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## The Humboldtian myth

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# THE HUMBOLDTIAN MYTH

*“The Humboldtian myth is like a shield which academics always raise whenever university reforms appear on the horizon.”*<sup>56</sup> *“Humboldt is carried into every debate about higher education like a monstrosity.”*<sup>57</sup> *“Humboldt is the name of the besieged ivory towers’ line of defence.”*<sup>58</sup> *“The Bologna Process is in fact the struggle between the bourgeois Humboldtians and the plebeian Bolognians.”*<sup>59</sup> These are just a few of the opinions about the work and myth of a man who, despite having not invented the concept of early modern Central European university education based on the unity of research and teaching, was largely responsible for its implementation. The story of Wilhelm Humboldt, who created from chaos a university of world renown and provided direction for the development of (Central European) university culture, is a theme which occupies anyone in academia who is interested in the idea of the *universitas* within a wider historical and cultural context. In 2013 Petr Pabian and Karel Šima’s mainly sociological view of Humboldt described his utopian vision of the university as an ideology, arguing that the great majority of the (academic)

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56 Lundgren, Peter: *Mythos Humboldt in der Gegenwart. Lehre – Forschung – Selbstverwaltung*, In: Ash, Mitchell (Hg.): *Mythos Humboldt. Vergangenheit und Zukunft der deutschen Universitäten*. Wien – Köln – Weimar 1999, pp. 145–169, p. 166.

57 Marksches, Christoph: *Was von Humboldt noch zu lernen ist? 11 Thesen*. In: Kovce, Philip – Priddat, Birgit (Hg.): *Die Aufgabe der Bildung. Aussichten der Universität*. Marburg 2015, pp. 239–246, here p.240.

58 Weisbrodt, Bernd: *Der wandelbare Geist. Akademisches Ideal und wissenschaftliche Transformation in der Nachkriegszeit*, In: (Hg.): *Akademische Vergangenheitspolitik. Beiträge zur Wissenschaftskultur der Nachkriegszeit*. Göttingen 2002, pp. 11–38, here p. 26.

59 Krull, Wilhelm: *Hat das Humboldtsche Bildungsideal noch eine Zukunft?* In: Rudersdorf, Manfred – Höpken, Wolfgang – Schlegel, Martin (Hg.) *Wissen und Geist. Universitätskulturen*. Leipzig 2009, pp. 207–219, here p. 207.

public are still under its sway, even consciously and gladly so because of fears about the consequences of university reforms over the past decades.<sup>60</sup> Our objective is to look at “Humboldt” as a myth, and in this respect our position is historical on the one hand, though somewhat more indulgent on the other, as we are not as direct in calling for some kind of “liberation”.<sup>61</sup> However, like our colleagues, we also ask: What is the purpose of this narrative, who does it benefit?

The Humboldtian myth has shown incredible resilience across epochs and regimes, demonstrating how strongly resistant the medieval academic community is to change. Konrad Jarausch says that this myth provides the basis for academic exceptionalism and academics’ demands to be treated differently to other professions. This claim ostensibly ignores the fact that over the last fifty years the number of universities in Central Europe has quadrupled and the number of students matriculating has increased fifteen-fold. The narrators of the Humboldtian myth have even managed to turn their position “outside of time and social reality” to their advantage, stubbornly clinging to their privileges as the foundation of their identity as members of the academic community. According to Jarausch, this attachment to the Humboldtian vision in today’s academic community is merely an empty slogan which has nothing in common with the reality of mass universities, and the Humboldtian cultural circle only impedes any reforms to universities. This is viewed from a global perspective, particularly by American and Asian authors, as the most traditional and least open to reform.<sup>62</sup> There is even a euphemism which compares the Humboldtian mythical narrative to an illness.<sup>63</sup>

Stories about the Prussian philologist and organizer of higher education are also well known in non-German countries which historically have shared the model of the Humboldtian university, inspired in part by the Prussian reforms – i.e. in Germany’s eastern neighbours, in Italy and in the Balkans.<sup>64</sup> In today’s universities in the Czech Republic and Austria we no longer encounter myths about the national reformer Leo Thun, or Hungary’s Jozef Eötvös, only the myth about

60 Šima, Karel – Pabian, Petr: *Ztracený Humboldtův ráj. Ideologie jednoty výzkumu a výuky ve vysokém školství*. Prague 2013, esp. pp. 11–13, 25

61 Ibid, pp. 138–143.

62 E.g. Fallon, Daniel: *The German University. A heroic ideal in conflict with the modern world*. Boulder/Colorado 1980; Neave, Guy – Blücker, Kjell – Nybom, Thorsten (ed.): *The European research university. An historical parenthesis?* New York 2006.

63 Jarausch, Konrad: Das Humboldt-Syndrom. Die westdeutschen Universitäten 1945–1989 – ein akademischer Sonderweg?, In: Ash, Mitchell G. (Hg.): *Mythos Humboldt. Vergangenheit und Zukunft der deutschen Universitäten*. Wien – Köln – Weimar 1999, pp. 58–79, here p. 75.

64 Livescu, Jean: Die Entstehung der rumänischen Universitäten im Zusammenhang der europäischen Kulturbeziehungen (1850–1870). In: Plaschka, Richard Georg – Mack, Karlheinz (Hg.): *Wegenetz europäischen Geistes. Wissenschaftszentren und geistige Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Mittel- und Südosteuropa vom Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*. Wien 1983, p. 21–35; Barbagli, Marzio: *Educating for unemployment: politics, labor markets, and the school system – Italy 1859–1973*. New York 1982.

Humboldt.<sup>65</sup> Over the years his story, which is basically about political compromise, has had other narratives added to it, and we are at present dealing with a myth which has the largest mobilizing influence within the academic community. “Humboldt” stirs up emotions – as an argument it appears in the debates about the present state and future of the university, and it has been held up as a slogan by representatives standing on one side or the other of the debate on reforming higher education.

Meanwhile, the historical core of the Humboldtian myth retreats into the background. Apart from a handful of historians, it is rare for anyone to see the important context of the reforms. Wilhelm von Humboldt was one of the participants in the crucial debates concerning the future of higher education in Prussia and Germany around 1800 – a time when the whole university education system was in crisis – something which offers parallels to the state of universities today. Sylvia Paletschek even talks about the “extinction” of German universities during this period<sup>66</sup>: around the year 1800, half of the universities had closed – a total of 22 German-speaking universities (including universities in Cologne, Strasbourg, Bonn, Erfurt and Münster). Their fate was decided by the constitutional changes which had been introduced in Germany as a result of the French invasions. It is important to recall that of the approximately 300 German states from the era of the Napoleonic Wars, only around thirty survived. The universities lost their sovereign, their patron and their political protection. But the crisis was mainly due to internal reasons – society viewed university education as unnecessary and outdated. Many of the formerly large and famous universities only had a handful of students registered: for example, Duisburg only had 38 students, Erfurt 43.<sup>67</sup> It is also often forgotten that this university apocalypse was not only confined to German lands: of the 143 universities in Europe in 1789, only 60 remained twenty years later. During the revolution and the time of Napoleon, all 22 universities were closed in France as they were viewed by the revolutionary regime as a body which limited and threatened freedom of expression. Professional academies appeared in their place which quickly grew in prestige, with some of them also being more research oriented. Universities were perceived as being incompatible with the challenges of the modern age, which required a rational and scientific approach towards the world. The word “university” was seen as being so hopelessly

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65 Engelbrecht, Helmut: *Geschichte des österreichischen Bildungswesens*, Bd. 4, Von 1848 bis zum Ende der Monarchie. Wien 1986, pp. 221–251; Szögi, László: Die Universitäten in Ungarn. Gründungswelle vom späten Mittelalter bis ins 20. Jahrhundert. In: Wörster, Peter (Hg.): *Universitäten im östlichen Europa. Zwischen Kirche, Staat und Nation– Sozialgeschichtliche und politische Entwicklungen*. München 2008, pp. 235–268, esp. pp. 255–259.

66 Paletschek, Sylvia: *Die permanente Erfindung der Tradition. Die Universität Tübingen im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik*. Stuttgart 2001, p. 27.

67 Mittelstraß, *Die unzeitgemäße Universität*, p. 20, 71.

old fashioned and historically discredited that only a few Prussian educational specialists used it in debates when describing the future institutions of higher education.<sup>68</sup>

The Humboldtian concept of the university was born from the interaction between ideological allies and opponents, the result of which (and also its symbol) – the University of Berlin (1810) – was a compromise. This grew from the shared conviction of the members of Prussia’s educated elite that the “old university” had had its day and that fundamental changes were necessary. There was a powerful group of politicians and officials at the head of the Prussian state who saw a way out of the crisis in university education through the transference of some of the university’s activities, specifically its lower arts faculties, to the gymnasium. The upper faculties were to be replaced by professional academies. The spokesperson for this group, the legal expert Julius von Massow, was a Prussian minister whose department was responsible for the reform of higher education. On the other hand, the theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, who held high positions within the Prussian Lutheran Church and scholarly societies, was regarded as the spokesperson of the conservative wing of reformers, who advocated revitalizing the university through a reform of its educational goals and curricula. The philosophers Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte also had considerable influence on the public debate on higher education. In addition to organizational issues, they both added the theme of higher education fulfilling the ideal of searching for truth and attaining social progress through education within an enlightened society. Thanks largely to Fichte, the legal-political issue of the future of the university became an ethical topic with a considerable mobilizing influence on public opinion; as part of his vision of the university, Fichte incorporated his dream of a better humanity which would be attained through the courses at generally focused arts faculties.<sup>69</sup>

If we look at this entire project from a distance, it is quite remarkable that such an ethically grounded argument, far removed from the reality of a complicated era full of dramatic political and social changes, eventually found an audience amongst the Prussian court and the public. Some authors have looked for a connection between the profound crisis of the Prussian state and its crushing defeat at Jena in 1806, when the shock of defeat prompted attempts to re-establish the state from its very foundations.<sup>70</sup> Fichte’s ethically based involvement in the debates was even mocked by his contemporaries – for example, one of his colleagues said that “*the university is in fact Fichte institutionalized*”, by which he meant the

68 *Geschichte der Universität in Europa*. Band IV. Hg. Von Walter Rüegg. München 2008, p. 27; *Hodnocení kvality vysokých škol jako světový problém*. Prague 1997, p. 105.

