

A Satisfying Death:
Eighteenth Century Creek Spiritual Traditions

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Early August was a time to forgive. The corn matured under the first new moon of the year. The Busk harvest festival reconciled and strengthened relationships, as it was the most important event in any Creek *talwa*. The community came together when Creeks of all ages participated in the preparations. The beloved women (clan mothers) displayed tortoise shell and white deerskin, their finest ceremonial clothes, in anticipation of igniting the first ceremonies with their dances.¹ Returning warriors fulfilled purification rituals and nearly everyone was fasting.² Revered Headmen from neighboring communities attended Busk, looking forward to the forging of bonds within the Creek community network. This is what it would have been like in the lower Creek *talwa* of Coweta in 1752. Yet trouble came rambling in when Thomas and Mary Bosomworth arrived in Coweta demanding blood.³ Amidst the festival of absolution, Creek leaders would decide to execute one of their own people, Acorn Whistler.

By the time of the Bosworth's arrival, the Creek Indians had already faced the consequences of European settler colonialism, such as disease and dislocation no longer residing near their original ceremonial mounds and complexes. Adding to that, economic dependency forged a humbling reliance on European goods and trade for the survival of Creek peoples. While rum the sorrowful "bitter waters" began its grasping infiltration on Creek communities. The Creek peoples changed with the infusion of these unfamiliar powers. Yet they had some success for the time being, in their negotiations with the various settler states. The vigorous Creek peoples proved capable of maintaining balance and power under the pressure and violence

¹ James Adair, *The History of the American Indians*, ed. Kathryn E. Holland (Tuscaloosa: Alabama Press, 2005), 141.

² Jean Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path: The Way of the Muscogee Creeks* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2001), 87.

³ Journal of Thomas Bosomworth, July, 1752, in *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs*, ed. William L. McDowell, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1958), 272-3.

of multi-national colonizing empires. Their ability to negotiate with European authorities for alliances and trade stems from the Creeks own value systems and decision making practices which encompass not only networking and survival within the broader picture of European settler colonialism, but also locally, within their own communities.

The Acorn Whistler crisis gives us a glimpse of how Creek peoples navigated conflict and change on a micro level within the bigger picture of European colonization. The Acorn Whistler crisis is but one of many challenges faced by the Creek communities, when the politics of empire building creates desperate and entitled colonial authorities who placed uncomfortable demands on the Creek community leaders. Additionally, the presence of multi-racial elites contributed to the growing pressure of Creek subordination to powerful outsider influences. For instance, the Creek peoples themselves transformed with the inevitable intermarriage of Europeans and Creeks. These multi racial or “mixed blood” people often manipulated the traditional Creek practices and politics. Mary Bosomworth is an example of this new colonial by-product. Some, because of her liminality, looked up to Mary. She could traverse the two worlds of the European empires and Creek communities, as she was considered to be a “beloved” woman.⁴ Having power in two worlds is an important element in Creek society and is also a significant foundational element of Creek philosophy. So, in response to the Acorn Whistler crisis, the Headmen of Coweta listened to Mary, the liminal princess.

Examining the events of the Acorn Whistler drama portrays how the Creeks were forced and at best influenced, by both outstanding conflicts of colonization and the effects of the Acorn Whistler crisis itself, to accommodate through flux, their ancient belief systems in order to survive and hope for lasting harmony. The Creek approach to this crisis shows us not only how

⁴ Journal of Thomas Bosomworth, July 1752, in *DRIA*, 270.

Creek spiritual traditions supported their communities under duress, but also reveals alterations made by the Creek world and its leaders, living under the cloth of European settler colonialism.

This paper will weave together instances of Creek philosophy with the Acorn Whistler crisis, by examining how these values intersected with the Decision of Malatchi, the Execution of Acorn Whistler, and the final Talks after his death. Since European textual evidence serve as the primary archival documentation from this time period, the spiritual and philosophical traditions of the eighteenth century Creek world may seem closed off to us. Yet, with a cautious look at the works of these outsider chronicles, the reconstruction of what the Creek peoples might have experienced becomes more possible. With the important incorporation of the works of contemporary Creek authors a more holistic Creek history is made possible. The insider view, supports and shares knowledge of oral tradition, to establish a sense of how Creek values shaped what happened in the distant realm of South Eastern Indian communities in the eighteenth century.

