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THE BALL GAME OF THE SOUTHEAST: STICKBALL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (CRM) IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

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THE BALL GAME OF THE SOUTHEAST: STICKBALL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (CRM) IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Dovie Deloris Ketchum, Tommy Downey, Cammack Brokeshoulder, and all those that lifted my soul when I stumbled along the way.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements iv

Table of Contents v

List of Figures vi

Abstract viii

Prologue – Emergence of Persistence 1

Chapter 1 – Study Design and Data Collection . . . 26

Chapter 2 – Applying the Actor-Network-Theory . . . 58

Chapter 3 – Choctaw Social Ecology in the Anthropocene . . 82

Chapter 4 – Killing the Game to Save the Man . . . 107

Chapter 5 – Playing in Forests and on the Ball Fields . . 146

Chapter 6 – Conclusion 188

Bibliography 195

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	*Page*
Figure P.1: Jim Tubby, 1908	3
Figure P.2: *Nanih Waiya* Mound	8
Figure 1.1: *Tullockchisko* by (George Catlin).	27
Figure 1.2: *Ball Play of the Choctaws – Ball Up* (Catlin)	28
Figure 1.3: Rick Billy telling Choctaw stories	45
Figure 1.4: Toby Billy inspecting a pair of *kapucha*	46
Figure 1.5: Luther Ringlero is flaring out the *kapucha* cup	47
Figure 1.6: Rance Weryackwe measuring *kapucha* length	48
Figure 2.1: Toby Billy working on *kapucha*	60
Figure 2.2: Ouachita National Forest	62
Figure 2.3: Pair of *kapucha*	70
Figure 5.1: Small pair of *kapucha*	147
Figure 5.2: Stylized *kapucha*	153
Figure 5.3: Mississippi Choctaw Hat/Cap, circa 1900	154
Figure 5.4: *Kapucha* made from cedar	160
Figure 5.5: Hickory Leaf	160
Figure 5.6: Tombigbee Forest, Mississippi	161
Figure 5.7: Hickory ready for bark to be stripped	161
Figure 5.8: Discussing the dimensions needed for *kapucha*	164
Figure 5.9: Harvesting a hickory tree	165

Figure 5.10: Drawknife 166

Figure 5.11: Hickory split to prepare for use 167

Figure 5.12: Phil's jig for bending *kapucha* 168

Figure 5.13: Steam box used to make hickory workable . . . 168

Figure 5.14: Steam-box II 169

Figure 5.15: Flared out cup for *kapucha* 170

Figure 5.16: *Kapucha* waiting for the cup to be strung . . . 170

Figure 5.17: Clamp applied to hold *kapucha* after bending . . . 171

Figure 5.18: 'Hangers' or 'Hanging Pair' of *kapucha* . . . 173

Figure 5.19: Choctaw Rabbit Stick 174

Figure 5.20: Picture of issues with hickory staves 175

Figure 5.21: *Kapucha* can snap 176

Figure 5.22: Toby after bending a stick 176

Figure 5.23: *Kapucha* and *Towa* 177

Figure 5.24: New tool for flaring out cup in second year . . . 178

Figure 5.25: *Kapucha* wrap variations in a circle 179

Figure 5.26: *Kapucha* for *Chikasha Bak Bak* 181

Figure 5.27: *Chikasha Bak Bak* uniforms in action 183

ABSTRACT

Forests are an essential source of natural resources in the production of racquets used by Choctaw (*Chahta)* people to play *Kapucha Toli*, also known as stickball or the ball game of the southeast. Choctaw efforts to sustain culture depend upon preserving the ability to locate and gather Shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*) making the game possible. As climate variations from human activity increase concerns about the future health of ecosystems and sustainability of natural resources, how can tribes integrate cultural values into current forest management plans? This dissertation case study argues that integrating cultural resources into natural resource management plans assures Choctaw sustainability goals become foundational in the collaborative stewardship of Oklahoma forests. Climate change data is projecting future disruptions to ecosystems that will directly implicate Choctaw communities and their ways of living in numerous ways (Bennett, T. M. B. et al. 2014). Choctaw communities and their cultures are vulnerable to competing interests for natural resources brought about by human induced climate variations (Bennett, T. M. B. et al. 2014). Cultural preservation is uniquely tied to sustaining Choctaw cultural interests in the natural resources of local ecosystems. In supplying natural resources for fabrication into cultural materials, forests enable socializing activities like stickball vital in the continuation of Choctaw culture.

KEY WORDS: Choctaw Stickball, Climate Change, Cultural Resource Management, Indigenous Methodology, Forests, Hickory, Persistent Identity System, Social Theory.

The Ball Game of the Southeast

Prologue: Emergence of Persistence

Emergence: An Introduction to the *Okla*

When a story reaches the point of enveloping the storyteller's voice as a passenger on the journey of shared experience, this is when the embodiment of the age-old adage "a good story writes itself" begins to take form. A storyteller may miss the purpose—miss a story—when writing before the words are apparent. When beginning this educational journey, in a possible existential bout of ego, I scattered on pages words concerning academic questions to nuanced themes pertaining to Indigenous people's rights to natural resources in their homelands. However, it is when words are evident in actions, and possibly in the fiber of their being, that a storyteller can become the receptacle of a tale—receptacle of a living story.

The significance of storytelling to *Okla* (people) is its use to transmit a rich repository of cultural symbols and events to both members and non-community members. Stories transmit acceptable behaviors and continuing ethical principles amongst group members. Discussing the reorganization of the Mississippi Choctaw government in the 1940s, Baxter York says that the Creator's law institutes an enduring principle that "they shouldn't forget their culture and language and their name", making stories an ideal instrument for community remembrance (York interview 8/22/1975: 2).

