

The Northern Cheyenne in Context: Empowerment and Healing

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Acknowledgments

Even though the scope of this paper – detracted from my final dissertation in anthropology - is rather modest, I cannot withdraw from uttering my most sincere gratitude towards all people who made fieldwork possible and, moreover, very pleasing. Towards friends and family, my mentors at university and to the employees of the Study Center for American Indians in Antwerp. My greatest mindfulness, however, goes out to the Cheyenne People, with whom I shared smiles and tears, beautiful moments, Indian jokes and great learning experiences. Special gratitude goes to Conrad Fisher, who has been a crucial cornerstone in my research and to the staff of the Chief Dull Knife College in general. Nea'eše!

1. Introduction

'Sweet Medicine' is a tradition of the renewal of law that came to the Cheyenne about a thousand years ago, and is said to be brought to them by Sweet Medicine, the Cheyenne culture hero. It is regarded by the Cheyenne people as the core of cultural teachings, carrying a body of pacifist teachings against war and violence (Nell Warren, 1998). The invasion of the colonizer meant a devastating threat to this way of life, meanwhile allowing the transformation of the sedentary Northern Cheyenne into a Plains Tribe. Mobility, stemming from the introduction of the horse, with the development of hunting and warfare as central occupations, transformed much of Cheyenne culture, so that, by 1830, they had completely abandoned agrarian and sedentary village life for the nomadic life of hunters. Ironically, this new way of life was to be mercilessly destroyed by the very forces that had made its existence possible - for since 1830, the white man's westward commercial expansions resulted in an encroachment war, which included the destruction of the buffalo herds and the seizing of the Cheyenne land. As if this weren't enough, while diseases ruled the country, the Cheyenne were militarily beaten, if not to death, then into submission and left to starve, in order to impose a doctrine of life, while at the same time destroying native occupations and social organization. This moral threat to the Cheyenne way of life became especially acute when after several centuries of ethnocast, assimilation was found to be the most desirable way to 'integrate' the Cheyenne along with the rest of the Native population of the Americas into the stream of dominant society. As exemplified in Sweet Medicine's tradition, the fear understandably arose that in traveling the road of life, the Cheyenne would eventually lose touch with their specific way of life.

In envisaging the interactional patterns in Indian-white relationships, we shall try to come to an understanding of the logics behind the assimilation policy pursued by the US government in the late 19th century, so as to gain insight into contemporary efforts in the struggle of the Cheyenne for their heritage. More specifically, we shall go in search for the incentives for the increasingly vocal and active Red Power Movement and try to figure out how this, as a force of empowerment, fits the overall 'healing process' of the tribe. Finally, we shall link this

collective healing process to the individual processes of the tribe's members to see the benign influence that culture exerts on its adherents.

2. Cautions

Along with a general need for anthropologists to 'revise their ethical code', we are to grasp the key issues at stake: those which require a broader understanding of the structural features and constraints of the domain of power / knowledge. For this reason, engaging with Native Americans is, far from being a *recherché* research ambition an inextricably political quest, raising discomfiting questions for researchers (Saunders, 2004). Although there are certain parallels between the concept of 'healing' and 'truth and reconciliation' as is being worked out in South-Africa and in various forms in Rwanda, as well as the efforts made in Holocaust studies, the specific configurations of North-American history and community make the term 'healing' perhaps more appropriate. Although smuggling in western concepts, it has nevertheless been creatively re-appropriated for specific Cheyenne ends, which is proving its worth in a day-to-day sense. When healing is thought of as the revaluing of Cheyenne self-confidence and the trust in their own answers, those that come from within the nation itself, healing is definitely taking place. But colonization still proceeds in more hidden and pernicious ways, especially taking the form of economical repression and oppression. It might be one reason why the term 'healing' seems morally and affectively to be much too general, if not shallow in relation to what it aspires to be; but in fact it has been expanded to account for the innumerable dilemmas and conflicts that are being encountered by the Cheyenne. Furthermore, I find the term profoundly positive and empowering. Healing, however general it may be, stemming from a derivate discourse, and however many the problems that may come forth, nonetheless seems to be an appropriate way to deal with the situation.