THE DECISION

In late July of 1752, Mary Bosomworth and her husband arrived in the Creek town of Coweta to deliver a critical message set upon them by the governor of South Carolina.⁵ Coweta's leaders had to decide if they would meet the demands of blood satisfaction requested of them by the colonial authorities. Faced with the threat of war against the British if they did not meet their demands, Creek leaders needed to act quickly and find someone to blame. Since Creek spiritual value systems encompassed political life and decision-making practices, these principals are exemplified in the verdict to condemn Acorn Whistler and the vital balancing of peace and war.

⁵ Journal of Thomas Bosomworth, July 1752, in *DRIA*, 270.

Mary's coming to Coweta took place in the preliminary days of the *talwa's* Busk, adding even more weight to her important message. She wished to address the headmen of Coweta, the *micco* and *yahola*, Chiggilli and Malatchi. However since Malatchi was away at war, the talks were postponed. Yet, the Bosworth's were given permission to stay in Malatchi the warriors, home, and await his return.⁶ The fact that Thomas and Mary were allowed to stay in Malatchi's house while he was away at war shows that they must have been greatly respected in the Coweta community and that these visitors were somehow an exception to particular Creek traditions.

James Adair in his ethnography, *History of the American Indians* noted that it was custom for an "away warriors" house to be ritually kept free of pollution.⁷ The wives of the outstanding war parties concerned themselves with maintaining the purity of the home, sweeping the house day and night, creating a huge pile behind the door, not to be disturbed until the warrior signaled his return.⁸ The leaders of Coweta allowed Mary, a half Creek half European woman, and her European husband, to reside in Malatchi's cabin while away. The Coweta headman must have considered Mary and her husband somehow exceptional, allowing them to stay in the head war chiefs cabin. Since the sacred ceremonies of Busk were underway which included restrictions against the involvement of Europeans and those who had not undergone purification rituals, this particular action reveals the bending of belief systems in order to accommodate the powerfully influential multi racial class.

Yet suddenly, Malatchi returned home early from war, maybe sensing something was off. Perhaps Malatchi had a bad dream while he was away, telling him to return home immediately and that there were disruptions in the "order of things". Possibly upon his early arrival, he was

⁶ Journal of Thomas Bosomworth, July 1752, in *DRIA*, 272.

⁷ Adair, *The History of the American Indians*, 143.

⁸ Adair, *The History of the American Indians*, 143.

greeted with applause from the clan mothers for, “acting in obedience to their guardian angels who impressed him in the visions of night with friendly caution”.⁹ Whichever supernatural event occurred, Malatchi returned home early from war to find trouble residing in his warrior’s cabin.

For immediately upon Malatchi’s arrival, Thomas Bosomworth, backed with the illusion of nobility due to his European heritage and fancy letters with golden seals, delivered his authoritative speech of blood orders.¹⁰

“I then proceeded to relate to them the whole affair of murdering the Cherokees at Charles Town and used all arguments in my power to convince them of the heinousness of the crime, and the expediency of their agreeing to give the satisfaction demanded which was to punish with death some of the most considerable offenders.”¹¹

The Coweta headmen listened to the grim story as their annual sacred fire burned in the background. How could they consider condemnation of a native brother during this consecrated time? For in response, Head Micco Chiggilli stated, “He was a very old man, but never in his life had heard of such a demand for such a crime...to kill their own people for killing their enemies was what he could not understand.”¹² Conveniently, already united for Busk, all of the Lower Creek headmen gathered for council in regards to this complicated circumstance.

Understanding Creek views of war and peace as well as the functions of community in creating harmony can help us understand how Chiggilli and Malatchi may have come to their conclusion and meet the demands placed upon them. We can examine The Creek Redstick/Whitestick legend as an aid because it contains the origins of Creek decision-

⁹ Adair, *History of the American Indians*, 377.

¹⁰ Joshua Aaron. Piker, *The Four Deaths of Acorn Whistler: Telling Stories in Colonial America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 235.