69 Mittelstraß, *Die unzeitgemäße Universität*, pp. 20–24; Rolfe, Gary: *The University in Dissent. Scholarship in the corporate university*. London – New York 2013, p.13 ff.

70 *Geschichte der Universität in Europa*. Band IV. Hg. von Walter Rüegg. München 2008, p. 47.

undisguised idealism and even utopianism of the whole project.<sup>71</sup> The public was evidently receptive to ancient platonic ideas about schools which would educate philosopher-kings, a place where education would not be determined by “*bureaucrats and pedants, but by philosophers and scientists.*”<sup>72</sup>

The next development in the Humboldtian educational project has been well researched, but there are still different opinions concerning its interpretation. Sceptics highlight it as an idealistic project which was far removed from reality; they talk about the “short-lived dream” of an ideal university which became a reality and worked well for only a relatively short period of time – a few decades is but an episode in the long history of higher education. The pessimists point to the fact that the Humboldtian concept was always only partially viable, underlining the compromised nature of the project from the outset. They overlook its ethical mission and focus on utilitarian criteria, particularly criteria which are quantifiable. Neither is there any shortage of general criticism of the Humboldtian project as something which has brought more negatives than positives, and it is also possible to find those who mock the two-hundred-year academic debate on the Humboldtian university as just further proof of the hopeless state of the university which is impossible to reform and is incompatible with the world that surrounds it. Optimistic voices are to be heard less often. The defence of Humboldt is carried out with some embarrassment, evidently from concerns about being stigmatized as being a nostalgic, distant professor, who is ready to remain in his ivory tower at any cost. However, when they do appear, they offer a revitalized, updated, enlightened vision of a better society through education. Fichte would be pleased to see his ethical argument resurface here about the beneficial influence of a properly functioning university on humanity. Naturally, the difference is that neither the parliaments or the public of the “liberal democracies” listen to that argument in the way that scholars and royal officials did in early modern Prussia.

Which elements of the Humboldtian reforms proved to be of long-term significance for the development of the university in Central Europe? Although there is no complete agreement amongst scholars, it is possible to speak of two central arguments which still resonate strongly within academia:

- a) *University autonomy and academic freedom.* The university is a community of scholars which should be governed only by a committee chosen from inside the academic community. This arrangement effectively immunizes academics against unwanted political and economic pressure, and within this framework of guaranteed freedom it is possible for them to develop their teaching and research in the appropriate direction – including directions which peers may view as unnecessary, erroneous or too expensive. The

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71 Mittelstraß, *Die unzeitgemäße Universität*, p. 22.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

university is an ethical community of people seeking the truth, their performance cannot be measured using a utilitarian standpoint, as the view of the present is not sufficiently relevant. Through its activities the university, more than any other institution, combines the past, present and future of mankind.

- b) *Combining research and teaching.* High-quality university education is unimaginable without the wealth of experience that educators have from their research work. The basic rules of research work and their transdisciplinary scope encompassing the “totality of knowledge and truth” is one of the main benefits of a university education in comparison with other higher levels of education.

Marita Baumgartner provided a unique insight into the social history of professors during the golden era of Humboldt. It is an illuminating overview of the difference between ideals and reality. In 1914 the following disciplines (according to hierarchy) made up the core of the humanities professorships: philosophy, classical philology, German studies, Romance languages and literature, and English studies. The majority of universities also had Oriental studies, Sanskrit, comparative linguistics, history, archaeology and art history. Hierarchically the natural sciences consisted of mathematics, physics, chemistry, mineralogy, botany, zoology and geography. Baumgartner described the dense network of family ties between academics throughout the whole of the 19th century: 2 out of 3 humanities professors had a relative who was an academic, every eleventh professor was the son of a professor, every tenth professor had a wife who was the daughter of a professor, every seventh had a son in academia. Baumgartner makes direct mention of professorial dynasties which ruled over the universities. She also states, however, that these ties were much more numerous and stronger in the 16th and 17th centuries. The situation was similar in the natural sciences, where the tendency to create dynasties was only marginally weaker. In the provincial universities, a professorship was attained at the age of 37–38 while the overall German average was 39. The metropolitan university in Berlin was considered to be the pinnacle of one’s career and, as a result, professors were accepted at an older age. In the natural science disciplines the average age of a professor was slightly lower, and the practical training at the metropolitan universities in Berlin and Munich was the same. Compared with today, professors held on to their chairs much more tenaciously – in the humanities only one in seven professors had experience of teaching abroad, while it was one in every thirteen in the natural sciences. Arts researchers would usually travel to German-speaking countries, whilst the natural scientists utilized the wider university circles and were considered more integrated into the international networks.<sup>73</sup> The ideological core

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<sup>73</sup> Baumgartner, Marita: *Professoren und Universitäten im 19. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen 1997, esp. pp. 55–86, 93–130, 181–182, 240–243.

of the Humboldtian university became clearer the moment the whole concept became threatened. Robert Anderson states that the golden era of the Prussian university model was clearly linked to the period of pre-industrialized Germany with its relatively small middle class prior to the country's unification. The rapid modernization of society after 1870 was no longer compatible with the Humboldtian concept.<sup>74</sup> Around 1900 it was obvious that the system was going through a crisis and that fundamental reforms were necessary. Jürgen Mittelstraß mentions three spectres which have hovered over "Humboldtians" since then: a reduction in the cultural level of students going to university; the mass nature of university study; and the movement of research away from the university, requiring its supporters to constantly defend its rationale and two central arguments.<sup>75</sup> The concept undoubtedly had more problematic areas, but from the perspective of the history of Central Europe in the 20th century, these three issues became highly significant and were the greatest threats to the viability of the Humboldtian university.

By 1900, university lecture halls were already overcrowded and the whole infrastructure was under such intense pressure that the issue of publicly financing universities became an acute problem. At the same time, there was political pressure to make education more accessible, though within the financial means of public budgets. Sylvia Paletschek pointed out that the 1870s–1880s saw a type of competition between political representatives of the German states and the free cities over which universities would be better equipped.<sup>76</sup> This ethos disappeared in Germany around the year 1900.<sup>77</sup> On the periphery of the Humboldtian circle – for example, in Czech, Polish, Greek<sup>78</sup> or Norwegian areas<sup>79</sup> – its effects lasted somewhat longer, particularly in connection with the birth of nation states where universities were their calling cards, but even here this ethos began to disappear during the interwar period when faced with the extremely high costs of higher education for a wider section of the population.<sup>80</sup> The expanding network of

74 Anderson, Robert A.: *European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914*. Oxford – New York 2004, p. 151 ff.

75 Mittelstraß, *Die unzeitgemäße Universität*, p. 31.

76 Paletschek, *Die permanente Erfindung*, p. 525.

77 vom Brocke, Bernhard: Wege aus der Krise: Universitätsseminar, Akademiekommission und Forschungsinstitut. Formen der Institutionalisierung in den Geistes- und Naturwissenschaften 1810–1900–1995. In: König, Christoph – Lämmert, Eberhard (Hg.): *Konkurrenten in der Fakultät. Kultur, Wissen und Universität um 1900*. Frankfurt am Main 1999, pp. 191–215, here 204–205.

78 Derwissis, Stergios Nikolaos: *Die Geschichte der griechischen Bildungswesens in neueren Zeit mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Einflüsse der deutschen Pädagogik*. Frankfurt am Main 1976, esp. pp. 191, 194.

79 Langholm, Sivert: The new nationalism and the new universities. The case of Norway in the early 19th century, In: Norrback, Märtha – Ranki, Kristina (eds.): *University and nation: the university and the making of the nation in northern Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries*. Helsinki 1996, pp. 139–152.

80 Doležalová, Antonie: Ve vleku nemožného českoslovákismu? Financování Univerzity Komenského v meziválečném období (skrze československý státní rozpočet). In: Slobodník, Martin – Glossová,

gymnasiums in the Habsburg empire from the 1880s produced a large number of students whose normal career course was the university. This was why Austrian governments were so hesitant about establishing more universities, even though there was a large number of candidates: Zadar, Terst, Ljubljana, Rovereto, Opava, Olomouc and Brno.<sup>81</sup>

However, mass education in the secondary and tertiary sectors produced a different type of scholar than in the past, who soon became far removed from the ideal of Kant, Humboldt and Fichte. The “new” students were much more pragmatic and saw money spent on their education as an investment. The costs of study were viewed as so exorbitant by families from the petit bourgeoisie and the peasantry that they were to be returned to the family as quickly as possible, either in a pecuniary form or at least in the form of heightened social status through prestigious employment.<sup>82</sup> As a result, values such as the search for truth and the cultivation of humanity as the general objectives of a university education were eroded under pressure from a general pragmatism and political and ideological particularism.

The pressure on the infrastructure and the lack of clarity concerning the future direction and mission of the university went hand in hand with doubts over being able to implement the Humboldtian vision of combining research and teaching for the greater good. The high number of poorly prepared students, hungry for a diploma more than an education, was more of a brake on research as it forced talented researchers to waste time on arduous mass education. The university began to be seen as an institution whose representatives failed to understand the challenges of accelerating technological and scientific research, indulging themselves in outdated philosophical idealism. There were cases in the humanities where it was not exceptional for a professor to work for decades on something which was intended only for a very small circle of specialists, and who was openly negative towards the wider reading community, which he ostentatiously ignored, veiled as

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Marta: *95 rokov Filozofickej fakulty UK. Pohľad do dejín inštitúcie a jej akademickej obce*. Bratislava 2017, pp. 89–103; Garlicki, Andrzej et alii: *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego*. Warszawa 1982, pp. 97–105; Grot, Zdzisław (ed.): *Dzieje Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza 1919–1969*. Poznań 1972, pp. 189–197.

