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WHITE CHEROKEES ON RED EARTH: BLOOD AND BELONGING

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis, I address White Cherokee identity, the historical trajectory it emerges from, and some of its political consequences. White Cherokee identity comes from social arrangements, place relationships, and governmental policy in the United States of America, each part of settler colonialism's ongoing effects. White Cherokees are not unique in the fact that other tribes certainly have White members. Instead, they are a specific example for exploring membership, place relationships, cultural practices, identity, race, ethnicity, and subjectivity. My family serves as a case study for my analysis, and I supplement it by engaging with other scholars. I focus my research on Oklahoma because the formation of Indian Territory, and subsequently the State of Oklahoma, is key to the building of White Cherokees. Beginning with the role of place-relationships, I establish that they are fundamental to developing White Cherokee identities. They help develop personal and familial histories closely tied to Indigeneity, oftentimes stories of removal.

Furthermore, the social and cultural changes in thinking about identity from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present have also made a White Cherokee identity possible and coherent to claim. This is partly due to the ways biological race was understood in the past and how those viewpoints were written into scientific practices and public policy. Race's legislation through blood quantum and technological advancements in genetics have allowed for new personal ethnic explorations for American consumers. While the changes in this thinking are essential, looking at them and the ways Indigenous identities have been politically and legally defined by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, a more robust understanding of White Cherokee identity is achieved.

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## *1. Introduction*

When I was growing up, my family would go to Papa's every few months. My maternal grandfather, Papa, lives in Paoli, Oklahoma, a small town about 7 miles north of Paul's Valley, the closest city. However, for my family, it was an hour and a half drive made for holidays and some reserved weekend days when my parents wanted to see him, Granny, and any other family down there. When I was little, my siblings and I would all get into the back of our family's car with my parents, and we would make the trip down.

Nowadays, we take that trip less often, and fewer of us take it. My parents go down less frequently than they did when my siblings and I were young, but they still make a point to see him. After the death of my maternal grandmother, Papa's first wife, my mom grew much closer with him. My little sisters and I had some excitement to see him when we were younger, but eventually, the trips became less exciting. Papa was socially and politically conservative, and as I grew older, seeing him would stir some hurt feelings in my heart about how he viewed the world, his place in it, and how he believed his children and grandchildren should fit into it.

The pilgrimage to Papa's, as I have come to see it today, is a calming drive. To avoid traffic, I leave my home in Edmond either before noon or shortly after the lunch traffic has ended. The first 40 minutes or so is spent on I-35 south surrounded by never-ending construction, strip malls, a short pass over the Oklahoma River, and the occasional police officer trying to catch drivers going just fast enough to pull them over. After passing the Riverwind casino, and the Norman city limits shortly thereafter, the landscape changes considerably. Trees line the highway, and I enjoy the feeling of driving over hills in comparison to the relatively flat roads of suburbia. Once I am past Norman, the highway's two lanes are rarely crowded, with 18-

wheelers being the main companions as I continue my drive south. When we were young, this part of the drive always felt longer for my siblings and me due to the lack of familiar sights. However, that lack was comforting as I visited Papa more and more for fieldwork. En route, it allowed me to anticipate what questions I had, think about what Papa and I would do and talk about, and brace myself for the awkwardness and discomfort I would undoubtedly experience. Afterward, it allowed me a brief respite to unpack and think through what I had experienced.

I exit I-35 when I see the gaming center, convenience store, and truck stop (all in one building) that has served as the marker of “we’re almost there” my entire life. Once off the highway, it is only a 10-minute drive past scattered houses and cattle, downtown Paoli, and then a bit further on to Granny and Papa’s. When I turn onto their property, going past the first cattle guard, I drive onto a gravel road. To the right is their old house, which has been renovated and is now home for my uncle and his family. There are a couple of hundred feet until the second cattle guard, which marks the beginning of where Granny and Papa’s residential space is, consisting of their house, which is connected to the enclosed barn, a raised gazebo-like structure that hosts more chairs than intended, an open-air barn, a small garden, the chicken coop, and goat pen.

However, as you enter the residential area, you begin to see who Papa and Granny, Papa’s second wife, are by the symbols outside, although they reflect Papa more than Granny for me. Right past the second cattle guard is a tall flagpole from which they fly the flag of the United States of America right above the flag of the Cherokee Nation. The flags are usually in a semi-tattered state, with some discoloration, rips, tears, or other blemishes readily visible due to their being in the elements at all times. Every few years or so, when the flags have finally met their end, somebody, usually one of my aunts or uncles, gifts Papa new flags for Father’s Day, Christmas, his birthday, or any other holiday that could justify handing him two new flags to fly



in front of his home. In a way, the flags showcase his pride and heritage, a pride and heritage he bestowed on his children, one they have tried to pass on to their children, and one they reaffirm in gifting him new flags.

When parking at Papa's, everybody usually parks in the grass and then walks across the stretch of gravel driveway towards the house. To walk into the house, most enter through the barn and then into the house through the connecting door. Part of this is due to proximity, but also because Papa is usually outside waiting for us. Outside of the house door is a wall of signs, road signs, crosses, and miscellaneous wall décor. Among these is a stone slab that is engraved and painted with the seal of the Cherokee Nation and a piece of plywood that has the Ten Commandments written on it in permanent marker. Two of Papa's clearest identities are his being Cherokee and his being Christian, Baptist specifically, and these identities are clearly communicated to any who happen to be invited to his home.

When I arrive, Papa is typically already outside waiting for me, alerted by the buzzer he had installed at the first cattle guard to tell him when somebody is coming. On the first Christmas, after he got the buzzer, he pulled me aside after it rang and said to me, "Now Evan, you know why I have that buzzer?"

"I assume it's to let you know somebody is coming?" I replied, wondering what other usage it could have.

"It's so the White man doesn't sneak up on me."

I laughed with him about his joke; I thought it was funny, and it was not an uncommon sort of joke of his to make about him being the Indian and the ways "White folk" had disenfranchised, oppressed, and otherwise related to Indians since 1492. However, as I look at myself and my

family, I see several White faces among his children and grandchildren, my aunts, uncles, and cousins.

...

At its core, this thesis is based on my experiences and thoughts regarding my relationship with Papa. My fieldwork with him, alongside experiences and conversations with my mother, have shaped my understandings of myself but also my analytical approach. To that end, this thesis is focused on what I call “White Cherokees.” White Cherokees, as I understand them from my own experience, are Cherokees who are phenotypically and culturally White while also identifying as Cherokee.

In this thesis, I focus on the historical, social, and political developments that made White Cherokees a possibility in the contemporary. Theoretically, this means questioning what Whitening as a social process means, how racial categories are products of history, and how White Cherokees complicate understandings of Indigeneity. By Whitening, I refer to the process by which certain Cherokees become socially understood as White (Roediger 1999). While this does refer to physically looking White, however, I am more concerned with people who are Cherokee that can socially present as White and benefit from Whiteness.

While my focus is on Cherokees, a majority of what I discuss is far from unique to Cherokees. The ability for people to identify as and with Indigeneity despite benefitting from Whiteness and appearing White is not limited to Cherokees. Many of the policies, if not all, that were implemented by the United States were designed to affect other Indigenous people. Likewise, the social processes that I discuss are also not unique to Cherokees, as Cherokees are

also in contact with other Indigenous peoples. The insights here are not limited to Cherokees alone, but other Indigenous peoples as well.

In discussing Cherokees as a legal and social group, there are multiple kinds of Cherokees that I discuss throughout. First, there are citizen Cherokees, who are members of one of the three federally recognized Cherokee tribes. The three “tribes,” a legal and political term in this instance, are the Cherokee Nation and United Keetowah Band of Cherokee Indians, both in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The United Keetowah Band was the original Cherokee tribe to secure federal recognition in Oklahoma, but the Cherokee Nation split off from the United Keetowah Band in the 1970s, when the Cherokee Nation constitution was ratified and accepted by the federal government. The Eastern Band is made up of Cherokee Indians who did not migrate during removal, and their tribe is headquartered in Cherokee, North Carolina. For the purposes of this thesis, I focus primarily on the Cherokee Nation, with mentions of the Eastern Band and the United Keetowah Band as appropriate. This is a choice based on access to resources, as the Cherokee Nation is more well-known due to being the second-largest tribe in the United States with almost 400,000 citizens. I am also a citizen of the Cherokee Nation.

In addition to there being citizen Cherokees, there are also “recognized Cherokees.” Recognized Cherokees are not legally members of the tribe but are recognized as Cherokees within their communities. There is no issue of membership socially, only legally. I do not discuss recognized Cherokees much, but their existence does complicate the role of legality in defining membership. There are also the Freedmen. The Freedmen are descendants of those enslaved by Cherokees and were granted citizenship through the treaties written after the Civil War. Freedmen are highly associated with being non-blood citizens as well as being racially Black.

This has complicated citizenship for them significantly due to the ways Cherokeeeness is conceptualized and applied to certain types of citizens. I discuss the controversy of the Freedmen's citizenship in chapter 5. Across these types of Cherokees, there are different social and legal parameters by which membership is accepted or contested. This is part of the basis for this thesis, as I seek to understand how White Cherokee's membership is contested, validated, or even rejected due to the ambiguities of granting membership to people who are legally members despite being White in many ways. However, I did not come to these questions at the beginning of fieldwork.

When I first began to conceptualize my fieldwork, I imagined myself working closely with Papa on his ranch, where he lives. It is not a large operation but is something that he developed as a form of part-time work while he worked full-time as a mail carrier in Moore and later in rural Oklahoma. One of my uncles, who lives near Papa, as well as my father, also participated in this kind of part-time cattle ranching. Although my father has since stopped, my uncle continues to run cattle. I wanted to explore the role of cattle-ranching in producing certain kinds of classed masculinities within the context of Oklahoma as a state with core narratives regarding cattle, cowboy culture, and the valuing of industries that are environmentally costly. This project took shape around my interests in food production, labor, and gender, as well as my childhood experiences of being brought to my dad's part-time ranch and my experiences with Papa as well.

However, that plan was altered for a variety of reasons. As I spent time with my grandfather doing fieldwork in early 2020, I noticed that there were other things occurring with my relationship with him regarding race. Although gender was still problematized in our relationship, race came to be felt differently for me as my grandfather identified me, his

grandchild, as Cherokee. I did not reject this classification, but it felt problematic for several reasons. On what basis was I considered Cherokee? With my blue eyes and blonde hair, I did not look Cherokee by any means, but what did I expect Cherokeeness to look like? Although Cherokees are famously mixed, and I am far from an outlier in appearance, I did not appear “Native” and thus did not feel as though I look Cherokee. I had a Certificate Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) card, but my quantum was so low it felt insignificant; nevertheless, the Cherokee Nation claims me, and I am a citizen in the eyes of the law. My relationship to my own Cherokee identity became increasingly problematized as I continued to work with and build a deeper relationship with Papa, who helped me to realize many things about my own relationship to and understanding of Indigeneity and how that differed from my understandings of Indigeneity within the broader context of Oklahoma, and within the greater United States.

This series of questions and revelations shifted my thinking on my project to an extent, and I began to pursue something related to my family in a more intimate manner over the course of my early fieldwork. However, this was further challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced an end to in-person fieldwork. Because of this, I am largely focused on engaging what it means to be a White Cherokee and using my familial and personal history as a means of ethnographic inquiry. COVID-19, despite its challenges, also allowed me to pursue a project that I may not have engaged with had I continued to do fieldwork and insisted on a thesis focused on classed masculinities and labor with part-time cattle ranching.

Because I have chosen to write about my family, I also recognize that the ability to do so is part of a historical moment in anthropological writing. My ability to write vulnerably in an academic-oriented text is the result of feminist ethnographers’ and anthropologists’ works.

Specifically, the works of Lila Abu-Lughod and Ruth Behar have shaped my work and my decision to work with and write about myself and my family in such a manner.

In “Writing Against Culture,” Lila Abu-Lughod addresses the relationship, namely the boundary between self and other, within anthropological practices. This relationship has historically been based on an assumed difference, in which certain kinds of differences are highlighted or repressed, in favor of narratives that are based on a Western self that is studying non-Western others. This relationship is built on a constructed self that is studying a distinct other (Abu-Lughod 1991). The way in which anthropologists position themselves in relation to their work is key, Abu-Lughod argues because anthropologists are at all moments embedded in the power relations that have constructed the “other” that is to be studied. When we question the self-other dichotomy, specifically by looking at anthropologists that work with their own society, we come to understand that it is a simplification and fallacy. Namely, the issue of objectivity arises. As a White Cherokee writing about myself, my family, and Indigenous people more broadly, I find the question of objectivity a null point but a thought-provoking one when considering perspective.

Objectivity is not something I could ever obtain when I am writing about myself; I am always going to be partial in some manner. However, my perspective as a White Cherokee gives me a position that is not necessarily in line with neither White anthropologists working with Cherokees nor necessarily racially Native Cherokees. In writing about my position, I must also address the power dynamics that come with being able to selective embrace or reject, being understood as White when one does not consider themselves so or solely so. By understanding how this became a possibility through political and social change, as well as forced removal and dispossession, it is my hope that my position is explicated throughout this work. Furthermore, I

address the question of power as it relates to claiming a White Cherokee identity in my final chapters. My self and my other are both inside and outside; I weave through social categories that understand and define me in certain ways that may not necessarily match with my own self-definition. Understanding the ambiguities in such a position and what it affords me is based on understanding power relations.

However, in choosing to write about the way power relations work regarding myself and my family, I found writing vulnerably to be necessary, both from a personal and academic position. In writing vulnerably and revealing myself, I do so not just to write in a way that connects with my readers but also to give my insights context and depth so that my insights are understood as being intimately related to lived experiences, both my own and others. I am inspired by the work of Ruth Behar in *The Vulnerable Observer*, as she blends ethnography and autobiography into a genre that gives her insights greater meaning, and in turn, makes it easier for her readers to understand what she does (Behar 1996). I know what I do about being a White Cherokee because, in my 22 years of experience, I have been one. I have, however, also been denied my Cherokeeness and had it take center stage for my identity by the people around me. It is a position fraught with ambiguities and paradoxes. I defend my claim so that I may be understood as both. It is a strange position to occupy, and I doubt the strangeness will ever disappear.

Therefore, my thesis is organized with this in mind. Beginning with the Cherokee removal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, I first recount the history of removal, resettlement, and contemporary efforts at land relationships in the Cherokee Nation across chapters two, three, and four. These chapters also look at the role of land in defining Indigenous identities, specifically at place-making processes, and how policies aimed at assimilation took that into account. Throughout

these chapters is my family history. I am eternally grateful to Papa's cousin, Jack Seabolt, whom I have not met but feel fortunate to have heard his words through a family history that he researched and wrote in 1982. His voice shines through his text, and he gives life to family members I could have never possibly met if not for him. Although I was familiar with my family's story, his research gave me clarity in moments otherwise obscure.

Chapters five through ten are focused on social and legal parameters of membership. I switch between ethnographic moments and reflection in chapters six, eight, and ten and more detailed analysis in chapters five, seven, and nine. Chapter five focuses on the ways biological modes of thinking have impacted Cherokee metrics of membership since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereas chapter seven is focused on legal means of defining membership and how documentation serves a role in verifying identity claims. Chapter nine is focused on the ethics and politics of identifying as a White Cherokee. This thesis is not about deciding a definitive way of being White Cherokee, but rather about seeking an understanding of identity categories in the United States from the margins of Indigenous and White identity.

## ***2. Removal and Reestablishment: Early 1800s through the Civil War***

Prior to the removals that took place from 1836-1839, the Cherokee people held and lived on the land in the region now occupied by the states of Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama. The Cherokee homelands were valuable spiritually, culturally, and economically to Cherokees, but two key industries brought Cherokee land rights and sovereignty into conflict with Georgian and National economic interests: the Georgia gold rush in 1828 and the amount of cotton produced and processed by Native peoples in the American southeast. As Cherokee cotton production and refining increased, anxiety about the Cherokee's economic threat



to settler society developed. The Georgia gold rush would further exacerbate tensions as settlers increasingly encroached on Cherokee lands to mine for gold.

In the Cherokee Nation census of 1835, the last census before removal, the Nation documented that in almost every family, one or more people could spin and weave cotton. Although much of this was used internally by Cherokees, external demand helped expand cotton production. Much of this was the same for the Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws, with the U.S. government distributing 500 spinning wheels to the Creeks alone in 1810. By 1830, the crop had become a significant income source for these four tribes, with labor supplied in part by enslaved peoples. On the 1835 census, the Cherokees documented 1,592 Slaves within the Cherokee Nation (Perdue and Green 2005). Importantly, the economic development of the tribes in the American southeast worked alongside the development of the American economy, and both depended on the labor of enslaved peoples, a practice that carried over into the post-removal economy.

Cotton production was in part possible because of this labor but also because of the fertility of the land on which it was grown. The land is in the ideal climate for growing cotton and had the necessary 200 frost-free days for growing cotton. Unlike the operations of settler society, which were centralized around the labor of enslaved peoples on plantations, Cherokee production was smaller scale. Cherokee homesteads consisted of several buildings clustered around smaller plazas, where families lived in the same home across generations. Because Cherokees were traditionally matrilineal, residents of a house consisted of women, their husbands, their daughters, and their husbands if married, their daughter's children, and unmarried sons. Together, these women would work fields together, moving from one family's section to another (Perdue and Green 2005). Within Cherokee families, most did not own slaves,

and of those that had slaves, an overwhelming majority were mixed blood, which altered their position within Cherokee society, something I explore more in chapter 4. Slavery was not the primary means by which Cherokee cotton production occurred, but it is nonetheless part of how many Cherokees utilized slave labor and participated in the economy of the American south. Because Cherokees were not producing cotton at the same rate as the White settlers around them, they were viewed as not taking full advantage of the land, which fanned the flames of Georgian expansion as they sought to incorporate Cherokee lands into the state.

Alongside the expanding cotton industry, gold prospectors flocked to Georgia in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to capitalize on the discovery of gold. The Macon Telegraph reported that in “the winter of 1829 and 30, when the precious metals having been discovered in great abundance upon our Cherokee soil, great numbers of people from Georgia and other States rushed to the Territory in search of its treasures” (Williams 1993, 25). Much of the gold found in Georgia was under the Cherokee's control, resulting in many prospectors trespassing into Cherokee territory to mine the gold., which was mainly done through placer mining in the alluvial beds of streams. Placer mining, while less intrusive and disrupting to the environment than many other forms of mining, still would disrupt the local environment via sediments and pollution. However, the Cherokees largely framed their obstinance to settler intrusions through sovereignty and land rights, not environmental degradation. In 1830, the Philadelphia Mint received \$212,000 in gold from Georgia, which adjusted for inflation is worth just over six million dollars in today's currency. Gold provided another lucrative opportunity for the country and the state of Georgia and contributed to Cherokee land being seen as desirable for economic development. Hence, Cherokee land rights were seen as problematic by people seeking to profit off the booming cotton and gold industries at the time. Not only were industries that boomed in settler society not

taking off within the practices of Cherokee land and labor systems, which did not rely heavily on slave labor nor intensive operations in water sources, but they were actively preventing settler society from expanding their own means of production and wealth accumulation.

The desire on the part of state and federal government and private industry to remove Indigenous peoples from Georgia and other states has been a force during much of this country's history. In 1802, the State of Georgia agreed to cede the land that is now Alabama and Mississippi to the United States in exchange for \$1,250,000 and the extinguishment of Indian land titles in Georgia, which subsequently established the modern-day borders of Georgia. The Cherokees, however, declined to move. In 1825, the Cherokee Nation was established by Principal Chief John Ross and Major Ridge, the speaker of the Cherokee National Council, and they then established a constitution in 1827. An election was held, and Principal Chief John Ross became the leader and representative of the tribe. In 1828 the tribe established a "Blood Law" that stated that any who sold even a foot of land to a White man would pay for it with their lives. Removal was not an option, nor was willingly ceding lands to White men.

In 1830 the Indian Removal Act was authorized by Congress and gave President Andrew Jackson the authority to negotiate removal treaties. Two court cases set the precedents for the removal of Cherokees and other Indigenous peoples in the United States: *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* in 1831 and *Worcester v. the State of Georgia* in 1832. In the first case, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the Cherokee were not a sovereign and independent nation. However, in the 1832 case, they ruled that Georgia could not impose its laws in Cherokee territory; only the federal government had authority in Indian affairs, which consequentially built the basis for sovereignty. President Jackson ignored the second decision, which invalidated the Indian Removal Act and instead pressured Cherokees into signing a removal treaty.

It is key to note that the treaty was signed by a minority political party within the Cherokee Nation. Originally known as the Ridge party, it was headed by Major Ridge, his son John Ridge, and nephews Elias Boudinot and Stand Watie. The party believed that it was favorable for the Cherokee Nation to establish friendly relationships with the United States government before White squatters and state governments made matters more violent. John Ridge began to meet with the Jackson administration in the late 1820s, although the State of Georgia had been holding lotteries for dividing Cherokee land as early as 1805. For the Ridge party, removal was inevitable for the Cherokee people.

In 1835, the treaty was signed by 21 proponents of Cherokee removal, including Major Ridge and the younger brother of Principal Chief John Ross. Principal Chief Ross refused to sign the document, and it was rejected by the Cherokee National Council. The treaty, as signed, agreed to the terms of \$5 million to be disbursed per capita, half a million dollars for education, compensation for all property left, title in perpetuity to an equal amount of land given up in Indian Territory, and 160 acres of land along with citizenship for Cherokees who desired to remain to remain in the states where they resided. The granting of citizenship and land to those who remained was struck by President Jackson, and the treaty was sent to Congress, where it was ratified on May 23, 1836 (Perdue and Green 2005).

The Ridge party became the treaty party, and they were considered by many to be traitors of the Cherokee people, the majority of whom were outraged and opposed to removal. The treaty party and those who volunteered to leave left with government support in the two years following the signing of the treaty. In 1838, the Army was deployed, and forced removal began. Over the course of three weeks, thousands of Cherokees were removed from their homes at gunpoint and forced into concentration camps in Tennessee and Alabama. Evan Jones, a Baptist

missionary who worked among Cherokees in North Carolina, accompanied the Cherokees he worked with as they were removed from their homes and sent westward. In his letters from May to December of 1838, he recalls what happened around him. In his letter on June 16<sup>th</sup>, writing from Camp Hetzel, near Cleveland, he speaks on the horrors that have been enacted on the Cherokees at the hands of the United States:

The Cherokees are nearly all prisoners. They have been dragged from their houses and encamped at the forts and military posts, all over the nation. In Georgia, especially, multitudes were allowed no time to take any thing with them, except the clothes they had on...The property of many has been taken, and sold before their eyes for almost nothing – the sellers and buyers, in many cases, being combined to cheat the poor Indians... Many of the Cherokees, who, a few days ago, were in comfortable circumstances, are now victims of abject poverty. Some, who have been allowed to return home, under passport, to inquire after their property, have found their cattle, horses, swine, farming-tools, and house furniture all gone. And this is not a description of extreme cases. It is altogether a faint representation of the work which has been perpetrated on the unoffending, unarmed and unresisting Cherokees. (Perdue and Green 2005, 172).

Although he is writing from the group of Cherokees that he accompanied during the Army-led removals of 1838, Jones goes to great length to document the abuses experienced and their normalcy. Of the 2,836 Cherokees who departed in the four groups led by the U.S. Army, 1854 are documented to have arrived, with the second group's arrival being undocumented. After these groups were removed, General Scott ordered the suspension of removal efforts and awarded a contract to Principal Chief Ross to remove the remaining Cherokees.

Principal Chief Ross organized removal in the form of 12 wagon trains, led by full-blood tribal leaders or educated mixed-bloods. Each train was assigned physicians, interpreters, commissaries, wagon masters, teamsters, and gravediggers. His brother, Lewis Ross, was the main contractor for furnishing forage, rations, and clothing for the trains. Although this was an improvement from the Army-led removals, estimates range from 2000 to 6000 Cherokee people died, with 4000 being the most accepted estimate (Perdue and Green 2005). They left in the fall

after the severe heat and drought of the summer of 1838 had passed. More than one Cherokee person died for every quarter mile traveled during the removal process. In Cherokee, it is called *Nunna Daul Tsuny*, loosely meaning the Trail Where We Cried, which we now know as the Trail of Tears in English (Perdue and Green 2005).

My great-great-great-grandmother, Nancy Hair, was part of the 12 wagon trains that came to Indian Territory. She left with her family when she was 8 or 9 years old (she was six at the time of the census in 1835) over the course of the five-month, 5043-mile journey from her homeland in Georgia. She lost her mother as she marched towards Indian territory, and her father, Jefferson Hair, embittered by the loss of his wife, was unable to raise Nancy, and she was taken in by the Brown family.

Nancy settled with her adoptive family in Sequoyah District, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory, just 15 miles from where my great-great-great-grandfather, Joseph Seabolt, lived, whose own grandfather, John Seabolt, had relocated to Indian Territory prior to removal. Between their two houses was the home of Sequoyah, a Cherokee scholar who was important politically and culturally, who created the Cherokee syllabary, and whose home served as a meeting place for many community members. Family stories often speculate that the two met as children in Sequoyah's home during a community meeting. The two lived in the house Nancy grew up in alongside her foster mother, Susanah Brown, who was widowed. Nancy inherited the homestead upon Susanah's death in 1866.

