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The Process of Ethno[re]genesis among the 'Weenhayek of the Gran Chaco (1976-2006)¹

Introduction

During the 21st century, in countries like the USA or Chile, several groups of people have suddenly appeared that have called themselves "indigenous" and that have reclaimed an ethnic label that has not been in use for decades or centuries. They have referred to some kind of established history of the area, claiming that they are actually descendants of a particular aboriginal group. The quality of the links between the alleged ascendants and the descendants is often hard to assess. By some anthropologists, this whole process has been called ethnogenesis.

Personally, I would rather call it ethnoregenesis as the first term should be saved for the process that presumably takes place when a group, in some type of supposedly initial phase, "discovers" or "attains" some type of ethnic identity. (Erikson, 1995, 2002) An identity that has been dormant for years — or possibly even centuries — naturally may be revived (although some of these processes, especially the ones quoted initially, probably would end up outside of the margins for the conventional definition of "ethnic identity"). In such particular cases I would prefer the use of the term ethnoregenesis.

The concept, and its definition, indicates that ethnicity itself is far from a fixed or inflexible phenomenon. On the contrary, I would argue that this is a relational phenomenon that is constructed, and reconstructed, according to the social, political and environmental context. Furthermore, I would claim that the "ethnic" dimension is something negotiable and only partially related to the "identity" of the group. One may perceive of a cultural continuity (real or fictitious) independently of one's ethnic association (being it conscious or unconscious).

In the case from Bolivia, described in the present article, I will argue that a vast complex of factors actually combined to cause an ethnoregenesis among the 'Weenhayek people of the Gran Chaco in the 1980s and 1990s, culminating with a cultural festival in 2004. I take the very organization of this festival as a token of a consummated process. To fully understand this process, however, we first need to discuss the history of this ethnic group as well as the socio-cultural conditions and the actors involved in the situation.

The present article may be regarded as a contribution to the ethnography and the understanding of non-Western, local or "indigenous" groups, and of a most particular response to certain aspects of globalization. It may also be seen as an attempt to provide albeit fractions of local activist struggle for influence and power. Finally it provides certain insights into the local reception of trans-national development work.

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Background

The 'Weenhayek Indians are foragers and fishermen of the tropical dry forest of the Gran Chaco. They have been known in the ethnographic literature as 'Mataco' and their language, '*Weenhayek Lhamet*, belongs to the Mataco-Guaicuruan language group. Thus they are fairly closely related to the Tapiete, as well as to the Chorote and the Toba. (Braunstein, 1993:4, Alvarsson, 1988:32, Métraux, 1946)

The 'Weenhayek still subsist from gathering, fishing and hunting, but, at least since the Chaco War (1932–1935) and up until present, fishing has been more important than hunting, and foraging has been complemented by some horticulture. The 'Weenhayek have for centuries supplemented these activities with work migration (Fock, 1966/67) to obtain staple foods, especially maize, and, after the Chaco War, cash and Western consumers' goods. These migrations ceased almost totally after the mechanization of the cane-mills in Argentina in the 1960s (ibid., Alvarsson, 1988:153) and was replaced by day labor. Very few 'Weenhayek outside the bilingual school program, hold a permanent job position.

'Weenhayek social organization has been based on units called *wikiyi*'. These were characterized by a given name, a fixed geographical area and by the fact that they had at least one leader or spokesman called *niyat*. (ibid:63, Braunstein, 1978/79) This unit seasonally fissioned into two or several bands and lived together only during the fruit-season (October-January). (Métraux, 1946:303) The present society is based on the fruit-season villages rather than the *wikiyi*'. The latter has simultaneously been transformed from a group to a category. (Alvarsson, 1988:69)

The 'Weenhayek are egalitarian and monogamous. They practice kindred *wikiyi*' exogamy and have uxori-local residence. Their kinship terminology suggests a "Hawaiian", generational system, based on cognatic principles. (ibid.:80-106)

In spite of evident social change, and in contrast to other Indian peoples of the region, the 'Weenhayek have refused to become incorporated into the national society. During the late 1970s they were even able to reconstruct features of their traditional socio-economic organization that had been absent for several decades. (Alvarsson, 1988)

Their ethno-regeneration has been characterized by a perpetuation of what are perceived to be 'Weenhayek values, and a fiction of cultural continuity. As we shall see, this has been possible because of the slow pace of colonization, the flexible social organization based on alliances between small, independent ambilineal units, economic independence owing to commercialization of handicraft and fishing, bilingual schools, and affirmation of legal rights to portions of their former territory.

Pre-ethnicity and Ethnogenesis

From pre-historic times up until the Chaco War, it appears that the Mataco-Guaicuruan peoples — like so many other hunting and gathering peoples in human history — were divided into small, independent units that were related primarily through kinship. "Pre-ethnicity" relations between ethno-linguistic groups were probably modeled on the familial affiliations within the group, such as alliances between bands and *wikiyi*-groups. (Alvarsson, 1988:63) This was reflected, for example, in the denominations of the neighboring Amerindian peoples, as these names follow the same pattern as those of the internal *wikiyi*-groups. (ibid.)