81 Kostner, Maria: *Die Geschichte der italienischen Universitätsfrage in der Österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie von 1864 bis 1914*. Diss. Innsbruck 1970; Otruba, Gustav: *Die Universitäten in der Hochschulorganisation der Donau-Monarchie: Nationale Erziehungsstätten im Vielvölkerreich 1850 bis 1914. Student und Hochschule im 19. Jahrhundert: Studie und Materialien*. Göttingen 1975, pp. 75–155; Anderson, Robert D.: *European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914*. Oxford 2004, pp. 234–240; Gawrecki, Dan: *Versuche um die Gründung einer Universität in Troppau im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, In: Schübel, Elmar – Heppner, Harald (Hg.): *Universitäten in Zeiten des Umbruchs. Fallstudien über das mittlere und östliche Europa im 20. Jahrhundert*. Wien – Berlin 2011, pp. 59–68; Moklak, Jarosław: *Lwów i Triest. Uniwersyteckie dążenia Ukraińców, Włochów, Chorwatów i Słoweńców (1908–1914)*. In: Pezda, Janusz – Pijaj, Stanisław (red.): *Europa środkowa, Balkany i Polacy*. Kraków 2017, pp. 241–248.

82 Pokludová, Andrea: *Formování inteligence na Moravě a ve Slezsku 1857–1910*. Opava 2008, pp. 268–274.

he was in the cloak of “pure science”.<sup>83</sup> The professor, who after many years of wallowing in the heuristic phase of his research, and despite amassing more and more sources and critiques, was unable to proceed to write even a short synthesis. Someone who in spite of the fact that the public knew little of his findings, held on tooth and nail to his post as a professor with a considerable salary from public sources; often maligning or getting rid of any (potential) competitors and pushing forward his own *famuli* – such a professor at the time would have been called a “*university mandarin*”, a favourite term often used by Tomáš Masaryk.<sup>84</sup>

## The radical departure from “Humboldtian mandarinism”

During the interwar period, radical political forces were effective in recruiting sympathizers from amongst frustrated students and university graduates. The Nazis were particularly successful during the interwar period amongst the young research staff and the “eternal senior lecturers”, waiting for a professor’s chair to be made available.<sup>85</sup> However, the attacks by the radicals against university mandarinism were selective, though particularly effective against professors of Jewish origin or with Jewish partners, foreigners and strong opponents of fascist “*völkisch*” ideas. The far-left fought successfully against academics from a bourgeoisie background and members of the academic community who stood in open opposition to them.

However, the majority of “mandarins” had no problem reaching a compromise with, or becoming fervent supporters of, politically radical regimes, whether Nazi or communist. Numerous professors quietly got rid of competitors and colleagues, while many simply did not have the courage to stand up for the persecuted or openly challenge the political authorities, preferring instead to hide behind the argument that their mission was academic, not political. Although some authors see the end of “Humboldtian mandarinism” with the destruction of the professors’ tightly-knit bodies,<sup>86</sup> there is a misunderstanding here of the cultural context. The core of this social group with its specific culture remained intact despite the

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83 Borovský, Tomáš (red.): *Historici na brněnské univerzitě. Devět portrétů*. Brno 2008, pp. 32–33, 78–82.

84 Ringer, Fritz K.: *Die Gelehrten. Der Niedergang der deutschen Mandarine 1890–1933*. Stuttgart 1983.

85 Grüttner, Michael: *Nationalsozialistische Wissenschaftler: ein Kollektivporträt*. In: Hachtmann, Rüdiger – Jarausch, Konrad – John, Jürgen – Middell, Michael (Hg.): *Gebrochene Wissenschaftskulturen. Universität und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen 2010, pp. 149–166.

86 Friedländer, Saul: *The Demise of the German Mandarins. The German University and the Jews*. In: Jansen, Christian – Niethammer, Lutz – Weisbrod, Bernd: *Von der Aufgabe der Freiheit. Politische Verantwortung und bürgerliche Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift Hans Mommsen*. Berlin 1995, pp. 69–82.

professors' lack of social credibility, and continued to insist on the classic ideals of university freedom and autonomy, at least in part.

Although the conditions at German universities under radical political pressure have been better explored than in other countries of Central Europe, it is clear that academic freedom and tolerance were not only in danger in Germany during the 20th century. Polish universities were hit by a wave of antisemitism from some sections of the student community which the professors were unable to counter effectively.<sup>87</sup> An anthology entitled *Za lepší svět* (For a Better World) from 1963 presents recollections of university life from the interwar period by Czechoslovak students from the far left. The memoirs contradict today's interpretation in the Czech Republic and Slovakia of students' lives as being an idyllic, politically indifferent time,<sup>88</sup> demonstrating as they do – albeit in a stylized, glorified and in places quite bombastic manner – the activities of politically radical groups of students in Czechoslovak universities. Although political indifference clearly prevailed in the student community, a large number of students were grouped in faculty societies of a professional character (The Lawyer, The Society of Philosophy Students, etc.), and there were fierce, sometimes even violent struggles over the leadership positions of students' political organizations. The radicalization of the public was also transferred to the university, dividing the academic community. This was manifested in German and Czech chauvinism and the eruption of conflicts in universities during the years of the “insignia wars” (1934–1935); the division of Polish academia in relation to Marshal Piłsudski's authoritarian reorganization; and the even starker divisions based on attitudes towards the Jewish question, Andrej Hlinka's Slovak nationalist movement, and the ultra-left radicalism of some sections of the student body.<sup>89</sup>

The metropolitan universities close to the centre of power were even more politicized.<sup>90</sup> The professors had their work cut out trying to maintain at least

87 Connelly, John: *Ztročená univerzita: Sovětizace vysokého školství ve východním Německu, v letech 1945–1956*. Prague 2008, pp. 140–143.

88 Grófová, Maria: „... a jako tretia vznikla filozofická fakulta“. *K počiatkom a prvým rokom FiF UK*. In: 95 rokov Filozofickej fakulty UK. Pohľad do dejín inštitúcie a jej akademickej obce. Bratislava 2017, pp. 40–72, pp. 44–61.

89 Domin, Karel – Vojtíšek, Václav – Hutter, Josef: *Karolinum statek národní*. Praha 1934; Domin, Karel: *Můj rektorský rok. Z bojů o Karolinum a za práva Karlovy univerzity*. Prague 1934; Goldstücker, Eduard (eds.): *Za lepší zítřek. Sborník o vzpomínkách na studentské pokrokové hnutí třicátých let*. Prague 1963; Dějiny UK IV., pp. 43–44; Friedländer, Saul: *The Demise of the German Mandarins. The German University and the Jews*. In: Jansen, Christian – Niethammer, Lutz – Weisbrod, Bernd: *Von der Aufgabe der Freiheit. Politische Verantwortung und bürgerliche Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Festschrift Hans Mommsen. Berlin 1995, pp. 69–82; Majewski, Piotr (ed.): *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1945*. Warsaw 2016, pp. 251–295.

90 Kučera, Karel – Truc, Miroslav: *Poznámky k fašizaci Německé univerzity pražské*, Acta Universitatis Pragensis 1960, r. 1, sešit 1, pp. 203–223; Chlupová, Alena: *K volbě rektora a prvnímu otevřenému vystoupení nacistických studentů na Německé univerzitě v Praze roku 1922*, Acta Universitatis Pragensis,

some sense of cohesion and mutual respect, and there were several students who remembered strongly polarized political opinions, as well as a growing impoliteness and even vulgarity in behaviour. One Prague professor of philology refused to accept phonology in his department as it was the teachings of that “*Bolshevik Jew Jacobson*”<sup>91</sup>; his left-leaning colleagues then entered into the debate about the difference between Italian and German fascism with the words “*we’re not going to argue about which shit smells worse*”.<sup>92</sup> However, the erosion of political neutrality was also noticeable in the provincial universities in Bratislava, Poznaň and Brno. The activities of the communist students in Brno’s universities were supported and even partially shielded by several professors, notably Jiří Kroha at the Technical University and Vladimír Helfert at Masaryk University. Otakar Vašek recalled the arguments between the radicals in 1932 in connection with a large political gathering of the academic community on the question of student social welfare and the controversial issue of the diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union: “*At the medical faculty in particular, where the right-wingers were in a strong position, much propaganda was made of the slogan ‘Kroha must not speak’. But Profesor Kroha did speak. In his speech he referred to the great example of the Soviet Union and the lives of its students now and in the future. His speech made a powerful impression and was a great success. However, the fascists at the medical faculty got their own back the next day when they beat bloody some students going into the faculty. They not only beat up students who had organised the meeting, but also Jews and foreigners, many of whom had nothing to do with yesterday’s meeting.*”<sup>93</sup> Students were dragged into public life by the radicals through discussions and meetings in support of the Most strikes or the Spanish Republican regime; influenced by these debates, some of the socially vulnerable students became aware of class differences and their prospects in life. The radicals were very blunt concerning the differences between their political beliefs and those of their fellow students, as can be seen in one left-wing student’s opinion of his colleagues: “*You can find good material (for the chauvinist rebellions – author’s*

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1978, r. 18, sešit 2, pp. 78–92; Psotová, Věra: *Fašizace německého studentstva a ohlas tohoto procesu mezi německými studenty v Československu*, Acta Universitatis Pragensis 1980, r. 20, sešit 1, pp. 31–60; Kindl, Vladimír: *Pokus o zařazení tzv. dělnického práva do výuky Právnické fakulty UK v období buržoazní ČSR*. Acta Universitatis Carolinae 1984, r. 24, sešit 1, pp. 45–66; Majewski, Piotr (ed.): *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1945*. Warsaw 2016, pp. 251–295.

91 Roman Osipovič Jacobson (1896–1982), a Russian linguist considered to be one of the greatest linguists of the 20th century, during the interwar period he was one of the representatives of the Prague Linguistic Circle, an association promoting a structuralist revision of linguistic approaches.

92 Vávra, Jaroslav: *Zapomenutá doktorská disertace o Jaroslavu Haškovi. Ke vztahům mezi posluchači a profesory Karlovy univerzity za fašistického ohrožení ČSR*. Acta Universitatis Carolinae 1984, r. 24, sešit 2, pp. 55–68, here pp. 59, 61.

