two symbiotic creatures who, in cooperation, leach off societal support for, and trust in, science as a public good.

In September 2015, Strielkowski left Charles University. It seemed his only option in prolonging his rich academic career would be to work within the typical habitat of predatory/parasitic publishers and authors, which seems to be mostly Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. Indeed, at first that appeared to be the case: that same autumn, Strielkowski undertook a tour of Russia's provincial universities, where he was welcomed as a famous professor from Charles University in Prague; according to the available information, he sometimes did not shy away from vague promises of institutional collaboration.[4] It is therefore quite remarkable that Strielkowski's next stopover was the University of Cambridge, more precisely in the position of research associate of the Energy Policy Research Group. Those familiar with the structure of the University of Cambridge would probably not regard this position as particularly prestigious, but to someone possessed of such an entrepreneurial spirit as Strielkowski, merely being listed on the webpage and corresponding from a University of Cambridge University email address would have been a blessing. No surprise, then, that Strielkowski already features in the editorial board listing of the aforementioned *Economics and Sociology* as "associate professor, University of Cambridge."[5] The official page of the North Caucasus Federal University (SKFU) reported on Strielkowski's visit under the headline "Cambridge – Prague – SKFU. We are developing cooperation."

Strielkowski's story is an especially bizarre example of what stands behind the sharp rise of so-called predatory publishing. It is estimated, for instance, that between 2010 and 2014, the number of 'predatory journals' globally rose from 1800 to 8000, and the number of articles published in such journals increased from 50,000 to 400,000 (Chen and Björk 2015). Importantly, careful reading of Strielkowski's story shows that his academic-trickster business model worked in synergy with dominant indicators of scientific quality integral to many evaluation and rankings systems. Strielkowski, after all, quite rightly promotes himself as an expert on how to get published in journals listed in SCOPUS and Web of Science—a valued skill, since many national scientific evaluation systems consider these two databases to represent an unquestionable guarantee of scientific quality and even to serve as barriers against mediocre and worthless publications. It seems, then, that the current globally shared obsession with "exact" bibliometric measurements of research productivity and impact is a source from which predatory/parasitic publishing arises, rather than a remedy for it. We must not forget that the motivation of the two databases, which are owned by private corporations and equity firms, is to make a profit rather than measure quality. What's more, the profit-driven character of Web of Science is likely to deepen under the new ownership of Onex and Baring Asia (Toonkel 2016).

Finally, by instructing us that the metaphor of "parasitism" is better suited than that of "predation," Stielkowski's story allows us to refine a more useful conceptual language for describing the ongoing and rapid metamorphosis of the academic publishing ecosystem. It may well be the case that science is subjected to severe bloodletting—not only by novelistic vampire characters, but also by the established publishers who act as vampires who leach public budgets for science and also take advantage of the non-paid labour of authors, editors, and reviewers. Even though Jeffrey Beall was even accused by many open-access supporters of acting in the interest of commercial-conglomerate publishers such as Elsevier, his role in pinpointing certain predatory publishers was no doubt pioneering. We believe that the continuation of his work in some form will be critical to and necessary for the credible development of open-access academic publishing, as well as for the responsible cultivation of the publishing landscape as such.

[1] This paper was originally published on the *Derivace* blog (https://derivace.wordpress.com/2017/01/26/predators-and-bloodsuckers-in-academic-publishing/) and has been lightly edited and augmented for inclusion in this pamphlet.

[2] The website for the "Parasitic Relations in Academic Publishing" conference, June 2, 2016 Czech Academy of Sciences, is here: http://www.avcr.cz/cs/udalosti/Parasitic-Relations-in-Academic-Publishing---Paraziticke-vztahy-v-akademickem-publikovani.

[3] The paper remains available online. Once the spelling mistake was ridiculed in Czech media, it was corrected – but only in the paper's abstract. See: http://www.economics-sociology.eu/files/ES_Vol8_1_Lab.pdf.

[4] See http://ria56.ru/posts/56346556438.htm.

[5] See http://www.csr-pub.eu/?en_editorial-board, 3.