As we have seen above, *wikiyi'* is a central concept in traditional 'Weenhayek (and probably in all Mataco) social organization. (ibid:62, Braunstein, 1976; Wilbert, 1982:25) This 'Weenhayek word can have at least three meanings:

1. a general word for "people";
2. a term that denotes the medium-sized unit of social organization, the "*wikiyi'*-group" mentioned above; and
3. a denomination of the Mataco (in the south often pronounced as *wichi*). This apparent confusion is most probably due to the fact that the Mataco-Guaicuruan peoples were not primarily organized in "ethnic groups" but in a number of medium-sized, contiguous units, *wikiyi'*-groups that Braunstein has characterized as "chain-linked". (2003:19)

Each *wikiyi'*-group was distinguished from other such entities by a name that it had received because of a character trait, for example, *Pelas* (the White Ones), *Lhupis* (the Bird's Nests), *'Asqanis* (the Cormorants), and so on. According to Fock, each group may also have been identified by specific tattoo markings. (Wilbert, 1982:23-25) Therefore, ethnic identity as such was probably not an issue at all until the first Whites appeared on the scene. This is certified by the former autodenomination of the 'Weenhayek: *'olhamelh*, which plainly signifies "us," or these days (in the south) simply *wikiyi'*, which means "people". (Alvarsson, 1988:2, 62, 120)

When the Whites appeared, however, they were perceived as fundamentally different from the 'Weenhayek and their distant relatives such as the *Wan'lhay* (Toba), the *'Asoowas* (Tapiete), and others. The latter, as stated above, had proper names associated with animals or group characteristics, much like the internal divisions of the 'Weenhayek — the *wikiyi'*-groups. The Whites, however, were classified as *'ahààtay* — "those with 'the color of death' [in their faces]" — a most deviant and negative denomination.

Under the influence of White oppression, the 'Weenhayek began to separate, and to distinguish, themselves from the Whites by adopting another, more characteristic name: *'Weenhayek wikiyi'*, the "Different People" (Alvarsson 1988:62ff; Claesson 1989:1). This is further underlined by the fact that the adjective may be used in a substantive form: *'Weenhayek* (s.) or *'Weenhayeyh* (pl.), which roughly translates as "*The Different [ones]*".

They also elaborated the name of their language from a mere *Lhamet* ('word') to *'Weenhayek lhamet* ("the word of the different"), thus emphasizing this paradigmatic shift even further.

As in other, similar cases, the 'Weenhayek probably did not attain an explicit ethnic identity until there was a concrete threat to their continued existence. Not until the Whites provided them with a contrast did they define their own character, their own "Mataconess". This was finally stated in the denomination *'Weenhayek*. Not until this phase we can speak of an ethnogenesis.

The Algodonal Massacre

Apart from occasional visits and seasonal work migrations, the 'Weenhayek were fairly "isolated" up until the 19th century. This implies that they had a good, most often a first-hand knowledge, of other cultures, of civilizations like the Inca

empire, for example, but that they maintained a sovereign and independent culture in their traditional habitat. In the beginning of the 20th century, however, outside influence gathered momentum.

In 1915 this culminated in a decisive incident at a place called "Algodonal" on the Pilcomayo River. In the oral history of the 'Weenhayek it has been called "The Algodonal Massacre". At this opportunity, Bolivian soldiers invited a number of 'Weenhayek men to a so-called "reconciliation party" in a fort at Algodonal. Even though there was some suspicion, however, the majority of the 'Weenhayek warriors were taken by surprise. All of a sudden soldiers appeared around them, firing their rifles until all but a few were dead. (Alvarsson, 1993:53-55)

In the traditional narrative, this event has been laden with strong symbolical overtones, and even though 'Weenhayek narrators stressed the courage of the survivors, the incident somehow also marked the first sign of powerlessness in the presence of white colonization. After this incident, the 'Weenhayek never thought of themselves as "superior" or "equal" to the whites as regards military force. (Alvarsson, 2003a:37)

The Chaco War

In 1932 the Bolivian army, lured by rumors of large deposits of oil, launched an attack on Paraguay to claim the whole of the Gran Chaco. The four-year long conflict came to be known as the "Chaco War". It proved to be disastrous for the socio-cultural situation of the 'Weenhayek — and their military inferiority vis-à-vis the Whites was accentuated even more. The Bolivian army considered the 'Weenhayek and the Tapiete to be "enemy groups" alleged to be associated with other Mataco-Guaicuruan peoples on the other side of the front². Thus the army decided to keep the local Amerindians out of combat. In consequence they were told also to remain in their camps, sometimes rearranged to serve as 'Concentration Camps.' However, some 'Weenhayek men were at times, especially during the last two years, employed as guides and ferrymen, and the women were given tasks like handling the laundry and cleaning camps.

When the Chaco War ended in 1936, the 'Weenhayek were again allowed to roam the forests and the riversides, collecting, hunting and fishing. But the old times were never to come back. The army had occupied their territory for five years. They had pacified all the Amerindian groups in the area, even the most rebellious of the all, the Bolivian Toba. During the War the Tapiete and the 'Weenhayek had been transferred time after another. In that way, much of their traditional social organization had been eliminated, never to be totally recovered.

The army had handed out provisions to the enclosed Indians. Thus it had introduced new staples: rice, wheat flour and macaroni; new stimulants: coca, mate and sugar; new consumers' goods: bicycles, radios, kerosene, Western clothes, and

² The majority of the Tapiete, e.g., have always lived on the Paraguayan side of the border. Most other Mataco-Guaicuruan peoples are divided by border, and/or closely related to each other. Labeling the 'Weenhayek as "enemies" was a gross mistake, however, they always considered the Chaco War the "War of the Whites".

shotguns; as well as new modes of thought and reasoning. And it was all there to stay. The Chaco War did what nothing before had been able to accomplish — it tied the Amerindians in northwestern Gran Chaco to the national economy. From now on they had to make money, in one way or another, to attain the goods they had grown accustomed to.

The 'Weenhayek in the north were the ones who suffered the most. They faced outright racism and severe discrimination. Those living around the town of Villa Montes, the northernmost town with 'Weenhayek inhabitants, remained as serfs, day laborers, and washwomen of the recently settled Creoles. They were deprived of all pride. Their language was forbidden. Their shamanism was outlawed.