93 Žilka, Ladislav – Vašek, Otakar: *O brněnských vysokých školách*. In: Goldstücker, Eduard (eds.): *Za lepší zítřek. Sborník vzpomínek na studentské pokrokové hnutí třicátých let*. Prague 1963, pp. 177–184, here 183–184.

note) at universities. The ‘golden youth’ were concentrated in universities – the sons of factory owners and businessmen in wholesale and the meat trade, green youths from the courts of estate owners and large farmers, as well as the sons of rich lawyers and doctors.”<sup>94</sup>

In his analysis of the “Humboldt myth”, Mitchell Ash states that its roots are obvious in the decades surrounding the year 1900. According to him, the reality of the Central European university started to be interpreted in a mythical way as a defence against impending changes. Ash terms the myth a neo-humanist code to defend the university from the influx of radically minded students from the petite bourgeois and the working class, and from the pressure from technical colleges and specialized research centres.<sup>95</sup> There were other threats on the horizon which motivated some professors to develop a neo-Humboldtian narrative – the unappealing idea of women entering academia and the greater influence of the socialists as the largest mass political party with an anti-elitist, international programme. There emerged a culturally pessimistic myth of the gradual disintegration of civilization as a result of the irreversible departure from the humanist tradition of the late Enlightenment.

In the eyes of German professors – the narrators of the myth – German civilization began to disintegrate around 1900. Externally, this was the result of being hemmed in by the demographic superiority of the Slavonic nations to the East, by the dynamic growth of the USA and its universities, and the rejection by the “old” European powers of Germany’s political and colonial aspirations. Internally, it was threatened by the democratic pluralism of lifestyles and values, the decadency of consumerism, female emancipation undermining traditional concepts of masculinity, the international socialism of “comrades without nations”, and the relativist values of the younger generation.

During this period the discourse of Czech and Polish professors was connected to the story of their nations and was optimistic as a result of the national-emancipation process and the emergence of their independent nations in 1918. It was the serious problems which the two new republics faced – chronic political instability in Czechoslovak democracy and the authoritarian regime under Józef Piłsudski in Poland, the economic crisis from 1929–1934, and the breakdown in the international position of both countries under pressure from Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia – which transformed Humboldt into a culturally pessimistic myth in Central Europe, requiring new solutions to be found.

The narrative of the Humboldtian myth had very ambivalent features under pressure from the Nazi and communist regimes. One common feature was a criti-

94 Borek, Zoltán – Lhotka, Jaroslav: *Studentské bouře*. Ibid, pp. 96–104, here p. 97.

95 Ash, Mitchell: Konstruierte Kontinuitäten und divergierende Neuanfänge nach 1945, In: Grüttner, Michael – Hachtmann, Rüdiger – Jarausch, Konrad – John, Jürgen – Middell, Michael (Hg.): *Gebrochene Wissenschaftskulturen. Universität und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen 2010, pp. 215–245, here p. 243.

cal view of the myth as belonging to the historically discredited tradition of the bourgeois university which was to be eliminated when creating a new humanity. This critique focused on three problems of the late-Humboldtian university, clear even to the impartial observer:

- a) The severe long-term lack of finance. The financial support was enough to keep universities operating at a minimal level with an emphasis on teaching, but not to concurrently develop pedagogical and research work at the pace of the top Western (private) universities. The Humboldtian ideal of combining research and teaching was just empty words.
- b) The university's lack of capacity in research infrastructure and an inability and unwillingness to address the demands of applied science for top research products. Here the university failed in its role as an accumulator of knowledge for the benefit of all of society.
- c) The individualism and exclusivity of university professors resulted in the failure of universities when faced with complex, transversal solutions to problems. Attempts at reform ran up against the closed nature of the professors who created, or ruled over, the universities' power structures, forming an image of overwhelming conservatism in the university committees which bordered on reactionary.

Ivan Málek, a biologist and Czechoslovak theoretician of management science, an admirer of the Soviet system and promoter of its application in the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences,<sup>96</sup> was very critical of interwar university education in 1955, but made several pertinent points: *"We really only considered universities when we were looking at basic research issues. But what were the options? The subsidies were very small and were aimed at the work of the teachers, which they barely covered. The institutions were not scientific institutions in the true sense of the word, but rather teaching departments and were thus poorly equipped for scientific work. Scientists worked either on their own here or in small groups of scientific workers; but the majority did not work collectively, it was more or less every man for himself... And those individuals who worked scientifically, most of them only did so a little – in addition to their teaching or other routine work – basically in the evenings, during the holidays and only as an unpaid private matter. For many of them their scientific work was to aid their own careers, and so it was not uncommon that as soon as they had been awarded the title of senior lecturer or professor, their scientific work suddenly dried up... It is understandable that under these circumstances the ideal was "pure science", i.e. science unburdened by specific goals, because there was no other kind."*<sup>97</sup> By 1966 Málek had somewhat sobered up from his admiration of Soviet science, but still maintained his distance from the interwar situation: *"Science was always only done at universities, and then...only as an aside, a more or less*

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96 Cf. Málek, Ivan: *Učíme se od sovětské vědy*. Prague 1953, p. 31.

97 Málek, Ivan: *Boj nového se starým v dnešní naší vědě*. Prague 1955, pp. 96–97.

*private matter of individual scientists, which could not be made into a system... Due to the major teaching duties at universities and the essential structure being designed primarily for these responsibilities, it was impossible to have enough groups working on larger and more extensive tasks.*"<sup>98</sup>

In both cases the main area of criticism was the administrative character of the Humboldtian university, specifically the autonomous professorial committees – a symbol of their superiority. In 1954 the vice-chancellor of Brno's university, Theodor Martinec, stated that the interwar Humboldtian university tradition was incredibly elitist towards the students, and as such to be greatly condemned: "When I was a student it was extremely difficult to speak to the dean or his assistant. Today you have the opportunity to talk to him. You are not allowed to regard the lecturers as superior beings. It is necessary to have a cordial relationship with them."<sup>99</sup> Ivan Málek was particularly scathing of the professors from the medical disciplines, whom he saw as having traditionally the highest level of superiority over the students and other university staff: "The readings from the podium with the students sitting on benches, taking notes, created a barrier between teacher and pupil which could not be crossed with some kind of openness, not to mention criticism. A great many of us were aware of how badly any criticism was taken, though this even applied merely to questions. The teachers attempted to explain this superior relationship to the students by saying that it offered them "academic freedom", by which they meant absolute freedom in attendance at lectures and practical training. ...Students saw only too well at the clinics how their private practices were more important for them than teaching; they saw how the theoretical workers either trembled in their assistants' poverty, or they were forced to earn money in various ways; we can recall the habit whereby the professors stood the theoreticians in front of the dean in alphabetical order so that the gains from tax and promotion might substitute for what the clinicians had from their private practices."<sup>100</sup>

One of the first blows against the power of the professors came with the communist putsch in Czechoslovakia in 1948. There was a similar situation in other Central European countries within the communist bloc, where the new regime was attempting to deal with the problem that on the one hand, it did not believe that members of the post-coup professorial bodies would really lead their students towards socialism, on the other hand, they could not easily get rid of them due to their academic abilities.

Even prior to the legislative measures which either took away the decision-making powers from the committees or abolished them entirely,<sup>101</sup> the profes-

98 Málek, Ivan: *Otevřené otázky naší vědy*. Prague 1966, p. 35.

99 Archiv MU, Fond ČSM, k. 4, projev prorektora Martince ke studentům VŠ.

100 Málek, Ivan: *Přeměna lékařské výchovy*. In. Málek, Ivan – Gutwirth, Alois (ed.): *O nového lékaře*. Úvod do studia lékařství. Prague 1949, p. 97–116, here p. 101.

101 Connolly, *Ztročená*, p. 125

social body found itself under pressure from radicalized students and members of the youngest academic generation, whether they were Nazis or communists. John Connelly argues that only the Polish professorial bodies managed to act decisively and in unison against the pressure from the regime on universities, based on the tradition of professors' social exclusivity, bound together by Catholicism and their recognition of how they had preserved the nation's existence and identity during the Nazi occupation, which cost the lives of many academics.<sup>102</sup> In the other countries of the Eastern bloc, the communists managed to break up the professorial bodies – some of the anti-regime figures were removed from the universities, some were intimidated, while a large number collaborated.<sup>103</sup> Unlike in Poland, the identity of professorial bodies in Czechoslovakia and East Germany was much more unstable. In East Germany this was due to collaboration with the Nazis, while in Czechoslovakia this was largely because of the left-wing orientation of a large number of intellectuals, which linked the professorial bodies closely to the interwar regime and thus also to the shock of the failure of a Western-style democracy and the trauma of the Munich Agreement in 1938. The traditionally left-wing orientation of the secularized Czech public and the advantages of socialism in rebuilding the country after the devastation of war also played a large role – many Czechoslovak professors were certainly not ardent communists, but they were convinced that the communist regime would give them the opportunity to implement the left's traditional idea of social solidarity.<sup>104</sup> There were indeed many professors whose opinions did not substantially differ from those of the communists.<sup>105</sup>

For example, the assumption of power at Brno's Faculty of Arts by the "youth" in February 1948 had a very distinctive character. A group of young Communist Party members entered a meeting of the professorial body and told those present of the establishment of a new power centre in the form of the National Front Action Committee. Some professors were specifically named and warned: those now in power knew about their reactionary attitudes and recommended that they either stopped attending the meetings or refrained from voting. The seizure of power by the communists in Prague's university was somewhat less theatrical and

102 Jochen August: *Sonderaktion Krakau. Die Verhaftung der Krakauer Wissenschaftler am 6. November 1939*, Hamburg, 1997, esp. pp. 51–53; Szoldrska, Halszka: *Walka z kulturą polską. Uniwersytet Poznański podczas okupacji*. Poznań 1948, p. 5 ff.; Banasiewicz, Maria: *Polityka naukowa i oświatowa hitlerowskich Niemiec na ziemiach polskich „wcielonych“ do Trzeciej Rzeszy w okresie okupacji (1939–1945)*. Poznań 1980, p. 219–231; Gawęda, Stanisław (red.): *Straty wojenne Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego i stan powstały na wiosnę 1945 roku*ed. Kraków 1974; *Reżimy totalitarne wobec ludzi nauki 1939–1945 : Uniwersytet Jagielloński: Sonderaktion Krakau, Zbrodnia Katyńska / [tł. Philip Stoeckle]*, Warsaw 2007.