Second, while imperialistic and colonial culture contact is not a new phenomenon, in North America it remains part of the situation in which all Native Americans live geographically on the inside of, but existentially on the outside of, the modernist, globalisation processes. In attempts of people and cultures to re-create boundaries, spatially as well as psychologically (localising), focus has come to rely on tensions and on processes of cultural loss, often ironically narrowing the perspective on contact with the dominant culture. In describing how Cheyenne culture is responding to these forces today, from a structural as well as an interactional approach, I shall discuss the adequacy of related images. After all, while some researchers argue that current developments in Native American communities lack 'authenticity' because of the integration of many features of western societies, Native Americans have frequently objected to this stance. They have pointed out that it is ironic that they were initially not taken seriously as experts on their own way of life and later they were not taken seriously as producers of it. Therefore, we should acknowledge that today not only the history of colonialism, but also the revival and recognition of Native American cultures are importantly in tension vis à vis their credibility. An ethnocentrically biased preoccupation with authenticity should not prevent us from acknowledging the incredible dynamics and creativity of Native American life (Zuyderhoudt, 2004). Besides, there is no longer an easy difference and distance between own and other society. Issues and positions brought to the fore in Native American communities often are similar to those found in non-indigenous communities. Native American

societies are diverse and heterogeneous and at times divided. It is thus important to do justice to the richness of cultural life by showing the diversity of accounts, practices and interests.

3. Dichotomies Underlying Contact

At the birth of the US nation, Indian tribes were generally looked upon as impediments to civilization. 'The Indian problem', as the US government, and the white man in general, put it had two facets: one, the question of how trade with the Indians was to be conducted, and two, how to most effectively obtain their land for national expansion. Although, 'the Indian problem' did not lose prevalence for describing all kinds of questions surrounding culture contact, what was understood with the term, and the solutions offered especially, did change continuously from this early characterization onwards (Utter, 1993). However, solutions to the questions raised have shown a consistent alternating pattern from trials of paternalism over attempts to hand out self-determination. In the 19th century, the Indian was offered the 'choice' between staying with his tribe, which was being removed to an isolated part of the country, or severing his tribal tie to accept citizenship and a small land allotment (Utter, 1993). While this policy caused the subsequent road to citizenship to be long and bumpy, it eventually ended in recognition by federal law of the consistency of US with tribal membership. From this moment onwards, existing tensions did not fade out but instead hid behind surface processes of dualist thinking: it seems that the white man has only been capable in handling with a 'cultural other' when differences are recreated to be insuperably different or when he is transformed into a mirror image, equaling the distinction of separation-assimilationⁱ. As Josephy (1968) argues, the challenge posed to the white conqueror – acceptance of the right to be Indian – has not been effectively addressed so that the core of the so-called 'Indian problem' – which many Indians characteristically refer to as 'the white man's problem' – remains a vivid and deciding factor in Indian-white relationships.

4. Self-Image and Interaction

Whites generally attempt to project and defend a positive self-image at the implicit (sometimes explicit) expense of Indians. Hereby, alterization seems to adopt a 'negative' form, in that esteem drawn from the Native American as a 'cultural other' is based upon contrastⁱⁱ. For this contrast has its positive pole at the 'white side', Indians have to face the more or less continual condemnation of their white neighborsⁱⁱⁱ. However, in condemning Indians for breaking with their past at the same time, whites are imposing both their own ideas of the 'noble red man' and their own interpretation of the values communicated by present-day Indian conduct, raising the complexity of the situation^{iv}. What they seem to demand is a Cheyenne who meets all the standards by which they judge 'colorful' Indians and at the same time has all the qualities they value most in whites. Ironically, conduct that many whites regard as reprehensible may in fact, as ethnographic literature suggests, be seen as reflecting some continuity between precontact times and the present, that is, it may be an Indian behavior pattern of long standing. Pitifully, this possibility is often not considered by whites, ignorant of traditional Cheyenne custom.