The very expression 'Mataco' was being laughed at. '*Mataco sucio*'³ was a common invective among the Creoles of the area. The Amerindians turned to drugs to find ease and comfort. Tobacco use, that had been ritually restricted in the past, increased sharply. Alcoholism and the use of coca spread quickly, especially among the men. The standard of living as well as health status decreased rapidly. And the former confident Amerindian ethnic identity seemed to die with it.

The First Swedish Missionaries

In 1943 an unconventional Swedish Pentecostal missionary, Astrid Jansson, moved to Villa Montes. She never built a mission, but, being an assistant nurse, she cared for some of the medical needs of the 'Weenhayek. She also became one of their main defenders, a spokesperson and a teacher. She stayed on for thirty years in the Gran Chaco and made a most unusual impression on the Amerindians. In the oral history of the 'Weenhayek, she hold a special position, possibly because they in her saw the first glimpse of recognition from a white person in the turmoil after the Chaco War. (Alvarsson 2002:110)

In 1949 she was joined by missionary family Gustaf and Märta Flood. While Astrid Jansson was a spinster and a "nobody" within the Swedish mission, Flood was already a most influential missionary. He was a "pioneer" of the Mission and he nourished entirely different thoughts about the Amerindians, and started, almost immediately to build a classical "mission" in Villa Montes that echoed those of the Jesuits in the 18th century. In his mind the 'Weenhayek could acquire a more "human" status only by becoming Christians. (Alvarsson, 2002:123) Even so, he inherited much of the confidence that Astrid had established among the 'Weenhayek.

Don Gustavo, as Gustaf Flood was known in the region, allowed only Spanish at church, following the advice of the authorities. Furthermore, he had a Bible portion painted on the front wall of the 'Weenhayek church of Villa Montes: *Vosotros que en otro tiempo no erais pueblo, ahora sois pueblo de Dios* ('[Ye] which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God', 1 Peter, 2:10). In this way his civilizing ambitions combined with his humanitarian view of the 'Weenhayek as fellow human beings with a prospect: they could actually become "true Bolivians" by becoming Christians.

³ '*Mataco sucio*' is Spanish for 'dirty Mataco', an expression often used at the time. Other similar expressions were '*indio sucio*' ('dirty Indian') and '*mataco cuchino*' ('Pig Indian').

The "Denial" Phase

Under pressure from the Creoles, and in line with Flood's idea of becoming true Bolivians, many 'Weenhayek individuals stopped using their language in public. They adopted Spanish names. They went to the mission church, even though very few of them converted to the religion of the missionaries.

To gain acceptance from the Creoles and the Mestizos - not the missionaries in the first place - the 'Weenhayek denied their language and their culture. They stopped their algarroba parties and their traditional dances. They denied relationship with ethnic healing. They denied their origin. They entered into a "denial phase" to please the Mestizos and to become accepted in Bolivian society.

This was mostly on the surface level, however. Overt cultural expressions were left or subdued. But at home, people kept on speaking 'Weenhayek. At nights, when the whites were far away, people still told the old stories of the trickster Thokwjwaj. They still gathered to remember old times and the oral history of their people. (Alvarsson, 1993)

The Pentecostal "Revival"

In 1971 Astrid Jansson had left for Sweden and the remaining Swedish missionary families had been transferred to other parts of Bolivia. Only a Swedish electrician was left at the Mission in Villa Montes. So the Mission called for reinforcements. But before they arrived, a remarkable religious "revival"⁴ had begun among the "Mataco". In the vacuum after the missionaries, some Amerindian evangelists had started meetings and gatherings on their own. Unusual things occurred. The Amerindians saw signs in the sky. Sick people were healed. Others experienced strong divine presence and spoke in tongues. Some were "slain in the Spirit"⁵. (See also Alvarsson, 2003a & 2003b)

Earlier, there had only been a few Amerindians who had been "touched" by the message of the missionaries. Astrid had written in a note that the work "progressed slowly". (Alvarsson, 2004:289) Now all of a sudden whole villages were affected, old as well as young people. The Christian/Pentecostal message, presented in an indigenized form and by Amerindian preachers, had a tremendous impact. *After* this "revival" the majority of the 'Weenhayek confessed to be "Pentecostals".

The religious fervor was not based upon formal preaching and large gatherings but upon fellowship, personal testimonies, prayer and intercession in the homes. When the new missionaries arrived the Amerindians held large meetings in the church which Gustaf Flood had built. When these were going on for too long, however, the uneasy newcomers closed the doors of the church and tried to get people to go home.

The result was just that the 'Weenhayek continued in the homes, singing, praying and crying. In this way they developed a form of religious practice that is still characteristic today for the special form of Pentecostalism of the 'Weenhayek,

⁴ A "revival" presupposes that something is dormant, and as I see it, there was no such condition among the 'Weenhayek. Thus I use the term within inverted commas to emphasize that the labeling is the missionaries' and not my own.

⁵ "Slain in the Spirit" is the Pentecostal term for deep trance.

i.e. informal, and often small scale gatherings, without any special liturgy and with a continuous alternation between prayer, singing, praise and testimony.

The Situation in the 1970s

When I arrived in the Gran Chaco for the first time in the mid-1970's, these Amerindians were still known as *Mataco*. But many of them, just like the Chiriguano of the area, claimed that they could not speak their autochthonous language anymore. You only needed to stay a couple of hours among them, however, to discover that this was a false claim. People still spoke 'Weenhayek [*and* Guaraní for that matter] at home. Furthermore, it was estimated that around 85 percent of them now professed to be "Pentecostal believers".

People were uneasy about their "indigenous" identity, however. They had a long period of what might be called "code switching," not only in matters of language. They actually switched between the "official" position, somehow ratified by the authorities and by the Mission, where *la vida vieja* ('the old life') was associated with evil, sin, and spiritual confusion, and the "unofficial position" where "the good old days" were when they were all better off, living a healthy life in the forest. These two points of view were never reconciled during the 1970s.