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Predatory Publishing from the Global South Perspective

Reggie Raju, Lena Nyahodza, and Jill Claassen

The publication of research outputs has a social justice aim fueled by desire of researchers to share their research for the betterment of society. Many believe in the necessity of a symbiotic relationship between reader and researcher, which is supported by the view that access to knowledge is essential for the production of new knowledge. New research builds on previous knowledge, establishing its validity through collective scrutiny. Traditionally, research has been made public through journals, meeting proceedings, and books produced largely by commercial publishers, and access to this research has been expensive. Despite the hope for a more symbiotic relationship, many accept that some publications will solicit greater interest than others. One can comfortably assume that if certain research publications are not "relevant" to potential readers, then they will not solicit too much interest. Responsibility lies with the reader to analyse the publications to determine their relevancy and influence, whether it is for education, adaptation, or praxis. Sharing information for the betterment of society is admirable, but has been hijacked by commercial publishers who have taken the research content and, with the aid of pro bono reviewing on the part of researchers, have placed a levy upon the distribution of scholarly research. The prohibitive costs levied for access have drastically limited dissemination of this same research. Researchers have responded to this limitation by advocating for more transformative publishing models that would be focused on driving open access as opposed to profit margins. In the case of journals, instead of limiting access to those who are able to purchase subscriptions, some are insisting that scholarly articles must be freely accessible to anyone who has access to the internet, emphasising the social justice aspect of research disseminstion.

Clearly, researchers' desire to share findings has been exploited by commercial publishers who not only levy exorbitant subscription charges, but also coerce researchers to cede copyright in exchange for improved visibility of their work. Then there are those unethical publishers who make "unearned" profits through deceptive processes—for example, the promise of vigorous peer review process that never actually happens. The whole publishing landscape has been turned on its head and has now become a tool for large profits as well as personal and institutional prestige.

The crux of this paper is to critically engage with what librarian Jeffrey Beall termed "predatory publishing."[1] Beall's unilateral determination of predatory publishing sent the research publishing world into a tizzy. Even though Beall has withdrawn his list from the internet, thanks to web-crawling technology, his list is not cleared from the web archive, nor can anyone prevent the analysis of the list by anyone who wants to parse it. Nor has there been an adequate reconceptualization of predatory publishing to ensure that it is not discriminatory to open access (OA) or the Global South.

The Conundrum

In an article in the *Journal of Korean Medical Science*, which levies processing charges to support "worldwide...free online access," Beall shares the core components of his definition of "predatory publishing." The first is the exploitation of the gold open-access model to earn profits from scholarly publishing in a dishonest way. Beall alleges that publishers are reneging on their commitment to deliver on a rigorous peer review process and that predatory publishers are "typically do[ing] everything they can to trick authors into submitting papers in order to get the author fees from them" (2016, 2). Beall further asserts that, "In gold open access, the publishing costs are covered by fees charged to the authors upon acceptance of their manuscripts for publication,...the published articles are free for anyone to access" (2016, 2). Inherent in this component of the definition is the levying of article processing charges (APCs). The second component is the lack of a rigorous peer review process. The third is the existence of "low-quality or predatory journals that exist...on the Internet" (Beall 2016: 1511). The fourth component is the medium of dissemination—that is, the internet.

What we find intriguing is the fact that Beall published his definition of predatory publishing in a journal from the Global South that levies processing charges to ensure wider accessibility. Bell (2017) posits that the concept of the "predatory" publisher has become a standard way of characterising a new breed of OA journals that, for some, appear to be more concerned with making a profit than disseminating academic knowledge. She goes on to point out that Beall used the term "predatory" to describe journals that exist exclusively to make a profit from charging publication fees (Bell 2017, 652). This raises the question: which commercial publisher is driven by profit? Anderson (2015) brings a critical focus on the second core criteria used by Beall in defining predatory publishing—that is, the "non conformity of good publishing practices." Anderson argues that it is a pity that Beall only got this realization after OA started to gain momentum. Are poor publishing practises, for example, really a new phenomenon? The third body blow is the medium of dissemination: in the current age, there is no clearing of the web archive. Does one individual have the right to condemn a journal to "junk status" and what are the implications of this condemnation when, although opinions may be revised later (or even silently withdrawn), the original opinion remains "live" on the internet?

It is unfortunate, but the reality is that the internet has become the most significant medium for the dissemination of information. We would argue strongly that castigating the internet as a medium for sharing research findings is nonsensical despite the fact that it brings with it major challenges. As the pace of change accelerates, so do the risks associated with that change.

