Exploring narratives of non-faculty professionals in neoliberal higher education: A cultural appropriation perspective on librarians

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how the rise of the new public management (NPM) culture in higher education affected librarians. Librarians are a central part of the traditional intellectual model of academia, whose professional ethos is challenged and threatened by the new market-oriented culture. Using a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews with managers and professional staff of academic libraries at a public university, the present study provides insights into the perceptions of non-faculty professionals on the infiltration of NPM into higher education. Our findings reflect a cultural appropriation of integration taking place under the dominant NPM, resulting in a hybrid traditional-NPM culture. Theoretical and practical implications of the effect of NPM on professional staff of academia are offered.

Keywords: Cultural appropriation, higher education, new public management, neoliberalism, non-faculty, profession

1. Introduction

Higher education worldwide is undergoing a massive transformation that some say is unparalleled since its modern institutionalization, a century ago (Schuster and Finkelstein 2006). In recent decades, business schemes and mind frames have reengineered public organizations and transformed the identities of employees working in these organizations (Deem and Brehony 2005). The change that is said to have originated in neoliberal ideas promotes practices associated with "new public management" (NPM), as it is reflected in public organizations (Olssen and Peters 2005), including higher education.

NPM is defined as a range of business-related strategies aimed at promoting the performance and efficiency of public sector organizations (Behn 2001; Pick, Teo, and Yeung 2012). Embracing NPM as a governance and managerial model in higher education often lead to fundamental cultural changes. NPM challenge and confront key ideals and values on which the traditional model of higher education is based (Deem and Brehony 2005), such as open intellectual enquiry (Olssen and Peters 2005). Academic staff is often described as the captive of a new hegemonic market and of managerial discourse in higher education. Some studies, however, suggest that academics have an ability to shift, negotiate, and recreate their job definitions with the aim of producing alternative discourses (Trowler 2001). The effects of a market-oriented culture on professionals in higher education were explored primarily among academic faculty, and investigation of the effects of this change on non-faculty professionals is less frequent.

The present study traces the perceptions of librarians at a public university (managers and professional staff) about their profession within the NPM culture. Two

research questions were posed: (a) What meanings do participants attach to the interaction of the NPM culture and traditional professional library culture? (b) What elements in the participants' narratives played a role in promoting these meanings? The contribution of this study to the literature on NPM in higher education is twofold: first, it offers a cultural sensemaking account of how professionals in higher education cope with the neoliberal culture externally imposed on them, which is currently missing in the literature; and second, it expands the limited knowledge on non-faculty professionals operating in neoliberal higher education. Specifically, the study proposes insights that are currently lacking into the cultural restructuring of the collective professional logic of non-faculty in general, and of academic librarians in particular, in the context of neoliberal higher education. By exploring these aspects, we seek to expand our understanding of how non-faculty professionals in higher education experience cultural clashes with NPM.

2. Literature review

To better understand the influence of NPM on higher education Hilgers (2011) distinction between three approaches is most helpful: (a) government-oriented (studying optimization technologies that focus on a self-regulating form of subjectivity and on the regulation of populations for maximizing productivity); (b) systemic (functional exploration of the network of relations between various positions in society); (c) cultural (shared beliefs and practices or ethics of life in certain groups or domains). These approaches seem to be highly relevant to the understanding of the various strategies used by organizations when coping with neo-liberal values invading their areas, including those associated with NPM in other fields.

In Western countries, NPM reforms have become a popular way of boosting the efficiency, accountability and productivity of public services (Pick, Teo, and Yeung 2012). Diefenbach (2009) described NPM as targeting five core areas in public sector organizations: (a) business environment and strategic objectives, (b) organizational structures and processes, (c) performance management and measurement systems, (d) management and managers, and (e) employees and corporate culture. Our review of the literature on NPM in higher education indicates that NPM is explored primarily from the point of view of the government-oriented approach, and rarely from that of the cultural approach.

