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# On the geopolitics of academic publishing: the mislocated centers of scholarly communication

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## ABSTRACT

Knowledge production is an important factor in establishing the geopolitical position of countries. In the recent heated discussion on predatory publishing, the geopolitical dimension of this topic is often ignored or treated superficially. In this paper, we introduce the term “mislocated centres of scholarly communication” to help better understand the emergence of predatory journals, and journals that bear similarities to them, in geopolitical peripheries. Mislocated centers of scholarly communication are perceived in the peripheries as legitimized by the center but are in fact invisible or illegitimate in the center. Thus, we argue the importance of viewing these mislocated centers as the result of unequal power relations in academia. To support our argument, we summarize the research on the topic of predatory publishing and demonstrate that predatory journals are a geopolitical problem because the geopolitical peripheries of science are much more often harmed by them than the center. Unlike predatory journals, mislocated centers of scholarly communication are not necessarily fraudulent but rather they are geopolitical roles imposed on some journals by a dynamic between center and peripheries. Our approach could help to criticize this system without discriminating against peripheral scholars or journals.

## KEYWORDS

Predatory journals;  
mislocated centers of  
scholarly communication;  
center and peripheries;  
scholarly communication;  
geopolitics of science

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Periódicos predatórios;  
centros mal localizados de  
comunicação acadêmica;  
centro e periferias;  
comunicação acadêmica;  
geopolítica da ciência

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Revistas depredadoras;  
centros de comunicación  
académica mal ubicados;  
centro y periferias;  
comunicación académica;  
geopolítica de la ciencia

## Sobre a geopolítica das publicações acadêmicas: os centros desubicados da comunicação científica

### RESUMO

A produção de conhecimento é um fator importante para estabelecer a posição geopolítica dos países. Na recente discussão acalorada sobre a publicação predatória, a dimensão geopolítica deste tópico é frequentemente ignorada ou tratada superficialmente. Neste artigo, introduzimos o termo “centro mal localizado da comunicação acadêmica” para ajudar a compreender melhor a emergência de revistas e periódicos predatórios que têm semelhanças com eles nas periferias geopolíticas. Os centros mal localizados de comunicação acadêmica são vistos nas periferias como legitimados pelo centro, mas na realidade são invisíveis ou ilegítimos no centro. Assim, argumentamos sobre a importância de

ver estes centros mal localizados como resultado de relações de poder desiguais no meio acadêmico. Para apoiar o nosso argumento, resumimos a investigação sobre o tema da publicação predatória e demonstramos que as revistas predatórias são um problema geopolítico porque as periferias geopolíticas da ciência são muito mais frequentemente prejudicadas por elas do que o centro. Ao contrário das revistas predatórias, os centros mal localizados de comunicação acadêmica não são necessariamente fraudulentos, mas sim têm um papel geopolítico imposto a algumas revistas por uma dinâmica entre centro e periferias. A nossa abordagem poderia ajudar a criticar este sistema sem discriminar acadêmicos ou periódicos periféricos.

## **Sobre la geopolítica de la publicación académica: los centros mal localizados de la comunicación científica**

### **RESUMEN**

La producción de conocimiento es un factor importante para establecer la posición geopolítica de los países. En el reciente y acalorado debate sobre las publicaciones depredadoras, la dimensión geopolítica de este tema suele ignorarse o tratarse de forma superficial. En este artículo, introducimos el término “centro deslocalizado de comunicación académica” para ayudar a comprender mejor la aparición de revistas depredadoras y de revistas que guardan similitudes con ellas en las periferias geopolíticas. Los centros desubicados de la comunicación académica se perciben en las periferias como legitimados por el centro, pero en realidad son invisibles o ilegítimos en el centro. Por lo tanto, argumentamos sobre la importancia de considerar estos centros desubicados como el resultado de relaciones de poder desiguales en el mundo académico. Para apoyar nuestro argumento, resumimos la investigación sobre el tema de las publicaciones depredadoras y demostramos que las revistas depredadoras son un problema geopolítico porque las periferias geopolíticas de la ciencia se ven mucho más perjudicadas por ellas que el centro. A diferencia de las revistas depredadoras, los centros de comunicación académica desubicados no son necesariamente fraudulentos, sino que constituyen un papel geopolítico impuesto a algunas revistas por una dinámica entre el centro y las periferias. Nuestro enfoque podría ayudar a criticar este sistema sin discriminar a los académicos o las revistas periféricas.