¹¹ Journal of Thomas Bosomworth, July 1752, in *DRIA*, 273-5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 274.

making practices.¹³ This important Creek epic harbors symbolism of war and peace while demonstrating how paralleled dualism combined in order to create the social harmony necessary in reaching consensus.¹⁴ The epic transmits allegorical elements of psychology, religion, and political theory through tracing the events and lessons of the archetypal “hero twins”. The Redstick/Whitestick legend has been passed down through oral traditions, as a native method of education and spiritual instruction.¹⁵ The tale summarized here is based off of story telling collected by Creek historians Jean and Joyotpaul Chaudhuri:

Two twins lived on earth, one gentle, the other aggressive, yet both curious and playful. They had instructions to strive for balance in exchanging their energies, representing a stability of opposite characteristics. This symmetry is not to be confused with a good vs. evil binary. The two brothers embarked on a vision quest, symbolized in the legend as “journeying through the mist”¹⁶ The more aggressive twin goes to a land of darkness where there is a tumultuous environment bursting with thunder and lightening, symbolizing a disorder in the exchange of elements.

In the dark world, the twin meets people playing the Creek double-stick ball game and sees people training in preparation of war. He completed several tests of skill in order to win the people’s respect as an active leader. One of the contests involved swimming under water and breathing. The twin fashioned a red stick out of a hollowed out reed in order to breathe out of, and thus he is now called the RedStick twin. However the fourth task that Redstick twin was asked to complete was

¹³ Jean Chaudhuri and Joyotpaul Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path: The Way of the Muscogee Creeks* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2001), 79.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

impossible. They asked him to get someone's heart. This could only be done with the guidance of a medicine man that could perform a purification ceremony (a white task) and the dark world lacked medicine.¹⁷ So the Red Stick twin left the land of darkness.

The second twin, with the gentle and reflective qualities journeyed to the world of light. Here was a luxurious land of nature, lush with animals, trees, forests and beautiful gardens.¹⁸ Many birds lived in this land of light and in the presence of the gentle twin some of them became irritated. The twin, wishing for peace, fashioned a flute out of a whitish hollowed stick. He whistled and sang into this "white stick" becoming the Whitestick twin, bringing harmony from his actions. The Whitestick twin talked to plants and animals showing the people plant based medicine and powerful musical chants to heal conflicts.¹⁹

Red stick twin and White stick twin return to the middle ground of mist to discuss their experiences. This transitional space symbolizes the commencement of blending darkness and light. The dialogue of the twins, each representing different worlds, one active and war like, while the other passive and peaceful, represents the foundations of Creek decision-making. Learning from their combined experiences in the different worlds of light and dark, the twins began to understand how each of their unique qualities could assist and bridge the gap between opposites.²⁰

Ultimately the hero twins decided they could help the two contrasting worlds come

¹⁷ Jean Chaudhuri and Joyotpaul Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path: The Way of the Muscogee Creeks* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2001), 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path*, 30-33.

together and share the varying psychological, physiological, and spiritual qualities, in order to create a complementary and united world.²¹ However the joining of these two worlds necessitated a symbolic war. Chaudhuri explains, “One world was full of active energy but faced conflict without adequate “medicine”, while the other had the medicinal resources but lacked the organization to deal with external conflicts.”²² Would the Creek headmen be able to come to a consensus, and “bridge both worlds”?

The meeting of the Creek headmen on August 10th lasted all day and all night.²³ The beginning of Busk and the day of the headmen’s meeting concerning the decision included elaborate introductory ceremonies. Many of the most sacred rituals were performed in the roundhouse and initiated by a priest, while accompanied by the beloved women of Coweta. Perhaps Mary participated in these initial fires and dances, since she was considered a fellow clan mother. But the regular function of the roundhouse during Busk would have changed to accommodate the Creek council in order to make their critical decision. That night the roundhouse became the transitional space, the middle ground of mist and legend. Smoke and guidance danced in the air, shadowing the curved clay covered walls. The many oppositional qualities of the time, the pressure of European settlers, colonial authorities, and the influence of multi racial elite, combined with the heartbreaking decision to punish a community member during their sacred festival, tested their traditions of integrating darkness and light. Yet the Creek headmen strived to maintain a sense of sovereignty in their decision-making practices. This is how.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Journal of Thomas Bosomworth, July 1752, in *DRIA*, 276.

