

Chapter 3

From *Natio* to *Corps* (1575–1820): The Birth of a New Type of Student Association in the Netherlands



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Not a year goes by without another case of violent hazing in Dutch universities reported in the newspapers. It concerns one university, then another, but it hits the mark every year. University boards are trying to restrict the use of alcohol and implement rules on initiation rites, but not always with success. Occasionally there is a near death or even a death. Apparently hazing is an ineradicable phenomenon, and almost every year a historian of the history of universities has to explain to the media how this came about. In public opinion this has all to do with conservative students from the upper strata of society who have united in student *corpora* as they are called in the Netherlands, although we also see a trend towards ‘corporalization’ of other student associations that display mimicry behaviour. But is it correct to link hazing to the *corpora* that emerged in the nineteenth century? How did those *corpora* originate? And how did this development from the medieval *nationes* to the *corpora* occur? That is the central question in this contribution. Though many of the examples relate to the University of Utrecht, the argument is valid for the entire Dutch Republic.

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A. M. Roos, G. Manning (eds.), *Collected Wisdom of the Early Modern Scholar*,
Archimedes 64, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-09722-5_3

3.1 Nationes

When the first Dutch university was founded in Leiden in 1575, the way in which students united followed the pattern of medieval universities. This was also the case at all Dutch universities that were founded afterwards.¹ Since the Middle Ages, students have united in *nationes*, which could take many forms, not necessarily by geographic origin. These nations, however different in nature, all had a more or less formal make-up and were of the same type. Their common goal was to maintain the cohesion of a group of students and to guarantee mutual support.² This continued even when, in the early modern period, these nations were much more likely to reflect geographic origins, partly as a result of the emergence of political entities that foreshadowed the modern nineteenth-century nation-states.

The same goes for the Dutch Republic. At the university of Leiden nations already existed three years after the university was founded.³ In Utrecht they arose immediately upon the foundation of the university in 1636. The names used for those nations suggest that in addition to the nations for foreign students (*collegia nationalia*), there were also regional associations for those students who came from different parts of the Republic (*collegia provincialia*). These *collegia* were well organized and mirrored the organization of the university. They were headed by a *rector* or *praetor*, assisted by one or more *assessore*s. There was even a beadle, often the last member who arrived. Sometimes these nations had their own members' armorials, some of which have been preserved.⁴

The extent to which these nations had a social function, namely the protection of and care for fellow countrymen in a foreign environment, is evident from the statutes of the student nation from the province of Groningen in Utrecht, founded in 1648 and including a number of Frisians as well. The statutes of this nation, written in an *album societatis*, stipulated that members of the nation were to visit sick fellow students and watch over them in the event of very serious illness. In addition, members had to be present at each other's disputations and ensure that opponents did not speak.⁵

However, an important element also was the formation of a provincial identity. The recently established Dutch Republic was a complex confederation of competitive autonomous provinces. Thus, in this period the province from which one came still largely determined a person's identity. Distinguishing oneself from others

¹Universities in the early modern Netherlands: Leiden (1575), Franeker (1585–1811), Groningen (1614), Utrecht (1636), Harderwijk (1648–1811) and Nijmegen (1656–1679). In several towns there also existed so-called Illustrious Schools, for instance in Amsterdam (1632) where the student body followed the patterns of the universities. Utrecht University was founded as an Illustrious School in 1634 and was elevated in 1636.

²Schwinges 1992, 211–212.

³Otterspeer 2000, 275–276.

⁴Insignia nobilissimorum ac doctissimorum [Dominorum] Gelerorum et Transysulanorum, The Utrecht Archives, PK: XXXIX D 4-7.

⁵Feith 1905.

seemed to have an ingrained antagonism (us vs. them), which in this case manifested itself mainly in mutual fights with other nations. At Utrecht, from the very beginning, the combined nation from the provinces of Gelderland and Overijssel in particular was guilty of this. In 1643, this violence got so out of hand that the town council decided to ban the nations under threat of heavy fines for those who were members of such an association or attended their meetings.⁶ A number of students had to appear before the university senate and were summoned to hand over the nation's statutes as well as the armorials. Furthermore, for positions in whatever kind of associations they might have, the students were no longer allowed to use the titles referring to official university positions such as rector, assessor and beadle. Most students agreed, but three of them from the province of Zeeland and five from Gelderland were removed from the *album studiosorum* ('ex albo expuncti sunt'). In other words, they were removed from the university.⁷ In the same year, 1643, the statutes of the university were established for the first time, but apparently the ongoing problems with the nations were so great that the university's statutes were immediately supplemented the following year with an additional article banning the nations. These kind of measures were not entirely effective: not in Utrecht, nor in the other cities with a university in the Republic. In Leiden, Franeker, Groningen and Harderwijk it was the same story: the nations were officially banned but survived throughout the seventeenth century.⁸