103 Connelly, *Ztročená*, pp. 125–130.

104 Urbášek, Pavel – Pulec, Jiří et al.: *Kapitoly z dějin univerzitého školství na Moravě v letech 1945–1990*. Olomouc 2003, p. 201.

105 Connelly, *Ztročená*, p. 131 ff.

there was more of an effort to gain legitimacy and express historical continuity. In March 1948 the Academic Senate proudly proclaimed that “*.for the first time in centuries, other members of the academic community can participate (at the meeting – author’s note) as an equal part of the university.*”

Academics interpreted the revolutionary act of the communist students in a historical way as “*renewing the tradition of the universitas magistrorum et scholarium...as in the first decades of our university the academic community was as one: even students could be voted rector, only later did power transfer into the hands of the masters.*”<sup>106</sup> However, the historical parallel was only an instrument and embellishment in the struggle for power. A short time later the Charles University Faculty of Medicine became embroiled in a dispute with a politically powerful student, and defended itself by referring to university tradition in the form of a court decree from 1791 and a 1904 ruling by the Supreme Court. However, there was an emphatic rebuttal to any “*appeals to decisions by the old rulers in the people’s democratic republic*”.<sup>107</sup> The expulsion of several members of the professorial body for political reasons as a result of the Action Committee’s influence in the Academic Senate was met with the banal sentence about “*painful intervention*” in the life of the university, and no other defence was needed.<sup>108</sup>

When the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was first established, the Nazis also found many more supporters amongst the assistant and senior lecturers at university than amongst the professors, albeit that the months following the occupation in March 1939 brought disillusionment to their supporters amongst the younger academics.<sup>109</sup> They had originally hoped that the expulsion of Jews and political undesirables would result in career advancement, but this involved a protracted bureaucratic procedure which showed the central organs’ lack of trust in people connected with the former Czechoslovakia, even if they were nationalists or pro-Nazi sympathizers. When the humanities were restructured in the German university in Prague, it was generally the case that the doors were open mainly to people with close links to universities in the Reich or people at the start of their academic careers, often new senior lecturers or associate professors. However, the personnel changes were overshadowed by the fact that a large section of the humanities in Prague was defined as either unimportant for the war or unimportant in general, and therefore destined to be downgraded, regardless of tradition

106 Archiv UK, Akademický senát UK, k. 38, zápis z jednání dne 12.3. 1948.

107 Ibid, k. 55, i.d. 666.

108 Archiv UK, Akademický senát UK, k. 38, zápis z jednání dne 12.3. 1948.

109 Míšková, Alena: *Německá (Karlova) univerzita*, Prague 2002, p. 64; Konrád, Ota: *Dějepisectví, germanistika a slavistika na Německé univerzitě v Praze 1918–1945*. Prague 2011, p.208.

or propaganda slogans about the blossoming of German science in the newly conquered territories.<sup>110</sup>

Both totalitarian regimes, therefore, challenged the Humboldtian principle of university autonomy and argued about the necessity of responding to the inflexible personnel conditions within the academic community with regard to ideological claims and the regime's strategic priorities. It was also relatively easy for them to attract young academics who were in the situation where the holder of the professorial chair was relatively young, while there were often many better-suited colleagues in front of them in the queue for this dream post.<sup>111</sup>

The instrumentalization of the Humboldt myth shows clear signs of it occasionally being "switched off" at moments when the narrative did not suit influential individuals within the academic community, usually with the support of a majority or at least a sizeable proportion of academics, and then reused in other contexts, often just a short time later. This arbitrary instrumentalization is the strongest admonition that in the 20th century we were no longer dealing with the real legacy of the humanist vision of Kant, Fichte and Humboldt, but only with a slogan used to defend various positions of power and interests within the university community. The rector of Brno's university, František Trávníček, a one-time supporter of Tomáš Masaryk and former legionnaire, who after 1945 gradually became the second most influential man in Czech science after Zdeněk Nejedlý, managed to move dramatically away from Humboldtian principles in his political-organizational attitudes and did not even attempt to disguise this in the relevant committees. Trávníček, ex-legionnaire and Masarykite, was appointed to the leadership of higher education and the Academy of Sciences in order to mercilessly crush bourgeois traditions and bring Czechoslovak higher education and science in to line with the models of Stalin's Soviet Union. During the interwar period, however, Trávníček had been one of the most talented Czech linguists, a supporter of structuralism and received special recognition in the field of dialectology. His political U-turn, when he reassessed all of his interwar attitudes and set out in 1945 on a political course under the flag of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, was not entirely connected to his work as a Czech studies scholar. Even here, however, he attempted to apply Marxist-Leninist principles and did not deviate from the official line. In this regard, his behaviour towards some of his younger colleagues and the students was domineering, often to the point of being unbearable. But there were other cases where he was recognised for being willing to use his political authority to protect talented scholars, even though this was al-

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110 Konrád, *Dějepisectví*, p. 215 ff.

111 Grüttner, Michael: Machtergreifung als Generationskonflikt. Die Krise der Hochschulen und der Aufstieg der Nationalsozialismus. In: vom Bruch, Rüdiger – Kaderas, Brigitte (Hg.): *Wissenschaften und Wissenschaftspolitik: Bestandsaufnahmen zu Formationen, Brüchen und Kontinuitäten im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart 2002, pp. 339–353, esp. p. 352.

ways within the department or discipline and only to a certain extent.<sup>112</sup> Trávníček had more of an ad hoc approach to the Humboldtian love of scientific truth and was only lukewarm towards the humanist camp's ethos of *universitas*.

## The shield of discipline continuity

The case of Trávníček is not that exceptional in Czech science. Josef Petráň places another two greats of Czech linguistics on the same level – the rector of Charles University, Jan Mukařovský, and the dean of Prague's Faculty of Arts, Bohuslav Havránek. “*Like so many other intellectuals after the liberation of 1945, they had to decide which side of the fence to sit on.*” (...) These were cases of “*distinguished scientists who – despite not being communists before the war – joined the side of the ‘progressive forces’ because they understood the ‘logic of history’.*”<sup>113</sup> Petráň has a great deal of understanding for the difficult situation faced by these pro-regime academics and does not hide the fact that this is for personal reasons. He presents Mukařovský and Havránek as academics who were in the “thrall of the regime”, and who destroyed the careers and lives of colleagues for ideological reasons, but who also tried to defend their subjects and the careers of other talented scientists from attacks by “apparatchiks”, as Petráň calls those who evidently did not share the Humboldtian ethos of an academic.<sup>114</sup> They stood apart from the Humboldtian university culture, disrupting and threatening it. This category also contained a whole discipline – that of Marxism-Leninism and its related subjects, including the history of the international workers' movement and political economy.<sup>115</sup> Workers in these disciplines were quietly denied the position of insiders by the academic community, though the regime outside considered them as people who would oversee the correct ideological management of the university. This was despite the fact that many of those who worked in the ideological departments also taught subjects which were considered fundamental by the academic community, in particular history, philosophy and sociology. The Czechoslovak Communist Party tried repeatedly to break the isolation of the ideological departments from other academics, but without much success. Here the Humboldtian defence reflexes worked well.<sup>116</sup> In 1974, the apolitical character of “true science” was again singled out as the main failing at universities which the Czechoslovak Communist

112 Uhde, Milan: *Rozpomínky. Co na sebe vím.* Brno 2013, pp. 52–76; Šlosar, Jan: *Jaké hlavy, takový jazyk. Rozhovor o češtině a o životě vedli Jiří Trávníček a Jiří Voráč.* Brno 2008, pp. 37–38, 43 ff.

113 Petráň, *Filozofové*, pp. 208–221, here p. 217.

114 *Ibid.*, pp. 244–245.

115 Urbášek, Pavel: *Vysokoškolský vzdělávací systém v letech tzv. normalizace.* Olomouc 2008, pp. 76–78.

116 Archiv UK, Ústav sociálně-politických věd, box V/53, i.d. 471, 475.

Party had been unable to tackle.<sup>117</sup> The distance between the “ideological” and “scientific” disciplines was apparent in the defence of the thesis, particularly with externals. They would usually not perceive any differences between the two kinds of disciplines, but during the defence of their thesis they would become all too well aware of whether they were entering a “temple of science” with their work, or if it was more on an ideological level.

One example of the defence a thesis in history at Brno University’s Faculty of Arts in 1960 was that of Captain Josef Domaňský, a worker at the Department of the History of the Czechoslovak Communist Party at the Antonín Zapotocký Military Academy. His candidacy was supported by strong political arguments as Domaňský was an active communist who had done a great deal of teaching and propaganda work. The title of his work was “*The origin of the people’s democracy of Czechoslovakia*” and the examination committee consisted mainly of pro-regime figures from the faculty (historian Bedřich Šindelář, professor of Marxism-Leninism Gustav Riedel, etc.), people who were considered by the academic community as borderline cases for political-ideological integration into the academic culture. The commission judged the objective of the thesis to be unacceptable – the author described it as “*strengthening the class education of our workers*”; and the commission also objected to the non-scientific character of the thesis, and that due to its “*sloganeering, it is a summary of lectures and propositions*”. In some of their statements the examiners were acting within the spirit of university tradition, placing them as guardians of scientific purity and reliability. These people, though, were not top-class scientists – from the examination committee, only Šindelář was widely respected within his field at the time. And there were limits to this respect for tradition. In spite of the scathing professional assessments, the thesis was not entirely rejected – they only stated that it would be impossible to defend it in the discipline of history...but they recommended that the candidate ask for it to be recognised at the department of scientific communism.<sup>118</sup>

However, if we ignore the relatively small group of ideologically disciplines, the dividing line between the disciplines which collaborated with the totalitarian regimes and those which suffered under them is very unclear and had been artificially created in order to defend the interests of disciplines by using the Humboldtian myth of pure science. Several disciplines exist which would not have become established in universities had it not been for the help of a totalitarian regime, projecting its specific interests onto them. The discipline, therefore, served the regime, but the regime also served the discipline. Typical representatives of this group of disciplines were psychiatry, Eastern European history and Slavonic studies, atomic physics, aerodynamics, genetics and sports medicine. Some strongly

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117 *Některé zkušenosti z práce SSM na vysokých školách*. Prague 1974, p. 28.

