The volitional nature of motivation and cultural creativity: an anthropological investigation

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Abstract:

We examine the volitional, non-rational nature of motivation and its impact on symbolic production at work. Based on a ethnographic study on a Brazilian special police force we argue that institutional stability and stable symbolic frames of references have long been taken for granted in studies of motivation, thus leaving aside the role of aesthetical demand in producing active symbolic elaboration at work. Unstable institutional frames of reference are relevant to understand the efforts of internal integration, identity building and relations of alterity at work. In this sense, this article has the main objective of contributing to the studies on intrinsic motivation within organizations.

Keywords: Motivation. Identity. Alterity. Metaphysics. Symbolism. Meaning.

A natureza volitiva da motivação e a criatividade cultural: uma investigação antropológica

Resumo:

Examinamos a natureza volitiva e não-racional da motivação e seu impacto na produção simbólica no trabalho. Com base em um estudo etnográfico em uma força especial policial no Brasil, argumentamos que a estabilidade institucional e os quadros simbólicos de referências também estáveis têm sido aceitos como dados em estudos de motivação, deixando de lado o papel da demanda estética na produção de elaboração simbólica ativa no trabalho. Os quadros de referência institucionais instáveis são relevantes para entender os esforços de integração interna, construção de identidade e relações de alteridade no trabalho. Nesse sentido, este artigo tem como objetivo principal contribuir para os estudos sobre a motivação intrínseca dentro das organizações.

Palavras-chave: Motivação. Identidade. Alteridade. Metafísica. Simbolismo. Significado.

La naturaleza volitiva de la motivación y la creatividad cultural: una investigación antropológica

Resumen:

Examinamos la naturaleza volitiva y no racional de la motivación y su impacto en la producción simbólica en el trabajo. Basándonos en un estudio etnográfico en una fuerza especial de policía en Brasil, sostenemos que la estabilidad institucional y la estabilidad de marcos de referencia simbólicos se han dado por sentado en los estudios de motivación, dejando de lado el papel de la demanda estética en la producción de la elaboración simbólica activa en el trabajo. Los marcos institucionales de referencia inestables son relevantes para comprender los esfuerzos de integración interna, construcción de identidad y relaciones de alteridad en el trabajo. En este sentido, este artículo tiene el objetivo principal de contribuir a los estudios sobre la motivación intrínseca dentro de las organizaciones.

Palabras clave: Motivación. Identidad. Alteridad. Metafísica. Simbolismo. Significado.

INTRODUCTION

Motivation is an enduring and challenging research topic in organizational studies. Recent changes in the nature of work and workforce has increased the need for new knowledge on the subject (KANFER, FRESE and JOHNSON, 2017). Yet, our understanding of motivation is still contained within the division of work in a hierarchical environment (FOSTER and MICHON., 2014; GÜSS, BURGER and DÖRNER, 2017; ELLIOT, ALDHOBAIBAN, MURAYAMA et al., 2018), with somehow stable frames of reference for the organization of the activities. We argue that inadequate frames of reference (L'ESTOILE, 2014, p. S64) demand another understanding of the desire for power and for reaching socially desirable goals, an understanding that has not been fully covered by the organizational studies because the issues of self-interest, self-satisfaction and stable frames of reference are very much taken for granted. Even the studies on intrinsic motivation (CERASOLI, NICKLIN and FORD, 2014) don't address quite the same phenomenon. A broader look at the individuals in their social and cultural embeddedness can shed light on other possibilities to think of motivation (MIGUELES, 1999a; 1999b; 2003), especially in terms of the understanding the desire for power and effectiveness within its social framing. It has specifically neglected the possibility of continuous improving organizational design and its strategies of internal integration as means to power, that is, the possibilities of subjecting organizational design and its internal mechanisms of cooperation to the individual's active effort to enhance effectiveness as a team member in search of a common goal. We propose here to look at organizational development and especially the symbolic production within it, as a human product, looking at the dynamic, continuous, active and creative effort of individuals in discovering ways to enhance effectiveness, creating references, boundaries, limits and rules for their own action.