All through the 1970s, the tendency in 'Weenhayek society was 'de-ethnification'. (Segato, 2003:160) In line with Rita Laura Segato's terminology, this means a purification, a cleansing of cultural traits associated with the 'old ways' related to the previous ethnic identity. People rid themselves of what was considered a bothersome heritage, an annoying past.

In 1979 I used the term '*Weenhayek* for the first time in writing⁶, but it did not catch on in public discourse until the early 1990s. However, when I published a first monograph on 'Weenhayek ethnography in Spanish, in 1993, I initially had intended it to be called *Yo soy mataco* ('I am Mataco') because this was how they were known in the area. But even though this book was aimed for the Creoles, however, it had to be changed to *Yo soy 'weenhayek* (Alvarsson, 1993) to align with the current discourse. At the time, the 'Weenhayek were rapidly giving up on the old, imposed term *Mataco* and found it more and more repulsive.

The Process towards a Reformulated 'Weenhayek Identity

In the early 1990s, people did not want to recognize the term 'Mataco' anymore. It was associated with the past (*la vida vieja*), with an imposed identity — *and* with a revisionism as regards the meaning. In academic Spanish, its etymology has usually been associated with *montaraces* ('forest people'). But the 'Weenhayek associated it with the Spanish verb *matar* ('to kill') and thus "Mataco" with "Killers" or "Assassins".

As we have seen above, the term '*Weenhayek* was originally used by other Mataco peoples to denote the dialect group of the extreme north — the 'Weenhayek.

⁶ I used it for a first work on the 'Weenhayek language: *Wenhayek Lhamet*. (Alvarsson, 1979) Note that this, in no way, was the first time that the concept was used orally! The 'Weenhayek themselves had used it for a long time. Nevertheless, this was the first public use of the term, as far as I know.

They were simply nicknamed "the Different Ones". As of the 1980s there was a gradual change in the respect for other cultures within the Mission. This opened up for a "Project of Cultural Support". The ethnographic and linguistic work within this project (where I helped out at certain phases), provided the 'Weenhayek with tools for a "reformulation" or a "reacomodation" of what they regarded to be "their own culture". In due course, boosted by other factors, this resulted in an increase in the official use of the 'Weenhayek language, initiation of linguistic work, indigenous teachers' training, bilingual education, expansion of local handicraft, the establishment of a small ethnographic museum, etc.

This was made possible as the social situation had changed considerably from the 1970s. In that period no one, except some of the more dedicated missionaries, could care less about an Amerindian people. They were seen as, and treated as, the pariah of Bolivian society. Even low status Amerindians like the Quechua and Aymara treated the 'Weenhayek as *salvajes* ('savages'). In the 1990s this was all different. All of a sudden a series of NGOs ('Non-Governmental Organizations') appeared with money from Europe for precisely *Amerindians* — and preferably hunters and gatherers, considered more 'natural,' more 'original,' and viewed in the light of cultural romanticism.

Thus it was suddenly of interest to have Amerindians around. They were not treated any better in society, racism still prevailed, but they were now the specific target of international development aid. Simultaneously, an ambitious program of the Bolivian government to grant land rights for the 'Weenhayek (prompted by lobbying from the Swedish Mission) resulted in a new *Decreto Suprem* (No 23;500), officially declared on May 19, 1993. This resolution gave sovereignty over a large portion of their traditional territory to the 'Weenhayek. Some old, established Creoles with cattle farming were allowed to retain their land for grazing. The 'Weenhayek were granted the right to gather traditional 'forest foods' and to take firewood also from these areas.

Two aspects were especially important. Schools in this area could now be re-organized as *Escuelas Bilingües 'Weenhayek*, i.e. as schools under autochthonous 'Weenhayek supervision. This allowed for an expansion and intensification of the already initiated program of bilingual education, and the employment of 'Weenhayek teachers. The second aspect was the right to *regalias* (local taxes) from the oil companies working in what was declared 'Weenhayek territory. Any type of natural resource found in the ground still belonged to the state, but the 'owners' of the land gained the right to a small percentage of the profit.

The Mission had also paved the way as regards education. After my initial linguistic work in the 1970s, which established the phonetic basis and a working alphabet for the language (Alvarsson, 1979, 1984), linguist Kenneth Claesson of Stockholm University worked on vowel length, syntax and vocabulary. Simultaneously, he initiated a translation of the New Testament to the 'Weenhayek language while his teacher wife, Gunvor Claesson started up training of bilingual teachers.

The first course for potential bilingual teachers was held in 1980, using a reader that I had compiled (Alvarsson, 1980), but the first bilingual class was not started until 1983 when a young 'Weenhayek woman, Domingaina Ayala, tutored by

Gunvor Claesson, took on a first grade in 'Weenhayek. I remember my first amazement when I, for the first time ever, saw 'Weenhayek children who were up to mischief in the classroom. In the Spanish-speaking schools of the 1970s that would have been considered impossible.

In 1985, the first *convenio* of bilingual education was established between the Mission and the Bolivian government. In 1991 the first high school undergraduate (*bachiller*) among the 'Weenhayek, Marino Pablo, got his honors. In 1992 the bilingual education took on its present name, for the first time including 'Weenhayek in its name: Centro de Educación Bilingüe 'Weenhayek.

On October 23, 1999 the 'Weenhayek gathered to acknowledge the alphabet of their language. Later the same year, on July 29, there was a resolution about an adapted school year calendar. This was tailored to keep the 'Weenhayek children, who previously had disappeared from school during the fishing season, in the classroom. The new Bolivian curriculum suddenly allowed for that type of ethnic idiosyncrasies.

