

# Stratification in academia as a status order: A Weberian proposition

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Increasing stratification in higher education is analyzed by using the concept of a status order. In Max Weber's work, "status" refers to ranks in a social hierarchy based on prestige; and persons of like rank tend to assemble and form a status group. Recent research has redefined status as signaling a "quality" that organizes relations between people as they form groups. These two lines of research are crossed to identify the processes that divide academia into various status groups and thus produce, despite individuals' merits, structural inequality. This approach is grounded on an empirical study of *Organization*, a journal supported by a group of critical, "postmodern" academics, whose key members come from the same universities (mostly English and, to a lesser extent, Australian and Scandinavian).

Inequality in the academic world is glaring. In management studies,<sup>(1)</sup> the situation is evolving toward a "world championship of scholarship" with its winners and losers (MURPHY & ZHU 2012:916). According to Podsakoff *et al.* (2008), 5% of scholars accounted for 55% of citations and published more than a quarter of the articles in the most prestigious journals. With reference to Google Scholar, 5% of scholars produced a quarter of the research (articles, books, working papers); and with reference to the Scopus data base, 5% of researchers represented about 50% of the articles and 80% of citations (COURTAULT *et al.* 2010).

This inequality does not result from merit alone, as several studies would like to believe (PODSAKOFF *et al.* 2008). If it did, we would have to admit that an overwhelming proportion of the most meritorious come, "as if by chance", from English-speaking lands and from the same universities and doctoral schools (BEDEIAN

*et al.* 2010), or even the same social group (ÖZBILGIN 2009). As Murphy and Zhu (2012) have shown, 66% of the authors published in the twelve major (four-star) management journals and 86% of the members of these journals' editorial boards were Anglo-American (United States, Canada, United Kingdom). The French represented 2% of the authors and 2.1% of editorial board members — about as much as Germans.

Unless the conclusions are to be drawn that Anglo-Americans are massively "better" scholars than others and that, owing to their talents, they merit this concentrated representation, does this inequality not entail social processes that beg to be explained? I do not claim to provide herein an exhaustive or systematic explanation of how academia operates. My intent is, instead, to propose a grid for interpreting this inequality with the help of the concepts of "status" and "status order".

The concept of status order (PODOLNY 1993) postulates that the social recognition (status in Podolny's words) enjoyed by individuals leads to a relatively stable social stratification over time. This implies that forms of inequality stem from social structures instead of the qualities of individuals. The status order tends to reproduce itself though the processes whereby people form groups and choose to associate with each other as a function of their respective positions.

<sup>(1)</sup> Despite the focus herein on managerial studies, the situation clearly does not differ much in other disciplines. In the two systematically top-ranking journals of sociology (American Journal of Sociology and American Sociological Review), from 90% to 95% of the authors are American (GINGRAS & WARREN 2006). Once again, we must draw the conclusion either that American sociologists are extraordinarily talented or else that the social processes in operation have led to the overwhelming domination of sociology by a few scholars with similar profiles. This article has been translated from French by Noal Mellott (Omaha Beach, France).

To pursue this line of inquiry, this article draws on both Max Weber's legacy and recent discussions to examine how the concept of status can help us conceive of the social hierarchy and equality. The second part of this article shows how this concept sheds light on the organization of the academic world. In the last part, the example of the journal *Organization* serves to examine in detail the argument that the academic field of management studies is organized in relatively closed status groups through a control over the admission of new members. In the Weberian sense, we thus come face to face with the phenomenon of "closure".

## The concept of status

### The Weberian legacy

The concept of status has its origin in the work of Max Weber (1864-1920). Status and class underlie the Weberian analysis of social stratification. Much caution is needed when interpreting Weber's brief notes about this concept in the unfinished fourth chapter of the first volume of *Economy and Society* (Weber 1978, 1995) and the other scattered references to it. The Weberian concepts of status and class have prompted much of the thought devoted to social stratification (KURZMAN *et al.* 2007).

On the one hand, Weber's writings refer class — in line with Marx — to the economy, *i.e.*, to the inequality of revenues: *"a probability which derives from the relative control over goods and skills and from their income-producing uses within a given economic order"* (WEBER 1978, vol. I, p. 302). A class groups individuals who share the same economic situation, and thus the means of controlling and using goods. Weber did not think that a class makes for a community: *"the unity of social class is highly variable"* (p. 302).

