

Hazing as a sacrificial crisis at the university: violence out of control

O trote como crise sacrificial na universidade: a violência fora de controle

Las novatadas como crisis sacrificial en la universidad: la violencia fuera de control

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Abstract

Based on René Girard, this study aims to analyze university hazing as a sacrificial crisis that triggers practices of violence out of control. Texts by Pierre Clastres, Van Gennep, and Victor Turner were used as the theoretical background of this study. We methodologically analyzed university hazing based on these authors' considerations on violent rites, investigating hazing behaviors as shaved heads, body painting, "hazing classes," university campaigns against hazing, and "solidary hazing." We found the necessity of critical analyses on hazing so universities install new forms of welcoming students without any use of humiliation, subjection, or violence.

Keywords: college hazing, education, university, sacrifice, rite of passage

Resumo

A partir da obra de René Girard, este estudo busca analisar o trote universitário como crise sacrificial que desencadeia práticas de violência fora de controle. Como fundamentação teórica, foram utilizados textos de Pierre Clastres, Arnold Van Gennep e Victor Turner, entre outros. Analisou-se, metodologicamente, o trote universitário a partir das considerações desses autores sobre os ritos violentos, investigando trotes que ocorrem nas universidades brasileiras, como raspar os cabelos, pinturas corporais, “aulas trote”, campanhas universitárias contra o trote e o “trote solidário”. Concluiu-se que são necessárias análises críticas a respeito do trote, para que novas formas de recepção dos estudantes, sem qualquer uso de humilhação, submissão ou violência sejam colocadas em prática pelas universidades.

Palavras-chave: trote universitário, educação, universidade, sacrifício, rito de passagem

Resumen

A partir del trabajo de René Girard, este estudio pretende analizar las novatadas universitarias como una crisis sacrificial que desencadena prácticas de violencia fuera de control. Como base teórica se utilizaron textos de Pierre Clastres, Arnold Van Gennep y Victor Turner, entre otros. Se analizan metodológicamente las novatadas universitarias a partir de las consideraciones de estos autores sobre los ritos violentos, investigando las novatadas que tienen lugar en las universidades brasileñas, en particular el llamado afeitado del pelo, las pinturas corporales, las llamadas “novatadas de clase”, las campañas universitarias contra las novatadas y las “novatadas solidarias”. Se concluye que son necesarios análisis críticos sobre las novatadas, para que las universidades pongan en práctica nuevas formas de recepción de los estudiantes, sin humillación, sumisión o violencia.

Palabras clave: novatadas universitarias, educación, universidad, sacrificio, rito de paso

Introduction

College hazing has sparked controversies in several countries, making its dynamics worthy of careful investigation. In a world where rites are increasingly losing their significance (Han, 2021), hazing displays an astonishing resilience, surviving campaigns and laws aimed at eradicating it. This text traces the trajectory of rites of passage that involve violence, aiming to demonstrate that hazing is one of these violent rites, though not merely a repetition of past practices with the same meaning or social dimension. Under current conditions, hazing

sacrifices the emancipatory tendencies of young people entering university, destroying what is most valuable in students: their potential to create a more humane future. We also argue that hazing serves as a political tool for the social control of university students and *campus* sequestration, effectively obstructing the university's path toward democracy and social justice.

By examining “light” hazing practices, such as the so-called “hazing class,” alongside university campaigns against hazing and “solidarity hazing,” we aim to expose the contradictions of a university that seeks to use hazing as a unifying form of violence but instead finds itself exposed to uncontrollable, exacerbated physical violence perpetrated by *hazing* groups. This violence is not a sudden or unexpected event, but rather a predictable and necessary act used to test new students and enforce their submission to the hazing group. We highlight the political collusion between Brazilian university leaders and such groups, which perpetuates the resilience of hazing and reveals the conservative, if not reactionary, character of the institution.

The progress made in advancing democracy—particularly in challenging patriarchy, racism, ethnocentrism, and sexism—renders the continuation of hazing, rooted in various forms of discrimination and prejudice, unsustainable (Almeida Júnior, 2016; Almeida Júnior & Queda, 2006; Conchão, 2023). Moreover, the environmental disregard exhibited by hazing groups is equally intolerable. Thus, within the university, there is no room for social reconciliation grounded in the resurgence of hazing violence. On the contrary, future peace and social unity on *campuses* shall only be achievable through the complete abolition of hazing. Only the total eradication of hazing, in both its “light” and “heavy” forms, will pave the way for true reconciliation within the university. No individual is anyone's toy. Under current conditions, individuals who engage in hazing, hazing groups, and the institutions that protect them can be unequivocally classified as criminals (Swofford, 2020).

Hazing as a Legacy to Sacrificial Rites: Violence and Group Cohesion

Communities were relatively small in early, stateless societies. There, the fundamental human unit was not the individual, couple, or family, but rather a group of a few dozen people—large enough to ensure material and cultural reproduction, yet small enough to maintain intense

cohesion and egalitarianism. Survival necessitated this strong cohesion as a pressing requirement. Any split or disagreement could be fatal for the community. To prevent such dangerous disunity, social and psychic spaces for divergence and independent values were severely restricted. Individual identities were constantly suppressed, and in their place, personalities tightly bound to the collective were encouraged. However, individuals could not be entirely crushed, given the dialectical nature of the collective/individual relationship.