Stories of removal bring with them histories of loss. Loved ones, property, feelings of security, health, and more suffered as thousands of Indigenous peoples were forcibly removed from their homelands and relocated to Indian Territory. The loss of practical knowledge about how to relate to one's local environment was felt heavily as well. The knowledge Cherokees had

about the American Southeast would not serve them as well in Northeastern Indian Territory. Thus, left traumatized and dispossessed following removal, Cherokees had to forge a new relationship with the land they inhabited. Indian Territory, later the State of Oklahoma, would come to operate as a distinct place in which meanings for Indigenous identity could be found.

In his ethnography *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996), Anthropologist Keith Basso presents a detailed account of place-making stories shared across generations by Western Apaches. These stories act as a means of building place worlds. Place-making acts, however, are not detached from the cultural and social worlds that reproduce them. Place-making does not just reproduce narratives of how places are and how we relate to them, but it also actively revises them in every instantiation as the wisdom of stories and place come to relate to the present. Place-making, then, is not just a way of *doing* history, but “it is also a way of construction social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities” (Basso 1996, 18). We come to know who we are, in part, through the relationships that forge our belonging not just to groups of people but also to the places around us.

This leads Basso to develop his understanding of sensing of place as a means of place-making. Basso describes this as a kind of imaginative experience in which our involvement with the natural and social environment comes to *appropriate* portions of the earth (Basso 1996). In appropriating portions of the earth, it makes place-making an every day, non-mystical, reoccurring event in which subjects come to experience a relationship with a place. These relationships are themselves part of the process of sense of place and differ across the person. One’s sense of place is inflected by their subject position and is further changed to reflect their relationship to another’s. Although Basso does not state it outright, I find his conceptualizing of the sense of place to be important in understanding the way place-making occurs over

generations. As experiences and personal sensibilities to places are accrued by one generation, it is also passed down to the next, and so on. Our understandings of place are never solely individual but come out of those who taught us how to relate to that place. Honing this sense comes with time as one relates to a place out of their own experience.

In my understanding of what is now the State of Oklahoma as a culturally significant place to White Cherokee identity production, I focus on two narrative threads: the “official” history that encompasses policy and events that are often retold through the history books in classrooms and public consciousness, and the personal narratives of and from family. Familial narratives help ground a cultural understanding of oneself as belonging to a tribe (in my case, Cherokee), while the “official” history of removal, the Trail of Tears, the Dawes Act, the Indian Reorganization Act, and more all help one understand how the United States federal government has continued to implement policies aimed at assimilating Indigenous people. What comes with this understanding is that Oklahoma is not just another state within a union of states but is unique in the way it has operated as an inheritor of Indian Territory. As Indigenous people came to understand and build new relationships with one another on new lands, they also gave meaning to the places they were now settled on. Family histories give contours to the official history; they breathe life into a Western mode of history that takes for granted certain understandings of how people have existed, how they have related to the lands they inhabit, and how Indigenous people have come to be in the contemporary and not as people isolated in historical moments.



### 3. *The Dawes Act and a New Era of Assimilation Policy*

The Cherokee Nation remade itself as it grieved the losses from the Trail of Tears and sought revenge for their losses from the Treaty Party, which led to the assassinations of Major Ridge, John Ridge, Elias Boudinot, and Stand Watie. All four belonged to the elite mixed-blood slaveholding class of the Cherokee Nation, and all were assassinated except for Stand Watie, who evaded his would-be executioners (Starr 1979). The Cherokee Nation was in disarray, with three distinct factions, the Old Settlers, Treaty Party, and National Party, all co-existing on the same lands in Indian Territory. The Treaty Party and Old Settlers had aligned when the Treaty Party arrived in 1835 and consisted of about 5,000 Cherokees. They became a minority of the Cherokee population in Indian Territory when the Eastern Cherokees arrived in 1838, numbering 14,000. Principal Chief John Ross refused to recognize the Treaty of New Echota that caused their removal, thinking it would undermine Cherokee sovereignty and permanently separate the Cherokee people from their homeland. However, in 1846, Ross accepted the treaty, and the Treaty Party and Old Settlers accepted the Eastern Cherokees' leadership (Sturm 2002, 66). The tensions between the Treaty Party, Old Settlers, and Eastern Cherokees/National Party reflected in part the tension between national and self-interest, reflecting the believed influence of blood on one's connection with the nation. Full bloods, conceptualized as the Eastern Cherokees who held out in defiance of the treaty and eventually traveled on the Trail of Tears, were in opposition to the mixed bloods and "White Indians" (Wardell 1977), who were English-speaking Christians. Blood gave a means of interpreting one's social position in terms of proximity to Euro-American society, but also one's politics regarding the Cherokee Nation.

When the Civil War began in 1861, these tensions exacerbated as Stand Watie, and the Treaty Party supported the Confederacy because of their position on slavery, whereas Principal

Chief Ross saw advantages in aligning with the Union, although he stayed neutral for much of the War. It is worth noting, however, that the Confederacy also offered greater sovereignty to the Cherokee Nation, and Principal Chief Ross signed a treaty with the Confederacy in 1861, due in part to pressure from surrounding Tribes that had allied with the Confederacy (Perdue 2005). Principal Chief Ross was taken captive by Union forces in 1862 and paroled shortly after, and then left for Philadelphia and Washington D.C., where he would spend his time for the rest of his war. Stand Watie, upon Principal Chief Ross's departure, declared the seat of Principal Chief vacant, assumed the position and replaced governmental officials with his supporters. Watie passed a conscription law, forcing Cherokees who hoped to remain neutral into hiding in order to avoid fighting, which left their families without valuable labor and led to an increase in poverty (Perdue 2005). Dissenters, however, met in council and continued to view John Ross and Principal Chief. Dissenters revoked the Confederate treaty and emancipated Cherokee Slaves. However, most would have to fight their way to freedom, as the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was two years away, and many slave-holding Cherokees would not willingly free them and had relocated their slaves to the Choctaw Nation or northern Texas (Perdue 2005).

When speaking about the Civil War, my great-great-great-grandmother Nancy would tell a story to her children and grandchildren regarding conscription while her husband Joseph was away at war. It is unknown if he served for the Confederacy or the Union, as family documents and stories offer contradictory evidence. Some stories say that he served the Union at Fort Gibson, others say he served under Stand Watie in the Confederacy (Seabolt 1982), and I have been unable to locate any evidence to support one more strongly than the other. Her sons, Josiah and James, were too young to serve, but she would hide men who were avoiding being forcibly drafted into the Confederacy. One day, Nancy was protecting three teenagers avoiding

conscription. They ran out her backdoor upon hearing the soldier's arrival but were shot dead as they ran. Out of fear of being targeted next, Nancy waited several hours until the dead of night. Then, she and some of the women who lived near her harnessed their horses and hitched them to a wagon. Together, they brought the teenagers' bodies to the Seabolt Cemetery and buried them. All that is known of these young men now is that one was named Rainwater, and the other two names are unknown. There are also stories of her bringing food to the young men who hid in caves north of her home (Seabolt 1982).

However, these stories of aiding resistance to the Confederacy contradict another part of the family history: the reality that Nancy and Joseph owned enslaved people. Although they did not enslave them after the Civil War, seeing as how it was then illegal, the family history speaks of it briefly and in a way that would have it seem as though they were benevolent. As much I would like to absolve my ancestors of some of the horrors of slavery, doing so would be irresponsible and, more likely than not, untrue. It is unknown how many they had enslaved, but Nancy stayed in contact with Rose, an elderly woman who she had formerly enslaved. I believe her last name was Walker, but the two names are brought up separately in the family history and without a clear connection (Seabolt 1982). She would visit Rose in Fort Smith, Arkansas, with gifts, often meats and other food, saying that she "could not bear to see her in poverty status" (Seabolt 1982). Not much else is known regarding Nancy and Joseph's enslaving of others; partly, I am sure due to the desire of my ancestors to purge the family history of an awful part of American history that they had a hand in.

After the Civil War ended with the defeat of the Confederacy, Reconstruction continued to impact U.S.-Indian relationships well after it had ended for other areas of the country. Two influences, the Homestead Act of 1862 and its effects, as well as "philanthropists" who

advocated assimilation, would come to allow for the passage of the Dawes Act. The passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 gained increased importance in post-Civil War Indian territory, as lands ceded by tribes in negotiations would be flooded with White Settlers (Perdue 2005). Laborers also came to Indian Territory to work on the railroad system's expansion. However, alongside laborers and settlers, many outlaws sought a haven in Indian Territory as they were not subject to Tribal law. This turmoil led to increased support for extending U.S. law over Indian Territory (Perdue 2005).

“Philanthropists” regarded themselves as “friends of the Indian” and positioned themselves as such. These philanthropists expressed great concern that Indigenous troubles would not be solved without U.S. intervention and argued that privatizing land ownership to individuals would aid in the assimilation of Indigenous people (Perdue 2005). It is hard to view their work as philanthropic from an Indigenous point of view then and now. The dissolution of Indian Nations at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is in part because many Tribal governments rested on a policy of land held in commune. Together, these two decisions and their subsequent instantiations in various forms of legislation made the assimilation of Indians into the national whole of the United States the goal of State policy.

This had many consequences but is probably most easily recognized in the creation of allotments and establishment of the rules of blood quantum, both written into law through the Dawes Act, first passed in 1887, but later extended to the Cherokees, as well as other groups, in 1893 when Congress directed President Cleveland to appoint commissioners for negotiating with tribes (Perdue 2005). This policy ended the creation of reservations within Indian Territory and the implementation of different provisions by which land was allotted to Indigenous people. The Dawes Act provided for the head of a family to receive 160 acres, a single person or orphan over

18 to receive 80 acres, and persons under the age of 18 to receive 40 acres. Cherokees refused to cooperate with the Dawes Commission throughout the 1890s. However, in 1898 the Curtis Act ended Indian land ownership without consent (Perdue 2005). In the Burke Act of 1906, the Dawes Act was amended to include that the Secretary of the Interior could force an allottee to accept title for the land and that with the receipt of land allotment came United States citizenship. The Burke Act, like the Dawes Act, was aimed at further assimilating Indigenous people into White society, using land as a means of citizenship (Tatro “Burke Act”).

Allotment land was generally not enough for economic viability, nor was the land suited to consistently growing crops in a volume that would support a family. Upon the death of a land holder, allotment lands were divided up amongst heirs, and the land became increasingly fractionalized. After 25 years, the allotment lands could be sold, and most were sold to White Settlers at bargain prices. Land that did not get claimed by Indigenous people through allotment was opened to White settlers, and profits were invested in programs to aid Native Americans. Since the passing of the Dawes Act, Native Americans lost 90 million acres, about two-thirds of the land that they held in 1887 (Washburn 2016).

Nancy and Joseph’s allotment was located in the Sequoyah District of Indian Territory but later was incorporated as part of Sequoyah County in the East of the State of Oklahoma. There they farmed and ran a small mail stop and way station on the Butterfield Overland Stage Line that ran from St. Louis to San Francisco (Seabolt 1982). My great-great-grandfather Josiah’s allotment was southwest of his mother’s allotment, with my great grandfather’s just east of his. However, Josiah and his family lived in the house that Nancy and Joseph lived in. It is unclear what happened to their allotment and its relationship to Nancy’s. Josiah married a full-blooded Cherokee woman named Cynthia, and in 1875 they had a daughter. Cynthia died the

following year. Josiah later married Ellen Ruth Johns and had nine children, one of which was my great-grandfather Daniel Henry Seabolt.

Josiah was a councilman of the Cherokee Nation representing Sequoyah district from 1883 to 1887. He served as a Sheriff of Sequoyah district from 1889 until his death. He also worked as a farmer on his land during that time. He is described as always working towards the betterment of the tribe, and to that end, he would tell the children to avoid speaking in Cherokee as English was the language that they would need in the future. Josiah passed in 1908 from pneumonia. Josiah's story is one that reflects how even though he was Cherokee and actively involved in Cherokee social and political life, he nonetheless was impacted by

Unlike some of his siblings, my great-grandfather, Daniel Henry, did not get along with his mother. When Josiah died, he was just 6-7 years old, and at the age of 13, he left home and moved between his siblings, mainly his older sisters. Eventually, he left Sequoyah County, moving to central Oklahoma, where he raised his children: my grandfather Phillip Michael (Papa) and his sisters Anita and Diane., Having been under 18 and not an orphan at the time of allotment, Papa's father did not have his name officially attached to an allotment, which meant that with the land from Josiah was lost after his son, Lawrence Seabolt, died in 1959, the allotment land was no longer within the family (Seabolt 1982). In the family document written by Papa's cousin Jack, this fact is not made clear. According to stories I have heard from Papa and my mother, Papa's grandmother, Ellen, remarried after Josiah's death. Her new husband was a White man with children from his previous marriage. Papa had said that some of these children took over the land when Ellen died. However, this does not follow according to the record left by Jack Seabolt. Most of Josiah's children had left eastern Oklahoma over the course of their lives. I believe that many did not wish to inherit and manage the land following either Ellen or

Lawrence's death, as their lives were established elsewhere. My family has recounted the stories of this land, though with a feeling of unfairness, that something left family hands that shouldn't have; specifically, it left the hands of Cherokees and now belonged to a White family.

Throughout his 40-page narrative, Jack Seabolt weaves in and out of time periods. Oftentimes his writing left me rereading and returning as I tried to make sense of my family history through a new medium and a messenger I have never met yet am connected to. His stories are often oriented through his relationships to family and place, specifically the Seabolt lands that were inherited from generation to generation. For him, eastern Oklahoma seemed to occupy a sense of home. Despite the fact that he is writing after the loss of this land, he writes in anticipation of the annual Seabolt reunion, which at the time was still occurring and took place near the family land: "Oklahoma's red clay soil is symbolic of the blood that was spilled for long-forgotten causes. Five generations of Seabolts are buried on that beautiful, forested hilltop above the serene, clear flowing Lee's Creek. Our Cherokee fathers and mothers who endured so much suffering, yet trusted in the "Great Father," merely lie in state" (Seabolt 1982, 34). Land and family have been made inseparable. The suffering of ancestors and family members is read into their new home, whose red clay welcomes the dead and provides for the living.

Policies of assimilation enacted by the United States, namely the Dawes Act and subsequent legislation that expanded its provisions, have continually sought to integrate Indigenous people into the majority White body politic. Although I discuss the impact of blood quantum in later chapters, I wish to focus right now on how forced privatization via land allotments changed the relationship between Indigenous people, governance, and land rights. Specifically, by shifting to privately held land that dissolved Indigenous governments, the United States government was successfully able to alter the way Indigenous people operated as a

*politically* distinct group. Furthermore, this was done towards the end of extracting labor and land from Indigenous people in a way that would benefit the United States government, economy, as well as westward-moving settlers.

In her book *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Kathryn Yusoff argues that the language and practices of geology occupy a central role in world-making projects, being used to define and understand ages of human and material history, often towards ends that the field itself does not recognize nor reconcile with. Specifically, the use of geologic knowledge and language in creating extractive economies does not grapple with the way it produces categories of human and inhuman and how those categories are reflective of the material relations of settler-colonialism. Specifically, racialization itself is a form of material categorization that renders specific people (per context) inhuman for the purposes of extraction (Yusoff 2018). For Yusoff, this means that the processes by which gold is understood materially to possess value deeming its extraction are like the processes by which Black people were, and are, dehumanized for the purposes of extracting them as a labor source. This made it possible to convert gold into slaves and vice versa. The slave trade depended on the geologic language of humans and non-human and communicating values as such. In the present, her concern is with the way this language is used alongside the idea of the Anthropocene, as a distinct geologic age in which humans are the defining force of geologic change. This conception creates a false humanism, she argues, that obscures legacies of colonial relationships that have continually dehumanized particular people and have maintained unequal relations of power that result in unequal exposure to the environmental shifts that come with climate change (Yusoff 2018). Definitions of human and inhuman arise out of relations of power towards extractive ends that favor the dominator, who is defining these categories.



To this end, Yusoff states that “the semiotics of White Geology creates *atemporal* materiality dislocated from place and time – a mythology of disassociation in the formation of matter independent of its languages of description and the historical constitution of its social relations” (Yusoff 2018, 4). This is to say that White Geology espouses a false view in which materiality is not socially constructed and is universal. In a most sinister form, the failure to consider the way in which materiality is socially constructed allows us to overlook the ways people are dehumanized and made into material goods to be dominated and controlled. This is relevant in considering settler colonialism, especially in the Americas, as both Black and Indigenous peoples were made into nonhumans to take something from them. For Black slaves, it was labor, and for Indigenous people, it was land. This is specifically important in discussing the logic of race as it pertains to creating categories of human and inhuman. For the purposes of property and land rights, considering the ways in which spatial dispossession of land and the dispossessions of people as a form of spatial extraction brings clarity to understandings of race, materiality, and their intersections (Yusoff 2018). Spatial dispossession of the land refers specifically to how the land itself is understood as possessing valuable resources and how those resources justify the disruption of an ecosystem for their extraction. Likewise, Yusoff argues that the dispossession of people as a form of extraction can be seen as deeming certain kinds of people valuable for their labor and extracting them from the land they are on. In both cases, the extraction of “materials” from space is done according to (dehumanizing) discourses of materiality and value.

Although Yusoff mentions the ways her conceptual framework interacts with Indigenous people, her primary focus is on the way it has specifically related to Black peoples. I would like to extend her argument to consider the ways that discourses of materiality and extraction are

applied to Indigenous people in the United States. Concerning the dispossession of land, settler colonialism is predicated on land being deemed useful to settlers' needs, based on an understanding of that land providing material resources that are useful in providing for settler society. This requires that Indigenous people are no longer on that land so that the resources benefit settlers and not Indigenous people. Therefore, Indigenous people are seen as an obstacle to obtaining resources and thus must be removed so that settler society can take full advantage of the land it seeks to obtain.

However, I wish to focus on the unique arrangement that becomes clear when looking at the creation of allotment land. Although this new way of managing land and Indigenous people also gave large amounts of land to White settlers moving into Indian Territory, it also still left land in the private ownership of Indigenous people who “required” assimilating into the White body politic. The land left to Indigenous people was specifically so that they would become citizens through imposed land ownership and that owning and laboring on land would bring them closer to White society. As a form of governance, the land was a means by which the United States could impose its sovereignty over Indigenous people. Instead of Indigenous people being allowed to operate as part of a Nation that held its own land and borders, Indigenous people were dispossessed of the ability to politically organize based on the borders of the land that they controlled. The Cherokee Nation could no longer organize based on land ownership within borders but instead was fractured with the creation of private property for its citizens, who were now made into citizens of the United States.

Taking away a means by which Indigenous people could politically organize as distinct would not make them White, though. This is why it is crucial to look at the way land ownership and labor are reconfigured in the arrangement of private property. Lacking the support

of tribal governments and left to their allotments to provide for their family, Indigenous people either had to produce enough to support their family, suffer through poverty on their land, or sell their land to move somewhere they could better provide for their family. In most cases, unfortunately, the latter two happened. Allotments forced a labor relationship that made it easier for the United States to further dispossess Indigenous people through economic means. The land would continually leave Indigenous hands and enter those of White settlers. In both cases, the land was being used in an extractive way that favored settler society. It reconfigured land ownership among Indigenous people in a way that prevented large amounts of land from being unified under a distinct sovereign nation while also incorporating Indigenous people into the economy of settler society via land sale and relocation or production through their allotment land. The relationship to the land that defined Indigeneity was what made Indigenous people intelligible through definitions of materiality that constructed them as obstacles to extraction and non-members of White (settler) society. Indigenous people were to be made White through relationships of extracting land and labor.

#### ***4. Inheriting Land Relationships: Place-Making and Difference***

My connection to land starts with my grandfather, who I call Papa. Papa grew up in Edmond, then briefly Del City, and eventually settled in Moore, sometime around middle school. All three of these cities are located within the general metropolitan area of Oklahoma City and grew into larger cities over the following decades. While he was alive, Daniel Henry, His father, and my great grandfather would visit eastern Oklahoma often, going back to Sequoyah County to see his siblings, nephews, and nieces. My great grandfather would also take his children to Tahlequah, the Capitol of the Cherokee Nation, as part of their upbringing. This trip would come

to be replicated by Papa for his children and my mother for her older three prior to having my younger sisters and me.

As I grew up, I learned about Papa's life bit by bit. However, when I began to do fieldwork for this project, my early interviews at the beginning of 2020 focused on collecting a more comprehensive life history. Specifically, I did this to learn more about his relationship with his father. I had an interest at the time in masculinity and cattle labor and was keen to see how he and his father spent time together and what else he did in his youth. I knew he lived in Edmond early on, as we would occasionally drive past Russel Dougherty Elementary, and my mom would inform us (almost every time) that was where Papa went to elementary school. Not much is known of the two years he lived in Del City, and during interviews, he mainly reflected on his time in Moore. I would spend time with Papa about once weekly during this period of fieldwork from the middle of January to the middle of March when the COVID-19 virus started spreading rapidly.

Whenever I went to see Papa, it was always refreshing to see the things that had not changed: the rows of round hay bales that I would jump on with my cousins despite Papa telling us not to, and the old derelict barn that I avoided going in alone because it seemed to be from a horror movie, dark inside even during the brightest of days. There was a small front where Papa used to put cattle at times, although now it is largely unused.

That February, the yellow grass of winter was still lying dormant, and the cold Oklahoma wind was easily heard over the music I was playing as I pulled into the driveway. When I left Norman, I had given Papa a call that I was coming, and he let me know he'd be waiting for me. As I parked in front of the house on the gravel driveway, he was waiting for me in front of the barn door.

I don't remember Papa being particularly affectionate early in my life, but I could've been taking for granted the affection he showed me, my siblings, and cousins. He wouldn't show it in many ways, but he would always tell us how lonesome he had been for us. It didn't matter if it had been only a few days, weeks, or even months. He always missed us and would never fail to embrace us upon our reunion. His hugs were nice, even if he no longer towered above me as when I was a child, and I now stood over a half-foot above him.

“Well, how've ya been, Evan? I've been real lonesome for you, so I'm glad you've come down today. Granny'll like to see ya too.”

“I've missed y'all too, and I'm glad I was able to come down today!” I said, with my generally upbeat intonation, although I feel as though I take on a bit of a drawl in conversation with him. I often maintained this style of talking with him and Granny so that I matched their general mood. There weren't many times that the two would show sadness or negativity; they were often in good spirits and felt blessed with the day, an attitude I found reflected in much of their lives.

Their house is warm, even when it isn't. The fabrics of the couch and blankets are heavy, textured, and dark-colored. The wall is adorned with many crosses, fashioned from various materials but mainly darker metals. The kitchen is the brightest part of the house, with its white cabinets and Granny's antique scale collection lined up on top of them. Every time I visited, I would hear some sports game on TV, usually football or basketball, depending on the season. Occasionally an old Western film would be on instead, and rarely much else. Granny preferred to watch TV in their bedroom during the day, so Papa would set himself down in his recliner and enjoy the television by himself. When I walked in today, the house retained much of its usual warmth, aided by the unusually warm February sun.

“So, what would you like to do today?” Papa asked me.

“If there’s anything you’re burning to do, we can do that, but I do want to ask you about your dad and your relationship with him.”

“We can do that! Let me get this TV shut off, and we can talk over in the kitchen.” After shutting off the TV, Papa and I took sat on opposing barstools at the kitchen island. When talking to Papa, I usually start with a guiding question or two and then follow wherever Papa takes me during these long talks; that day wasn’t any different.

He began talking about his early childhood. He remembers his family being rather poor, and they would do their own work on their house. His father couldn’t fit under the house to reach the pipes from the well, so he would have Papa get down there and do the work with his guidance. Being a young boy at the time, Papa was terrified of the scorpions and snakes that he knew were under the house, despite never running into one himself. At the time, Moore wasn’t very developed. “The section we lived in was two houses, maybe. Most of the people out there were working people, you couldn’t really say it was farming country.”

Papa spent his leisure time in various ways, but he was mostly outside with other boys who lived around him.

My dad bought me a horse when I was... pretty young, let’s see, now what was her name, anyhow? I had a horse, my friends didn’t have a horse, but I had another friend about 2 or 3 miles, and he had a horse, and we’d go riding them horses mostly at night, we’d ride at night. We’d ride at night because it was ol’ country roads, dirt roads, and it was desolate, and nobody was around. And that was a lot of fun too, we liked to ride the horses, anyhow.

In addition to spending time with his neighbors, he would often go hunting with his dad and uncle in an area that wasn't too far from where he lived.

I remember one time probably when I was 14? 15? My dad got me some beagles, some little beagle hounds. And my uncle had gotten me a 4-10 shotgun, and boy I used to love to go rabbit hunting with those beagles, it was a lot of fun. I did that till the beagles, I can't remember if the beagles got too old to go or if I got too old...

His time hunting wasn't his only experience with animals and the reality of death for food. His family would have different "adventures," as he called them, and the task of raising and butchering chickens was one of them.

"Living out there, ya know, we had different adventures like, one time we bought a bunch of chickens, and once they got big enough to butcher, we had a big day of wringing chickens' necks and cleaning chickens. 'Course, we only did that one time 'cause my sisters, they couldn't stand it - us wringing those chickens' necks. So, as time went on and they got over all that, we got rabbits, and you know how rabbits are, they multiplied fast. We had a day of killing and cleaning rabbits, rabbits good to eat! We ate a lot of rabbit back then when I was growing up, I'd shoot them rabbits and bring 'em home and clean 'em. Well, that didn't work either. Sisters couldn't stand that. Us killing them rabbits and butchering 'em.

Papa spent much of his childhood not just outdoors but intimately so. He would go out and actively become acquainted with the land he lived on and was, in a sense, guided by his father in doing so. As he got older, Moore would continue to develop, eventually becoming one of the largest cities in Oklahoma, with a population of just over 63,000. His interests would shift, and

he became more involved in sports. He worked at his uncle's gas station, where he met my grandmother, who would come around and have him pump her gas a bit at a time so that she could see him more often.