All this time, The Swedish Mission had an ambitious in-service-training program for young 'Weenhayek teachers. The number of teachers gradually grew and after the first decade most villages had at least one bilingual teacher. Even though the program was most practical and extensive, it could never grant any exams. Therefore, not until 1999 did the first teacher receive her exam; in this case through the SEBAD Institute in Yacuiba. The person was Domingaina Ayala, the woman who held the first classes in 'Weenhayek sixteen years earlier (see above). Later two of the other "girls" (now married women), Erminia Salazar and Inéz de Sánchez followed. The year after, in 2000, the first 'Weenhayek man, Nicolás Sapiranda, had his teacher's exam through the INSPOC Institute in Camiri.

In 2003 the 'Weenhayek New Testament was inaugurated, and the same year a small hymn-book was published. In 2004 and 2005 several other young teachers had their exams and it is calculated that within two years (2008) there will be some additional teachers, plus one lawyer and an professional in administration. In total some 40 teachers are working in almost all villages in the 'Weenhayek territory.

Parallel to this process, the "pro-indigenous" organization CIDOP (Confederación Indígena del Oriente Chaco y Amazonía de Bolivia, Unidos y Organizados) repeatedly encouraged the 'Weenhayek to take political action and organize themselves. The model, developed among the Bolivian Guaraní, with caciques, and in particular a *cacique general*, i.e. a president with executive power, however, appealed very little to the acephalous 'Weenhayek. (Alvarsson, 1988:129)

In 1992, after some adjustments of the organization developed among the Guaraní, Silberio Rivero Pérez from Capirendita was elected the first *Capitán Grande* for what, at the time, was called the CWP (Comunidad 'Weenhayek de la Provincia del Gran Chaco). On August 10–11, 1993, the next version of the organization was created, the OCWP (Organización Capitanía 'Weenhayek del Pilcomayo). On December 8 the same year the Tapiete were included in the organization and the name was changed to ORCAWETA (Organización Capitanía 'Weenhayek-Tapiete). On the same occasion, José Pajayis López from Capirendita was elected to be the first *Capitán Grande* for this new organization.

On January 28, 1994, the ORCAWETA established its new regulations. After this, an intense period of adaptation followed — and subsequently a struggle for power. One of my informants has even named it the *La guerra del poder* ('The War of Power'). As part of this struggle, some of the new leaders challenged the representatives of the Swedish Mission. At the time, the president of the local Pentecostal church was a 'Weenhayek, the schools were under 'Weenhayek leadership and political action mainly in the hands of ORCAWETA. The missionaries only held the economic power in the social projects funded by the Swedish government (according to the regulations of that organization).

Somehow, the ORCAWETA leaders suspected the missionaries of cheating the Amerindians and keeping part of the project money for themselves. The discourse on "corruption," used by the leaders, was most certainly borrowed from the local Bolivian political scene. Whether the leaders believed in the accusations or not, or whether it was a means to achieve more political control, I do not know. The critique was never ratified by the 'Weenhayek grassroots, however, and from around 1997, the ORCAWETA leaders of the time gradually lost the confidence of the people.

In 1998, the women of Capirendita, under the leadership of Maria Sánchez, organized a women's march on Villa Montes. (As far as I know, this was the first time ever that the 'Weenhayek took on overt political action.) They paraded the streets of the town, and united outside the mission headquarters — where representatives from the central Mission office in Sweden were visiting — to express support for the mission and counteract the criticism made by the ORCAWETA leaders.

This very year, 1998, all this commotion resulted in a severe split within the ORCAWETA. The members finally dethroned the old president and elected a new one, Lucas Cortez. Under his leadership the relations to the mission were improved and ORCAWETA regained some of its confidence. In 2000 the first *regalías* were given to the 'Weenhayek by the oil companies. This resulted in a housing project in Capirendita — and a series of new problems, especially accusations of corruption. In 2004, the present *Capitán Grande*, Federico Salazar, was elected, and thus the idea of FESTIWETA, the first cultural festival ever of the 'Weenhayek people, was born.

Conditions for Ethno[re-]Genesis

It is not easy to sum up the conditions for 'Weenhayek ethno[re-]genesis. The contributing factors are many and the interaction between them extremely complex. Some of the main conditions, however, include the new attitude towards indigenous peoples, and especially Amerindians, that were diffused in Bolivian society during the 1990s. As we have noted, independent development organizations, NGOs, made clear that their "donors" preferred projects among "Amerindians". Mestizos, as poor as they may have been, did not attract their supporters and were left alone.

This privileged position was further reinforced by the politicization of indigenous issues by the National Amerindian organizations — like the CIDOP, mentioned above. Both these categories diffused the idea that Amerindian cultures and identity features were endemic — and valuable — even socio-economic assets in Bolivian society. Even though the Mestizos and the Creoles never really changed

their hearts, they understood that it was "politically correct" to overtly acknowledge indigenous rights, and Amerindian "culture" as something valuable.

The National Amerindian organizations actually put a new pressure on indigenous groups like the 'Weenhayek: they should feature an "original" indigenous identity and culture. To the 'Weenhayek leaders this was something of a shock. For decades they had suppressed their cultural markers, e.g. traditional clothing, and now they were asked to present something that had given up long ago. Thus they gradually became desperate to "reconstruct" ways and artefacts that would speak of a "particular 'Weenhayek identity". This was where my little ethnography from 1993 came in handy and became known as *el libro* ('The Book'). There were many other influences as well, however, some of them typical reinventions of tradition. One such example, clearly visible at the FESTIWETA (see below), was the idea of all historic 'Weenhayek clothing being manufactured in caraguatá fibers⁷.