118 AMU, Fond A2, Filozofická fakulta, k. 1, CSc., i.d. 1/9.

ideological subjects simply changed their name – for example, the treatment of hereditary illnesses had been established during the Nazi era as racial hygiene. A large number of professors from this discipline did not even change the titles of their lectures during the period of political-ideological reversals.<sup>119</sup>

## The shield of historical memory

“Humboldt” plays an important role when analysing the historical memory of the academic community. Its function is to act as a shield which deflects the many doubts about the dishonourable, inhumane or disloyal behaviour of academics confronted by the pressure of the regime. The myth immunizes the academic community against its own guilt, transferring it outside of the university walls. It presents an exalted vision where evil cannot coexist – it has to be brought there from the outside. Shortly after the arrival of the front in 1945, the senate of Göttingen University sent the representatives of the occupying forces an address: “... *the reasons for the recent disruption of scientific activities did not have their origins in the university grounds*” and so the professorial body “*is making every endeavour to follow the centuries-old tradition of the German university in the sense of idealism and universalism*”, whose “*spirit can best thrive through the preservation of the university’s autonomous administration*”.<sup>120</sup>

Czech universities know a very similar story from 1989–1992 when they were coming to terms with the legacy of the communist regime. Special academic bodies – rehabilitation and ethical commissions – were set up for this very purpose at the universities in Prague and Brno. One key theme was how to compensate academics who had been expelled from university by the regime and whether – and how – to deal with those academics who collaborated with the regime or were directly involved in its repression. From the outset the atmosphere was tense, while the dramatic differences in the interpretation of historical memory greatly disturbed the post-revolution leadership of the universities and faculties. In the name of unity and calm within the academic community, academic dignitaries tried to transform that atmosphere as quickly as possible: “*The emotionally precarious contradiction, which I would term ‘the worker on the inside – the worker waiting outside’, has*

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119 Walker, Mark: The Nazification and Denazification of Physics. In: Kertz, Walter (Hg.): *Hochschule im Nationalsozialismus*. Braunschweig 1994, pp. 79–91; von Knorre, Dietrich – Penzlin, Heinz – Hertel, Wieland: Der Lyssenkoismus und die Zoologie in Jena. In: Hoßfeld, Uwe – Kaiser, Tobias – Mestrup, Heinz (Hg.): *Hochschule in Sozialismus. Studien zur Geschichte der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena (1945–1990)*, Band 2. Köln – Weimar – Wien 2007, pp. 1166–1180; Linnemann, Kai Arne: *Das Erbe der Ostforschung. Zur Rolle Göttingens in der Geschichtswissenschaft in der Nachkriegszeit*. Marburg 2002.

120 Weisbrod, *Dem wandelbaren Geist*, p. 26.

*to disappear as quickly as possible,*” wrote the vice-dean in terms of restructuring the management of Charles University’s Faculty of Arts.<sup>121</sup>

Over time the activities of these commissions focused mainly on quelling passions, “*so that a wave of blind hatred did not sweep over the faculty*”. Only a few of the commission members did not understand the strategy of the leadership of the two universities, led then by people from the anti-communist dissident movement, who, in the spirit of the “velvet” slogan from November 1989 “we are not like them”, refused to intervene significantly against those from the academic community who had cooperated with the regime, preferring instead to pension off the main culprits. However, the Brno rector Milan Jelínek was in a more difficult position than the Prague rector, Radim Palouš, as he was criticized for his membership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (1945–1969) and his prominent role at the university in the first twenty years of the communist regime – which was seen as the reason for his alleged excessive leniency towards the communists. It was said that Jelínek created an atmosphere at the university which was “*more conducive for the culprits than the victims.*” The rector indignantly defended himself, referring to the “*inquisitorial practices*” of some commissions. In the cases of both Prague and Brno, the situation was quickly brought under control, at least from an outside perspective. Those academics who demanded a radical break from the past found themselves isolated from the rest of the academic community in 1991–1992. Without the support of the students, who after the exertions of the revolutionary year of 1989–1990 began to lose interest in politics, it was impossible to establish a programme which would thoroughly reflect on historical memory. Although for the general public the issue of academics’ participation in the evils of the communist regime was quietly set aside ad acta, and the academic community once again shielded itself under the cloak of dignified unity, this did not mean that historical memory ceased to influence internal university debates, though unfortunately more of the backstage intrigue variety.<sup>122</sup>

Prominent academics from within the structures of the communist regime often apologised for their behaviour by referring to the creation of “Humboldtian” space, where high-quality scientific research could be carried out freely during a challenging period by providing political cover for persecuted colleagues. A similar “sacrifice” for the maintenance of “academic freedom”, at least within the limits of the department or discipline, was given by many an academic functionary from the time of the communist regime, as can be seen in more than one post-revolution laudation or obituary. Here “Humboldt” provides both an alibi and a feeling which is usually interpreted by the discipline as solidarity and pro-

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121 Jareš, Jakub – Spurný, Matěj – Volná, Katka: *S minulostí zúčtujeme. Sebereflexe Filozofické fakulty UK v dokumentech sedmdesátých a devadesátých let 20. století*. Prague 2014, p. 586.

122 Ibid, pp. 604–606; Archiv Masarykovy univerzity, Fond A3 Lékařská fakulta, box. 2, sign. B.VI/2.

tection, which help to defend the freedom of research and teaching during times of repression.

Who was protected in this way and who was not? This protection could be enjoyed by individuals who did not get involved in politics and who anxiously avoided any direct confrontation with the regime. It required from them at least a minimal level of cooperation in the symbolic form of attending the regime's rallies, meetings, volunteer work, etc. It was also important for them to adapt their research themes, at least outwardly and formally, to ideological requirements – usually citing one or two classic Marxist-Leninist paragraphs would suffice, inserted before the main body of a work which otherwise had little in common with ideology. The researcher's private religious beliefs did not necessarily matter, nor did a petit-bourgeois or kulak background, nor did the fact that they were in contact with people who were openly opposed to the regime. However, "Humboldt" failed to defend the students, who were treated much more harshly in terms of ideology than university employees; there was no protection for political dissidents and rebels, or for solitary researchers straying off the beaten track of science without regard for the academic community or ideological regulations.

German historiography has demonstrated how unwilling universities were to deal with their Nazi past. Here historians talk about an asymmetric remembrance of the collaboration with the Nazis, which although affecting the aristocracy, the army and the industrial oligarchy, had nothing to do with universities (together with the church), which made the smooth transition to operating "normally", utilizing the moratorium granted by society thanks to the Humboldtians. This moratorium ended approximately twenty years after the fall of Hitler's regime and was linked to the generational change in the academic community.<sup>123</sup> Here the Humboldtian myth once again functioned as a selective means of defence. With the tacit approval of the Western Allied powers, the professorial bodies closed ranks around the Humboldtian principles of autonomy and politically independent science, claiming as one to have been the victims of Nazi despotism. After the war very few academics spoke out about the German universities' share in supporting the Nazi regime. One of them was the philosopher Karl Jaspers, who had been persecuted by the Nazis in the 1930s and 40s because of his outspoken views and his wife's Jewish background.<sup>124</sup>

It was only with political upheavals and the university crisis of the 1960s that another chapter was added to the lengthy appraisal by Central European academics of what "Humboldt" is and is not. The new social movements, in particular the politicized youth, demanded a comprehensive revision of the history of West German universities and the identification of those from the academic community

123 Weisbrod, *Dem wandelbaren Geist*, pp. 23–26.

124 Ash, *Konstruierte Kontinuitäten*, pp. 240–242.

who had been prominent in the Nazi regime. The students also came out strongly against the system of the “professorial university”, demanding shared decision-making powers.<sup>125</sup> The student rebellion was targeted mainly at representatives of the humanities and social sciences, in particular the nationalist conservatives who had openly collaborated with the Nazis, and targeted the weakest point of the entire Humboldtian narrative – the fact that the humanities demonstrated the greatest willingness to collaborate with political authorities in order to strengthen their position within the university and with the public, a position which had been weakened by the gradual, general “farewell to Humboldt”. The 1960s also saw attempts to establish in universities social-science disciplines which had previously been rejected by professorial committees, who referred to their overtly political foundations, normally based on US models (e.g. transcultural, gender and environmental studies). Their left or left-liberal ideological bases were supposed to be a guarantee of university equality in allegedly traditionally conservative disciplines and professorial committees.<sup>126</sup>

At this time in Czechoslovakia there was also tension within academia as a result of attempts to identify the political interference in universities during previous eras, specifically the Stalinist ideological deformation of academia, which in a certain sense brought an end to the debate which had briefly taken place in universities in 1956–1957. This was a revision of the communists’ anti-Humboldtian programme in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and a return to the tradition of “pure science”, restricting the influence of ideology on scientific research and relationships with countries from the capitalist bloc. As for the students, one notable phenomenon in the mid-1960s was the democratization of access to courses, which was similar to trends in the West. However, students did not face economic obstacles, as in Germany or the USA, but ideological obstacles which had previously sought to generate a new elite of the socialist intelligentsia. Unlike in the West, therefore, there was no anti-elitist conflict with the relics of professorial influence in universities, as this had already been destroyed with the communists’ assumption of power in 1948–1949. In the long history of coming to terms with Humboldt, it is possible to see the Czechoslovak reforms of 1967–1969 as a very brief episode aimed at renewing the classic Humboldtian traditions, primarily in relation to scientific research, ideology and power. Naturally, the process of the Czechoslovak reforms was so short and chaotic and linked to the local character of the relationship between the university and the political powers that it had little influence on the future development of the theme in Central Europe. With one exception. Although the small gains in scientific independence were quashed by a resurgent Communist Party after 1969, the episodic liberalization in Czechoslo-

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125 Ibid, pp. 240–242.