We argue here that there are aspects of lasting motivation that cannot be thought of as contained within the framework of rational, depersonalized, abstract and precise contractual relations. Nor can it be properly conceived within the frame of the "substantive economy", that is the belief that material conditions of life are logically distinct from political and spiritual ones (L'ESTOILE, 2014). This article portrays a study conducted in a *Critical Action Organization* (CAO), which is a type of organization that, according to Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio et al. (2009), deals with events of extreme uncertainty and high probability of critical consequences of large magnitude, involving risks to the lives of members and non-members. The CAO studied in this article works under extreme conditions (ZANINI, MIGUELES, COLMERAUER et al., 2013; ZANINI, MIGUELES, and COLMERAUER, 2014), carrying out daily operations under severe circumstances, in which the lives of agents are constantly under threat and the results in terms of military and civil casualties are comparatively high (LIMA, BUENO, PRÖGLHÖF et al., 2017). At first, the study aimed at understanding, in depth, how the trust bounds emerged in a low trust society (ZAK and KNACK, 2001; ZANINI, 2016) observing human interaction to see the concrete arrangements that enabled participation and engagement, from which trust could emerge and last. What we observed, however, changed the course of our investigation.

According to Decéné (2009), Critical Action Organizations (CAOs) were created during the Second World War to use violence in a planned and sporadic way to reach better results than those possible by conventional forces. CAOs are organized in smaller, autonomous units, with fewer soldiers and a new combination between information, technology and strategy. This type of organization is important to increase effectiveness in actions with features of urban guerrilla. These units are designed to be effective alternatives for the growing complexity and uncertainty of combats, given the risks for civilians, soldiers and criminals. For these purposes, centralized control tends to be inefficient (SPULAK, 2007). Shared leadership and autonomy are key to success, but it increases the demand for intangible elements of coordination (such as trust, motivation and active cooperation) and reduces the effectiveness of centralized command and control (ZANINI, MIGUELES and COLMERAUER, 2014). The CAOs usually have a strong internal cohesion and a strong sense of devotion to a common cause (WEBER, 1968; CLAUSEWITZ, 1979; STORANI, 2006; SPULAK, 2007; DECÉNÉ, 2009; ZANINI, COLMERAUER and LIMA, 2015).

This article is part of a six-year longitudinal study on intangible aspects of operational discipline and trust in Brazil, conducted by a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The research adopted participant observation for two consecutive years in a CAO, and returned for a period of three months in each of the following four years, as issues raised with the quantitative method demanded deeper understanding.

It is the result of an ethnographic part of the longitudinal study on a Special Operation Unit of the Military Police in Rio de Janeiro (BOPE), a troop of about 450 members, located at Laranjeiras, Rio de Janeiro. We could never have imagined this organization would have led us to a study on metaphysic aspects of motivation at work. The study found a phenomenon that, at the beginning, could be mistaken for exceptional motivation, as described by Zanini, Migueles, Colmerauer et al. (2013; 2014, 2015). But neither the concepts nor the theoretical perspectives on motivation could grasp what we observed. There was a will, a desire, or a hunger for taming what the members called *chaos* that escaped our explanations. The soldiers' experience at work is often described as a *foray in chaos*. And this is a quite literal description of what they intend to communicate. Their activity is performed in what they describe as the borderline, the frontier between civilization and the "other side". During the fieldwork observations, listening to all the description of the hardship those men encounter in their everyday routine, the many life threatening situations, the seriously injuring routine, the growing number of police fatality (VILLARREAL and SILVA, 2006; LIMA, BUENO, PRÖGLHÖF et al., 2017), the relatively low salaries and the precariousness of the health care system to treat the injured, we asked: why do you do it? The answers were mostly: "*because someone has to do something. And we are this someone*". And: "*the captive has no one else to count on. We are their last resort.*"; "*Because if we give up, the city will fall*"; "*because if we don´t do it, soon we will all be on our knees to crime*". What produces this sense of duty and its acceptance? We are conscious of the fact that this is an extremely complex issue that does not fit the limits of one academic article, so that with this article we propose to examine one specific element that has been puzzling us since the beginning of the longitudinal study, back in 2011: an exceptional motivation and the observable effort to continuously enhance operational discipline through individual and organizational development, especially making use of an active symbolic production.

What was found extrapolates the original intentions. As often happens with inductive, qualitative research, the fieldwork brings surprises and unforeseeable elements that demand a search for new, reasonable explanations. We encountered an active semiosis, a sometimes clearly conscious and other partially unconscious search for symbols and symbolic ordering of their activity that brought us directly in contact with the members' uneasiness, with the incomplete nature of their organization and its imperfections, and their effort to continuously complete their "creation". The idea of incompleteness, the need for a clear identity, for boundaries and for effectiveness was present from the beginning of the research process, as seen in the interview with the retired Colonel that, back in 1978, gave himself the task of creating a symbol in the initial moments of the organization:

> "*I needed a symbol, something to represent the new unit we were creating. And so I went on looking for references and inspirations…. The skull is a traditional symbol for the military. And it has many interpretations, which range from ferocity and toughness to death, from the mission to the hardship of military life. The two crossed* garruchas, *are a symbol of military police. The knife on the skull means victory over death, in this arrangement meaning the specific mission of a special troop created to fight for the deterritorialization of crime entrenched in civil society that uses human fences as a mechanism of defense. The red on the circle has many associations: from preventing the loss of blood to the strength of loyalty that needs to surround a special unit…. I invested a lot of time in searching for the best symbol... and I think it worked.*"

In fact, as Storani (2006) points out, the skull became a totem for the unit, an element with clear strength in providing references for identity and guarding the discipline. Its use can be observed in many different moments, from the highly risky tattooing in the body (that is seen both as symbol of the strength of the bond with the unit and as a risk, for it can jeopardize the soldier by allowing identification as member of the unit if he is captured by the criminals), in greetings or in war cry: "*Caveira!*"(skull). Reference to the skull is constant also in disciplining moments in which there is effort to explain what is an adequate or inadequate behavior for a "*skull*", as they refer to themselves.

The relevance of this active symbolic creation appeared in interviews, in which we sought to understand the origin of observable elements and of the present arrangements, resorting to the memory of the founders and of those who have been at the organization for a long time. During the participant observation, as described below, it was possible to see new elements being added to the symbolic repertoire of the group in a continuous refining of their understanding of their mission and their identity. We proceeded as suggested by Newell (2018), observing the continuous semiosis, in an attempt to understand the signs and

symbols less as delimited representations fixed in structures, and more as indeterminate and ambiguous elements that, in the flow of interaction, continuously gained social efficacy, some being abandoned and other incorporated as basis for further elaboration. At a certain point, although observing the process of creation and refining, we realized we were still locked into the symbolic analysis. Proceeding as suggested by Geertz (1989), looking for the web of meanings and searching inside of it for the keys to motivation and its reasons, when we remembered the dissatisfaction of Turner (1985), with the idea of culture as a merely derivative of social structure, recognizing rites and symbols as factors in social action, "a positive force in an activity field", that does not exclude psychology and religion (p. 3). To then recall that Geertz himself never lost contact with the dynamic aspect of culture, which led him to define culture as a "web of meanings in flow" (GEERTZ, 1989; OLIVEIRA, 2012).

Considering the above, there are three questions worth investigating: how can we think of the dynamic element of this flow? What is this force that produces this continuous effort for taming reality in symbolic terms, producing such a visible and active elaboration? Why is it that these men, who could so clearly and dramatically describe the chaos, hardship and risks involved in their work, feared expulsion from the unit as the worse possible sort of punishment? One fact was clear: they really wanted to do this job. This is what we call here motivation. How can we understand this "willingness"? And they want to do it in the right way. Given that a clear definition of "the right way" is not readily available (that's what we call here the inadequate frames of reference, as in L'Estoile (2014)), they called the task of creating the references to themselves. This is what we call here cultural creativity (their own academic production is evidence of this fact: This restlessness was relevant to us and their own academic production attests this fact[1]).

We divided our argument in two parts: in the first, we bring attention to the need for thinking this motivation that is prior to engagement in active symbolic production. On the second, we look at a specific effort of symbolic ordering of social life. We were facing an onto-epistemological issue that connected the suffering with the situation, the desire to contribute to the solution and the creation of a symbolic frame to provide stable and shared understanding of the situation, which would enable focused and effective cooperation. The suffering with chaos, disorder and injustice seemed to us, at least in our interpretative effort (GEERTZ, 1989), to produce the volition and determination to solve the problems, that lead to the engagement in the search for the means to fix it as means to lead to the desired state of order and peace. This imagined and desired state of order and peace, at the same time an ethical and aesthetical ideal, is of an orderly society where the captive is no longer under the powerless position of a victim without support, a state anticipated in desire and imagination, a sort of "should be", where the ultimate victory would be the peaceful city, where the unit would be effective more as a myth (inhibiting the crime from planning to return due to its symbolic strength) than as an actuating force.

To think of this desire, we resort to the work of Schopenhauer. The relation of causality springs from inner experience, a possibility that we would like to explore, of a "should be" ideal that leads to a perception of the dreadful "unfit", which then leads to an intuitive search guided by the conception of an ideal society. Between the "think-in-itself", or life as a "representation" that is apprehended by the individuals, and this "should be", present in the desire, there is a lack of connecting elements that demands creativity. This "should be" appears quite often in reference to an abstract idea of the social contract. When explaining social contract, the members often resort to Rousseau, in their words "Rousseau's social contract is not here!". However, in their speech, "Rousseau's social contract" does not mean necessarily Rousseau – the author – and his theory, but an expression that postulates and condenses the absurd of this absence. Underlying this idea of order, peace and justice there is an implicit understanding of this "should be" that is so obvious and taken-for-granted by the members to the point that it goes unsaid. This "should be", although not clearly formulated, is at the bottom of the search that is oriented towards the improvement of self-discipline and team performance, as well as the capacity to offer resistance to what is perceived as treat to it, namely social and institutional disorder.