2.1. Government-oriented NPM research in higher education

Embracing NPM in public organizations in general, and in higher education in particular, usually occurs in competitive contexts nationally and internationally. NPM is based on neoliberal assumptions such as the rational, economically self-interested individual, and the free market as the most efficient and moral mechanism for regulating socio-economical exchanges (Olssen and Peters 2005). According to NPM supporters, competition is the driving force of a linear chain of causes and effects, with increased rivalry leading to increased responsiveness, flexibility, innovation, greater diversity, productivity, efficiency, effectiveness and quality (Marginson 1997).

NPM in higher education has been documented in various, particularly Western, countries, including Australia (Pick, Teo, and Yeung 2012), the USA (Slaughter and Cantwell 2012), and the UK (Olssen and Peters 2005). At the organizational level, higher education organizations undergo important changes associated with the rise of neoliberalism, among them (a) the emergence of a new

institutional leadership that focuses on strategy and is change-oriented, (b) the adoption of corporate-like procedures (plans, target goals, incentives, etc.), (c) the transformation of governing councils into corporate-like boards in composition and discourse, (d) the marginalization of collegial viewpoints in decision making, and (e) the modification of the traditional disciplinary organization (Olssen and Peters 2005; Veiga, Magalhães, and Amaral 2015).

Critical scholars have argued that NPM is more than a set of technical changes in higher education, as it brings about a "fundamental shift in the way universities and other institutions of higher education have defined and justified their institutional existence" (Olssen and Peters 2005, 313). NPM is therefore perceived as instigating a broad cultural change in higher education organizations.

2.2. Cultural research of NPM in higher education: Professionals in a cultural clash

A second approach to NPM is the cultural, which involves the influence of the deeply rooted values and beliefs shared by members of a certain organization on professional groups, and on the power to shape professional understandings and actions locally (Bloor and Dawson 1994). Scholars define profession as including several key characteristics: (a) theoretical knowledge as a basis for skills, (b) skill-related training and certifying examinations, (c) members' autonomy and control over their work, (d) a professional code of ethics, and (e) a self-governing professional organization of peers (Abbott 1991). Based on these elements, professionalism consists of two types of schemas: conscious ones, which shape professional conduct in prescribed

situations, and unconscious ones, which shape professional conduct in unprescribed situations (Bloor and Dawson 1994).

The professional intellectual culture in higher education has been transformed under performative NPM pressures affecting professional careers and daily work practices (Olssen and Peters 2005). One such line of research demonstrates the transformation that took place in academic profession by highlighting the structural elements reshaping professional autonomy. For example, Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) illustrated this change in the USA using higher education survey data of three decades. Their analysis identified the restructuring of professional procedures in appointments and routine work. Researchers also explored how the restructuring initiatives leading to standardization, together with social processes of socialization and the treatment of deviance, have transformed the traditional understanding of employees (Hermanowicz 2011; Olssen and Peters 2005). A second line of research based on the cultural approach emphasized the experiences of academic staff in the face of NPM. The rise of NPM in higher education often leads to a state of turbulence, as individuals feel that they do not fit into the new corporate managerial culture. Several works that investigated the professional identities of academics in higher education under NPM have reported that participants described an intense struggle between academic and managerial values (Harley 2002; Henkel 2005; Winter 2009). Most of the studies perceive NPM as an external constraint that can either be accepted or rejected by faculty members (Deem and Brehony 2005; Harley 2002) overlooking other possibilities of reaction.

Focusing mainly on cultural clashes between NPM and higher education institutions, most of this literature has overlooked the variety of other professional groups, which may experience the new dominant culture differently due to the

existence of distinctive subcultures of occupational communities (Van Maanen and Barley 1984). Academic librarianship is a professional case of particular interest in exploring the effect of NPM.