## **1. Introduction**

The clear division between the center and peripheries is a simplistic presentation of the geopolitics of knowledge production. In fact, from peripheries' perspective, the answer to the question “What is central in science?” is neither easy nor free from peripheral actors' biases. In this theoretical paper, we analyze the recent discussion on predatory journals (i.e. illegitimate journals without strict review processes that often deceive scholars into publishing in them), and we show that knowledge production in the peripheries is influenced not only by the direct influence of the center, but also by imaginaries produced by center–periphery relations. These imaginaries consists not only of images of an idealized center, but also something that we call “mislocated centers,” which are

perceived in the peripheries as legitimized by the center but are in fact invisible or illegitimate for it. Although both central and peripheral actors produce these imaginaries it is peripheries that are most disadvantaged by their influence. Thus, using the example of a recent discussion about predatory publishing, we develop theoretical tools to better deal with mislocated centers in the scholarly communication.

Scientific peripheries are not necessarily economic peripheries at the same time. Moreover, “center” and “periphery” are relational terms: they name a relationship between two regions and not qualities specific to the peripheral or central regions. As in the theory of academic dependency proposed by Alatas (2003) or the concept of the subordinating object introduced by Rodríguez Medina (2014), we take the strongly unilateral impact of one region of knowledge production on other regions as a determinant of academic centrality (impacting) and peripherality (being impacted). A central region is one that influences other regions more strongly than other regions influence it. A peripheral region is influenced by the center more strongly than it, in turn, influences the center. It is mostly central regions that set the priority directions of science and legitimize it, as well as setting the standards of reliable and rigorous scientific inquiry (Alatas 2003). For instance, Rodríguez Medina demonstrates an important role that central knowledge plays for careers of peripheral scholars (Rodríguez Medina 2014, 10).

The current hierarchy of global science is likely to change, but today the center is still located in the US and some regions of Western Europe, because of large funding of science and historically created cultural hegemony which results in the domination of English in science (Demeter 2019; Marginson and Ordorika 2011). Although the significance of Chinese or Indian science is growing, we can still observe a marked inequality, for example, in citations: Chinese scholars are less cited by US scholars than the latter are by the former (Marginson 2018). Because of this, we classify such scientifically powerful countries, such as China, India, or Germany as semi-peripheral (i.e. which are central in some respects and peripheral in others).

In the last decade, hundreds of articles were published about predatory publishing. Although most of the predatory journals were usually reported in medicine and natural science (Seethapathy, Santhosh Kumar, and Hareesha 2016, 1762), the problem was usually framed as one of the whole publishing market and not of a specific discipline. The term “predatory journal” was coined by Beall (2012) to describe journals dishonestly using the open access (OA) model and deceiving scholars for their own financial interests. A large-scale literature review by Krawczyk and Kulczycki (2021) revealed that Beall has strongly influenced discussions on predatory publishing and most authors writing about this topic believe that predatory journals are characterized by poor-quality peer review processes, collection of article processing charges (APCs), and intent to deceive scholars. Recently, a new definition of predatory journals was proposed by Grudniewicz et al. (2019), who defined predatory journals as “entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices” (2019, 211). Grudniewicz et al. do not link predatory publishing with OA and do not focus on the review process because they see it as hard to assess.

We believe that a discussion on predatory publishing needs a fresh theoretical perspective to fully take the geopolitical dimension into account. Moreover, we think that

studies on knowledge production in the peripheries can profit from discussions about predatory journals when they are reinterpreted in geopolitical terms. In order to achieve this, we coin the term “mislocated centers of scholarly communication” and shows how this concept works for deepening our understanding of scholarly communications in the era of predatory publishing. Therefore, we claim that a journal functions as a mislocated center of scholarly communication if it meets two criteria: (1) it is illegitimate or invisible from the perspective of the center of knowledge production; and (2) it is legitimized in the periphery due to its perceived connection to the center. These mislocated centers lead many peripheral scholars to publish in journals that are later deemed predatory in the center (Xia et al. 2015).