The Creator made a covenant with the *Okla*, and according to York, they would not be forgotten as long as they remember the name given to them (York interview 8/22/1975: 2). In honor of this communion, truth in the presence of the divine was to be spoken and expressed in the open. Dialogues on community development were

conducted on sunny days on mounds expressing a perceptible socio-ecological symbiosis in Choctaw understandings of their place in the universe.

Storytelling as methodology can provide an ethnographic gaze into a community, incorporating local principles and worldviews into the purview. Storytelling is a *Chahta* modality for the cultural transmission of ethics; *Chahta* (Choctaw) ethics are based upon a continuum of family tales from before sovereign authority acted upon a way of life. Cultural stories are foundational in developing community relations via shared meanings and experiences that become transmitted in retellings through the generations. Stories retold at cultural events become semiotic sources for an emergent cultural revival, which for Choctaw people will spring forth in the lives of future generations with the prospect to engage in community defining activities.

Echoing similar words Curtis Billy mentioned in his presentation at the Bizzell Library in 2009, Choctaw Historian Olin Williams, at Choctaw Days at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), describes *Kapucha Tolih* or *tolih* (Choctaw Stickball) as representing the resiliency of Choctaw culture (Williams 2013). While watching a video of Williams' presentation, I was beginning to understand what Rick Billy, a Choctaw language instructor, and his son Toby Billy were trying to get across to me when I asked questions about Choctaw social practices vulnerable to a changing climate. In a profound moment of clarity, this project's direction became clear: the persistence stickball imagery as a semiotic representation of Choctaw culture, and as a result the significance of the role Shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*) plays, as source

material for *kapucha* (racquets) for the ball game of the Southeast, in the associations that organize Choctaw social life.



Figure P.1: Choctaw Man, Jim Tubby, 1908, Mark Raymond Harrington, National Museum of the American Indian, Catalog number: P12169 https://siarchives.si.edu/blog/telling-story-illuminating-native-heritage-through-photography (accessed 8/15)

My ethnographic contribution was moving away from climate variations and culture, specifically questions regarding water shortages and Choctaw social practices in the Anthropocene; and, now, focusing more on the persistent facets of Choctaw culture as a story of cultural resiliency, cultural materiality, and cultural activity. Susan Crate and Mark Nuttal (2009) explain that climate change research for the discipline of anthropology is about culture, and the use of hickory for *kapucha* is a practice providing an interesting way to approach questions concerning ecological change and culture. The reliance on hickory as a source material in fabricating *kapucha* makes it a cultural practice interdependent upon the health of local forests in Oklahoma and throughout the southeast.

Choctaw stickball is a field sport and social activity that continues to express culture for communities in Mississippi and Oklahoma. However, despite having a uniquely Choctaw flare, stickball is not an entirely Choctaw game. Stickball features some shared qualities with other field sports played with two racquets by the original cultures in the southeastern part of the United States—a reason it is regarded as the Ball Game of the Southeast. Cherokee, Chickasaw, Muscogee Creek, and Seminole people share a variation of the ball game with Choctaw people. Each variation is played with two rackets, but each version is culturally specific to a community with particular etiquettes and ceremonies associated with the game.

Differences can center on purpose and circumstance for a match or game, including games for social, ceremonial, diplomatic, and leisure purposes. Stickball games were vital in community development as children throughout the southeastern were able to engage in routine play "to become familiar with local traditions and practices (Rogoff 2003:295)." Stickball developed and reflected Choctaw customary actions of incorporating local ecologies into material relations of 'growth', thus bringing both nature and *Chahta Okla* (Choctaw People) into being (Ingold 2011:87-88). One common feature of the southeast ball game is not picking up a *towa* (ball) with one's hands. A gendered variation of the game exists that allows the women's team to use their hands, but the men's team must use two racquets. The Cherokee Fish Game is a community game played male against female, where women use their hands to throw the ball at a piece of wood designed to look like a fish placed on top of a pole.

Seemingly, sticks can carry a degree of taboo if touched or used by the wrong individual. Though not to be specific on purpose at the moment, some stickball cultures

practice a belief that a set of sticks has cultural agency and each stick represents a duality in the sexes. If one stick in a set is male and/or if the stick is doctored with medicine, one can see how this might create a circumstance where a taboo on women carrying a child touching sticks is necessary for spiritual balance in a community. Context is important to remember when examining social phenomena. When the game occupied a different ceremonial space among the Choctaw, it is possible a similar protocol to that of the Cherokee was followed, and a man would give up his sticks "rendered unfit"—or even not be allowed to play in a match—if his wife had touched them before a match (James Mooney 1890:111).

"*Chihowa* puts you on a journey through the game," mentions Rick Billy, as he describes an important aspect of the game communicated to him by Pastor Eli Samuels. According to Rick, Pastor Samuels taught an important lesson on facing adversity in the game when he stated, "If you get hit, get up." Rick explains this is an important lesson about the game often overlooked contemporarily by those who equate the game with the ferocity of just being a contact field sport. Hits are a part of the ball game, Rick stresses. His point being that character is on display in how one responds in situations of difficulty. In many ways, Pastor Samuels lesson about stickball is mirrored in the lives of *Chahta Okla* and their response to cultural adversity. Continuing on the topic his father started, Toby Billy talks about one motivation for playing Choctaw Stickball. Describing it as a journey towards balance for players and community, Toby says, "Game is played because the Creator gave the game to end the conflict between brothers, as the inception of the game was about ending the chaos."

