Hegemonic university tales. Discussing narrative positioning within the academic field between Humboldtian and managerial governance

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Abstract
This chapter observes and analyzes hegemonic narratives in and of the academic field. In particular, our focus is on normative and evaluative accounts relating to forms of university governance. We suggest centering on two overarching approaches to what is seen as legitimate in terms of governing the university. First, we trace the age-old Humboldtian perspective, representing especially professorial independence and self-governance. Second, we consider the newer managerial perspective, separating top-down university management decision-making separate from (or counter to) faculty influence. We find that, as the latter form is currently taking hold within European universities, scholarly remembrance of the former Humboldtian governance tradition has morphed into a nearly uncritical, hegemonic tale of a glorified past. In contrast, we suggest, the managerial perspective represents a powerful ante-narrative, a hegemonic story in-the-making. The morally laden, and somewhat fantastical, Humboldtian tale, being itself hegemonic, is unfit to serve as a critical counter-narrative vis-à-vis the managerial approach that has attained considerable authority. Thus, we argue that contemporary governance discourse is suspended between two poles: the Humboldtian perspective, favoring professorial power and authority relations, and the managerial perspective, subordinating faculty under market considerations and continuous evaluation. The dilemma arising from this “suspension” also renders the governance discourse into regions of impracticality and elitism. We argue that a counter-narrative fit to challenge the managerialist governance structures in practice is lacking, with elitism continuously
reproduced in-between an ancient hegemonic narrative (Humboldtian) and equally hegemonic contemporary ante-narrative (managerialist).

Introduction: an on-going field transformation in higher education
In recent decades, we observe fundamental changes in many Higher Education (HE) systems in Europe and beyond, often labeled as “academic capitalism” (Münch, 2014; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) or “academic neoliberalism” (Bottrell & Manathunga, 2019; Fricke, 2014). Universities face increasing national and international competitiveness for status and financial resources and respond to this with different policy measures and strategic organizational development. These changes go along with the idea that the production of internationally visible top-level research and teaching is best stimulated by market-based competition and is to be professionally managed. This notion of research and higher education being manageable “products” is no longer new. In fact, universities worldwide have established governance systems responding to this powerful discourse since early in the 1970s (Antonsen & Jørgensen, 2000; Kristensen, Nøtteroglou, & Raffnøe-Møller, 2011; Mendiola, 2012). However, albeit an established form of university governance in many countries, the discourse on HE still treats this managerialist development as novel, obviously standing in contrast to an “older” model and established systems. We argue that this is rooted in the perception of scholars that the notion of the managerial university stands in contrast to a perceived “righteous” idea of the university. Such a moral stance and perspective corresponds with the Humboldtian ideal of university construction, conduct, and governance that maximizes professorial autonomy and self-administration. The construction of these two opposing narrative positions comes with major implications for current and future academic practice: first, clinging to the narrative of the Humboldtian university might be idolizing and idealizing, ignoring critical insights as to social classism, asymmetries in within-faculty-power, and male hegemony that impacted and still impact the university experience (Bagilhole, 2010; Graf, 2015; Graf, Keil, & Ullrich, forthcoming; Hartmann, 2002). As much as the managerial university deserves criticism, it would be wrong to construct the Humboldtian university as some sort of better, golden age of university development. Especially given the myriad tenets that have been ascribed to it over the decades, it remains a myth-laden narrative (see Ash, 2006). Second, we argue that criticism of the managerial governance system rooted in idolization of the Humboldtian university is in fact naïve. Because it clings to a utopian ideal, discursively redlining improvements the managerial university – or other form of university governance – might bring about, the Humboldtian idolized model does not foster a constructive dialogue of options in contemporary organizational governance, especially as HE has indeed massified to serve the majority of each cohort in many countries and thus is no longer the province of a small elite. The myth-rooted opposition gives way to the managerial university becoming an ante-narrative: a bet on the future, placed by university management, relying and hoping that the managerial university will make retrospective sense as the hegemonic tale of the future (Boje, 2001a, 2001b). Deriving from this assumption, our chapter is structured as follows: First, we motivate our narratological stance on the issue of university governance. Here, we also elaborate on the different narratological concepts we employ in order to approach the two selected stances towards righteous university governance: hegemonial narrative, counter-narrative, and ante-narrative. Second, we apply these concepts to the Humboldtian and the managerial narratives. We emphasize characteristics of the Humboldtian tale as hegemonic, and we draw attention to the, initially, counter-narrative character of the managerial narrative. Then, we discuss the transition from counter- to ante- to hegemonic narrative of the managerial perspective. We call special attention to tellers (authors) of the Humboldtian narrative and how the perseverance of traditional power structures may have facilitated the
rise of managerialism. Finally, we point out implications of our considerations for both academic practice and conceptual development.