Despite all of the challenges that the internet brings, it has become a way of life for those in the Global North and is fast becoming the norm for those in the Global South. There is broad acknowledgement (albeit with maybe no acceptance) that:

- there are illegal or inappropriate materials on the internet;
- illegal downloading of music and other copyrighted material for free is widespread;
- addiction to online social networks is growing, leading to the disruption of living standards and professional activity;
- the use of the internet in spreading computer viruses and even intercepting credit card or bank details for spurious purposes is rampant; and
- there has been an exponential increase in cybercrime.

The internet has also aided and abetted the spread of fake news, which has become a major bane for deliberative democracy and journalists around the world. As the media landscape changes, there are ominous developments that will always challenge openness and democracy. In order to maintain an open, democratic society, it is imperative that government, business, and consumers work together to solve the problem of fake news. Everyone has a responsibility to combat the scourge of fake news and disinformation, whether through promotion of standards and best practices for journalism, public support for long-form investigative journalism, and the reduction of financial incentives for fake news. Given Donald Trump's creation of an award for the most corrupt reporting (Flegenheimer and Grynbaum 2018), governments should promote news literacy and strong professional journalism. High-quality journalism helps to build public trust and correct fake news without re-legitimizing it.

There also has to be a holistic strategy to combat unethical publishing practises. Fake journals pose a number of ethical issues for authors and academic institutions who must decide how to deal with content submitted to and/or published in them. Everyone (not just Beall)—authors, institutions, editors, and publishers—has a responsibility to support the legitimate scholarly research enterprise, and to avoid supporting fake journals by not publishing in them, serving as their editors or on their Editorial Boards, nor knowingly publish in them without consequences. Institutions need to refrain from raising unrealistic promotion expectations that drive authors into making unwise decisions. Only by addressing the underlying reasons for the resilience of fake journals can this challenge be solved.

Low-quality publishing

In his enthusiasm to denounce content from publishers who also happened to be primarily located in the Global South, Beall defined predatory publishing loosely and rather "unacademically." We would advance that unethical publishing is not the same as "low quality" publishing; in fact, there are significant differences between predatory and "low quality." The interchangeable use of these terms is a clear indication of a poorly defined concept. In Beall's ill-defined concept, predatory publishers, range from well-meaning but clueless start-ups to amateurs, from those that are somewhat deceptive to those that are downright fraudulent. Kravjar and Hladík (2016) point out that some publishers are predatory on purpose, while others may just be making mistakes due to neglect, mismanagement, or inexperience. They also argue that it is important to realize that OA alone does not equate to predatory. We would add that good publishers can publish bad work and bad publishers can publish good work. Hence, the yardstick to measure "low quality" is not well defined and will be extremely difficult to objectively define.

What is missing, then, is a more precisely detailed contextualization for "predatory" or "low-quality" publishing. The issue of publishing quality predates OA and is not exclusive to OA journals. The bias in Beall's assertions is brought to the fore by Berger and Cirasella (2015, 133), who point out that "Beall favours toll-access publishers, specifically Elsevier, praising its 'consistent high quality.' However, a simple Google search for 'fake Elsevier journals' reveals Beall's position as [fragile]. Furthermore, Beall conflates OA journals with 'author pays' journals, and reveals his scepticism, if not hostility, about OA." Kravjar and Hladík (2016) affirm this bias when they directly quote from Beall that, "while the open-access (OA) movement purports to be about making scholarly content open-access, its true motives are much different. The OA movement is an anti-corporatist movement that wants to deny the freedom of the press to companies it disagrees with." We believe strongly that OA is *not* about denying freedom to corporations, but is rather about social justice: it is about sharing research for the betterment of society. It is, further, about collectively finding solutions to challenges that beset society. Situated in Africa, we view OA as a means of converting Africa from a net consumer of the world's knowledge production to a frequent contributor to knowledge production. As indicated above, access to scholarly content is critical to the production of new knowledge.

Peer review

Peer review is viewed as the gold standard for scholarly publishing. Abdul Azeez (2017) shares this assertion by pointing out that peer review is the cornerstone of a quality publication as the manuscript is thoroughly checked and read by experts in the respective fields for academic and scientific quality. But peer review is not as infallible as it is made out to be. Other scholars, such as Eve and Priego (2017, 765), advocate that peer review is deeply flawed.