In a similar description, Simpson Tubby talks about the value the "peace game" played in stabilizing relations and constructing new affinities between Choctaw communities (Swanton 2001:153). The 'peace game' is a version of the ball game where communities are divided into teams by moiety (Swanton 153). Considering instability in community or between communities could result around varying lines of affinity, from familial to clan disputes, the social institution established in stickball repositions local kinship and clan networks by extending associations in the formation of identify to include township and regional affinities. Choctaw Nation was organized into subdivisions consisting of townships and village-like or analogous areas, making an activity that could structure lives for social cohesion a significant attribute. From cheering on your local teams to your region's team, social networks and geographical affinities surrounding and established through Choctaw Stickball seem analogous with the modern landscape of sports fandom.

This ethnographic report tells a story about the Shagbark hickory-*kapucha-Chahta Toli* culture network. This manuscript is a presentation of one small part of a deeply storied social history for Choctaw people and exposes readers to a persistence life way and practice. The reason I say a social history is because this is very much a story of the people who contribute to a particular form of cultural continuation. This is a tale of emergence embodied in the tenacity of a community to coalesce and persist, reflected in the stories of their origin. The story of Choctaw people coming to inhabit their ancient homelands is a story of emergence from a Cave very different from Plato's account of surfacing from a cave (Plato and Bloom 1968)—an emergence embodied in a community and peoples' acts of persistence and coalescence. This story was

originally told by *Pisatuntema*- known as Emma in English. Sometime around 1910, *Pisatuntema* begins our tale:

> "In very ancient times, before man lived on the earth, the hill was formed, and from the topmost point, a passage led down deep into the bosom of the earth. Later, when the birds and animals lived, and the surface of the earth was covered with trees and plants of many sorts, and lakes and rivers had been formed, the Choctaw came forth through the passageway in Nane'Chaha. And from that point, they scattered in all directions, but afterwards, remembered the hill from the summit of which they first beheld the light of the sun." (Mould 2004:65)

The emergence of a *Chahta* community from the cave stands in stark contrast to the story relayed in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* in that the Choctaw emerge and inhabit the world as a community (Plato and Bloom 1968). This is not a tale about the importance of the observations of a philosopher in spreading the light of inquiry into the darkness of the cave. *Pisatuntema* provides a symbolic narrative on the exogenesis of the *Okla* (Choctaw people) that indicates an emergence from *Nanih Waiya* and a ceremonial relationship to this mound.

Cultural games such as *tolih* are informed and situated in local landscapes as an active reflection of relations to ancient homelands, as games can express practice and participation in natural environments. Describing Choctaw 'cultural actions' as the embodiment of continuance, Leanne Howe (2014) explains homelands are part of an *Embodied Tribalography*. Howe explains that active experiences and relations to a place are generated from a genesis event of temporal emergence that incorporates an emergent sacredness to a landscape and can be passed on to future generations in communally stories and activities of being. Howe gives the example of playing sports as an act of Choctaw cultural continuation in her novel *Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story*—a Choctaw story set in both 1907 and present day Oklahoma.

Standing on the summit of the Choctaw Mother Mound, *Nanih Waiya,* in Mississippi in the sweltering heat of July with the sun hanging high overhead, I am reminiscent of *Pisatuntema's* words. The words "scattered in all directions" represent the current state Choctaw people find themselves in with Choctaw people living across the United States, and some, usually in one of the armed services, living across the globe. Considering the potential symbolism represented in the design of a *kapucha* cup and Pisatuntema's mention of remembering *Nanih Waiya* (Figure P.2) as the place of beholding light, I cannot help pondering the association of sunlight to the concept of knowledge, possibly reproduced in the geometric forms and patterns in the design of a *kapucha*.



Figure P.2: *Nanih Waiya* Mound located in Winston County, Mississippi (Photo by Scott Ketchum)

Unmistakably, one *kapucha* style resembles a circle with a cross in the center splitting the horizon into four directions. The added perception of duality held in each pair of sticks takes on greater meaning when considering a conscious selection in crafting *kapucha*. Each headman, elder, family, clan, stomp ground, township, or community had the potential for a story associated with the fabrication process of

kapucha. Connecting the continuation of cultural symbolism in Mississippi Choctaw communities to family stories passed through the generation, Mould 2003 writes,

> "The long ago past exists only in passed down stories, whether written or oral. This is the history of greatest cultural symbolism: rabbit sticks and blowguns; prophets and rainmen. But quickly, tribal history makes a jump to remembered experience: house dances and stickball games; hog roasts and farming. It is a life and land void of cars, electricity, and running water, a life full of sweat and toil and hunger, a life of the supernatural and the family. (Mould 2003:xxxi)"

Mould also eloquently elaborates on the significance of community social experiences, giving context and meaning, in the continuation of Choctaw cultural symbols. The interplay of storytelling, experience, and interaction continues to be a community-based formula for cultural resource management. The fabrication of Choctaw cultural symbols in materials like rabbit sticks and *kapucha* continue as a result of contemporary kinship and family bonds.

The retelling of *Pisatuntema's* story begins this ethnographic account and challenges two prevailing dialogues concerning Indigenous peoples. One discourse concerns the universalized image that represents Indigenous people as living a nomadic existence close to nature and outside of the boundaries of civilization. Community retellings of origin stories serve to disrupt external depictions, something Gus Palmer (2003) describes as an act of recreating the storytelling voice in portrayals of origins to counter the "post card Indian" representations—images of 'Indianness' universalized from photos similar to those taken by Edward Curtis.