It was not only the mutual violence that caused the displeasure of the authorities, but also the bullying and provocation of the townsmen. The problems of 1643 were partly the result of confrontations with the non-academic world, which often – but not only – took place at night. In 1643, students of the Gelderland nation were accused of 'schreeuwen ende schrappen, stoten ende cloppen op de deuren en de huysen' (yelling and scraping, punching and knocking on doors and houses).⁹

The internal coercion that emanated from these nations was also perceived as detrimental because it would have a corrupting effect on the moral development of the students. Students were often forced to join and spend large sums as a form of entrance fee and at academic events such as graduations and disputations. From the income generated in this way, parties were given periodically. We know from such a festive meal in Utrecht from 1657 that it lasted two days and that 40 people were present.¹⁰ As was often the case, this splurge ended with a brawl in the street.

⁶Resp. 100 guilders (approx. € 1150) and 25 guilders (approx. €290). This decision was as usual posted *ad valvas* at the town hall. A translation in Latin was posted at the university. See: Van de Water 1729, 490.

⁷Kernkamp 1936, Vol.1, 175.

⁸Resp. Otterspeer 2000, 275–278; Boeles 1878, 283–289. Van Berkel 2014, 207–210; Bouman 1844, 143, 346.

⁹Kernkamp 1936, Vol. 1, 185. "Schrappen" is scratching with a rapier on the cobblestones of the street to frighten passers-by. Bromley (1702), 278 also describes this phenomenon.

¹⁰Van Vredenburg (1914) 14.

For many students, these financial demands were so heavy that they incurred large debts and, for example, had to pawn their textbooks to the booksellers in the city.¹¹

We do not know very much about the development of the nations, but we do know that the suppression by the authorities was probably successful in the end. In the course of the seventeenth century, we hear less and less of these nations as an organized form of student life, although that does not mean of course that they no longer existed. This is in line with Lawrence Brockliss's observation that in France law enforcement with regard to students was mainly a problem in the first half of the seventeenth century, which also does not mean that after that students posed no problems for the authorities.¹² In 1674, the Proclamation of 1643 was still reaffirmed and posted *ad valvas* in Utrecht. Although the unrest around the *collegia regionalia* in Utrecht occasionally took serious forms, the situation was not as bad as in other university towns in the Republic. The reason for this is probably partly due to the fact that the university of Utrecht was a municipal university, unlike the other universities which were all provincial universities with the provincial government as supreme authority. In those provincial universities the municipal authorities had less judicial influence in matters regarding students and the university. In Utrecht, students came to the ordinary court and the chance that issues were settled amicably there were smaller than if they had been discussed before a *forum academicum* as those university courts were called.¹³

The levying of entrance fees as a kind of a membership fee for a student nation or any other form of student association, which was then turned into a drinking-bout or an elaborate meal by the whole group, appears to be a universal tendency in the student world of the early modern era. The universality of this practice has been compared to the guild entrance fee, which underlines its universality.¹⁴ It was certainly part of student life in Italy, where it acquired the name of *spupillazione* and also stood for the whole system of hazing freshmen. It was also known by the name of 'pennalism', derived from the term used for freshmen, in Germany named *Pennalisten*. Hazing as a system to harass freshman seems to have originated in France, from where it spread all over Europe.¹⁵ The aspect of violence between students and between students and townsmen is also omnipresent and has traits of an initiation. It is what Natalie Zemon Davis has called 'rites of violence' in the context of religious violence, but it also seems to apply here and was widely

¹¹ In 1721 the booksellers in Utrecht were forbidden to buy books from minors, see: Kernkamp 1938, Vol.2, 273–274.

¹² Brockliss 1987, 55–64.

¹³ Wingens 1992. The *forum academicum* is a manifestation of the more widely existing *forum privilegiatum*.

¹⁴ Karras 2003, 100.