It would seem that the single most important element in Beall's predatory publishing argument is the peer review process. The argument proposed is that it "guarantees" quality. However, the peer review process is shrouded in subjectivity. First, editors undertake the first level of review before making choices about reviewers. Much of the decision-making power rests in the hands of the editors, who are the link between the author and referee. Editors often arbitrarily reject manuscripts before they reach peers, and the choice of reviewers is a very subjective process. Thirdly, reviewers themselves are never totally objective, especially when there is a need to *interpret* research results. Finally, there is the accusation that North American reviewers see contributions by non-North Americans, especially content coming from the Global South, as weak and thus not publishable. Shuttleworth (2009) corroborates this allegation, stating that there is evidence that decisions to publish are often judged by country: a US-based journal is much more likely to reject non-US papers, whatever the quality.

Peer review is thus not the absolute gold standard in determining quality. The reliance on peer review to categorise, *carte blanche*, journals as predatory (or not) is negligent and destructive. For journals in the Global South that do not have a peer review process, they are doomed to be rated as junk, denying the world access to potentially important research.

Publish or perish

Drawing from the distinction that there is a difference between "low quality" journals and fake journals, or journals engaging in criminally speculative activities, we would like to turn our attention to co-conspirators, be it the publishing system or authors. As posited by Baumann (2003, 14), there is significant pressure from institutions to align to the "publish or perish" system of institutional assessment. There are thus various institutional carrots and sticks that negatively influence some publishing outlets versus others. Where one publishes has serious implications for the evaluation of research careers and funding for research projects, and publication outputs are highly prioritised. Beasley (2005) adds that young academics are incentivised to churn out publications in their fledgling years.

Kravjar and Hladík (2016) accurately sum up the negative impact of the "publish or perish" mantra, stating that, "together with market demand and supply in the absence of morals and ethics," this has "a 'carcinogenic' effect and they infest and infect the scholarly community. The key to combatting them is through an appeal to ethics." In this "publish or perish" landscape, the demand to publish (or else, and within a certain time-frame) is what really ensures that fake or fraudulent publishing thrives.

The role of librarians: publishing literacy

The last few years have witnessed the emergence of new literacies such as digital literacy and news literacy. As the Internet has triggered a degradation of trust, we propose developing a publishing literacy to counter the growth of fake publishing, and which would be commensurate with other literacies such as information and news literacies.

Authors need to become more literate in identifying tell-tale signs of journals that may not be totally kosher. Some of these signs include:

- continuous solicitations to submit to the journal;
- offer of unrealistically quick turnaround times from submission to publication; and
- manuscripts accepted "as is" with no reviewer comments

Authors who knowingly publish in fake journals to augment their contribution to their disciplines are, in fact, cheating the system. This cheating harms authors who play by the rules and adhere to the higher standards of academic practice. Authors also need to know that, in terms of the law of delict (an intentional breach of a duty of care), knowingly publishing in fake journals is complicity in a crime and they must accept co-liability in the degradation of trust around academic research. What is important here is the validation and credibility of research outputs. Researchers need to be able to identify journals that have a positive impact on the evaluation of their careers by their departments. They need to seek out journals that will aid in funding future research projects, and they need to become more aware of the fact that socio-economic impact is as important as citation impact and downloads.

Conclusion

The concept of "predatory" publishing turns out to be more complex than the definitions initially, and still, bandied about. However, there is minimal engagement with the concept from a Global South perspective. The generalization embodied in the initial definition brings real grief to those in the Global South, and thus a Global South perspective is imperative for the purpose of educating the research community. A more meaningfully precise definition would help research stakeholders to more effectively identify the journals in question and prevent their toxic effects on science. However, to fully support the well-intended philanthropic role of open access to scientific research, both authors and information practitioners should commit to support and cultivate the so called "low quality" journals to reach their full potential in "high quality" publishing, whilst continuing to investigate fake journals, for the purpose of educating other stakeholders. Related to this would be the introduction of a new publishing literacy that would make researchers more aware of the pitfalls of publishing in fake journals. More importantly, researchers need to accept co-liability in a criminal activity if they knowingly publish in fake journals as continued support for fake journals is, for all intents and purposes, a crime against the betterment of humanity.

Beall's unacademic definition of so-called "predatory" publishing needs to be dispelled and interventions like that of publishing literacy need to be sought and enacted. Any intervention *must* not be prejudicial to the Global South or to open access as OA is critical to finding solutions to problems that beset Africa: OA is driven by a desire for social justice and social justice is the lifeblood for improved living conditions for Africans.