126 Menand, Louis: *The future of academic freedom*. Chicago – London 1996, pp. 4–5, 17.

vak science in the 1960s remained deeply etched in the memory of the academic community; first and foremost as an era of contrast compared to the ideological repression which came both before and after, rather than for developing ideals and concepts. Due to the haste of the reforms and the reformers' different interests, they never became part of the university tradition and were not referred to after the fall of communism.

Mitchell Ash noted that the continuity in handing over the Humboldtian narrative was always linked to people from the university or discipline who saw themselves as being affected less by political power than the academic dignitaries at the level of rector and dean.<sup>127</sup> It is also necessary to take into consideration that the staff purges carried out by the regime were always more extensive in the humanities than in the less politically orientated science and medical disciplines, which every regime needed to maintain in operation. The personnel changes in East German universities after 1945 were quite drastic, helped as they were by the voluntary departure of many academics to the western part of the country. Ralph Jessen shows that the turnover in staff in East German science was at 83%, albeit with large differences in the disciplines.<sup>128</sup> Although different authors give different figures, in comparison with Czechoslovakia and Poland, the continuity in personnel at East German universities saw the greatest disruption.<sup>129</sup> The personnel changes associated with both the rise and fall of the communist regimes in Czechoslovakia and Poland do not even come close to the aforementioned figures. Here the cohesion of the academic community was exceptionally high and the defence mechanisms worked well. One typical justification in the memoirs of actors from the revolution in 1989 would be a reference to the character of the people involved ("a nice person"), while their political affiliation and career within the regime's structures were marginalised. Ash points to a great amount of shielding, using strong words such as truth, freedom and democracy within these defence mechanisms.<sup>130</sup> In Czechoslovakia and Poland, unlike in Germany (for understandable reasons), there were many references to the nation: "national

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127 Ash, Mitchell: Zum Abschluß: Bedeutet ein Abschied vom Mythos Humboldt eine „Amerikanisierung“ der deutschen Universitäten?, In: also (Hg.): *Mythos Humboldt. Vergangenheit und Zukunft deutscher Universitäten*. Wien – Köln – Weimar 1999, pp. 253–266, here p. 257.

128 Jessen, Ralph: *Akademische Elite und kommunistische Diktatur. Die ostdeutsche Hochschullehrerschaft in der Ulbricht-Ära*. Göttingen 1999, p. 261 ff.

129 Ash, *Konstruierte Kontinuitäten*, p. 241; John, Jürgen: Der Mythos von „rein gebliebenen Geist“: Denkmuster und Strategien des intellektuellen Neubeginns 1945. In: Hoßfeld Uwe – Kaiser, Tobias – Mestrup, Heinz (Hg.): *Hochschule im Sozialismus. Studien zur Geschichte der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena (1945–1990)*. Band 1. Wien – Köln – Weimar 2007, pp. 19–70; Jeskow, Jan: Die Entnazifizierung des Lehrkörpers an der Universität Jena von 1945 bis 1948, In: *ibid.*, pp. 71–95; Herrmann, Hans Peter: *Krisen. Arbeiten zur Universitätsgeschichte 1933–2010 am Beispiel Freiburgs i. Br.* Freiburg i. Br. – Berlin – Wien 2015, pp. 79–127.

130 Ash, *Konstruierte Kontinuitäten*, p. 243.

science”, “bravery at a time of national oppression”, “of the people, close to the wide strata of the nation”, “a worker in national science”.<sup>131</sup>

After 1989, membership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party was not one of the major issues in the staff purges – unlike the NSDAP, the Communist Party was not declared a criminal organization. Membership of the party amongst Czechoslovak professors and senior professors was commonplace, and it was hardly surprising that this community, under pressure from political changes, closed ranks around the principle of shared historical experience and their defence of Humboldtian academic freedom against ideology. This argument, understandably, did not apply to the so-called ideological departments which were more or less immediately thrown overboard by the academic community, marked as being those responsible for the university’s decline. The academics symbolically listened to the calls from the students of the revolution, and expelled some of its members who had been too closely linked to the regime, while accepting several former dissidents as a symbol of purging and reconciliation.<sup>132</sup> However, there were no widespread personnel changes, despite the fact that some of the anti-communist forces within the academic community had called for them. After the political pressure from the radical students began to wane, the post-revolution university management applied a more conciliatory approach towards the subaltern members of the old regime. After all, a number of the new university dignitaries had personally known the prominent political professors, and some of them had also found it difficult to deal with their ties to communism. If we look at those who left university after the revolution in 1989, we see they were people who had abandoned the “Humboldtian traditions” by abusing the power structures, by showing a willingness to place ideology above science and by being too close to the political and ideological structures of the regime. In short, the boundary between those who suffered as a result of the revolution and those who came out unscathed, or who even improved their careers, was unclear and permeable.

At the forefront of the apologists’ argument was someone who had sacrificed themselves for their discipline by accepting a political function and thus taking on the role of protector of more vulnerable colleagues. This was also backed up by ideological sources, where even high-standing academic functionaries were accused of trivializing the lack of class politics and Bolshevik toughness in strategic as well as personnel issues, hiding behind the concept of academic freedom and allegedly unbiased scientific positivism. In 1960 the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education stated that “*there has appeared in our universities a tendency to promote ‘academic freedom’ and an ambiguous attitude towards the teaching profession,*” and “*one of*

131 E.g. Archiv UK, Akademický senát 1882–1945, k. 17; Archiv MU, Fond B100, Otakar Borůvka, i.d. 818; Ibid fond A., RMU II, k., sign. 3357/49; k. 2, sign. XIV.

132 Archiv MU, fond Rektorát A II/2, k. 53, sig. 53/1; ibid. fond Lékařská fakulta A3, k. 9. sign. BVI/2.

*the main dangers is the positivist interpretation of scientific and social-scientific issues.*"<sup>133</sup> After the fall of communism and Nazism it was possible to escape censure for having collaborated with the regime if you were able to call on a well-known opponent of the regime. Naturally, everything had to be embedded within the narrative of science suffering under a despotic regime.<sup>134</sup> Jaspers' reminder to his colleagues from Heidelberg University that their collaboration with the Nazi regime had not been as passive as they tried to make out, is considered to be one of three exceptions in the whole of Germany and Austria.<sup>135</sup> In a Czech context, only the memoirs of Václav Černý are similar in scale.<sup>136</sup> In other memoirs we tend to find only minor references where the author has the courage to touch on politically sensitive issues, or the memoirs might have been left with family members with the proviso that they were to be published thirty years after their death. Therefore, the real impetus for dealing with the impact of communism on universities has had to come from a younger generation of researchers.<sup>137</sup>

## The shield of academic freedom

Let us move away from Central European university culture, which was so sorely tested by changes in ideology and regimes in the 20th century: Louis Menand used very similar language to speak about American universities and the instrumentalization of the Humboldtian contribution to academic freedom. He points to the elasticity of the concept when faced with the political pressure connected to the Cold War and the conservative wave of McCarthyism, which left American scientists in a similar dilemma to their Central European colleagues. Academic freedom came under further pressure at the end of the 1960s and the start of the 1970s, when according to many academics, the university's main mission was to fight against all types of inequality and racism, including all indications of democratic conservatism or American Republicanism. In 1996 – i.e. a long time before the anti-liberal revolt of American voters, labelled Trumpism by commentators – Menand stated that the majority of Americans thought that universities were hiding behind the shield of Humboldtian academic freedom in order to spread

133 Národní archiv, Fond MŠK, k. 27, zápisy z jednání kolegia ministra z 28.4. 1960 a 5.5. 1960.

134 vom Bruch, Rüdiger: Kommentar und Epilog, In: Weisbrodt, Bernd: *Akademische Vergangenheitspolitik. Beiträge zur Wissenschaftskultur der Nachkriegszeit*. Göttingen 2002, pp. 281–288, here p. 286.

135 Jaspers, Karl: *Erneuerung der Universität. Reden und Schriften 1945/1946*. Heidelberg 1986, p. 100; Ash, *Konstruierte Kontinuitäten*, p. 243.

136 Černý, Václav: *Paměti III. 1945–1972*. Brno 1992.

137 Spurný, Matěj – Jareš, Jakub – Volná, Katka: *Náměstí Krasnoarmějců 2. 2: Učitelé a studenti na Filozofické fakultě UK v období normalizace*. Prague 2012.

the “*truth of multiculturalism and postmodernism*”. Menand argues that universities alienate themselves from the rest of society with their stubbornly defended privileges, their existence paid for by public budgets, and by being out of touch with reality. Accordingly, this ideological concept has no hope of being generally accepted by Western societies.<sup>138</sup> The focus of criticism is the *Codes of Politically Correct Speech*, which in their extreme form caricature the ideal of academic freedom in a “colour-blind discussion” as the way towards an ideologically conceived vision of an absolutely equal society. Even the minorities who are supposed to be defended by these codes sometimes respond negatively to them. Kurt Shell presented the example of the Black Power Movement, celebrating everything black as beautiful (Africanization of names, afro hairstyles, etc.); including radical speeches, where all whites are labelled as racists and murderers.<sup>139</sup> The situation in British and European universities is not so different today, though unlike the USA the universities here share the dream of the Western European left about a liberal Islam and the possibility of completely integrating migrants into the secular model of Western society.<sup>140</sup>

In this light, the defence of a university’s political independence using Humboldtian references would seem to be a very problematic area of debate. Humboldt’s late-Enlightenment legacy did not survive the rise of democratizing movements at the end of the 19th century, in particular the “age of extremes”, as historians have labelled the 20th century. At the start of the 21st century, academia has been unable to reach a consensus on how to update the old-fashioned Humboldtian arguments – at least their two main linchpins – which would stand up to the conditions of the 21st century. Today Humboldt has become a slogan where anything goes.