Continuing to challenge the Cartesian rationale behind illustrations of indigenous peoples' contributions to civilization, Pisatuntema describes social cohesion and a sense of identity being innately situated within interplays of relations to landscapes. From the premises of Social Contract theorists, the social was

conceptualized as springing from the motivations of the human mind apart from nature—a formulation of human ontology where non-human things stand outside of modifying relations with human actors (Locke 1948). The second discourse concerns the origins of the Choctaw people and their connection to Mississippian cultures that preceded European arrival. *Pisatuntema*'s story over the emergence from the mound frames social space through the recognition of *Chahta Okla*'s relationship of origin to the mound and surrounding ecologies.

Knowledge concerning origins is often framed as relational in landscapes (Thornton 1997; 2008; Boas 1901; Cruikshank 2000). Origin stories can provide understandings of community values that define contemporary beliefs held among Choctaw people. In an alternative account of their appearance in the Mississippi region, Peter Folsom (1899) describes the Choctaw and Chickasaw monogenesis as a long migration to the region following the guidance of a pole. Folsom states,

> "The ancestors of the Choctaws and the Chickasaws lived, in primeval times, in a far western country, under the rule of two brothers named Chahta and Chikasa. In process of time, their population becoming very numerous and their territory overcrowded, they found it difficult to procure subsistence in that land. Their prophets thereupon announced to them that far to the east was a country of fertile soil and with abundance of game where they could live in ease and plenty... A great prophet marched at their head, bearing a pole, which, every evening on camping, he planted erect in the earth in front of the camp. The next morning, the pole was always seen leaning in the direction they were to travel that day. After the lapse of several moons, they arrived one day at the mound on Nanih Waiya Creek where they camped for the night. The prophet erected the sacred pole at the base of the mound. The next morning the pole was seen standing erect and stationary. This was interpreted as an omen from the Great Spirit that the long sought-for land was at last found. It so happened, the very evening the advanced party camped at Nanih Waiya Creek that a party under Chikasa crossed the creek and camped on the eastern side. That night a great rain fell, and it rained several days… Nanih Waiya Creek and other tributaries of Pearl River were rendered impassable. After the subsidence of the waters,

> messengers were sent across the creek to bid Chikasa's party return, as the oracular pole had proclaimed that the long sought-for land was found, and the mound was the center of this land. Chikasa's party, however, regardless of the weather, had proceeded on their journey… In this way the Choctaws and the Chickasaws became two distinct, though kindred nations (Mould 2004:71-72)."

The story of the brothers *Chahta* and *Chickasha,* a story with many recorded variations but common elements, is a tale about the sustainability of ecologies and recognition of socio-ecological balance. In this version re-told by Peter Folsom, where most versions focus on the balance of community to surrounding ecologies and resources, *Chickasha's* party moves onward toward their own homeland after considering local flooding and community size.

Illuminating on stories contribution to perception, Thomas King (2003) describes stories and storytelling as a major component in contributing to human understandings, and suggests contemplating several meanings and interpretations associated with a story. In addition to origin stories, Choctaw stories also provide ethical frames for approaching knowledge. To reinforce the understanding that all knowledge is relational and given from the Creator, a story of two brothers—Tashka and Walo—being asked not to share certain details of their adventure following the sun home, and in which they pay the ultimate price, provides an important lesson in listening to those who share information with you, especially when knowledge might be consider sacred (Bushnell 1909). Doyle Tubby describes Choctaw storytelling as a family affair as "Each family had their own way of storytelling (Mould 2003:xxxiv)." Choctaw Storytelling is a practice aimed at establishing and transmitting a collective memory and history in retelling family experiences that interpret "event and daily life" (Mould 2003:xxxiv).

Squinting as I look up into the sun, the rays take form into numerous patterns echoing motifs of days past. As far as storytelling goes, a journey started in 2011—when I began studying anthropology and documenting drought conditions in South Central and South Eastern Oklahoma—felt like it had finally come full circle in this moment. Little did I know how real that declaration would become in the coming month with the historical water agreement negotiated between Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations with the State of Oklahoma, announced on August 11, 2016.

In truth, this journey began on a snowy February 4th. I still remember it, like it was, yesterday. It was my mother's birthday. We had a funeral to attend. My father's Grannie Myrtle had passed away earlier that week. We struggled driving from Yukon, Oklahoma to Ardmore. The trip must have taken several hours. On a good day, it might take an hour and a half to two hours at most to get there traffic permitting. Stopping at a Stuckey's, my father makes a phone call, and then he tells my mother something. We stopped to consider turning back. Something has changed. Dad drives faster, as fast as possible—you know, fast enough without endangering lives. Arriving at the Indian Hospital in Ardmore, we quickly head to the lobby on the floor where my Grandma Ketchum was staying after suffering a minor heart attack a few days prior. My dad had taken off to ask my grandmother if she felt like seeing everyone- I thought. I mean, I guess that is what I thought was going on. I remember he was heading towards us. Something was different in the way he approached us. Then, with tears in his eyes, he simply said, "She's gone." At the young age of 46 years, Dovie Delores Smith-Ketchum passed away.

Out of protection, I was never really allowed to say goodbye. I was left with memories of words and stories, and they brought me this far to Mississippi. Soon, I would make the drive toward the Neshoba/Kemper county line, towards places in family stories that are now fields of overgrow weeds; for the time, I am unaware of the intersecting story of vulnerability and resilience analogous with my family in Mississippi after the rest of Choctaw Nation left for Indian Territory on the Trail of Tears.