Our paper is structured as follows: first, we briefly discuss the issue of imaginaries produced by center–periphery relations. Next, we present numerous arguments to show that predatory publishing is a geopolitical problem. After that, we define the concept of mislocated center of scholarly communication and provide empirical examples to illuminate this concept. Finally, we summarize the paper and discuss how thinking about the mislocated centers can change the perception of the predatory publishing phenomenon and help to better study peripheral academia.

## 2. Geopolitical imaginary: the idealized center and predatory peripheries

Center–periphery relations influence not only the economic sphere but also create various imaginaries. Some of the most famous works in postcolonial theory deal with the problem of imagined categories by which the center describes peripheries, (e.g. “orientalism” as “imaginative geography” criticized by Said [2003, 54]). When considering something like an imagined center, scholars usually describe and demystify some idealized image of the center. Such an image may present British universities as good-willing, when in reality they are proudly teaching colonial administrators, i.e. one of the main agents of colonial coercive power (Said 2003, 213–215). Imagined centers may be “mystified” (as described by Rodriguez Medina (2014, 175–176)), such as through images of Oxford or Sorbonne which present these universities as places of scholarly genius, instead of places with better working conditions. However, what is not well described in the literature so far is a creation of the ‘imagined center,’ as an entirely different place than the center as source of geopolitical power. Oxford University or British colonizers thus have real power in the world system, even without the imagination which idealizes them. At the other extreme, one can find “mislocated centres” that influence various systems only because they are imagined to be part of the center, when actually, they are not. Many journals which are described as predatory seem to be a good example of the latter.

The debate on predatory journals seems to sometimes produce harmful images of the idealized center and predatory peripheries. In 2015, the same Jeffrey Beall who coined the term ‘predatory journals’ criticized the Scientific Electronic Library On-line (SciELO), a crucial platform for Open Access publishing in Latin America, describing it as a “publication favela” (Beall 2015b). While he did not explicitly call SciELO ‘predatory,’ he criticized it as unable to make scholarly publications visible, and this was a part of his more general narrative, by which created serious doubts about the legitimacy of all OA publishing channels, while paying little attention to malpractices by larger publishers like Elsevier

(Krawczyk and Kulczycki 2021). Beall's position was strongly criticized (e.g. Velterop 2015) precisely because SciELO plays an important role in quality control and dissemination of knowledge in Latin America (Packer 2009).

The aim of properly addressing the geopolitical dimension of the problem of predatory journals is to undermine such prejudiced views by creating an accurate image of unequal power relations. As we argue further on, previous attempts to frame predatory publishing as a geopolitical problem have made a great effort in the first task (undermining a prejudiced view) but not in the second (creating an accurate image of unequal power relations).

### 3. Why are predatory journals a geopolitical problem?

The geopolitical nature of predatory publishing is twofold. On the one hand, the discussions about them, and lists of predatory journals, are often biased against journals and articles produced in peripheral countries. On the other hand, as we will show, many studies show that the negative effects of predatory publishing are significantly more damaging to peripheral areas of knowledge production than to central ones. In this section we present a more complete picture of the discussion about predatory publishing by using expertise earned while conducting a literature review and qualitative analysis of 280 publications on the topic (Krawczyk and Kulczycki 2021).

Authors of numerous studies have argued that peripheries are more profoundly affected by predatory publishing than the center. Xia et al. (2015) found that the three most frequent affiliations of authors publishing in journals accused by Beall of being predatory were located in India, Nigeria, and Pakistan. Demir (2018) identified India, Nigeria, and Turkey. Although the countries identified may differ depending on each study's methodology, almost all studies seem to agree that they are overwhelmingly peripheral countries (Erfanmanesh and Pourhossein 2017; Shen and Björk 2015). Moreover, most journals accused of being predatory operate in peripheral countries (Shen and Björk 2015). Also, Perlin, Imasato, and Borenstein (2018) found that in Argentina, scholars who obtained their PhDs locally were more likely to publish in predatory journals than those who obtained their PhDs abroad.