¹⁵ On *spupillazione*, see: Davies 2009, 143–145. On pennalism: Müller 1996. In the Netherlands the term *pennalia* and *pennaal* can be found in archival material from resp. the universities of Utrecht (Van de Water 1729, 490) and Franeker (Boeles 1878, 282).

distributed in the student world. For example, the ‘salting’ ritual in Oxbridge more than once led to violent excesses and bullying was part of it.¹⁶ More about that is discussed below.

3.2 The Eighteenth Century: Diversification in Entertainment

One of the causes cited as the reason for the disappearance of nations – and the sometimes exuberant violence that accompanied it – is the proliferation of other, more ‘civilized’ forms of entertainment. Soon after the founding of early modern universities, also in the Dutch Republic, we find the appointment of riding masters and fencing masters at the universities to train the students in the use of weapons. In the Dutch Republic, like elsewhere in Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century, a new commercial elite emerged with aristocratic ambitions buying titles and searching for a new life style. This process of ‘aristocratization’ also had consequences for the student population which meant that noble academies or *Ritterakademien* sprang up all over Europe. They were sometimes affiliated with the universities, but sometimes they were privately owned. In 1705, under the auspices of the town council, such a noble academy was established in Utrecht where one could learn to ride horses, dance, fencing, learn languages and the like. The aim was to lure nobility and new elites to town, which would also benefit the university. This *Académie à monter à cheval* (speaking French was also part of this new life style) functioned for twenty years and then fell into disrepair, but was given a new chance in 1751.¹⁷

In order to provide sports entertainment (and thus to deter students from less innocent entertainment), in Utrecht a *maliebaan*, a pall mall, was built as early as 1637, a year after the university was founded, where the pall mall (or in French: *paille-maille*) ball game could be played. It was the largest *maliebaan* in the Republic and was mentioned as a point of interest in numerous travelogues.¹⁸ In the same period, a pall mall was constructed in Leiden and plans for this were worked out in Groningen, but they were probably never realized. In addition to this sporting pastime of the students, coffee houses were also established where billiards could be played. And although Utrecht only had a permanent theatre in 1796 (the strict and influential Calvinists managed to prevent the erection of such a theatre time and

¹⁶Davis 1973. See also: Dhondt, Boran 2018.

¹⁷See the recruiting bilingual brochure by Nicolas de Chevalier: *Description de l'Académie à monter à cheval, établie à Utrecht* (1706). For *Ritterakademien* see: Simone 1992, 317–322.

¹⁸Marshall 1772, 207–208; Bromley 1702, 277–278; *Gentleman's Magazine* 1801, 218 and 394. On 394 the much-repeated story (also in Bromley 1702) that Louis XIV, king of France, forbade the cutting down of the trees surrounding the mall by his soldiers during the invasion of 1672 because of the beauty of the mall.

again), the town was actually visited by many traveling theatre companies.¹⁹ So, over time, more opportunities arose for students to enjoy themselves in a cultural sense as well.

In short, in the eighteenth century there was more for the students to do than to go after each other's blood and after their fellow citizens, even if this did not mean the end of student violence. James Boswell (1740–1795), the later author of *The Life of Johnson*, studied law in Utrecht in 1763/1764 and from his diaries we read that he regularly visited balls of the local elite, where, in vain, he fell seriously in love with Belle de Zuylen who was a *savante* and later became a famous member of the European Republic of Letters. But that did not prevent him from participating in 'truly an adventure' one evening, namely 'an entertainment of Dutch students; a concert; all keen on meat and drink; then marching like schoolboys with Kapitein and frightening the street.'²⁰ Although very little is known about the organization of students in the eighteenth century, the fact that a 'captain' was present in the group suggests that the street violence of students was organized in nature.

3.3 New Organizational Forms?

The question now is what happened in the second half of the eighteenth century that caused Dutch students to organize themselves in the *corpora* at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which bore some resemblance to the German *Burschenschaften*. The *studentencorps* is a form of association that has been dominant in the Netherlands for more than a century and is still partly recognizable. In my opinion, there are three elements that have come to play a role in the development that resulted in the creation of the *corpora*. First, there was primarily a need for more diverse entertainment, where personal interest could find a way out in a specific eighteenth-century form, namely sociability. Second, there was a slowly growing political consciousness that was expressed in a jointly experienced national feeling, even though that could sometimes manifest itself in great contradictions. Incidentally, that sentiment did mobilize a sense of cohesion, but did not immediately lead to unity among the students. Lastly, and in this case with more continuity from previous centuries, a further ritualization of the phenomenon of hazing contributed to the transition into a new kind of student association.

