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Althoff, Martina; Dollinger, Bernd; Schmidt, Holger

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Fighting for the “Right” Narrative: Introduction to *Conflicting Narratives of Crime and Punishment*

Martina Althoff, Bernd Dollinger
and Holger Schmidt

Introduction

Narratives are a constitutive part of the talk of crime. Whenever an event is interpreted as “crime” and reactions to it are determined, stories are established. Events are described, responsibilities ascribed,

M. Althoff (✉)

Department of Criminal Law & Criminology,
University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands
e-mail: m.althoff@rug.nl

B. Dollinger

Department of Education & Psychology,
University of Siegen, Siegen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany
e-mail: bernd.dollinger@uni-siegen.de

H. Schmidt

Department of Social Education, Adult Education
and Early Childhood Education (ISEP), TU Dortmund University,
Dortmund, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany
e-mail: holger3.schmidt@tu-dortmund.de

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justifications sought, alternative interpretations evaluated, etc. In other words, crime is contested by devising and rejecting narratives. Narratives are linguistic and cultural patterns of the construction of crime that organise the production of crime. By “patterns” we mean that narratives do not simply exist. They are established and negotiated in social and institutional processes. Some narratives can be established in these processes in the longer term, others will be forgotten or wither. This is a conflictual process. But what exactly it means to link narratives and conflicts in the context of criminality and punishment has hardly been examined in detail so far, and this is what this volume seeks to illuminate.

Narratives

Our starting point is the observation that for a narrative understanding of crime it is necessary to consider conflicts or questions of hegemony and subversion to a greater extent than has hitherto been the case. In order to explain this more closely in the following, we first describe our view on narratives, then we go into more detail on conflicts or rather the question of what can or should be regarded as hegemonic or subversive.

So what do we understand by narratives? First, it should be noted that there is little consensus on this term (Ryan 2008a). Narratives are understood very differently. Nevertheless, key points that are often associated with narratives can be stated, such as *that they are a special form of linguistic (or textual) communication*. To place narratives (or stories, as used synonymously here) at the centre of analysis follows a linguistic turn that does not merely see communication as a representation of a non-verbal reality, but ascribes a particular intrinsic value to narratives (Nash 1990). The currently growing interest of criminologists in stories and storytelling goes back to the assumption that narratives create a specific form of crime reality: they are to be taken seriously because they constitute crime as such or at least make it communicable without simply depicting it (Presser 2009). Accordingly, *crime is not spoken about, but crime is spoken*. There may be “objective” events, e.g. physical actions

that lead to the injury of one person by another. However, such events only become “violence” or “crime” if they are related in a special way. This relation concerns form and content:

In formal terms, certain conditions must be met for crime to be narrated. Events must be given a certain form so that they can be narratively understood and represented as crime. With reference to narrative theories (e.g. Bruner 1991; De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012; Ewick and Silbey 1995; Polletta et al. 2011) we emphasise three formal aspects: relationally connected participants, activities, and characteristics; a relatively high communicative value, and a temporal sequence.

Firstly, narratives of crime provide *relationally connected participants* including peculiarities attributed to them such as responsibility, motives, and actions (Dollinger 2020): perpetrators harm others, victims suffer, policemen investigate. Offenders bear responsibility, victims do not. Offenders have a motive, victims usually do not. Without such actors, activities and characteristics, one can hardly speak of “crime” (Watson 1976). Secondly, narratives mark an event with these participants and attributes as something special, because *the event is worth telling*. Narratives assign events a value of “tellability” (Ryan 2008b): minor events are not told, but dealt with as routine or they are—at most—reported, but not related to as a story; if there is a story for an event, it has to be of interest to a more or less large circle of people. Something has happened that is worth becoming the subject of a story. Criminality often has a particularly high tellability; in media and politics, crime is a recurring theme (e.g. Greer 2005; Simon 2007; Surette 2011). Thirdly, as a narrative, an event is given the form of *a temporal course* (Labov and Waletzky 1967). If no change over time becomes apparent, it would not make sense to speak of a story; it is the most important formal characteristic for identifying narratives. Narratives imply movement or change, whereby in the case of crime the time-bound actions of people (sometimes of organisations or institutions) are communicated: something is stolen; someone is murdered, deceived, injured, lied to, aborted, betrayed, and much more. What these very different forms of action have in common is the assumption of a temporal sequence. The situation before the narrated event is different from the situation after the

event, because, in the meantime, according to the narrative, an offence has occurred.