After he graduated high school, Papa went to college in Colorado on a baseball scholarship, but after intense homesickness and watching one of his teammates die from getting hit by a baseball in the head, he returned to Moore. He began to work in Moore for the United States Postal Service (USPS) and continued to work for them until his retirement. He married my grandmother, Alice Jean, in the early 1960s and had my mother in 1963 and my Uncle Mike shortly thereafter. The two divorced, and Papa married Linda Miller, who we call "Granny," within the following decade.

Papa got into raising cattle for beef through his new father-in-law, who my mother mainly called "Grandpa Miller." He ran cattle himself and taught Papa much of what he knew. Papa got interested in doing so partially out of his desire to own land as his father had and because he enjoyed the lifestyle of raising cattle part-time. At first, he and Granny ran what Papa called a "primitive grocery store," which sold some groceries, gas, feed for animals, and beer. When my aunt Staci was born, they sold the store and bought a mobile home and lived in it on five acres that they bought behind his parents' property. A few miles down the road was a brick house that a developer wanted to have moved so that he could build on the property. Papa bought the house, sold the mobile home, and they lived in the house while Papa took off the brick on the outside and then had it lifted off the foundation and moved to their five acres, where he had laid a new foundation for it. He had to remove the bricks because the house was too heavy with them. After moving the house, Papa put the bricks back on the house, one by one.



After a few years of living in this house, Granny looked at Papa and said, “We’re gonna build us a house. I’m not living in this place anymore.” This began the process of Papa and Granny moving to Paoli. At first, they lived in a little house they had bought in Paoli, and Granny ran a daycare out of it. Eventually, though, after two years and three weeks, they moved into the little house they built on their current land in Paoli, where Uncle Dan and his family live now, although they’ve renovated the place. Granny and Papa built a new house on the same property, further up the drive, and live there to this day. During the period that the house was being built, while working as a rural postman in Paul’s Valley, Papa began to build his herd.

His herd started small, with only a handful of cattle and grew significantly with time and is now small again, numbering less than 30, on account of his age. He would invest extra money in cattle, and when expenses came up, he would sell some cows. It wasn’t a big money-making project; he spent about two-thirds of his revenue on expenses. This cycle has continued, with his equipment progressively improving, and he doesn’t do nearly as much as he used to. He retired from the USPS in 1992 after over 30 years of service as a letter carrier and then did some odd jobs alongside my Uncle Dan transporting equipment to oil companies in Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas primarily, but sometimes as far as Louisiana and New Mexico. After two years of this, he quit: “it got down to being about October, and I still hadn’t put no hay up, which I usually do in June or July. So, I quit. I was tired of the road and stayed home. It was interesting. Got to see a lot of things, things I’d never seen before.” After quitting, he “loafed” around for a while and eventually worked with a man at his church, Melton, on his cattle stocker operation. They would work the cattle, castrating and vaccinating them, since they usually came from sale barns or ranches where they had never been “worked” before. This is because stocker operations usually purchase cattle after the weaning period has ended, while they are still young, and work on

raising the cattle to about 650 pounds, and then they are sold to feedlot operations, the next stage of the supply chain. He continued to do this for five to six years and then quit when Melton passed away. After this, he leased more land, increased the number of cattle he “ran,” and worked part-time doing that. This slowed down as he aged, and he eventually leased less land and ran fewer cattle, and now he has a herd of about 20-30 cows, 10-20 goats, and some chickens.

Although the nature and scope of his operations have changed, Papa has nonetheless had attachments to land since he was a child living in Moore with his father. Prior to Moore, though, there is a long history within the family of living in Sequoyah County, just north of Sallisaw, a few miles from Sequoyah’s house. Even tracing back to Nancy Hair and her journey from Georgia to Indian Territory on the Trail of Tears, we see land and its grounding effects of both family history, as well as a larger understanding of how history has played out. History itself is constructed through a relationship to place, locating people in places within narratives of how things happened, to whom, why they made the choices they did, and what that means for where we are now, both physically and metaphorically. These narratives are not just constructed and maintained but also revised over time. Family histories become a way of understanding the relationships of socio-historical processes through narratives that have been used to locate themselves and their kin within a given place world. Place-making is not just attaching meaning to a place and giving it significance within a narrative but is also locating oneself within the past and present, and at times, projecting that relationship into the future. It is simultaneously a spatial and temporal relationship in which beliefs, practices, and systems are reproduced, altered, and projected into the future or are disrupted to prevent that process. The future is itself an

important location for place-making and identity formation. It is an intersection for the two as relationships between people and place are projected forth.

I find the Cherokee Nation Seed Bank to be an incredible example of the relationship between space, time, and identity. I was fortunate enough to interview Pat Gwin, the Cherokee Nation's Senior Director of Environmental Resources, and Feather Smith, a cultural biologist, over the phone, as the Cherokee Nation was under lockdown due to COVID. The two work together in carrying out the operations of the Seed Bank, which works as a project intersecting goals of culture, language, health, and environmental knowledge. Both grew up in Tahlequah, although Director Gwin also grew up in Broken Arrow, a city just outside of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Both described their childhood as growing up outdoors, in environments that were rather clean and without pollution, which is part of what influenced them to get involved with environmental work as they got older.

The Seed Bank started in 2006 and was originally a collaborative effort between the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, although the partnership only lasted for two years. Inspired by the Global Seed Vault in Norway, Director Gwin began looking for seeds that Cherokees planted historically. In working with the Eastern Band and various Cherokees in and outside of Oklahoma, the Seed Bank was able to start and grow its collection of seeds over the years. However, the Seed Bank is not just a repository of seeds but also reproduces and distributes them amongst Cherokees. Today, over 30 seeds are offered, a mix of corn, beans, gourds, tobacco, etc. Seeds come from those that made the Trail of Tears with Cherokees, some were adopted upon arrival, and others come from the Eastern Band. In distributing these seeds, they serve as a means by which Cherokees can acquire a material form of cultural heritage while also participating in culturally oriented gardening that connects one to

being Cherokee in the present. In another interview with NPR, Director Gwin reflected on the relationship between Cherokees and plants, saying, “You can’t be Cherokee without Cherokee plants. And without Cherokee plants, there can be no Cherokee” (Danovich 2019).

Many of the crops are grown in the Cherokee Heirloom Garden in Tahlequah, which also serves as a location for education about these plants. The garden’s signage is all in Cherokee, “their true names,” as Feather Smith referred to them, followed by their Latin names in binomial nomenclature. The garden serves as a place for Cherokee language learning, but also is involved with the Medicine Keepers group, which is a group of Cherokee elders who share knowledge of plants, and their myriad uses, especially their medicinal value, with younger Cherokees and Cherokee medical students. The Heirloom Garden operates in tandem with the Seed Bank to reproduce seeds for cultural use, but also as a vehicle for knowledge transmission as Cherokees learn Cherokee, gardening, and the uses for traditional plants.

Lastly, the Heirloom Garden and Seed Bank also work with community health and education so that Cherokee citizens are more conscious about opportunities for growing their own food and how that food can contribute to a more balanced diet. Demonstrations around harvesting and cooking what has been harvested serve as a mix between public health outreach and Cherokee ethnohistory. These events are oriented to both children and adults, as the Seed Bank and Heirloom Garden ultimately hope for Cherokees to be gardening in earnest to connect Cherokees to their culture and history and bring that relationship into the present in hopes that Cherokees use that knowledge to take care of their community’s health and education.

The Seed Bank is an intersection of Cherokee persistence despite the effects, past and present, of settler-colonialism. In reckoning with the effects of settler-colonialism, gardening culturally significant plants is a means by which the past is brought into the present. Yet, this

gardening is meant to be a means of community building, knowledge reproduction, and language learning. In orienting itself to these goals, the Seed Bank and Heirloom Garden build stronger bonds between the Cherokees of today and their ancestors in a way that encourages a relationship with the land. Being Cherokee is constructed in the past, and the present, by a relationship with the land that is meant to be socially and linguistically known in Cherokee. The names of plants are in Cherokee, they are a part of Cherokee ethnohistory, and that is sustained today through this project.

Furthermore, this relationship is projected into the future through efforts of education and inclusion of Cherokees of all ages. Land relationships in this configuration differ from the ones I discussed in the previous chapter. Instead of being oriented around labor for purposes of dispossession and assimilation, they are towards maintaining a long relationship that is grounded in social interaction and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, they are inherently agentic in nature as gardening is based on a set of choices aimed at Cherokee lifeways rather than being imposed upon via private land ownership. This has consequences in place-making, as gardening becomes a means of infusing Cherokeeeness into land relationships. Framed within both biological and cultural knowledge, crops are planted in specific configurations to prevent cross-pollination, preserving the original breeds of the crops. Although practically useful for producing specific plants, it also serves as a means by which the Cherokeeeness imbued in such plants is protected and reproduced, to be planted again in the following season. As a means of being Cherokee, land relationships are vital; they continue to breathe meaning into Cherokee lifeways across time.

The land relationships promoted by the Cherokee Nation through the Seed Bank and Heirloom Garden are responses to the relationships imposed by the federal government in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which were carried out to dispossess and assimilate Indigenous

people. Reconnecting Cherokees to traditional knowledge and practices as related to land, I would argue, is part of redefining land relationships as distinctly ethnic, and that the land on which those relationships take place is itself constructed as relating to those who occupy, extract from, or tend to, it. In expanding this from Cherokees to Indigenous people more broadly, it becomes a racial means by which Indigenous knowledge is promoted and disseminated across community members who have varying levels of proximities to knowledge and practices.

Although she is focused on the relationship between architecture, technology, time, and space, philosopher Elizabeth Grosz provides insights on the relationship between the construction of a city and those who inhabit it. Grosz argues that a city operates as a collective boundary that takes (imaginary) forms defined by its inhabitants while also shaping and regulating the bodies of its inhabitants. Furthermore, this cuts across social categories of class, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, etc., as well as the geographic, economic, and political understandings of the city itself. This, for Grosz, means considering the ways that bodies and cities are “highly complex and thoroughly saturated with behavioral, regulative, psychical, legal, and communitarian components, nonetheless the corporeality of cities and materiality of bodies – the relations of exchange and production, habit, conformity, breakdown, and upheaval, have yet to be adequately thought as corporeal” (Grosz 2001, 50). In extending Grosz’s argument about cities to the formation of larger spatially defined political entities, namely the State of Oklahoma, I find her argument useful for understanding the complex ways that social-spatial arrangements redefine the material understanding of space. Because of land relationships that are themselves being understood as racially particular, space becomes understood as possessing a different form than it would have had had it been under different stewardship.

In considering my relationship with Papa, I take his relationship with the land to come, in part, from his Cherokeeeness. Having been raised on land, with a relationship to the land that was inherited by his father and his father before him, I understand it as a generational understanding of the importance of land in maintaining a sense of Cherokeeeness. Although cattle are being run and crops are not being grown, there is still an understanding of Oklahoman land providing for his livelihood. Furthermore, being Cherokee is a given; it is infused into his being and his relationship with me, my cousins, my aunts and uncles, and others. His association with the land as a Cherokee person taught me how I should relate to the land; something passed down across generations.

Being in Oklahoma is not just being in any other state. It is the state that was *designed* to assimilate Indigenous people within the same state borders as White settlers. Furthermore, it is also in the state that Indigenous people constantly contest their legal rights to land, water, and sovereignty. Oklahoma has, and will always be, in contestation with the tribes that are now located here.

For White Cherokees, this spatial relationship is in part reflected in their ambiguity. Being both White and Cherokee puts one at the intersection of two sovereignties, but one's position is not clarified by simply being in Oklahoma or reckoning with the status of multiple sovereignties. Rather, I would argue, land relationships are a means by which one can arrive at a particular understanding of their position. This does not mean that having a relationship with the land through certain forms of labor (for social or commercial reasons) reveals one political orientation or another, but that land relationships are significant in the ways that those governing powers operate. Cherokees seek to reproduce a land relationship that is distinct from the State of Oklahoma, as it tries to maintain difference and refuse assimilation. At the core of land,

relationships are the ways that forms of governance are enacted and understood for people of different identities. Place-making is, at every step, about creating certain types of places for certain people.

As I shift my focus towards social and cultural changes in identity thinking (Jackson 2019), I find it helpful to illuminate the role of subjectivity, why I use it at moments and not at others, and what it means to consider subjectivity alongside identity. Jackson defines identity thinking by its operations: it binds people together into discrete groups, blinding us to the way these categories are constructions that have changed in meaning over time. Furthermore, he also argues that it is crucial to the administration of life by obscuring differences within groups, highlighting superficial similarities, and, for Jackson, is a precondition to violence (Jackson 2019). Identity thinking is much more focused on the creation and administration of a group. I take subjectivity to refer to the experiences, that is what *happens*, within a person's life, what they do, what they do not do, their regrets and desires, their conversations, and more, and how they coalesce around an understanding of a person, from both internal and external sources (Kleinman and Fitz-Henry 2007). This image is, crucially, neither defined by the self nor others, but is instead “encompasses all the identifications that can be formed by, discovered in, or attributed to the person” (Biehl 2013 [2005], 137). Subjectivity allows for a more creative conceptualizing of personhood than identity categories. Rarely, especially outside of academic writing, is identity thinking discussed as something fluid, non-rigid, and always changing. Subjectivity, however, is more readily positioned at this moment in time to engage in questions of stability and time. Furthermore, because subjectivity is at all times concerned with people and their experiences, history, and memory can be seen as fundamental to understanding subject formation and subjectivity – that is how one comes to be understood, from various viewpoints,



across various moments of one's life, and what one does to challenge, affirm, or otherwise engage one's position.

In discussing history and memory, I find Kamala Visweswaran's discussion on subject refusal in *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (1994) to be excellent in considering the relationship between history and memory, specifically as it applies to subjectivity. In recounting her work in India with female freedom fighters, specifically with a woman she calls "M," who refused to be a subject of her research unless it was on her terms, Visweswaran discusses the relationships between subject formation and how that positions subjects within history and memory. M's refusal did not take an overt form but instead was the result of reflecting on M's dodging of calls and visits that were not centered around her current work running an orphanage. M's refusal to be profiled as only a freedom fighter was, Visweswaran argues, part of her recognizing that her subjectivity may be used towards political projects that she would not necessarily support. Part of her emphasizing the orphanage, and the work still to be done after freedom, was also part of her belief that it is the responsibility now of the younger generations to continue the work began by Gandhi and the freedom fighters, to "carry out the task of social uplift left uncompleted at Independence, to fight against the graft and corruption that characterized modern India" (Visweswaran 1994, 65). What M does is refuse to have her experiences historicized; instead, she puts them in the present in the memory of Visweswaran, but in direct relationship to the future goals, her goals, the goals of Visweswaran, the goals of the children at the orphanage, and what she believes should be the goals of the Nation.

Memory, Visweswaran argues, is what connects the individual to history. Furthermore, it is multiple, varied, collective, and plural, yet always individual. This relationship between memories, and histories, is what is fundamental to understanding subjectivity in my work here

about White Cherokees. Because memory is at all times multiple and varied, and never universal, and always at risk of being lost to erosion, distortion, mistakes, and even lying. History serves as a means of compiling memory – rendering it “complete” and as a representation of a subject, be that ideas or people. It is a narrative by which we understand where we stand in relation to those that came before and those that come after. Memory, however, does not necessarily agree with history, it does not automatically validate, nor does it necessarily contradict or critique the position of a given history.

Subjectivity, in the way I use it in this thesis, is about the relationship between self and other, and memory and history, and the ways these conceptions intersect with one another. The memories I have of growing up, of interacting with friends, strangers, and loved ones, have all shaped my understanding of Cherokeeeness. Papa’s memory of growing up, his interactions, trips, jobs, etc., all also shape his understanding of his Cherokeeeness. However, being outside of tribal borders and not participating in “traditional” tribal activities put us at odds with most conceptions of what it means to be Indigenous. If my memories with Papa are what connect me to my Indigeneity, what does that mean in relationship to the historical telling of Cherokeeeness? Subjectivity and identity, history and memory, self and other, each of these give space in the middle where subject positions are contested on lines that are not always consistent. The parameters for their evaluation are constantly changing. This gives space for ambiguity. This ambiguity is part of how White Cherokees came to be, and with it, concerns about what Cherokeeeness is, where it is located, and who can claim it are brought forward.

##### ***5. Inheriting Cherokees: Biogenetic Models of Membership***

I was early on in my high school education when my mom and dad decided to have commercial ancestry kits done. Despite knowing my father's maternal ancestry, and my mother's paternal Native ancestry with relative certainty, my parents were nonetheless curious about what "answers" the kit would provide. They swabbed their cheeks, put them in the mail, and weeks later got an email with a link to view their results. My father's profile came back as expected; his ancestry was a mix of Western European ancestry, with the majority being Irish. My mother's test came back as expected as well to an extent, with the majority being mixed European ancestry and then a small percentage of "Native American" ancestry, about 6% or so, which corresponds to the blood quantum listed on her CDIB.

The number correlated closely with the blood quantum listed on her CDIB, maybe a bit more, but when confronted with the percentage, she had two reactions that I remember well. She did not necessarily argue with the science behind the test but was not willing to fully agree with it either. Additionally, she called forth the family narrative that there is more Cherokee blood in us than there is reflected on our CDIB cards. This narrative goes back to Papa's mother, who was mixed White and Cherokee, but neither her parents nor grandparents made it onto the Dawes Rolls of 1906. Our family already had legally verified Cherokee blood, but there is still a narrative of there being more blood than is reflected on documents. The missing roll member is not necessarily a life-changing narrative within the family; her being Cherokee or not does not change anybody's identity. However, the narrative regarding her presence and her being the descendant of a Cherokee (or Cherokees) who refused to be on the Dawes Rolls reflects the value of blood in presenting oneself as connected to a Cherokee, or Native, identity. Legal recognition of her Cherokee blood would double the quantum of Papa and all his descendants. For my siblings and me, that would mean moving from a 1/32 quantum to a 1/16 quantum.

Although not changing our identification according to Cherokee Nation rules, if we were on the Baker's Rolls of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, our mother would have membership, but we would not.

The way in which I interact with Cherokee and Native as terms is not the same. I use "Cherokee" to not only specify the tribal, national, and social discourses that are related to Cherokee identity but also to keep in mind that "tribal" identities are themselves separate from Native as a *racial* identity. However, the two are deeply entangled and thus can be considered alongside one another at many points. First, it is important to understand the relationship between identity and blood, as it helps foster a greater understanding of how national and racial identities are coproduced with racial science. Furthermore, the coproduction of national and racial identities is marked by strategic deployments of essentialism, the consequences of socio-historical processes on membership, and political engagements with how ethnic and racial identities are narrated within historical projects. Altogether, these work to produce the identities that I am referring to as White Cherokees. White Cherokees, as I discussed in my introduction, are tribal citizens who can access the legal rights that come with tribal membership but experience differing levels of social and cultural inclusion in Cherokee life and often appear phenotypically White. This is associated with Cherokees more so than other tribes due to the Cherokee Nation being the second-largest tribe in the country, but also having notoriously loose membership criteria, both now and when the Dawes Roll was first created. Part of understanding how the position of White Cherokee came to be means taking into account the racial science that helped racialize Indigenous people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the policies of removal and dispossession that accompanied 19<sup>th</sup>-century racial thinking. Putting these policies into dialogue

with ways of imagining kinship and identity gives greater insight into how identities that are located in the intersections of race, legality, and Indigeneity are constructed.

I use the term “coproduction” in accordance with anthropologist Kim Tallbear and her use of this term in her book *Native American DNA* (2013). Drawing on work in science and technology studies, the concept of coproduction aims to represent how social and scientific processes are mutually constitutive. Society and science work in tandem “to reinforce, shape, or disrupt the actions of the other...” (Tallbear 2013, 11). Because power is also held unevenly, the social and scientific are often coproduced in a manner that reflects already existing inequalities. Blood and genetics are used by non-Natives to produce a biological imagining of what Native and Cherokee identities are and how they are reproduced through biogenetic understandings of identity, oftentimes detaching Native identity from the social and making it one solely of biological inheritance. This becomes complicated when we look at those who refused to be counted on the rolls, the Freedmen, and other subject positions complicated by the simultaneous biologizing and legalizing of identity.

By “biologizing,” I refer to the processes by which a social category comes to be understood as rooted in biological processes. There is a long history of biologization of identity, but most notably in constructions of race that occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Racial science considered race a scientifically valid object for study and sought to produce it through various methods, namely measuring the phenotypic difference. This quantified difference was used to characterize racial groups as different on cognitive and civilizational levels (Abu El-Haj 2007). Although my focus is not on this part of biologized identity, it is important to keep in mind the violent history of biological thinking and the way it is understood when dealing with blood quantum. Likewise, by “legalizing” I do not mean considering an identity legally valid and

permissible, but rather that legalizing identity means that an identity has been shaped by interactions with the law, while the law is influenced in turn by the assertion of that identity and how it is socially understood. I explore this concept in more depth in chapter seven, with my discussion of Jan French's *Legalizing Identities* (2009). Together, biologizing and legalizing illuminate the intersection of numerous systems through which identity may be proclaimed, contested, validated, and authorized. These intersections are what produce the complex conditions under which various identities rooted in Indigeneity are articulated.

I turn my focus now on the production of a “cohesive” Cherokee identity, one that has been shaped since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of the first Cherokee Nation on ancestral homelands in the southeastern United States. The Cherokee Nation was in part state and nation-building to survive and resist the United States, producing a Cherokee nation in which citizens were understood as distinct from the United States and mobilized in resisting settler colonialism. In doing so, the Cherokee Nation also engaged with two of the predominant racial ideologies of the time, producing a racialized nation that was predicated on ethnic identity, cultural heritage, history, and language (Sturm 2002, 52). The first racial ideology that shaped how Cherokee identity existed early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was predicated on “race” as fundamental to the nation. Race, and racial metaphors of blood and kinship, could be used as the basis for nation-building (Sturm 2002, 53). The second ideology took shape later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and centered around the role of blood quantum in defining membership. The shift from understanding race through the nation to citizenship through blood quantum is in part due to the imposition of blood quantum by the federal government. However, since the initial imposition of blood quantum, it has become a culturally salient way of defining membership by both tribal members and non-tribal members. Racially, and as a question of national belonging, blood

quantum becomes required by both governments and citizens alike in order to make claims of membership. Blood being necessary for membership, though, is not novel but has instead changed shape as relationships between tribal governments and the United States changed.

As the Cherokee Nation developed, preexisting systems of kinship, governance, and labor changed in response to changing circumstances of Native people in relation to colonial structures. Largely due to Euro-American colonial and cultural influence, the matrilineal clan system went out of favor, and patrilineal descent became socially and legally reinforced, and in 1810 the practice of blood revenge was considered a crime against the nation, not the clan. This meant that revenge and recompense were arbitrated by authorities of the Cherokee Nation, not those with power in the clan system. Blood belonged to the nation and not the clan, cementing the role of blood in building a unified Cherokee Nation (Sturm 2002, Perdue 2005). This meant that crimes committed against one's clansmen were no longer addressed through clan relations and processes of revenge or recompense; instead, crimes would be addressed through the governmental structures of the nation. This further contributed to the clan systems degradation within Cherokee society, and national unity became the preeminent way through which Cherokees politically organized. As a nation-building exercise, changing the way blood revenge was carried out helped cement the Cherokee Nation as both a political power through which Cherokees were now organized and a means by which the clan system was further disempowered. The disempowering of the clan system and the emergence of the Cherokee Nation were necessary for the construction of a unified Cherokee nation in which citizens imagined themselves as all belonging to the same group. Despite divisions within Cherokee society, the Cherokee Nation sought to unify all Cherokees to protect Cherokee culture and land.

Economic class created divisions in Cherokee society and was understood through blood as a metaphor, based in part on ancestry. Rather than being predicated on being White or Cherokee, it was instead based on full vs. mixed blood, with the former being of a lower economic class position than those who were mixed blood. This understanding was further reinforced as plantation-based economies and the adoption of slavery spread through the Cherokees, which were favored by mixed-bloods and not nearly as much by full-bloods. This understanding comes from a full-blood point of view, as they often were more culturally conservative and refrained from participating in systems that were brought by settlers (Sturm 2002). The 1835 census showed that only 17 percent of Cherokees had any degree of White ancestry, yet the slave-owning wealthier class showed 78 percent claiming White ancestry. This is contrasted with the 1 percent of full-blooded Cherokees who owned slaves. This correlation, although significant, is also by no means determinant and did not prevent Cherokees from participating, or not, in systems of slavery, plantation-based economies, or subsistence farming (Sturm 2002, Perdue 2005). One's status as a full- or mixed-blood Cherokee did not necessarily indicate participation in plantation-based economies, as many Cherokees still engaged in local farming and trading practices amongst networks of Cherokees and White settlers.

The differences in mixed and full blood status become further clarified when we also look at how notions of "traditional" and "progressive" were thought of prior to removal. Being fullblood did not necessarily mean one spoke Cherokee, and the same can be said of a mixed-blood individual knowing English. Religious practices, language, and general participation in Euro-American society were not determined by being full or mixed blood. Cherokee identity was understood not so much on the role of phenotype and ancestry but instead was impacted by the role of blood in proximity to Cherokee and Euro-American practices and society. Blood was not



equivalent to race but instead reflected one's heritage and likelihood to participate in certain aspects of society but was by no means self-evident.