An example of the first element, diversification of entertainment for students, can also be found in the diaries of James Boswell. In those diaries we not only read about a much more diverse and 'civilized' pastime, such as playing billiards, but we also see that he was a member of a literary society of which he was even one of the

¹⁹In 1711 professor Pieter Burman (History, Eloquence and Politics) opened his series of lessons with a lecture which was an *oratio pro domo* for the comedy, which ended in a huge controversy with the protestant clergy in town; Haven 2005; Sorgen 1885.

²⁰Pottle 1952, 68.

founders. Interestingly, only French was spoken there.²¹ This is one example of the growing sociability of the eighteenth century that also affected student life. In these literary societies, the members mainly discussed and wrote *about* literature, although original poetry was sometimes published in the magazines of these societies. One type of these societies, called ‘critical-contemplative’ by literary scholars, consisted largely of students. Examples are *Linguaque animoque fideles* (1757) in Leiden and the literary society *Dulces ante omnia musae* in Utrecht (1759). The last one actually was partly founded by students. Contrary to what the name suggests, *Dulces* was deliberately set up to underline the importance of the Dutch language. Initially it was a society of students only, but gradually Utrecht professors and other influential graduates from Utrecht and other university towns also became members. Their plea for Dutch literature was in fact a political statement and can be seen as an expression of national sentiment or a form of proto-nationalism. Students at the *Athenaeum Illustre* in Amsterdam also took part in this type of society with a political connotation.²² In Groningen this sociability was still alive around 1800.²³

Proto-nationalism already touches on the second element in the development of the creation of the *corpora*. Many of the members of these societies, including *Dulces*, played a role in the debates on the regeneration of the Dutch Republic, which many believe was necessary because of the contrast with the glory and entrepreneurial mindset of the seventeenth century. This is clearly visible in the career and ideas of one of the founders of *Dulces*, the law student Meinard Tydeman (1742–1825), who became a professor in Utrecht in 1766.²⁴ His rectorate speech – in Latin, still the *lingua franca* of the universities – from 1772 was entitled *De Luxu*, but it was also published in Dutch. His speech argued that wealth could be addictive and undermine polity. This fear of economic and moral decline, coupled with a whole series of regeneration proposals, became concrete in the political turmoil of the late eighteenth century: in the 1780s a wave of democratic ideas passed through the Republic, fuelled by difficult economic conditions and the loss of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War.

The conflict in the Republic, which was teetering on the brink of civil war, largely revolved around the question of where the blame lay for the decline. The country was divided into two major factions that had already caused great divisions in the seventeenth century. On one side were those who had gathered around the house of Orange-Nassau that took on more and more monarchical features, and on the other side were the so-called *regenten*: an oligarchy of aristocratized merchants. Students in all university cities of the Republic actually took part in this factional struggle, mostly, but not all, on the side of the *regenten*. Because the town of Utrecht in particular played an important role in the anti-Orangist sentiments, a group of Utrecht

²¹ Pottle 1952, 160. He described this society as a ‘learned society’.

²² Knegtmans 2007, 150–152.

²³ Caljé 2009, 405–407.

²⁴ Dorsman 2012.

students also became active in this camp. They marched in so-called exercise societies that coexisted with the existing citizen militias and practiced with weapons. Sometimes at the end of their exercise, attended by a large audience, they fired a salute while reciting ‘excellent patriotic poetry’.²⁵ Some students also played a role as political agitators. When the political tide turned in 1787 and they had to leave the country with other anti-Orangist leaders, they fled to France to play a – modest – role in the French Revolution. In 1795 these political refugees returned to the Netherlands with the French armies.²⁶

But despite the fact that students were clearly recognizable as a group that wanted to achieve the same political goal in the turmoil of the 1780’s, this alliance did not immediately lead to new forms of student organizations. Interesting, however, is the military aspect. Military or semi-military functions often play a role in group formation of young men.²⁷ In the eighteenth century, for example, it was customary in all Dutch university towns for students to attend important festivities with a guard of honour with drawn swords. They also accompanied the procession of dignitaries with weapons at such festivities, as is described in detail in a report of the entry of the stadholder William V and his entourage in 1766 in Utrecht. These entries were a standard ceremony, a remnant of the medieval *joyeuse entrée*. The universities were also always involved in this because the stadholders had the right to appoint the professors. At the entry in 1766 there was also clearly an initiative from the students to make themselves known.