Malatchi, Coweta's head war chief would be considered a Redstick, while Chiggilli, the civil King, would be a Whitestick. The active war leaders, much like the Redstick twin, would argue for a refusal of the Bosomworth's demand, promoting war with England. While the passive Whitestick leaders would respond with great caution and hope war could be avoided, as did Chiggilli. The decision must be reached in order for the harmony of Creek society to continue and not disrupt the important ceremonies of renewal. It was urgent.

The next morning they gave their answer proclaiming, "All the wise men of our nation had met together for nothing, for all their united wisdom could not determine what answer was best to be given to the demand that was made."²⁴ By these terms the decision at first appears to be inconclusive, as if no decision had been made. Yet it was custom, when dealing with decisions of a deathly nature, that if a council could not arrive at consensus, the final answer would become the burden of the town's head war chief.²⁵ William Bartram observed:

"In all transactions that require secrecy, the rulers meet here (roundhouse), make their fire, deliberate and decide. When they have decided on any case of death or whipping, the Micco appoints the warriors who are to carry it into effect; *or he gives the judgment to the Great Warrior, and leaves to him the time and manner of executing it.*"²⁶

Therefore the Creek headmen had made a decision indeed. It was to put Malatchi, the head warrior, in charge of who would die and how. The headmen appear to have thrown it to

²⁴ Journal of Thomas Bosomworth, July 1752, in *DRIA*, 276.

²⁵ William Bartram and E.G. Squier, *Observations on the Creek and Cherokee Indians*. (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1853), 64.

²⁶Ibid.

Malatchi in order to preserve the harmony at their sacred festival of Busk. This decision making process shows how the combining of active war like philosophies can combine with passive civil qualities, because giving the head war chief the authority of decision making to such a delicate situation was indeed a redstick move, yet avoiding war with England and further interruption of Busk was for sure the whitestick thing to do. The forces combined harmoniously and now Malatchi would accept the responsibility of blaming Acorn Whistler and choosing his executioner.

EXECUTION

The condemnation of Acorn Whistler resided in the management of a particular Creek custom, called 'blood revenge'. This "bad custom" as certain religious leaders called it, proved convenient for the conspirators to structure their story against Acorn Whistler.²⁷ This value system of blood for blood proved capable of circumventing Acorn Whistlers last line of defense, the Beloved Women of Okfuskee, while simultaneously giving the rest of the Creek community a reasonable justification for his death. It was important that the Creek *talwas*, especially that of Acorn Whistler's hometown, did not know the true reason of his death. The true reason being, that the European authorities demanded a sacrifice in retribution for a skirmish on colonial settlements. If the beloved women of Okfuskee had known the true reason, they would have tried to stop it.

Although Coweta's male leaders created the idea of Acorn Whistler's death, decisions of inner tribal punishment and execution, needed to be centered on the consensus of Acorn

²⁷ Bartram, *Observations on the Creek and Cherokee Indians*, 71.

Whistler's clan mothers.²⁸ The authority of the clan mother sprung from her connection to the respected functions of female elements in environmental cycles. Creek women were bonded with regeneration, water, moon, earth and sacred corn.²⁹ There exists an entire complex of feminine education, ritual, power, and beauty that imparts the value of womanhood and its reverence within the community. Yet the strength and authority of the local clan mothers began to change under the stress of the colonial era.

The clan, when created in the Creek origin myth, had the assignment to guard and protect nature.³⁰ This guardianship saw plants and animals as relatives that must be protected from destructive humans. As Creek communities became permeated with the effects of settler colonialism, this primordial mother clan once assigned to the trusteeship of nature, experienced changes in value from regenerative colonial violence.