While leaving the park, I gather a few hickory nuts that I almost trip over getting into the truck. We start the drive towards *Bogue Chitto* to an area around the Neshoba/Kemper line where my Grandma Ketchum's Brokeshoulder's family had allotments of land until sometime late into the 1890s. It is in this area that they had resided for generations before my great-great grandfather Cammack Brokeshoulder had to leave to live on his allotted land in Oklahoma around 1911. Cammack was married in Mississippi in 1908 in a ceremony conducted by Simpson J. Tubby (Green et al. 1922:250-252). Though I can never be certain, there is a high degree of probability that Cammack played stickball on a regular basis with community members around the Neshoba area. Cammack would leave all that behind and remarry in Oklahoma giving birth to my great grandmother Corrine (Connie) Brokeshoulder-Smith and my uncle Cammack (Mike) Brokeshoulder jr. (West).

My family expedition to the Choctaw homeland, to a place considered the site of Choctaw genesis and located in a landscape of timeless cultural revelations, capped off my ethnographic project on Choctaw Social Ecology and Climate Change but would serve as the opening of this ethnographic tale. Amy and I set out eastward with Aiden

and Aren during the summer of 2016 to visit where Cammack grew up in Mississippi. Having an opportunity to visit the forests in Southeastern Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana that Choctaw people inhabit cemented my understanding of the significance of forested and riparian ecologies to Choctaw cultural practices.

Framing this ethnographic story around the resilience of Choctaw culture is to trace one trajectory of a game that is, and was, shared throughout the Southeast. My own identity as a person of mixed Choctaw and European ancestry very much influenced how I approached fieldwork and wrote the text for this ethnographic report. My family is Mississippi Choctaw from Oklahoma, which denotes my great-great grandfather Cammack Brokeshoulder arrived in Indian Territory in 1904 to apply for recognition as a Choctaw to receive an allotment of land.

Actually, Cammack would go back to Mississippi until legal adulthood, returning to Oklahoma to live on his allotted lands sometime around 1913 or 1914. On July 24, 1911, Commissioner Wright at the Muskogee, Oklahoma Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) oversaw a hearing that would determine his fate on receiving allotted lands in Oklahoma. Since Cammack had not established residency on his property, his claim was in jeopardy. Commissioner Wright declared,

> "Claimant testified May 25, 1911, that he knew nothing of the requirements of the law as to three years continuous residence in the Choctaw-Chickasaw county, and, considering the fact that he is a young Choctaw Indian, having no one to advise him and to properly look after his interests, his statement is no doubt true…The evidence shows that claimant has no property in the State of Mississippi…I am therefore of the opinion that patent should be issued in the name of said Cammack Brokeshoulder for his allotment selection, under the provision of Section 42 of the Act of Congress approved July 1, 1902 and it is so ordered (Brokeshoulder family records, BIA Claims Commission 1911).

He was only an eight-year-old when he arrived in Indian Territory and was expected to live on property for three consecutive years. Before starting this project, I had lots of questions about Cammack's life and why my family had remained in Mississippi when the majority of Choctaw people left for lands in present day Oklahoma. Faded documents I received in a packet from my grandmother's family records discuss an Oklahoma Supreme Court case, *Brokeshoulder v. Brokeshoulder*, having something to do with Cammack's land (Green et al. 1922). Once I had asked my grandmother's brother—my Uncle Mike Smith— about what happened to Cammack, but at this point all I had to go on were family stories.

Lest We Forget: Telling Cammack's Story

Would I be able to survive a journey on foot eastward from Oklahoma across forested lands in Arkansas, traversing the Mississippi River, and, if not already difficult enough, being no older than eight years of age? Thinking to myself about the sheer insanity of such a feat, I wonder how a boy Cammack's age was able to walk back to Mississippi from Oklahoma with just his brother Adam—the closest in age to Cammack and second youngest of the five Brokeshoulder brothers that also included James, Lee, and John. A family story suggests the brothers walked back along the railroad tracks that brought them into Indian Territory.

At an age very close to that of my youngest son Aren, and compared with the prospect of him making a similar expedition, I am uncertain that any parent today could condone such an action. Nor would it be possible without a call to DHS upon spotting

two children walking unaccompanied. Nevertheless, this was a time when socialization for children included methods for surviving with local biota.

Cammack was born near Bogue Chitto around the Neshoba/Kemper County lines close to Philadelphia, Mississippi sometime around 1896, around the time of passage of the Dawes Act and soon-to-be passed Curtis Act (1898) in Oklahoma. Cammack's birth was a time of transition for Choctaw families who stayed in Mississippi communities and had limited contact with non-Choctaw outsiders. Missionaries were able to establish churches for the first time in several of these communities. From what I have gathered, Cammack was from a Choctaw family fortunate enough to have an ancestor who received an allotment of land in Mississippi as outlined in Article 14 of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek.

After driving across the river from Arkansas into Mississippi, I am immediately astonished by the shear magnitude of Cammack's long, possibly heralding, journey. For a youth with little to no supervision, a trip across several states would seem to require a fearless spirit or, in the least, one that is driven with a purpose—like going back to the place you call home. Elaborating on the capabilities and adventurous disposition of Choctaw boys, H.B. Cushman, son of a missionary living among the Choctaw in 1831 to 1833, wrote that the tendency "was to gain all the experience possible in all manly exercises" (Cushman 1999:196).

I wondered what motivated Cammack to make such a journey? What was waiting for him and Adam in Mississippi? What made that area home for him? Besides stories, I know little was written about Mississippi Choctaw culture beyond books depicting their life from the documents of missionaries (Kidwell 1986; 1995; Goode

1863:64-65). According to Baxter York, the "remnant of the main nation stayed" to continue a collective way of living in Mississippi; York says so that they could continue to practice "*i'yi koya*: everybody go and help cut cotton, and logrolling and so on (York 4/8/1974)." As ideal as *i'yi koya* (*iyyi kowa*: broken foot) that sounds, I knew something must have changed, and I was pretty certain a life of isolation and invisibility had moments of oppositional encounter.