[1] Although Beall has since taken down his website, *Scholarly Open Access*, where he posted and regularly updated his list of "predatory" publishers, the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine has captured and archived time-stamped versions of it: https://web.archive.org/web/20160422160248/https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/.

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'Misleading Metrics' and the Ecology of Scholarly Publishing

Kirsten Bell

According to numerous commentators, we are facing an unprecedented threat to the integrity of scholarly publishing: predatory open-access journals that will publish anything as long as the author pays for the privilege. A phrase coined by Jeffrey Beall, his website 'Scholarly Open Access: Critical Analysis of Scholarly Open-Access Publishing' was devoted to exposing their activities before it was summarily shut down in January 2017. In addition to his blacklist of predatory publishers, Beall (2014) also developed a list of 'misleading metrics': organizations providing 'bogus' impact factor measurement services to journals. These companies, he suggested, were a symptom of: 'The competition among predatory publishers... especially among the hundreds of predatory publishers and journals originating from South Asia'. Although Beall's intent was to highlight the ways in which the 'corruption' of scholarly publishing was spreading beyond publishers themselves, he inadvertently pointed to the emergence of a new publishing ecology surrounding these journals—an ecology that mimics, in many key respects, the infrastructure surrounding 'legitimate' journals themselves.

To date, the infrastructure around scholarly publishing has been the focus of far less critical attention than the activities of publishers themselves (Posada & Chen 2017). Despite the integral—albeit largely invisible—role such service providers play in the scholarly publishing economy, they are often treated as epiphenomena, thereby largely escaping sustained attention as socio-cultural projects in their own right (cf. Star & Lampland 2009). In what follows, I aim to bring one such piece of academic infrastructure into the spotlight: Web of Science (WoS), along with one of its so-called 'predatory' counterparts: Impact Factor Services for International Journals (IFSIJ). As I aim to demonstrate, analysed through the lens of parody and mimicry rather than predation, such organizations serve to expose and unsettle the relations of authority that traditional forms of scholarly publishing depend upon (see also Bell 2017).

Web of Science and the journal impact factor

Librarians typically treat WoS as the "gold standard" citation indexing service (Harzing 2017). Journals must submit an application to be indexed in WoS's Core Collection (Sciences Citation Index Expanded, Social Sciences Citation Index, Arts & Humanities Citation Index) and are evaluated by WoS's editors based on criteria such as: basic publishing standards, editorial content, evidence of international focus, and citation analysis. WoS is also responsible for the *Journal Citation Reports*, an annual report in which journals in its Core Collection are ranked based on their impact factor—a proprietary metric that evaluates the relative impact of journals on the basis of the average number of citations they receive in any given year for articles published during the preceding two years.

Despite the fundamental role WoS plays "in the machinations that determine which scholars, which ideas, and which values attain legitimacy and eminence" (Klein with Chang 2004, 153), it has been the focus of surprisingly little sustained examination, although attention has been frequently drawn to its bias towards English-language and particularly American sources (e.g., Van Leeuwen et al. 2001; Archambault & Larivière 2009; Svensson 2010). While this is clearly an important issue, and one I have more to say on below, taking bias as a starting point forces any subsequent discussion into a framework underpinned by the concept of error. However, as Ruhleder (1995, 41) observes of the rise of computerized scholarly databanks, "their development is not merely a technical exercise, but often an exercise in power." Such infrastructure codifies, embodies and prescribes particular ethics and values regardless of how comprehensive (or not) it might appear (cf. Star & Lampland 2009). Thus, an exclusive focus on the latter can easily serve to obscure the former, with problems misperceived as technical rather than epistemological.

From the standpoint of its organizing logic, scarcity is not a deficiency of WoS's core indexes, but a virtue. To quote from WoS's own overview of its journal selection process, "It would appear that to be comprehensive, an index of the scholarly journal literature might be expected to cover all journals published. It has been demonstrated, however, that a relatively small number of journals publish the majority of significant scholarly results" (Testa 2016). By "significance," WoS is, of course, referring to the journal impact factor, which only the journals it indexes can achieve. In effect, WoS operates as a Möbius strip, with no orienting point beyond itself. As Klein and Chang (2004, 142) observe, "So far as justifying its inclusion decision goes, ISI [WoS] can effectively pick itself up by its own bootstraps. If it includes a set of journals that cite each other, those journals and those scholars by definition become 'significant.' If it excludes a community of journals and scholars, they thereby remain insignificant." In essence, inclusion in the index actively *produces* the impact it claims to measure.