In addition to formal features, crime narratives can be identified *by their content*. The formal roles, activities and characteristics of the participants mentioned can vary in their content depending on the respective story. Sometimes it is assumed that there is a given set of narratives with specific roles. According to this view, the limited cultural spectrum of possibilities to tell stories can only be varied by individual narratives, while the core stories themselves are fixed. In relation to crime and especially to perpetrators, Youngs and Canter (2012) mention four possible narrative roles of a perpetrator: as a powerful revenger who fights against external resistance; as a tragic hero struggling with fate; as an actor driven by external circumstances and alienated from other persons; as a powerful and professional actor. Other scholars reject the idea of a limited, culturally predetermined set of narratives. They instead derive from the assumption that narratives are situation- and context-dependent constructions which therefore need to be reconstructed from the respective interactions of a narrative process (c.f. De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012; Sacks 1995). The focus here is on how people are indicating to each other that they are telling a story, which, furthermore, has a specific meaning for them. Depending on the context of a narration, different contents are negotiated, whereby in the case of “crime” the violation of criminal law norms always becomes a topic. For this reason, the relevant stories usually contain (at least) perpetrators and victims as well as a related, temporally aligned actions of these two role holders. The evaluation of this action—or non-action, if applicable—is usually unambiguous: crime is something forbidden, i.e. the narrated actions are evaluated negatively. The pejorative meaning can be modified in individual cases, for example if crime is understood as a kind of resistance, as fun or emotional stimulation (e.g. Ferrell et al. 2015; Katz 1988). Nevertheless, this ascription only varies the underlying narrative scheme, according to which crime itself is to be assessed negatively. Crime narratives therefore do not have any arbitrary content—and yet crime can be told in very different ways (Dollinger 2020). What is meant by “crime” varies greatly according to historical

and cultural conditions. Moreover, there are often different versions of an event at a certain place at a certain time.

In view of these differences and (possible) conflicts, the credibility of stories must be justified and negotiated (Nünning 2015). Whoever speaks of crime is confronted with the task of convincing others of a certain course of action, of assigning roles (of perpetrators, victims, witnesses, etc.), of attributing responsibilities, etc. This can take place in “small” informal publics, such as in an everyday conversation, or in highly formalised contexts such as a court hearing. In any case, what “really” happened must be told credibly and plausibly. Alternative ways of telling an event must be delegitimised so that a particular story can be credible. Stories of crime have a special characteristic compared to many other stories: although crime is often the subject of controversy and there are numerous narratives of crime and punishment, there are still instances—despite all the contradictions and contingencies of relating crime—that make ultimate decisions about which narratives are “right” (Barrera 2019). Criminal justice has the authority to determine which actions can be identified as crime and should be sanctioned. Judges act as decision-makers on the truth of narratives, even if they are controversial and although it is clear that people in court present *their* story with special interests because they want to influence a trial in their favour (Komter 1998).

The cultural embedding of crime stories deserves special mention in this context. Narratives of crime never stand alone; there are no purely individual stories, just as little as there is a “private language” that can only be understood by one person (Wittgenstein 1953/2010). Crime is a social construction and a cultural event, and even a judge can only speak law within a certain culture and legal system. In democracies, the jurisdiction—albeit within the framework of a separation of powers—must be linked to a publicly monitored and legitimised rule of law and to criminal policy guidelines. In this sense, a judgement only makes sense because it is embedded in institutional and cultural contexts. The dependence on contexts also applies to narratives of individual “perpetrators” or “victims”. These narratives refer to cultural backgrounds which make the narratives understandable, be it by friends, a judge, a social pedagogue or someone else. Narrators employ categories and