Achieving such cohesion is a significant social achievement. The discovery on how to foster this strong unity manifests in culturally specific ways within each group. Yet, as Girard (1990), Clastres (2003), Van Gennep (1960), and many others have noted, its universal nature attests to its effectiveness as a dynamic that ensures survival. It is not only the fittest individual who survives and reproduces, but perhaps more importantly, the cohesive group.

Numerous scholars (Clastres, 2003, 2004; Girard, 1990; Turner, 1969; Van Gennep, 1960) have identified rites as a fundamental source of the psychic and social forces that create group cohesion while simultaneously masking the material motivations behind these rituals, thus clouding participants' understanding. The violence of the rite serves as a radical test to determine whether the initiate is prepared to join the community, whether they are willing to sacrifice themselves and remain obedient to the group's rules. Initiation tests whether the individual is capable of renouncing impulses that could lead to actions against group unity. In other words, after enduring the rite, it is believed that the person will no longer foster discord within the community or lead the group towards existential danger. While the rite is rarely lethal, it is always extremely unpleasant and painful, concluding the preparation imposed by an authoritative pedagogy that allows no dialogue. The survival of the group takes precedence over individual interests and impulses.

Clastres (2003) shows that in stateless societies, the rite uses pain to inscribe an undeniable equality among group members on the body. No individual is superior or inferior to anyone else. No one shall aspire to wield power over another. Group cooperation is cemented through the ritual test. We might infer that the first gods represented equality, solidarity, commitment to the collective, and the inseparable relationship between the whole and its parts—values that human groups cultivated to ensure their own survival.

In such societies, ritual violence is a profound social invention that enables the group to attain cohesion, which enhances its chances of continuity. This violence is legitimized because

it prevents a far greater violence that would arise if the group were to fragment. It is justified by a religious framework that renders it understandable, acceptable, and legitimate.

For those undergoing the rite, it represents a sacrifice of their individual identity in favor of one that is more advantageous to the collective. The rite enacts a brutal expulsion of individual impulses and summons unity, communal harmony, cooperation, and the collective whole. It symbolizes the death of the individual and a rebirth into the group. Refusal to undergo the rite is tantamount to rejecting the collective and the group's deified law, which has become both legitimate and obligatory. The consequence of such a refusal is marginalization, exclusion from much of the group's resources, and, in some cases, death (Laraia, 1967; Stonequist, 1937).

The mythical and religious imagination contributed to the social invention of the rite, which was capable of unifying and sustaining the group. In reality, as suggested by Durkheim (1996), the group itself is the true god, taking its law above and beyond the individual. The appearances in which each member is immersed indicate that the group is merely following divine order. The divinization of laws adds supernatural elements to the social and coercive power of the group, a force capable of generating meaning, guiding individuals, instigating fear and obedience—in short, capable of shaping and controlling individual impulses. This divinization is only possible through consensus, the absence of questioning and divisions. Thus, a self-perpetuating cycle is created: a symbiosis between the sacred, the rite, harmony, and group cohesion.

The violence and cruelty of the rite are deemed necessary, legitimate, and divine. In Girard's (1990) words, this is "good violence," which prevents the greater violence that could supposedly be unleashed by the gods—violence that would correspond to total chaos and the heavens downfall. "Impure violence" is, in fact, triggered by the division of the group, the collapse of consensus, which guarantees the functioning of laws and the distinctions between good and evil, the very foundations of social order. A dangerous and uncontrollable state of undifferentiation which must be contained by sacrifice.

Through indoctrination, supernatural intimidation, pain, torture, and more, rites have the power of breaking the individual will, imposing limits on personal impulses, and degrading subjectivity. They replace the original personality with another if need be. Such rites lie at the core of the dynamics of highly cohesive collectives—not a cohesion formed by consensus, but one imposed through homogeneity.

The violent rite operates on multiple levels and is not entirely rational or functional. It achieves something vital—it works—but also obscures what it truly does by giving the idea of accomplishing something else. While effective in its primary goal of producing groups capable of survival and prosperity, it pretends to serve a different purpose. It blends Darwinian empirical reality with religious mysticism, shrouding itself in secrecy and mystery. “They don’t know it, but they do it.” The rite establishes taboos and arbitrary procedures while sneakily achieving something essential and decisive for the survival of the community. It prohibits and enables, giving meaning to the world and actions, therefore having a pedagogical effect.

In societies governed by States, all of this is reversed. The rite of passage no longer serves to enforce equality among all members of the group. There is now a division within society—a group constitutes or dominates the State and holds the power to subjugate those outside of it. Under these new conditions, the rite tests loyalty to the oppressive group, which selectively chooses its members. The core principle is no longer cooperation, but competition. The rite is not meant to foster equality but to create hierarchies. The secret of the rite is no longer shared with everyone; it becomes a privilege that grants access to military, priestly, or technical roles, with little to no manual labor (Kim, 2015; Kusimba, 2020). Loyalty to the group is established in opposition to the society and social unity. A dense web of discourse justifies and naturalizes inequality and social division. The rite solidifies differences and divergent interests, a social chasm between those who command and those who are commanded. Those excluded from the violent rite are perceived by the dominant group as inferior, less human, and unworthy of respect, while a sense of pride develops among the initiates.