Furthermore, the 'Weenhayek needed to reorganize socio-politically. Even though, as we have seen above, it was entirely alien to their tradition, they instituted the title and function of *El Capitán Grande* ('The Great Captain'). In most cases, except the leaders of the "War of Power" period, this was complemented by association to the 'Weenhayek [Pentecostal] Church. In many respects this movement was again — after a period of heavy missionary influence — transformed into a veritable indigenous Church, called *La Iglesia 'Weenhayek*.

The First FESTIWETA

On November 19 to 20, 2004 the organizations of the 'Weenhayek people arranged their first cultural festival ever. They called it FESTIWETA, an acronym for *Festival Indígena 'Weenhayek y Tapiete*. As an anthropologist who had worked almost 30 years among them, I was invited as an honorary guest⁸.

Cultural festivals are not new, neither to Bolivia nor Argentina — the countries where the 'Weenhayek and the Tapiete live. Peoples with a more outspoken ethnic identity, well defined within the national society, have held them for decades. So the idea as such has been present for a long time. However, there had never before been a cultural festival among these two neighboring hunting and gathering peoples of the northern Gran Chaco.

⁷ The caraguatá plants, and in particular the *Bromelia Serra* or *Bromelia fastuosa*, are utilized for a series of knitted and braided products, in particular the female gathering net, the *sikyey* and the male gathering bag, *hilu'*. Only the latter one has been commercialized. For a fuller treatment of this phenomenon. (Alvarsson, 1994)

⁸ As has become evident to the keen reader, I came to the Gran Chaco in February 1976 and thus celebrated 30 years in February 2006. Originally, I arrived as a "peace corps-like" volunteer, funded by the Swedish International Development Association, SIDA, to work as an educationalist at the Spanish-speaking schools for the 'Weenhayek, a project that was run by the Swedish Free Mission (1976-1979). The next long-term work (1983-1985) was a more traditional anthropological field-work, funded by Uppsala University. The third, longer period (1992) was financed by the Bolivian government through funds from i.a. SIDA. During that period I led the commission for the establishment of the 'Weenhayek land rights. I have visited the 'Weenhayek almost every year since 1976 and, in total, I have spent some six years in the field.

In early 2004 plans for this cultural festival were initiated. Financing was found from NGOs and Oil Companies in the Gran Chaco. Attractive posters were printed and information diffused. Representatives from different ethnic groups in Bolivia were invited to sing, dance and participate. Festival grounds were arranged at the ORCAWETA headquarters, just across the Pilcomayo river from Villa Montes. People from the neighboring villages and towns were invited to display and sell handicraft.

On November 19, 2004, and in the presence of some one hundred people, the festival was inaugurated by the recently elected *Capitán Grande* (the President of the ORCAWETA), Federico Salazar. He expressed his pleasure about being able to receive special guests for this occasion, about the people who had already come, and his wishes that this festival would be of importance for the 'Weenhayek and the Tapiete peoples. Then he invited representatives from the local authorities to speak. Finally the festival was declared opened.

To be able to have as many official representatives as possible, the inauguration had been postponed twice. Originally it had been planned for the early morning. Later it was announced that it would be at 11 o'clock. Now we had met for the third time, and we were approaching 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The *Alcalde* (Mayor) of Villa Montes had not yet showed up but now Salazar had decided to start anyway.

It was a hot day. November is the first "summer month" of the Chaco. It may also be the first month of the rainy season — but it is always a hot month. Even though we were standing in the shade, we were already sweating. When the introduction was over we hastened to look for something to drink.

The area around the ORCAWETA office had been arranged as a market place. Women from the 'Weenhayek villages close by, were standing behind tables displaying traditional handicraft like the knitted *llicas* (shoulder bags), fabricated from the fibers of the caraguatá plant, baskets made from palm leaves, and a series of other articles. A few men had tables as well. They sold medicinal herbs, most of these in plastic bags with small, handwritten labels attached to them.

One woman sold *jwaat'i'* (algarroba beer). The *jwaay*⁹ fruits were ripening fast and this was the traditional season for algarroba beer. This beer was the sole food item of the ancient 'Weenhayek parties. It was filling, nutritive and appreciated for its high content of alcohol. When I tasted the beer, it was unfermented, however, and this was most certainly an adaptation to the anti-alcohol policy of the Swedish Pentecostal Mission¹⁰. The organizers of the festival had to balance between the dif-

⁹ The algarroba is the fruit of the white algarroba tree (*Prosopis alba*) ripening among the first fruits of the *yakyup* season (the 'fruit season'). It is greatly appreciated for its taste and for its high content of sugar which makes it a perfect choice for brewing of beer, the *jwaat'i'* mentioned in the text. (Alvarsson, 1988:58, 170–171, 211–213)

¹⁰ As we have seen above, when the Swedish missionaries arrived on the scene in 1943, i.e. just after the Chaco War, many of the 'Weenhayek, especially in the town of Villa Montes, turned to alcohol to ease the social pain. Because of this exposed situation, alcoholism became an increasing problem. Thus the Swedish missionaries applied the teetotalitarian policy that they had learned through the popular movements in Sweden, to the 'Weenhayek. Therefore, those who joined the mission in 1950's all were teetotalers.

ferent parties of interest to make it possible. The serving of alcohol on the premises, were it 'traditional' or not, would have barred the mission from supporting the festival.

Among the dozen or more tables I could not spot any Tapiete table. In this context, the 'Weenhayek is the dominant group with some 3,000 members in Bolivia only. The Tapiete is a much smaller group, possibly numbering only some 50 to 100 people in Bolivia. The rest lives in Argentina and in Paraguay. (In the following I therefore refer solely to the 'Weenhayek unless otherwise indicated.)