semantics that are accessible to others and that can be used by them to explore and evaluate the meaning of a crime story. And besides institutional and individual narratives, the dependence on context is also true in the case of public or collective narratives, i.e. crime stories that are, for example, told by the media who cannot (arbitrarily) reinvent new stories. Instead, media agents compile the material available to them (Althoff 2018). The very different contexts of storytelling make it possible to assume conflicts or at least a high potential for disagreement, as there are manifold situations and institutional or everyday contexts in which crime is discussed. Whoever tells a crime story has to direct it towards the respective contexts and the relevant audiences so that it is, and can be, perceived as a “convincing story”. It is precisely because narratives aim to persuade and to negate alternative ways of telling an event that conflicts are of central importance for a narrative analysis of crime.

Counter-Narratives and Hegemony

In the realm of conflicting narratives, we are—in the words of narrative theory and research—dealing with dominant or master narratives as well as counter-narratives. Power relations turn out to be analytically valuable when it comes to differentiate among these concepts: according to Ewick and Silbey (1995), narratives are socially organised phenomena that can only be communicated meaningfully within the framework of historically specific cultural contexts. Narratives are irrevocably linked to the production of meanings and the power relations expressed in this specific production. Stories are therefore not told by chance, their contents are determined by social norms and conventions, and this also applies to how and why stories are told. Similarly, Andrews (2004) and Bamberg (2004) stress that the hegemonic character of master narratives results from the fact that they structure social reality as “pre-existent sociocultural forms of interpretation” (Bamberg 2004, p. 360). They establish actions and events as routine, thus giving them the appearance of normality and naturalness, “with the consequence that the more we as subjects become engaged in these routines, the more we become subjected to them” (Bamberg 2004, p. 360). At the same time,

master narratives provide orientation in everyday action, without which subjects would not be able to act.

According to Ewick and Silbey (1995), the hegemonic character of some narratives also results from their ability to function as a mechanism of social control. Hegemonic narratives have the potential to occupy consciousness and reproduce social inequalities and power relations without this becoming particularly visible. An important aspect here is that hegemonic narratives exclude alternative narratives. The contingency of narratives is made invisible: "The events seem to speak for themselves; the tale appears to tell itself" (Ewick and Silbey 1995, p. 213). Hegemonic narratives seem to express what is self-evident; they make their connection to particular contexts and perspectives unrecognisable. Subversive narratives, on the other hand, make this connection transparent: subversive narratives are narratives that show that narratives are bound to special contexts and power relations, that they are not only solely individual, but that people always live and act in special social contexts. Where hegemonic narratives conceal their linkage to context, subversive narratives show that in legal communication, for example, a purely individual attribution of responsibility and guilt is inadequate, since people are always socially embedded. Subversive narratives thus make visible what hegemonic narratives suppress; subversive narratives "break the silence" (Ewick and Silbey 1995, p. 220).

The relationship between hegemonic and subversive narratives should not be thought of as dichotomous, but as more complex (Bamberg 2004). Often subversion does not consist of simply telling the opposite of what is predominant, but of using individual pieces of established narratives and changing them, placing them in new contexts, equipping them with new meanings, and so on. Hegemonic views are constantly readjusted, partially modified, and oftentimes subversively undermined. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) explain, hegemony is not rigid. It encompasses different demands and articulations, which are made equivalent in a certain way. Differences and contradictions, however, always remain. A special feature of a hegemony is that it encompasses differences and can thus be flexible. Hegemony can permit subversion which it "organises" and uses for adaptation. Without subversion there would be no hegemony.

But of course hegemonies can actually be hollowed out. Associated with the concept of counter-narratives is the notion that personal stories “resort to and corroborate, but also resist and subvert, socio-culturally dominant master narratives” (Bamberg 2008, p. 288). Irrespective of this analytical aspect, the aim of critically questioning current narratives and their social functions (e.g. maintaining the power of the narrators) and thus denaturalising them follows an emancipatory agenda. According to Delgado (1989, p. 2414f), counter-narratives have the potential that they “open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live [...]. Counterstories can quicken and engage conscience”.