Why a narrative perspective on this struggle for authority in the university?

Here, we show how promising it is to explore the on-going discourse among multiple university stakeholders from a social interactional narrative perspective. In doing so, we see the conflicting perspectives on university governance as narrative units and make these the subjects of our sociological observations. Narratives, consequently, are considered social practices (Georgakopoulou, 2010). We concur that narratives, in their social context, have the potential to reproduce or challenge “existing relations of power and inequity” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 197) as they are interwoven with and constitutive of social relations, interactions, and the institutionalized organization of those (as represented by the university). Narratives hinge upon, but also constitute, social life. They are deeply entangled with the social rules for “when, what, how, and why stories are told” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995), and, most importantly, they determine, by whom they may be told, and whose view and perspectives they represent. In this setting, paying attention to the power (im)balance for groups and individuals involved in the university field, is vital to interpreting Humboldtian and managerial tales. Whilst the managerial narrative has been brought forward by external agents, to professors and faculty at universities, the Humboldtian narrative is being told and reproduced by these faculty themselves.

In general, understanding patterns of consistent social interpretations and representations of certain events as narratives is highly useful for the sociological endeavor of critiquing existing and shifting power relations. Understanding a narrative means being able to answer the question how social groups inter-subjectively account for social life. With a view to the interrelation between narratives and organizations (here: the university), scholars have long relied on narratives to learn about organizational practices. One established perspective is that of “communication as constitutive of organizations” that proposes to think of organizations as “talked into being” (Heritage, 1984, p. 290). Related to the concept of narrative, we aim to specify those inter-relations, the transactions, and the positionings of and around different narratives that create the organization in the first place (Frandsen, Lundholt, & Kuhn, 2017). In the following, we present and distinguish from one another various notions of narrative that are employed in our observations and that may usefully serve generally in social science applications.

What is a narrative?

A narrative in its most general sense can be described as “sequences of statements connected by both a temporal and a moral ordering” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 198, citing Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 1988). The eminent position of the term narrative in social science, outside of literature studies, is based on the assumption that all identities and social action, all positionings (Bamberg, 1997), are brought forward as stories. In consequence, non-literary narratives are social interactions in themselves, and they represent and reproduce (sometimes defy) larger social structures. These social interactions can be represented in manifold different forms: mostly, scholars have referred to language (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 198) as mediating a narrative. However, an increasing number of studies does consider embodied narratives, material narratives (Strand, 2014), sociomaterial narratives (Flora, Boje, Rosile, & Hacker, 2016; Lueg, Boje, Lundholt, & Graf, 2019), multimodal narratives in business (Bager, 2019), or art and design (Pantaleo, 2019). Being observant, as a scholar, of the narratives represented in the social world, can contribute to the gathering of insights on marginalized views. A narrative is often described as “having” three features: the first feature is the feature of temporal order. The understanding of narrative as a sequence of statements connected by temporality is anchored, mostly, in the field of literary studies. Increasingly,
social scientists have challenged the notion of the one clearly identifiable narrative structure, including Bamberg (2011, p. 15) and Boje (2014), who argue for the eminence of surfacing and testing “small stories” (Bamberg, 2011, p. 15) and for the fragmented and living character of narratives (Boje, 2014), respectively. The second feature of a narrative would be a “selective appropriation of past events and characters” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 200) by a teller. Third, there is the feature of emplotment, or recently “emplacement” (Jackson, 2013), meaning that sequences, statements, and characters are, or will be, interrelated by patterns of belonging. As a fourth feature, narrative structure leads to cohesion, causality and, most prominent in fairy tales, closure. Closure here means the provision of a moral principle in light of which the sequence can be evaluated (White, 1990). Again, moral interpretations of ideal social behavior are densely interrelated with social power structures. Narratives, thus, are instruments, consciously or unconsciously to produce a normatively laden social order (Frandsen, Lundholt et al., 2017; Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991).