Some studies have shown that the problem of predatory publishing is present not only in the peripheries, but also in the center. For example, in a study on predatory journals focusing on tourism and hospitality, Alrawadieh (2018) found that most authors had affiliations in the US ( $N = 120$ ), followed by Nigeria ( $N = 85$ ), Taiwan ( $N = 77$ ), Malaysia ( $N = 70$ ), and Turkey ( $N = 61$ ). However, it is important to see such results in the context of total publication output and the number of researchers in a given country. According to the UNESCO Science Report (UNESCO 2015), in 2009, there were 20 times more researchers working in the US than in Turkey and 40 times more than in Malaysia.

Although the aforementioned studies are based on Beall's controversial lists, a study using Cabell's new list of predatory journals seems to support these results and indicates that the scholars from the periphery are more affected by predatory publishing than those from the center (Severin et al. 2021). Naturally, both lists originate from the center and can be biased against peripheral journals or authors, but it is also possible that these results can be explained by the unequal conditions of knowledge production in the center and in the peripheries of modern academia. When in the center, reasons for

publishing in predatory journals may be the ‘publish-or-perish’ culture or misidentification by a scholar. In the peripheries, we add another cause that we describe as mislocating a center of scholarly communication.

In this latter mode, knowledge produced in the center typically exerts a powerful influence on peripheral scholars, whereas knowledge produced in the peripheries is almost invisible to the center. Many studies have reported that the source of legitimization in peripheral science is often not the result of scholarly discussions in the peripheries, but the result of (real or imaginary) recognition by the center (Abriszewski 2016; Rodriguez Medina 2014).

Raising awareness among scholars is frequently proposed as a solution to the issue of predatory publishing (Krawczyk and Kulczycki 2021). For example, Oermann et al. (2018) advise scholars to seek guidance on where to publish from senior colleagues and supervisors. However, such advice does not take into account that publishing in predatory journals might be caused by national-level regulations in peripheral countries or institutions (e.g. national or local evaluation systems). Asking for senior colleagues’ help is also pointless if most of them cannot properly distinguish central journals from those that only look like central journals – or have no interest in doing so.

Another frequently proposed solution to predatory publishing is to emphasize that of the two research cultures of “publish or perish” and “quality, not quantity,” only the latter should matter (Xia et al. 2015). “Publish or perish” is usually understood as pressure on scholars to publish large numbers of papers, and many authors rightly argue that it is the quality, not the quantity, of papers that should matter. However, although the “publish or perish” culture is an important factor for the proliferation of predatory journals, such framing often obscures the geopolitical nature of the problem (Bell 2017). If one considers it the main reason for predatory publishing, one only recognizes the competition in the global academic community and the pressure to publish more papers. This obscures the fact that the global academic community is not homogeneous and that the causes of predatory publishing are not limited to pressure external to academia but can also be rooted in unequal power relations between the center and the peripheries.

Bell (2017) proposes changing perspectives on the whole phenomenon of predatory journals. Instead of framing them as predatory, she suggests seeing them as a (possibly unintentional) parody of modern scholarly publishing. Referring to the work of Bhabha (1984), she stresses the fundamental ambivalence of such a parody: on the one hand, it criticizes an unfair system of scholarly publishing and its norms, but on the other hand, it is “a sign of the inappropriate” (Bell 2017, 657), which is used (mostly by the center) to discriminate against authors from the peripheries. This approach is valuable because it helps to recognize that predatory publishing is just a symptom of the deep inequalities in the entire system of modern global science. It also highlights the bias in the writings about predatory publishing, in which authors mostly criticize peripheral OA publishers while remaining silent on exploitative practices of big central publishers like Elsevier (e.g. raising prices of journals to achieve extremely high profit margins [Larivière, Haustein, and Mongeon 2015]). However, Bell’s broad definition of parody (i.e. anything that is similar and somehow different from the object of parody) is a limitation to her approach. Thus, we argue that there is a need for a term that criticizes the flaws of publishing in the peripheries and helps to differentiate between different roles of peripheral journals, whereas Bell’s approach seems to label almost all peripheral publications channels as an ambivalent parody.