The rite becomes crucial for maintaining control over the State, territory, and population. By uniting the dominant group, it facilitates the extraction of wealth produced by the subjugated population. This model is replicated across various institutions, each of which require its members to undergo a specific ritual. Each organization is viewed as a small, enclosed territory that will be governed exclusively by its initiates—a miniature State. As a result, there is a proliferation of rites specific to each organization.

Initially, these initiated groups assume military, priestly, and technical roles, all of which correspond to positions of command and privilege. The violent rite is perceived as an inescapable part of the recruitment and training processes. Later, in modern societies, we must

also include university education, which legitimizes certain individuals to uphold positions of power and authority within society.

Despite the issues that arise from using rites to establish privileged groups, in these early States, the rite remains crucial for the reorganization of society, helping to exert control over nature and increase social complexity.

In brief, it can be implied that the rite is bound to a formative process that shapes individuals to meet the urgent demands of society and its groups. This process tests loyalty and marks the individual as a member of a specific group. In stateless societies, this process aims to include everyone and is fundamental to social life itself. However, with the emergence of the State, the testing and inclusion become selective, reserved for those destined to govern society—those who will be privileged and exempt from manual labor.

In contemporary capitalist societies, social control is simplified through economic relationships, with salaries sufficient to subdue individuals. Money and wages replace many other forms of social subordination. While rites persist for certain command positions but, in capitalist companies, cohesion is largely established through financial compensation. Bullying and moral harassment (Freitas et al., 2008) play a relatively secondary role in controlling work and production units. Thus, the reliance on violent rites becomes weaker within production organizations, becoming nearly invisible in capitalist companies, where it survives more as a historical remnant than as a core element of power relations. Such rites do not disappear from the recruitment, selection, and training processes of dominant groups, but their significance changes drastically. Now, the rite incorporates elements of cynicism, arrogance, vanity, and pride, revealing its dysfunctional and degraded character. It no longer fosters collective harmony or allow for an increase in social complexity. Instead, it stands as an obstacle to new equality, the deepening of democracy, the historical process of humanization, and the potential for reconciliation with both internal and external nature.

With these preliminary observations, we turn our attention to college hazing. It is evident that, in it, the ritual plot has its peculiarities, however, it retains key elements of individual sacrifice and immersion in a collective. We can conceptualize the campus as a territory apart from the rest of society. To enter, there are both social and, often, physical barriers. For employees and faculty, competitions and tests are required to join. For students, there is the

demand to pass an entrance exam or some other type of selection. The campus is a private territory, accessible to only a select few.

Within this space, faculty and staff are fully trained and integrated into their social roles. However, this is not the case for students, who are still in training and on their way to professional incorporation. The violent rite targets this group, not with the intent of integrating them into the university or society at large, but with the hidden objective of inserting them into a privileged professional group—one destined for leadership, often unfamiliar with equality and democracy.

Hazing is the outcome of a long historical clash between forces vying for control of the university. As a device for indoctrinating intellectual and technical “elites,” the university holds a far broader social role than that which is generally acknowledged. Changes within the university, particularly in the training offered and the pedagogies employed, have significant social repercussions. For this reason, many argue that the university must be kept within certain limits to curb its emancipatory potential (Almeida Júnior, 2022; Andrade, 2022; Chomsky, 2004; Said, 2005).

Despite being a formative locus, where educational agents would have the opportunity to reflect upon and modify the foundations of their own prejudices, the university has also become notorious as a place of production and reproduction of barbaric practices. In a way, this corroborates Walter Benjamin’s (2012) assertion that there is no document of culture that is not also a document of barbarism. Historically recognized as a space for knowledge production and dissemination—to the extent that, from a Kantian perspective, it became a bastion for the defense of enlightened individuals free from the influence of other institutions, such as the church—the university has also been a breeding ground for physical and verbal abuse, moral and sexual harassment, rape, and various forms of prejudice, including racism, homophobia, misogyny, and sexism, among other manifestations of violence which not only persisted but still thrive today.

Behind a veneer of civilization, the perpetrators of such barbarities often benefit from silence, particularly on the part of the most powerful administrative sectors within the university. This same silence echoes in the eyes of victims who are all too aware that little, if anything, can be done due to the unspoken pact that binds a brotherhood of aggressors of sorts. Among all the atrocities committed within university institutions, perhaps the most enduring is hazing.

Although this article focuses on the analysis of hazing practices carried out in Brazilian universities for decades, the very history of the university is intertwined with that of hazing, as can be noted in the rivalries established between French and German students who attended the same classrooms at the University of Paris in 1342 (Mattoso, 1985). At the University of Heidelberg in 1491, hazers labeled new students as animals, subjecting them to having their hair and body hair shaved and forcing them to drink a glass of wine mixed with urine. It is worth noting that these newcomers were excused from being treated as irrational animals through a grotesque banquet of waste, sausage, and salt, after which they took an oath committing to repeat the same procedure against future newcomers (Mattoso, 1985). In Brazil, the first instances of hazing were observed among students at law schools, particularly in Olinda, where a law student was killed during a hazing incident in 1831.