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The restlessness of the members in face of the observed economic, political and symbolic disorder, produces a desire for meaning and order which appeared to be the connecting thread that pulls all the efforts of continuous improvement and their search to think about themselves and their mission in a position marked by countless existential doubts. It is this desire, for which the members fail to provide rational explanation, that led us to the core of a challenge that resembles more the object of philosophical than cultural anthropology, when considering the semiotic production as a manifestation of an aesthetic processing of the lived experience from which the symbolic dimension is the product of a restlessness that is prior to it. To analyze this creativity and the symbolic production it engenders, we selected the dynamics of one specific process of symbolic elaboration, the substitution of Saint George, as the patron of the unit, for the Archangel Michel. This ended with blurred frontiers between their job and the activity of the criminals, their "other" in relation to whom the member's own identity is refined and acquire meaning (PIRC, 2017). This relation of alterity with the criminals is both a source of suffering, the reason for existence and key to understanding the dynamism of articulation between identity and alterity (BAUMANN and GRINGRICH, 2004, p. xi). Their activity somehow mingles, in the sense that both, eventually, end in death and suffering. At the same time, they are opposite, in the sense that the studied CAO exist to eliminate the criminals, who are the reason for their existence.

It is important to note that this is not the only religious or metaphysical reference employed at the unit. The search for inspiration and sources for refining the unit's identity ranges from the Japanese "bushido", the ancient code of ethics and behavior of the samurais, to contemporary elements of evangelical, neo-pentecostal and catholic religions. The internet and the readily available information is partially an enabler of this process. Our choice of this specific substitution is to provide empirical evidence of this continuous elaboration and its relation with identity and alterity.

This process resembles the active engagement in "organizational bricolage": restructuring activities, role shifting, reorganizing and reassembling work in a special force unit has been observed by Bechky and Okhuysen (2011), in which the main ability of the *bricoleurs* is to draw from the pool of resources at hand, to assemble ways to respond to new situations. But in their case, it occurs at the concrete field of activity, not in the abstract, symbolic domain. What we observe here is in line with a process Lévi-Strauss (1997) had already noted as part of cultural production of the basis for the thought.

THE SUBJECT OF ANALYSIS AND THE METHODOLOGY:

The understanding of the importance of a symbolic universe and metaphysics for military organization goes back to early history. There is a strong element of irrationality in these bonds of loyalty and commitment (WEBER, 1968). There is a clear search to increase power over chaos, which produces an ordering intention from which cultural creativity is the product. What we call here metaphysical dimension is this a priori mode of functioning of thought that produces a certain content, a language, and shapes the experience giving it order. Rationality and the symbolic edifice emerge in a response to a need perceived in the experience as an ethical and esthetical violation. Exceptional motivation, then, in this specific case, is understood not only as the search for the fulfillment of human needs, but also as its denial.

Schopenhauer (2001, p. 114) presents the distinction between the sublime and exciting in the domain of experience and this can shed light on this phenomenon. The sublime is the denial of the individual, subjective and self-satisfying disposition, the effort to direct one's effort to something objective, different from one's own well-being as source of greatness. The exciting refers to fulfilling (almost immediately) a desire that is fully sensitive, and therefore, subjective. The experience of self-denial and self-sacrifice, observed in the extremely high risk-taking, seems to connect to the idea of sublime, of the heroic disposition, to self-sacrifice for a mission or a valid cause, for some sort of unnamed "selection". According to the troop's psychologist:

> "There is a deep narcissist aspect in this work… the soldier who mistakenly shot a civilian who was holding a drilling machine during an operation could not forgive himself, not only for 'failing to protect the civilian' but by failing in the mission itself because of an unacceptable (for him) human failure, thus bringing 'shame' on the institution. The pain of the soldier was not due to the human error: a soldier mistaking a driller for a gun in the twilight during an operation. But for what is an unacceptable failure for those who should be above the common possibilities of errors, to who is denied the possibility of 'common weakness'. But it is far from explaining everything…"

On the other hand, there is the domain of the excitement. Of a daily routine in battle, of a life experienced in the domain of adventure, that represents the "adrenaline addiction" that also appears in the interviews. Balancing these two dimensions and "holding the troops back, assuring maximum control of aggressiveness and maximum operational discipline and focus on the mission" is, in the words of the leaders (a colonel, a lieutenant and two commander mentioned this balance, during the interviews) their central task, the hardest and most relevant activity for those in command. The tension between these two dimensions is core to understanding the notion of operational discipline. The motivational result of self-denial for a cause needs to be considered. Yet, the recent studies on self-sacrifice, are more a subject of analysis of the motivation of terrorists than of military (BLOOM, 2009; KRUGLANSKI, 2009).