IFSIJ: Parody as clarity

This aspect of the database is readily apparent when one examines so-called 'misleading metrics' service providers such as Impact Factors Services for International Journals (IFSIJ), which is a fairly typical example of the genre. Implicitly referencing WoS, the IFSIJ website states: 'We are not claiming that our journal impact factor is better than other agencies providing it, we just calculate the journal impact factor according to our own process and methods' (IFSIJ 2018). They go on to describe their process as follows:

> Journal Impact Factor (JIF) is calculated per year on the basis of 100 points and on number of articles published during a year.
>
> - Originality (A): 50%
> - Quality of Papers (B): 20%
> - Review Process (C): 20%
> - Regularity and Timely Publication (D): 5%
> - Editorial Quality and Website (E): 5%
>
> Total X = (A+B+C+D+E). (IFSIJ 2018)

I have previously argued that by invoking the status of the impact factor without its substance, such organizations reveal the journal impact factor for precisely what it is: a fetishized and vacuous number (Bell 2015). However, closer inspection tells a more interesting tale, for while IFSIJ's method might appear absurd, it is far from arbitrary. What we see echoed in their approach to the journal *impact factor* is effectively the Web of Science's stated criteria for journal *indexation*.

While this distorted mimicry might seem like a misunderstanding of the impact factor, it arguably shows a clear sense of the underlying forces in operation. After all, a key reason why many editors want their journals to be indexed in WoS (especially in the Google Scholar era) is to obtain an impact factor, and the criteria for the former make the latter possible. By playing fast and loose with these categories, the IFSIJ makes their intersections explicit, something that is particularly evident in its decision to market itself as an impact factor measurement service rather than as a citation indexing service. Again, this reveals not so much a misunderstanding of WoS, but rather an astute view of how it operates.

As these organizations are well aware, the key to WoS's lucrative business model is not the act of citation indexing itself but its proprietary system of assessing research impact, which it remains strongly wedded to, despite the manifold critiques of the impact factor. For example, when a team of researchers contacted Thomson Reuters, the then owner of WoS, regarding issues with the metric identified by their own citation analysis, they found company personnel willing to talk, but unwilling to change their business model. To quote one of the researchers in the study, "while they [Thomson Reuters] agreed to essentially all the key points we made, they did not want to change anything that would collapse journal rankings, as they see this as their key business asset" (Bohannon 2016).

Who's misleading whom?

Organizations like IFSIJ arguably expose the fuzziness of the lines between a "legitimate" metrics company and a "misleading" one, which is evident as soon as one looks at Beall's criteria for determining the latter. According to Beall (2015), "misleading metrics" are characterized by the following attributes:

1) the website for the metric is non-transparent and provides little information about team, location, experience, company info, etc.;
2) the company charges journals for inclusion on the list;
3) the value of most journals increases each year;
4) the company uses Google Scholar as its database for calculating metrics;
5) the metric uses the term 'impact factor' in its name;
6) the methodology for calculating the metric is contrived, unscientific or unoriginal; and
7) the company exists solely for the purpose of earning money from the questionable journals that use the gold open access model.

However, WoS meets virtually all of these criteria, which has been pointed out in the comments on Beall's list. As Klein and Chang (2004) observe, WoS's processes are entirely black-boxed: there is little consistency in the journals chosen for indexation, many journals indexed do not meet the stated inclusion criteria, the identity of its editors and advisors is concealed, and the records of reviews are likewise private. Moreover, the two-year period used in impact factor calculation is largely arbitrary and was chosen primarily on the basis of its cost-effectiveness (Archambault & Larivière 2009). The impact factor is also calculated in a non-transparent fashion and there is no straightforward relationship between a journal's citations and the score it receives (Brembs, Button & Munafò 2013; Larivière et al. 2016). Journals' impact factors also generally climb each year in conjunction with the growth of WoS's indexes, given that there are a greater pool of citations available to cross-reference.