Nevertheless, although there was a lot of fighting there is hardly any proof of large-scale clashing of arms between students and the non-academic world in the Dutch Republic, as there was in other European university towns and which sometimes resulted in numerous deaths.²⁸ It all remained rather well-behaved and did not bring the students closer together in military and political allegiance. At least not until 1813, when students from Leiden and Utrecht united in a regiment to join the army to stop Napoleon’s advance and in 1830 against the Belgians in the South of the country who wanted to secede from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. More about direct military action by students will be analysed below, but there is another activity that is somewhat related to the ceremonial semi-military aspect and that is the cavalcade. We see them for the first time in Utrecht at the celebration of the centennial jubilee in 1736. Horse-drawn wagons were decorated with allegorical representations, based on a classical tradition. For example, a Bacchus was transported on one of the wagons, which gives reminiscences to classical ideology. Also, at the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the university in 1786, there was such a cavalcade that required some organization among the students. A straight line runs

²⁵ See the newspaper *Hollandsche Historische Courant*, 25 October 1785.

²⁶ Dorsman 2018.

²⁷ Schindler 1997, 330.

²⁸ Interestingly, Dutch 18th-century newspapers reported time and again about violent and often fatal clashes abroad between students and for instance garrisons stationed in the towns.

from these cavalcades to the masquerade processions of the nineteenth century, which were organized by the *corpora*.²⁹

3.4 Hazing

All this indicates that new organizational forms were emerging, which we also see in the major festivities in which the university was closely associated, such as the already mentioned entry of William V in 1766. Students there really took the initiative to get involved.³⁰ Conversely, but with the same intention of being able to determine it themselves, students in Groningen refused to participate in the entry of the prince in 1777 as the professors wanted, thus showing their independence.³¹

Closely linked to this new kind of self-consciousness is a revival and especially the ritualization of hazing. The Dutch term for hazing is *ontgroenen*, literally ‘de-greening’. In 1793 the oldest known so-called *ontgroensenaat* or hazing society was created in Utrecht, named *Senatus veteranorum glirium*, the senate of old hands.³² There is an interesting theory about its origin. In a footnote in the commemorative book of the aforementioned entry of William V in Utrecht, something is stated about the initiators of the student participation in the festivities. It was customary at the time for professors to keep lists of the students who had been on their *privatissimum* classes. The lists were maintained by one of the older students, the *veterani*, appointed as *praetor*. The *praetor* also had to collect fines from those students who didn’t show up for class, who didn’t obey the rules, and the like. At the visit of William V, it was the *praetores* of the various classes who took the initiative to convene the students to organize a contribution to the occasion. At least there was a kind of formal contact between a group of senior students with authority. It is not entirely clear whether this was only for this one event or whether it indicates some form of union that replaced the nations.³³ What is certain is that in the late 1790s there were plenty of *ontgroensenaten* around at Dutch universities.

In a publication entitled *Brieven over de Vereenigde Nederlanden* (Letters about the United Dutch Provinces), lieutenant Johann Jacob Grabner (employed by the Dutch Republic) wrote in 1792 that the moral conduct of the Leiden students was ‘worth imitating’ compared to how things went among the German academic youth. In the Netherlands ‘one knows nothing about regional (*landsmanschappelijke*) alliances, as also about the resulting hobby to play brute, to have fights and to commit all kinds of student-like liberties’. The only bad trait of the Dutch students he

²⁹ Van Herwaarden 1976.

³⁰ *Gedagtenis* 1766, 16–17.

³¹ Van Berkel 2014, 350.

³² Literally: senate of old mice, meant is: senate of old rats. In Dutch an old rat (*oude rot*) is an old hand, an experienced person.

³³ *Gedagtenis* 1766, 16, footnote (w). The link here made between the *veterani* as professor’s aides and the *Senatus veteranorum glirium* of 1793 can be found in Van Vredenburg 1914.

mentioned was hazing, where every prospective student had to give a drinking party ‘to lay off the fox hide’ as it was called in Germany. The translator of these letters, originally published in German, noted in a footnote that this hazing was not compulsory. The translator also noted that it should be banned by the rector magnificus, but the rector turned a blind eye, even if it was officially forbidden.