Interesting in this sense is Winther Braroe's study^v (1975) that complements analyses on the results of acculturation (the extent to which Indians embrace white values) with the involvement of these values in selves identified with whites and Indians vis-à-vis one another, so that mechanisms of assimilative urges and acculturative process can be understood. This enables us to detract an appropriate understanding of linkages of situational and institutional analyses of human conduct, in other words, how individuals come to act so that their acts cumulatively bring about or retard institutional and cultural change. In all this, values appear as an independent player negotiating relations: differences in cultural values expressed in different presentations of self are not only sources of tension or potential conflict, they constitute an accommodation or solution to certain conflicts as well. For all participants, these norms and values are thus more than goals of behavior, as they provide a symbolic means of presenting, defining and evaluating the self. It is in fact precisely because of the contrasting images of Indians and whites that interaction proceeds with as little conflict as actually occurs.

However, it is not that Cheyenne approve or passively accept their place in the social universe. But rather than seeking wholesale change, they have attempted to adapt to circumstances in various ways and to manipulate existing arrangements to gain personal and collective advantages, following the course of a process that has been called 'cooling out' (Goffman, 1962). This is only a partial strategy however, as within the process attention is diverted from the exploitative nature of their subordinate status in part by their seeing themselves as exploiters of whites. Inversely, were whites to become cognizant of the cultural differences between themselves and Indians – were they to have a more intimate knowledge of reserve life – this knowledge would initiate serious self-questioning. The fact that whites, in large part through their ignorance of reservation life, are able to maintain an image of Indians as profane persons justifies a special treatment of them that violates the usual norms governing interpersonal behavior. Thus, various kinds of protective measures are taken, both by Indians and whites, to ensure the perpetuation of the status quo in the community. This is a pervasive aspect of human interaction: when conventional images of social selves are threatened, more is at stake than selves alone. The entire situation is jeopardized, as well as the social system of which it is a part. Serious disruptions of the self are thus avoided by acceptance of routines in self-presentation and identification, through which stability is not only acquired on a personal, but also on a structural level. Indians and whites alike tenaciously hold to their respective images of one another. Both groups shore up the barriers blocking information that might bring about redefinitions of themselves, of the situations in which they interact, and of the society built out of these situations. The definition of a given situation is thus more complex than either whites or Indians realize, containing contradictory and morally loaded claims about relative personal worth. But these claims do not lead to overt conflict, so, in essence, a kind of moral standoff is affected (Winther Braroe, 1975).

Considering strategies of covering and withdrawal, one sees how the Cheyenne have tried to fit in the polar view of assimilation – separation. This, however, turned out to be a 'loose-loose'-situation, in that both were received with criticism from whites, and only provided partial solutions for the survival of tribal life. Lately, however, the Cheyenne have come to overtly and masterfully integrate cultural traits in leaving the polarities of the dominant society behind. They put a step forward as contemporary American Indians of the Northern Cheyenne tribe, integrating both white and Cheyenne ways, and not willing to be excluded from either of the two. Hence, they

subject existing images of colorful vanishing primitives to critical scrutiny to be transformed into images of alert, responsible citizens of the United States. In this process the Cheyenne extend their position as actors, in trying to control the white man's response to them in sink with the definition of interaction they hold as favorable. Thus, in contemporary times, the Cheyenne are not merely defending their assailed moral worth, instead they do all they can to alter it. This way, hopefully, a new definition of the interactional situation can be agreed upon by both whites and Indians.

5. Theoretical Considerations of Culture Contact

Instead of the persistent accentuation of 'acculturation' and 'cultural loss', we seem to be confronted with a thorough persistence of 'ethnic identity'. It appears that a great many cultural manifestations can be transformed or even lost, without a concurrent loss of 'Indianness'. Therefore, a related assumption may lose its infallibility, namely the seeming, though pervasive, consensus "that the transitional stage – when a person is neither fully Indian nor fully White – is necessarily one of stress, personal disorganization, and behavioral pathogenesis. To be 'between two worlds' forces individuals into conflicts of choice and produces casualties among those who cannot embrace either the old or the new ways exclusively (Winther Braroe, 1975: 7-8)." Acknowledging this possibility would involve a profound restructuring of western thinking – and consequent acting – in situations of culture contact. In upholding erroneous assumptions regarding the isolation and autonomy of human societies, problems accumulate, for a dynamic process of adaptation and change through inter-individual and intercultural contact is negated. Such extremist points of view, as is clear, have yielded from the one pole to the other, from assimilation to romanticism, incapable of offering any kind of relief to either group.