This desire for order, control and justice (the contrary of which is chaos, disorder and violence), which would produce "freedom for the captive", a central category in their cultural imaginary, the structuring element around which most of the symbolic elaboration develops. The captive – a double victim of crime and of society's omission, subjected to unacceptable risk and violence – is the external object of all their effort. Their fragility demands their sacrifice, in the absence of all others: including politicians and civil society.

The ethnography (GEERTZ, 1989; RAPPORT, 2015; SKOGGARD and WATERSTON, 2015) revealed an active search for building boundaries, establishing the contents for the nature of the mission and the limits to it. An unfinished symbolic work, crafted in the effort of differentiation in which the criminal is the other, who needs to be controlled, stopped, and saved. Controlled and stopped for the chaos and violence they produced, but somehow also saved, from the wrong choice for "the other side" and their position in society, from their double position of producer and victim of violence and exclusion.

This duality, present both in the need for the use of force and the need to control aggressiveness, is expressed in the symbol of the CAO, the knife on the skull, that also differentiates the members of a police special troop from an army, the first dealing with a member of their own society, who should be brought to justice and to the domain of law, and the second trained to deal with the complete "other", the enemy, who demand other energy, has other relation of identity and alterity.

This duality of the police work, dealing with members of one´s own society, which needs to be both controlled and protected, a unit created for law enforcement dealing with the expansion of violent crime, explains much of the challenges and effort of symbolic production observed in this study. CAOs are a novelty in terms of organization of law enforcing mechanism that needs to cope with escalating crime within civil society. This novelty brings significant challenges in providing an identity that is central for the development of strategies of internal integration and for the construction of tacit agreements on how to act.

It is in this context that the supernatural appears, with its saints, devils and angels, in the "second world of thought and imagination" (SCHOPENHAUER, 2005, p. 13). It is in this sense that the issue of spirituality at work can be considered metaphysical and instrumental, at the same time, without being a contradiction.

Schopenhauer (2001) notes that neither reason nor science are capable of crossing the border of representation. The rationality they seek and express is product of a secondary elaboration, and they are, by themselves, products of imperfect symbolic edifices built to express the experience. The description of images, in this sense, reveals a reality that needs to be accommodated into language and symbolic ordering to be brought to consciousness, thus organizing the necessary rationality demanded for ordering action.

Schopenhauer notes that investigation (in science and life) is a metaphysical need, intrinsic to humanity, which keeps us constantly dissatisfied with the mere phenomenon. Incapable of grasping the essence of the thing itself, the search for knowledge emerges around something unknown, which is furtive to the intellect and impossible to be recognized in time and space. The CAO members are at the same time "scientists", constantly investigating their own creation and searching for strategies to improve it (as is the *bricoleur*, in LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1997).

 They are in constant search for grasping the essence of their institution, of their identity and of their mission without ever being satisfied with the results. Schopenhauer notes that at a certain point, the scientists arrive at the limit of their investigations. At this moment, they reach a border that retains a *qualitas oculta* (hidden quality). It is precisely here, where physics reaches its limits, that metaphysics starts: "meta-effectiveness", as he calls it, where we find the space for symbolic creation. Faced with the limits of reason, the feeling will assume a crucial role according to Schopenhauer (2001), as the opposite of the concept. The Metaphysical need is not settled by science and reason.

The body becomes the locus of the objectivity of the will, volitional principle, without fundament, irrational, in whose core is the will. At this point, he finds that "the world is my representation, but also my will" (SCHOPENHAUER, 2001, p. 11). Multiple possibilities fight in human consciousness until one of them wins. The archangel Michael, presented below, is one of these examples. Order, as we came to learn later, appears as part of a notion of common good and the necessary participation of all citizens. An idea present in Aristoteles (2001), who describes man as a political being, inclined not only to belong to the polis, but also to participate in its institutions, unconsciously reflecting the survival of ancient understanding of the nature of civil society in today's world (BELLAH and JOAS, 2012).