**What is a hegemonic narrative?**

In line with the approach of this handbook, our focus is on narratives as fostering, and as being representative of, social power relations. In this vein, many observations focus on conflicts between agents bringing forward a narrative in favor of dominant power structures, and those agents pushing a marginalized and / or opposing perspective (a counter-narrative). First, when trying to disentangle the many notions that come with narrative social interpretation, we depart from that notion serving as foil of comparison, the “hegemonic narrative”. Common other, similar terms that express a concentration and representation of power are “master-narrative” or “dominant narrative”. “Hegemonic narrative” applies to those “stories that reproduce existing relations of power and inequity” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995: 198). Whilst “dominant narrative” is mostly being used as a synonym to this, a “master-narrative” is often used to describe such types of dominant narratives that occur in and around organizations (Frandsen, Kuhn, & Lundholt, 2017; Lueg, 2018). The notions overlap, and do not exclude, but rather specify each other. We draw on the notion “hegemonic narrative” since it emphasizes the rather subtle, sometimes veiled, socio-structural aspect in charge of reproducing contemporary power structures between agents, organizations, and larger social structures. As a synthesis from numerous definitions, we propose:

Socially hegemonic narratives are stories

*told in favor of* those holding power over social matters relevant to that story,

*told by* those agents who actually are in power or benefit from this power structure, and

*outlining moral rules* (if subtly) that prevent and *oppose* the imagining of *any* other power structure.

Consequently, hegemonic narratives are tough to challenge successfully. Perhaps the most effective maneuver of hegemonic storytellers is their being in charge of deciding who holds what position. Hegemonic storytellers legitimate, by means of their actual power positions, how stories are told, and by whom. Social norms specify rules of participation. Rules assign roles of storyteller and audience, but also the roles of those who may not interfere, inquire, or challenge. Storytelling, in consequence, can serve to preserve, to challenge, to weaken dominant structures, and might even propose and provide pathways to new structures. It is a strategic expression; “strategic” meaning serving the purposes of certain social groups of

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1 In discourse analysis, the term “master-narrative” is sometimes applied to substitute the notion of “Discourse”. Discourses, often also described as “capital D-discourses” are socially created identities or images of groups of people that agents refer to in their sense-making processes (Gee, 2015; Georgakopoulou, 2010).
agents, despite not being an explicitly planned and rationally chosen behavior. In this, storytelling is as inherently strategic as is taste, liking, and lifestyle, in Bourdieusian sociology (Bourdieu, 1984): it does, in fact, express how its bearer perceives of the world and themselves, but it also expresses how they wish the world and themselves to be (see also the concept of symbolic violence; e.g., Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu, Passeron, Nice, & Bottomore, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Krais, 1993). Again, with a view to our comparing the Humboldtian and managerial tales, this matters, since we emphasize that both narratives certainly do display characteristics of hegemonic claims benefitting one social group only.