Indeed, kinship complicates the entire narrative of blood and race. The concepts of blood and ancestry contribute to a view of Cherokee identity as biologically bestowed but looking at kinship practices makes it less clear. Whereas blood and ancestry are something traced through relationships of birth and kinship via biological relationships, kinship extends beyond that to include those within one's immediate social relationships. Clan relationships function as a form of kinship relationality and are a means by which Cherokees are related to one another within networks of matrilineal relationships. Kinship itself is part of what contested where Cherokee identity is located. As Cherokee and White society continued to intermingle, intermarriage became increasingly common. Within the clan system, those born to a Cherokee woman and White man would, through the rules of matrilineality, be considered Cherokee and belong to the clan of their mother. However, as gender roles changed through relations and impositions with the dominant colonial society, Cherokee men occupied more prominent positions in Cherokee social life, and concerns about intermarriage grew within Cherokee society. As the Cherokee Nation became increasingly centralized and clan practices declined in the 1820s and 30s, ideas about kinship began to change. In part, because the new Cherokee Nation was largely led by men, but also because of the changing gender roles, the Cherokee Nation changed laws so that children of White women and Cherokee men would be considered Cherokees. These reforms came alongside reorganized inheritance patterns, the creation of a national police force, the inability of Cherokee women to vote, and the abolishment of polygamy (Perdue 2005). Blood, ancestry, and kinship were entangled with the clan system. As views of blood and ancestry changed to favor bilateral descent that came from both men and women, so did the ways in

which the clan system operated in Cherokee society. The clan system did not define citizenship as coming from a Cherokee male ancestor, but this changed as Cherokee society adopted ways of thinking about kinship from White society.

However, even considering these reforms, historical views of Cherokee kinship persisted for a period of time. Once an enslaved Black person, Molly was given to the Deer Clan by a White man, Sam Dent, who had beaten his Cherokee wife to death as a means of saving himself from the law of blood being invoked, which would have led to his being killed in revenge. Molly was adopted in the Deer Clan, given the Cherokee name *Chickaune*, and became Cherokee, and was no longer enslaved. She took the place of the woman who had died within the clan. Decades later, the White man's family sought to reclaim Molly and her sons and return them to a life of enslavement. Brought before the Cherokee supreme court in the 1830s, the court ruled that Molly and her sons had become Cherokee by virtue of adoption and were Cherokee regardless of racial ancestry (Perdue 2005). The ability of kinship to override racial ancestry complicates an understanding of Cherokeeness as located in blood and/or race. (Sturm 2002, Perdue 2005). In this case, kinship via clan adoption was prioritized over citizenship being bestowed by biological descent. Even though Molly was not biologically Cherokee, she was regarded as a member of the Deer Clan and thus was eligible for the rights bestowed upon a Cherokee citizen. This verdict is also compelling since many Cherokees were racially prejudiced, held people of African descent in slavery, and had even outlawed miscegenation with people of African descent (Perdue 2005). Kinship has been a powerful means by which people have located themselves in social relationships. In the case of Molly, we see how it even took priority over racial prejudice and moved towards valuing blood descent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After the Civil War ended with the defeat of the Confederacy, Reconstruction would complicate and have long-lasting consequences on U.S.-Indian relationships well after Reconstruction ended for other areas of the country. This included a statute that gave the President of the United States authority to suspend any appropriations (namely money and land, but also objects being sold or given to tribes) for any tribe if they are in a “state of hostility” with the government of the United States, as well as repeal treaties with those tribes. After the war ended, State policies regarding Native peoples changed but were based on two decisions made by the United States House Committee on Territories. With the 1887 Dawes Act, we see the federal government acting on the idea that Indian removal was not effective enough at dealing with Native peoples as a distinct group of people within the United States. The government then believed that new policy needed to be directed towards detribalizing and “assimilating” Native peoples. The act authorized the Dawes commission to “negotiate” with the Cherokees, Choctaws, Creeks, Seminole, and Chickasaws, established blood quantum, allotment era land policy, imposed United States citizenship, and overall would have impacts in the ways membership and legal status is conceptualized.

The goal of detribalizing was to disconnect Indigenous people from their Indigeneity and assimilate them into the greater body of dominant society. Included in this was the distribution of property collectively held by the five tribes to individual members of each tribe. Assimilation in this context refers to the policies used by the United States at varying levels to incorporate Indigenous peoples into the national body politic. These policies were usually aimed at removing Indigenous people from their cultural practices, language, and communities. Although the Dawes Act, Dawes commission, and allotment are hallmarks of these policies, Indian boarding schools and the Indian Relocation Act of 1956 were fundamental to incorporating Indigenous people into

the United States culturally and linguistically. The act came during a period of “termination and relocation,” which was billed as allowing Native people to benefit American society as well as themselves by becoming “modern citizens” (Fixico 2014, 193). The Dawes Act and Commission was merely one of the first in a long series of legislative and policy choices aimed at incorporating, modernizing, and terminating Indigenous people’s existence as a distinct population within the borders of the United States.

Although the 1887 Dawes Act established an allotment land policy, outlawed Native cultural and religious practices, forced U.S. citizenship, and actively promoted Christianity and Euro-American values through Indian boarding schools. The Dawes Act established a commission that would come to define racial purity through a degree of Indian blood, understood as blood quantum, the smallest of which on the Cherokee Dawes Roll was 1/256, which is eight generations from a full-blood Cherokee ancestor. Prior to the Dawes Act, Cherokee blood thinking was not based on a quantified idea of blood through descent, but rather mixed and full-blood status located in ancestry and cultural, social, and class practices and positions. However, commissioners designated enrollment status based on appearance as well as an individual’s proximity to and participation in Euro-American society, giving full-blood status to those who were “poorly assimilated” and mixed-blood status to those who resembled [W]hites (Grande 2004). Those who did not meet either status were effectively “detrribalized” and not enrolled, regardless of blood quantum or kinship ties. In contrast to the *social* qualities of the Cherokee concept of blood, the Dawes Commission institutionalized blood differences through a *biological* conception of blood quantum. Blood left the realm of the social and became a biological index of identity, which is required to claim the legal rights of being Native. Accompanied by other ways of changing or challenging Native identity formation, the federal government sought to

dispossess Native people of their cultural lifeways to incorporate them into the American nation, not just their land. The establishment of blood quantum is clearly related to not only federal policy (and policing) of Native identity from a legal framework but also helped the federal government enact ways of forcibly assimilating Native peoples. This effectively created “pure” Native people, and all others had their Nativeness quantified via blood quantum. Although one could fully participate in Cherokee society and represent an ideal way of being Cherokee, they could be  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$ , or another quantum of blood, and thus regarded as less Cherokee by the commission. Racial science sought to create typologies of humans and human societies through the creation of different human races, often based on phenotypic differences. This was then understood as biological evidence for the differences between peoples and their societies. Because it is interested in codifying differences in the biological, racial science was useful in justifying the creation of blood quantum, as it collapsed metaphor and substance and became the essence of Native identity.

Based on 19<sup>th</sup>-century racial science, blood quantum was concerned with the purity of race. Rather than being defined as exclusive, it was inclusive; the amount of blood one had reflected proximity to tribal practices, culture, and more, instead of being exclusionary as a means of alienating an individual from White society by possessing any amount of blood, as the rule of hypodescent operated for African Americans. Blood quantum effectively kept track of how many Native people still belonged to tribes and how close they were to being incorporated into White society. In calling blood semiotic material, I draw on Donna Haraway, who defines semiotic material as “the *simultaneity* of both the facts and explanatory theoretical power and also the relentlessly tropic, historically contingent, and practical materiality of science” (Haraway 2004, 204). Blood operates in this manner because it comes both from a specific

genealogy of thought in which one's status as mixed- or full-blood reflect their social position, but also because blood can operate as a biological material, valid in racial thought, in order to explain and position an individual's racial status. It locates an individual in a series of biological relationships of descent that are understood as having different consequences on one's relationship to Cherokee identity based on racial science's notions of purity and a Cherokee notion of proximity and practices. Blood, as a material defined by racial science, brought concerns about purity, descent, and heritage into a public way of "knowing" race through biology. Blood became a matter of public concern and a means by which Natives could be brought closer to White Euro-American society. Furthermore, Haraway characterizes the semiotic material of science as revisable from both its practitioners and those it is practiced on; "what counts "semiotically" as inside and outside is the result of ongoing work *inflected by* and *constitutive of* power of all sorts" (Haraway 2004, 204). This is to say that the meanings of blood are negotiable by both racial scientists and Native peoples, as they are both directly entangled with the social and biological meanings of blood. Thinking of blood as a semiotic material allows us to fully appreciate the ways in which blood as material comes to signify a wide range of beliefs that are scientifically approved, be it through research that focuses on the ways in which blood works biologically or the ways it was used by racial science to consolidate identity categories. Blood as a metaphor for membership and kinship became something co-constituted as scientific understandings of blood and blood quantum were developed and deployed as tribal communities came to their own understandings of quantifiable descent and what that meant for tribal membership.

Indeed, while the Dawes Act intended to detribalize Native people, as Tallbear explains, "what has happened in effect is a *rearticulated* tribalization of Native Americans in blood

fractions and through bloodlines” (Tallbear 2013, 47). In becoming a quantified measure of tribal identity, blood quantum gives Native people another means by which they can articulate their belonging to a tribe. Biological kinship is something measured, and one can pinpoint the ancestor(s) whose blood quantum locates them in a series of historical relationships to legal policy, cultural practices, kin, language speaking, and so forth. Instead of measuring an individual’s proximity to dominant society, it instead reflects resilience in being Native. Blood was understood through the relationships that produced one’s blood quantum. The ability to identify through descent (although not necessarily patrilineally) from one’s ancestors is what the implementation of blood quantum strengthened, and it allowed for tribal membership to be articulated in a way that is distinct from other racialized identities in the United States. To possess tribal membership, one must not only descend from an ancestor who belonged to that group historically but must also *prove* descent through a rigorous process that involves documenting one’s relationship to them, as well as their presence on a particular roll, as determined by the tribe one hopes to join. For example, one would have to prove a blood relationship to somebody on the 1906 Dawes Roll in order to join the Cherokee Nation, whereas one must prove descent from somebody on the 1924 Baker Roll for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and *also* possess a minimum of 1/16 blood quantum.

In the present, blood quantum provokes anxieties in many culturally conservative Cherokees around the Whitening of tribes, as is seen clearly in the Cherokee Nation. Because the Cherokee Nation does not have a minimum blood quantum standard, anybody who can prove a direct line of descent to somebody on the Cherokee Dawes Roll can apply for Cherokee Nation citizenship. However, some on the rolls have as low as 1/256<sup>th</sup> degree of Cherokee blood, and just three generations of having children with a non-Cherokee later, descendants would have

1/2,048 degree of Cherokee ancestry (Sturm 2002, 89). Tribal enrollment has progressively increased over the past 60 years, trending toward a greater population of “White Cherokees.” Including all people with Cherokee ancestry, regardless of blood quantum, is controversial. In part, this is due to the widely held belief that one’s Cherokee blood quantum truly reflects proximity to Cherokee social and cultural life. Once again, blood is a shorthand for understanding proximity, though now it has been quantified in a manner that makes it possible to quantify whether somebody is close enough to be “truly” Cherokee.

This is a question that is still being asked, without definitive answers, but the terms of its debate are written in part by the political history of Cherokee Nation leadership. In responding to a question on the institution of a minimum blood quantum, one Cherokee tribal elder replied to Sturm, saying, “I’m hesitant to say that, yes, there is. If they have a tiny amount [of blood], then they really don’t have a heritage. They know very little. I’m talking about 1/100 or whatever... They wouldn’t know their family or ancestry, and they’d know little about their culture or language” (Sturm 2002, 98). Blood quantum is be understood by many Cherokees as reflecting not only a degree of separation from a full-blooded Cherokee ancestor but also the cultural knowledge of being Cherokee as well, a view that Sturm indicates is commonplace among Cherokees embedded in Cherokee Nation social and cultural life with culturally conservative views. This understanding does not come from a belief in blood and blood quantum alone; after its reinstatement in 1948 and until 1985, the Cherokee Nation was being run by Cherokee tribal members who were initially appointed by the federal government and possessed a small fraction of Cherokee blood. During that period, Principal Chief Keller (1949-1975) and Principal Chief Swimmer (1979-1985) and their administrations were generally thought of by citizens as White men running the Cherokee Nation (Sturm 2002). This reflects a continuity from the Treaty Party



and during the Civil War, where Cherokees with small amounts of Cherokee blood, oriented towards White society, were in leadership positions of the Cherokee Nation. This meant that Cherokees associated a lower blood quantum with proximity to and participation in White society in a way that was not reflective of many Cherokee's realities as racially Native people, who participated in Cherokee social and cultural life.

However, one's degree of separation ancestrally does not necessarily mean one has been removed from cultural centers of Cherokeeness, where people become Cherokee socially and culturally. Blood quantum alone does not define Cherokee identity but rather occupies a semiotic-material space in which it is understood as being the location of a Cherokee essence. These meanings often coalesce around what blood quantum does for preserving Cherokeeness across generations and what must be done to protect and advocate for Cherokee cultural citizenship. The US census reveals a trend of increasing numbers of US citizens identifying themselves as Cherokee; since 1970, the Cherokee Nation has grown from 40,000 members to almost 400,000, with the majority of new enrollments being those considered White Cherokees, as indicated by the ever-smaller average blood quantum. White Cherokees come to be understood as members who lack the stakes in Cherokee identity that those who are embedded in Cherokee social and cultural life have. As Cherokees have incorporated into the dominant White society, they occupied the margins of Cherokee society, and at times were not even thought of as Cherokee at all, despite legal membership. Concerns around Whitening also consider the ways in which the Whiteness of White Cherokees threatens the cultural integrity of difference that the Cherokee Nation occupies, which is something that validates the presence of a sovereign nation within the borders of the United States. Therefore, concerns about White Cherokees are not just about cultural membership criteria but also about how sovereignty can be maintained when so

many members are only legally recognized as members and are not necessarily invested in the cultural and legal sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation.

As concerns over descent, Whitening, and cultural citizenship unfold, they must also be put into dialogue with the benefits of having so many enrolled Cherokees, even if the majority are understood as White due to appearing White, passing as White, or possessing a low blood quantum. Chief among these benefits is the greater amount of federal money that comes with more tribal members. A larger amount of money means that the benefits for all tribal members increase, including the improvement of tribal services. For Cherokees, this has meant that there were more funds to preserve and promote Cherokee culture. The decision to preserve Cherokee cultural patrimony is directly related to allowing the enrollment of White Cherokees; “If the Nation cannot remain biologically and racially Cherokee, then it is even more essential that it remain culturally Cherokee” (Sturm 2002). The presence of White Cherokees is necessary to preserve the cultural Cherokeeeness from which they are believed to be detached. Ironically, because there are so many White Cherokees, Cherokeeeness may be better preserved via efforts directed at Cherokee language promotion, tribal health provisions, and other efforts at cultural preservation and promotion, regardless of whether White Cherokees participate in these endeavors.

Although the racial science behind the idea of blood quantum has fallen out of favor scientifically, it still occupies a powerful position in Native spaces. Likewise, the dramatic developments in the field of genetics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century provided new avenues for understanding biogenetic inheritance along racial lines. Blood quantum finds its successor in the idea of percent genetic inheritance, allowing new ways of imagining and forging connections to Nativeness to emerge. DNA tests are now being used to do what blood quantum once did, which is locate

ancestry in the realm of biology; however, their applications have been much more symbolic than scientific. Although these connections are largely symbolic in nature, they nonetheless are powerful as everyday people try to connect themselves to Nativeness in a manner that they believe is biologically credible, even though the concept of biological race does not hold up scientifically (Tallbear 2013).

Tallbear traces the emergence of the idea of Native DNA as a socially meaningful way of proving ancestry in the social field in which it is deployed, that is, as a new way of thinking about kinship and biogenetic inheritance, picking up where blood and blood quantum left off. But also as a way of imagining the workings of molecular anthropology. Molecular anthropology has become understood by the general public as a field that is capable of creating bonds between social categories and one's biological inheritance and revealing that "truth" to an individual through DNA testing. Part of the issue lies in how genetic information is believed to work by the public; the fallacy of DNA to RNA to protein production as a linear causality has produced a sense of determinism in how people operate and historically operated. Genetic material (deoxyribonucleic acid, DNA) is transported as a single strand of messenger ribonucleic acid (compared to the two strands of DNA), RNA, to mitochondria, which then read the genetic material that was transported so that it can produce proteins. The general public imagines genomes to be 1:1 relationship in which there is a traceable lineage of genetic sequences that produce the same thing in each body. Furthermore, this production is inherited from one's parents. Although an admixture of parental genetic material, it is still believed that sections of who one is can be traced to one's biological ancestors. Like blood, the logic of linear causality in popular notions of genetics, that is, uninterrupted production in which one source can only cause one effect, seeks to operationalize biology as determining which identity positions one can

take. Our genotype is produced through the admixing of our parent's genetic material, and theirs from their parents, and so on. However, if we view this as unidirectional influence, we prevent ourselves from considering the role of environments (at both the cellular and multicellular level) that influence the activation of certain genes, as well as mutations and their effects (Tallbear 2013, 39). This logic lends itself to thinking of "pure" Native ancestors to whom we can trace our biological lineage and that their genetic information was reproduced unchanged over time. In considering the environmental and mutational effects, it becomes much harder to imagine any kind of pure genetic sequence onto which an identity may be projected.

Unlike blood thinking, genetic thinking has to do with genetic markers that are identifiable in an individual's genome that have been associated with certain racialized groups, such as Native people. However, it is clear that this technology is unable to isolate any kind of marker that indicates a tribal ancestor, only the possibility of Native ancestry. This is different from blood, which carries with it tribal and racial meanings. Conflating the two also projects genetic thinking into the past, where it was not known nor deployed in understanding ancestry and membership. If we project this kind of thinking into the past, it validates contemporary efforts at making genetic information valid for membership and further complicates debates about membership criteria in ways that may undermine sovereignty. Furthermore, blood has some basis in the way Native people imagine themselves and their kin. As Tallbear says, "[w]hen I cite those fractions, I think of my grandparents and great-grandparents. I remember their names and their parents' and grandparents' names. I remember how through both dispossession and restricted choices, they came to be on the particular reservations now denoted in my blood quantum fractions" (Tallbear 2013, 64).

Like Tallbear, I associate my blood quantum with my grandfather, his stories and how he locates being Cherokee in his blood, in his parents' blood, as well as in the specific instances when he connects what he does and how he is to the way he imagines being Cherokee should be. He does not locate his Cherokeeness in a gene or in his belonging to a certain population possessing a kind of haplotype. Blood talk is powerful for representing one's relationship with kin and locating oneself within narratives of removal, dispossession, and genocide. Locating oneself in these networks, social processes, and kin helps explain the felt attachments to identity, yet also creates anxieties around who is claiming these identities, something I explore in more depth later when I discuss Sturm's work on those she calls "race-shifters," and Naomi Leite's insights working with those claiming an "urban Marrano" identity in Portugal.

Nevertheless, genetic testing is still an important way that people vocalize and understand their connections to Native and tribal identities. Part of identifying "Native DNA" is isolating sections of the genome and attributing them to a particular racialized population of people. DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) is a molecule that is made up of two polynucleotide chains that form a double helix. This double helix carries in it the genetic instructions for the growth, development, functioning, and reproduction of all known organisms and some viruses. Each strand of the double helix is composed of a series of nucleotides that are made from deoxyribose (a sugar), a phosphate group, and a nucleobase of cytosine, guanine, adenine, or thymine. What genetic testing does is seek to match series of nucleotides to series that are more prevalent among certain populations. There are not unique markers of certain populations, but rather ancestry markers of interests occur in differing frequencies in different populations (Tallbear 2013, 82). If we take genetic markers to be unique to a population, we grossly oversimplify the relationship between genetics and human existence. This gets further complicated by the belief that as data samples

grow, the ability to pinpoint genetic markers of tribes may be possible. What this does is oversimplify not only human-genome relationships but also the socio-historical processes by which tribes have come to set their own membership criteria, which has changed over time. The presence of blood quantum minima, originally imposed through colonial order but nonetheless altered by tribes to their definition of membership, as well as the incorporation of spouses or adopted children into the citizenry of a tribe, reflect that a tribe is, although strongly associated with a biological link to a tribal member, may not be necessary for membership. Furthermore, many Native people have ancestry in multiple tribes, and the presumption that one can be isolated as belonging purely to one tribe is not how tribal membership has worked historically nor in the present. Genetic work that presumes the existence of Native DNA and isolates it identifies sections of genetic coding as belonging predominantly to a certain group. Likewise, if one were to isolate a section of genetic coding as belonging to a tribe, this would collapse legal, social, and biological notions of membership, each with complex social and legal histories that are also full of contradictions, into one neat sequence of guanine, adenine, cytosine, and thymine.

The availability of this kind of ancestry “testing,” so to speak, has opened the possibility of gaining legal enrollment in a tribe through genetic testing, although, in most tribes, genetic evidence of Native ancestry is not considered evidence for claims (Tallbear 2013). Although Tallbear critiques the practices of genetic scientists and the economic market for genetic testing, she also addresses how Haraway’s concept of “gene fetishism” is useful for understanding what Native DNA allows in identity claims. Derived from Marx’s commodity fetishism, in which objects become commodities through a process of detaching them from the social networks that produce them, gene fetishism similarly detaches genetic material from the social conditions that produced it (Haraway 1997). In the detachment from the social, commodities take on a mystical,

almost autonomous quality that removes the consumer from the production of the commodity, and in turn, the laborer from their fruits (Marx 1978). Haraway's gene fetishism critiques the objectification of the gene, detaching it from the human and nonhuman actors who contributed to it and imbuing it with a particular set of meanings – detached from those that produced it (Haraway 1997). What gene fetishism does is effectively allow for identity to be displaced from social relations and instead located in biological reality, one that is constructed and presented by the scientific technologies that purport to identify those genes, and then racializes them as either predominantly, or uniquely, Native (Tallbear 2013, 71).

Ultimately though, what blood and genetics exemplify is the fluidity and resilience of definitions of ethnic and racial identities. The development of “blood politics,” from full and mixed blood to quantifiable blood quantum and their effects on Cherokee nation politics (Sturm 2002), to the developments in genetic science that oversimplify human-genome relations and tribal membership standards, exemplify the interpretative space in determining one's identity. The idea of being Cherokee and being Native have come to rest in the interpretative space that exists in the ambiguities of essentialism and physiological characteristics (Stoler 2016). Stoler's conceptualization of the relationship between essentialism and physiological characteristics is embedded in a robust analysis of racism and how it is enacted, but it also is helpful in thinking about how Native identity functions. Blood comes to function in the way of an essence, as a “strategic inclusion of different attributes, of a changing constellation of features and a changing weighting of them” (Stoler 2016, 264). Essentialism can be used in a way to define an identity in contesting the colonial imposition of other identity constitutions; this is to say that essentialism can be used as a tool against colonial identity conceptualizations. Cherokee blood, although defined initially by Cherokees as full and mixed for the purposes of locating one within networks

of ancestry and society, was colonized by the imposition of blood quantum. Yet, the belief in blood as something that can determine one's ability to claim Cherokeeness also reflects an essentialist view of Cherokee identity – one that is selectively deployed in discussing where Cherokee identity is located. Simply put, the idea of blood as membership is a kind of strategic essentialism (Conklin 1997) that locates Indigeneity in a rejection of the colonial model of blood as determining identity. Knowing oneself and being known as pertaining to a certain identity may, in fact, require a strategic essentializing of cultural traits to fit in with hegemonic ideas surrounding membership (Conklin 1997, Sturm 2002). Strategic essentialism differs from essentialism in that it is a politically motivated action to benefit those who are being essentialized. Although Conklin's definition of strategic essentialism comes from the Brazilian context, in which Indigenous groups are pressured to maintain outsiders' understandings of cultural "authenticity" in order to attain rights, it may end up forcing them to act "inauthentically" in the process of producing the externally defined authenticity (Conklin 1997).

However, the selective deployment of blood as required is telling when considering the experiences of the Freedmen. The Freedmen are those of African descent who were enslaved by Cherokees and were freed upon the ending of slavery in the United States, as many Cherokees fought with the Confederacy and did not release those they had enslaved prior to the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1865. Freedmen and their descendants were listed as Cherokees on the Dawes Roll of 1906 under a section dedicated to the Freedmen. Controversy emerged in the 1980s when the Cherokee Nation changed citizenship rules to require the presence of an ancestor that was listed on the "Cherokee by Blood" section of the Rolls, thus stripping the Freedmen of their citizenship and right to vote if they did not meet this new requirement. In 2006, the Cherokee Supreme Court ruled this exclusion unconstitutional but was overturned in a special



election that passed in 2007. In 2011, a Cherokee Nation District Court voided the 2007 amendment but was overturned by the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court later that same year.

It was not until the exclusions of Freedmen impacted a run-off election for Principal Chief that the federal government stepped in. The Department of Housing and Urban Development froze \$33 million in funding, and the assistant secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs wrote a letter objecting to the ruling. The federal government, Freedmen descendants, and Cherokee Nation reached an agreement that allowed Freedmen to vote in the special election. However, this did not end the dispute surrounding tribal membership. Freedmen brought forth cases in federal courts in attempts to regain their treaty rights and recognition as citizens of the Cherokee Nation. In 2017, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ruled in favor of the Freedmen and the Department of the Interior, which granted Freedmen full rights to citizenship. This was accepted by the Cherokee Nation, which amended the constitution and other legal doctrines to remove the words “by blood” in early 2021 (Kelly 2021).