Indeed, within the context of Brazil, the university has often been an institution that opposes emancipatory, libertarian, and communitarian ideas. It is a markedly individualistic institution, at best conservative, and in many cases overtly reactionary, despite the ongoing struggle to implement affirmative action policies. It frequently produces knowledge aimed at dominating and colonizing mentalities, often hostile to democracy and those excluded from its halls (Almeida Júnior, 2022; Andrade, 2022; Santos & Almeida Filho, 2008).

As a representative of university barbarism, hazing seeks to expel any ideas or individuals that advocate for emancipatory interests of any kind. Many students arrive at university with emancipatory, libertarian, and identity-focused ideals, valuing the environment, culture, and country, thereby challenging the conservative, reactionary, and imperialist control over the *campuses*. However, despite said emancipatory ideals, students often join university while feeling uncertain, with worldviews still under development, seeking validation and a sense of direction. Under these conditions, new students must confront ideologically aggressive groups that have been organized by hazing proponents (Almeida Júnior, 2022; Zuin, 2002). Hazing is a form of exorcism of these ideas, with the more or less conscious aim of purging mentalities of anything that might represent some form of emancipatory tendency (political, sexual, cultural, gender, racial, religious, etc.). In essence, hazing strips away the humanity of students entering the university—an anti-exorcism of sorts, monstrous in its execution.

To achieve this, hazers place themselves at the center of social life on campus, using negative examples, psychological pressure, intimidation, exclusion, mistreatment, torture, raw

violence, and whatever other tools available (Assembleia Legislativa do Estado de São Paulo [Alesp], 2015). Their goal is to break the resistance of new students, crush their spirits, and instill ideas and values conducive to oppression, corruption, competition, and the maintenance of absolute, irrational hierarchies. These practices aim to naturalize such behavior, framing it as part of a (cruel) “human nature,” and any deviation from this must be ridiculed and punished. Hazing is grounded in a reductionist worldview that promotes competition, the selfish domination of the weak by the strong, and the subjugation of the collective by a privileged group—a form of obscurantist Darwinism that justifies oppression and finds humor in it. Hazers seem to forget that mocking the vulnerable is not humor, but cruelty.

Through hazing, students are taught a wide range of prejudices—against class, gender, race, sexual behavior, appearance, religion, ethnicity, and the environment, among others—which work to justify oppression, naturalize inequalities, and advocate for environmental pillaging (Almeida Júnior & Queda, 2006; Almeida Júnior, 2016). These prejudices are visible in practices that equate first-year students with beggars (toll roads), women (cross-dressing male students), alcoholics (forced drunkenness), rural workers (wearing large hats), and miners (mud baths). They are also evident in the derogatory nicknames assigned to new students, which reference their ethnic origin, physical appearance, gender, and other social conditions. Moreover, hazing groups often display an overt denial of environmental issues, which is indicative of their broader prejudices against these groups.

In light of these practices, it can be inferred that hazing sacrifices the identity of the new student, extinguishing their developing sense of self, their freedom, their capacity for humanity, and their dreams of emancipation, while implanting a personality filled with prejudice and hatred, one willing to lie, humiliate, punish, torture, and use violence in its place. In essence, hazing teaches the new student to become an oppressor, responding to the pressure exerted by the hazing group to act in this manner. The ideal outcome is the formation of a personality that revels in oppressing others. We can consider this group as fostering antisocial personalities, narcissistic sadism, and psychopathy (Ongaro, 1991).

Van Gennep (1960) notes that the transition from one social condition to another involves three types of rites: separation, marginalization, and incorporation. There is no exact proportion or balance between these modalities, but these distinct rites outline a path that facilitates the transition between different social roles. Separation rites are designed to sever ties

with the former condition, signaling that a significant change is underway. They typically initiate a liminal period, during which the individual learns about the new condition, with its own unique characteristics. During this time, the individual is no longer what they once were, but are also not yet prepared for the new situation. It is a time of preparation and transformation. As the new condition approaches, rites of incorporation into the new group take place. It is often gradual, with rites marking each new level of progression.

College hazing is generally perceived as a ritual that separates new students from their former lives. It constitutes a sudden shock, coinciding with other transitions typically experienced when entering university, such as leaving home, moving to a new city, starting a new level of education, or passing entrance exams.

In Brazil, this initial separation is followed by a relatively short period that generally culminates on May 13th¹, marking the apparent “end of hazing” and the new student’s formal incorporation into university life. We think, however, that things happen differently. This initial period of hazing consists of a series of separation activities that disconnect the new student from their pre-university values and worldview. May 13th merely outlines the beginning of the true liminal period, which will continue throughout the student’s entire university experience and only conclude with graduation and entry into the job market—events that constitute the rites of actual incorporation.