2.3. Academic Librarianship in the 21st century

Since the mid-1990s, academic librarians and libraries have been experiencing a series of dramatic changes that reshaped the landscape of their work. First, the introduction of new digital technologies has allowed libraries to provide readers with more content, faster, and more effectively, but at the same time, it subverted the traditional role of the library in accessing content, thus unsettling the core "techno-cultural" foundation of the profession (Abram and Luther 2004; Manoff 2015). Second, the social belief about the inherent value of knowledge was undermined by the spread of neoliberal beliefs that view knowledge as a commodity and a tool (Buschman 2007; Lawson, Sanders and Smith 2015). Third, economic and cultural pressures, aligning with business logic, have affected the values and arrangements of higher education institutions, as governments increased pressure to promote an instrumental orientation in higher education, in the hope of enabling countries to compete in the global knowledge economy (Shore 2010).

Technological changes, the growing popularity of neoliberalism, and the rise of NPM in higher education have forced academic librarians to "constantly justify their worth to university administrations, municipalities, and corporate trustees to ensure continued funding and self-preservation" (Eisenhower and Smith 2010, 314). Two main reactions have been identified in response to this situation. First, academic libraries started to embrace a new business-like operational model, emphasizing

(Quinn 2000) efficiency (e.g., self-check incorporation of machines, preference of access over ownership), calculability (e.g., focus on quantity of library inputs and outputs, as a substitute for quality), predictability (e.g., reliance on approved plans), and increased social control (e.g., use of technology as a regulatory mechanism).

Second, these changes affected not only the operational model of academic libraries but also the profession itself, so that librarians must be metadata specialists (Calhoun 2007), cyber literate, entrepreneurial, multitasking, immediate feedback oriented, and driven by a need for challenge (Buschman 2007). Recent critical studies have directly linked these changes in the academic librarianship profession with the new neoliberal focus in higher education (e.g., Beilin 2016; Buschman 2017; Lawson, Sanders and Smith, 2015). These descriptions are often based on external observation rather than on participants' narratives, and suggest a binary dichotomy between traditional professional culture and NPM culture among librarians. The literature still lacks a cultural sensemaking account of how academic librarians cope with the external neoliberal culture imposed on them. This lacuna exists also in the broader literature on non-faculty professionals in higher education. The sociological framework described below can prove most useful in filling this lacuna.

3. Cultural appropriation of a framework for exploring professions in higher education under the NPM culture

Cultural appropriation is "the use of a culture's symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture" (Rogers 2006, 474). According to Rogers, in all forms of cultural appropriation, actors are proactive in making elements from the other culture their "own", but cultural appropriation can be manifested in

different ways, and under different circumstances results in different outcomes.
Fostering the notion that cultural clashes inherently reflect power structures between
two competing cultures, Rogers' (2006) typology of "cultural dominance" seems to be
the most suitable type of cultural appropriation for discussing the effects of NPM on
higher education and its professional staff. Cultural dominance is defined as a
situation in which elements of the dominant culture are imposed on a subordinate one.
Under cultural dominance, the "sending" culture usually has greater access to media
and to political, economic, and military resources, in a lasting manner that forms
power supremacy. The members of the subordinate culture, who are subjected to the
new cultural demands, negotiate how to appropriate (i.e., use, adopt, and manipulate)
the imposed cultural elements. These reactions, by individuals or a collective, can
have several manifestations (Rogers 2006): (a) assimilation, leading to a complete
restructuring of identity, values, and philosophies; (b) integration, which involves
internalization of a part or all of the dominant culture, or a fusion of the two; (c)
intransigence, which involves open resistance to use elements of the dominant culture;
(d) mimicry, which involves the behavior of practicing the elements of the dominant
culture without internalizing it; and (5) covert resistance, which is a concealed form of
opposition to adopting aspects of the dominant culture, at times with reflective
awareness of the colonizing effects of the dominant culture. Based on this typology,
the present study explores how librarians appropriate NPM culture.

4. Method

To examine how library managers and staff interpret their professional role under
NPM culture, we base our analysis on a qualitative methodology, which is well-suited

to examining the subjective point of view of individuals operating within a specific frame of meaning (Patton 2001). The research protocol was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of our institution, and approved for human subject research.