Limitations similar to those of Bell's approach can be found in Allman's (2019) description of predatory journals as cases of "social banditry." He argues that predatory journals can be "a force to disrupt exploitation" (Allman 2019, 442) and redistribute unequal resources in scholarly communication. Such an approach rightly highlights that belonging to globally invisible and under-resourced peripheries may create a feeling of injustice in scholars and encourage them to publish in predatory journals because they no longer believe in the possibility of gaining recognition from the center or take part in discussions on an equal footing with central scholars. Unfortunately, these advantages notwithstanding, Allman's approach underestimates the negative influence of predatory journals on the peripheries (e.g. possible accusations of fraud against peripheral scholars, undermining the process of critical review of knowledge produced in the peripheries, and money lost on APCs) and does not deliver a language appropriate for criticizing predatory journals without discriminating against peripheries.

Another relevant theoretical approach is taken by Stöckelová and Vostal (2017). They also see predatory publishing not as an issue with some journals, but as an issue with the entire global system of knowledge production. They suggest viewing the entire scholarly communication as placed in a space divided by two axes: (1) publishers' geopolitical position (North versus South) and (2) their attitude towards profit (for-profit versus non-profit). Although making a profit is intuitively contrary to the scientific ethos from this perspective, the problem of journals that neither charge fees nor operate peer review process may become invisible. Contrary to the central publishing market, most journals in many peripheral countries are published by universities and not by commercial publishers (Chavarro, Ràfols, and Tang 2018). However, there is no reason to assume that a lack of commercial interest excludes the possibility of poor review processes or publishing malpractices.

#### 4. Mislocated centers of scholarly communication

As we have seen, a clear division between predatory and legitimate journals can lead to unfair accusations against some imperfect journals from the peripheries (e.g. criticizing some small OA journals published by local publishers or university presses, but not Elsevier's journals). Broad terms (e.g. Bell's "parody") that avoid negative connotations could prevent discrimination against peripheral journals falsely accused of predatory practices. However, such terms are not useful for pointing out some real issues that some peripheral journals have to deal with.

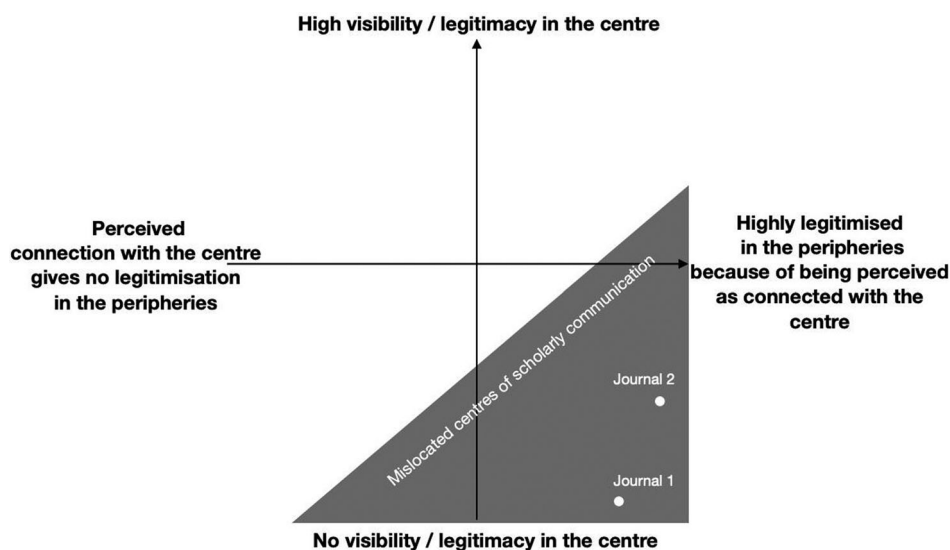
Thus, in this paper, we propose the term "mislocated centre of scholarly communication," which can be useful for describing and criticizing the role of some journals in the peripheries without condemning peripheral scholars who publish in them or accusing publishers of bad intent. This role can be imposed and does not have to be taken willingly. We define a mislocated center of scholarly communication as follows:

A mislocated centre of scholarly communication is a role in the geopolitical system which can be played by a mean of scholarly communication that is both (1) illegitimate or invisible in the centre and (2) legitimised in the periphery by its seeming connection with the centre.



A journal functions as mislocated center of central scholarly communication when, for example, it is perceived as predatory in the center but is regarded as prestigious by a peripheral institution because it presents itself as international. Also, non-predatory journals that are invisible or illegitimate for the center can be mislocated centers of scholarly communication. Although journals that are illegitimate or invisible in the center are by definition not connected to the center, they may seem as though they are from the perspective of the peripheries.