FESTIWETA Night Activities

After having inspected the tables and met a good number of old friends, we returned to Villa Montes for some rest. At nightfall we were again present on the festival premises. I had been asked to contribute with a popular talk on "Early Images of the 'Weenhayek," showing some of the photographs taken by early ethnographers and missionaries in the area. I have collected and digitalized a series of photographs taken by Eric von Rosen (1921), Erland Nordenskiöld (1910), Rafael Karssten (1932), Alfred Métraux (1946) and some early Swedish Pentecostal Missionaries. The CD is kept at the educational center in Villa Montes, but this was the first time ever the photographs would be displayed in public.

After some musical entertainment, it was my turn. This was a very unfamiliar situation for me as an anthropologist. I am used to participating and observing in this area — and to lecture about it back home. But for the first time ever I would lecture in public — to this people about their own past. The situation also had a ring of something anachronic about it. There I was, in the midst of the wilderness, with all the nocturnal insects buzzing over my head, and with hundreds and hundreds of 'Weenhayek sitting around me, totally dependent on electric currency, on a microphone, on a relatively new ORCAWETA computer and a homemade CD, trying to show pictures from a past that noone in the audience has experienced.

The picture show worked out fine. People chatted. They had opinions about the show and demonstrated their interest. One spontaneous comment afterwards was provided by an old friend of mine from my "village of reference" *Hoo'o'yo'*, who said that: "Why didn't you show the pictures of us? I know that you have them!"

He referred to all the pictures I took in his village during my second period of long term fieldwork, in 1983–1985. I was unable to provide a good answer. The fact that I believed that what I had shown were unique pictures, and of high pertinence to their own history, was of little relevance to him. He would have preferred to see what his family looked like 20 years ago. And, of course, it is impossible to claim that he was wrong.

After a rearrangement of the stage, there was a series of musical performances. First there was a group from the Andes singing Andean folk music and presenting *saludos* (greetings) from their home town. Later there was a beautiful dance performance by a group of young Guaraní women, dressed in their traditional tipoyas.

The main 'Weenhayek attraction this evening was a group from Capirendita performing old chants. Two men shook their calabashes and sang in a most traditional way. There was no doubt that what they produced was well founded in the musical tradition of their people.

The most interesting part for me as an anthropologist, however, was the way they were dressed. I have seen pictures from recent events where 'Weenhayek leaders have appeared in what I would call 'quasi-traditional' clothing, but this was the first time I saw them "live". One of the men, Gregorio Bautista, was dressed in a type of shorts made of caraguatá fibers, much in the style of the *llica* shoulder-bags. They appeared *very* different from the original deer skin loin cloths used in the past.

The t-shirt-like top that he was wearing was also more similar to the bags than to the traditional, classical mail shirts worn by 'Weenhayek warriors in the past. The cap was made of wool and was woven rather than knitted, like the original head bands were. It had feathers, but also unorthodox tassels made of wool. As far as I could see, the traditional shell discs had been replaced by larger, more visible discs — made of plastic!

Afterwards there were several other performances, but this one stayed on in my head. Somehow it became a symbol of the "re-ethnification" or the "ethnoregenesis" of the 'Weenhayek. Something had clearly happened in the thirty-year period that I could survey. The *Mataco of the Gran Chaco*¹¹ had definitely been transformed into the 'Weenhayek.¹²

Theoretical Aspects on Ethnogenesis and Ethnoregenesis

The whole idea of "pre-ethnicity," and the formation of ethnicity (Eriksen, 1995:250-252), i.e. ethnogenesis as such, are based on the notion of personal identity formation. According to popular theories, there is no notion of 'self' until there is 'another.' Building on this, I have suggested that ethnic identity only appear gradually, replacing the supposed familial-like relations to non-kin with "afamilial-like" links to more and more distant relatives, and successively "strangers". Conflict, and the subsequent affirmation of dichotomy, breed the idea of "us" versus "them". (Alvarsson, 1990:8)

The naming of "the others" (as something different from "ourselves") constitutes the initiation of ethnogenesis. The evidence from the 'Weenhayek, who traditionally named their ethnic neighbors in the same way they named fellow 'Weenhayek *wikyí*' groups (Alvarsson, 1988:62, 124), see above, suggests that this naming initially may have followed "familial" patterns.

The process of "ethnification" gathered momentum when the whites appeared. All of a sudden there were greater cultural differences than experienced before. Probable initial curiosity was successively replaced by conflict and enmity. Colonization led to loss of land, rights and, through the "The Algodonal Massacre" in 1915, to a pronounced sense of helplessness. This feeling of defeat is akin to the "signs of impotence and deficiency" as described for alcoholics by Gregory Bateson (1972:313). This sudden insight is closely connected to a reorientation. Conclusions are drawn from this new sapience and employed to the present situation. This was probably the first step in what sometimes has been called "ethno-loss".

¹¹ This was how I called my doctoral thesis on this people in 1987. (Alvarsson, 1988)

¹² The activities continued in much the same pattern the following day, with [little attended] expositions and sales in the daytime and [much attended] musical performances at night.

The "First Denial Phase" implies a "Negotiation of Identity". Maintaining ethnic pride is no longer self-evident. The price for continued traditions may be too high. It may even cost one's life. Thus the ethnic group "negotiates" its ethnicity. It becomes somewhat relative. The most conspicuous elements are shaved off, like using the 'Weenhayek language or traditional clothing in the street.

According to some theories, cultural continuity may be achieved also through non-conventional means, even contrary to what most social scientists previously have thought about the matter. Segato has shown how the Colla of northwestern Argentina chose *de-ethnification* as their strategy. In the referred case, Segato claims, de-ethnification of religious life was a way of struggling for a better position within the nation. (Segato, 2003:187) The Colla gained freedom from ethnic oppression by transforming into a religious category instead of being an ethnic group. This strategy, most certainly, was a dormant factor in the 'Weenhayek "revival" in 1971.