4.1. Context of research

The study focuses on the academic library system of a leading public university located in a Israeli city. The university library system has evolved in the early 20th century and gradually expanded to include dozens of libraries, most of them small departmental ones. In 2002, following a major reorganization, many of the 25 separate libraries were consolidated into larger ones, a Library Authority was established, and the computerized library catalogs were merged into a single unified catalog. Furthermore, personnel was reduced by half and a comprehensive physical renovation was carried out. Today, eight large libraries operate at the university in four campuses. In the present study we included participants from the Library Authority and five libraries on three campuses.

4.2. Participants

Participants included 20 interviewees from a public university: eight managers (of academic libraries or at the Library Authority), 10 professional staff members[1] of academic libraries, and 2 former managers. Eighteen of the participants were women.

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[1] Staff members were professional librarians, as confirmed by library managers and the participants' job descriptions. In Israeli public universities, professional librarians serve in tenure-track librarian positions, and often hold (or are expected to complete) an MA college degree in library science or a related field (e.g., information studies). Several participants interviewed began as non-tenured paraprofessionals in the libraries (e.g., loan assistant, catalog assistant), and progressed to professional positions.

Using snowball sampling, we initially approached present library personnel, and based on recommendations of the initial participants, we completed the sampling by approaching former managers who were considered to have played a key role in the institutional history of the library, and to have insight into the changes that have occurred. The final sample of participants provided a rich source of information on the phenomenon being investigated (Paton 2001). The authors approached participants directly by email, and asked them to participate in the study.

4.3. Procedure

Based on a narrative inquiry, which is common in social science (Clandinin 2007), we rely on the assumption that individuals make sense of experiences by forming a story that involves generating meaning through processes of attention, selection and interoperation (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber 1998). Narratives often include a plot that develops over time to provide an explanation of a phenomenon (Clandinin 2007). The methodology of narratives is ideal for exploring the interaction of professional identity with culture, because narratives often reflect individuals' identity and its relations to community or social structures (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber 1998). The narratives of participants were collected by semi-structured interviews (Paton 2001). Both authors participated in the majority of the interviews as co-interviewers. Interviews ranged between 60 and 150 minutes, and most of them were conducted at the library. Our original interest, which also guided the site selection, was the aesthetic regeneration of the academic libraries at this particular university, and the new norms and activities emerging there, which were groundbreaking in the Israeli academic landscape when initiated, a decade ago.

Interviewees were informed about the aim of the study, and participants were asked to tell their own story of the changes that academic libraries underwent in the preceding decade, and to elaborate on the meanings they attribute to these changes, on their responses to the changes, and on their actions and views prompted by these changes. Next, participants were asked to describe their role as librarians and to reflect on the emotions aroused during the change, and on the meaning they attached to their profession in the past and in the present. NPM was not explained or addressed directly, but it quickly rose to the surface during the interviews, as a prominent process in the changes that occurred. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

4.4. Analysis

Although narratives are stories, the essence of the stories is obscured by its raw textual form. Therefore, the analysis aims to uncover the internal regularity of the story, as well as the storytellers' selection and interpretation processes providing a reasonable explanation for them (Clandinin 2007). The analysis included three stages (Giorgi 1975): (a) the interviews were coded into basic categories of meaning, and each category was labeled; (b) basic meaning categories were grouped into themes; and (c) based on all the stories collectively, a new meta-account was formulated, aiming to elucidate the studied phenomenon. The analysis was conducted by the two authors separately, and the few disagreements that emerged were discussed jointly until agreement was reached.

5. Findings

Two principal themes emerged from the interviews, revealing the perceptions of interviewees regarding the profession of librarians at the university, following the shift toward NPM culture: (a) the role that survival narratives played in facilitating and promoting the adoption of the NPM culture and (b) the hybrid traditional-NPM culture created at the university (i.e., a group of three professional components: the autonomy to provide service, entrepreneurial collegiality as a resource, and competition as a code of ethics).