Although WoS does not charge individual journals for inclusion in the database, university and college libraries pay a princely sum for an annual subscription to its Core Collection, which currently costs the University of Roehampton Library £17,431.20 per year, a figure that makes the amount IFSIJ charges journals for impact factor calculation (USD $125) seem paltry in comparison. Moreover, its owner, Clarivate Analytics, is a commercial entity whose goal is profit maximization. Indeed, the company explicitly markets itself as enabling users to "discover, protect and commercialize new ideas." Thus, as Larsson (2009: 5) observes, "control of the rules of the game remains in the hands of a corporation whose sole purpose is to make profit," especially given the ways that its notions of "impact" have transformed the global research landscape.

The global economy of publishing

Via its journal ranking system, WoS has become critical to the global economy of publications and citations, especially since the 1990s (Larsson 2009). During this period, the emergence of systems of academic audit made the journal impact factor increasingly salient as a proxy measure of researchers' quality and impact (Burrows 2012). Acting as a substitute for evaluative labour, the impact factor of academics' publishing venues provided a form of symbolic currency that could be traded into a material economy of jobs, promotions, salaries, and benefits (Eve & Priego 2017). Indeed, impact factor calculations are now used to allocate research resources in the form of money, merits, and power on an international scale (Larsson 2009), a phenomenon Chou (2014) labels "SSCI Syndrome." In Larsson's (2009, 3) words, "These calculations thus produce winners and losers—not only among individuals, but also in terms of approaches, research groups, disciplines, faculties and universities. It indirectly also produces winners and losers among continents and even languages, which are used to communicate research."

In light of the intense criticisms of its bias towards English-language and Northern (and especially American) sources, WoS has recently taken steps to become more "inclusive" via its Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI). According to WoS's promotional materials, "ESCI expands the citation universe and reflects the growing global body of science and scholarly activity" (Clarivate Analytics 2018). ESCI complements a variety of regional citation indexes that WoS now hosts, including: the SciELO Citation Index (Scientific Electronic Library Online), the Russian Science Citation Index, and the KCI-Korean Journal Database. However, WoS does not calculate the journal impact factor for periodicals in these databases—this only happens for those journals ultimately chosen for inclusion in the Core Collection (Testa 2016). As Repiso and Torres-Salinas (2015: 235) observe, ESCI has effectively 'created a space halfway between limbo and purgatory' ["creado un espacio a medio camino entre el limbo y el purgatorio"]: a "waiting room" where journals bide their time in the hopes of being promoted to more prestigious indexes.

This system has enabled WoS to expand its coverage in multiple directions without undermining the prestige and exclusivity upon which its business model relies (Repiso & Torres-Salinas 2015). Indeed, given the ways it distances itself from the quality of the "emerging" journals it indexes, ESCI perpetuates a value system that continues to separate the "best" (the "west") from the rest. Beall (2016), for example, was a predictably vocal critic of the index, which he condemned as containing "junk" journals, a view echoed in ESCI's Wikipedia entry. Thus, it's hardly surprising that various Global Southern scholars are sceptical of ESCI's stated capacity to raise the profile of the "global body of science" emanating from outside the Global North (e.g., Somoza-Fernández, Rodríguez-Gairín & Urbano 2018).

Given the systematic exclusions and inequalities that WoS produces and perpetuates via the journal impact factor, it was inevitable that a variety of "alternative" metrics companies would emerge to service so-called "predatory" publishers. In other words, far from being an aberration, these companies are actively produced by the prevailing logic and structure of global knowledge production (see also Bell 2017). Although some are deceptive in their advertising claims, many—like IFSIJ itself—make no secret of the fact that they are run *by* Global Southern companies *for* Global Southern publishers. Thus, characterising these organizations as producing "misleading metrics" without recognizing the circumstances of their emergence, has a clear potential to reproduce—and naturalise—the coloniality of power/knowledge (see Bell 2017).

Conclusion

For "predatory publishing" watchdogs, the rise of "misleading metrics" companies provide further evidence of the subversion of academic knowledge by unscrupulous organizations bent on prioritizing profit over science. This lens perpetuates a framework in which prevailing systems of academic value remain unquestioned, ignoring their intimate entanglement with commercial interests, and the ways they epistemologically privilege English-language scholarship from the Anglo- and Eurocentric Global North and marginalise and exclude the rest. Why should 'value' be dictated by corporate actors inside the Global North? Why shouldn't organisations in the Global South develop their own metrics and databases? Taken seriously in their own right, "misleading metrics" companies provide a powerful critique of the current bases for evaluating scholarly knowledge production. In particular, they force us to confront the fact that despite the democratic, egalitarian ethos it espouses, contemporary scholarly knowledge production is the "visible face of a hierarchical system echoing the structure of feudal nobility" (Guédon 2001, 10; see also Bell 2017 for similar points).