As we have already seen, the protective role of women in regards to the warrior cabin had become compromised in order to accommodate the new multi-racial class and their European partners. The tribal agenda increasingly had less to do with matriarchal guardianship and more to do with political, economic, and cultural compromise to ensure the survival of the people. Sacrifices were made, for in the case of Acorn Whistler, the manipulation of the tradition of blood revenge circumvented the authority and consensus of the clan mothers while simultaneously keeping peace throughout the broader network of Creek communities and colonial authorities. This is how.

The lower Creek headman decided to make Acorn Whistler's death appear to be the result of a family dispute, between Acorn Whistler and his nephew. It was extremely important

²⁸ Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path*, 49.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

that Acorn Whistler's community did not know the truth about his death until after he had been killed.³¹ If Acorn Whistler's kinsmen discovered that he died to appease European authorities there would have been considerable outrage. So, there needed to be a way to make it look like a "traditional" yet private punishment. The tradition of blood revenge fit perfectly.

The particular tradition of blood revenge seeps through many Native American stories for it is a custom shared by all southeastern Indian tribes. This tradition becomes necessary when a relative or kinsman is killed. In order for the deceased's spirit to be peaceful, it is believed that the murderer must die. There are various rules and reasons for punishment concerning blood law. For example, if the revenge of blood is required from a person and he escapes, then his nearest kinsmen or friend is answerable for this fact.³² An additional scenario of blood revenge happens in the event of an accidental death, for the incident would still require blood for blood, although sometimes elders would step in to save a child who may have accidentally caused harm. Usually blood revenge and the retaliation must happen fairly quickly. The sooner the satisfaction is had, the better. With Acorn Whistler, his dispute with his nephew was in fact "an old quarrel" and this led to a convoluted justification of his death.

Creek punishments often took place in public. The entire *talwa* would witness and sometimes participate in the execution. Therefore there needed to be communal agreement as to the reasons for the death sentence. Okfuskee's beloved women and leaders needed to know the details of why Acorn Whistler had to die. For even execution played a significant role in the Creek spiritual worldview.

Sacrifices and punishment took place in the chunky yards, serving as a civic arena for the

³¹ Journal of Thomas Bosomworth, July 1752, in *DRIA*, 279.

³² *Ibid.*

implementation of the tribe's spiritual customs. Be it a war captive, blood revenge, or punishment, the chunky yard was scene to torture, execution, and sacrifice.³³ As with the roundhouse and public-square, the chunky yard had its particular functions in serving the spiritual traditions of the Creek villages. The chunky yard located in the center of town, resembled an amphitheater built slightly into the ground. The stick ball game was also played here in order to quell intertribal disputes. Recalling that symbolic warfare helped the Creek community reach consensus. The chunky yard occupying a large space in the middle of the *talwa*, exemplifies the transmutation of Creek origin mythology into everyday life and ritual practice. For the chunky yard served as the community's transitional space, where everyone could participate in the fusion of light and dark, life and death. Punishment was often a public event where everyone knew the story of the crime. Yet this was not the case for Acorn Whistler.

For Acorn Whistler did not receive a ritualized public execution. His executioner had the orders that "all possible haste must be made to put him out of the way."³⁴ It was also to be a secret as to the true reason of his death. Had the true reason been known, Acorn Whistler's kinswomen would have intervened because Clan Mothers often served on councils making judgments concerning punishment and death. Beloved women or "war women" had the power to decide the fate of captive's lives.³⁵ It seems that Acorn Whistlers clan would have tried to protect him and refused his execution entirely if they had known the true reason.

Creek headmen pushed a particular custom of blood law on Acorn Whistler's nephew, feeding fuel to a fire of past resentment. Acorn Whistler did not bring drought, commit adultery,

³³ Bartram, *Observations*, 84.

³⁴ Journal of Thomas Bosomworth, July 1752, in *DRIA*, 279.

³⁵ Nathaniel Knowles, *The Torture of Captives by the Indians of Eastern North America*, (Philadelphia: [s.n.], 1940), 177.

cause accidental death or break peace, but the conflict with his nephew would prove life threatening. Acorn Whistler had supposedly threatened to kill his nephew in a dispute involving a woman. The customs of retaliation included execution for the intention of murder (threats). So this tradition, “That one should be dealt with exactly as he intended to do with his neighbor”³⁶ fit perfectly into the grand scheme of the Creek headmen, the Bosomworths, and the British colonial authorities. Acorn Whistler could be safely executed for “Creek” reasons in order to disguise the truth.