Whether this initiation was really that innocent is the question. A year earlier, the former Utrecht professor of theology, IJsbrand van Hamelsveld, who was fired for political reasons in 1787, published his *De zedelijke toestand der Nederlandse Natie* (The Moral Condition of the Dutch Nation). In this book he complained about the Dutch universities and their students. The latter hardly worked, although they were also fairly quiet. But the officially forbidden hazing still took place, according to Van Hamelsveld, on which occasions ‘many young people are endangered by excessive drinking’. Some even had to pay for it with their lives.³⁴

Just as the nations that emerged at Dutch universities in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were as old as the European university itself, so hazing as a rite of passage is inextricably linked to student life. It is the discarding of childhood, it is the incarnation of the unformed, it is the ‘separating men from beasts’ as it finds its classic wording in the *Manuale Scholarium*, dating from 1481.³⁵ In this ‘handbook’, there is talk of the student’s *depositio cornuum*, getting rid of the horns. A variant of this is the aforementioned phrase of removal of the fox hide. In 1601, the University of Franeker had banned the *depositio*, although it is not clear of what exactly it consisted.³⁶ The ban was issued because of its violence, yet the ban was only partial, because it also stipulated that it was allowed when the freshman student asked for it.

The freshman student was referred to as *groentje* (green), and the first time that term occurred in university sources was in 1747 at the University of Franeker.³⁷ In a comedy on students from Leiden, the term *groentje* appeared in relation to students in 1735.³⁸ It was clearly an eighteenth-century term in this sense. A Leiden publication from 1780, *De Spectator der Studenten*, described the do’s and don’ts of the greens, who were labelled as ‘the most unpleasant bears, the rudest goats and the plumpest donkeys’. These 12 articles required, among other things, that a green should always greet a senior, with the hat in hand ‘under the first button of the waistband’. A green was also not allowed to wear a sword and when playing billiards must first ask whether there are senior students in the room who might want to play first. In class he was to keep quiet and patiently bear what a senior student did to him.³⁹

³⁴ Van Hamelsveld 1791, 421.

³⁵ Karras 2003, 74.

³⁶ Boeles 1878, 281.

³⁷ Boeles 1878, 281–282.

³⁸ *Het Leidsche studentenleven* 1735.

³⁹ *De Spectator der Studenten* 1780, 157.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, some fragmentary information from various universities indicates the existence of organized hazing. In 1749 there was a *Senatus minor* for students in Harderwijk, which indicates the tradition of copying university structures.⁴⁰ In 1776, the Groningen rector magnificus reported that freshmen had to undergo a hazing and were declared students by means of a document or a diploma, although it is not known whether we are dealing with an organized hazing in this instance. What we do know is that the main purpose was to squeeze money from the freshmen for a party or a meal in a compelling, but still reasonably friendly way, although violence seemed to have occurred from time to time. It is not very clear how well these hazing days were initially organized, but at the end of the eighteenth century every university eventually had several *ontgroensenaten*, which could be explained – if the above-mentioned theory of the role of *praetores* is correct – by the existence of certain veteran clubs that emerged from the *privatissima*. Initially, however, unity in the student world was still hard to find. In the 1790's, at least ten of those competing *ontgroensenaten* were active in Leiden. But then in 1799 three of them took the initiative to continue as one association. Utrecht had already preceded this in 1793 with the *Senatus Veteranorum Glirium*.

Hazing was seen as a problem by the authorities and the response is reminiscent of the attempts in the seventeenth century to ban the nations. In 1798, the Groningen rector proposed to ban hazing, an attempt that was repeated over the next four years. In 1803, the department of Holland devoted attention to hazing practices in Leiden by reviving a 1629 bill. This was followed in 1804 in Groningen in a 'Decree against the so-called hazing'.⁴¹ The reason for the concern of the university boards was that hazing seemed to be getting rougher. A Leiden professor, who in 1828 looked back on his own time as a student, cited as the cause the merging of the various *ontgroensenaten*. When there was not yet a single, unified organisation, students could choose for themselves where they wanted to belong and that dampened the violence. When students in Leiden had registered with one of the various senates, they received a 'preservative certificate', which indicated that this student was under the protection of that specific senate.⁴² Another Leiden professor wrote about his experiences in 1812, such as 'humiliations, baseness and ridicule without end' and 'a lot of filth'.⁴³

In Leiden and Utrecht in particular, complaints about hazing were extensive. A few years after the French occupation had ended and the responsibility for higher education was centralized and lay with the government in The Hague, this was still

⁴⁰De Vrankrijker 1939, 196. In this case the bravado of the students went even further: *Senatus Minor* is the term for those professors who constituted the *forum academicum*.