The idea of “blood” was deployed in a manner that restricted Cherokee identity to a biogenetic construction. This restricted Cherokee membership to those who could prove Cherokee identity through documentation on the Dawes Rolls, specifically those who had an ancestor that was Cherokee by blood. This restriction rejects any kind of social identity as a basis for Indigeneity but also attempts to make biological conceptions of racial inheritance part of Cherokee identity – something it was not historically. Colonialism’s impositions on identity in the past and present work to create instability in identity metaphors and categories. Identity categories are unstable because the past and present are in tension with one another. The strategic deployment of a blood-based identity, in this case, was done as an exclusionary act aimed at rejecting certain ways of being Cherokee along racial lines. The belief that Freedmen were not

Cherokee by blood, and thus not Cherokee, is not in line with historical parameters of kinship and belonging. Instead, it illustrates the power of essentialisms to be mobilized for both belonging and racism by the same people. The Freedmen's relationship with Cherokee/Native identity is itself a reflection of the value of blood in determining membership, but also what happens when blood is not necessarily guaranteed nor enough, but they have a right to membership due to historical incorporation and, in a sense, a need for tribal accountability about the less desirable parts of Cherokee history: the fact of the practice of slavery by some Cherokees.

Unlike the Freedmen, there are those who claim Cherokee identity and seek political and legal recognition outside of the federally recognized tribes. These Cherokee-identifying people come together and seek recognition as Cherokees through governmental means, often resulting in the creation of state-recognized tribes rather than incorporation into a federally recognized tribe. Oftentimes, these state-level tribes consist of people who do not meet standards for enrollment in federal tribes yet nonetheless identify with a tribe. Many times, they are the only ones in their family who claim this identity, and they seek out those with narratives of ancestors and reclamation that are similar to their own (Sturm 2010). This is not a phenomenon unique to the Cherokees, although it is much more prevalent amongst Cherokees than other tribes. This is largely because Cherokees are understood as more phenotypically and culturally White in popular discourse, due in part to historical exogamy, a historical willingness to adopt "[W]hite standards of civilization," and looser tribal membership requirements than other tribes (Sturm 2010). Rather, many tribes have people who claim a tribal identity despite not being socially recognized nor enrolled. This creates tensions within tribes as the factors for membership are scrutinized by tribal members. What comes with the social professing of an identity that is based

in Indigeneity? Furthermore, it also begs the question of what identity reclamation is, what it does, by which processes does it unfold, and how it is understood and legitimated by different stakeholders.

## 6. ***“You Are, Because I Am”***

*As he did every time I visited, Papa asked me what I wanted to do for the day, “what do you want to get into today?” In my typical fashion, I responded by trying to make myself useful, “I don’t know, what do you have that needs done?”*

*“Well, we can rake those limbs over there. The cows are all down there and I would hate for the calves to get hurt walking on a sharp one.”*

*“Alright, let’s do that then.”*

*We began by getting the little green tractor. I was driving it, and Papa drove the ranger. I was not as anxious this time, I knew how to drive a tractor to a place without complications, or so I hoped. Once we got to the little area where all the limbs are, Papa looked at me, “Now you hop down from there and I’ll show you how I want it done.” I got down and he hopped on to the tractor. He shifted it from neutral into high, lowered the rake in the back, and then drove around in a circle. Simple enough, I thought. After his run around and dropping it off in an empty patch of dirt, he had me hop back on to it, and do a few runs. Left, left, and another left.*

*“You have to be sure to pick up some of the dead grass and stuff too, otherwise the limbs’ll just fall right through the rake.” Papa’s voice rang in my head. I habitually*

*checked behind me to see if I was doing it properly, looking to Papa as well to see if he was watching me. He was walking around picking up some of the bigger limbs that were lying around that were out of the way for the tractor. After I went around twice, dumping the piles right next to Papa's, he had me get off and showed me how to make it into one larger pile, rather than a long line of limbs and dead grass.*

*"Okay, now go around another time or two, and make sure you get all that over there," he said, referencing the limbs that were right next to the trunk of the large tree. I picked those up, and as I began the U-turn to head back to the pile, the tractor stopped. It wouldn't move. Papa didn't notice. I started troubleshooting, hoping to fix the issue before Papa noticed it even existed. Last thing I needed was him thinking that I couldn't operate a tractor, let alone this little one. I could hear his voice already, "how am I supposed to teach you to operate the big tractor if this little one is already tricky for ya?" If I was not capable of doing something simple, why would he let me work with an even bigger and more complex piece of equipment? I raise the rake. Back up a bit. Try again. Fail. Adjust my angle, turn a bit to the right. Give it a little gas. Fail. Right as I gave up, Papa noticed. The tractor didn't want to move. He came over and directed me on how to get it in to four-wheel drive, which he insisted would fix the issue. Fail.*

*"Well. Let me take a look back here."*

*"You see anything?"*

*I wondered if I should get off the tractor, but Papa would probably tell me to just get back on, he could take care of it.*

*"Alright try it now"*

*I gave the tractor some gas, and it moved a bit. Papa moved around some more branches and grabbed a big one I had apparently picked up somewhere along the way and resituated it in the rake. He raised his hand, signaling me to give it some gas. Success. The tractor kept moving. The rest of the limb raking continued as expected. Pick up limbs. Leave them at the pile. Neaten up the pile. Repeat. After about 20 minutes of this, using the same signals as earlier, Papa motioned for me to stop.*

*“Alright I think that’s good. Let’s head back up to the barn.”*

*I drove the tractor up to the barn, careful to not go over hills that were too high or too steep. I remember as a kid being told to be careful of that, as whatever vehicle we were in could flip if it was too steep and uneven. It certainly felt like the tractor could, but it did not.*

*Papa hummed quietly, thinking about what we should do next. “Let’s go clean out the chicken coop and then be done for the day. I’ve never cleaned it before, but I’ve got an idea about how to.” Papa then loaded a shovel, hoe, and rake into the ranger. Together, we put the wheelbarrow onto the front end of the tractor, and then drove around the front yard to get to the gate for the chicken coop that would fit both the tractor and the ranger. We unloaded everything and then headed for the coop. Papa handed me the rake and took the hoe for himself. He used it to get the chicken manure off the top of the nesting box, while I took out all of the other stuff in the coop, except for the boxes. There was one on each side. Once he finished the right one, he switched to the left, and I started raking the right side. Much of this went on silently, with us working on our respective tasks. After raking, I shoveled everything into the wheelbarrow, and then*

*switched to do the other side while Papa took a brief break. After everything had been shoveled out, we went to grab hay.*

*“You think one is enough? Or will they need two?” I asked.*

*“I think two will be good, give the hens lots of cushion for their eggs.”*

*Back with the two squares of hay, we set it out in the nesting boxes. Papa began coughing at one point, blaming it on the small pieces of chicken manure that were getting in his lungs. I laughed a bit and offered to finish up for him. He didn't respond.*

*“All right, that should be good.” The coop had been completely redone on the inside, that is if you consider redone to be fresh hay in the nesting box and an absence of chicken manure.*

*Papa looked at me seriously as we stepped out of the coop.*

*“Evan, you should be honored.”*

*“Oh?”*

*“You're my first grandchild to ever clean a chicken coop with me.” He laughed and laughed over this for the next 5 minutes, and I laughed with him.*

*His health had been deteriorating over the past few years, but never to the point where he couldn't get around. I think having me around has made it easier for him to do some work, and at times I'm unsure. There are some things he doesn't let me do. Not because I can't do it, or it's that much easier for him, but I think because it lets him know he can still do things.*

*“Let’s go get this stuff put up and be done for the day, you’re working me to the bone, Evan!” He laughs, and I laugh with him lightly, and we get started on getting everything put up.*

As I worked with Papa, I felt myself reconnecting not only with my grandfather as a person but also reconnected with how pivotal being Cherokee was to understand my experiences. I had not denied being Cherokee, but I had weighed it differently over the previous years. I was focused more on knowing myself in other ways and did not seek to question that which I already knew about myself. I took my Cherokeeness for granted. Yet seeing him, working with him, eating with him, and just being with him served as reminders of my own Cherokeeness, something he saw in me and did not question.

In her work with “urban Marranos” in Portugal, Naomi Leite chronicles the relationship between the Marranos and Jews from around the world. The urban Marranos are descendants of Sephardic Jews who were forcibly converted and who went into hiding when the Portuguese Inquisition targeted people who were suspected of practicing Judaism in secrecy. In the present, urban Marranos were often not welcome into the local Sephardic community and have instead formed their own community based on their experiences of being descendants of Marranos, their ancestors who went into hiding. In finding belonging in the present, individual relationships often served as the basis for feelings of affection, love, and nurturance, which led to experiences of belonging. Having been rejected by local Orthodox Jews because neither their distant ancestry nor their desire to be Jewish make them Jews in Jewish law, their relationships with other Jews, those who validated their experiences and desires, but also validated their individual experiences

and sought relationships on an individual level, not just communal, were made much more important (Leite 2017).

One such instance in which these actions fostered deep feelings of affection and love was when given a chance to officially be recognized as Jews; many could not afford the enrollment fee for classes and services for teachers that would teach them how to properly be Jewish. Many of the urban Marranos found a closer relationship with Ashkenazi Jews and not Sephardic Jews like their ancestors were. This eventually resulted in urban Marranos choosing to create an Ashkenazi congregation, not Sephardic, which was met with controversy by tourists and outreach workers. Yet, they did not arrive at this decision randomly. When they began to create their own congregation, the teachers who taught them were Ashkenazi, which was in part due to the willingness of those Ashkenazi who accepted them. To be taught, though, one had to pay the enrollment fee. This was a problem for many, as they could not afford the cost of the enrollment. When they revealed this mixed news to an American friend, the hope of being taught and moving forward in becoming officially Jews, they were met with an offer of funding. Their friend, a New York Ashkenazi Jew who had formed close relationships with the urban Marranos, did not hesitate to offer assistance, as he understood the distance from Jewish identity that they felt as descendants of Portuguese Jews and his as growing up in a secular house. Their desire to connect was also his, and in offering to pay for their enrollment, he saw it as a way of supporting those he had come to see as family. This sentiment was shared by urban Marranos as well, as one member, Catarina, posted online: “We thank our American cousins for that [gift]. We call each other that, cousins, and we ARE family... We are theirs, they are ours, we ARE one in that which matters” (Leite 2017, 239). Their expression of kinship is not something based on this one instance but instead is reflective of an affirmation of a kin relationship that has been built over



time. This gift was not the first, but it was meaningful due to the context in which it was offered. Love, family, gift, and closeness are ways of expressing the deeper emotional relationships that they had with their Ashkenazi family, it was a way of expressing their bond and validated their reason for pursuing an Ashkenazi congregation, as this was just one more instance in which their Ashkenazi family had welcomed and supported them (Leite 2017).

Their feelings of support are part of their understanding of this kind of affection as kin, a form of kinship that altered how they saw themselves relating to the Jewish world of the present. Even though their ancestors were Sephardic, they felt that they belonged with the Ashkenazi Jews who had continually accepted their claims to Jewish identity. After years of meeting with tourists, forming long-lasting relationships with numerous Ashkenazi Jews who valued and validated their identification with Judaism and Jewish identity, they found experiences of belonging in those relationships and decided to become an Ashkenazi congregation as another way of expressing that belonging. Belonging for them was felt in the interpersonal relationships with other Jewish people, a particular type of Jewish people, and that made all the difference in how they articulated their Jewish identity.

My experiences with Papa operate in a similar manner. I am the descendant of Cherokees who, over decades of federal and state policies that removed and disallowed Native people, became distant from epicenters of cultural Cherokeeeness. I find a sense of belonging in my interactions with Papa. Papa teaching me how to drive the tractor and rake limbs is not just about me learning how to do that; it is about the shared experience, the experience of nurturing and being nurtured. That experience is part of what connects us. In cleaning the chicken coop, we both grapple with the relative abilities of the other, trying to work with the other in a way that lets us still enjoy the feeling of being together with another to whom we are close.

The title of this chapter is derived from a memory I have of Papa. I am not sure when it happened or the exact circumstances under which he said it, but years ago, when I was talking with Papa, I had asked him how he saw me as Cherokee. It was one of the bolder questions I have asked him, and I feared I had hurt his feelings in asking as if it reflected a desire to not be Cherokee. Instead, I was met with certainty in Papa as he looked at me and told me, “You are because I am.” When I work with Papa, when I look into his eyes as he insists on doing things his way, I understand what he meant by that. I am his grandchild, though it is not just about my blood relationship, but because in sharing meals, in teaching me how to drive a tractor, he affirms our bond and in it the quality of Cherokeeness that is imbued in it. By teaching me how to do what he does, he also affirms my being Cherokee. I am Cherokee because he is Cherokee.

Yet, such a simplification is not sufficient. Even in Papa’s affirmation, there is ambiguity in the perceptions of others. We do not exist in a space occupied only by family memories and stories. Rather, there is a relationship between self and other, of interior and exterior, that provokes my asking Papa how he knew me as Cherokee comes from this place of interiority. My subjectivity is, at all times, constructed by my interior and exterior.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois defines “double consciousness” as a state in which “the Negro is... born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (DuBois 1903, 7). There is a sensation of twoness, of being both, but one never fully allowing the other to be realized. There is a clear power differential between them though, that puts White Americans above the rest.

In thinking about double consciousness and White Cherokees, mixedness complicates the matter even further. Beyond the physical appearance of Whiteness and a particular blood

quantum, there are still the cultural markers of membership. Yet, none of these are solidified in criteria universally accepted, and White Cherokees maintain a position as both White and Cherokee. In my experience, I would argue that double consciousness is not present in the way that DuBois defines it but is nonetheless helpful in thinking about how standards of membership and aspirations are related to racial/ethnic positions. It is not that I have White society telling me I am Cherokee and Cherokee society telling me I am not, but I am receiving questions of membership on both sides. My membership may be secured in some ways, and in others, it is not. Rather than existing as Cherokee and White, two distinct categories that are supposedly irreconcilable, I exist as a unified White Cherokee. This means I am located between the two, juggling expectations of membership to both.

This seems paradoxical at first, especially if Indigeneity is taken to be inherently non-White. Yet, in a racial system that has been consistently marred by racial science's insistence of Whitening and detribalizing Indigenous people so that they could be incorporated into the White body politic, the insistence of being both White and Indigenous has always been a possibility and reality. Yet, this goes beyond racial science. It involves the social and cultural practices and beliefs that we hold so that we are differentiated from those around us. But it could never be simplified to one or the other. It is both, always. Subjectivity means locating identities within and outside of a person in the interplay of interior and exterior. Where one struggles, and the other seems overdetermined, the opposite may, in fact, be true. Only in considering both do we get a more complete understanding of the impacts of settler colonialism on identity.

## ***7. Legalized Identity: Racial and Tribal Identity***

In Sturm's ethnography *Becoming Indian*, she offers an interpretation of the identity processes engaged in by people she calls "race-shifters." Although she defines race-shifters as those who change their racial self-identification on the U.S. census from non-Indian to Indian (Sturm 2010, 5), she also uses the term synonymously with "wannabe," a term that Native people understand broadly as White people who appropriate a Native (or specific tribal) identity and misrepresent both people and culture. For Sturm, race-shifters are not just changing their identification on the census, but they are actively claiming Native and tribal identities, despite not being enrolled or recognized members of a tribe. Instead of using the term "race-shifter" following Sturm, I will instead refer to such people as "Cherokee-identifying" people, although this phenomenon is by no means limited to Cherokee identity. Race-shifting as an analytic reinforces the idea of an identity transformation that can be completed, that is, that they can become Cherokee as a finalized identity rather than something that is constantly in tension as they seek to be recognized as Cherokee by non-Cherokees and citizen Cherokees. However, as discussed earlier, Cherokee citizens run the phenotypical gamut from "appearing Native" to mixed (with various backgrounds), Black, and even White Cherokees. Citizen Cherokees are also spread across the globe, with varying proximity to epicenters of Cherokeeity, that is, the physical presence of Tribal headquarters in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and in Cherokee, North Carolina, where the Eastern Band is headquartered. Whereas blood, blood quantum, and genetic markers become the biologized material for asserting a tribal identity, in this chapter, I focus on the ways that social and legal contestations complicate the processes by which Cherokee identity is constructed and validated.

Part of my rejection of the term "race-shifter" comes from personal experience. My blonde hair, blue eyes, fair skin, and other phenotypic features would squarely locate me in the

“White” category of the American racial system. Yet when I was younger, I firmly identified as Cherokee, as something I knew, something Papa made clear I could not forget, and an identity my mother reinforced in her own ways. It was not the sole identity I claimed, but I was much more outspoken and open about this identity than I am now. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I first met one of my best friends, who is mixed Kiowa, Seneca, Comanche, and White, and who presented as Native and identified as such. His proximity and claim to such an identity are greater than mine; of that, I had no question. This is why he rejected my claim when I told him I was Cherokee. It took me time to truly convince him of my Cherokee identity, beyond just the legal fact of the matter (my tribal membership card), and to establish that I did, in fact, have some relationship to a Cherokee identity that went beyond loose ancestry and legality. In hindsight, his initial rejection is not surprising. There are many people who claim a Native identity despite not being enrolled members, and because I was not phenotypically Native, nor obviously to Nativeness through other means, my claim lacked many of the qualities that would have signaled it as legitimate. Being dismissed as somebody who is Cherokee identifying, a claim to Cherokee identity that does not necessarily hold up to certain criteria of authentication, invigorates a sense of legitimating my claim to Cherokee identity through means like documentation, family history, and my relationship with my grandfather. Each of these things does something to validate my Cherokee identity in a way that is intelligible to Cherokees and non-Cherokees. The ability to claim a Cherokee identity is further complicated by the presence of those who claim it but who are not currently incorporated into one of the federally recognized tribes. Federally recognized tribal membership provides a basis for claiming a Cherokee identity but is not sufficient alone, as I argued earlier when discussing the power of blood. Cherokee-identifying people complicate the

role of ancestry as a means of identity validation within discourses of Indigeneity and Native identity.

I wish to focus on two parts of Sturm's discussion of Cherokee-identifying people, namely, the way they narrate their connection to Cherokeeeness and organize into state-recognized tribes. What each of these does is give insights into how racial identity and tribal identity are often collapsed, how reclamation of identity is framed and understood, and the way Native identity is strategically accepted or denied based on one's ability to document or legitimate it. Rather than viewing what Cherokee-identifying people are doing as immediately suspect, I instead want to approach this in a way that does not contradict their claims, as it is not my role to authenticate, validate, or agree with the people with whom Sturm worked. Rather, I approach them with a sense of empathy, as people who are intelligible to me through some shared experiences in identity reclamation, yet I have critical documentation to support my claim, and they do not. This is not to ignore or forget that those who make this claim do not necessarily possess the biogenetic material that is necessary for such identity claims, but to instead focus on the theoretical questions that come when we consider these claims seriously and as deeply related to the ways governance and documentation are used to assess and validate identity claims.

In claiming a Cherokee identity and ancestry, the Cherokee-identifying people that Sturm discusses often narrated their becoming Cherokee as related to the fact that their ancestors had to hide their Cherokeeeness. Racial persecution justified their ancestors' choice to engage in practices that resulted in their passing for White rather than Native. Oftentimes, this was told in tandem with a history of local laws that encouraged such practices. These laws often limited land ownership among Natives, or in some cases, birth certificates only allowed for individuals to be

marked as Black or White, obscuring the presence of Natives in the American Southeast (Sturm 2010). Most Cherokee-identifying people in Sturm's account narrated these stories with a sense of pain, reflecting on the loss of kinship and honest identity proclamations for the sake of passing was painful yet necessary. Sturm questions why they did not think of their ancestors' choices as "a case of fortuitous physiognomy that could then be exploited for social gain or financial necessity..." (Sturm 2010, 39). Sturm argues this is to protect them from claims that their ancestors willingly exited Cherokee social systems; this would make their efforts at reclamation questionable. Although Sturm's ethnographic descriptions are useful, I found it interesting that many of her arguments about Cherokee-identifying people were framed in terms of their defending their claims, making it harder to disentangle Cherokee-identifying people from a defensive standpoint. Her book, both explicitly and implicitly, highlights the relationship between reclamation and distance, be it temporal, phenotypical, or geographic in nature, and the complications that come with reclaiming an identity based on heritage.

However, connecting these distances and narrations to the ways Cherokee-identifying people organize themselves, we see part of why Sturm argues that they are defensive about their position as Cherokees. Part of her choice in using the term "race-shifter" lies in her argument that these people are undergoing conversions in becoming Cherokees: "once settlers, now they are Indigenous; once socially alienated, now they are part of a tribal collective; once spiritually unmoored, now they have new moral convictions; and once culturally empty, now they are fulfilled" (Sturm 2010, 86). Through practices like using sweat lodges, drumming, participating in festivals, talking circles, and more, Cherokee-identifying people strengthen their identity through repeated performances of Cherokeeness (Sturm 2010, Butler 1990). Although Butler's argument is about gender, the relationship between interiority and exteriority that she describes,

drawing on the work of Foucault, is important in producing a coherent subject: “however, it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (Butler 1990, 185). In applying this to Cherokee identity, we see that a Cherokee interior is produced through exterior performances. However, because Cherokee-identifying people locate their Cherokeeeness in spiritual and biological essence, one that represents a Cherokee identifying person’s “true self,” these performances are understood as bringing one’s interior and exterior into congruence. In this sense, we can understand identity reclamation as being about producing a coherence between a felt interiority and one’s practices and performances; the repeated performance fosters belonging not just in their local community, that is within their tribe, but also to a more ephemeral kind of Cherokeeeness, something they see themselves sharing with other Cherokees.

Cherokee-identifying people not only become Cherokee themselves but also become socially and spiritually connected through an imagined connection to other Cherokees, reinforced by those near them locally. However, the connection they forge is not something I refer to as imaginary in the sense of being false, but in the way that Anderson describes in *Imagined Communities*: “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1983, 6). Cherokee-identifying people do not think of themselves as separate from those Cherokees with federally recognized membership, but rather as enacting a form of Cherokeeeness that is intelligible to them as such, something they believe



connects them with not only other Cherokees in the contemporary but also those Cherokees from whom they claim descent. Their *reclamation* of a Cherokee identity is one based on racial and ethnic comradeship, one that is extended beyond the borders of the politically organized tribe and directly reinforces their emotional, physical, and spiritual experiences of belonging. Tribal recognition is itself a form of political organization, one that does not prioritize any one way of being Cherokee, as seen in the federally recognized United Keetowah Band, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and the Cherokee Nation. Cherokee-identifying people connect themselves to this political diversity by creating state-recognized tribes, ultimately hoping for federal recognition. This political participation, as well as their cultural practices, connect them to Cherokees beyond their tribe, to a racial and ethnic understanding of being Cherokee.

However, part of what they base their racial and ethnic claims on are essentialist beliefs about where Cherokeeness resides – claims similar to those made earlier about blood carrying the ability for one to participate in Cherokee society and culture in certain ways, that becomes less possible as one's quantum becomes smaller and smaller. These essentialist metaphors are not accepted as fact but are instead ways of thinking about how identity is constructed and acted on. What is interesting about the essentialism deployed by Cherokee-identifying people is how it relates to Tallbear's discussion of genetics and Native DNA that I discussed in the previous chapter. The people with whom Sturm talked seemed to be concerned with the way that genetic material and blood operate as means of connecting them to their Cherokee ancestors. It allowed them to feel the sorrow of removal and the pain of going into hiding (Sturm 2010, 41). What it also did, however, was allow many Cherokee-identifying people to locate a Cherokee essence inside their understandings of biology; it allowed them to *feel* Cherokeeness through their body and spirit (Sturm 2010, 42). This embodied connection to Cherokeeness is what validated, time

and time again, Cherokee-identifying people's claim to Cherokee identity. Where it diverges from some of the essentialist claims I discussed with blood, however, is that the felt connection to other Cherokees is in one's blood, rather than one's blood helping locate them within networks of experience, history, and place. Rather than blood acting as a metaphor for connection, it becomes how one's identity is validated. The perceived substance of blood acts as a legitimator for identity instead of acting as a means by which one can connect to one's ancestors, kin, and history. It detaches Cherokee identity from the social and cultural context in which it is embedded and places it solely in biogenetic inheritance.

This can be seen as contradictory to their desire to foster a personal coherence through interior and exterior congruence. If the interior is all that is needed to claim a Cherokee identity, Sturm's account makes clear that many Cherokee-identifying feel their Cherokeeeness comes from their subjective interior and biogenetic inheritance, their practices associated with Cherokeeeness validate their claims but do not produce their Cherokeeeness. These practices validate and connect them to other Cherokees, making them intelligible within discourses of Cherokeeeness and Indigeneity. What this means for identity reclamation, however, is that it is not enough to have biogenetic inheritance. It is something that provides the ability to connect to a Cherokee, or Indigenous, identity, but alone is not sufficient. One must engage in practices to bring the two into congruence; if they are not felt or perceived as having congruence, then one's identity comes into question as socially disingenuous. Identity claims are about personal connections to a category of social experiences and practices. However, these practices and experiences validate that connection and make it socially understandable and acceptable. However, not all Cherokees agree on a singular way of understanding Cherokeeeness.

Part of understanding the different ways of being Cherokee is also taking into account how kin networks are deployed by Cherokee-identifying people as they make connections with those with similar stories of hidden ancestry and White passing, and these people become their kin. This differs from citizen Cherokees who locate kin in relationships of marriage, adoption, clan, descent, and participation. This is, however, a reflection of the ways in which Cherokee-identifying people come to understand themselves as Cherokee as compared to citizen Cherokees, who have primarily understood themselves as Cherokee since a young age enculturated with that identity. In this sense, it would be unsurprising if the differences in establishing Cherokee kin networks broke down as state-recognized tribes grow and have families participating in Cherokee identifying social life across many generations.