In order to exploit this potential, entirely new stories about an event in question do not always have to be told. It can be more promising for narrators to connect to existing master narratives. In this sense Bamberg (2004, p. 363) states that “there are always certain aspects of dominant stories that are left intact, while others are reshaped and reconfigured. Speakers never totally step outside the dominating framework of the master narrative, but always remain somewhat complicit and work with components and parts of the existent frame ‘from within’”.¹ Accordingly, the sentence formulated above—according to which there would be no hegemony without subversion—can be reversed: subversion presupposes hegemony, and in most cases, subversion should contain at least parts of hegemonic narratives (Hannken-Illjes 2012). Apart from exceptions, hegemonic and subversive narratives are usually not entirely contrary to each other, but are more or less integrated. It is therefore not easy to decide when subversion actually goes so far as to

¹A good example can be found in the context of prisons: In this setting, a “conversion story” (Järvinen 2000) can be regarded as a hegemonic expectation that prisoners are facing. According to this narrative figure, an—institutionally accepted—life story implies an (apparently) inevitable decline in which the “remorseful” narrator has hit “rock bottom” but now is “ready to better him- or herself”. This narrative is sometimes opposed by stories told by prisoners that may follow a similar plot, but in which the narrators prove to be “headstrong” and far more self-determined actors than the rather limited narrative rules of the prison would usually enable them to be: They reject the institutional expectations and the associated subject positions for themselves; the narrators thus “saddle up” on hegemonic narratives, but rewrite them individually (cf. Schmidt 2016, p. 73).

undermine and counteract hegemony, especially in view of—as Polletta (2006) points out—the often existing ambiguity of narratives. In order to establish that a narrative is, for example, hegemonic or a counter-narrative (or other), value judgements are required that should be made transparent.

Reflexivity and Normativity

As suggested at the outset of this chapter, narrating crime and punishment is a persuasive activity; the same applies to the scientific examination of crime. The question of which version of an event is more “convincing” and “credible” than another can be relevant for research. In criminalistics (or forensics) and also in parts of criminology it is regarded as an important task to decide which representation of an event is “true”. Yet, for narratively oriented criminologies, on the other hand, this analytical stance appears somewhat difficult (Sandberg 2010). Distinctions such as those between “true” and “false” or “believable” and “exaggerated” stories are not primarily descriptive, but make normative decisions. Those who say that one narrative is more “credible” or “more realistic” than another attribute a higher value to it and devalue other versions of narratives. Such attributions prove to be difficult for narrative criminologies, since they are based on specific evaluative standards and assumptions on the part of the researchers, which must be substantiated.² If one acknowledges that narratives are contingent, then they are to be recognised for themselves, i.e. in the form and with the content that was actually told. Even an “exaggerated” or “unauthentic” story—according to whatever standards—is a social reality and can be taken seriously in itself (Presser 2009). Narratives often change according to the context in which they are told; even in the course of a single research interview, narratives can contradict themselves or change

²We refer here to Max Weber (1904) and the controversy around his demand for “objectivity” and about the possibility or necessity of making normative judgements in research. The dispute continues to this day. We deliberately do not reconstruct it, but merely refer to aspects that are significant for a narratively oriented criminology.

(e.g. Brookman 2015; Sandberg 2010). It is not (always) necessary in research to decide which version of a story is “right”, but one can reconstruct that there are discrepancies within individual narratives and between narratives. They can be very revealing because they tell us something about the narrators and their contexts.

Narratives are often flexible and contradictory. They adapt to the contexts in which they are produced. This might be considered problematic because, as mentioned before, research itself is a highly complex context in which narratives are generated. Thus, for example, research interviews do not simply depict the stories of “perpetrators”, but rather evoke and shape them (Presser 2008). A different research question, a different time and space of interviews, a different interviewing person, etc. can lead to different stories. Such contextual conditions must always be carefully considered when collecting and analysing data (Slembrouck 2015).