6. The Turning Point

The question remains at what point the Cheyenne refused to go along with the scheme that denied them moral value in the dominant society, and started the struggle for affirmation that they are the possessors of morally valuable and ritually deserving selves^{vi}.

World War II seems to have played an important role in the process for Indians in the United States, much alike it has been the case for the rising of emancipatory women movements in the west. Wartime unlocked the reservation doors that had been closed ever since the Indians' military defeat. A considerable amount of Cheyenne warriors participated in the fight, whereas labor shortage caused industries to offer jobs to reservation Indians, as had never happened before (and has not ever since). The war years opened up new sources of livelihood and the tribes' social and economic structure underwent important changes. But, when in the postwar years the economy boomed, it did not for the Indian, who was no longer hired. However, the war veterans were no longer willing to endure their misery stoically and to accept stagnation as a way of life, dedicating themselves to leadership and social action (Steiner, 1968). Others could neither accept the constraints of the limited cultural environment of the reservation nor surmount the loneliness of the cut-off Cheyenne who chose to go into the

cities (Hoebel, 1988). On the reservations, the interest in cars was a symbol of their unrest. This expressed the need 'to get somewhere,' to 'get going,' to escape the despair.

Concurrently, young Indian intellectuals who had seen the modern world in the military service wished to know more about it, how it worked, and where they, as Indians, would fit in^{vii}. But, in this movement, the Indian youth could no longer be singled out for education as had been the case in the former boarding schools, as they immersed themselves in group thinking (Blatchford in Steiner, 1968). Receiving the blessing from their tribal elders and knowing that they would be welcome home, the young Indians felt that by traveling the road to college they were not going away from their people.

All these efforts of the Indian youths were unknowingly supported by a growing insecurity from the dominant society's part with the birth of postmodernism reflections on the World Wars brought along. Cultural values that had been dominant and unquestioned for ages became partly discarded. In this soil the Indian took advantage of the new breathing space experienced and gave continuance to the warrior spirit in struggling for the right to manage the own affairs without government interference. Aside from the demand to have a share in the material wealth of industrial society there is more at stake here: an ideological quest, directed by a philosophy of life, and on the public validation of claims to a morally sacred self.

7. Healing

People are ready to grieve. They overlook and experience the pain preceding generations went through and consequently, as a collective, put the step beyond: healing the wounds. In transforming negative remembrances of the past into positive learning experiences, people are in search of a constructive way to come to themselves, to make the adaptation necessary to survive in a changing environment. But they realize it is essential to make the change in their own way: true healing is healing from the inside out. While within the healing process it has shown to be of utmost importance for the Cheyenne to recover their sense of self-worth and dignity that has slowly been destroyed by the judgments of the white man, on a collective level too, the Cheyenne are slowly recovering from the uncertainties dispersed by a 'paradigm of ignorance.' After all, great part of the crisis in Cheyenne self-confidence came forth from decades of 'rational intervention' by the white man, who pretended the necessity of a certain, culture-specific expertise and thereby used 'ignorance' as a strategic term to support the belief in this need. But the knowledge brought in, brought a split within the community along (Stroeken, 2004). In fact, the fundamental problem is not whether people accept programs of the federal government or not. The fundamental problem is that the programs impose a model of society on the people, while having a perfectly functioning social system before. The question is whether or not the Cheyenne will accept patrons deciding the outlook of their community. Against the neo-liberal projects, people are looking for another pathway to walk. But this way is still to be created. Discussions are a way to come to a united voice: how can we serve the community better, *as a people?*^{viii}