Each mislocated center of scholarly communication somehow influences actors in the peripheries, and it exists because of the strongly unilateral influence of the center on the peripheries. However, each mislocated center can have a different degree of influence on the peripheries, depending on the extent to which it fulfills the two criteria of the definition. [Figure 1](#) presents a complex picture of different kinds of mislocated centers of scholarly communication. The horizontal axis represents the degree to which being perceived as connected to the center is important for the legitimization of a journal in the peripheries. The vertical axis represents how legitimate and visible the journal is in the center. Between the two axes, there is a place for all scholarly journals. The gray triangle represents journals that function as mislocated centers of scholarly communication, which influence the peripheries to different degrees. Journals that we could place closest to the bottom-right edge of the figure have the strongest influence on the peripheries as mislocated centers. Journals influential both in the center and in the peripheries would be placed outside the triangle (for example, when analyzing almost all peripheral regions, we could place *Science* or *Nature* in the upper right corner of the figure). To better explain how to operationalize our concept, we will present two examples of mislocated centers of scholarly communication, which are shown in [Figure 1](#). These journals were placed on the figure based on our qualitative assessment of their position on each axis. They are examples drawn from the literature and our professional experience and basic information about their publications were checked in Scopus.



**Figure 1.** Two journals as mislocated centers of scholarly communication.

The journal *Risk Governance and Control: Financial Markets & Institutions* (Journal 1) is a journal from Ukraine established in 2011 and described by de Jager, de Kock, and van der Spuy (2017). It was previously indexed in Scopus, which made it likely to be seen by the periphery as a sign of internationalization and legitimization from the center. Most authors published in the journal are from South Africa and the journal experienced rapid growth, with the number of annually published articles increasing from 27 in 2011 to 109 in 2016. However, its publisher was put on the Beall's list of predatory publishers in 2015, and articles published in the journal have rarely been cited. This journal functions as a mislocated center of scholarly communication that had a strong influence on the peripheral region (South Africa); it is invisible or illegitimate in the center but at the same time, it was prestigious for South African authors because it was indexed in Scopus.

Our second case is *Sustainability* (Journal 2) published by MDPI, which is not a predatory journal, but still to some extent functions as a mislocated center of scholarly communication. It is indexed in WoS and Scopus and it is based in Switzerland. Its publisher – MDPI – was accused of malpractices in the past (Beall 2015a), and around 2018, the journal started being criticized for publishing a large number of papers to collect APCs (around 1400 USD at that time) (Wals 2018). Moreover, most papers published in the journal are authored by non-central scholars, whereas those authored by scholars from central countries are a minority. The journal is not completely invisible or illegitimate in the center, but is controversial enough to not be considered prestigious by central institutions. Moreover, its publications can sometimes be seen as dishonest shortcuts to enriching authors' CVs. However, considering the number of articles from the peripheries and the journal's high APCs, it seems that this journal is regarded as prestigious by many peripheral authors because of its origin in a central country, indexation, and decent citation rates. This mislocated center is not as strong as the first described example, but its influence is still substantial.

In general, the emergence of a mislocated center is related to a misjudgement of a journal's geopolitical position on the part of peripheral actors. However, this misjudgement need not be associated with an error in the axiological sense. We could say that somewhere in the process of legitimization (e.g. adding a journal to national whitelists of prestigious journals, or awards given by institutions to their scholars for their publications), a mistake is made: a journal is being legitimized because it seems to somehow be connected to the center, whereas it is not. However, this is not to say that the journal is illegitimate or should not be perceived as legitimate. Journals should be perceived as legitimate also for reasons other than their geopolitical centrality.

As Vessuri, Guédon, and Cetto (2014) rightly pointed out, being accessible on the internet is not equal to being really globally visible. One can name numerous indicators of journal visibility and legitimacy in the center. Citations by central scholars, readership in the center, and number of central authors publishing in a journal are indicators that are easy to study. Information on the personal opinions of central scholars, discussions about publications on candidates' CVs during hiring or evaluation processes in central institutions, and advice on where to publish provided by central institutions is harder to collect. Similarly, the most straightforward indicator of legitimization earned by a journal in the peripheries because it is perceived as connected to the center is legitimization by a peripheral country whose goal is to promote publishing in central journals.