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION

The search for metaphysical grounds for identity construction in a CAO is deeply related to the institutional frame within which its activity occurs. Institutional diversity is relevant, especially in the configuration of the context in which spirituality can emerge as a way to grasp reality, impose meaning to the experience and shape the way to interact with instable courses of social action (WEBER, 1968). Metaphysics is relevant to produce stable references, grounds for cognition, and frames of reference for interpretation of reality and judgement (DOUGLAS, 1966; 1986; ELIADE, 1992) in the absence of all else. This is even truer in institutional arrangements where the available schemes of thought fail to provide the necessary grounds for decision and action. Spirituality, and the desire to be connected to other spheres, can be a way to feel saturated with power (ELIADE, 1992) and it can be extremely relevant if one's daily activity deals with life-risking situations and with proximity to death. The experience of work, which for modern consciousness is primarily an economic activity, can be lived as a connection with the sacred, giving it another existential dimension. As is confirmed from the interviews:

> "Yes, somehow we have social permission to kill. And there are moments in which it is inevitable. There is no other way to fight crime in a state like Rio [de Janeiro]. But we strive not to. That´s what make us different from them (the criminals). We are law enforcement agents. Well trained soldiers. And we are loyal to the skull: a successful operation is one with victory over death – and it means no civilians, no soldiers and no criminals are fatal victim of the operation. Each operation is one step closer to the captive being released. The criminals shoot to kill. We struggle not to. Our mission is taking them to justice."

But what precisely does this permission mean? What are the limits to this? Killing in the name of what, in a society in which law and order seem so foreign to so many? (GROSSMAN, 2009). These are questions for which the CAO members continuously struggle to find answers. In a violent and chaotic state and its largest city, how can they claim to be different from the criminals, from the corrupt politicians and from the corrupt police officers in other organizations or in other police units? How can they be sure of the nobility of their cause, the legitimacy of the actions and choices and of the cleanliness of their intent? In a tarnished occupation such as that of the police (BITTNER, 2003; ZANINI, MIGUELES and COLMERAUER, 2014), how can they be sure they are not on the side of further injustice? How, as member of the state, can they be sure they are effectively the "spear tip of the law that goes far at the heart of crime", as they sometimes refer to themselves?

CHAOS, DISORDER AND IMAGINATION

The interviews carried out for this study revealed statements full of descriptions of images. The images are clear in the CAO members' minds. These images produced an idea, which members seemed to believe it was possible to be communicated through a mere description. Their descriptions collected during the interviews often sounded like a call for empathy and support. Too many things are clearly very wrong for them. The difficulty we encountered was to grasp their intention behind the descriptions, because the phenomenological description of the observed reality "as it is" for the observer is the product not of the thing in itself, but of consciousness (DURAND, 1989). We were interested in the elements of this consciousness.

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The intense description of the images revealed a reality hard to fit into language. To make sense of the observed reality it is necessary to resort to imagination. We wanted to understand how they did this. The repetition of the narratives and the detailed description of scenes were part of the effort to let the images speak for themselves, as if the cruelty of the scenes were the best synthesis they could produce of the message they were willing to convey.

The images were evidence of suffering, violence, cowardice, injustice and vulnerability of the innocent. The vivid scenes were both part of their trauma and the grounds to justify the importance of their work. In themselves, the images could have produced fear, a desire to escape, depression, and other negative emotions. Yet, they produced motivation, engagement and a desire for power. The soldiers' "relation to hell" is neither passive nor destructive of their will.

The concept of blind will, and of the blind emergence of desire as causal to gasp the representation of the world, appears in Schopenhauer (2005, p. 12) as opening the gate for will as free from reason and representation, as a blind impetus. The body is the source of the "volitional principle", without groundings, and irrational in itself. To come out of its invisibility, will manifest itself by means of ideas and the eternal archetypes of things. They are original acts of the will *(ursprüngliche Willensakte),* that is, objectifications of the will.

For Schopenhauer, the metaphysics of beauty refers to beauty in nature, in arts and as a theory of knowledge, which is the aspect that interests us most. In this sense, the metaphysics of beauty refers to the archetypical content of all transitory things, the ultimate essence of beauty that guides the aesthetic demand. Beauty is a form of knowledge in us, as a specific form of knowing, and it is related to all our conception of the world. Beauty, as a quality of knowledge that cannot be empirically known or immediately demonstrated to the senses, can only be grasped intuitively, as in this case the ideal of justice under a social contract. On their cultural imaginary, the hero and the outlaw, the good and evil, the angel and the demon were common archetypes deployed in an attempt to explain the images described by the members in our fieldwork (DURAND, 1989; MERLEAU-PONTY, 1999).