8. The Source of Decisions

The uniqueness of the Cheyenne tribe lies within Mahuts, the Four Sacred Arrows, and Is'siwun, the Sacred Buffalo Hat, brought to the people by the Culture Heroes Sweet Medicine and Erect Horns respectively. They were given to them by Maheo^{ix}, who continues to unite and give the people life and blessing through these two Sacred Covenants (Powell, 1969). They provide the people with the framework of meaning out of which to determine their identity – orienting the Cheyenne toward their way of life, through ceremonies, customs and values. They talk about where the tribe came from, where the tribe is at present and where the tribe is going to. Therefore, they are the guiding elements for the Cheyenne people in figuring out the adjustments that are to be made in order to survive in a changing environment^x (Little Coyote, 1972). These adjustments therefore come from the heart of the Cheyenne spirituality, as knowledge is pledged from Maheo, through the Covenants^{xi}.

The Cheyenne have long been people whose entire existence was guided by the sacred ceremonies, the great channels of religious worship, regenerating power and healing^{xii}. As long as these ceremonies are conducted in a proper way, the Cheyenne believe, there will be a lot of healing and the tribe and its members protected. In content, Cheyenne rituals are said to be compulsive and functional actions (by former anthropologists), working directly upon the mechanical system of the universe (Hoebel, 1988). Clear is the emphasis on the dependence of human beings upon the help of the supernatural world, meanwhile demanding harmonious action of all if the ceremonies are to bring their fullest blessing to the people. In such a collective thought and remembrance, the continuity of the group is assured, nonetheless discordance or emigration^{xiii}. Analogous is the accentuation of self-torture in the Cheyenne ceremonies, pain creating not only cohesive ritual power for the individual, but also facilitating 'communitas' (Devisch, 2002). However, the primary role in the ceremonies is reserved for the 'Real', namely the source of life itself. The ceremony then breaks the silence experienced by the victim as means of communication will be called upon in pledging knowledge from the spirits and from Maheo. Healing then appears as most central to this quest for knowledge and both profoundly intertwine in the enactment of ritual. Culture is therefore not to be regarded as a burden that has to be transmitted or mastered. Rather it is a useful network of codes, negotiable to a certain extent, but essential to assure the personal and collective well-being of all Cheyenne. The accent lying on the embodiment of knowledge, knowledge transforms a whole person, since knowledge is not looked upon as a capital^{xiv}, but assumed in practice while occurring. Through the intrusion of the non-symbolic or 'Real' in the ceremony the Cheyenne try to tune in to and become in synchrony with their environment. Hereby, codes of social exchange where attention and duration prevail over mere transaction - gift and offer - take a central place, rather than manipulation. This 'pulsation' between gift and offer form an alternative perspective to Cheyenne ritual, placing the accent on a dynamic duality instead of on submission and domestication. After all, trying to avoid debts is evaluated as crisis in Cheyenne society, for a certain dependence and credit in relation to the environment may not induce feelings of guilt, as is often the case in western societies (Stroeken, 2004).

Rites are thus not performed out of mere tradition or routine, but each performance accomplishes something that is otherwise absent. Emotionally laden, its healing force is to be situated in sensation and sentiment, rather than in its effectiveness, in that ritual (and its effectiveness) springs from an experiential structure (Stroeken, 2004).

Thus, while the Massaum or Crazy Animal Dance –essentially a hunting ritual- was allowed to disappear as hunting lost prominence in tribal life, no longer matching the experience of the people, the Arrow Renewal and Sun Dance were different. The Arrow Renewal expressing the embodiment of the tribal soul and well-being and the Sun Dance revitalizing the world each spring – to the Cheyenne’s and to the whole universe’s beneficence - their maintenance is a sacred obligation of the Cheyenne to themselves, reaching to the deepest layers of their hearts (Stands In Timber, 1967, Powell, 1969).

Alike the Sacred Covenants worshipped in ceremony, the ancestors too bring visions for the tribe, uniting past, present and future within them. Their life-lessons, transmitted through story-telling in a present tense, contain future-oriented insights - although this far-sightedness is often denied the Indian – that culminate in great care for the next generation. The Cheyenne, very grateful towards their ancestors for the great offerings they made in defending their culture and homeland, feel it is now their turn to provide the next generation with the same foundation of belonging the ancestors provided them with (Bently Spang in Abbott, 2000).