⁴¹During the French occupation the provinces were dissolved and changed into *départements*. For Leiden, see: Colenbrander 1916, 207; for Groningen: Jonckbloet 1864, 379.

⁴²Tydemans 1830. Tydemans was a son of the above-mentioned Utrecht professor Meinard Tydemans. He made those remarks in an extensive inquiry, organised by the ministry of the Interior about the many complaints there were about the system of higher education in 1828. There was one question especially on hazing.

⁴³Pruys van der Hoeven 1866, 12–13.

a reason for the head of the education department of the Ministry of the Interior to contact the university boards. The boards obediently reported that there had sometimes been undesirable conduct and that they tried to do something about it, but that did not sound very convincing. They were probably aware of their own impotence. Notable is a letter from the Minister of Justice from 1824 in which he blamed the professors who for years on end did not oppose the hazing out of fear that the students would move elsewhere.⁴⁴

3.5 The Origin of the *Corpora*

It is unclear exactly how things went in the *ontgroensenaten*. Nevertheless, we do have a fairly extensive account from Utrecht from the memoirs of a German student who had come to Utrecht because his father had entered the service of Louis Bonaparte (king of Holland in the years 1806–1810). Count Carl (Anton Wilhelm) von Wedel, registered as ‘Comes de Wedel’ at the University in 1809, after having studied law in Göttingen. In his memoirs he described the Utrecht hazing ritual.⁴⁵ Initially, Von Wedel did not want to get involved in student life because he had heard that in Utrecht students only fought with their fists and he did not want to have anything to do with students who ‘keine Satisfaction gaben’. He had fought one duel himself in Göttingen, from which he emerged unscathed.

One day, however, a student came to his room with the announcement that he was a beadle of the academic senate and that von Wedel had to report to Prorector Brown. Von Wedel recognized the student from class and said that he had not come to Utrecht to joke but to study. Then the student explained what the difference was between the German student world and the Dutch. The German way of settling disagreements was to use blood-spilling violence. In Utrecht there was an ‘Ehrengericht’, a court of honour, set up as a copy of the academic senate with a *prorector magnificus* and assessors. In that student senate (referred to by Von Wedel as ‘student court’) all quarrels between the students were resolved and the verdict of this board was widely respected. Anyone who did not observe it was expelled as ‘dishonourable’. According to this student beadle, the student senate had more prestige than the senate of professors. Not only was this tolerated by the university, it was even encouraged and the student rector even consulted with the real *rector magnificus*. The student senate was elected by the students and the senate then appointed one of them as prorector.

New students were expected to report to the prorector immediately after registering at the university and to request a hazing or admission ‘*intra numerum sodalium*’. Place and time were then set for that ceremony. The *groen* was then brought to a room filled with students, was examined (a ‘jester’s exam’ with a ‘jester’s

⁴⁴For this correspondence see Colenbrander 1916, 207–215.

⁴⁵Von Wedel 1897, 16–33.

hood', according to Von Wedel) and was eventually promoted to *doctor artium liberalium*. Subsequently, the student had to take an oath of obedience to the prorector. The intention was for the newly hatched student to offer supper. Von Wedel thought it was a bit of a stretch to be labeled a *groen*, which he equated with what a *Fuchs* was in the German student world. He was prepared to pay a supper, but did not wish to participate in the ceremony, he considered himself too proud for that, seeing himself as a 'Göttinger Burschen'. Von Wedel was allowed to receive only the diploma and to pay for the dinner following the ceremony. The receiving of the diploma nevertheless gives a glimpse into the ceremonial part of hazing: the whole resembled a ritual of a secret society, in which the prorector wore a long allonge wig, a wide-brimmed hat with a red ribbon, a red cloth-lined toga, and the face was blackened with moustache and goatee. After a speech by the prorector in Latin ('Cicero would not have understood him'), Von Wedel received the diploma, implicitly promising obedience to the prorector. The ceremony ended with the singing of the *Io Vivat*, which had become part of the standard repertoire of student songs in the Netherlands.

During dinner it turned out that the intention was to drink the newly hatched *doctor* under the table, which Von Wedel refused and therefore was punished: he had to drink a large goblet of wine. He refused that too, prompting four burly students to grab him and pour the wine inside. Von Wedel then took two knives from the table and threatened his attackers. On an '*ad loca, silentium*' of the prorector, it immediately fell silent. The rector persuaded him to stay, because running away would mean that as long as he was studying in Utrecht, he would become a pariah, no one would want to associate with him anymore and that he would be given the silent treatment. The next morning one of the students present at the ceremony stood at his bedside to invite him to have a drink and make it up.