5.1. The role of survival narratives in facilitating and promoting the adoption of the NPM culture

Our data suggest that interviewees' perceptions of their current work and professional identity are related to past canonical events in the world of libraries. The digitalization of academic journals, together with computers becoming an inherent part of academic studies were viewed as key factors in the drastic reduction in the number of visitors at the library. According to participants, these events led to "disastrous" scenarios, in which academic libraries were being closed. They mentioned international and local disaster stories. One conversation with a library manager illustrates the centrality of the disaster myth:

> They eulogized the libraries, and the fact that they still exist. Once they thought that everything will become electronic, and many institutions rushed to close down their libraries. Harvard or Yale, I can't remember now... Forty-five libraries were closed. Here [in our country] we had a university that closed their central library; there is no central library there.

Interviewees who were part of the library system in the late 1990s witnessed such disastrous closings. For example, the following recollection shows the emergence of such a perception: "Once there was a time that the queue for book loans stretched from here [the counter] to Honolulu… But then we started to see fewer people coming to the library." An interviewee from the Library Authority provided a quantitative description to this memory: "We monitored the statistics and saw the declining student numbers at all times. It went down by tens of percents. This was very significant, statistically significant." Interviewees even witnessed such a disaster first hand: "There was a library here that was very active in the eighties. It was very massive, with many budgets. And the Internet rather changed it, and the university closed it down and rented out the space." "At other libraries at the university, they took entire floors, they said 'we need classrooms more than we need a room for journals, and they took it.'" In the eyes of many of our interviewees, their new professional identity is a natural adaption, necessary to avoid disasters and to survive them if they occur.

5.2. A hybrid traditional-NPM culture

The culture reflected in the interviewees' accounts was that of a hybrid between the traditional culture of the library with that of NPM. This hybrid culture stood on three professional pillars: (a) autonomy to provide service (i.e., viewing professional control as constrained to address only the quantitative and qualitative aspects of service); (b) entrepreneurial collegiality as a resource (i.e., viewing a self-made spirit of collegiality as a fundamental professional resource); and (c) competition as a code

of ethics (i.e., considering comparison as a guide to right and wrong professional conduct).

Interviewees expressed a strong sense of pride in their new hybrid culture, which was manifested in statements such as "I am very proud of the library I manage because of the change we are leading… We were able to understand it very early and we were the first to act". Others tended to appropriate this new hybrid culture by embracing and endorsing it: "We believe we need to speak the language of our customers" or "I want you to get the best service you can have. When I receive a complaint, I take it very seriously, and I always say that a complaint is an opportunity for initiative. I can learn from it what I can improve." Many participants portrayed their "local" culture as being a groundbreaking development in their professional field, both at their own university and at the national level, influencing other universities. Comments as such "we were the first to introduce the use of…" "we were the first library at the university to…" "we developed the concept of …" or "representatives from other libraries come to see our…" frequently emerged and reflected the participants' self-perceptions as pioneers, and the strong level of mission they sensed promoting the new hybrid culture within the professional community. Some interviewees attributed the formation of the hybrid culture to a wider context of cultural change. One staff member said: "The client is important; this [idea] reached the university, department secretaries, and the same thing in the libraries, and this is different from what it was 30 years ago." Another staff member commented: "I'm not sure that the role definition [of librarians] has changed, but the spirit has. It's something in the [organizational] culture of the entire university with regard to students. They pursue students to get them to study here, and the library also wants students to be here."

5.2.1. First professional pillar: The autonomy to provide service

One of the central themes that came up repeatedly in the interviews is the notion of service-orientation as a core belief in the interviewees' current professional ideals as is revealed in the following excerpts:

> We look the students in the eye, and ask ourselves whether we know who they are. We segment our audiences, [then think,] what service do we need to give them?

> We see the library as a place that should provide a service experience, good service. For us, providing service are not idle words, we believe in it and try to think about the small details.

Interviewees expressed similar ideals of customer service when referring to the library as a place where "one can feel at home." One interviewee mentioned that she read in a professional journal about the concept of "one-service-environment" and was struck by the idea.

Interviewees presented the transformation of traditional professional autonomy into the autonomy to provide service of their own will. For example, one account involved a library manager who decided, together with the employees, to use name tags. The interviewee stressed that this was "part of our service perception, no one at the university was forcing us to do it." Another staff member commented: "No one told me I need to be more accommodating toward the students, a less 'traditional' librarian, [but] I personally saw the importance of [quality] customer service." Although many stated that students of the new generation are more demanding than they were in the past, another cause of the change in culture has to do with the selection of the staff: "Today we don't choose new librarians by professionalism [as the leading criterion] but by human relations."