While hazing is commonly perceived as a means of integration into university life, it is, in reality, an initiation into the hazing group. It imposes the group’s law on the individual, placing itself above institutional orders and, at times, even above the nation’s legal framework, which is evident in the “commandments” directed at students of the Universidade Estadual Paulista (Unesp): “Freshmen rights: 1) The freshmen (*bixo*) has no rights”... The *bixo*’s rights to life, freedom, and equality, as guaranteed by our Constitution, do not apply at Unesp” (Alesp, 2015, p. 655). This statement is both shocking and revealing of the prevailing mentality within hazing groups. Even if expressed jokingly, it exposes how hazers wish to be perceived by new students—as figures of authority capable of creating and enforcing their own laws on campus.

¹ It is noteworthy that May 13th, 1888, is the date when the Golden Law was signed, formally abolishing slavery in Brazil. The use of May 13th to “terminate” hazing activities is a mockery and unmistakably highlights the racist undertones of these rituals.

On the surface, hazing is seemingly a ritual in honor of the university, as if it were a revered entity. However, this appearance is deceptive. The true sacrifice is not made to the university itself but to the hazing group. The new student is sacrificed as a means of gaining access to it. The deification of the university serves as a mere facade, concealing the actual idol that governs all—the hazing group. In practice, this concealment symbolizes a hijacking of the university and campus by hazing groups who, rather than genuinely caring for the institution, imprison, exploit, and degrade it to serve and promote their own interests. Hazing rituals ultimately sacrifice and mutilate emancipatory ideas and tendencies within new students. The effects of this immolation are evident when comparing the behaviors of students involved in hazing to those who are not in the group (Almeida Júnior, 2016).

The irrational demands imposed by the hazing group, and their subsequent compliance, create a dependency on the group. The particular nature of the group's values—rooted in lies, denial of reality, and rejection of social norms—isolates its members from broader society, leaving them with little to no ability to share the group's practices with outsiders. A kind of parallel reality is established, both self-reproducing and self-regulating. Generally incomprehensible and perverse to outsiders, this denial of reality and external values is fundamental to the perpetuation of hazing groups. The more adherent to internal values these groups are, the less contact they have with reality, and the more bizarre their behavior becomes. Diana Dias and Maria José Sá (2014) suggest that this dependency among students is evident in their research in Portugal.

Upon closer examination of College hazing, it becomes clear that it seeks to sacrifice emancipation, which challenges the unequal order upheld by its participants. In the context of hazing, individuals are made to “become slaves,” which should eventually grant them the right to “enslave” others. The notion is that by accepting their own oppression, students will earn the right to oppress in the future. They inhabit an uncivilized parallel world where the constitution, democracy, equal rights, and compassion for others are nonexistent. Hazing, therefore, plays a critical role in shaping and sustaining groups of professionals with an obsolete mindset—individuals disconnected from the pursuit of genuine solutions to the social inequalities afflicting the country. These professionals will carry the ideas and prejudices reinforced through hazing into their technical and leadership roles, obstructing necessary and self-evident social transformations. They deny reality and inflict undue suffering on those whose humanity is disregarded. Hazers are not only admirers but active builders of social exclusion.

In the rites of stateless societies, we observe efforts to maintain group cohesion by providing pathways for the various transitions people will inevitably face throughout their lives. These transitions need to be explained and make sense so that society does not suffer excessively or become too disorganized. This ensures that the centrifugal forces stirring human passions remain under control. Thus, these rites serve a regulatory and explanatory function. In societies governed by a State, these rites continue to contribute to stabilizing dynamics. However, due to their divisive nature, they occasionally devolve into irrational reactions that are disconnected from reality, impeding the development of new forms of social organization, new ways of interpreting laws and rights, new relationships with nature, and new modes of interaction between people. In seeking to reclaim its course, cooperation is often obstructed by rites that, in the early stages of humanization, established it as a deity and the foundation of social existence. The pendulum swinging between cooperation and competition must overcome these impasses and get back on track for the necessary processes of civilization.

Understood as a type of ritual, hazing violence does not serve to prevent greater violence; rather, it reaffirms the substantial and unnecessary social violence that could be easily avoided with a bit more equality. In some cases, this destruction results in course abandonment, breakdowns, mental disorders, and suicide (Lima et al., 2017; Swofford, 2020). Hazing creates cohesive yet dysfunctional groups, alienated from societal needs and positioned in opposition to them. To sustain this cohesion, it is crucial to understand the role of hazing as a point of contention between the university and the hazing group.

Hazing as a Sacrificial Crisis and the Ritualistic Hegemony of the Hazing Group

The characterization of hazing as an immutable tradition, as if it were impossible to envision university entry without the use of violence, prompts an analysis of the relevance of hazing to the functioning of the university's bureaucratic-authoritarian structures. At this point, it is worth reflecting on the importance of hazing for the cohesion of relationships within the university. From this perspective, it becomes crucial to reflect on hazing's importance for the cohesion of relationships established at the university level. To explore this further, we can

consider Girard's (1990, p. 19) observations about sacrificial rites and their function within the psychosocial economy of the group that practices them:

Sacrifice serves a real purpose here. The issue of replacement arises at the level of the entire community. The victim does not replace a particular individual who is particularly threatened, and is not offered to a particular individual who is particularly bloodthirsty. Instead, it simultaneously replaces and is offered by all members of society, to all members of society. The community in its entirety is protected from its *own* violence through the sacrificial act, and it is the community in its entirety that directs its focus toward external victims. The sacrifice channels the seeds of discord dispersed throughout the community, offering a partial appeasement.