The custom of blood revenge worked its way into the Creek value system and seems to coincide with their emphasis on reciprocity. Yet it is interesting that the Great Medal Chief of Tuckabatchee told ethnographer, William Bartram, when asked his opinion of retaliation and if it was fair to punish the innocent for the guilty and if it came from the Master of Breath, he surprisingly replied, “I believe our custom did not proceed from E-sau-ge-tu E-mis-see (Master of Breath), but from the temper of rash men, who do not consider consequences before they act. It is a bad custom.”³⁷ It is puzzling that an Indian leader would deny any spiritual value to the frequently practiced law of retaliation among his tribe. Maybe he was hesitant to reveal the supernatural significance of blood revenge to the European ethnographer, or maybe “bad customs” came from a different spirit and not the Master of Breath, for there were many supernatural assistants in the Creek spirit world.

Creek peoples believe in the Great Spirit, the giver and taker away of the breath of life.³⁸ Also known as, Hesagedamesse, who is most frequently mentioned in Creek prayers, but he is

³⁶ Adair, *The History of the American Indians*, 190.

³⁷ Bartram, *Observations*, 71.

³⁸ Bartram, *Observations on the Creek and Cherokee Indians*, 26.

not a God or Holy Spirit, only an assistant to Ibofanga.³⁹ Traditions and spirituality characterized every aspect of Creek life because all values stemmed and harnessed directions from a specific “energy” flowing through all things. This sacred energy is called Ibofanga.⁴⁰ Creek Indians appealed to Ibofanga through the assistants of higher spiritual entities. These spirits helped with problem solving, prediction, hunting, medicinal knowledge, and healings.⁴¹ Supernatural forces could even help change the course of physical events, controlling environmental elements, such as rain and winds.⁴² Upon death, the family of the deceased would hope that the higher spiritual entities assist their loved one in the ultimate return journey to Ibofanga. Violent deaths, as with Acorn Whistler could cause the spirit a prolonged journey in its return to Ibofanga, yet Creek custom included burial practices that could help conjure the assistance of a safe journey.

As in the case of Acorn Whistler, who died violently, particular funeral rites and intense cleansing rituals helped his return to Ibofanga. The Creeks would not touch their dead for several days, especially if the cause of death was violence or sickness. Only family members interred the corpse, anointing his hair with bear oil and painting his face.⁴³ Acorn Whistler would have been buried with whatever few treasures, medallions, or trinkets he owned. After the burial his family would live apart from the rest of the tribe for several days, and upon their return undergo rituals using button snakeroot.⁴⁴ The women of his family had a requirement to wail and mourn his death, singing loudly their voices could be heard throughout Okfuskee. The widow cry also

³⁹ Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path*, 24.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁴¹ Vine Deloria, *The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Adair, *History*, 164.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 164-166.

served as a call for blood revenge. The widow would not be allowed to marry for four years, requiring assistance from other clan members.⁴⁵ Death disrupted the whole community and with Acorn Whistler gone, Little Okfuskee lost a hunter, warrior, and future elder.

THE TALKS

Acorn Whistler's family wanted answers. The case of his death seemed doubtful, based on an old claim for blood revenge between Acorn and his young nephew. His family would have consulted with their *talwa*, deliberated, and finally request satisfaction in return. Since his nephew was also eventually executed, it is possible that Acorn Whistler's family had something to do with it. Killing the nephew would satisfy the family and ensure the secrecy of true intent on behalf of the lower Creek headmen.

Around the time of Acorn Whistlers death many of the Creek *talwas*, were concluding the ceremonies of Busk. Recalling that at this time, all sins, except murder could be forgiven. As William Bartram eloquently observed of this special time, "This happy institution of the Busk restores a man to himself, to his family, and to his nation. It is a general amnesty, which not only absolves the Indians from all crimes, murder only excepted, but seems to bury guilt itself in oblivion."⁴⁶ This would give the conspirators a good deal of relief and harmony of spirit to present "good talks" to the rest of the Creek people after Acorn Whistler's death was known. Their explanations of why Acorn Whistler died centered on the idea of sacrifice, he died for the good of the entire nation.