What appears from this account is that with such a *groensenaat* a form of association had arisen with a clear structure and rules, whereby obedience was due to the chosen head of the association. It also appeared that fixed rituals had arisen in these senates with customs reminiscent of esoteric societies. Interestingly, it becomes clear from Von Wedel's report that things could get rough, and those who did not want to participate could be completely excluded.

It has already been pointed out above that the concerted action of students in a (semi-) military setting probably helped to shape the unification of the student body from the mid-eighteenth century. That became very concrete when in 1815 Napoleon led his last campaign through Europe from Elba until he was finally halted at Waterloo. While his army marched to the North into the newly formed United Kingdom of the Netherlands, about 120 students from Leiden and Utrecht volunteered for the battle and were actually included in a battalion of *chasseurs*. There was no actual fighting, but it did promote a sense of unity.⁴⁶ That feeling of going to war together was very strong in 1830–1831, when, following the separation of the

⁴⁶ Otterspeer 1992, 452, even claims that 'while marching' a few *groensenaten* negotiated to arrive at a single association.

Belgians from the United Kingdom, hundreds of students again reported for military service and marched in separate battalions to the Southern Netherlands. How deep the bonds forged there proved to be is shown by the countless reunions that continued until the 1880's.⁴⁷

3.6 Conclusion

It is precisely around the end of French rule that in the Netherlands a new type of student organization arose at all universities from the *groensenaten* that wanted to unite all students and encompass all of student life much more than before. That unification was not without a struggle. For a long time, several *groensenaten* continued to exist alongside these new organizations, and not all students were incorporated. In Utrecht, for example, in the nineteenth century the theologians almost always have maintained their own position. If that also was the case in the early modern period is unclear. But although unity was never fully achieved and countless competitors emerged in the last years of the nineteenth century, the student *corpora* nevertheless held a dominant position in Dutch student life well into the twentieth century. Characteristic of these *corpora* is that, compared to the students in the early modern period, they developed fixed elements that regulated student life. In the first place, hazing was largely regulated through these corpora.⁴⁸ Secondly, these groups offered the opportunity for students to develop in all facets of student life. The *corpora* had many sub-associations or societies as they were called, *corpsgezelschappen*, in which students also acquired social skills that prepared for functioning in society.⁴⁹ They also offered the opportunity for personal development, whether in the literary, cultural or sports field.⁵⁰ In doing so, they followed in the footsteps of the eighteenth-century sociability movement. Finally, the corpora offered students the opportunity to meet on a regular basis in their own environment – next to the lecture halls and coffee houses and pubs scattered throughout town – by setting up *sociëteiten*. These began their existence in established coffee houses and cafes, but eventually developed into the private club houses of the *corpora* in the form of large

⁴⁷ Bel et al. 1981; Kossmann et al. 1982; Santegoets 1998.

⁴⁸ For this, see also Caljé 2009, 414–415.

⁴⁹ The term *dispuut* is also used, which connects to debating society. There indeed were debating societies, but *dispuut* is also used in a broader meaning. They probably grew out of eighteenth-century societies like *Dulces*

⁵⁰ Sometimes at a high level. The in 1828 founded Studenten Concert, later named Utrechtsch Studenten Concert is the oldest still existing symphony orchestra of the Netherlands, See Dijkstra en Westra 1993.

private buildings that presented themselves often as strongholds in the centre of the urban environment.⁵¹

At the beginning of the nineteenth century a new kind of student association developed in the Netherlands, the *studentencorps*. Although regional clustering of students exists even today, these *corpora* preached unity, which definitely ended the already declining regional *nationes* at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The *studentencorps* grew into more or less stable organizations with their own traditions, club houses and subgroup structures. They were influenced by developments from the previous century such as sociability and growing political consciousness. The phenomenon through which these developments were channeled into a newly organized student life was hazing, which always had some sharp (and dangerous) practices, but which got more often out of hand at the end of the eighteenth century. At the same time, the ritualization of hazing helped shape the unity among students.⁵²

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⁵¹Minerva was founded in Leiden in 1815 (later also the name of the Leiden Studenten Corps), Mutua Fides in Groningen, also in 1815, and Placet Hic Requiescere Muis (known as PHRM) in Utrecht in 1816.

⁵²There was no space here to compare the Dutch *studentencorps* with the German *Burschenschaft*, although they have some likeness.

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