Based on Girard's reasoning, one could highlight the presence of two types of violence in relation to sacrificial rites: purifying violence, which allows the victim to channel the violence of the community members through the sacrificial ritual, thus partially satisfying the "seeds of collective discord;" and impure violence, whose presence cannot be prevented in all social relationships and spreads uncontrollably. When the second form of violence overtakes the first, the so-called "sacrificial crisis" emerges. This crisis is defined as follows:

The sacrificial crisis, that is, the loss of sacrifice, occurs when the distinction between impure and purifying violence is blurred. When this distinction vanishes, purification becomes impossible, and impure, contagious, or reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community... The sacrificial crisis must be defined as a crisis of *differences*, that is, of the cultural order as a whole (Girard, 1990, p. 67).

In the context of hazing, the sacrificial crisis is manifested when a group—the hazers, who perpetrate physical and psychological atrocities—sets itself apart from others and assumes the authority to determine what forms of violence should be applied and when they will be used against new students. By spreading uncontrollably, this type of violence becomes so pervasive that, in extreme cases, deaths, rapes, and physical and psychological mutilations of newcomers are dismissed as mere excesses from games that went too far. Stemming from the moral disengagement of those who perpetrated these barbarities and those who downplay them, this justification becomes crucial for maintaining both power structures within universities and the perception that such aggressions are isolated incidents. This is necessary so the university can maintain its image as a place of excellence in knowledge production and academic coexistence, supposedly grounded in moral behavior.

However, what truly persists is a superficial *appearance of morality*, concealing an internal reality riddled with various forms of physical and psychological violence. It is almost ironic to recall Kant's aspiration, articulated at the height of the European Enlightenment, in which he emphasized the importance of the germ of enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) spreading to all social spheres, including the university, which would enable the individual to break free from the protective oversight of institutions such as the church, allowing them to make public use of their reason. The Prussian philosopher cautioned: "Through art and science we are *cultivated* to a high degree... But there is still a long way to go before we can consider ourselves moralized" (Kant, 1986, p. 19). Now, for morality to be effectively cultivated, it would be essential to ensure that, through art and science, the practices of decorum and love of honor were substantially experienced in the lives of individuals. To this end, the university was expected to play a crucial role in shaping the enlightened individual, capable of critiquing their submission to certain social institutions, notably the church in the 18th century. This would enable individuals to experience, in a meaningful way, the ethical and moral bonds established with others.

However, Kant's aspiration faded as the contradictions between capitalist relations of production and the productive forces intensified, leading to heightened social inequalities and exploitation as conditions for generating and increasing capital. Herein lies the irony: the university, which should be the social institution par excellence in combating all forms of barbarism, has metamorphosed into a place where the production and reproduction of knowledge are primarily based on competition and constant discord among its participants.

Beneath the surface of the university's cultivation of arts and sciences lies a concealed—rather outright denied—culture of barbarism, perpetuated and maintained by its official representatives. It is no coincidence that many universities currently go to great lengths to avoid any responsibility for hazing practices, either by rationalizing that the physical and psychological abuses occurred off-campus or by struggling to punish the perpetrators of such atrocities, as bringing these cases to light could damage the university's reputation.

Another sign of the dysfunctions associated with hazing is the realization that these practices do not unify but rather exacerbate divisions among students on campus (Almeida Júnior, 2016), which can be characterized as impure, divisive violence in Girard's (1990) terms.

In today's society of spectacle, where relationships are algorithmically measured (Mau, 2019) and everything, including professors and universities, is subject to public evaluation, it is

certainly not beneficial for a university's name to be associated with a tolerant attitude toward hazing. Thus, alongside universities' efforts to distance their names from completed hazing incidents, there are also attempts to restore, in Girard's words, a form of purifying violence toward the hazing victim, aiming to contain the overwhelming and uncontrolled violence inflicted by the hazing group.

Against this backdrop, the implementation of so-called "solidarity hazing" carries the connotation of attempting to introduce a type of purifying violence within the university environment. However, it must be remembered that hazing itself is a form of violence embedded in language, as no hazing practice can exist without some form of aggression. At its core, hazing embodies the belief that one has the right to "domesticate" another person, who is not viewed as an equal but rather as a "*bixo*" (something akin to a pet, from the Portuguese word '*bicho*'). The deliberate use of the letter 'x' in *bixo*, as opposed to the correct spelling '*bicho*' (meaning animal), with *ch*, reveals the contempt of those who consider themselves superior, to the point that the victim is not even deemed worthy of being identified as an animal. That is why the term "solidarity hazing" is inherently contradictory, as the act of new students helping those in need—by collecting medications, for example—becomes delegitimized when forced under the conditions of hazing.

In fact, there are other signs of the university's attempts to take control over violence in such a way that purifying violence, as emphasized by Girard, is restored, contributing to the cohesion of the university community as a whole. Several anti-hazing campaigns were launched by universities following the murder of student Edison Tsung-Chi Hsueh, who was found dead in the swimming pool of Universidade de São Paulo's (USP) Medical School club in 1999. One notable campaign, initiated by Unesp in 2000, was titled "Hazing Never Again"². The campaign sought to reward the best slogans opposing hazing, with the winning phrase being: The winning sentence was the following: "Watch out, Senior student! Bixos are now protected under law"³. The third-place slogan read: "Freshmen may be 'bixos,' but Senior students can't be animals."