Against this backdrop calls for reflexivity of research, understood as “monitoring and reflecting on all aspects of a research project” (Jupp 2006, p. 344), appear reasonable. In recent years, demands for reflexivity have taken off in many disciplines. They are based on the insight that there is a cultural trace to every research activity. The knowledge about a research “object” is produced by a multitude of decisions in a field-, situation- and actor-specific way. The more or less openly formulated hope to pursue this cultural trace, to make it transparent and thus to arrive at other and possibly “more substantial” insights, is connected with the claim to reflexive research. Reflexively conducted research is thus recognised as a privileged access to “truth” or “appropriateness” of findings.

However, the boom in demands for reflexivity (c.f. Armstrong et al. 2016; Lumsden and Winter 2014) has not led to a clear concept. Reflexivity is understood and interpreted very differently (Lynch 2000; Riessman 2015). The reference to reflexivity is therefore in danger of functioning as a mere label: those who claim to carry out reflexive research sometimes want to assert certain ideas of “correct” research against other positions. The assertion of reflexivity thus may turn out to be nothing more than a strategy. In order to counter this risk, we think it is necessary to state and justify exactly how reflexivity is understood

and implemented in the context of concrete investigations—a demand that is of central importance, especially for narrative-oriented criminologists. They themselves ultimately deliver stories that are aimed at being “convincing” and “authentic”.

Instead of making general demands for reflexivity, it is therefore more sensible to ask the following concrete questions: What is hegemonic for whom and why? How is this expressed? What justifies speaking of a counter-narrative? In which everyday or institutional contexts are individual narratives considered hegemonic or subversive? And—if such an assessment should be made—for what good reasons is a subversive or hegemonic status assessed positively or negatively?

Important points of reference for such questions are criminal policy and the criminal justice system. These are institutions that “decide” on the hegemony of individual narratives. What is defined as crime in criminal policy and what individual judges define as crime is, qua official definition, crime and thus a hegemonic narrative. But contextual ties are still important. What a judge determines to be criminal, for example, can be normal for young people in their surroundings. The passing on of secret information can be an act of treason for a politician, for others it may be regarded as a democratic duty and legitimate resistance to state surveillance. Abortion can be criminal in one case, and permitted in another. These and other examples show that criminology can by no means simply follow what politicians and actors in the criminal justice system determine. Criminality is ultimately a question of continuing debates and accordingly historically and culturally variable—a well-known insight of critical criminology (c.f. Reiner 2016, 15–16). Even in a given society it can be disputed at a particular point in time whether a crime narrative is hegemonic or not, for example if something is forbidden, but considered normal by large parts of the population. Deciding what is hegemonic and what is not can therefore be tricky—especially in criminology. For example, when criminologists speak out in favour of giving a voice to “subalterns” (Spivak), this has to be particularly justified because it is a genuinely normative demand. While most criminologists would agree on the fact that right-wing extremism, for example, should be excluded and scandalised other matters such as abortion and drug use may be more difficult to assess. So

this point remains complicated, and this is exactly where the following contributions come into play.

Structure and Content

This leads us to the structure of this book. Besides the introduction, the volume consists of four sections and twelve chapters. The first section is composed of foundational texts written by three authors on the concept of counter-narratives, on the relationship between small stories research and narrative criminology, and on the concept of public narratives. The second section deals with the topic *Popular and everyday narrations of Crime and Punishment*. In four chapters different subtopics are discussed: the interdependence of public and everyday stories of crime and (in)security, (counter)narratives of crime and punishment in museums, (counter)narratives in US-American superhero comics, and conflicting narratives of crime and policing in newspapers in inter-war Britain. The third section concerns *Crime Narratives in Social and Criminal Justice* and includes three chapters which scrutinise narratives and counter-narratives and their societal effects in very different contexts. The first chapter of this section is on (counter)narratives in European newspaper coverage of the European Convention on Human Rights. The following contributions explore (counter)narratives in case files from residential care in West Germany and in police reports of interrogations. The fourth and last section of this volume is entitled *Media outrages and narrations of gender, crime and migration*. Both authors of this section draw from a gender perspective on the intersection of stories of migration and crime using different topics, viz. human trafficking and sexual violence.