The debate has become all the more complex because the very concepts of democracy and political alignment have undergone a crisis in recent years, particularly in their liberal definitions, and thus it is difficult for a university to define its position within this turbulent landscape of public discourse. The university community likes to refer to Humboldt when setting itself up as the guardian of democracy, or as an island of absolute democracy from where it can criticize the rest of the world and set it to rights using democratic criteria, despite the fact that the public no longer sees it in this role. The public suspects academics of promoting their own economic and political interests and placing the academically defined natural law of “Good” above the positive-legal norms emerging from the deci-

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138 Menand, *The Future*, pp. 4–5, 17.

139 Shell, Kurt L.: Die amerikanische Universität und die Herausforderung durch den Multikulturalismus. In: Steger, Hans-Albert – Hopfinger, Hans (Hg.): *Die Universität in der Welt, die Welt in der Universität*. Neustadt an der Aisch 1994, pp. 27–44, here p. 32 ff.

140 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/12059161/Politically-correct-universities-are-killing-free-speech.ht> (18.7. 2017)

sions of democratically elected parliaments. The fact that the majority of Western European universities appear to be left or liberal-left leaning is seen as evidence of the ideological character of universities and their disregard for the principle of objectivity, which academics like to refer to under the banner of Good and Truth. The uncertainty and defensiveness of left-wing forces in the West today has resulted in academics being charged with rewriting the results of democratic elections through their commitment to the left. In this light, the instrumentalization of the Humboldtian legacy appears as an attempt by academics to strengthen their position in a tumultuous public debate where radical opinions abound.

In comparison with their colleagues in the third world and even the USA, the mission of university communities in Central Europe is unclear. Although universities in places such as Indonesia, Thailand, India, Latin America and Africa, have accepted the principles from the classic European university model – i.e. its organisational structure, course system and titles, it is when it comes to political neutrality that the universities of the “third world” choose another path. From their foundation, these universities have grown from an ethos which was anti-colonial and on the political left, whether democratic (including Catholic) or radically revolutionary.<sup>141</sup> The nationalist-leftist orientation of universities in many third-world countries is reinterpreted according to the political situation, and is strongly present in university culture, albeit not explicitly expressed in official documents.

According to its conservative critics, the university mainstream openly talks about the university’s mission as the fight against racism and all forms of inequality and discrimination – i.e. the highly political agenda of the liberal left.<sup>142</sup> However, this tends to be in a less overt form in official declarations concerning the mission of American public universities, where the specialist-organizational and efficient vision of academic capitalism is at the forefront. However, in places such as the University of Baltimore, the code still contains the declaration to “*continue to cultivate a community that values diversity, equity and inclusion*”.<sup>143</sup> How that is subsequently implemented depends on the personal political affiliations of university dignitaries.

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141 Shils, Edward – Roberts, John: *The Diffusion of European Models outside Europe*. In: Rüegg, Walter: *A History of the University in Europe*. Volume III. Cambridge 2004, pp. 163–230.

142 Menand, *The future*, p. 17.

143 [http://www.ubalt.edu/about-ub/docs/Strategic%20Plan\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ubalt.edu/about-ub/docs/Strategic%20Plan_FINAL.pdf), p. 7 (16.8. 2017).

## A shield against globalization

The declared mission of Central European universities usually treats the theme of political commitment with great care. The changes in regime and ideology in Central Europe throughout the 20th century provide a warning against political activism, and the academic community is very wary about ideological interference in science and teaching, albeit that even here there are differences amongst disciplines, and the social sciences in particular do not erect as many barriers as other disciplines. Overall, though, Central European universities are the most firmly rooted in Humboldtian traditions. As a result of their historical experiences, they place special emphasis on the vision of freedom of research and autonomous university administration. For example, as part of the definition of its mission, Poznań University's central motto is "*In looking to the future we do not forget our traditions*". It is tradition – the realization of the social good through science and teaching – which forms the central axis of that treatise. Another typical feature is an emphasis on regional and, to a lesser extent, national ties. This was strongly present in the original Humboldtian cultural context, though it was discredited by the Nazi regime in Germany, the heart of the Humboldtian university tradition. However, it is through these ties that the University of Poznań has been a standard bearer of educational traditions in Poznań and Greater Poland (Wielkopolska), though the national motif is used carefully and sensitively in the sense of being committed to creating a cultural legacy. The most politicized definition of its mission can be seen in a declaration on the values of democracy and pro-European ideas – though not explicitly the European Union – in the document *Magna Charta Universitatum* from 1988.<sup>144</sup> Comenius University in Bratislava has an even more "Humboldtian" mission, taking another step away from political interference. This is linked to service to the homeland and nation, and it even uses the title of "*national university*", which in Western Europe, and Germany in particular, is usually viewed with scorn.<sup>145</sup> In the introduction to its mission, Ljubljana University defines its identity as being strongly linked to the national ideal, i.e. "*the consolidation of national identity with the development of specialist Slovenian terminology*."<sup>146</sup> The Ivan Franko University of Lviv uses "National" in its title, immediately declaring its position as a defender of Ukrainian national identity. The university museum is an interesting attempt to maintain high-quality courses and research after hundreds of years of terrible political conditions in this peripheral area of Europe – in the 20th century alone the dramatic changes in regime cost many lives, with the

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144 [https://amu.edu.pl/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/239755/STRATEGIA-ROZWOJU-UAM\\_NOWELIZACJA.pdf](https://amu.edu.pl/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/239755/STRATEGIA-ROZWOJU-UAM_NOWELIZACJA.pdf), p. 10 ff. (15.8. 2017).

145 [https://uniba.sk/o-univerzite/poslanie/\(15.8.2017\)](https://uniba.sk/o-univerzite/poslanie/(15.8.2017)).

146 [https://www.uni-lj.si/o\\_univerzi\\_v\\_ljubljani/poslanstvo\\_\\_vrednote\\_in\\_vizija\\_ul/](https://www.uni-lj.si/o_univerzi_v_ljubljani/poslanstvo__vrednote_in_vizija_ul/) (15.8. 2017).

university being renamed three times.<sup>147</sup> The mission of Brno's Masaryk University is introduced with the preamble "*Masaryk University's mission is to create and expand knowledge which will develop society's quality of life and culture. This comes from the values upon which the university was founded.*" This also leaves us unclear as to what a university's mission might be in relation to political authority. What is again important here is the reference to rather idealized interwar conditions and values of democracy, interpreted carefully in a slightly liberal-left concept without being too specific: *From this emancipatory (Czech national – author's note) beginning then grew the democratic character of the First Republic Masaryk University, later suppressed by the Protectorate and the communist regime. And it is from this initial direction that the values of the university are based today, evident in the accent on democratic values and humanity, an accent which can be seen in activities such as the inclusive nature of the education, strengthening the university's international links and supporting voluntary civic initiatives by the students.*<sup>148</sup> Therefore, the Humboldtian myth in the countries of Central-Eastern Europe has undergone a similar form of modernizing, though it is still firmly attached to the values of a regional and national identity. Within the political-cultural context of the countries of Central Eastern Europe, it is a theme which has been widely shared across society and the great majority of political camps. The viability of the Humboldtian narrative in the 21st century lies within the social acceptance of its moderately optimistic ethical vision.

There is a widening gap in Central European university culture between the missions of some German universities and those in Central Eastern Europe, as well as in the German provinces. In Germany, more so than in its eastern neighbours, the mission reflects the global aspect of competition which management is tied to. There is more political commitment and a progressive account of the Humboldtian myth, as well as a clear separation from the traditionalist-conservative aspects of Humboldtianism, in particular its national (Prussian and German) aspects. One of the most publicly committed schools from the Central European university tradition is the Freie Universität Berlin. At first sight its university motto of *Veritas, Iustitia, Libertas* seems to refer to Humboldtian ideals, but under the surface it is a substantial reinterpretation and modernization of the old vision. "Humboldt" is conceived of in such a modern way that it instils the feeling amongst traditionalists that it has been repudiated. However, a more accurate interpretation is that the Freie Universität, strongly rooted in the leftist traditions of the city of Berlin, is narrating the Humboldtian myth from a leftist-activist perspective. It extracts from an almost exhausted historical tradition some elements of Fichte's idealism and reinterprets them in the spirit of the liberal-socialist ideas

147 <http://www.lnu.edu.ua/about/> (14.6. 2018).

148 [http://www.muni.cz/media/docs/1110/Dlouhodoby\\_zamer\\_MU\\_2016\\_2020.pdf](http://www.muni.cz/media/docs/1110/Dlouhodoby_zamer_MU_2016_2020.pdf) (15. 8. 2017), esp. p. 5.

of the 21st century. In Central European terms, the Freie Universität stands out due to the description of its mission as being socially committed, again in the spirit of the European liberal left: gender equality, dual career paths with ties to the family, ecological responsibility, inclusion and so on. Discursive elements emphasizing the example of American universities' efficiency are muted, the mission's regional link is absent, and unlike the universities in Central Eastern Europe, the national aspects are treated with great caution as a result of the Germans' historical experience with a nationally conceived polity.<sup>149</sup>

## Conclusion

The example of the Freie Universität Berlin, as with other universities in Central Eastern Europe, goes against Ash's theory of the culturally pessimistic form of the Humboldtian myth, and points to the possibility of another life for this mythical narrative – though, of course, in a radically different form. This myth has not disappeared from universities in Central Europe, as there is still a strong demand for its role as a “shield”. It may even shake off its defensive role and lose some of its culturally pessimistic features. There are two directions in which this narrative might develop – either in a moderately conservative form with links to national identity as a source of security and protection in the uncertain world of globalization, or it will be restricted to a leftist and left-liberal political subculture in a politically and ideologically polarized society, attached to the values of autonomous administration, academic freedom and democracy.

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149 <http://www.fu-berlin.de/universitaet/profil/gesellschaft/index.html> (16. 8. 2017).