Suffering (SCHOPENHAUER, 2001) is inseparable from existence and there is a relation between the dissatisfaction produced by suffering and the aesthetical search. Social disorder is caused by negative elements, in relation to which they emerge as restoring elements.

The CAO members' identity as "guardians of the last door before hell" is produced in opposition to the "gate to peace and inclusive prosperity" that would be the capacity to organize society according to an ideal, where institutional perfection produces ethical ties among its members. This ideal society would be the product of individual virtue, at the core of which would be the courage to do the right thing and the solidarity towards those who are more vulnerable. The cultivation of virtues would lead to social support for their work and to enhance capacity to restore social order.

THE PROCESS OF SYMBOLIC PRODUCTION

Lévi-Strauss (1977) notes that the demand for order, observed both in "primitive" and "civilized" thought, produces ordering efforts and has an eminent aesthetic dimension. Order in thought, in nature and on metaphysics, is, at the same type, precondition for thinking and an aesthetic demand, an idea that Douglas (1966) embraces. The idea of "order" as an esthetical dimension, and the cultural effort to order the world as a basis for the capacity to think, connects the process of ordering the world to the esthetical experience. The need for order is a demand of all thought (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1997). The first object in this form of knowledge is the intellectual demand, which is prior to the satisfaction of any other practical needs. If we fail to impose order to experience, even if it is done only in thought, is as if "the entire universe order could be destroyed" (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1997, p. 24). The invocations that emerge from these efforts for ordering, correspond to the capacity to "proceed safely" (IBID, p. 25). This demand for organization, first in thought, is critical for thinking and acting. The next section provides evidence of this within the CAO.

THE SUBSTITUTION OF SAINT GEORGE FOR THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL: A BUILDING BLOCK IN THE PROCESS OF DIFFERENTIATION.

We are the undesirable, headed by the incompetent, doing the indispensable for the ungrateful.

(BOPE Lieutenant)

SEARCHING FOR A CLEAN IDENTITY

According to Bittner (2003), medieval guards in Europe were recruited from the destitute groups. They suffered with many satirical representations and were perceived as originating from the same groups they should restrain. During the absolutist period, they represented the most dingy aspects of tyranny. For this reason, their activity was perceived with ambiguity and ambivalence, a group to be feared and admired at the same time. Police work, by the very nature of the activity, is still the same today. The police keep society from the direct contact of a frightening, perverse, cruel and dangerous world. Douglas (1966) notes that the liminal categories are those that most represent risk for human mind. In Brazil, this liminality is deepened by inequality (ZANINI, MIGUELES, and COLMERAUER, 2014).

On the surface, the substitution of Saint George by Archangel Michael may seem motivated by the preferences of one object of devotion for the other. But what was in question was not Catholicism or a saint's devotion, but a process of forging the group's identity, in which the saint and the archangel are cultural references employed in the search for grounding thought in fixed representations. The change has less to do with the CAO members' position in formal religion than in cultural imaginary and folk religion and the association both with social groups in society as a whole and with different units in the military police forces. The choice of the Archangel eliminates the ambiguities produced by the folk image of Saint George and its association with crime and Afro religiosity in the slums, at the same time a religiosity of part of the captive and the source of spiritual protection of the criminals. The process of differentiation was necessary for the construction of positive meanings attached to "their activity in chaos".

In Catholic cosmology Saint George was a Roman soldier of Greek origin and officer in the Guard of Roman emperor Diocletian. He was a Christian martyr and one of the most venerated saints. His intercession is believed to be particularly effective and he is one of the most prominent military saints. In Brazil, due to strong syncretic movements, the image of the saint, mingled with African religions, placed the saint in the "twilight zone", the dangerous gray area from where the members of BOPE were at the same time trapped and attempting to detach themselves.

During the colonial and imperial periods, the slaves, forbidden from worshiping their deities, used Catholic images to camouflage their religious practices, selecting the saint that most resembled their African deities as object of devotion. This is well observed in historical and theological research in Brazil (SANCHES, 1973; VERGER, 1999; PRANDI, 2000). Saint George is venerated in various cults of Afro-Brazilian religions, where according to this process of syncretism he also stands for *Ogun*. *Ogule (*Ògún*)*, in *Iorubá* language and mythology, are divinized African ancestors that correspond to forces of nature and their archetypes. Ogun, in one of his aspects, is a blacksmith that forged his own tools for agriculture, hunting and war. In *Candomblé* religion, *Ogun* is the owner of all roads and crossings, together with *Exu*, another deity in this pantheon. In folk religion and in the cultural imaginary, *Exu*, in one of his aspects, is the devil himself. In one of his manifestations, *Ogun* can be powerful and triumphal, but he can also be angry and destructive, and can use his warrior strength against the community he serves. He is also venerated at Umbanda, where *Zé Pilintra*, the archetype of the trickster, protector of the harbors, cabarets, bars, gamblers and gutters is a protégée of Ogun, and therefore Saint George.