The fact that service has become crucial to the librarians' identity is reflected in practices that focus on self-improvement intertwined with self-regulation. The following excerpt illustrates this:

> We constantly engage in how to improve… What could be done better… How do we learn from previous [experiences] to improve our outcomes… We are constantly working on self-regulation, regulation by ourselves of what we do, of our professionalism, we try very hard.

Interviewees mentioned, for example, that they greatly rely on their annual customer service survey to guide their work goals. It appears that the discourse of self-improvement has also been integrated into their routine work in the form of formal feedback channels, such as emails sent to students, and informal feedback channels such as *ad hoc* students' comments. One manager noted: "At our staff meetings, once a month, we study together the conclusions drawn from students' feedback. We are a learning system." Another manager described a different approach:

> "[We learn about the students' needs through] surveys and our rounds in the library. We speak with students all the time, so we learn from them."

As a result, the upgrading and expansion of service have become goals in themselves, as evident form the next excerpt:

> We listen to our customers, and we examine past cases, and each time we want to learn how to do it better. I think that's the secret of our success, and it will be the key for our future. We can't sit on the sidelines... We made a conceptual change; we changed physically; we made a change in personnel, so we reached the top. Now the problem is where to go from here?.. We need to find the next thing; That's problematic."

Participants emphasized that they carefully selected their areas of expansion, as they wished to "maintain the 'librarian character' of the library, the high level that should be in the library, and the proper context of activities." Therefore, interviewees in general expressed a strong tendency to hold to a minimum the features they regarded as being at the fundamental core of the traditional librarian profession.

5.2.2. Second professional pillar: Entrepreneurial collegiality as a resource

Questioning the interviewees about changes in their profession brought to our attention the rise of a new model of collegiality. This model was viewed as being linked to dramatic cutbacks in the staff of the libraries. One interviewee estimated that in the six years he served as CEO of Library Authority, the staff was reduced by half. This was the result, among others, of the fact that "the function of every person who retired was not filled unless there was no choice." One staff member expressed a similar idea: "Today, there isn't one librarian per floor, there's one person at the counter in the entire library, and it's a financial constraint that one person must replace a librarian on each floor."

A veteran library manager compared the work models of past and present:

> [Past] librarians were lazy in my opinion, in retrospect; they had a very good life. The team here today is working a lot harder than in the past.

> We also made a change in the structure of the workforce: today people are more multi-functional... In the past, a person could concentrate on a very specific job. Loan librarians, only on loans... Today it's not like that; you try to give them [training in] everything.

The new work model is considered to be as a necessity in the current work environment in higher education. The following exchange exemplifies this point of view:

> Interviewer: "How come there is no money, but you [librarians] are able to be more productive?"
>
> Interviewee: "We cannot afford to lower our quality. We are fighting for our existence. We are all fighting for our existence. So, we work more, and get more done, or else..."

Coping with the dramatic cutback in personnel and with the increased workload, that is, with growth driven by the ongoing attempts to upgrade service, is accomplished by adopting an elastic management of staff assignments, combined with a culture of collegiality. The shared projects are often framed as the expression of entrepreneurial spirit, therefore projects are not "merely" work but a natural expression of individuals' internal desires and abilities, and their way of creating meaning at the workplace:

> Each librarian has a topic under his/her care, but they do everything. What does it means doing everything? They have shared projects. We believe in teamwork, in joint projects. This is actually our strength.

Adoption of service as a key goal has been associated also with increased accessibility of the library staff to students. Many libraries took advantage of the renovation to remove the walls of personnel offices and replace them with glass partitions. This change has been suggested to make it possible for all staff to be available even when they were preforming routine non-service tasks, so that they were always able to communicate with their clientele. Interviewees also described new platforms of communication used to promote the accessibility of the staff, including WhatsApp and web chats.