On the other hand, status is grounded on prestige, esteem and "social honor" (COX 1950). This relational concept evaluates how individuals are distributed in the social hierarchy owing to the prestige they are recognized as having: *"an effective claim to social esteem in terms of positive or negative privileges"* (WEBER 1978, vol. I, p. 305). This hierarchy is a matter of consensus. As a type of inequality, it is double-sided (PIAZZA & CASTELLUCCI 2014:290): to be seen as a *"relationship between social groups"* (for instance, between members of two professions, such as doctors and nurses) and as a *"hierarchical relationship among individuals"* (a doctor and a nurse). In modern societies, prestige is based, in particular, on formal education and the diplomas that validate skills and know-how, or on a profession. The profession of lawyer endows all who exercise it with a degree of prestige in society, despite the wide disparity of incomes in this group (KARPIK 1995).

Status is visible through patterns of consumption, lifestyles and values. Individuals of equivalent status tend to adopt common consumption and behavior patterns, like the "leisure class", analyzed by Veblen,

on the East Coast of the United States at the end of the 19th century. Status confers the material or symbolic privileges attached to a respected social position, for example, the opportunity to keep company in a given social circle or to gain access to a certain profession. It bears an offer of resources. Unlike class, status makes for community, a point to which we shall return.

### Revival of the concept

The concept of status has spurred several recent publications (PIAZZA & CASTELLUCCI 2014). For Podolny (1993:830), whose writings have contributed to this revival, *"a producer's status is defined as the degree to which market participants perceive the quality of its product to be superior to that of its competitors."* Status serves to signal quality in an uncertain situation, since there usually exists a stable and, in general, positive linkage between the producer's status and the quality of the proposed products.

Partnerships between firms (for example, of a company manufacturing a recognized brand of computer chips with a computer-maker) so clearly signal information about the expected quality of products that Podolny has advanced the argument that a firm's status changes as a function of its alliances. A firm grows stronger when it associates with a higher-status partner; or on the contrary, weaker when associating with a lower-status partner. According to Robert Merton, products will be evaluated better if they come from a high-status firm than products of like quality from a low-status firm. As a consequence, the high-status firm will, for a lower production cost, be able to propose its products at a higher price; and the low-status company will have trouble competing.

Status *"invokes the imagery of a hierarchy of positions — a pecking order — in which an individual's location within the hierarchy shapes others' expectations and actions toward the individual and thereby determines the opportunities and constraints that the individual confronts"* (PODOLNY 2005:11). A status order exists and, as Podolny has tried to show, tends to be stable over time.<sup>(2)</sup> Competition pushes higher-status actors, since they are able to do so, to choose partners with a status at least equivalent to their own. For Menger (2009), this association of actors on the basis of their social recognition is "selective cooptation". As Podolny (2005:255) has pointed out, status is by nature a conservative, stabilizing force.

The concept of status can be applied to both firms and individuals. It has found applications in the sociology of culture (DUBOIS & FRANÇOIS 2013; MENER 2009) and of organizations (WASHINGTON & ZAJAC

<sup>(2)</sup> For Podolny, "reputation" refers to an actor's past behaviors. Reducing status to a signal of quality risks confusing status with reputation. This confusion can be cleared up by taking the social dimension into account: reputation does not create a social structure. The space allotted for this article does not allow for discussing the relations between reputation and status. The key idea is that a status is, in fact, incorporated in the social structure, specifically a status order. Podolny's definition has been widely adopted (cf. WASHINGTON & ZAJAC 2005, PIAZZA & CASTELLUCCI 2014, BITEKTINE 2011).

2005) as well as economic sociology (ESPELAND & SAUDER 2007). It has even been suggested to apply it to academia (PODOLNY 1993:837).

Podolny's argument is economic; it aligns the concept of status on a signal of quality (PIAZZA & CASTELLUCCI 2014). However the economic and social definitions can be brought together by conceiving of status both as a signal of quality and, in accordance with the Weberian tradition, as a position in a social hierarchy. Both definitions hinge on the prestige an actor is recognized as having. Status is a subjective evaluation (of quality as inferred from the position in a hierarchy) as well as a structural reality (a relatively stable hierarchical structure).

Prestige directly signals quality. Buying a prestigious writer's book involves an expectation about the quality of what we are going to read. A book associating René Char and Picasso, for example, does not just reinforce the status of both artists, *i.e.*, their respective places in the hierarchies of poets and painters; it also sends a strong signal to readers about the book's quality.