Such legitimization is most frequently provided according to rules of research evaluation established by that country. Other important – but harder to study – indicators of legitimization are personal opinions of academics and prestige that a peripheral scholar earns in their local institution after publishing in a journal.

It should be noted that one could compile lists of different kinds of mislocated centers of scholarly communication. A presentation at a conference in a central Western city, a foreign scientific prize, or a scholarship in a foreign institution could be a mislocated center as well. This was clearly the case of fake (or predatory) conferences organized by WASET and awards presented to scholars at such conferences regardless of the scientific merit of their work (Summer, Munchhausen, and Eckert 2018).

## 5. Bibliographic databases as a means of creation of mislocated centers of scholarly communication in Turkey

Macháček and Srholec (2017) found that around 2% of papers indexed in Scopus from Turkey were published in journals included in Beall's lists. Demir (2018) showed how the mislocated center confuses scholars. In the words of a Turkish scholar, "One cannot know whether a particular journal is fake or not. If it is fake, why is it indexed in a prestigious index? You cannot label a journal indexed in a prestigious index as 'fake!'" (Demir 2018, 1304). However, if predatory journals indexed in Scopus were really prestigious in the center, it would not be the case that Indian scholars publish in them twice as many papers as scholars from the US (Macháček and Srholec 2017).

The data mentioned above indicate that scholars from the US are better positioned to identify journals that can later be accused of being predatory even if they are indexed in Scopus. At the same time, many scholars and policymakers in the peripheries treat Scopus as a reliable indicator of high quality. Demir (2018) notes that in some universities in Turkey, even Ph candidates are under pressure to publish articles in journals indexed in Scopus (or other international indexes regarded as prestigious), and the quality of the articles is often not considered. Using international citation databases is part of the wider support programme in Turkey, which financially rewards scholars' publications according to the journals' impact factors (Tonta 2018).

Scopus actively promotes its own prestigious status, which is a crucial factor for the emergence of these mislocated centers of scholarly communication in Turkey. On the Scopus website (Scopus 2020), one can read that it delivers "the most up-to-date and highest quality interdisciplinary content" and that it has "an internationally acclaimed board of selection experts so you can be sure that what you see on Scopus meets your high standards." The share of Turkish scholars publishing in predatory journals indexed in Scopus is substantially higher than that of US scholars (Macháček and Srholec 2017).

In semi-peripheral Turkey, journals from Beall's lists of predatory journals indexed in Scopus are mislocated centers of scholarly communication. They meet both criteria of our definition: (1) they are illegitimate in the center because they were accused of being predatory by Beall (whose lists were legitimized by studies published in top central journals, *Science* and *Nature*) and many were subsequently removed from Scopus; and (2) they are legitimized in the periphery by being indexed in Scopus, which is often perceived in Turkey as a sign of prestige and central legitimization. However, it is important to note that our reinterpretation of this case does not

condemn the journals in question or their articles as fraudulent or of low quality, because Beall's lists are not flawless.

This case shows that the mislocated centers of the scholarly communication are created by both central and peripheral actors. Turkish universities co-create them by establishing regulations that incentivise publications in journals indexed in Scopus. Elsevier (the biggest central publisher, which runs Scopus) co-creates mislocated centers by not filtering predatory publishers and encouraging Turkish scholars to trust it. Moreover, as argued by Vessuri, Guédon, and Cetto (2014), Elsevier and Scopus create conditions for metric-based competition between journals which leads to a publishing landscape where few journals are perceived as elite and many peripheral journals are widely marginalized.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

We coined the term “mislocated centres of scholarly communication” to better describe the mechanism of the emergence of predatory journals and of journals that bear similarities with them in the peripheries. These journals emerge because the center is an important source of legitimization in the peripheries, and because there is considerable uncertainty in the peripheries over what is central and what is not. We argue that our approach can help to better explain why peripheries suffer the most from predatory publishing, as many journals could be classified as predatory and mislocated centers of scholarly communication at the same time (predatory journals are sometimes indexed in Scopus, have names similar to the prestigious journals or abuse words as “Global” or “International” in their titles) (Crawford 2014).