5.2.3. Third professional pillar: Competition as a code of ethics

Interviewees argued that students have the power to affect the internal processes of academic libraries. These perceptions reflect the dominance of the market logic inside the bastion of higher education, where competition between the sub-units of institution is encouraged. This point of view is echoed by the next excerpt:

> This is a free market; the target audience [students] does what they feel is comfortable for them […] If I don't adapt to their needs, they will go; If I won't be nice to them, if I don't give them what they want [they will say], bye. I keep fighting... for my clients.

The cultivated sense of competition, as described above, is viewed not only as a product of student behavior. Rather, as suggested by some of the interviewees, competition has become a central organizing logic of libraries because of the managerial tactics and the win-lose culture of the institution:

> "There is competition [between libraries]; it is a legitimate competition; this university has created the model… it is in the form of the overt and covert management tactics of the university…. if you do more you'll receive more resources than other libraries"

The logic of competition, promoted either by student behavior, university management, or both, has led to librarians embracing competition as an ethic of self-regulation. In other words, librarians adopted competition as a standard for differentiating between right and wrong in their work. In answer to the question "what will happen if in five years from now students stop physically coming to the libraries," managers responded that they will examine what's happening in other places to educate themselves about their own situation:

> Look... if it [students stop physically visiting the libraries] happens to all the libraries… I mean, if my competitors at other libraries in the university... or my colleagues at other universities… and I will know students arrive there and not to me.. It's like, I have two cups: one empty and one full. In the empty one, something is wrong. If you tell me, all the cups are empty, I'll say 'okay, let's find a different purpose for ourselves. '"

This ethics is also present among staff members: "If there is a library in the USA that uses virtual reality glasses… And once it proves itself in other places, we need to have it."

Accepting competition as a code of ethics is coupled with increased practices of marketization. Interviewees described using classical marketing tools such as logos, promotional products (branded pens and bags), banners, and advertising slogans. They also addressed the growing use of social media (Facebook, Twitter) to promote the branding and visibility of their libraries. As part of embracing competition as a guiding code, participants stressed their awareness of the need for marketing and promoting their library. This notion surfaced in the following responses: "We're not [marketing] professionals, but we try to do everything with what we've got. Today we must all be commerce-oriented" and "It's true that we are not a business, but we think of ourselves as a product that needs to be marketed."

6. Discussion

The interaction between NPM and professional culture in higher education has been scantly explored and greatly under-theorized. This lacuna is particularly noticeable with respect to traditional, non-faculty intellectual professionals, such as librarians,

operating within the higher education system under NPM norms. The findings of the present study provide a multifaceted account of the type of cultural appropriation taking place in the current professional perceptions of librarians, under NPM culture.

The present work confirms previous research on the transformative effect of NPM on public organizations, particularly on the meanings employees ascribe to their work (Deem and Brehony 2005). Interviewees acknowledged key changes in core elements that have been associated in the literature with the essence of the profession (e.g., work autonomy, collegial control, and code of ethics). But unlike the common binary description of transformation of professions in higher education (e.g., with regard to librarians, Beilin 2016; Buschman 2017; Lawson, Sanders and Smith, 2015), the preset work describes a more complex process. The participants' viewpoints on changes in their professional work under the NPM culture seem to reflect cultural integration, as a new hybrid traditional-NPM culture is taking shape. Our analysis indicates that the elements of NPM culture (values, symbols, rituals, and technologies) were internalized by the librarians and integrated into their professional identity and daily work. These include aspects that are consistent with the classic features of NPM, such as individualistic values of consumer sovereignty, competition, and initiative, as well as methods of monitoring (Olssen and Peters 2005). We note, however, the subtle power relations behind such a cultural encounter that does not represent a cultural fusion. In the hybrid culture that we documented, "one has been absorbed into another, which remains largely unchanged as a result of the encounter" (Delanty 2011, 645). This finding also explains the difference between the present narratives and those reported in past research regarding the negative emotions that NMP elicited in higher education professionals (Harley 2002; Thomas and Davies 2005) and librarians (Sloniowski 2016).