Mould gives an account of the social and cultural upheaval the Mississippi Choctaw faced in the 1890s when time and colonial forces finally penetrated into their isolated communities hidden in a bubble of forests, fields, rivers, and swamps. Mould writes,

> "The history of the Mississippi Choctaw is the slow continuous history of daily struggle. Family stories, shared broadly, record the struggle between the Choctaw who stayed and the whites that moved in. In one story, the missionaries burned all the stickball sticks, decrying the game and the revelry that surrounded it, in order to save the Choctaw's souls. They burned all of the sticks, that is, except those of the Bogue Chitto players who, as Estelline Tubby recounts, stated simply, "No. We will not listen to those people. We'll just keep our things and keep our culture the way it is. (Mould 2003: xxxiii)"

Though situated in numerous distinctions, this statement of refusal and allegiance to Choctaw Stickball seems very reminiscent of a position document concerning lacrosse players (Simpson 2014). These acts of continuation and determination were likely social influences on Cammack, as all of this upheaval took place during his childhood.

Besides daily struggle, Mould's statement elaborates on history through *kapucha* as reflecting the community's vulnerability to external forces and resiliency in acts of continuation. Stickball is imprinted in both landscape and collective memory for Choctaws living in Mississippi, making Choctaw ontology a reflection of both material

and symbiotic relations with *kapucha*. This social symbiotic relationship is developed in the repeated human interactions that play a part in transforming the environment not as "inscription", but as incorporative of the dynamic growth of all natural beings interacting in Choctaw Social Ecology (Ingold 2011:87-88).

As a boy living in a world rapidly changing, *Kapucha-toli* would have been an activity that might afford a sense of peace and stability— a semblance of continuation in a way of life- anything that would allow some amnesty from the onslaught of vultures and contractors looking to make deals for allotted forested lands in Mississippi that followed in the wake of the federal government's acquisition of Choctaw lands. Every last speck of land was to be consumed by the immensely large circulating horde of lease companies, contractors, and speculators intent on picking Choctaw lands, much like bones, clean of Choctaws.

Cammack may have been vulnerable in a world of unscrupulous contractors looking to strike a deal for a few acres when they arrived in Indian Territory or in a world of foremen looking to sell Mississippi Choctaws as laborers. "They intended to sell the Choctaw, presumably as slaves, once they arrived in the Indian Territory. (Levine 2004: 531-532)" However, a persistent familiarity and affinity to the things that define individuals seems to be exactly how culture resiliency is embodied in the lives of cultural practitioners.

Well, I have gotten ahead of myself, as I never told you how the journey began. The allotment of lands in Choctaw Nation brought the family to the area to file their claims for allotments in Indian Territory, as "Entire Choctaw communities tended to migrate together…unified, kin-based community (Levine 2004: 531)." Traveling from

somewhere in Mississippi near present day Bogue Chitto in 1905, my great-great-great grandmother Frances Billey-Brokeshoulder and her husband Nicholas Brokeshoulder's father *Oklanatubbee* made the journey in a similar fashion. *Oklanatubbee*'s English name was Adam Brokeshoulder, spelled 'Okchalintábi' by ethnographer John Swanton (2001) who visited with Simpson Tubby in the Neshoba/Kemper area in the 1920s and translates it as "He-saved-and-killed".

Frances Billey had been widowed for a brief time and then remarried Elan Tookolo, and by 1904 they had a one-year-old daughter named Sarah Ann Pearl Tookolo; this meant that Nicholas Brokeshoulder must have passed away at some point between Cammack's birth and Sarah's. Having been recently remarried and with Cammack being so young compared to his oldest brother James Brokeshoulder, almost twenty years his junior, raised my curiosity about their father Nicholas Brokeshoulder. What I knew for certain was Nicholas Brokeshoulder and Francis Billey were part of the Choctaw communities that stayed behind in Mississippi after a larger group migrated to Indian Territory, known as the horrific Trail of Tears, following the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830.

Traveling to Indian Territory in 1904 to apply for tribal citizenship and an allotment of land, Francis Billey and Elan, ultimately, would not receive allotments, as a result of Francis being a direct descendent of a *Hickubi*, who received 640 acres in Mississippi along the Neshoba/Kemper county lines. I did not realize this was a rare occasion itself. Baxter York expounds on both the rarity as well as loss in the "proof that we have today is that we have one 640 acres on on (sic) Neshoba and Kemper line (York 1974:2)." This seemed to confirm family stories on the loss of land, but there

would be further confirmation of events—and of details I only thought were true of an experience documented concerning the Osage (McAuliffe 1999; Red Corn 2002).

Continuing on the rarity of receiving an allotment in Mississippi, the process for filling with claims commissions in Mississippi created factors that lead to only a few families receiving lands. Confusion on the part of the community spotlighted an issue when Choctaw Nation split in two. Many of those who stayed behind did not speak English and followed the traditional ways of electing representatives in negotiations concerning community matters. Communication and cultural barriers made cheating Choctaw people trying to navigate legal documents in English an easy endeavor- and so it commenced, the cheating.

Mississippi Historian Franklin L. Riley (1904) writes a very informative account on the degree of deceit in both the cases of the Choctaw Land Claims and Yazoo Land Claims, both being commissions established to register Mississippi Choctaws. A reprinted account of the testimony from Gabriel Lincecum revels two significant observations about Choctaw culture. Lincecum states, "I saw the representation of some of these Indians go forward to agent with a large bundle of sticks, as is the Indian custom, and offer to register the families thus represented" (Riley 1904:348).