Cherokee identifying people highlight the role of governance in authenticating identity claims. The recognition of Cherokee identifying people as Cherokee by state governments challenges the legal authority of federally recognized tribes to authenticate tribal members according to their own standards. Although there are multiple federal tribes of Cherokees, each one has clear connections to the federal government's registering of Natives on rolls in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Federal tribes, although possessing their own (limited) sovereignty, are themselves authenticated by the federal government. Blood quantum is necessary to prove tribal membership, not necessarily a racial identity, and I would argue a tribal identity. What Cherokee-identifying people show is that legal recognition is not social recognition, although the two are popularly perceived as inseparable. Legal and social recognition is important for both citizen Cherokees and Cherokee-identifying people; even though they are being authenticated by different levels of government (federal vs. state), their social recognition comes from within the tribes. Thus, the issue regarding Cherokee identity arbitration is not in the social recognition of

identity. Neither citizen Cherokees nor Cherokee-identifying people find their identity in the validation offered by the other. The ability to be recognized by the other is itself a power relationship that resides in authority to recognize, something that citizen Cherokees do not give Cherokee-identifying people. The tension in Cherokee identity instead is in verification and if somebody is truly able to be verified as Cherokee. Verification is derived through numerous criteria, but the ways in which blood as a metaphor is understood, documentation is present, and cultural practices are framed all provide ways of understanding one's social position in relation to Cherokeeeness. That is the way in which one practices one's Cherokee identity locates oneself within a discourse of Indigeneity. The articulation of this Cherokee identity is distinct to those identifying as tribal members and those who possess tribal citizenship. The legal distinction and history of the two groups help highlight how social and legal definitions of membership become entangled and complicate what it means to claim tribal membership.

Cherokee identity has become highly associated with the legal context in which it has existed since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, due in part to the ways in which cultural and legal identity have interacted since the imposition of blood quantum. In considering the ways in which Indigenous identity in the United States has undergone a process of legalization, I wish to look at Jan Hoffman French's work on "legalizing identity." Before I get into the components in which her analysis is useful to discussing Indigenous identities in the United States, there are certain aspects to keep in mind, as well as the ethnographic context in which she developed it.

French's ethnography *Legalizing Identities* (2009) is based on fieldwork she carried out in northeastern Brazil with the Xocó, an Indigenous tribe primarily composed of African descended individuals that, alongside over forty other tribes, gained recognition in Brazil after 1970 (French 2009). However, she also worked with Mocambo villagers who sought out

quilombo recognition. Quilombos are communities that were established by fugitive enslaved peoples who created autonomous settlements in Brazilian hinterlands, and today is a legal recognition sought out by those descended from those who lived in quilombos. (French 2009). Both Indian and quilombo identities are tied to a particular historical relationship to the land and are the basis for a unique legal status in Brazil. For example, the 1973 Indian Law was originally used to justify colonizing the far reaches of Brazilian territory, but later became the basis on which Indians were able to legally assert their right to be culturally different, and that entitled them to land rights on which they can continue cultural practices. Likewise, the quilombo clause of the 1988 constitution was originally considered a symbolic gesture towards the Black consciousness movement but later became a means by which rural Black communities could secure land rights (French 2009). In both instances, we see what French calls postlegislative negotiation. Postlegislative negotiation is a process by which “the impact, consequences, interpretations, and even the meanings of any given law are often determined only *after* it is enacted” (French 2009, 6). A law can be passed with one intent but come to mean and be applied in completely different circumstances from what was intended.

In considering postlegislative negotiation, French finds governmentality as key to understanding its importance to her legalizing identities framework. Governmentality looks at the processes by which social order, or governing, is produced by actors that are not the state. This means looking at the ways in which non-governmental organizations, the state, public practices and beliefs, and private entities all work together to produce social order (French 2009). Governmentality expands the ability of the state to govern without being directly involved (Foucault 1977). French notes that, ironically, in the Brazilian context, this meant that those are seeking recognition as a quilombo or Indian tribe often were looking to those authorized by the

state (anthropologists, non-governmental agencies, the Catholic Church, lawyers, etc.) for recognition so that they would be recognized by the state. This effectively reinforced the Brazilian state's power while also empowering the state's ability to verify identity claims in the first place. In light of the way this legislation was negotiated after its passing and how that is related to the various ways that state power is exercised in Brazilian society, we see that laws do not necessarily have the intended effects.

Governmentality and postlegislative negotiation are fundamental to French's legalizing identities analytic, as it plays on the fact that how a legal component is constructed is itself part of a social negotiation of the law. Likewise, the social is altered by the presence of legislation and how it is used to validate, authorize, or otherwise inflect the social with new power relations as altered by the law. The law and the social become understood as co-constituting one another. French's analytic is based on five components that all rely on governmentality and post-legislative negotiation to explain why the law and identities become understood through one another and produce unique relationships between the law and identity. According to French, these five components all occur simultaneously:

- 1) There are revised or new ethnoracial identities in the lives of those who invoke rights based on the identity's legal definition.
- 2) The meanings of laws are shaped and reshaped through the assertion of these identities.
- 3) Cultural practices are reconfigured.
- 4) The meanings of the community are questioned and altered as identity is legalized, "legalizing identity is as much about those who choose *not* to participate as it is about those who do" (French 2009,15). For example, for the Mocambo villagers who chose

not to identify with the quilombo movement, their self-conceptions changed with quilombo status recognition. Their conceptions varied and often led to questions about whether conceptions of the community were being created through religious affiliation (a history associated with the word for “community” in Portuguese) or political entity. Who was, and was not, a quilombola went beyond arguments of the benefits that come with recognition, but also involved the ways loyalty to existing identities, local politics, and fears associated with identifying as Black within Brazil, where mixedness is a feature of national identity, it would impact one’s self-conception.

- 5) Even though the opportunity to identify a certain way may come from the law, identification comes from experiences of struggle. (French 2009, 13-15).

French’s analysis is helpful in looking at how blood quantum was imposed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and how its imposition has redefined conceptions of blood and membership ever since, as I discussed in the previous chapter. The metrics by which blood quantum is imposed are now tribally decided, something that has led to the emergence of new tribal entities. The decision for the UKB to split off is in part based on a culturally conservative definition of Cherokeeity, one that requires a higher blood quantum. Blood quantum as the legal parameter of tribal identity, used both by sovereign tribes and the United States federal government, quantifies blood as an objective measure of identity, which has altered understandings of identity as well as how membership laws are implemented by certain tribes.

The latter three components of French’s framework are helpful in thinking about the way legal status affects tribal, and more specifically Cherokee, identity in the U.S. Although the first two components are important, they have been discussed in various ways in earlier chapters. In

recognizing that legalization changes local practices, it is key to look at the ways ancestry and kinship are narrated by citizen Cherokees and how they work to validate their claims while maintaining skepticism of Cherokee-identifying people's claims. The changing practices regarding kinship narration not only reflect how legalization has changed practices but also how it has complicated what it means to claim a Cherokee identity. Key to this is the role of oral history and documentation. Oral history is part of the claiming process for both citizen Cherokees and Cherokee-identifying people. However, citizen Cherokees can substantiate those histories with documentation, documentation that includes tribal registry cards, Certificate Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) cards, family names on rolls, birth certificates, and more. However, in Sturm's interviews, citizen Cherokees were hesitant to disrespect Cherokee identifying people's oral histories due to the hypocrisy of validating and valuing their own oral histories while dismissing those of Cherokee identifying people (Sturm 2010, 123). Likewise, Cherokees and Cherokee-identifying people recognize that records are far from perfect, as many documents in the South would have listed both Native people and African Americans as "colored" (Sturm 2010).

The role of documentation, or its absence, is known to Cherokee-identifying people; they recognize that documentation is the only way to fully substantiate one's claims. However, Cherokee-identifying people's oral histories come with that knowledge. Many have stories from grandparents and great-grandparents about their Cherokee ancestors and the ways they chose to blend into White society. These stories are their oral histories, they validate their claims to identity, and they are recalled as Cherokee-identifying people frame their own identity as one that came about because their ancestors refused to be identified as Cherokee (or Native) yet kept that identity alive via familial stories. This was possible because, according to Cherokee-



identifying people's narratives, they were taught that they had Cherokee ancestry by their family, but that it was something to keep hidden to protect themselves from social retribution from dominant White society. They not only invoke notions of kinship, but they also give reasons for why they were cut off from kin networks by the constrained choices their ancestors made. These choices included the adoption of White names, adopting White cultural practices, documenting themselves as White in bureaucratic forms, and many more choices that incorporated them and their family into Whiteness. By choosing to blend into White society as a means of survival, their ancestors made their Cherokee identity something to keep inside the house, so to speak. The stories of being Cherokee are passed down from generation to generation, without living public life as Cherokee. Their inability to locate themselves in established citizen Cherokee networks is because their present situation is historically grounded in a reaction to colonial imposition. The refusal to be enrolled, the choice, or lack thereof, to integrate into White society, the lack of documentation that comes from these impositions, and constrained choices was purposeful as Cherokees were removed from the American South. Private stories of hiding, passing, and privately knowing oneself as Cherokee provides a means by which Cherokee-identifying people base their identifying as Cherokee in the present. Even with that history in mind, however, documentation is still the primary means by which one's ancestry can be authenticated. Both citizen Cherokees and Cherokee-identifying people find meaning in oral history as a means of connecting themselves personally to their ancestors, yet citizen Cherokees' concerns about Cherokees being both culturally and racially Cherokee (that is, racially Native) are intertwined with concerns about who is claiming a Cherokee identity. These concerns have reinforced the value of documenting one's ancestry. Oral history as a practice of locating oneself in kin

networks is challenged when those historically cut off from kin networks, be it by choice or because of colonial policies, assert relationships that are not verified in writing.

There are those though who are recognized Cherokees, often appearing visibly Native, and recognized as such within their communities, yet they differ from citizen Cherokees and Cherokee-identifying people in that they are in a middle area claiming Cherokee membership as a legal status, not as a social identity. Whereas Cherokee-identifying people are viewed with suspicion by citizen Cherokees because of their public proclamation of an identity despite lacking federally recognized tribal enrollment, recognized Cherokees are socially accepted as Cherokee despite lacking enrollment (Sturm 2010). Unlike Cherokee-identifying people, recognized Cherokees are those who are located in Cherokee social and cultural life, recognizable within kin networks and stories, but who lack tribal enrollment. Social acceptance does not hinge on legal documentation but is to an extent empowered by it due to the legitimating authority it possesses.

However, White Cherokees challenge this conception as well. Although legally members, they are oftentimes separate from Cherokee cultural knowledge and practices but also appear phenotypically white. Legal documentation serves as a means of identity validation here, but it is not sufficient for social acceptance. Blood and blood quantum work together in contradictory ways here, as White Cherokees possess a blood quantum necessary to claim membership, yet the metaphorical value in Cherokee blood has been stretched thin as the blood quantum becomes smaller and smaller with each generation of marriage to non-Cherokees. Blood quantum challenges the value of blood as a metaphor in this instance. Because of the complex interplay between cultural identity and legal identity, which have both been affected by the imposition and regulation of blood quantum as well as changes in citizen Cherokee kinship authentication and

thinking regarding blood, it is hard to fully locate Cherokee identity in one or the other. Cultural practices of kinship have altered to authorize documentation as validating ancestry, which challenges the prestige oral history once occupied. Locating oneself in kin networks through both is, of course, preferred, but the ability to meet either or neither standard reflects one's ability to claim a Cherokee identity socially and legally.

Lastly, French's analytic includes the fact that a way of identifying may come from the law, but that identification is understood in the context of struggle. For Cherokees, whether citizens, recognized or Cherokee-identifying, there is a narrative of struggle against settler colonialism. These struggles are contextualized within experiences of Cherokeeeness. For citizen Cherokees, it includes but is not limited to stories of removal, boarding schools, discrimination, and struggles for recognition and rights. For Cherokee-identifying individuals, it is their struggle with personally-identifying as Cherokee considering their ancestors' constrained choices to escape persecution. In both cases, there is recognition of a struggle that validates their identification. It is the ability of Cherokee identity to persevere because of, or despite, the experiences and choices of one's ancestors. Part of what legalization does is validate the suffering of ancestors; it gives insights into how our position in space and time came to be. It gives meaning to ancestry that we live with inside of us.

I would be remiss were I to discuss where others locate their Cherokeeeness without addressing where I locate my own. For me, Cherokeeeness is about bearing witness to the tragedies my ancestors went through. It is about seeing my grandfather, however often or rare, and knowing that he and I both became who we are because of the tragedies our great grandparents endured. It is about knowing the way my family was detached from Cherokee centers of identity because of allotment policies. Yet, Cherokeeeness is also about locating myself

in the racial landscape we live in today. I learned to be in this world through the interaction of White and Cherokee parents and grandparents. My father's Irishness rests in me much in the same way that my mother's Cherokeeness does. However, my father's family's story is not one that is untold. It is the story of the American dream – of immigration following the potato famine in Ireland who, after generations of work and wealth accumulation, occupy a place in the American upper-middle class. My mother's maternal story I do not know, as it was never recounted to me in any detail. However, my Cherokee ancestry I know better than the rest; I know the stories of Nancy, Joseph, Josiah, I know where they are buried, and I know the stories of visiting Tahlequah and memorializing the suffering they went through due to settler colonialism. This is in part due to my stronger ties to my mother's family, especially Papa. Although I have some knowledge of my other family lines, my maternal grandfather's line is the one I know best and is the family unit in which familial ties and stories are most present. I am located between these, and I feel as though I should not forsake my Cherokee ancestors and their stories simply because blood is "running thin." Cherokeeness is not just in blood, as essentialist as it sounds, but it is also in my relationship with Papa, kinship, and culture. It is through him in particular, but also my mother that I understand myself as Cherokee. My choice to engage the question of Cherokee identity as something complicated and influenced by settler colonialism comes from my own position as the product of policies of removal and allotment that displaced my ancestors, but also as somebody who is still located in "Indian Country," and is still entangled in the relationships between Indigenous people and settlers. Where Cherokeeness is located for me, for Papa, for citizen Cherokees, for Cherokee identifying people, are all part of disentangling legacies of settler colonialism, of locating one's relationship not only with other Indigenous peoples but also with the land where they are located. The presence of so many

Indigenous tribes in Oklahoma is because they were removed here against their will. It is because of settler colonialism's powerful impositions that identities are complicated by legality, land, and culture. The production of Cherokees like myself is not historical happenstance but is by design and part of the structuring framework of settler colonialism.

#### **8. *Better Left Unsaid***

*The wind brushed against my cheeks and bare hands, wicking away what little moisture was left in them. I kept my hands in the pockets of my hoodie in a futile attempt to keep warm from the wind; I would have to take them out soon enough in order to drive the tractor. It was the "little green tractor," an accurate name given its petite form compared to the larger tractor parked next to it. Papa did not need to use the big tractor today, nor did he need to use it that often. Even then, he joked with me about how one day he would teach me how to drive it.*

*Papa had to walk me through how to drive the tractor so that I could use it. I felt as if I was taking another driver's test, albeit this one made me feel much more anxious about not doing it right. My sister-in-law once had to borrow an 18-foot trailer to move hay for her horses, and she had prayed to land on the hitch the first time she backed up so that he wouldn't ridicule her. His ridiculing would have most certainly been about her being a woman and unable to do what needed to be done, regardless of if it were a presumedly meaningless and correctable task. In my own way, I felt similar. I felt that if I showed any anxiety, Papa would joke about how I "wasn't even in control of that lil' ol' tractor." It is not that I felt like my masculinity was threatened or that femininity was a*

*bad thing. Rather, to have my abilities be compromised and then demeaned when I knew that I was already being perceived as unable to complete them was nerve-wracking. If I was found to be even more incapable, Papa's comment would insinuate that I was only not manly enough for him but that I was not enough to even be trusted with a simple task. I was caught in a purgatory of sorts: if I sought to embody a masculinity that did not come naturally, I felt like a fraud and disingenuous with Papa. However, if I did not do enough, I was incapable of tasks and would be ridiculed for that inability. After taking the tractor around in a little circle, my grandfather took the chain out of the cupholder, which I found odd considering the meticulously ordered barns he took care of and attached it to the front of the tractor. I found it hard to accept that everything had a place, and for some reason, the chain's place was inside the tractor cup holder. The back attachment had lots of little teeth, which I assumed would not be relevant to moving the circle bale holders.*

*"I'll open this gate and leave it open. Now be sure when you go through it, you're going completely straight because that back attachment is wider than the front."*

*"Ok, I'll be sure to line it up good," I replied.*

*It's odd thinking about the way I change my speech when I talk to him. My mom does the same thing. We slow down a bit, change up our syntax some, throw in a twang or drawl at times, but we mainly do it when we're around this side of the family.*

*As I pull through the gate and into the pasture, I see my grandfather standing next to the first of the four bale holders that need to be moved. Half of the herd has had their calves, and they need to move further down the pasture where there is more grass*

*available for them to eat other than the hay. As we go through the process of lining up, attaching the chain to the holder, and moving it, all communication is done through hand signals: “up,” “down,” “little bit more,” “turn around,” “back up at this kind of angle until you get there.” All of this is conveyed, and probably more, through vague hand signs.*

*After finishing up the bales—without a single mess-up despite the ever-pervasive anxiety on my side—Papa comes back to me sitting on the tractor with the chain and looks at the front tire.*

*“Does that tire look flat?” he kicks it a bit. Pushing his foot down into the rubber, feeling it give way to the force. “Sure, feels like it is. Alright let’s head back up to the shop and park it in front of the barn, that’s where my tools are.” I nod in acknowledgement and begin to slowly head that way. I could turn the speed up by moving the lever from ‘turtle’ to ‘rabbit’ on the tractor, but I don’t want to get ahead of myself and mess something up in that simple move.*

*With the tractor parked in front of the barn, Papa opens the second barn door and turns on the air compressor. After looking at the tractor, he takes the front attachment, flips it back, and then pushes down, so that the front of the tractor is off the ground. He motions for me to lower the back attachment so that it provides a stronger base for the tractor’s weight.*

*We begin the slow process of taking off the tire. It certainly wouldn’t have been slow had I known what I was doing, and Papa been more physically capable of getting*

*down to work on the tire. But we worked through our relative inabilities as he instructed me over the deafening roar of the compressor, and I slowly interpreted and acted on it.*

*“Alright get this bar and loosen up each one, I can’t do it from up here, so you’ll have to.”*

*I fumbled with the bar a bit, struggling to get it to line up perfectly with the lug nut, but by the third of six, I started to line it up faster. Pushing and pulling on the bar was weird. I’m not even entirely sure what it was called, all I know was whoever tightened this last time sure did tighten them far more than I could have. After the bar, I once again learned my way around the lug nuts with the compressor gun. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Each came off faster than the last, but still took me some time as I adjusted my footing to try to balance on my knee and foot while bent over.*

*“We sure wouldn’t make it in a Nascar pit!” Papa said as he laughed, taking the lug nuts from me and turning the compressor off. We took the tire off the tractor and Papa inspected it. Spinning it, bringing it close to his face, pouring water on it. He could not find anything wrong with it.*

*“I know a guy up in Wayne, we’ll need to take it to him to get it looked at. Are you in a rush for time?”*

*“Nope, I’m good to be here for a few more hours.”*

*“Alright, you put that in the back of the truck, and I’ll go get the keys and let Granny know. We need to head to Wynnewood at five o’clock, and it’s three now, so it’s best if we go ahead and go now.” He had to go to Wynnewood later with Granny for my cousin’s ball game, and to retrieve a cactus for her. He was already inside when I went*



*to meet him there. I had put the tire in the back of the truck and went inside to wash my hands and grab my water bottle before we left.*

*“Linda, why do you need that cactus?”*

*“Mike, you know I have been looking for a nice big one ever since I first saw em. They’re just so beautiful and blue,” Granny then looked towards me. “I saw one when I was out with Staci [my aunt], and it was so beautiful. I asked around to see if anybody owned it and nobody did, so I called the sheriff and asked him, and he said I was free to take it.”*

*“Where are you even going to plant that thing,” Papa asked, making clear he was still paying attention.*

*“I was going to put em in some of those buckets you picked up the other day.”*

*“Why my new buckets? They’ll die just as quickly in the ones from last year.”*

*I laughed a bit at this, and Papa looked at me to make sure I was laughing. He always checked to see if his jokes landed. I grabbed my water bottle and we headed to the car, saying our quick goodbyes to Granny.*

*Driving to Wayne was a quick trip; we just make a right on the main street in Paoli coming from Papa’s, which turned into a highway on either side of the town. Throughout the drive, there was only the sound of the wind, the truck reacting to the inconsistencies of the highway, and Papa’s deep breathing. After a while he asks me about my spring break plans. I told him I had none, I was planning on doing schoolwork, some research, and coming to see him a few times. He smiled when I said I was going to come see him, and said he had plenty of work that needed to be done.*

*“You know that hotwire that’s up there on corner of the property? I need to run it on this other pasture further down. I also need to finish cleaning out and taking down that old barn. I bet that’s what gave the tire a flat. Calves’ll be done being born by then so we can do some other work there. Would you be ok with all that?”*

*“Of course, if you’ll have me that is.”*

*“Well of course I would! You’re my grandson. Oh, you see that big house over there? That’s my neighbor’s. He’s a good man, got lots of land and lots of cattle.”*

*I nod in acknowledgement, unsure of what else to say. I smiled when he said of course, but then he switched gears to talk about his neighbor.*

*Once in Wayne, we met with the man in the garage and gave him the tire. He got to work, and Papa and I stood outside the garage waiting. After a while the owner came out. While I was with them, I played a silent role in the background, moving with them, observing, not needing an introduction or explanation as to my presence. Middle aged with greying hair, the owner took a strong role in talking with Papa, but he did not interrupt. He had a strong demeanor; his tone was boisterous and his stride long. They got to talking about cattle. Each had calves, but still had at least halfway to go until calving was done. He got to talking about how big his Simmental bull was, showing my grandfather photos.*

*I stood behind them both, a silent participator who may be called on at any moment., whether it be just as Papa’s grandson or his grandson who has been helping him out a lot lately. I was unsure in what manner he would introduce me if he were to, and I also wondered if I was supposed to introduce myself. After a few minutes of their*

*talking and my silence, I realized if Papa were to introduce me it would be at the end, and it would not matter what I thought of his introduction. He would introduce me how he saw fit. However, Papa never did introduce me. Had it not been for the work needing to be done by both men, I feel as if they could've talked for hours. Eventually the owner said he needed to get back to work and directed Papa to the front desk. He paid in cash and cracked a joke to the clerk about how "I bet you love handling money." I sighed. She sighed a bit louder, then laughed lightly out of politeness, and handed him his change, "Well it is my job, sir."*

*If the drive there was uneventful, the drive back occurred in a vacuum. Devoid of all sound except the movement of air around the car and in and out of Papa's lungs, we returned to the barn in Paoli.*

*With the tractor still lifted, we restarted the air compressor, put the attachments back on it, and used it to put the tire back on. It looked good. He had me go park it back in the covered area. I was unsure how close to get, or what all was up there. I got as close as I could without looking up for assurance, then looked towards Papa, who gave me cues regarding the rest of the space I needed to cover. I parked the tractor, and we headed inside.*

My relationship with Papa has changed over the years. My unsureness and anxiety in the present are a result of the years of childhood wonder and affection followed by a purposeful distancing when I was a teenager; I realized I was gay. In my childhood, my younger sisters and I would visit him on holidays and other occasions throughout the year, but during the summer,

we would spend an entire week there with him, Granny, and our cousins. This week was not some odd chosen week, but the week that the Paoli Baptist Church had vacation bible school, arguably the week of the year in which I would receive my most concentrated education in Christianity. Granny and Papa were already the most pious of my grandparents; of that, there was no question. As a child, I did not have much of an issue with religion. It was something there, something I did for the adults in my life to make them happy. I did not necessarily believe any of it at the time but rather learned what was necessary to recount the classes of the day later and move about my life. Our home was more secular than Christian in practice. Papa's Christianity was a means by which we know him and by which he liked to be known. He was a devout man then and remains so today.

As I grew older, the fissures of suburban secular life and rural Christianity continued to widen, and I stopped visiting for that week in the summer. It was something I detested, Papa's house became something I detested, and indeed Papa himself began to earn my scorn. I do not recall ever hearing anything from Papa to provoke my scorn at the time. I had not heard from him that he hated gay people, that he didn't believe in what I was coming to understand as my right to equal protection and practices in American society. Rather, I knew how the church felt, I knew how my mom had felt, despite her efforts to change, and I projected that socially conservative view onto him. I was not wrong in this projection, I would later find out, but nonetheless, I came into an understanding of Christianity and queerness and how they fit (rather, did not fit) together, and how I felt hurt knowing my grandfather was not supportive of who I was. For these reasons, I detached from him, opting to stay home when possible, using excuses of school and other plans so that I could escape his questions about "co-eds" at school. To this

day, I have still not come out to Papa nor Granny, but I think there has come to be an understanding between us about who I am and how that is not going to change.

This alone is not why there is an awkwardness in the air as Papa teaches and I learn. As I learned about the Church's position on queerness, broadly defined, I saw the ways in which gender shaped my interactions with Papa. Papa wished to see me, along with his other male grandchildren, become a proper "man." Queerness disqualified me from this, nor did I have any intention of pursuing the kind of manhood he wished to see me embody. Sports were never my thing; I much preferred the inside time with my aunt's and female cousins chatting about any range of topics over being outside, checking on the cattle, and doing those things I had come to associate with masculinity. As I left the innocence of childhood, however, the insistence I conform to gender norms strengthened. The questions about girls and dating became more frequent, my bodily language was a target of scrutiny, and I felt myself turning inside out as I tried to make a space for myself somewhere between masculine and feminine, between his desires for me and that which I wanted for myself.