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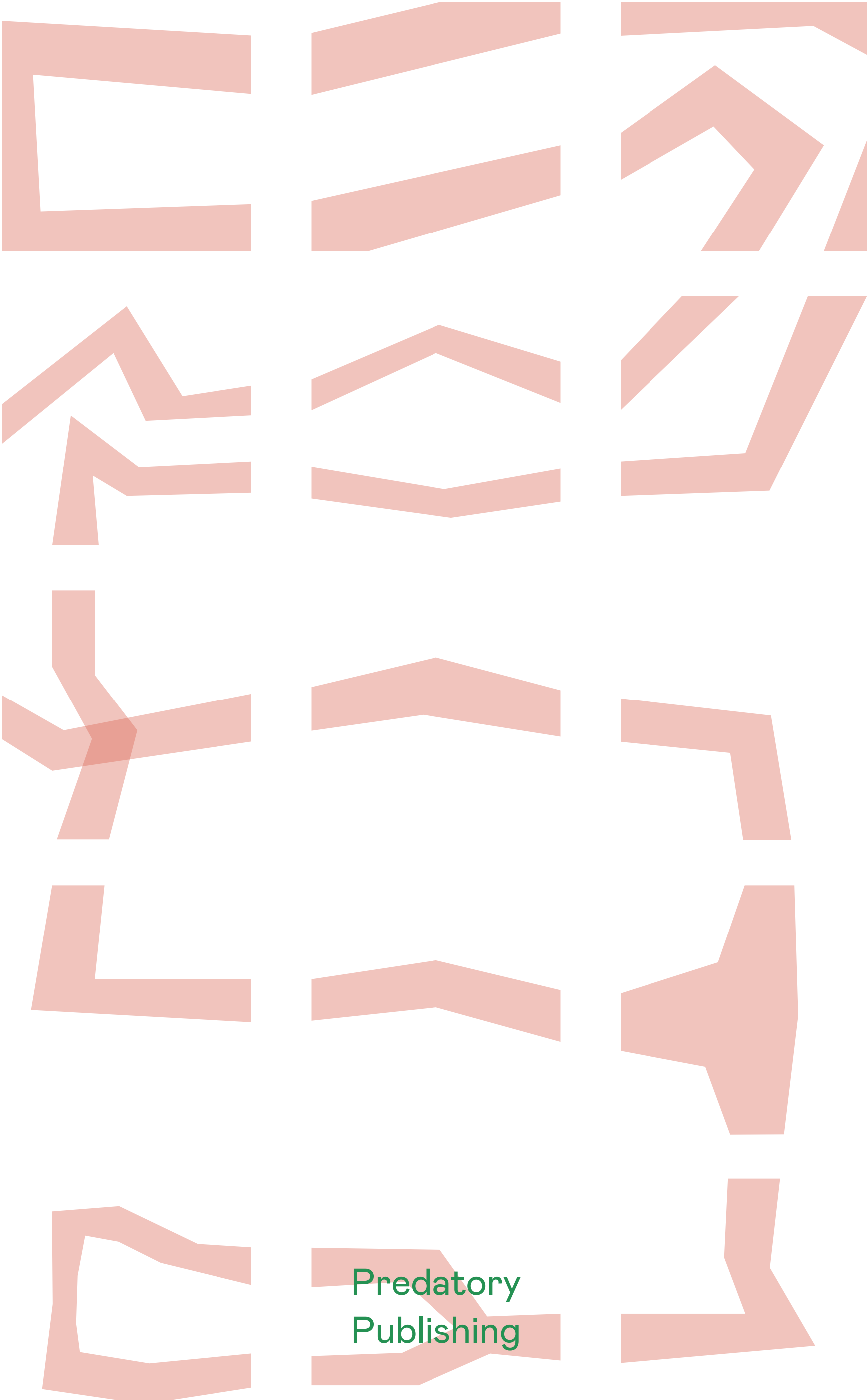
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