These awards, in reality, clearly demonstrate how the university's bureaucratic-authoritarian structure views its freshmen—"bixos"—as subjects to be domesticated. Indeed,

² A throwback to the expression "Tortura nunca mais" (Torture Never Again), created to oppose the 1964 dictatorship,

³ Mockingly referred to fauna protection laws, creating a parallel to environmental legislation.

intellectual arrogance has accompanied the history of relationships between educational agents since the early days of universities. It may not be far-fetched to suggest that hazers, being humiliated by their professors, sadistically take revenge on new students, perpetuating a sadomasochistic interaction process. In fact, in some hazing rituals, hazers replicate the violence endured from professors in their everyday university life, as will be further analyzed in the case of the hazing class.

Likewise, just as newcomers masochistically endure the physical and psychological pain of hazing, they acquire the “right” to sadistically domesticate the next group of students entering the university (Zuin, 2002). This so-called “right” is earned through surviving hazing’s barbarities and being accepted by older hazers as part of a group that views itself as superior. However, for the purifying violence discussed earlier to take hold, the hazer who oversteps boundaries must be domesticated, much like the “*bixo*.” Hence the warning in the third-place slogan: if the newcomer is a “*bixo*” needing domestication, the senior student must be of the same breed, as they should have already been “domesticated.” Consequently, by behaving like an animal, the senior student, too, must be tamed and controlled in their hazing actions.

The winning phrases in the contest serve as warnings to hazers, urging caution when targeting new students—especially to avoid crossing certain boundaries. In other words, hazers must not deviate from the accepted script of purifying violence that is permitted within university life. If they do, impure violence may emerge, spreading uncontrollably to the point of murder or rape, which would inevitably attract unwanted media attention and tarnish the university’s image. It is now clear that not all hazing actions can be interpreted as unifying or purifying, as may have been assumed in the past.

This raises important questions about the role of “prank classes” in maintaining the purifying violence that supposedly fosters cohesion among university colleagues. As the term suggests, a “prank class” is conducted by a hazer playing the role of a teacher in front of new students. This “teacher” enters the classroom, briefly greets the newcomers, and warns them that he will not tolerate delays. Those who are late, he says, will face punishment, ranging from suspension to expulsion.

He then proceeds to lecture, explaining that the required texts must be read in four languages, and that any challenges to his teaching or grading methods will not be accepted. Suddenly, a hazer, pretending to be a novice student, expresses frustration and accuses the

“teacher” of being an authoritarian. Upon hearing this comment, the “teacher” shouts the hazer out of class. Since the newcomers do not yet know each other, they believe that the expelled student is genuinely new to the course. As a result, the fresh students, bewildered and shocked by the “teacher’s” harsh behavior, may even become tearful.

Just then, another hazer bursts into the classroom and yells, “You stupid animals, you’ve just participated in a prank class!” Between tears and laughter, the hazers embrace the new students, sharing in a kind of masochistic identification, as, the previous year, they had been the ones despairing at the “teacher’s” temper during the prank class. Now, it was finally their turn to exact sadistic revenge for the pain they endured by subjecting the new students to the same ritual.

It is interesting to observe that the prank class serves as a cipher for students’ grievances about their professors in everyday university life. These complaints often center around punctuality rules that allow no leniency, regardless of circumstances; disproportionate workloads, as each professor views their subject as the most important; a lack of communication between faculty members, leading to overlapping or redundant content and an overwhelming load of assignments; and the students’ inability to voice their concerns about teaching and assessment methods, among other issues. By exorcising these frustrations through a kind of regressive catharsis, the power dynamics—sometimes bordering on domination—are preserved. The purifying violence, once again, is channeled towards the new student, who becomes its sacrificial lamb.

It’s no coincidence that when asked about the prank class, many professors not only support it but also give up their own class time to accommodate it (Zuin, 2002). They know, deep down, that the prank class allows students’ frustrations to be purged through this regressive cathartic movement, as the expulsion of these feelings provides a sense of relief while simultaneously contributing to the maintenance of the disproportionate power dynamics between professors and students, thus reinforcing purifying violence. It does not concern them whether the new students might become so desperate from the physical and psychological violence of hazing that they even drop out, as these regulated forms of violence are perceived as crucial for preserving the psychosocial cohesion of professors, hazing students, administrators, and university staff.

The sacrifice of the freshmen, who become their sacrificial lambs, is not in vain, as it prevents the spread of discord among these university groups from escalating uncontrollably. Thus, a connection can be drawn between the hazing class, certain university anti-hazing campaigns, and solidarity hazing: all of them are attempts to preserve order through institutionally sanctioned violence, which helps safeguard university cohesion by electing the new student as the sacrificial lamb.