What is a counter-narrative?
A “counter-narrative”, in its core, is a simple, but much needed concept: in relation to organizations it has been described as an account that somehow resists another, more dominant narrative (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004, p. 1), and, we might add, sometimes only a narrative perceived as being more dominant. This does not automatically make “the other” account a master-narrative or a hegemonic narrative. It simply indicates that there are (at least) two narratives that stand in tension with each other. All those interrelated narratives then are embedded in other types of narratives that may again disaggregate into several counter-narratives. In relation to organizations, this has been called “polyphony” (Frandsen, Lundholt et al., 2017, p. 4). This notion of “counter-narrative” is quite modest and not meant to be as absolute or dichotomy-inducing as one may think. In contrast, the term “subversive” narrative has been used in a rather less encompassing way. Kuhn (2017, p. 2) has brought forward the useful metaphor of the “authoritative text”. This notion, going beyond taking text for an entity in its most simple form (e.g., written protocols, policies, statements) describes the fight over power and sense-making by the involved agents. “The textual metaphor suggests that its production is the ongoing result of a process of authorship—and that authorship is where a multiplicity of actors vie to inscribe their visions of the whole into the conception of ‘we’ while simultaneously contesting the writing efforts of others. Counter-narratives are those that contend for authorship by reinterpreting or challenging a plot line; they disrupt canonical stories, dominant identities and master narratives” (Kuhn, 2017, p. 22).

Here, it is worth adding, that counter-narratives can entail different levels of social advocacy: some counter-narratives may argue against persisting structures with a goal of liberating manifold, diverse social groups by unveiling how these groups are affected (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 197). Other counter-narratives advocate strategic self-interest, with authors focusing narrowly on their very own interests.

What is an ante-narrative?
We employ Boje’s concept of “ante-narrative processes” as a canvas for our analysis. Ante-narrative is the one moment of story development where “living story webs” unfold (Henderson & Boje, 2016). These living stories are told and unfolded by agents in the present, in our case: professors and other proponents of the Humboldtian narrative, and management and other proponents of the managerial narrative. They serve to bridge a grand narrative of the past and a story to be, an image of how the future could look like (Boje, 2001b; Henderson & Boje, 2016). At the stage of ante-narrative, stories told contribute to or contest an emerging story. An ante-narrative is a bet, by one social group of tellers, that a fragmented polyphonic story will make retrospective sense in the future (Boje, 2007). This process hinges upon faith, rationality, and obviously on the actual resources tellers have to push “their” ante-narrative. As Boje points out, the strategic employment of ante-narratives is of importance to strategy, and to leader visioning, inter alia, as it is the “before” of a story (Boje & Rosile, 2010). Ante-narrative allows the focus on the collective story-making of different actors, together, who will manage to bring forward a successful story, and those who will end up with a counter-narrative position. In our case, we think it is important to bring in ante-
narrative to illuminate the contributions of the Humboldtian and the managerial narratives in the rise of the managerial narrative.