9. Youth as a creative power

For young children nowadays cultural elements are largely co-existing; they do not wonder about possible inconsistencies, although bestowed with different messages. When these children become adolescents, however, tensions escalate. “Youth tend everywhere to occupy the innovative, uncharged borderlands in which the global meets the local. (...) These frontiers are also sites of tension, particularly for young people who confront the contradictions of modernity as they try to make good on the millennial promise of democracy and the free market in the newly liberalized states (Comaroff, 2000: 45).” The observation of youngsters fitting in a youth culture that is presented on MTV, ‘dressed as hip-hoppers, with the mindset of a gangster,’ is most fearful to many parents and grandparents, uttering “this is not your ways, you should follow the tradition!” Here we encounter the ambivalence surrounding youth, this life stage embodying both the Cheyenne’s dreams, they investing in human capital and seeking to husband the youth’s potential, and their existential angst and worst nightmares of social impossibilities. The term ‘youth’ congeals both the belief in pure, utopist potential, as the fear for failure of moral reproduction, in a bipolar and contradictory union. “In short, ‘youth’ stands for many things at once: for the terrors of the present, the errors of the past, the prospect of a future; for old hopes and new frontiers.” Indeed, “youth embody the sharpening contradictions of the contemporary world in especially acute form (Comaroff, 2000: 33, 34-35).”

However, the introjection of television images – often mistaken for a loss of ‘Cheyennesness’ - is not a passive process, but implies a continuous transformation of these images, youngsters thereby re-inventing the west continuously (e.g. Indian disco and Indian rap, Techno-Powwows, etc.), and redefining (Black-)American culture in the face of Cheyenne culture and tradition^{xv}. An innovative youth culture arises, one of desire, self-expression and representation, carrying its potential in forms of politicization with regard to their place within the dominant society. Within this process, youngsters appear to possess the extraordinary capability of integrating two cultures that are generally thought of as being incompatible. “In sum, youth culture, in an epoch of

liberization, has shown itself uniquely able to link locales across transnational space; also to motivate the kinds of material practices that, in turn, have redrawn the maps of high modernism. (...) While they may not, for the most part, have captured the mainstream (...) the young remain a constant source of creativity, ingenuity, possibility, empowerment. A source of alternative, yet-to-be-imagined futures (Comaroff, 2000: 44, 47).”

Conclusion

The avowed intention of the American government (and Catholic Church) to assimilate the Cheyenne into white culture on first sight appears to have succeeded. The Cheyenne wear Western-style clothing, no longer live in tepees, speak English, use Western utensils, engage in the white man’s economy for livelihood and have adopted many white forms of recreation. But it is important to understand that these changes are to be situated on a surface level (especially material culture), rather than that they influence the mindset of the people (deep-life issues). The ceremonial, as a field of personal and collective dedication, remains forever important in its renewing lessons, following a path of birth – death and rebirth, thereby showing the course towards culture-sensitive healing; physically, it continues its role as a major identifier for the people’s identity. In all this, the people’s sense of distinctiveness and pride not merely as Indians, but as members of the Northern Cheyenne tribe, appears to be as strong as ever. On the other hand, this strength of Indian personality and presence is often neglected by their white neighbors, which is largely due to the specific situations that provide the context for interactions. The assimilation policy, however, brought many disruptions: fragmentation of Cheyenne knowledge, language loss, social problems, malfunctioning institutions, in-group discordance and struggles in family socialization. Structures that have served the Cheyenne for ages were destroyed by the colonizer; the holistic frame of their society overthrown. Now that the pressure to assimilate has diminished, the Cheyenne are recovering from the trauma that has been passed on from generation to generation: collectively as well as individually. This shows that the Cheyenne are not slaves of social interaction, nor servants of social organization. Instead, they continuously shape and reshape their life world creatively. After years of discussion, they are now warmed up for full action in putting decisions into practice.