The main criticism to be addressed to Podolny concerns his idea that status necessarily changes through the successive associations formed with partners, specifically: that the association with a partner of lesser status always lowers one's own status. This seems too categorical, as Dubois and François (2013) have shown in their study of associations between poets and publishers, where the alliance with a lower-status partner does not systematically lessen the status of the more prestigious one. Picasso might sign a book with an unknown poet without losing status; but the poet's status will, for sure, benefit from this association with a so prestigious painter.

## Academia as a status order

To illustrate the idea of status, Weber proposed the example of Chinese scholars (WEBER 2000). They were made to compete for access to prestigious positions, had to pass difficult formal examinations and were then subject to lifelong evaluations of their intellectual aptitudes. This competition through selective examinations was based on criteria apparently related to a merit system. The recruits had, therefore, to continually improve their qualifications and skills. Under the control of the emperor for whom they were "consultants", they formed a "corps", a somewhat autonomous social group that devised its own rules of operation and, in particular, set the social rewards that the "best" among them could hope to receive. This corporate group of scholars was organized in a social hierarchy based on prestige.

We recognize in this description many similarities with the contemporary situation in higher education. Academia, too, is made up of highly qualified individuals who compete with each other for prestigious positions and are subject to ongoing evaluations of their intellectual, apparently "meritocratic", qualities. Academics, too, form a relatively autonomous social group that operates following rules it has mostly set

for itself. Academics, too, sometimes play the role of "consultant" for political and economic elites.

There are three main constitutive aspects of status in academia. The first is affiliation with specific universities. A professor from Harvard is better positioned on the social scale than a colleague from the University of North Dakota. This affiliation signals the quality of the "production" of each: more will be expected of the first than of the second. As Merton pointed out, the work of the first will, when of equivalent quality, be better evaluated than that of the second. Contrary to Valle and Schultz's (2011) assertion, this is not the only constitutive aspect of status in the academic world. A second factor is publications. Publication in an academic journal is a sort of tournament; the authors tourney each other when they submit articles to the same journal. Since it can publish but a few articles, the journal uses this as an argument when it vaunts its refusal rate as proof of its demanding intellectual standards (BEVERUNGEN *et al.* 2012). Victory in this tournament sends a positive signal about the quality of the published intellectual work. Under the current system, this victory is instantly evaluated in terms of the journal's ranking or "impact factor" (BERRY 2009). Likewise, expectations about a book's quality are related to the prestige of its publishing house. Thirdly, holding a position on a journal's editorial board — besides increasing the chances of being published and of playing a key role in academic affairs (ÖZBILGIN 2004) — is also a signal of the recognized qualifications of the person holding the position, all the more so if the journal has a high rank.

### How the status order operates in academia

What I am suggesting is that academia is organized as a status order mainly through cooptation. Owing to this process, actors, each of equivalent status in their fields of qualification, associate with each other so that the prestige of the one reflects onto the other, thus amplifying differences with lower-status actors. This is the case on both the organizational and individual scales, among firms (PODOLNY 2005) as well as artists (DUBOIS & FRANÇOIS 2013; MENGER 2009).

In academia, scholars mostly work with colleagues of equivalent status. In a study of coauthored articles published in the major journals of managerial studies, Acedo *et al.* (2006) classified the authors in four categories as a function of their bibliographies: category 4 grouping the authors with the best reputations.<sup>(3)</sup> This study found that 45.49% of the coauthored articles were written by authors from categories 3 and 4; but only 5.48%, by authors from categories 4 and 2. By the way, 19.9% were written by authors from categories 1 and 4 — usually an experienced scholar cosigning an article with a doctoral student or young PhD in his/her department. These patterns, brought to light through a network analysis, have been confirmed by other studies (EVANS *et al.* 2011, JONES *et al.* 2008). Although

<sup>(3)</sup> Acedo *et al.* (2006) selected the major American and European academic journals of management, the latter like the former, in English: *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Management and Human Relations*.

the pattern of an experienced scholar coauthoring an article with a doctoral student or young PhD does occur, it is but another way that scholars consolidate their status while diffusing their ideas and sponsoring a promising young talent in the best networks. As already pointed out, this sort of association does not necessarily demean the higher-status partner.