Lincecum's comment on sticks poses an interesting commentary on becoming and representation found in cultural materials. Additionally, Lincecum's quote provides a substantive explanation on the power to represent held in objects and the authority to speak held by representatives. The bundle held the power to permit one to speak on the behalf of community members and to represent them in official dialogues.

In the Department of the Interior Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes' applicant documents for James Brokeshoulder from 1905, *Oklanatubbee* is interviewed about his lineage back in Mississippi. The documents states,

> "The name Alo-ma-cha…at the date of the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, the father of two male children over ten years of age, and one female child under ten years of age named respectively, Ah-chuck-mish-tubbee, Ish-tah-a-mah and Ah-to-be-tubee, and that at said time Alo-ma-cha resided upon the SE/4 of section 4, township 9, range 14 east (Department of the Interior Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes List of Papers)."

Oklanatubbee was the youngest of four children born to *Alo-ma-cha-tubbee— Alo-ma-cha*'s official name usually was only used around other Choctaw people. Based upon information from informant Simpson Tubby, John Swanton gives a limited treatment to a discussion on Choctaw names and titles like *tubbee* and *tah-a-mah*. From Swanton's notes, he writes "Tábi said to mean "royalty" or "peace," but probably the common ending of a war title, signifying "to kill (Swanton 2001:121)." Swanton continues, "The following women's names…given to women used as official messengers…Mantema, "to go and carry or deliver something sacred or particular. (Swanton 2001:121)" Based upon Swanton's analysis on Choctaw names, *Ish-tah-a-mah* was likely the name of *Oklanatubbee'*s sister.

Upon realizing this history that *Oklanatubbee* was 77 years old and alive during the Yazoo Commission in the 1840s, but did not receive land in Mississippi, *Oklanatubbee* was recognized as a Mississippi Choctaw along with his five grandsons and eligible for inclusion on the Dawes Rolls for Choctaw Nation. Speaking on his acceptance to the rolls, Choctaw Claims Commission notes, "there can be little doubt that this is his family. He is to all appearances a full blood Indian, speaks and

understands the Choctaw language and has the appearance of being at least 70 years of age (Department of the Interior Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes List of Papers)." Cammack left Indian Territory some time after the hearing in 1905.

Uncertain if the two boys travelled alone on the way back or traveled with an escort, court records and letters from federal officials show Cammack made the journey back to Mississippi, likely back to live with their mother Francis Billey-Tooklo and stepfather Elan Tookolo. Considering all this information, something didn't sit well with me. What happened to Nickolas Brokeshoulder? Uncle Mike had some information, but most of it dealt with Cammack's murder in 1920. An incident that frames this auto-ethnography as both a story on the possible vulnerabilities of people and culture to administrative forces as well as a tale on the resilience of community in the continuation of embodied practices.

Cammack finally had to leave Mississippi to settle on his allotted land in Oklahoma, likely the result of reaching legal adulthood. Cammack married Ruby Cathey and had two children—my great grandmother Connie and Uncle Mike (Cammack Jr.). His brother-in-law John Cathey murdered Cammack shortly after he returned from France, where he fought during WWI. *Durant Weekly News*, from March 19, 1920, reports,

> "Word was received here last Friday of the alleged killing of Mike Brokeshoulder, well known and wealthy Chickasaw, who has large interests both in Pontotoc and Johnston Counties. From the best information obtainable Brokeshoulder was killed by his brother-in-law, John Cathey…(Durant Weekly News 1920)."

Information in the news report of Cammack's death came as a surprise, including the dialogue on large interests in Pontotoc and Johnston Counties.

Cammack, who went by Mike for short, is described as a wealthy *Chickasha* man, which alludes to a distinction for many of the Mississippi Choctaws that migrated during the allotments. The separation between the Choctaws arriving in the 1830s and those arriving in the 1900s is best surmised as distinctions in political authority and geographical location. Despite changes in political designation from the allotments and statehood, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, acknowledged as sovereign, held the political authority that extends into designated lands, recognized as their 10½ county service area. Most often receiving lands outside of Choctaw Nation, and in Chickasaw Nation instead, hence the designation of *Chickasha* to Cammack, at the time, many of the Mississippi Choctaws existed in a liminal space between cultural yesterdays and contemporary realities. Bearing in mind the statement about wealth, I wondered, did Cammack's death have something to do with his designated lands and wealth?

Suggesting his murder was more than a personal quarrel with his brother-in-law, *The Oklahoma Minor,* a newspaper from Krebs, gives details on April 15, 1920 of actions taken by John Cathey after shooting Cammack. "Wearing a gas mask which had been worn in the front line trenches by the man he is accused of having killed and armed with a Winchester, Cathey entered the bank at Pontotoc…" (*The Oklahoma Minor from Krebs* April 15, 1920:retrieved online 5/2014). A family story of wealth from oil land, with a large number of assets in the bank, was a motivation given for John Cathey's action. It was upon discovering a report entitled *Conditions in the Healdton oil field: March 15, 1915*, published by the United States Bureau of Corporations, that stories began to move from the realm of speculation to reality. Providing information on output from January 26, 1914 to March 23, the report states,

"Cammack Broke Shoulder lease, operated by John Carlock, estimated production 7,400 barrels, actual pipe line runes from the lease 2,966.70 barrels…(United States Bureau of Corporations 1915:75)."

After discovering this information, I still wondered about the stories surrounding why the Brokeshoulder family finally decided it was time to leave the Neshoba/Kemper area in 1904. What had changed in Mississippi that they no longer could 'squat' on family allotments? It was in an interview with Baxter York discussing the last allotted property in Mississippi, still owned by the Robinson family today, that the final piece of a family puzzle falls into place, and shadows confined to the past begin to emerge.