Everything would be perfect if not for one detail: the desire for power among the hazers, especially those who take the pranks to new extremes against the new students. It is as if these hazers declared loudly, “We have the right to decide how long and how much the freshmen will suffer. It’s our turn to exercise our power!” When this happens, the very thing the university seeks to avoid at all costs emerges—the so-called sacrificial crisis. In this context, a crisis of differences arises as the hazing group takes control over hazing practices, deciding how new students will suffer when hazing is carried out, all at their discretion. In this scenario, the conditions are highly favorable for so-called excesses—euphemisms for barbarities—to emerge from uncontrolled violence, such as: throwing acid at new students, causing some to go blind from this unfortunate “joke”; rapes justified by the victim’s intoxication (after all, they were the ones who chose to get drunk); drowning of new students who, unfortunately, did not know how to swim (if they had known, they would not have died, so they are to blame for their misfortune), and yet were still thrown into the pool by hazers, among other atrocities.

Indeed, the hazers have learned their “lessons” well from their professors: in an environment where intellectual arrogance prevails and sadomasochistic interaction thrives, some feel entitled to view themselves as superior to others, who are considered to be in need of domestication—the so-called “*bixos*.” For university as a whole, if hazing practices were limited to things such as tolls (demanding a fee for new students to cross the campus), shaving heads, painting bodies, and even engaging in misogynistic, sexist, racist, and macho “jokes,” there would be no issue. These would be labeled “mild” hazing rituals, fostering group cohesion within the university community through purifying violence directed at the sacrificial lamb.

The problem for the university arises when hazers attempt to distinguish themselves as a hegemonic group, literally taking control of the domestication process and opting for hazing practices that may cause irreversible damage, thereby attracting media attention. In an era of

effective digital memory, where nothing can be forgotten, associating the university's logo and "heavy" hazing practices can be fatal to its survival, as previously mentioned.

In truth, the disproportionate violence between someone being killed during hazing and someone forced by hazers to collect money at traffic lights during toll activities cannot justify the continuation of the so-called tradition of "light" hazing practices, as though they were not also violent. Both "light" and "heavy" hazing are, in fact, hazing; they both involve violent practices that can cause physical and psychological harm lasting a lifetime for their victims. Just as "light" hazing cannot be considered a valid alternative to the risks posed by "heavy" hazing, the so-called purifying violence of the former cannot be reasonably defended over the impure/uncontrolled violence of the latter, which instigates sacrificial crises within the university environment.

In light of the ongoing struggle between university administration and hazing students over control of hazing practices, several questions arise: must every initiation of new students be guided by physical and psychological violence, as though there were no alternative? Must the bonds established between university groups always be consolidated through the use of—alleged—purifying violence, with the new student cast as the sacrificial lamb? Would it not be possible to foster new traditions of student initiation, grounded in practices of inclusion and respect for individual identities?

Conclusion

Questions like the previous ones are challenging, as the answers to all of them converge not only in refounding the way in which new students are received, but also other relationships between professors, students, managers and administrative technicians at universities.

Questions like these are indeed challenging, as their answers not only converge on the reformation of the initiation process for new students but also on reshaping other relationships among professors, students, administrators, and university staff. Both the creation of new ways to welcome students into university life and the development of relationships that are not based on arrogance and sadomasochistic interaction among educational agents point to a different approach to treating incoming students. Clearly, hazing and its associated violence are unnecessary and, at this historical moment, do not unify but rather divide and disintegrate.

Students enter this new world hoping to be welcomed with respect and dignity by their more experienced peers, yet are often treated as sacrificial lambs to be sacrificed, either for the sake of maintaining purifying violence that helps preserve cohesion among university groups by tempering their internal conflicts, or to continue the uncontrolled barbarities perpetrated by certain hazing groups. Thus, no form of hazing is devoid of some exercise of violence. In fact, it is crucial to highlight that physical and psychological attacks occurring at a moment of extreme joy—such as passing an entrance exam and beginning a new chapter of life—represent one of the cruelest aspects of hazing. In such moments of jubilation, the violence tends to be downplayed and not recognized for what it truly is: elements of a barbaric celebration.

Following this line of reasoning, it is a fallacy to assert that participation in hazing during university initiation solely depends on the new student's choice and that, therefore, any resulting aggression should be condoned. This illusion of free will quickly dissipates, as choosing not to participate in hazing or even reporting it through anonymous hotlines can lead to what might be termed "social cancellation." This can manifest not only as physical exclusion—where more experienced students avoid any contact with the reporting student throughout their entire course—but also in terms of social networks related to university life, affecting participation in academic projects and social gatherings. However, in the face of massive pressure from hazing groups, who consider only those who submit to their demands—rooted in humiliation and physical aggression towards new students—as their true allies, there is also a notable emergence of resistance movements among students themselves, often organized by academic centers and rebelling against the cruel and inhumane logic of hazing.

Thus, not only are the practices of the hazing groups increasingly questioned collectively, but also the university administration, albeit reluctantly, begins to take action to punish students who persist in committing atrocities both within and outside the university setting. Furthermore, the administration is now focused on promoting ongoing programs for discussion and combating hazing throughout the academic year, rather than only addressing it during student orientation periods. Perhaps this shift can already be identified as an indication of the university's reaffirmation as a place for the production and reproduction of a type of knowledge that fosters humanistic practices capable of treating newcomers as emancipated individuals, each with a name and a history, rather than merely as "*bixo*."

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Notes

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