As I considered the way in which I drove the tractor and the slowness with which I took the nuts off the tire, my gendered position became increasingly apparent to me. I had grown up surrounded by women, with an absent older brother, a father who was present half the year due to his work taking him outside the home, and a grandfather who came with baggage I did not wish to deal with, for fear it would weigh on my heart in a manner I could not bear. In looking back on my childhood and the years of my adolescence, I realize now I had purposefully removed myself from places in which I felt I would be harmed, not just out of a desire to protect myself, but also to protect the image of those who I felt would harm me so that Papa could remain Papa, and not become a man who wished for me to be somebody I am not.

In her book *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Carolyn Steedman recounts her working-class childhood in 1950s London. Steedman focuses specifically on the ways in which she learned class and gender through her mother. Namely, Steedman narrates a relationship with her mother that is tumultuous, that is shaped by her desire to be a good child, to make up for the cost that she incurred simply by being in this world. She was made to feel a burden to her mother, and her mother reminded her of this fact as she reminded her that she was also a good mother. Steedman's narration is not just for the sake of autobiography, though; it is an exercise in connecting her and her mother to working-class families within circumstances much like her own (Steedman 1986). Steedman's understanding of her family life, of the way she is in this world, is shaped both by her understanding of history of placing her mother's life within the context of class and gender. Her mother's aspirations were shaped by class and gender, and Steedman paid a price of those aspirations, she knew the world through a feeling of desire that was unfulfilled, an unfairness in the treatment she received, which itself was born from her mother's feeling of living in a world that treated her unfairly.

The awkwardness between Papa and me, I like to think, is our reconciling. It is us trying to make up for the lost time. It is unlikely that either of us knows in full detail why the other is the way they are, but that is not the point of our coming together. It is a joint effort to move forward. As Steedman works through a persistent dream she has had since childhood, in which she is wearing the clothes she learned so early to desire, she states that "you're nostalgic for childhood whilst it's happening to you, because the dreams show you the landscape you're passing through, but you don't know yet that you want to escape" (Steedman 1986, 143). My late childhood was filled with a desire to escape, to escape the unfairness that my family and society were imposing upon me. It demanded from me a certain way of being, one that I felt was

unmanageable and unfair. I can say the same feeling most certainly resided in Papa and my mom at various moments in their life. Be it the political feelings of discontent Papa feels like a member of an older generation, surrounded by a world that demands rapid change from home, a change he is rarely given time to acclimate to, or my mother's struggling with three children as a single mother in the 90's after divorcing her first husband; both have had moments in which they feel society has forsaken them, leaving them holding a bag full of desires, yet lacking the means by which they could fulfill them. However, what I imagine they sought, much in the same way I seek it with Papa, is a sense of fairness, of acceptance, of belonging as they are.

Subjectivity is, in part, defined by its multiplicity. Rather than subjectivity simply repurposing multiple identities into a singular, more inclusive identity with more categories expressed at once, in hopes of being a more complete, fair representation of a person, subjectivity takes those and puts them into a relationship with practices, place, emotions, and more. In doing so, nothing is guaranteed. Yet, subjectivity encourages us to focus on these relationships is part of why I do not use it in lieu of my examination of how White Cherokee identities came to be. Had I been able to interview and spend time with White Cherokees throughout Oklahoma, unimpeded by COVID-19, I would have been able to focus more on the relationship between subjectivity and other factors that impact how one identifies. Feeling a sense of racial and ethnic belonging is also related to one's belonging in a gendered sense, or even religious. Because subjectivity encourages us to focus on the relationships formed between subjects, the places in which they are, and our senses of self, it is helpful in examining how belonging works in examining everyday life.

## ***9. Refusal in the Closet: The Politics and Ethics of Identity***

Settler colonialism's production of various Indigenous subject positions is itself a reflection of its ongoing failures and maintenance. Seeking to incorporate Indigenous people into a White land-owning body politic is one of the fundamental goals of settler colonialism, and it is predicated on removal, citizenship, and recognition (Simpson 2014). However, recognition itself is predicated on certain power relations based on authorizing who one is and how one sees oneself (Simpson 2014). Although the last two chapters have touched on the politics of recognition among Cherokees, I now wish to focus on the politics of identifying as Cherokee outside of Cherokee contexts. What does it mean to assert oneself as belonging to a sovereign nation that is located within the United States? What does it mean to assert belonging to a nation whose sovereignty is defined in relation to federal and state governments? What does it mean for phenotypically White citizens of both nations to profess to be tribal citizens and American citizens? What consequences come with a primary identity as a tribal citizen and a secondary identity as an American citizen? What are the politics of disclosing this identity, and when are they made relevant to those living in tension within their identities? These questions cannot be disentangled from the ways that Cherokees define themselves in relation to one another and is relevant to the way race operates in the United States.

When I was growing up, my mother had a gorgeous pair of beaded earrings. Gifted to her by Papa when she graduated high school, they are orange with details in black and white. As the primary color on the Cherokee Nation flag, the orange on her earring's is meant to index her tribal membership, although it is not necessarily evidenced that is the intent in color choice by the artist, although my grandfather had the flag's colors in mind in choosing earrings gift to her. My mother has had these earrings for almost 40 years; I rarely see them leave her jewelry chest. However, within the chest, they occupy a place of prestige with her other sentimental jewelry in the locked



drawer. She treasures them; they are her only piece of beaded jewelry and something she treasures as a connection between her and Papa and as a connection to her own Cherokeeeness. Nevertheless, she identifies as Cherokee primarily. She does not reject her White ancestry, but she does not feel as connected to it. My maternal grandmother's western European ancestry is not as well documented, and my mother was much closer to Papa's family as a child. She was raised surrounded by Cherokee people and identifies as such. Her features are largely reminiscent of Papa, yet she also grew up around her mother, which also shaped how she presented herself. Her dyed blonde hair signals Whiteness, yet her skin has never been pale or fair; rather, it is a light golden brown. Phenotypically, I would say she appears mixed or White. However, she does not consider herself White and will typically inform others she is Cherokee if they presume she is White.

To add another layer to my mother's identity, I also wish to consider her current work as a nurse practitioner for the Absentee Shawnee Tribe. When doing her clinical schooling in which she worked under another nurse practitioner, she worked at the urgent care clinic in Shawnee. After completing schooling and after receiving word of an opening and being recommended to apply by those she had worked with, she started working for the tribe. Working for the tribe has been an experience she has loved. The tribe has treated her well, she enjoys spending time with her coworkers, and it has brought her into greater proximity to other Indigenous people, but also social issues that affect Indigenous people.

Namely, she feels as though she better understands what has happened to Native people, not just historically but today. She has never lived in communities that are predominantly Native, nor has she seen some of the more immediate effects of the marginalization of Native people in Oklahoma. Although she is not "coming home to it," as she says, by working with Native people

as both patients and co-workers, her understanding has developed enough that she sees the federal government at fault for what has happened to Native people in the United States, namely, health disparities.

My mother did note that she has always identified as Native fully despite this distance that she has become increasingly aware of. Her identity has strengthened as she has interacted with more Native people. Patients will question at times if one of her coworkers is Native due to her appearing phenotypically White. However, my mother has not experienced this kind of question at all. Ironically, her coworker grew up in a Native community, whereas my mother grew up distant from hers. What my mother's experience means, to me, is that it is never too late to connect with one's community and that the means by which one feels connected are in flux as the circumstances of one's relationship with community change.

Tribal identities cannot be disentangled from the political organization that gave way to them. With colonization, though, tribal identities are shaped in opposition to settler society and practices. In asserting a tribal identity, one is connected to histories of removal, dispossession, and the effects of policies deployed by the colonizing force. The creation of this kind of identity is tied to fights for sovereignty. In reimagining sovereignty through an Indigenous lens, Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson argues that sovereignty is not about a right to violence, exclusion, maiming, or killing in the name of maintaining jurisdiction and territory, which is how Western sovereignty has been conceptualized (Simpson 2014). This conceptualization of Western sovereignty is embedded in the historical development of Western nation-states, which differs greatly from the history that produced Indigenous sovereignties (Simpson 2020). Instead, Indigenous sovereignty is framed as a form of relationality through families, clans, nations, and territory (Simpson 2014). This kind of sovereignty is based on kinship. Furthermore, this

sovereignty is nested within the sovereignty of the United States of America (and for some tribes, other colonial nation-states, such as Canada). Simpson's work comes out of her work with her own community, the Mohawk of Kahnawà:ke, who live on an approximately 18.55-mile reservation, or "reserve," in the southwest of Quebec, a largely French-speaking province of Canada (Simpson 2014). However, despite federal recognition from Canada and the United States, the Mohawk of Kahnawà:ke refused citizenship of these two settler nations. Instead, they insist on the integrity and legitimacy of their own governance through the governing body of the Iroquois Confederacy, the Haudenosaunee. This also means refusing passports, refusing to pay taxes to these nations, and refusing to vote in these nations' elections. Beyond questions of identity, they reject colonization by insisting on their right to remain *politically* Iroquois, separate from the settler polities that surround them.

What also comes with this refusal is an acknowledgment that colonization is ongoing in a settler form, however, "in this form, it fails at what it is supposed to do: eliminate Indigenous people; take all their land; absorb them into a [W]hite, property-owning body politic" (Simpson 2014, 7-8). Simpson argues that ongoing debates over membership criteria exemplify this ongoing existence and failure. Although there are ways of knowing each other through practices that foster belonging, something I have discussed in my ethnographic vignettes, Simpson highlights that the issue is in how to codify membership rules so that Mohawk membership is preserved. This means considering not only the social and political processes that have altered membership thinking over time but also how it is practiced from a legal standpoint. This is done from a position that is constrained by the sovereignties of settler nations. Refusal, in this instance, is a refusal to have membership decided by outside authorities. It takes away the power of deciding membership from colonial authorities that have imposed upon and altered kinship practices over the preceding

centuries. This differs from recognition, which is predicated on an unequal power balance where one entity possesses the power to recognize, and the other is in the position of being recognized. Sovereignty, then, in this conception, is about where power resides in verifying and validating identity claims, with refusal and recognition being two options by which membership is understood, each reflecting a different power dynamic.

I argue that Cherokee identity, along with other tribal identities in the United States, is not squarely located in either refusal or recognition. This is because tribal identities as legal statuses granted by political entities are debated within nested sovereignty and culture. Because being Indigenous is not just a legal status nor a solely social/cultural identity, they exist in a space between the law and the social, where sovereignty decides not only what rights are imbued in Indigenous identities, but also how such identities are authorized and accepted. The ability to assert and validate Indigenous identity means locating an individual in discourses of history, culture, kinship, and political difference. Because it is an identity that has been legally defined and carries legal power, it can be contested through the law, as seen in the Cherokee Freedman controversy that I discussed in chapter 5. Yet, this recognition by law does not mean one is viewed socially as Cherokee. Yet, social acceptance is not enough for the legal status of being a tribal member because of the power of being recognized that was instated by the federal government but is upheld, updated, and maintained by tribal governments. Recognition and refusal operate together as a sociolegal apparatus in which identity can be refused in one moment and accepted in another.

Because Indigenous sovereignties are located within the sovereignty of the United States, they are limited and constrained. In expanding their own sovereignty, the sovereignty of the federal and state governments is reduced. Sovereignty assertions in one area of the law have wide-ranging ramifications for sovereignty in other places, and the United States government and tribal

governments both wish to see their sovereignty expanded. With the imposition of blood quantum and its subsequent revisions in tribal law, we see a negotiation between sovereigns in deciding tribal identity. The ability of tribes to set their own blood quantum criteria refuses to allow the United States to impose criteria for citizenship. However, the continued use of blood quantum in tribal membership reflects the power differential of tribes and the United States in recognizing who is and is not a tribal member. In the Freedmen controversy, I discussed in chapter 5, this ability for the Cherokee Nation to decide membership criteria on its own was rejected as it violated treaty rights, a reflection of the power of the United States to enforce membership criteria. Sovereignty regarding membership is thus limited and nested. Drawing on Simpson's conceptualization of Indigenous sovereignty as kinship, we see that Indigenous kinship today is a set of practices that are limited and reside within greater Euro-American understandings of kinship. Because of its limited and nested status, Indigenous kinship is embedded in the political discourses of sovereignty; to be Cherokee is not to be Cherokee in ancestry and kinship alone, but also to occupy a political space of alterity within a settler-colonial society. As such, claiming membership to a tribe is not just about asserting a personal identity but also connects one to cultural discourses of kinship, refusal, and resistance. Because of the intersections of so many discourses of identity (biological, legal, social, cultural, political, etc.), which are not necessarily discrete nor stable, it is helpful to understand how identity claims become embodied experiences that are negotiated in context, especially when considering White Cherokees.

In claiming a Cherokee identity, I connect myself to these discourses, and I argue that Indigenous identities cannot be disentangled from the political and social relationships they are embedded in. Yet, because I am primarily White, both phenotypically and culturally, yet still

identify with and locate myself on the margins of Cherokee identity, I find myself caught between two modes of representing my experiences. Thus, using the term

White Cherokee, I hope to represent my own position. Rather than using it in a manner that would reject my claim of Cherokeeity (as is often the case in arguing for tighter blood quantum requirements), instead, I use it as a means of locating myself within these discourses. The Whiteness I embody and experience is based on my ability to blend in with and occupy spaces of Whiteness, often without external contestation. However, I find such a position untenable and uncomfortable. However, in voicing my Cherokee identity, something that presumably would remove me from Whiteness and White society, I locate myself in an identity that is frequently understood as racially Native, something that I do not fully claim. Furthermore, because Cherokee identity is understood as racially Native by most Cherokees and non-Cherokees, my claiming a Cherokee position is met with scrutiny, demands of proof, or even rejection. Thus, claiming a Cherokee identity as a White Cherokee is about locating someone within categories that seem impossible to occupy simultaneously.

However, this is not a thesis on reconciling those feelings. It is about how to represent oneself when being faced with the way identity forms are constrained and pulled in different ways by different political forces and actors. In this sense, using the closet as a metaphor clarifies the ways White Cherokees negotiate ways of being known, as well as interrogating the ethics of identity declaration within certain contexts. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes “closetedness” as a “performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence –not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it” (Sedgwick 1990, 3). The closet is constructed out of the lack of proclamation of an identity that has been determined to be different according to the discourse that

surrounds it. It presumes a known interiority that, if made public, places the individual in a stigmatized position predicated on a lack of knowledge (or rather, a different kind of knowledge) about who that person is in consideration of information being made knowable to those around them. This knowledge combines with what is previously known about an individual and is connected to greater societal knowledge about gender, race, sexuality, *etc.* Ways of personally-identifying are always entangled with the social context and history that allows that identity to be produced, claimed, and known. It is in politically located knowledge that certain ways of knowing become understood as possessing a truth value that allows them to circulate as part of a regime of truth (Sedgwick 1990). Drawing on Foucault's work, notably in *Discipline and Punish*, whereby a regime of truth is constituted by a collection of techniques, knowledge, and scientific discourses, which are formed and become entangled with "the practice of the power to punish" (Foucault 1977, 23). A "regime of truth" refers to the ability of those in power to wield knowledge as a means by which they authorize their practices of power. This does not come from some knowledge form that is detached from power, as knowledge itself is produced within a field of power. It is in power to regulate knowledge that a regime of truth is built as it allows for the differential treatment of constructed others through knowledges that are predicated on truths that are meant to serve specific exercises of power, often benefitting those who are already regulating and practicing power.

Ann Stoler has also explored the relationship between regimes of truth and their connections to articulations of race and racism over time. Stoler asserts that racial essences are not fixed nor finite. Rather, they are malleable and substitutable, able to "combine elements of *fixity and fluidity* in ways that make them both resilient and impervious to empirical, experiential counterclaims" (Stoler 2016, 239). The racial formations of the present are themselves based on the formations that preceded them; they are *renewed* with each instantiation. This makes sense

when thinking about the movement from blood to blood quantum and then to genetics. In each instantiation, the racial essence is biologically located, but the way in which it is understood socially differs. But these understandings themselves are not linear nor weighted equally by all actors. Native people are much more likely to speak of blood and blood quantum than genetics, whereas somebody who purchases a commercial ancestry test in pursuit of Native DNA will prioritize genetics. These are all being produced by the existence of what came before and yet do not cease to exist simply because they have been altered. These ways of knowing, though, are always in dialogue with the phenotype of the person, as well as the legal and political ways in which identity is verified. Race is a social act, always entangled with the legal and political ways in which identity is verified. The ability to “verify” race locates race in both the seen and unseen of an individual. There is ambiguity, as exemplified in the previous chapters, in the relationships between what is seen as readily apparent and seen vs. the inner self, which exists in relation to what is seen as observable and objectified, but also what is felt in the realm of sensibilities and subjectivity (Stoler 2016).

These relationships, those of the seen and unseen, the externally observable and the internally experienced, are entangled in the operations of power. The way certain racial attributes are focused on in one historical moment is due to the ebbs and flow of racial thought; its fluidity is seen in the rejections and acceptances of different articulations (Stoler 2016). In rejecting full and mixed blood statuses but accepting blood quantum, the biological notion of an essence is still replicated, yet the mechanisms by which that is articulated have changed. This change, despite the biological essence’s resilience, gives an illusion of progress in racial thinking, when the reality of race has nonetheless persisted. When put into dialogue with hegemony, this thinking gives way to



a more complicated understanding of racial regimes of truth and also the closet as a metaphor for understanding ambiguous racial positions.

A concept largely built upon by Italian Marxist political activist and intellectual Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is the idea of a social group being built on the incorporation of subordinate groups into a dominant group, of which the general interests of all groups and the life of the state as a whole are formed (Hall 1986). In his discussion of Gramsci's relevance for studying race, Stuart Hall notes that hegemony possesses three distinct points in Gramsci's formulation. The first is that hegemony is a particular moment in history in which social forces coalesce into a historical moment that is identifiable by its unique formation and persistence until the "crises" of that moment begin to appear, which marks the beginning of the unfolding of hegemony. Secondly, hegemony is multi-dimensional in that it encompasses not just economic life but also political, social, cultural, legal, and more. It becomes a way in which society fundamentally reorganizes itself around the belief in and perpetuation of certain truths. Lastly, each hegemonic formation will have its own specific social composition on which it is organized. These formations are not necessarily a unified dominant economic class, but rather a coalition of those from a portion of the dominant class (Hall points to finance rather than industrial capital, or national rather than international capital), along with various subordinate groups who have been won over through concessions and compromises, which in turn validate the role of the dominant group (Hall 1986). Hegemony is a means by which we can understand how people belonging to marginalized groups understand themselves as being in solidarity with those of dominant groups, despite there being various ideas by which their solidarity could be considered impossible. In connecting Foucault's concept of regimes of truth with Gramsci's hegemony, we see that knowledge becomes valued in the ways that it reinforces certain types of power exercises, often predicated on the formation of a

dominant group consisting of those from various classes of society. This group is built on a form of class solidarity that does not seek to overturn class inequality but rather is based on maintaining a particular form of inequality that benefits members of the dominant group in different ways. It is because of this that hegemony must be maintained as a coalition across multiple strata so that the dominant group can maintain its positions of power.

The concept of hegemony and regimes of truth, including Stoler's conceptualization of a racial regime of truth, are themselves interlocked as a means by which power structures are constructed, maintained, and then dissolved. In thinking about the closet, it can then be understood as a means by which hegemonic truths are disproven by an alternative way of occupying spaces that are perceived as inappropriate for people of certain identities. In thinking about the ways the closet is constructed around sexual identities, we see how a dominant heteronormative society excludes people from positions of power based on ways of knowing those who are marginalized for their sexual practices and made into socially distinct categories. Identity functions as a heuristic for knowledge and are then used to understand an individual when they come out. Thus, coming out as gay takes an entire set of knowledges about gay people and their practices and projects it onto the individual, often in efforts to validate, or reject, their belonging to that category. This belonging dictates their ability to speak from positions that are imbued with certain power relations as related to the knowledge system that produced them. Thus, a position created based on heteronormativity, the inclusion or empowerment of a non-heterosexual individual within that system, threatens to bring down the entire hegemonic regime of truth that is built around heterosexual norms. Exclusion and discrimination then are sociopolitical acts, at all times located within social and historical context, and predicated on knowing and recognizing certain kinds of difference and then acting on that knowledge in a manner that has political goals.

The closet then functions as a means by which these knowledges are mediated, which conveys a sense of knowing what awaits one on the other side of the closet when one “comes out.” With a speech act of silence constructing the closetedness that people with “hidden” identities occupy, one can also understand it as a way of passing as a member of the dominant group. The act of coming out is the opposite of passing, it rejects the idea that one passes and actively asserts one’s identity at every instantiation of coming out (Stratton 2000). The closet exists in a dichotomy with coming out. Whereas the closet functions as an imagined liberal utopia that is bound up with both essentialism (that is, a unified and evident identity) and individual privacy, something that is based on modernity’s construction of private and public as distinct spheres of life. As public and private life have become less distinct, especially in the rise of multiculturalism that came in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they have blossomed into new possibilities for the politics of identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as identities like sexual orientation have turned from something held privately in the closet to something that should be publicly proclaimed (Stratton 2000). Things that were previously held in private with those who are close are now expected to be publicly proclaimed under hopes of acceptance and in efforts at normalizing difference.

Before I connect this metaphor to experiences of being a White Cherokee, I want to first connect it to my experiences as a gay person. I first realized I was gay in early middle school. The year was 2011, and the experiences of LGBT people were not only becoming known on a wider scale, but public opinion was rapidly shifting from disapproval to acceptance. Although this was built on the work of activists over the preceding decades, it all felt very immediate and fast for me. I was not gay alone, though, but was surrounded, both on- and offline, by other queer-identifying people. Early on in my time as a gay person, I encountered an opinion on social media arguing that coming out is not the burden of those who are queer. Rather, one should not have to explain oneself

to those who are unfamiliar, and that one should not feel as though one is hiding something by not disclosing something that is not the business of others. In hindsight, this is a privileged position to take. It presumes the ability to act without repercussion, the ability to either pass without as much issue and/or the ability of an individual to possess such a level of privacy, among other things, make the position untenable in the long term. Despite this, my personal circumstances allowed me to adopt this mindset, and I found it both liberating and confining. I was trapped between the closet and self-liberation. I was gay and had no issue admitting it to those with whom my relationship had no bearing on my life at home. Being gay in school was easy but being gay at home was different. Whereas school was a place where I only saw people for about seven hours a day, home was the place I grew up, with people I saw every day and whom I wanted to remain close to. Its permanency made preserving safety and comfort paramount. Personal safety, thankfully, was not a question due in large part to my older sister's coming out as a lesbian in her late teens. Comfort occupied the central focus of my experiences within and outside the closet from that moment until my later years of high school.

Comfort for me was based on two things. The first was the embodied experiences of shame that were provoked whenever gayness existed in opposition to the role I was understood to occupy and was to be avoided at all costs. The second was the desire to avoid explaining who I am. This can be understood as an avoidance of coming out, of making something implicit to my understanding of myself exist in other's conceptions of me, in a way that would change rather than accommodate my current being. I had not changed my understanding of myself. However, things I did, or thought, would now be understood differently considering a new way of knowing me. Shame came, and with it, the feeling of boiling from the inside out, like I would combust at any moment, and that all I wanted to do was disappear from the current circumstances. Being judged

for something I was provoked a desire to hide it, to escape the social ramifications of simply existing as I am. Shame was an emotional and physical experience of pain that conditioned my way of existing. It showed me that I knew who I was and that I also knew being gay around certain people or in certain contexts was undesirable in order to prevent that feeling from reoccurring. Avoiding coming out, although related to experiences of shame, was also about controlling the ways in which I was perceived by those around me. It was more comfortable to be misunderstood as part of the norm than it was to have to deal with the awkwardness, ignorance, and probing questions into my life that would have come with coming out. Outside of my particulars, though, my experiences exemplify the role of the closet in mitigating painful and uncomfortable experiences by those who either can pass or choose to engage in behaviors in deliberate efforts to pass. However, upon coming out, it does not end. Once one realizes one belongs to an identity that is “passable” within society, there is a pressure to make that knowledge known to others, be it in intimate or public spaces.

In my experiences as a White Cherokee, the closet works differently for me in personal practice. Firstly, I do not experience shame in any regard to being Cherokee. I am not filled with the red-hot shame of being “outed” as Cherokee. Yet, because I understand myself as Cherokee on my own and as a member of my Cherokee family, I do not feel the need to occupy the space a Native Cherokee person would. Rather, I choose to make my position known as it becomes relevant. It helps me situate my opinions and experiences within discourses of Cherokeeeness and Indigeneity. It helps me explain why I feel on the margins of both Cherokeeeness and Whiteness. My experiences of both are impacted by the presence of the other. My ability to claim a Cherokee identity is complicated by my Whiteness, and my Whiteness is offset by the feelings of belonging and loyalty to my Cherokee identity. The ability to pass and engage in practices of passing is

largely due to comfort, not shame. It is not that I reject my Cherokeeeness when in public, but rather it can needlessly complicate my social position at times that are inappropriate or inconvenient. An example would be me explaining a complex position and personal identity to a stranger who assumes I am only White which unnecessarily complicates simple interactions. My ability to choose reflects my passing within White society, but the moments of comfort and discomfort within White spaces highlight the role of Cherokeeeness in impacting my subject position. Likewise, my discomfort in claiming a solely Cherokee identity is based on the knowledge that I am not representative of Cherokee culture. I am both White and Cherokee, and I experience spaces as somebody living within those identities. My Whiteness and Cherokeeeness both are felt internally but are suspect in their articulations, as my political identity as Cherokee puts me in opposition to White settler colonialism, and my phenotypic and cultural Whiteness distance me from fully occupying a Cherokee identity.