The Humboldtian university – A hegemonic narrative?
What we call the Humboldtian narrative is, in fact, a second-order observation (Luhmann, 2013): actually, we observe the narrative of the narrative by Wilhelm von Humboldt, the influential Prussian scholar and education minister. He, Humboldt, delineated the internal and external structure a university should possess in his 1810 memorandum on the occasion of the foundation of the University of Berlin (today: Humboldt Universität zu Berlin). Employing a liberal political stance, he elaborated on suggestions, i.a., as to the so called “unity of research and teaching”, on the organization of research, and on the various responsibilities of university and state. Even though Humboldt’s ideas have not been implemented in an accurate sense, they massively influenced the development of the organizational structure of universities, in Germany, throughout Europe, to North America and East Asia (cf. Powell, et al., 2017). Those ideas pertaining to governance and agency of scholarship being ascribed to Humboldt, serve as “a powerful rhetoric appeal and formative influence on policy debates by shaping corporate and professional identities” (Jessop, 2008, p. 4; cited in Lüde, 2012, p. 151). Most important, here, is the observation that despite Humboldt never having described the one legitimate form of university governance, his name is continuously used to defend the idea of the primacy of scientific autonomy, professorial authority, and self-governance. It is this interpretation of the Humboldtian perspective that we call “Humboldtian narrative”. By way of example, Mitchell Ash argues that “Humboldt is a symbol of the autonomy and predominance of the faculty in university affairs” (2006, p. 249).
This mental model implies that scientific advancement results from scholars’ individual efforts within a community of equal scholars, protected by extensive autonomy against state interventions. This “autonomy-claim” of academia responds to Humboldt’s idea of solitude and freedom (“Einsamkeit und Freiheit”; own translation from original German) as core principles of scholarship. The scientific community should be free from state interventions to devote their energy to “pure science” in order to, over the long run, benefit society. Consequently, the professorate should have the decision-making power over research and teaching issues without any external interference. These visions have left their mark on both the organizational structure of many universities, and on scholarly identity. Ideas of the “Humboldt model” have morphed as they moved globally (Cowen, 2009). This brought about an administrative structure mainly based on academic self-governance and notable professorial power (Hüther, 2010; Rüegg, 2004), while university leaders (presidents and deans) were gazed upon as serving as „primus inter pares“. Decisions were made by professors themselves or committees of professors. In this sense, universities have been characterized as “organized anarchies” (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972) or “professional bureaucracies” (Mintzberg, 1979) within “loosely coupled systems” (Weick, 1976). Notably, again, these descriptions center on professors as agents and main benefactors of this anarchy; not considering further stakeholders.
Much doubt can be raised as to whether administrative staff and subordinated faculty below the professorial position shared (and share) this perception. Since professors, in the Humboldtian narrative, are not only “chairholders” but also award relevant degrees for academic careers and control access to scholarly positions, non-tenured faculty and staff are highly dependent on their personal support and decision-making (Graf et al., forthcoming; Kreckel, 2008). These highly self-referential power structures (Bourdieu, 1988) also result in socially exclusive personnel structures and intersectional inequalities, bordering on “institutional discrimination” (Gomolla & Radtke, 2002). In most HE systems, women are

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2 For a historical subsumption, see, for example, Lüde (2012); Schelsky (1960); Ashby (1967).

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still significantly underrepresented (e.g. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018; Zippel, 2017), and moreover, the proportion of female scholars decreases the higher the position, often described as the “law of increasing disproportionality” (Putnam, 1976, 33 ff.) or glass ceiling (e.g. Cech & Blair-Loy, 2010; Rosser, 2004). Furthermore, there is some empirical evidence that there are analogue processes regarding social background (Blone, Möller, & Böning, 2019; Bourdieu, 1988; Graf, 2015; Hartmann, 2013; Möller, 2015). Ethnicity or race (e.g. Bernal & Villalpando, 2010; Coleman, 2005; Gabriel, 2017; Gutiérrez y Muhs, Harris, González, & Niemann, 2012), disability (Dolmage, 2017; Kerschbaum, Eisenman, & Jones, 2017), and further categories of belonging.

The managerial university: A counter-narrative?

Since the 1970s, professorial self-governance has been increasingly questioned. For manifold reasons, “there is a considerable loss of confidence in the capacities for self-governance of the academic community” (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p. 244). Decreasing trust and lower financial resources available raised political and public claims for more transparency and audit as well as for more efficiency and effectiveness in academic governance (Engwall & Scott, 2013; Enders, 2013; Weingart, 2013; Weingart & Maasen, 2007). Hence, politically initiated, structural transformations at universities ensued.

New Public Management (NPM) quickly became a field-wide notion to describe the improved (“new”) way of dethroning old authorities allegedly responsible for slow organizational decision-making (“management”) at state financed organizations (“public”). This idea, of dethroning old authorities, qualifies the managerial narrative as being, initially, a counter-narrative. Universities were to be turned “into organizational actors, which are able to act strategically and position themselves with regard to their competitors” (Krücken & Meier, 2006, p. 242). Such organizational agency, reflecting heightened competition, extends to disciplinary groups and organizational subunits (Marques & Powell, 2019). The transformation toward NPM is often (critically) discussed under terms such as the “entrepreneurial (enterprise) university” (Clark, 1998, 2001; Davies, 2001; Weingart & Maasen, 2007) or the “neoliberal university” (Bottrell & Manathunga, 2019; Rustin, 2016; Valero Duenas, Jørgensen, & Brunila, 2019) or, more generally, “academic managerialism” (Krücken, Blümel, & Klok, 2013; Meier, 2010). Along with these structural changes, a “new” paradigm has emerged of how science and academia should be organized to efficiently achieve scientific progress.