Collectively, institutions that serve the reservation today are severely questioned. The cyclic Indian Time allows people to rewind decisions made in the past and adapt these institutions toward more culturally sensitive models, based upon the integration of indigenous knowledge. This collective healing process meets individual healing processes, going counter to the western tendency of regarding social problems as individual deviancies: ‘the big picture’ is questioned and society transformed in favor of the well-being of all tribal members. Acknowledging that the Cheyenne had a significant existence prior to and independent of the dominant society, that is of significant importance for the discussion of tribal processes today, Cheyenne culture follows its own path of organic growth and change. Moreover, people take active part in the creation of the contemporary dominant society (Pirsig, 1992), and its response to Native American tribes. At stake here is then an interplay of general human history, not simply a response to the west. The ability to act, from the consciousness, instead of react, is enforced by the guidance of the Two Sacred Covenants that guide decisions from the heart of Cheyenne culture.

The power of the tribe thus lies in the people's sovereignty to decide which changes are allowable, or positive, and which ones are not.

The tribal aim, however, is not one of invariability. The very nature of Cheyenne life is one that is flexible and open to adjustment. People are in search of balance, which is the legacy of the ancestors till today. Cultural values are continuously negotiated with the forefathers as a source looked upon for a balance of change and continuation; balance between old and new, between tradition and innovating elements, between changes and cultural strongholds. It is a challenge, since there is an inherent tension: these dual poles do not seem to want to co-exist in the same space (Abbott, 2000). Here we encounter the strength of adolescents who show the capability to integrate both past and future into a coherent present whole, transforming features that at first sight would be expected to clash. They, in fear of, but with the consent of their tribal elders, move beyond the polar duality of separation and assimilation, building on a new future for their tribal ways that are slowly changing. For the university-educated Indians have both knowledge of the workings of the outside world and a dream of a modern tribalism. They are freer to seek a future for their tribe that is livable in today's society, but that is nonetheless recognizably Cheyenne.

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Fieldnotes from the author, gathered in July, 2003.

ⁱ Even anthropology showed this division: the (American) interpretative school, that saw cultures as separate cognitive systems, opposed the (European) structuralist school that saw culture as minor to the socio-cultural dynamics in society. Alike larger tendencies in society, each of both is risky, the first approximating notions of race linked to the post-modern culture-relativism of ethnohistory, the second opening the door for protagonists of globalization that silence critical minds by perceiving them as old-fashioned traditionalists (Stroeken, 2004).

ⁱⁱ As we shall see an urge towards assimilation is often inherent to this form of alterization. The focus of this study being the Indians' relation to their white neighbors, while explicit romanticism seems to require some distance to develop, it will nonetheless soon become clear that urges toward assimilation are in fact subtly larded by implicit romantic notions.

ⁱⁱⁱ The fact that the problems of whites are downtrodden here, as they would lead us too far from the research question, does not mean that they are non-existent. However, Indians and whites face different problems in establishing identities that are fine and worthy, which is largely due to differential social stratification arrangements, meaning that there is an enormous gap between the two groups' relative positions in the social hierarchy of the dominant society (Winther Braroe, 1975).

^{iv} Very telling in this respect is the question whether 'special rights' (e.g. hunting and fishing rights) are to be withdrawn from Natives. The main argument heard from opponents of the continuance of 'old' treaties allowing these rights is that the 'traditional Indian' doesn't exist as such anymore either. Striking here is that those who recognize the contemporary outlook of Native societies and how it has changed too force Native Americans to remain 'authentic' (this concept is influenced by artificial romantic notions originating in the perception of the white man), at least, if they want to avoid urges toward assimilation, in this case the withdrawal of rights that are of great cultural (and economic) significance for tribal life.

^v Winther Braroe worked in an (undefined) Cree community in Canada. Edward H. Spicer (1961: 1) observed for North American Indian communities: "*As one goes from reservation to reservation, the feeling grows that what one sees today is what one saw not long before on some other reservation.*" This not to negate the unique characteristics of each tribe, for Spicer is specifically referring to typical patterns of whites' and Indians' adjustment to one another, and to the similar personality characteristics encountered even on reservations with differing cultural origins. What has been reported by other ethnographers indeed seems to confirm that these similarities are indeed widespread. Even, studies on other societies (e.g. on Indian society with its cast system) raise the possibility that the patterns described above are inherently human or at least widespread on a worldwide scale.

