



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## **A Note from Erica Flapan, Editor in Chief, *Notices of the American Mathematical Society***

The monthly “A Word from...” opinion piece in the December 2019 issue of the *Notices* has kindled controversy, including a great deal of attention on social media. The *Notices* is continuing to receive letters to the Editor about this piece sent by members of our community. In order to make these letters available to readers as soon as possible we are posting them at <https://www.ams.org/notices>. A selection of them will also appear in the April issue of the *Notices*. We encourage diverse viewpoints, and as always we require civility and accuracy in the content that we publish.

## **A Note from Catherine Roberts, Executive Director, American Mathematical Society**

The *Notices* has a long history of publishing opinions that are of general interest to mathematicians, even when the opinions are controversial. I support the editorial independence of AMS publications. The AMS encourages lively exchange of ideas when presented with civility. With differing norms on social media, and in light of the current nature of discourse in the United States, this ideal only becomes more challenging for us as a community.

The AMS is committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. I recognize that several members of our community were deeply hurt by opinions expressed in these pages. It is never my intention that our readers or contributors feel threatened or unheard, and I am sorry if some people felt that way. The AMS is committed to building a diverse community of mathematicians and we support discussion on how we might achieve this. I welcome your thoughts and hope that we can continue this important dialog.

## **A case of mistaken identity**

Della Dumbaugh’s entertaining and thought-provoking piece on George Mackey in the June/July *Notices* contains an amusing instance of mistaken identity. On page 886, it is asserted that “[Griffith] Evans joined the Rice faculty in 1912 and remained there until 1934, bringing remarkably talented mathematicians including Benoit Mandelbrot, Tibor Rado, and Carl [sic] Menger as visiting professors.” In point of fact, it was not Benoit Mandelbrot, but his uncle Szolem Mandelbrojt (1899–1983), who spent the academic year 1926/27 (when Benoit was two years old) at Rice.

A student of Sergei Bernstein in Kharkov and of Hadamard in Paris, Mandelbrojt was among the founding members of Bourbaki. He would go on to an illustrious career as Hadamard’s successor at the Collège de France (1938–1972) and, ultimately, a member of the French Académie des Sciences. His doctoral students include, among others, Shmuel Agmon, J.-P. Kahane, Paul Malliavin, and Yitzhak Katznelson. Szolem Mandelbrojt was also on the original Conseil de Rédaction (Advisory Board) of *Journal d’Analyse Mathématique*, along with Einstein (!) and such other worthies as Borel, Denjoy, Hadamard, Littlewood, Montel, and Weyl.

*Lawrence Zalcman,  
Jerusalem, Israel*

(Received October 7, 2019)

## **Fair Research Data, A New Development**

I would like to bring the topic of FAIR research data to your attention.

In many European countries, e.g. Germany, there is a strong movement that all research data should be freely available according to the FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable). See <https://libereurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/LIBER-FAIR-Data.pdf>.

In principle, FAIR is a laudable goal that will improve the openness of science. Of course, this is a major challenge for scientists who produce massive data, e.g. from numerical simulations, or physical experiments. In addition, the way data and standards are defined also poses some serious challenges for mathematical

\*We invite readers to submit letters to the editor at [notices-letters@ams.org](mailto:notices-letters@ams.org).

research as a whole, by including non-traditional forms of “data,” such as mathematical formulas and theorems.

How and in which form can we standardize the way to find mathematical formulas or mathematical theorems, when different communities use different terminology for the same objects while the same formulas for different objects?

The German Research Foundation DFG has just started a large call for building research data infrastructures to deal with this, see e.g. [https://www.dfg.de/en/service/press/press\\_releases/2018/press\\_release\\_no\\_58/index.html](https://www.dfg.de/en/service/press/press_releases/2018/press_release_no_58/index.html).

Most people in the mathematical community seem to ignore these developments, but this may lead to real threats for the community if we do not join the movement right from the beginning. Examples of such threats could be that standards will be fixed that are incompatible with our current way of producing mathematical articles (in LATEX) and PDF, or that the way formulas are stored is just graphically. Another problem may be that standards for model generation, mathematical software, or simulation data are cumbersome or impractical. It is clear that commercial code providers are heavily lobbying with governments to make standards that are good for them and that IT companies and data analytics people have their own views of how data should be addressed.

The mathematical community must unite in a common quest to be on board right away in the developments (the German math community has already decided to do this) and to make these principles realistic for mathematics and the neighbouring sciences and to preserve and improve established publishing standards like to be able to deal with the future developments. This may require also the construction of new and uniform concepts, such as semantic annotation of formulas or theorems.

*Volker Mehrmann,  
President of the European Mathematical Society*

(Received September 26, 2019)

## From the Academics for Peace

I am writing to you to give the latest news about the Academics for Peace in Turkey, and also thank the AMS for its support.

After penalizing about 200 Peace Academics, finally courts in Istanbul started to give acquittals. I was acquitted in early September, and the remaining four mathematicians (Tuna Altınel, Feza Arslan, Kıvanç Ersoy and Özgür Martin) were acquitted later in September or October. Many Peace Academics are being acquitted every day thanks to the Constitutional Court’s decision of July 26.

Those 200 academics (including mathematicians Öznur Yaşar Diner and Özlem Beyarslan) who had already been penalized by the courts will object to their sentences and

demand new trials. It is expected that they will all be acquitted too.

We believe that the Constitutional Court’s decision is no accident and was planned by the top officials. We think that the administrators could not handle the international pressure and degrading reputation. So, it is thanks to international solidarity, thanks to the mathematical associations, but especially thanks to the Human Rights Committee of the AMS, that we are being let free from this legal nightmare. By publishing statements about me, Betül Tanbay, Tuna Altınel, and other mathematicians on trial, the AMS made the biggest public impact. Thank you very much.

Not only did the AMS support lead to acquittals, but it has been a great psychological help to know that we have friends and colleagues out there who are thinking about us, who are ready to support us. Thanks to my colleagues, I understand and have experienced at first hand what solidarity really means.

Thank you very much once more. I feel extremely lucky that I am a mathematician, and I am proud to be a member of the American Mathematical Society.

Best wishes in solidarity,  
*Ayşe Berkman*

Note: The AMS statements about Turkish mathematicians can be found at the following links.

<https://www.ams.org/about-us/governance/committees/JudicialHearingReportOnTunaAltınel.ByCherlin07-30-19.pdf>

<https://www.ams.org/about-us/governance/committees/StatementOnContinuedConcernForTurkishMathematicians.05-28-19.pdf>

[https://www.ams.org/news?news\\_id=4893](https://www.ams.org/news?news_id=4893)

[https://www.ams.org/news?news\\_id=4712](https://www.ams.org/news?news_id=4712)

(Received October 16, 2019)