Saint George is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, and the protector of the Military Police in Rio de Janeiro. And police "kills", as Barcellos (2003) observes in São Paulo, as one case of a tendency of police work all over Brazil, as the officers in BOPE themselves note. But he is also Ogun, protector of *Zé Pilintra*. The Saint represents the multiple ambiguities that are a feature of Brazilian culture (DA MATTA, 2000), and represents, therefore, all the mingled categories that jeopardize clarity

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and the search for stable references necessary for the construction of a troop that pretends to be the institutional reference in excellence in police work.

The syncretic image of Saint George and its association with the groups from which the identity building process should differentiate was responsible for symbolic contagious and a source of confusion that somehow needed to be eliminated. Saint George, instead of allowing a clear position on the side law, ethics and common good, produced a hybrid position, reinforcing the tarnished image of the police and the promiscuity between law and crime, good and evil, right and wrong.

It is in this context that we observed cultural creativity in a movement described by Buber (1977; 1992): a constant movement between "I", "you" and the "thing", in which new meanings emerge in the course of the dialectics on inter-subjectivity that take into account the external object, the specific reality of a CAO in a violence plagued context.

The Archangel Michael first appeared at the CAO in a moment of life crisis of one of the leaders: During the operations to occupy the Alemão Complex of slums, the two-month-old baby of one officer was going for a second heart surgery. At the prayers that precede the CAO operations, the baby´s fight for life and their mission of "victory over death" mingled, creating a special emotional atmosphere. The group somehow shared the father's questioning whether the fate of his baby was caused by his professional activity. "- Do I need to feel guilty? Am I a grave offender, a terrible sinner? What is the role of a soldier in this life and death situation?"

The doubt: are we on the right side? Do we deserve punishment? Was key to the life crisis. The individual's crisis was an expression of a hidden group questioning. The individual's doubt brought to the surface a similar collective uneasiness. Months passed in which the question remained. On the conversation, the ideology of some criminal factions in which property is a form of crime, the idea of the criminal as a victim of the system, among others, were somehow present. Archangel Michael, as a metaphor, appeared in this context. As the one with the role of fighting evil powers, coping with evil forces, without ever mingling with them. In time, the references to the Archangel Michael gradually occupied the role of the adequate metaphor to express their relation to their activity and the situation. Our point here is that the metaphor worked well because it solved a collective identity crisis. A year later, there were images of the Archangel Michael in different parts of the headquarters as the concrete evidence of this fit. Symbolism: a patron, a totem: the skull - were all mechanisms of controlling what they called "excessive energy" and its dispersive effects. The patron became the guardian of the necessary virtues and the mission.

Douglas (1986), in her analysis of how institutions frame the thinking process of individuals, points to the role of social conventions anchoring the mind. The process of framing the idea of collective good can only be solved when individuals entrench their minds in a model of social order. To acquire legitimacy, every institution needs a formula that finds its rightness in reason and nature (DOUGLAS, 1986, p. 45), which in phenomenological terms means that reason, alone, cannot do the job without an ontology that fixes cognition somewhere other than in reason itself. Analogies, upon which the necessary agreements are built, confer sameness and dissipate conflict elements from which the mind needs to be insulated (IBIDEM, p. 59). Indefiniteness and ambiguity are thus gone. Proximity does not mean contagious threats, eliminating, therefore, the things that cannot be mixed or confused without considerable risk (DOUGLAS, 1966).

To conclude, studies on motivation tend to take frames of reference as given. Frames of reference are relevant in the social world, allowing common understanding of reality and mutual orientation. They involve ontological, ethical and political aspects (L'ESTOILE, 2014, p. S64). When these aspects are unclear, as may occur where institutional development is inadequate (for whatever historical (ZANINI, MIGUELES and COLMERAUER, 2014) or anthropological reason, that would certainly be worth investigating), the frames of reference may be inadequate in stabilizing the understanding of the nature of the organization and of the activities of public servers, thus negatively impacting their activity. In this context, unclear references seem to jeopardize the proper organization of critical activities, which is especially serious in a CAO, which involves decisions on life or death situations. Proper organization for action demands their development, without which the limits and opportunities for action become threatening unclear. The active process of searching for these frames seems relevant to understand institutional development and stability, as well as the challenges of police work. This research intends to make a contribution in this direction.

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