^{vi} The process we will discuss here seems to have known mutual reinforcement, other tribes starting to refuse their profane status along, by which forces were put together to alter the position of the Indian in general. This group, however, came forth from similarities in ascribed statuses, while the possessors do in fact not constitute a 'group' in the conventional sense of the word. Tribalism is extremely important and cultural differences are manifold. However, in their response to the dominant societies, tribal forces often gathered providing energy for the struggle of separate tribes in turn.

^{vii} This is extremely important, for, as Bruner states (in Winther Braroe, 1975), there have been no open channels of communication with whites for long, whereas the contemporary increase of knowledge about the white world may induce a subsequent rising ability to realistically negotiate it.

^{viii} In all this, women play a major role, centring leadership about children and family, in extending circles to the society as a whole, instead of focusing on elections and titles (Jamison).

^{ix} Maheo is 'the great collective spirit and consciousness of all things existing in the Universe (Nell Warren, 1998).' Some confusion exists, however, for Maheo is commonly translated into English as 'God' or 'Creator.' Powell (1960, 1969), for example, speaks of Maheo as a male God, the One and Only. However, criticisms arose in time, stating that Maheo, in its real meaning, does not show any tie to Christian theology at all (similar is the criticism on the interpretation of Sweet Medicine as a Jesus-like prophet). Such revisions of earlier anthropological writings critically address the native spiritual traditions being presented as pre-figurations of

Christianity, probably because classical anthropology originated in the arrogant western European belief that all human spirituality would evolve towards monotheism (sometimes a more gentle political agenda may have been at stake: a willingness to destroy the historical stereotype that Indians were devil-worshippers). These authors point to the syllable ‘Ma’ almost universally meaning ‘mother’ and wonder why God’s female partner, the Goddess, has been left out in translations. Many spiritual systems of Native Americans indeed taught of all being, including Deity, as twinned in nature – both male and female. Because of this discussion, I will not refer to Maheo as male gendered (Nell Warren, 1998). While the derivation of the term ‘Maheo is thus not commonly known, it may be useful to consider Rodolphe Petter’s description, stating that Maheo stands for something supernatural, apart from the human and common, mysterious, and sacred. It must have originally implied all that is inscrutable, occult, and awe-inspiring because of its being unknown and unrevealed. When the term Maheo refers to the ‘All Origin’ in a generic way, the plural of it, Maheono, Maheonasz, refers to a living, supernatural being existing anywhere in nature and sometimes in a mysterious power or animal (Powell, 1969).

^x Inversely, since the Arrows were the highest authority in the tribe, nothing new could be done without the permission of their priest or keeper (Stands In Timber, 1967).

^{xi} It is important to see that the Covenants are at the same time the *core* of Cheyenne society, as they are the basis to rely on to allow *changes* in a contemporary context.

^{xii} Only a small introduction –focusing on what are important elements with regard to the research question- on what are extremely rich ceremonies can be given here, pitifully. The interested reader may consult Powell’s detailed two-volume work: *Sweet Medicine: The Continuing Role of the Sacred Arrows, the Sun Dance, and the Sacred Buffalo Hat in Northern Cheyenne History* (published in 1969).

^{xiii} Moreover, the ceremonies are occasions for much socializing too as offer ideal occasions for gaming, feasts, gift-giving, meal-sharing, visiting, gossiping, for happiness and fun. Therefore, they are occasions on which tribal bonds are strengthened.

^{xiv} While a significant role is offered to the experience and expertise of the elder (judicious ability, accumulation of ritual and oral knowledge), the value of knowledge is in first instance defined by the personality of the teacher, and less by measurable effects.

^{xv} On the other hand, Cheyenne culture and tradition are redefined on a par with the contemporary, whereby youngsters re-invent the past to do something new with the tradition that has been passed on from generation to generation (e.g. the fancy dance at Powwow celebrations).