The choice — so decisive — made by the editors of the mainstream journals involves similar processes (BURGESS & SHAW 2010, ÖZBILGIN 2004). Universities, too, each in its domain, are organized as a status order, which is “objectified” through repeated ranking procedures (ESPELAND & SAUDER 2007). The universities with the best reputations tend to recruit the “best” professors and researchers; they then furnish these recruits with the best resources so as to enable them to consolidate their status individually (D’AVENI 1996) — thus accelerating the Mertonian process of accumulating advantages while amplifying differences. In fact, these universities exchange young PhDs through narrow recruitment channels (BEDEIAN *et al.* 2010). These processes operate all the better insofar as citation indexes and classifications for ranking journals immediately provide the information to be used for cooptation strategies.

## Status groups

### Status groups and closure

For Max Weber, individuals of equivalent status tend to form a community, a status group. Like Chinese scholar bureaucrats, such a community’s members share values, lifestyles, work experiences, a group consciousness.... Communities of this sort are, however, informal. Given their similar social positions, the members share not only social but also economic interests. They are able, therefore, to coordinate their actions for the purpose of establishing norms.

Though differing depending on their level of prestige, status groups function via a “closure” based on the academic degrees that validate qualifications. This criterion, in particular, will be used to establish distinctions between members and nonmembers, so as to control the group’s composition. Status groups can thus become “castes”, *i.e.*, groups that recruit their members using their own criteria (COX 1950). According to Bendix (1974:154), who draws on Weber, “*whether formally free or institutionalized, modern intellectual life tends to form cliques and schools of thought or style. And on that basis, distinctions of class and status are formed among intellectuals*”.

In scientific circles, the validation process involves the academic degree (PhD and the place where it was obtained), affiliations and, of course, publications. A publication seems to function like a security: it is evaluated as a function of the journal where it is published, of the latter’s rank and impact factor. It becomes a sort of currency on the academic marketplace. Recall that three main means establish an academic’s status: affiliations, publications and

prestigious positions (in particular on the editorial boards of academic journals or through participation on committees or in roundtables at academic congresses). All three are directly or indirectly linked to the person’s productivity in research.

An appointment to an editorial board very much hinges on this productivity (ÖZBILGIN 2004). As for affiliations, the chances for entering a prestigious university (and thus benefitting from its status) mainly depend on the individual’s results in research, given the tenure system (BEDEIAN *et al.* 2010), which has now been implanted in French universities (MENGER *et al.* 2015).

What are the reasons for this emphasis on research? The latter is definitely not the only criterion that could be used for evaluations and promotions. It is, however, a more discriminating one than the individual’s “performance” in teaching or administration. Productivity in research is very concentrated — a Pareto curve: 5% of researchers account for about 50% of articles and 80% of citations. In contrast, “teaching performance” is more evenly distributed among academics, in a bell curve (MENGER *et al.* 2015).

Research and teaching, the two main academic tasks, have different underpinnings. For one thing, 5% of professors cannot attract 80% of students.... In contrast, research is a scarcer resource, so contested that an individual’s high productivity in research sends a stronger signal about his/her reputation than would be the case for teaching. Furthermore, academics seem more sensitive to performance in research: “*researchers proudly display their stars, like army medals*” (CHEVRIER 2014:21). Besides, research claims to offer a promising, innovative learning experience — in par with the latest scientific trends — in flagship programs (MBAs, for example), unlike teaching standardized, routine introductory courses. In addition to the obvious variability of the quality of courses, teaching is a “locally” evaluated “performance”. Unlike research, it is hard to compare teaching across establishments or among individuals since there is no agreed-upon means of measurement (like bibliometrics in research). Research emits a signal about the person’s reputation that is conveyed fast at no extra cost, whereas teaching, intended for a broader public, requires logistics and costs the professor’s salary.<sup>(4)</sup>

The reputation of establishments of higher education depends, first of all, on research, where competition, easy to measure, facilitates international comparisons and classifications. To be persuaded of this, we need but consult the brochures or websites of French universities, which systematically list scholars’ individual results in terms of research (publications) but do not describe their “educational skills”. As French business schools undergo a process of “academization”, their results in research are the discriminating criterion for ranking them (MENGER *et al.* 2014, 2015). The variable of research allows for the widest dispersion among

<sup>(4)</sup> Might the situation not change owing to the creation of a global market for teaching through massive open online courses (MOOCs)? Might the possibility of diffusing such courses on a large scale at small cost... but is this to be hoped for?

schools and for quite strong correlations with a school's rank, budget and degree of internationalization. The result is blatant. Two academic labor markets are organized in a hierarchy: the one for top-level research professors (based on their publications) and the other for teaching professors. This holds for English-speaking lands (HENKEL 2005) as well as French business schools.<sup>(5)</sup> Besides, the number of positions for "research only" or "teaching only" is on the rise, thus dividing academic labor, the faculty, into two unequal groups.