Michael Bamberg and *Zachary Wipff* deal with the conceptualisation of counter-narratives. Counter-narratives irritate background assumptions that support alternative narratives. Analyses must address the concrete contextual conditions of narratives, without which counter-narratives cannot be understood as such. Predicated on the “narrative practice approach”, they demonstrate how master- and counter-narratives relate to each other and refer to specific contexts.

To illustrate their focus, they compare closing arguments of a defence lawyer and a district attorney in a murder case and reconstruct overlaps and differences, which result in different kinds of stories. In this way, they make it clear that crime stories contain special structures of expectation, for example, for a perpetrator as the protagonist of a story who actively violates common values without comprehensible reason. Counter-narratives contrast such attributions from a defensive position. With these references, the authors illustrate the particular usefulness of their analysis for a narrative-oriented criminology, which they call upon to take the contexts of narratives seriously.

In her chapter, *Alexandra Georgakopoulou* deals with a further facet of (counter-)narratives that have so far been neglected in criminology. She shows that small stories—understood as fleeting stories, emergent in everyday-life environments—play a significant role in the context of crime, since the people involved are at risk of stigmatisation and sometimes far-reaching consequences. All the more so since in many circumstances it is not always possible for them to generate unified and coherent narratives (‘big stories’). In her contribution *Alexandra* first introduces the main rational and methods of the small stories approach. Then, using examples from her own research, she opens up the possibilities for a narratively minded criminology. It becomes clear that the analysis of small stories can be a fruitful perspective for criminology—especially in times of social media, where fragmented and multi-vocal narratives are the rule rather than the exception.

In the final chapter of the foundation *Martina Feilzer* explores the concept of public narratives of crime and punishment to make it empirically accessible for measuring its influence and its significance for public opinion, e.g. punitive attitudes or public trust in criminal justice. The contribution is of conceptual nature, discussing the different levels at which stories of crime and criminal justice as “cultural products” are narrated and cross different narrative levels. Public narratives can be part of a range of discourses and can be storied collectively and individually. The assumption debated here is that public narratives are creating public knowledge and shaping public opinion on crime and justice. To illustrate this, the author discusses the results of an experiment in which she wrote columns on crime and punishment in a local newspaper and

surveyed readers' knowledge before and after publication. Her findings show that in order to measure public opinion criminology needs the concept of public narratives to understand how society makes sense of crime and justice.

Katharina Eisch-Angus analyses everyday narratives on security and crime at the interface with public discourses. On the basis of her own ethnographic surveys in England and Germany, she explores how public discourses are processed in everyday life. People experience themselves and their surroundings as safe or unsafe by referring to public debates and ascribing special meanings to them in everyday life. The emergent stories fluctuate between fiction and factuality and they combine national or international events with elements of biography and life in the community. Historically established cultural semantics, which are updated in relation to new events, flow into this attribution of meaning. The result is not a mere adaptation of public stories, but rather particular context-specific narratives of everyday life which have the potential to contrast political and public discourses.

Museums are another site of conflicting narratives. Although they play a major role in how events are remembered and how societies understand themselves, they have hardly been studied in criminology. *Hannah Thurston* changes this by addressing the question of how museums as storied spaces shape opinions and produce cultural meanings of crime and punishment. She discusses the results of a museum ethnography she undertook in the Lone Star State of Texas. In her thorough analysis, she illuminates the complex interplay between dominant narratives of harsh punishment and diverse, more subtle counter-stories, such as those critical of the death penalty, which raise awareness of the consequences of Texan toughness for the social environment.

Comics can affect public attitudes about crime and justice. Using Batman as an example, *Daniel Stein* examines the intersection of master narratives and counter-narratives in superhero comics and its controversial reception (in (online) reviews, articles and blogs). Generally, Batman's devotion to justice goes beyond his devotion to law in the name of serving the people and is embodying a socially responsible vigilantism. Taking the example of Batman #44 "A Simple Case" and its story about police brutality, it shows narrative ambiguity by being

a counter-narrative to the master narrative of Batman as a vigilante warrior. The author shows how in the controversial reception of the counter-narrative the authorising of mass murder takes place; it includes the risk of a racist vigilantism and the threatening of social order instead of protecting it.