In contrast to the Humboldtian idea of individual freedom, and scholarly autonomy, now, market-like competition is deemed to be key to scientific progress. Though the production of scientific knowledge has always been driven by competition on an individual level, what is “new”, is the idea that professional managerialization of university governance and harshly (international) competition between scientific organizations should stimulate scientific knowledge production and thus promote top-level research. Yet, over the past several decades, with on-going HE expansion and the globe-spanning communication advances facilitated by the information technology revolution, widespread competition has been matched by vastly increasing collaboration across borders, be they cultural, disciplinary or academic status – with implications for how universities are to be managed (cf. Powell, 2018). Universities are considered an “organizational problem” demanding solutions (Wissel, 2007). Just as the previous Humboldtian narrative, this “neoliberal narrative” also entails specific structural frame conditions. Hence, since the late 1970s, we observe a distinct shift towards organizational economization and a transformation of universities into “entrepreneurial

3 These developments have been embedded in a wider societal claim for responsible use of public finances not only concerning the HE sector, but also other public organizations, such as hospitals, in which New Public Management was widely implemented.
universities”, mimicking private for-profit organizations. In the course of these structural changes, there are fundamental changes of the inner-university power relations, too. Especially university management decision-making power has been distinctly extended. However, these power shifts do not proceed conflict-free, but evoke struggles for power and dominance between professors and university leadership. In view of this, the amplification of centralized management power does pose a threat to the status of the individual scholar as “primus inter pares”, this representing the traditional construction of scholarly preoccupation and conduct (Hüther, 2010). Due to this struggle for power, it is not surprising that critical voices arise among the professoriate defending the “old system” and the managers of the “new system”. In particular, it is emphasized that now decisions on scientific issues are influenced by “external” stakeholders who follow their own interests instead of following the greater interest of science.

Many of the scientific articles criticizing the shift in university government refer, explicitly or implicitly, to Humboldt’s ideas as they argue against the new paradigm. By way of example, Schimank describes this process as the “threat of de-professionalization” (“drohende Entprofessionalisierung”, own translation from the original German) (Schimank, 2005). By referring to Humboldt to defending their own position of power and privileges, this narrative turns into a nearly uncritical, hegemonic tale of a better past. Titles like, “Matthew defeats Humboldt” (“Matthäus schlägt Humboldt”, own translation from original German) (Meier & Schimank, 2009) or “The University in Ruins” (Readings, 1996) obviously reflect this verdict.

Discussion and conclusion: Transitioning from counter- to ante- to hegemonic narrative?

In both cases, the master-narrative and the counter-account stipulate the ideal organizational structure and power distribution. Consequently, the further the university’s transformation progresses, the more the “neoliberal narrative” becomes common and turns from a “counter-narrative” to the new “hegemonic-narrative” as it becomes the legitimate “blueprint” for “framing self-perceptions and identity as well as behavior” (Lundholt, Maagaaed, & Piekut, 2018, p. 3). Indeed, what is “counter” and what is “hegemonic” narrative hinges upon the social stakes involved: Bamberg and Andrews emphasize “[w]hat is dominant and what is resistant are not, of course, static questions, but rather are forever shifting placements” (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004, p. X). Humboldtian and managerial narrative are interdependent as they serve one another as a reference. Due to the changed structural political conditions and requirements in many countries, university management as well as individual scholars have to respond; they have to position themselves – for better or worse. Aiming at favorable positions on the university market (Berman, 2012), universities implement, i.a., performance measurement systems, and business-like management tools, as well as undertake efforts to foster a university’s specific corporate identity (Graf & Lueg, 2019). Strategic organizational development and branding processes become important factors of success in global competition and contribute to institutional narratives (Drori, Delmestri, & Oberg, 2016).