Our interviewees reported a new, multifaceted identity emerging against the historical background of disastrous scenarios for academic libraries, associated partly with the rise of digitalization (Martell, Moran, and Saunders 2000). These myths cultivate the professionals' instinct of survival, and appear to play a key role in producing the willingness to absorb elements of the dominant NPM culture into the traditional librarian culture. Professional cultures in higher education, particularly those in post-crisis situations, are less likely to withstand the pressures of the external culture. Thus, our findings refute previous research suggesting that professionals in higher education have considerable ability to negotiate and produce alternative discourses (Trowler 2001). Note, however, that these earlier studies addressed mostly academic professionals (Schuster and Finkelstein 2006).

Our findings indicate the presence of a thematic coherence in the interviewees' narratives. The librarians present the change in their professional core not as abrupt but as a natural extension of past focus. These findings contrast with studies suggesting that such change is experienced as a dramatic process, challenging core values of traditional professionals in academia (Shore 2010). Service is an excellent example in this regard. The focus on service quality in academic libraries is not new (Nitecki 1996), but competitive pressures, together with new technologies, made user satisfaction a matter of occupational survival, as a tight link emerged between user satisfaction and usage of library facilities (Simmonds and Andaleeb 2001). This reflects a fundamental change in service strategy. The literature suggests that service can be used as an organizational tactic, that it can be general (i.e., customer service), and it can become a cornerstone of organizational culture and highly specific (i.e., service as a product) (Mathieu 2001). The interviewees' experiences of providing quality service and improving it as a natural part of their work is at odds with the deep

strategic change in the centrality of service in their professional culture. Psychological research suggests that coherent and continuous narratives are adapted to maintain the self in light of dramatic changes (McLean 2008). Therefore, it is not surprising to encounter professionals who present NPM changes as natural extensions of their traditional professional culture.

The findings of the study have practical implications both for those supporting NPM in higher education and those resisting it. The study supports earlier findings about the role of the managerial layer in promoting NPM (Deem and Brehony 2005), and emphasizes the cultural domain. Institutions of higher education wishing to promote NPM culture should not only empower library managers to change work patterns, but also invest resources in mobilizing cultural change. Managers require material resources and support to promote the deep changes in symbols, beliefs, and values needed for cultural integration of non-faculty professionals, consistent with NPM in higher education. The main HR processes for accomplishing cultural change are the selection and socialization of personnel (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2015). At the same time, the study also offers insights for those opposing NPM in higher education. Critical scholars calls on academic librarians to be counterhegemonic and resist the corporatization of higher education and its distortions of knowledge, often by using discursive resistance (Bales and Engle 2012; Eisenhower and Smith 2010; Lawson, Sanders and Smith 2015). The present findings, however, focus attention on cultural processes. For example, as an extension of the current framework and findings, it is reasonable to argue that the accumulation and application of cultural capital at an occupational level (e.g., Sela-Sheffy 2005) is vital for resisting the NPM culture. Cultural capital includes cultural resources (material and symbolic) that promote social status in a stratified context (Bourdieu 1990). Cultural anthropology

and sociology research can help form a better understanding of the bottom-up process of accumulating cultural capital by professional communities.

In sum, the present research provides a new understanding of the cultural change occurring among non-faculty professionals in higher education. Although the research produced important insights about the meanings assigned by academic librarians to their profession under the NPM culture, it should be noted that the qualitative nature of the study makes it difficult to generalize the results to other contexts. Note further that caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to various populations (Firestone, 1993), such as other academic librarians who have faculty status. Nevertheless, the insights of the study can be used in analytical generalization and case-to-case transfer generalization (Firestone, 1993). It is difficult to assess whether elements in our interviewees' narratives are related to the institutional arrangement of public universities in the country, the historical situation at the university under study, the librarians' individual personalities, or other factors. Further research on these issues is recommended. We also recommend using, in future explorations, the cultural appropriation theory (Rogers 2006) presented here as a meta-framework for describing the wide range of effects of NPM culture on professions in higher education.

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