Part of it is also the burden of coming out, of revealing an identity that is not readily apparent. The concept of identity forces this question, asking you to explain what you are rather than being constructed as a relational subject. You are put in a position in which you must explain yourself, your presence, and more. This is something akin to what Twyla Baker, President of Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College, a tribal college, calls “translation exhaustion,” which is the idea that a marginalized person must first explain historical context all the way to the contemporary, repeatedly, due to the lack of knowledge that the listener has. This is not just an individual issue but rather is emblematic of the erasure of Indigenous histories within school systems (Baker 2019). Because White Cherokees appear White, they are put in a position in which they must explain their relationship to Cherokeeeness and Whiteness. This means, but is not limited to, presenting ancestry, asserting tribal membership, why you do not (or do) know Cherokee, why you do not “look”

Cherokee, and more. This experience is not guaranteed, but oftentimes one must prepare a defense simply to assert one's "true" self. You become emblematic of the problems of settler colonialism and must be willing to resolve that problem by explaining your identity.

The closet exists because there is a hegemonic system present. Because hegemony is at all times concerned with the ways in which a dominant class's power is preserved and exercised, it is also concerned with the regimes of truth that are present. Knowledges are indicative of one's position in the hegemonic system, but hegemonic knowledge can also be used to undermine hegemony. One such instance is blood quantum. Originally imposed by the United States, blood quantum later was a means of greater tribalization, strengthening tribal identities. Rather than just being a way of knowing who was or was not a tribal citizen, it allowed citizens to articulate a distinct legal and political status, one based in Indigeneity and was how rights to land and financial entitlements could be articulated. What was once hegemonic later became counter-hegemonic. Even then, the status of blood quantum as an agent of hegemony or counter-hegemony is circumstantial and depends on the way in which it is being called upon. Rather than thinking of it as solely one or the other, it is more beneficial to consider blood quantum and other ways in which identity is proclaimed and verified as part of a discourse of racial and tribal sovereignty, in which there are moments that racial formations become clearer. These moments are clustered around ways of thinking about race: in one moment, it is blood quantum; in another, it is the presence of historical blood; and in others, it is their cultural knowledge that makes them privy to a particular identity. These are all places where power relations, based on historical and contemporary experiences of knowledge production and subjugation, are fought and defended.

Yet, White Cherokees seem to be presented with a multitude of options, shaped by their position as related to the social, legal, political, and biological parameters of identity. By this, I

mean that White Cherokees (presumably) possess the privilege to divulge their Cherokee identity whenever they see fit. Some may identify as Cherokee and Native and not recognize or reconcile with their Whiteness. Others may not recognize themselves as Cherokee at all really or may even only mark it in checking boxes on bureaucratic forms. In everyday experience, though, I would imagine there are two predominant ways of being a White Cherokee. I would call them Indigenous aligned and settler aligned White Cherokees. In no ways does this dichotomy claim to encompass all, nor do I seek to establish the two categories as inherently coherent, and I find it easily imaginable that some may claim one category and yet be recognized as participating in the other. The politics of people claiming tribal identities are not easily boiled down into two distinct positions either.

Indigenous-aligned White Cherokees articulate their identity as based on a politic of representation, inclusion, and justice. It is a coming-out based on explaining one's views, setting right the information that is present about an issue, or thinking about ways in which Indigenous people may be better incorporated within a given institution or organization. There is, to varying extents, a reckoning with one's Whiteness in ways that contextualize one's position. In general, they understand themselves as aligned with the goals of their fellow tribal members and Native people more broadly. This does not, however, mean that they are involved in actions deemed explicitly political, nor does it mean that what actions they are engaged in are deemed beneficial by other Indigenous people. This kind of identity is, to me, defined in its critical engagement with social and cultural history of the United States and uses its position to articulate and go against a hegemonic history.

Settler-aligned White Cherokees, however, are not using their position in such a manner. These Cherokees can be better understood as those aligned with the hegemonic formation, which



is to say, the dominant White society. They usually come out only in times of asserting difference to legitimate a political position that aims to tackle the issues with Whiteness. I associate this with a defensive “well, I’m Cherokee, and I don’t have a problem with it.” Other times, they come out as Cherokee for the perceived benefits that come with being identified as such, namely in practices of employment and education where the boons of affirmative action are believed to operate to their benefit. Oftentimes, settler-aligned White Cherokees are agents of hegemony, utilizing their position to renew the power that Whiteness holds while utilizing Cherokeeeness selectively to benefit their position.

Both positions are not evident in any White Cherokee person. They may indeed coexist in one subject, which selectively utilizes their Cherokee identity to be critical within spaces of activism while also utilizing it to further validate the position of White society in the United States. The closet as a metaphor allows White Cherokees to articulate their Cherokeeeness and Indigeneity in manners that are embedded in the racial, political, social, and legal systems of governance within both tribal and settler contexts. In asserting an Indigenous-aligned White Cherokee identity, one is working against settler-colonial hegemony, which is predicated on the success of settler colonialism, that is, the erasure of Indigenous people (be it through incorporation or genocide) and the occupation of all their lands. Conversely, a settler-aligned White Cherokee identity is aligned with perpetuating that hegemony. The point of all of this is that the formulation of identity verification and validation is based on exercises of and differences in power and knowledge. They reinforce and challenge the way settler colonialism operates in the United States and challenge narratives of tribal cohesion and the notion of a unified subject experience within any identity. The choices to come out as or refrain from coming out and the context in which it is occurring all help locate White Cherokees within

relationships of power. Most importantly, though, this does not change the fact that all of these people still identify as Cherokee, with tribal membership, and feel that they belong.

### ***10. The White Man on the Fence***

*This time when I was pulling into Papa's, a congregation of cars confronted me. I recognized my dad's and Papa's, but the rest were strangers to me, probably from a lack of paying attention to who drove what from past family events. I got out of the car with my sisters. They came with me today, as did my parents in their own vehicle since we were late, and they refused to wait. My younger sister Allie was home from university on spring break and had not seen Granny and Papa since the holidays. My parents see Granny and Papa much more often than the three of us do, although that has changed as I have been doing fieldwork. Even then, they saw him once or twice a month, my sisters saw them a handful of times a year, rarely more than five or six.*

*"Well how are y'all doing?" Papa greeted us as always, this time accompanied by my uncle, silent but still embracing each of us with a hug and a smile.*

*"We're doin good Papa, how about you?" I said, giving him the usual side hug.*

*"I'm doin good, about to put up this hotwire, you all itching to help?"*

*I nodded in acknowledgement, while my sisters declined respectfully and headed inside to see Granny and everybody else. The work group was made up of Papa, me, my father, my uncle, and two of my cousins, Beau and Moses. They were not coming now*

*since Moses had yet to arrive, and Beau was doing something else, but the two would come to help us out here before too long.*

*We rolled the wire onto a spool that would make it easier to pull across the large swath of fence. Papa held the spool, I cranked it, my uncle assured everything went in an orderly manner, and my dad was unrolling the wire on the other end. A complicated procedure for something that I thought would be much simpler. They all assured me that it was much easier this way than any other way. I was the only hotwire newbie here.*

*Papa and my uncle moved with a synergy about them, silently communicating what was next and so forth. My dad and I disrupted the synergy, me more than him certainly, mostly due to the lack of knowledge and having to be walked through everything. The rest of them had an understanding of how to do most things that they got through experiences over the years. I, however, did not have that, and thus took longer, knew next to nothing, and had to learn how to do it all. Terminology, methods, and more, each thing contributed to me slowly climbing up the learning curve of ranch work. After the spool was rolled, Papa grabbed insulators, and then we rode the ranger to grab the t-posts. Papa and I loaded the t-posts, one after the other, until we had what he deemed “a fair amount.”*

*“That should do us pretty good don’t ya think? We’re just going from the corner there to that other corner,” Papa said, pointing to the edges of the property that were obscured by equipment and trees.*

*“I think so, if not somebody can always come back for another few posts.”*

*“I think so too, let’s head out there, Dan [my uncle] should be there with the tractor by now.”*

*The tractor made putting the t-posts in easier, rather than having any one of us slam it in with specific equipment or a sledgehammer. The tractor’s front end was like that of a bulldozer, with the back end having three spokes for lifting round bales. Papa has two tractors, the big one and small one, respectively. They are a highly versatile piece of equipment, used to make any and every task as easy as can be. In this case, the front end was used to push the posts into the ground, removing the need for muscle work. However, the first post, for the “charger” as Papa called it, would have to be done by hand. It came to the two of us to do this task while my uncle and dad dispersed the t-posts to a spacing they found appropriate. I would hit the t-post with the sledgehammer, applying a force I could manage but make progress with. One, two, three, ding. With each ding, the sledgehammer would move the post further in the ground. When I seemed hopeless, Papa would try and hit the post in, making some more progress but never much more, and then I would try some more. By the time my uncle and dad had returned, Papa and I were found helpless and exhausted by both of our inabilities yet stubborn refusal to let the ground’s rejection of the post stop us. We finished, and they waited. Papa took pliers to adjust the post’s orientation, however miniscule, so that the solar panels on the charger faced the proper direction.*

*“That should be good, now let’s get to grounding it. Evan, get that sandpaper out of the back of the ranger and let’s get some of the rust off this fence, that way it will conduct to the ground better.” I grabbed the sandpaper, and then walked over to the fence and Papa took the paper and started applying pressure to get the rust off, showing me how I should*

*do it. After I did it for a minute or so, my dad stepped over to me while Papa was distracted and showed me a “better” way of doing so. Papa noticed halfway.*

*“That might work, go ahead and try it,” Papa said, as my dad stepped away. I tried it. The paper split in two. Papa and I made eye contact, silently laughing and ridiculing my dad for stepping in only to have his method not only not work but end up with the sandpaper ripping. I continued the way Papa showed me, and we went about setting up the fence. After the charger got set up, my dad and uncle ran the wire from the charger to the other end, where Papa and I were setting up the connector to the barb wire fence that was already there. There was barbed wire already where the new hotwire was going, but this was to ensure that “the cows don’t go teasing the neighbors bull, since he’ll get over if he wants over.”*

*It was at this point that Moses and Beau arrived. Had we seen each other in the barn or house, we would’ve nodded, said hello, asked how the other was doing. Being in the pasture, we acknowledged each other’s presence with a nod and continued. They got off the 4-wheeler and headed to where we were all congregated, giving a nod in recognition of arrival and response. Having finished the connector, we now needed to make sure the wire was as taut as it could be. This required me, Beau, Moses, and my uncle to all pull on the wire as much as we could and hold it while Papa secured it. My dad was in the middle to make sure it was tight there as well, which one would think it would be, but he was there as a contingency plan, I assumed, for what, I do not know. As we held the wire barehanded, my hold started to weaken, and the rest pulled tighter while I adjusted my grip. Shortly thereafter, Moses as well. Then Beau. My uncle never needed*

*to fix his grip, I assumed he either had the callouses to make it not as painful, or he persevered through the pain that the rest of us obviously felt.*

*“Alright, done.” We let go, and the wire stayed in place, tight as can be. We then began moving backward, each one of us attaching insulators in groups of two: Beau and Moses, me and Papa, and my uncle and dad. Papa and I, for some reason, had the daunting task of getting the glass insulators screwed into the tree with raw strength alone. At first, neither of us was able to mount the needed strength to break through the tree’s bark, but eventually, I got a footing and enough of a borehole that let me get the insulator in. This was then repeated for the other two trees that needed an insulator to house the wire.*

*As Papa and I finished up, we headed to the charger so that we could turn it on once everybody had finished attaching the wire to respective insulators and posts. At one point, though, my dad and uncle had finished theirs, and Beau and Moses were the only ones working. “Evan, should I turn that charger on and shock ‘em?” He looked at me with a smile, his eye lit up, he knew what he was doing and knew it would be funny to see.*

*“I don’t know Papa, that’s liable to hurt,” I said, knowing it was well outside of my power to get him not to shock them.*

*“It’s not that bad! I’ll get ‘em real good.” Papa turned on the charger, and on the other end of the wire, we saw Moses jump back from the shock on his hand. Beau was also shocked, but it was through his long sleeve shirt, so he did not react as much. Papa turned off the charger through his laughter and the two gave Papa a look of disapproval and anger. As they headed up the wire, you could tell Papa was in for it from the two based on the look in their eyes. They were angry, but not furious, just enough to voice*

*frustration with Papa's actions, yet not much more than that. He laughed and laughed and laughed, bragging about how he got them good.*

*"That's just mean Papa," Beau said with Moses. Papa finished his laughing, trying to defend himself from the two's judgment. Harmless fun, one could call it. Having had his fun, he got back to work, talking with my uncle and dad. No more than a few yards from us, Beau and Moses started looking back and forth at each other. Their plan was rather obvious to those paying attention. They lied in wait, Beau's finger on the switch, watching Papa's hand hover around the hotwire. He touched it, thinking it was safe to play with while making conversation, yet it was far from that. Beau and Moses flipped the switch, and almost as fast as they had jumped back earlier, Papa did the same. He waved his hand in pain, his body language reflecting the pain and frustration with Beau and Moses having shocked him.*

*"This is why y'all are at the bottom of my list, Evan would never shock me like that! He also listens to me and doesn't think he knows better!"*

*"Sure thing Papa, that's why we're at the bottom of the list, as if you didn't shock us first!" Beau responded.*

*I laughed at Papa saying all that. I did, in fact, not know any better, nor would I shock anybody (at least I'd like to think so), let alone him. The laughter and back and forth between Papa and my cousins left as everybody started making moves to pick up and head back to the barn. When we returned, each man took upon himself to put away certain tools and equipment. I put up the sledgehammer and extra insulators, and a few other trinkets that went into the bucket of hot wire pieces.*

Identity categories are helpful insofar as they are in dialogue with the people they purport to represent. Yet, inside that same insight is the knowledge that identity categories never have, nor could, represent anybody perfectly. They are helpful as heuristics, an intellectual sleight of hand for more complex interactions. The existence of Indigenous implies that of Settler, White implies presence of non-White, and so forth. They are not necessarily dichotomies but nonetheless held in opposition and solidarity with other categories as necessary. Notably, there are histories and memories embedded in identity thinking. In reading about my family putting up a fence, it is not immediately necessary to think about the ways we locate ourselves in categories. Yet, despite being White or Native, we all choose to identify with Cherokee-ness. Subjectivity is helpful in thinking about my family's relationship with identity categories as we make places for ourselves in our surroundings.

As we put together the fence, our self-knowledge comes from different places. For my uncle and Papa, their sense of self comes from a distinct history of growing up on land, traceable from generation to generation back to removal and Cherokee homelands. Although the technology, methods, and animals worked with have changed, and it is now in Paoli, Oklahoma, not Sallisaw or Tahlequah or even Georgia or North Carolina; we know how and where this knowledge was built upon, by who, and that those people are Cherokee, just like we are. This is not an essentialist understanding, but one built on experience and feelings, of interaction and knowledge. My grandfather learned in part from his father, who learned from his, and so on.

In thinking back on Visweswaran's discussion on history and memory that I discussed in my fourth chapter, I find that memory is what drives my understanding of history and my family's relationship to it. We are the products of complex social processes, yet we are not



without agency in these processes. We can conjecture about how history may be different by posing questions from our memories, memories that are embedded in, shaping, and being shaped by history. How might things differ if my great grandfather, Daniel Henry, remained in Eastern Oklahoma? What if my family had relocated to Tulsa, or even Tahlequah, instead of Central Oklahoma? If we had continued to learn Cherokee and passed it down instead of favoring English? What are we capable of doing now to (re?) connect with our elders and ancestors? If history were to change, how would we change?

My family is not alone in this regard. Other families also have moments where questions could be asked that would come to shape the memories that they now have. One's relationship to history is realized, I would argue, in the way that one locates oneself in it. Memories, practices, beliefs, places, and more all serve as ways of putting ourselves into dialogue with how things are and how they could have been. If we focus our efforts on predetermined identity categories, categories that are defined by their relationship to settler colonialism, we lose pieces of the puzzle, and ourselves, to that category. In looking at things through the lens of subjectivity, we retain our sense of self while also gaining clarity about the ways identity categories function and how they are embedded in exercises of political power.

Likewise, looking at practices of place-making and the relationships people have with the land that they are on helps to illuminate aspects of identity and subjectivity. It is a medium through which meaning is given to so much, and in turn, we use metaphors of space to discuss the ways we understand ourselves. Locating identity in practice, caught between two identities, both of these metaphors, amongst many others, evoke images of a spatial relationship. Although this was not the focus of my thesis, I find that spatial metaphors provide a helpful way of looking at identity thinking, which is part of what led me to pursue an analysis of land relationships and

placemaking. People do not exist outside of the relationships they form with the places they inhabit. Even when removed, new place relationships are forged, and older relationships are remembered.

For my family, being Cherokee is about kin. It is about the every day, the small things, the feeling of belonging with those like you. The presence of formal or other modes of being Cherokee is merely verification but does not make me Cherokee. I am made Cherokee through the work I do with Papa, through the meals I eat with him, through the stories he tells me, in the ways he connects me to him, and to his father and mother, and their parents before them. I exist through these people, and their ways of being have resulted in the way I am today. The fact Papa lives and works on his own land is not something out of coincidence; it is part of an inherited way of being, something that goes back in his family to the Cherokee homelands. In putting up the fence, I see myself as connected to those ancestors, who were forced off their land, forced into U.S. citizenship and private land ownership, who then moved as they needed to so that they could provide for themselves and their families. Putting up the fence is not just about delineating where the cattle can graze, but also about marking Papa's land, Papa's land that he has acquired, managed, and taken care of, land that he intends on protecting from the White man, even if the Cherokees around him look like them.

## ***11. Epilogue***

Deciding to focus my thesis research on White Cherokees came amidst a lot of turmoil. Socially and politically, the past year has involved a pandemic, the election of a new president, COVID diagnoses for many family members and me, and so many other things. Thankfully, my

family has managed to recover from their cases without long-term effects manifesting thus far, and my hope is that it remains so.

This research provided a sense of clarity about my own identity. Although I have always understood myself as Cherokee, my connection to it was at times, and other times strong. Although I discussed this some in previous chapters, I wish to reflect more now on how elements of place and metaphors of identity influence my own thinking, albeit in a more explicit manner than previously used.

My mother is a 5<sup>th</sup> generation Cherokee Oklahoman, beginning with Joseph Seabolt and Nancy Hair in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Although Oklahoma only became a state in 1907, her being Cherokee has put her family here since before then. Oklahoma has always been home for her, and I find the same to be true for myself. In my childhood, due to my father's military service, we lived in Florida and Virginia when I was one, up until I turned 7, in 2006. We would return for holidays, and each return carried with a mystical quality. We would stay with my maternal grandmother in south Oklahoma City but would always spend an entire day at Granny and Papa's. My first memories of Papa involve the cold winter wind of Oklahoma chapping my cheeks as I got out of the family car and anxiously walked up to him, meeting a man I have supposedly met time and time again but am now remembering as my grandfather.

Papa's "farm," as we called it in childhood, unconcerned with the nuances of naming land and what it reflects, was a mystical place. It was large and nothing like anything we had seen before. His cattle roamed across the gated pastures, rotating between them so that each pasture could recover before their next turn to host the cattle. He had a bull named Curly, a red and white Hereford whose hairs on his head curled. He was larger than any animal we had seen

before and much closer. Curly lasted a few years before he was sold off, as is the nature of bulls on a ranch, but Curly was part of the excitement.

My mother would always tell us about being Cherokee. How Papa would load her and her siblings into the van with Granny, and they would go to Tahlequah and see the Cherokee Nation, learning about their family and tribe. She spoke of these memories fondly, and my siblings would reminisce with her about their own trips to Tahlequah. I looked forward to these trips with a sense of wonder that I would get to learn more about my family and tribe that I had been told about in-depth yet did not know in person as much. Oklahoma was the state in which I would learn and become connected with being Cherokee. In hindsight, I wasn't wrong, but there was certainly more to it than just being in Oklahoma.

Returning to Oklahoma, we saw Papa more than ever before. In doing so, I identified more strongly with being Cherokee. It felt more "real" than before, in part because I was closer to people who saw me as Cherokee and who I also saw as Cherokee. I identified openly and proudly as Cherokee.

Yet, as I grew up and encountered more and more people who identified as Native, I struggled with this identity more and more. I did not feel secure in claiming it. It felt wrong, almost appropriative. My family's usage of words like "Indian," their comfort level with a local mascot being a "savage" with a headdress, and the ease in which they conveyed their desire to see the Indians win in a western film, each of these and more made me feel less secure in this identity and even at odds with my family. To this day, the latter two of these still make me feel odd inside. I understand now that this feeling is me grappling with the ways that my family's position as Cherokees distant from cultural epicenters has affected them. They see icons that are offensive and find a source of historical representation and value in them. I think that we are

trying to reconcile being Cherokee in the spatial and cultural fringes, finding meaning and belonging where we can.

I understood myself as Cherokee more securely as I finished high school and began my studies at the University of Oklahoma in 2017. As I continued to live life and learn and change, I came to accept and understand the way my Whiteness and Cherokeeeness contoured one another more fully. An almost paradoxical conclusion, I found myself identifying as both. Being Cherokee to me was something that did not overshadow being White, but I also understood that my experiences were very different from those who are racially Native. The two had felt exclusionary growing up, and in the discourses that I had access to, they were often spoken of as mutually exclusive. White Cherokees, however, have existed for a long time and are far from unique to Cherokees. I was only one in a pool of thousands, if not more. This produced for me more questions than answers, questions I reflected on as I spent time with Papa doing fieldwork. How does he see me as solely Cherokee despite my appearance? How am I Cherokee despite the only Cherokees I know being those in my family? What does it mean to be both Cherokee and White?

These questions guided my research, implicitly at first and later explicitly. Without knowing it, I had been asking questions, reading books and articles, and focusing on identity in my studies. My security in being Cherokee does not come from legal recognition entirely, although it certainly secures it in other ways, nor does it come from the relationship with the land that my grandfather has and taught me. It comes instead in the way I relate to my grandfather and other family members, in the way we understand ourselves as Cherokees and descendants of other Cherokees. The injustices that affected our ancestors, although distant in time, are no less relevant to righting the wrongs of this country. Our being in Oklahoma is not a coincidence, but

it is on purpose and was to make room in the southeastern United States for more settlers and economic expansion. We are in Central Oklahoma because of assimilatory policies aimed at dispossessing and fragmenting Indigenous populations in Oklahoma. In holding on to Cherokeeity, whether we know it or not, we defy these policies and recognize the importance of history in shaping the contemporary. This is possible because of the simultaneous fluid and rigid nature of identity. The persistence of biological notions of identity makes it possible for us to adhere to our identity, yet the importance of a quantifiable amount of Cherokee blood and visually appearing as Cherokee are also important to claim this identity. These understandings come out of social negotiations, spatial arrangements, and political relationships.

As COVID vaccinations began to be distributed in 2021, my family decided to gather for Easter in early April. It was my first-time seeing Papa since March of 2020, a year earlier. Since our last meeting, we had chatted over the phone a few times, conveyed how we missed one another and hoped for the pandemic to end. In the course of a year, I was close to finishing my coursework for my degree, we had both been infected by and recovered from COVID-19, thankfully without complications. Papa had also started a small garden behind the barn, consisting of tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables, although none were heritage seeds, a fact I found a bit funny, although unsurprising as he did not access the internet at all really, and would not have known about the Seed Bank at that point (although he does now). The small family reunion at Easter was a welcome event for all and a cause to also celebrate some of the good things that had happened, chief among them being my older sister's engagement to her fiancée.

Papa did not seem to protest that she was engaged to a woman and welcomed her fiancée with open arms. Her fiancée, an Italian Jew from New York, brought another person with different experiences to be shared and understood. Furthermore, Papa's sister Diane, Aunt Di as

we called her, was also present. I had never met her, and she hadn't seen Papa for a long time. As the day ended, she congratulated Papa on his big family and how he was blessed with all these people. Papa responded in a joking fashion, praising our family for its diversity, "We have all kinds of people down here, Choctaws, Cherokees, Irishmen, and Israelites," he said, winking at my sister's fiancée, who was seated directly across from him, and me. I rolled my eyes at his saying Israelites, a term I was not necessarily familiar with but knew was not appropriate. Granny chimed in, "and German!" to which Papa responded, "we ain't got no Nazis!" which prompted another wink and stifled laughs from those around him. The stifling of our laughter, I think, reflects a general knowledge that the joke was funny for its sudden shift and inappropriateness in reducing Germany to one moment in history, albeit a tragic moment that still has consequences in the present.

What I think his praising of family diversity also does is showcase the resilience and value of identity thinking in the everyday. It is precisely because identity thinking is always shorthand for complex relationships and processes that it is fluid and resilient. The semiotic sleight of hand that is compiling hundreds, if not thousands, of years of history into one word is deceptively simple. Identity thinking is resilient in part because it is a shorthand for so many complex relationships, and it is in that shortening act that people are put on the margins of identities, negotiating a belonging that is felt but not seen or understood as readily. This does not mean that any identity claim is free for anybody to make. Rather, they must be understood as arising out of historical relationships and be afforded a certain amount of recognition. In examining cases like my own, on the margins of identity categories, there are insights to be gained in how identity thinking operates, and even clarity into the workings of settler-colonialism, land, and how they continue to operate and influence the present.

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