John Carter Wood takes a historical perspective in his contribution by focusing on (counter-)narratives in newspapers in inter-war Britain. As the leading medium for the creation of crime narratives at that time, newspapers had an immense influence on what was negotiated as crime and how it was dealt with: here too, the question of the legitimacy of the (state) responses to crime is central. Using two newspapers of the late 1920s as examples, Wood traces voices that narratively legitimise the death penalty, but also those that appeal to the empathy of the reader by offering accounts of the psychological and social backgrounds of the crimes in question. The resulting sympathy for the condemned raises political debates, as does the scandalisation of harsh police interrogation, which is also being discussed. Thus, on the one hand, the transformative potential of (counter-)narratives is indicated, and on the other hand, it becomes clear that the topic is quite complex, since numerous ambivalences arise and the line between "hegemonic" and "subversive" is continually shifting.

Martha Komter reconstructs through conversation analysis how the police produce reports of interrogations. The reports do not simply reflect what the suspects said. Depending on the situational conditions of the interrogations, police officers make protocols that they co-constitute and that generate a particular form of reality. The protocols incorporate statements of the respondents in different forms, depending on the preferred protocol styles and the number of interrogators involved. The protocols are prepared with a view to their usability in law enforcement processes, so that they are part of the process in which master narratives are actively and gradually developed. The statements of the respondents, on the other hand, are counter-narratives in that they depend on their individual preconditions and are linked to different goals, which does not necessarily mean that they are resistant to the master narratives.

Mechthild Bereswill, Henrike Buhr and Patrik Müller-Behme explore personal-related files from residential care institutions in West Germany from the 1950s to 1970s. Case files are understood as powerful artefacts which motivate particular actions within the institutions that work with or create those files. Drawing on own research and on the basis of a selected individual case file the extent to which individual case files can be analysed as narratives is examined here. The study shows that case files contain a prototypical master narrative to establish a “deviant subject”: even though case files include bureaucratically regulated actions and interactions, they leave room to negotiate social order and social control without affecting the institutional power. The conclusion is that case files can be understood as rather fragmented master narratives which are able to include counter-narratives coming from outside the bureaucratic process.

Lieve Gies demonstrates in her contribution that counter-narratives can be powerful even when they are directed against widely accepted moral standards, in this case the recognition of human rights standards. She attributes the status of a master narrative to human rights and analyses how this narrative is criticised, using press reports in Great Britain as an example. While counter-narratives are often attributed a progressive quality, this analysis reveals a different tendency. The narratives directed against conventions on human rights are combined with criticism of social policy and positions that are critical of minorities, which can hardly be considered progressive. As pointed out in this introduction and by other authors in this book, she notes that master- and counter-narratives are often not clearly distinguishable, that they refer to each other and are anchored in contexts that must be taken into account in any analysis. In this way, conventions on human rights can also be given the status of counter-narratives, although they are delegitimised in the press reports as mainstream worthy of criticism.

In her chapter *Maria de Angelis* turns to the topic of crimmigration—the conflation of migration control with criminal justice control. With reference to current discourses and on the basis of her own research, she elaborates which public narratives are predominant in current UK politics and how they manifest empirically on an individual level by persons without fully provable rights to enter and remain in the UK. These stories “from below” highlight the complex interplay between migration,

crime and gender and illustrate how our ways of seeing the “right” or the “wrong” sort of migrant are steered by narratives.

Finally, *Martina Althoff* explores society’s storytelling concerning New Years’ Eve 2015 in Cologne (Germany) which has attracted a great deal of national and international attention. The case, a typical example of crimmigration—understood as the intersection of migration and crime—shows how the policymaking process is steeped in narratives and how those narratives create certain realities about migration. Two master narratives can be differed here: the securitisation narrative by constructing the migrant as the other; in this narrative, migration comes along with constructions of crime, insecurity and danger. The sexualisation narrative is constructing sexual violence and sexism as problems of the other and coming from outside the society. The interweaving of the two master narratives attributes sexual violence exclusively to refugees, reinforcing the idea of migration as a security problem and excluding counter-narratives of everyday sexual violence in Western society.

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