Acorn Whistlers relatives were for the most part, furious. Several of his kinsmen "burned

⁴⁵ Ibid., 214-215.

⁴⁶ Bartram, *Observations*, 69.

the town” and sought vengeance.⁴⁷ The Bosomworths original plan included visiting Okfuskee and delivering the true reason of Acorn Whistler’s death. Yet, the Lower Creek headmen and the Bosomworths decided to give their talk in the Upper Creek town of Tuckabatchee rather than risk their lives in Okfuskee, Acorn Whistler’s hometown *talwa*. In attendance were many headmen of the Upper Creek towns and some relatives of Acorn Whistler. The talks would prove important in keeping peace within the nation. Creeks viewed laws of nature as the primary source of authority, yet the power of consensus between the united networks of the Creek nation became necessary when dealing with political disputes.⁴⁸ Exchanging of ideas, open discussion, and all voices being heard would have been the ideal situation for problem solving and peacemaking in a Creek conference.

However this Council at Tuckabatchee was different in that it had a great deal of authoritative biased influence. The Creek headmen who attended the Tuckabatchee Conference were not even on good terms with Acorn Whistler’s hometown of Okfuskee.⁴⁹ The very town that needed the most healing and understanding from this crisis appeared under represented and unacknowledged at the meeting. Okfuskees own great leader, the “Red Coat King” refused to attend the conference.⁵⁰ Therefore most of the talks sided with the Bosomworths and Coweta. It was to be accepted that Acorn Whistler was sacrificed for the good of the nation, and the good of the nation was to do as England demanded.⁵¹ At this point, the disintegration of autonomous Creek decision-making practices is portrayed through the disregard of Okfuskee’s enraged

⁴⁷ Joshua Aaron. Piker, *The Four Deaths of Acorn Whistler: Telling Stories in Colonial America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 165.

⁴⁸ Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path*, 70-73.

⁴⁹ Piker, *The Four Deaths of Acorn Whistler*, 169.

⁵⁰ Piker, *The Four Deaths of Acorn Whistler*, 169.

⁵¹ Journal of Thomas Bosomworth, in *DRIA*, 290.

community members. Traditional Creek politics under the influence of multi racial elites and European authorities became more vulnerable. Creek customs were used against them in scenarios such as this. For the Creek Indians would understand the “satisfaction” colonial authorities desired, comparing it to their own blood revenge custom.

CONCLUSION

The spiritual traditions of 18th century Creek society established the foundations for actions while accommodating space for change in response to crisis in the transformational periods of European settlement. As we have seen, the values of Creek culture influenced every move in their individual daily lives and the actions of the Creek Nation as a whole. The ultimate spirit of Ibofanga and the Redstick/Whitestick legend created authorities of natural law, tribal structure and decision-making processes. Purification and renewal engendered respect and reverence for all living things that shared sacred energies and histories. Creek spiritual traditions strived to achieve order and harmony in the altering realities of the new colonial world.

The colonial authorities used multi-racial peoples to help manipulate Creek values toward their own ends. Yet, the Acorn Whistler crisis also shows how Creek belief systems contained inherent flexibility that allowed room for change due to the respect of opposition and differences. Creek headmen and clan mothers tried to honor custom throughout the changing times but the pressures of subordination to European colonization made Creek structural autonomy exceedingly difficult.

However, this story is about more than just the manipulation and marginalization of Creek communities and belief systems during the beginnings of settler colonialism. This story also shows how the Creek peoples remained agents of their own world through the difficult

process of colonization. Compromise and manipulation of belief systems doesn't necessarily have to be good or bad, as we have seen, change can mean bridging two worlds, in an attempt to unite opposing parallels in the quest of balance. At times certain practices appeared to have been strictly adhered to, while others were maneuvered or ignored in the pursuit of harmony. Creek actions in response to crisis and change demonstrates a powerful sensibility developed by their spiritual heritage that is established in the continuing existence and survival of the great Muscogee Nation today.