While publishing or being an editor in a predatory journal is seen as reprehensible, we argue that probably most peripheral scholars are somehow influenced by mislocated centers of scholarly communication or actively co-create them. There is nothing shameful in that; it is the result of one of the work conditions in modern, geopolitically sharply divided academia and says nothing about scholars' integrity or the value of their work. Moreover, functioning as a mislocated center of scholarly communication or co-creating one is sometimes unintentional or enforced by national or institutional regulations. It also does not challenge the fact that there are many good journals published in the peripheries, regardless of their visibility and perceived legitimacy in the center.

We believe that mislocated centers are connected with the phenomenon of predatory journals and that these centers are the result of unequal power relations between center and peripheries. Our concept could help to explain the results of the studies on the geography of predatory publishing: a much higher share of authors from the peripheries have published in predatory journals than authors from central countries, such as the US (Demir 2018; Xia et al. 2015). At the same time, it is important to undermine all narratives that idealize scholarly communication in the center and portrait peripheries as somehow inherently predatory. Beall and his unclear methodology of identifying predatory journals in the peripheries itself co-creates mislocated centers.

Using the example of SciELO, we illustrated how narrative about predatory journals can lead to a discrimination against science produced in the peripheries. However, this does not mean that the whole academic discussion provoked by the predatory journals should

be treated only as a hostile attack on scholarly publishing in Latin American or other regions. Results like these from the study by Perlin, Imasato, and Borenstein (2018) – who stated that scholars with PhDs obtained locally in Argentina were more likely to publish in journals from Beall’s list – are still curious and deserve in-depth exploration. Also, Rodriguez Medina describes an important role that central knowledge plays for the careers of peripheral scholars (Rodriguez Medina 2014, 10) and Kreimer (2019, 186–188) argues that science in Argentina focuses too much on obtaining prestige from collaboration with the center and too little on solving local problems. This indicates that mislocated centers, whose emergence is caused by a need of at least seeming legitimization from the center, are something by which academia in Latin American seems to be endangered.

Moreover, it is important to note that the existence of mislocated centers of scholarly communication can be extremely beneficial for some peripheral actors. It has frequently been pointed out that predatory journals can be used to earn promotions by dishonestly publishing in them (Beall 2012; Biagioli et al. 2019). Also, mislocated centers could be sustained by actors who benefit from them. When peripheral scholars’ careers are legitimized by the mislocated centers of scholarly communication, they are strongly motivated to support them, even if they are fully aware of the invisibility of such journals or conferences in the center. The reasons for the existence of mislocated centers are thus much more complex than a simple lack of awareness among peripheral scholars.

We believe that mislocated centers of scholarly communication are mostly not the result of peripheries’ mistakes, but are actively produced by the current system of scholarly communication created and legitimized by the center. Chavarro, Ràfols, and Tang (2018) rightly point out a bias present in prestigious global bibliometric databases, such as WoS, and Rodriguez Medina (2019) emphasizes the need for a less strict approach to specific linguistic standards of correct English. To better resist this unfair system of global science, peripheral institutions should be more critical of the reliance on such ostensible signs of central prestige as the indexation of journals in Scopus or WoS. They should instead emphasize the importance of generating original and inspiring knowledge focused more on the practical implementation of science valuable to local communities (Kreimer 2019). Moreover, it is important to stay critical to the geopolitical dimensions of various global initiatives in scholarly communication, just like in case of some legitimate doubts of Latin American scholars and institutions of instruments such as Plan S – an initiative for open-access science publishing launched in 2018 by a consortium of national research agencies and funders from 12 European countries. In promoting OA, Plan S does not challenge the concentration of the global publishing on the oligopolies of the big academic publishers from the center (Debat and Babini 2020).

Naturally, our concept has limitations. Publishing in the peripheries is associated with numerous challenges (e.g. the challenge of publishing in a foreign language, writing styles, resources, or invisibility of locally created theories). Mislocated centers of scholarly communication are only one of them. Moreover, there are some global issues in academia (e.g. the “publish or perish” research culture) that affect both the center and the peripheries. Nevertheless, our concept can help create a more accurate image of publishing in the peripheries and gain a deeper understanding of the emergence of predatory journals and journals that share certain similarities with them.

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