At the time, the 'Weenhayek officially became "Pentecostals" without any ethnic constraints. They belonged to the *Asamblea de Dios* Church, just like thousands of other Bolivians. Unofficially, however, they created their own type or form of Pentecostalism that they practiced "at home" — and, when they were on their own, without the Mestizos or the missionaries, also at church. Officially they preached and sang in Spanish, unofficially, however, they prayed and testified in 'Weenhayek. Therefore, this may be one of these incidents when people, an individual or even a whole society, in a situation of change chooses an alternative that is not a culturally accepted one; according to Hannerz: *Presented with a choice [...] people may under some circumstances not opt for what may have seemed to be their culture.* (Hannerz, 1991:4)

The intention, consciously or unconsciously, may still be cultural continuity. Therefore, this strategy may be labeled "*covert* ethnic [re]genesis". Unlike the *overt* parallel, this process is characterized by "code-switching," i.e. shifting between an overt attitude, including the use of the official language and recognized manners, as well as the covert use of the local language and hidden but standardized cultural behavior. The term, code-switching, is taken from socio-linguistics where it refers only to language. In my terminology, it is used to denote also behavior. (Heller, 1988) This means that we can have a *momentary* code switching that is contextual, that is, geographical or semantic, as well as a *delayed* code switching, as when a method of healing does not work and the sick person tries a new method in the opposite cognitive field.

In due course, these two fields may meet, come closer, interchange, and finally amalgamate, a process that I call *merging*. (Alvarsson, 2003a:55) The end result of this merging may be a more complex cosmology that takes its basic outline from the receivers' previous world view but is complemented by idiosyncratic versions of some of the main characteristics of the new culture or new religion that are compatible with the local culture.

Not until the 1990s do we see proof of "overt ethno[-re-]genesis". At the time, this was made possible, and could be regarded as a valid cultural strategy for the 'Weenhayek, because several outside actors changed the socio-cultural environment. Now, non-missionary foreigners, i.e. NGO employees and consultants, could rein-

force the tendencies towards a cultural rebirth. This was openly displayed by the official use of 'Weenhayek in writing, at ceremonies, etc.; as well as the use of traditional or quasi-traditional dress (see above). From a Batesonian system theory perspective (1972), this flow of new information in the system changed both the actors (the 'Weenhayek) and "the others" (the Mestizos and the Creoles). One of Bateson's expressions may help us understand this: "the larger system — man *plus* environment" (1972:317; the italics are Bateson's). I interpret this as "man plus his society, plus the society surrounding him," e.g., the nation-state as well as multicultural agencies, transnational companies, etc.

Furthermore, Segato argues: "choosing belief is, by the same token, selecting companions, making alliances, and seeking identity with a contracted group of others, while building up, in symbolic terms, an opposition to the social identity of those who are not part of it". (2003:21)

A Concluding Remark

After the de-ethnification, following the disgrace in the wake of the Chaco War, there was obviously a gradual re-ethnification among the 'Weenhayek. The first phase, however, from the establishment of the Swedish Mission in 1949, to the change in the Mission policy in 1975, was characterized by the abolishment of traditional "Mataco characteristics". The new Mataco could come into being only by adopting Christianity and dropping the *vida vieja* ('the old life') and everything associated with it.

Because of this intermediary phase it is pertinent to speak not only of 're-ethnification' but also of an ethnoregenesis. When the NGOs and the government suddenly were interested in supporting "indigenous peoples" in the 1990s, the old "Mataco" identity was never renewed. Instead, a new 'Weenhayek identity was formed as a result of the transformed situation. Through the schooling and cultural programs of the Swedish Mission, they were well prepared for this change, and they took it on by themselves.

From having been ashamed of their old cultural heritage, they now gradually changed their attitude towards it. This was in part, I am sure, a natural process of nostalgia, of searching one's roots in a changing world, similar to the local folklore societies in Europe. In part it was also a typical hunters and gatherers' opportunist reaction. New attitudes and new possibilities of economic support suddenly made it 'politically correct' to be an *indígena*, an Amerindian.

In all these superficial turns it is important not to forget that during all these changes, there has always been a strong undercurrent of cultural continuity, not at all, or very little, affected by missionary work. Here I have put "ethnogenesis" with inverted commas because I believe that there is also a cultural continuity, not affected by cultural festivals. People gather, hunt and fish as they have always done. Old people still know the impressive oral literature of the 'Weenhayek and some of the young leaders just have to think of an *abuela* (grandmother) or an *abuelo* (grandfather) to remember a great deal of their "traditional culture".

The reasons why the transformation was so successful *and* why there was a cultural festival in 2004, a maximum display of cultural pride, must be found in oth-

er, external factors, however. The new *Capitán Grande*, Federico Salazar, is married to a Creole journalist, with skill and interest in organizing media events. A great number of the 'Weenhayek leaders have been invited to other cultural festivals in Bolivia. At these festivals all the other ethnic groups have worn their identity marker, their ethnic symbols.

Among the 'Weenhayek almost all these symbols had been done away with in the de-ethnification process. Therefore they experienced a void when they met "the others," and as they perceived it, culturally more well-equipped groups. New ethnic symbols had to be invented (or reinvented) — and in this context the only available anthropological work on the 'Weenhayek, came to have a disproportionate influence. During the FESTIWETA, the *Capitán Grande* even mentioned it during his inaugural speech as "the basis for this festival". This situation was, of course, somewhat unusual to the present author, just like it would be to most classical anthropologists. This traditional "untouchability" of a foreign scholar is rapidly changing, however. Most academic works are now becoming well-known worldwide through the internet. Simultaneously, in many places all over the world, ethnic minorities are searching for ethnic symbols that today are found only in ethnographic monographs or articles. And they become increasingly good at finding them. Thus anthropologists become main collaborators in cases of ethnogenesis as well as ethnoregenesis.

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