The stratification characteristic of academia should, therefore, be interpreted as a hierarchy of status groups with varying degrees of prestige based on the variables of research and affiliations. These groups rely on two major institutional factors, which are the driving force in status formation: academic institutions (universities, business schools, departments, doctoral degrees) and academic journals (in particular, the editorial boards of the "best" journals). These two factors are tightly correlated. Academics affiliated with the same universities sit on the editorial boards of the best journals, as the diagram from Burgess and Shaw (2010:636) depicts.

This network diagram has been drawn using data about the editorial board members of the 36 top-ranking journals of the well-known *Financial Times* classification. On this diagram, the only university not in the United States is French: the Institut Européen

<sup>(5)</sup> In this system, teaching is the variable for making adjustments: business schools set the number of hours of courses a professor must dispense as a function of his/her results in research. As a director at EDHEC clearly put it, "If a professor does not fill his contract of publications, he can be dismissed. However, if he is a good teacher, we might keep him. In this case however, he will have a lot of hours of courses to teach" ("Les coulisses du mercato des profs-stars", L'Expansion, p. 52, 4 May 2011).

d'Administration des Affaires (INSEAD). Doing a few simple calculations using Burgess and Shaw's data, we notice that 76% of editorial board members are based in the United States. For these 36 journals, the average ratio between, on the one hand, the number of editorial positions that board members held in other journals in the *Financial Times* group and, on the other hand, the total number of editorial board positions is 42.11%. This is evidence of the concentration of these key positions in the hands of a small interconnected elite.

To examine the collaboration (the cosigning of articles along with less formal actions) between members of the teaching staff in managerial studies in the United Kingdom, another study (EVANS *et al.* 2011:394), adopting a statistical method, drew the conclusion that cooptation, a powerful means for organizing academic life, leads to the formation of "rich clubs".

Academic institutions recruit, as shown, from the doctoral degree programs of institutions with equivalent prestige. These doctoral programs are the cradle for the socialization of status groups. The major variable is not just the country of origin but, even more, the specific institution where research professors teach or have pursued their PhD (ALTMAN & LAGUECIR 2012). From this perspective, the admission of persons from other countries into doctoral degree programs in universities in English-speaking lands does not upset the status order. It merely reinforces its ramifications. This does not stem just from institutional strategies. In effect, faculty members themselves choose, in priority, young colleagues who share their values and have graduated from institutions like their own in terms not of just prestige but also culture. Academics working in a prestigious university where research reigns tend to choose young colleagues from establishments like their own (D'AVENI 1996).