Hence, it is obvious that the NPM model, the executive strength of the managerial narrative, is on a winning streak.

In view of the deep disapproval by numerous and still legally powerful professors, and from a narrative perspective, we ask: how could the managerial narrative diffuse so successfully through virtually all levels of the contemporary university? In order to explain the transition from counter-narrative to hegemonic narrative, we turn to the concept of ante-narrative. Ante-narrative, again, is that moment within a discourse where the story is not yet told, however agents do take their bets on what morale will prevail in an uncertain future (Jørgensen & Boje, 2009). The ante-narrative, here interpreted as a managerial politically induced bet on the future (see above), could also be connected to the Bourdieusian notion of field struggle.
(Bourdieu, 1988, 1998): In the crucial moment of powerful forces introducing their counter-narrative, proponents of the Humboldtian narrative missed out on the opportunity to create a rational opposition that criticized the deliberating effects of managerialism for all agents involved. Instead, moments of ante-narratives were (and are) being used to secure professorial group privileges; an eminently conservative approach in an era characterized by transformative change. Becoming a discursive fight over privileges and ownership, the narrative clash was prone to be won by strong, external forces.

The role of the proponents of the Humboldtian tale was, and is, more often than not, the one defending privileges and old benefits for the professorial elite insofar as inherent problems are ignored. Many other stances against, and in critique of the managerial narrative could have been conceivable: in answering the efficiency-demand of the managerial narrative, a restructuring of the university system could have been possible. This restructuring could have been used to liberating subordinated researchers from hitherto career-impeding structures, to foster inclusion, to change an authoritarian, discourse (e.g. Bowen & Tobin, 2015; Blome, Möller & Böning, 2019; van Dyk & Reitz, 2017). However, the lack of advocacy of the traditional symbolic elite is telling. Likewise, the new academic elite in economics and business has been exceedingly effective in expanding their authority, in particular due to the on-going educational expansion and globalization (cf. Mæbe, 2015). By way of example, eloquent silence meets activism initiated by non-tenured faculty in Germany (e.g. Netzwerk für Gute Arbeit in der Wissenschaft; N² - Network of Networks, 2019; cf. also Gallas, 2018; Graf et al., forthcoming). Professors, in fact, do little to extend their privileges of tenure and social security to their immediate coworkers. Those favorable structures that are to support research freedom and unbiased service to society are cherry-picked for those (still) in power: professors. Yet this strategy did not promote success vis-à-vis an equally hegemonic, new, and politically supported managerial narrative. In this vein, tellers of the (selectively told) Humboldtian narrative have played their part in facilitating the rise of new public management. Now, as exemplified by our own question “how could this happen?”, the managerial narrative has turned into a narrative offering closure, a story that also describes the besieged and defeated noble Humboldtianism.

However, none of these narratives is suited to function as a subversive, a counter-narrative inasmuch as it would allow “the silenced to speak” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 199). Persisting inequalities and power imbalances are scarcely addressed. In the rare case these dimensions are addressed, the actual arguments are often dispelled and reinterpreted in light of the managerial paradigm. For example, gender equality and diversity are addressed as important issues in the context of the German excellence initiative (“Exzellenz Initiative”), a competitive funding program initiated by the Federal Government, as a prime example for NPM measures. However, gender equality is not framed as a central moment of equity but as a factor of success in the international competition for excellence (Engels, Beaufays, Kegen, & Zuber, 2015).

In this sense, both university tales can be regarded as hegemonic narratives, as “stories that reproduce existing relations of power and inequity” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 189). Which narrative is dominant depends on nationally-specific traditions and the varying institutionalization of Humboldtian or managerial principles. The struggle for primacy between two fractions of the dominant academic class – the professors and university management – continues. In order to address and challenge problematic issues inherent to both of these narratives, a narrative beyond the existing opposition would have to emerge.

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