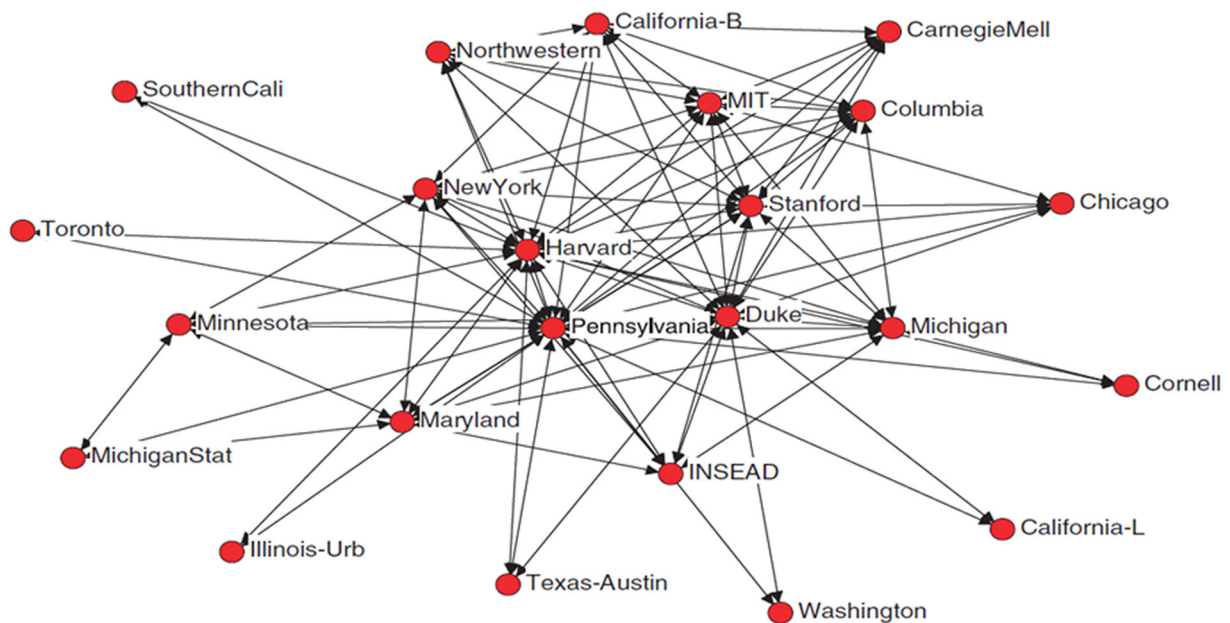


Figure 1: Network of universities with members on the editorial boards of the 36 top-ranking journals of the well-known classification made by *Financial Times* (Burgess & Shaw 2010:636)..

### A critique of *Organization*, a critical academic journal

To illustrate my remarks, I have chosen *Organization*, one of the few European journals ranked with four stars by the French National Center of Scientific Research (CNRS). Specialized in the sociology of organizations, it would offhand seem to be more open, especially since it is a “critical” journal in organization studies. Its editorial line is to contest the dominant North American models, in particular positivism and quantitative methods, and to direct attention to critical thinkers from other disciplines, such as Bourdieu, Foucault or Deleuze (PARKER & THOMAS 2011).

I examined the tables of contents of the issues from the last five years: in all, 220 articles by 352 authors from 175 universities and 28 countries, including Romania and Brazil. Given its location in Europe and its editorial line, the network around *Organization* would, we assume, be less “hegemonic” and less concentrated than what Burgess and Shaw described in the “mainstream” journals of the *Financial Times* group, dominant in major North American universities. However the social relations formed around this European journal are very hierarchical, thus revealing the overlapping between academic journals and universities, the two main places for making the status of researcher.

Five universities account for 21% of *Organization*'s authors. The situation has changed a little since a previous study (JONES *et al.* 2006), which found 25% for the period from 1994 to 2001.

The key universities in this journal's network are clearly identifiable: those in the United Kingdom (Leicester, Manchester, Cardiff, Essex) plus a few foreign establishments, such as Copenhagen Business School or the universities in Lund (Sweden) and Sidney (Australia).

In all, 60% of the articles have been signed by more than one author. Furthermore, 49% of these coauthored articles involve at least one author from the most represented universities; and 35%, more than one author from these universities. Furthermore, 45% of the authors are English.

Italians make up but 0.005% of the authors; and Germans, 2.8%. The French authors, 1.9%, come from four establishments of higher education (University of Paris-Dauphine and three *grandes écoles*). All but one of them (who had a PhD from a major American university) coauthored articles with high-status foreign colleagues. Among the “exotic” scholars (to the exclusion of English-speaking lands and Scandinavia), 44% coauthored articles with a colleague from one of the ten most represented universities.

If we eliminate the special issues that *Organization*, to its credit, devoted to “management from the South” or post-colonialism, we discover but two authors from countries in the planet's South. Each of them had a PhD, the one from an Ivy League university in the United States and the other from an English university centrally positioned in the journal's network.

Of the twenty authors who signed 21% of the articles, 60% are English, all of them from the aforementioned universities. In fact, four or five of them have published at least one article per year. Out of the twenty most published authors in the journal, 85% have been current or former members of the editorial board. Among the three others, two have sat on the editorial board of *Organization Studies*, the other major European journal of organization studies, which has as its mainstay the annual colloquium organized by EGOS, the foremost social event in this discipline. The editorial boards of *Organization* and *Organization Studies* overlap: 29 persons sit on both boards.

We thus come to see the interconnections between the elites of the European academic journals specialized in organization studies.<sup>(6)</sup> These authors (some of them also editorial board members) are in a position for exercising broad control over publication in the journal's pages and partial control over access to the field of critical management, of which *Organization* is a flagship. The most published authors share the same academic (and social) activities. These social patterns are, we might imagine, even clearer in the dominant mainstream journals than in this European journal, given the latter's critical, multidisciplinary stance: we search in vain for a single article by, for instance, a Brazilian or Romanian author in *Administrative Science Quarterly* during the same period.

These data throw light on stratification in academia. According to the Weberian interpretation proposed herein, these groups tend to reproduce themselves by coopting members through complex procedures, such as integrating researchers from dominated countries. These phenomena, leading to closure, are sometimes hidden. According to Özbilgin (2004), Turkish colleagues who were admitted to a journal's editorial board, probably as a token of the board's plurality, did not have any communication from the board over a two-year period! In the words of this former editor-in-chief of *British Journal of Management*, himself of Turkish origin: “White masculine hegemony continues to reproduce itself, as graduates, who are trained in elite research institutions with entrenched forms of inequality, are blessed from the beginning through the system of patronage with privileged access to prized posts in the academic labor market. In the same way, journal editors want high impact factors and seek well-known people to sit on their boards and to publish in their journals. This process keeps well-known persons well-known. The glass elevator effect is hard to break into unless you are in the friendship circle of the ‘well-known’, which is more likely if you are from the upper class, the product of an elite institution, especially in the United States or Britain” (ÖZBILGIN 2009:114).

This remark points to the existence of a status order, where the dominant groups — expecting a quality of work produced using criteria they have to a large

<sup>(6)</sup> The big American universities are nearly completely missing in this picture. *Organization* is not part of the dominant American networks: I have turned up only one author from one of the top ten American universities (according to the *Financial Times* classification).

degree defined and incorporated in the hierarchical logic of self-reproduction — have definite social profiles. As a driving force, status tends to establish hierarchical groups that might be relatively separate from each other (PODOLNY 2005). An example is the domination of English-language journals, which mainly publish English-speaking authors or foreigners who have undertaken a doctoral degree program in English-speaking lands (ALTMAN & LAGUECIR 2012). This is the case of *Organization*, a journal articulated around a dominant group — the critical, postmodern current of thought — whose core is made up of English researchers and, to a lesser degree, of Australians and Scandinavians. The major authors belong to the same English-speaking culture, come from the same universities and often enough work together to coauthor articles or sit on editorial boards in the same journals. Dominant status groups are in the position of exercising broad control over the recruitment of new members. Not only do they hold positions of power in universities and on the editorial boards of journals, as we have seen; but also, as Weber suggested, they decree the highly standardized norms (and enforce them) that tightly govern academia's intellectual production (GREY & SINCLAIR 2006). As Özbilgin (2009) has stated, they are hardly inclined to give up key positions or to yield on the norms governing academic production, since these norms serve their interests.

## Conclusion

This interpretation of inequality in higher education suggests that the current system of scientific evaluation, centered on publication in journals that are ranked and claim to have high “impact factors”, favors and consolidates the organization in terms of status groups with unequal degrees of prestige. To its advantage, this interpretation avoids falling into the trap of oversimplifying social reality by positing a binary contrast between “dominant” and “dominated”. It lets us see academia as a series of hierarchical, specialized status groups, which vary depending on the country, discipline or current of thought, in the likeness of the group formed around the journal *Organization* and English universities — a social network still separate from the major North American journals.

This interpretation has tried to explain academia's fragmentation and its convergence toward an “elite of the elites” with shared characteristics. It would, of course, come as a surprise were the relentless race in research for the obtainment of academic recognition (CHEVRIER 2004:18) not to have consequences on how higher education is organized. For sure, inequality existed prior to the incredible acceleration of the race toward a top rank or classification of establishments, journals, scholars, etc. However, forms of inequality have undoubtedly deepened. They tend to rigidify through processes that are not just (or at least not mainly) meritocratic.

In structural terms, this is a consequence of using rankings, as Espeland and Sauder (2009) have shown in American law schools. These ranking systems

rigidify and artificially deepen status differences by organizing competition like a tournament, by defining and making data available via bibliometrics — data that are simplified and sometimes erroneous (BERRY 2009) — and, too, by setting special rules for organizing this competition so as to artificially increase the differences between rivals from schools in the top tier and those from schools just below that level, or between articles published in three-star and two-star journals, etc. From this point of view, systematically using lists that ranks journals (as Section 37 of the CNRS does), especially in French schools of management, reinforces the processes described herein — to the point that some deans have now been won over to strategies, in particular for faculty management, that exclusively pursue the number of stars (GLESS 2014).

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