Baxter York finishes our tale on the vulnerability of communities and culture to the legal frameworks and extractive forces associated with colonialism. Speaking about another family with an allotment in the area, Baxter describes events that occurred making the Robinson owners of the last allotment. Baxter explains,

> " Now, there was another one—they law was that the…you can't make a deed and trust on these land. But one white man made a deed trust with the Choctaw when the Choctaw didn't know any better…someone told him that if you get a good lawyer and you'll get all of these lands back, the 640 acres. Why then, he did. He hired a lawyer, and the case was gonna come up in March. Then during the Christmas time, why this white fellow invited these Indians up there and began to give them firewater. And after they get tuned up right, why they kill them and throw him in a washout place, and cover them with pine knot and so on. But the Choctaws found them. So, the court didn't do nothing about that; both the county and the state didn't do nothing about that…it's always where dominant group have a way of winning. (York 4/8/1974:2)"

After reading Baxter's account, the only thought I had was something the Dude said in the *Big Lebowiski*. "Well I'll tell you what I'm blathering about! I got information, man! New shit has come to light and…and…shit, man! (Joel and Ethan Coen 1998)"

Driving through a road of forests and tall grass along the Neshoba/Kemper line, and as I pass, ghosts no longer content to remain concealed in landscapes reclaimed by nature find new life emerging from revelations of truth passed on in family stories. Picking up scattered pieces of a puzzle, strands of truth flow like a river across time, depositing moments like sediment that sits and waits to reemerge. Any appearance of vulnerability is subsumed by the resilient strength of a Choctaw familial bond.

Chapter 1: Study Design and Data Collection

Project Interlude

I was only vaguely aware of Choctaw Stickball when I arrived on University of Oklahoma's Norman campus in the spring of 2009 to start a degree in Native American Studies. My first real exposure to the game came in April at the Bizzell Library. Curtis Billy directed a workshop on making *kapucha* that included a story by Don L. Birtchfield about Stickball. Monte Randall suggested I attend a tournament being held on OU's intermural fields over the weekend to get a chance to see the game played. The next morning my son Hunter Creek and I got up early and drove to Reaves Park to watch several games. The constant action was entertaining, and the pace and movement of the game made it intriguing. Ambulances parked near the field served as a quiet reminder of the risks associated with playing contact sports, especially one where people are carrying two-and-half-foot long wooden racquets.

Sports were a central component of my upbringing—with a heavy dose of O.U. athletics on television and weekend softball or bowling tournaments. I recall Cleveland football great Jim Brown being inducted into the National Lacrosse Hall of Fame (Vescey 1984) from either watching a sports talk show or listening to my dad or uncle. I say this because lacrosse was the only Native North American game I had knowledge about before this project, and that was anecdotal information on cultural regions used in a history course.

Unbeknownst to me before fieldwork were local stories concerning former ball fields and legendary Oklahoma Choctaw *Toli* players such as Captain *Hitoka* (stickball field)—a legendary ball player, signatory of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, and

for whom Atoka county is named (Rick Billy 2015; Wright 1930:330). In addition to being represented in landscapes via place names, some of the first images of players, *kapucha*, or ceremonies associated with the Choctaw rendition of the ball game come from the depictions of painter George Caitlin, which includes his painting of stickball player *Tullockchisko* (1834) (Figure 1.1) and the painting *Ball Play of the Choctaws—Ball Up* (1846-1850)(Figure 1.2)

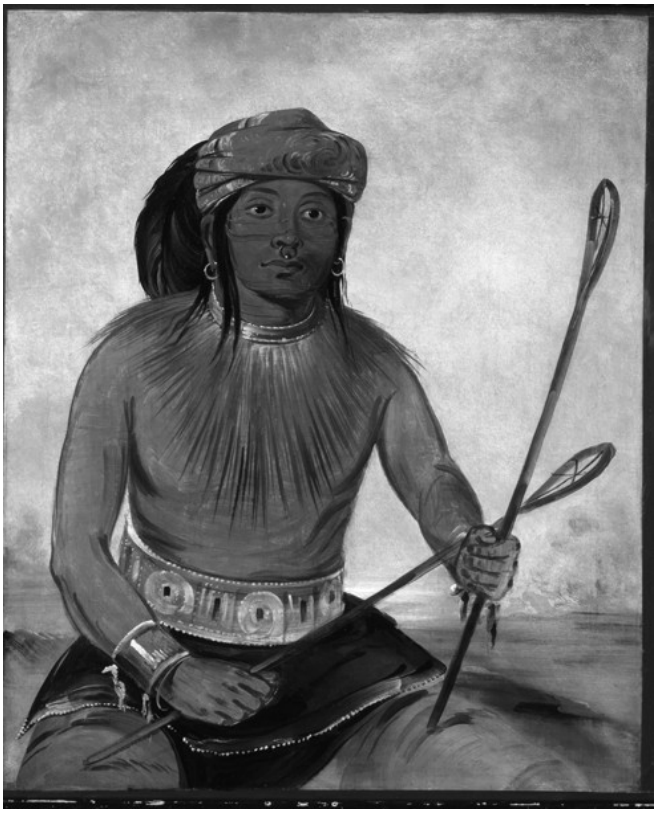

Figure 1.1: George Catlin painting depicting a Choctaw stickball player named *Tullockchisko* holding the traditional pair of sticks, 1834. Courtesy Smithsonian American Art Museum, with permission from the National Library of Medicine www.nlm.nih.gov

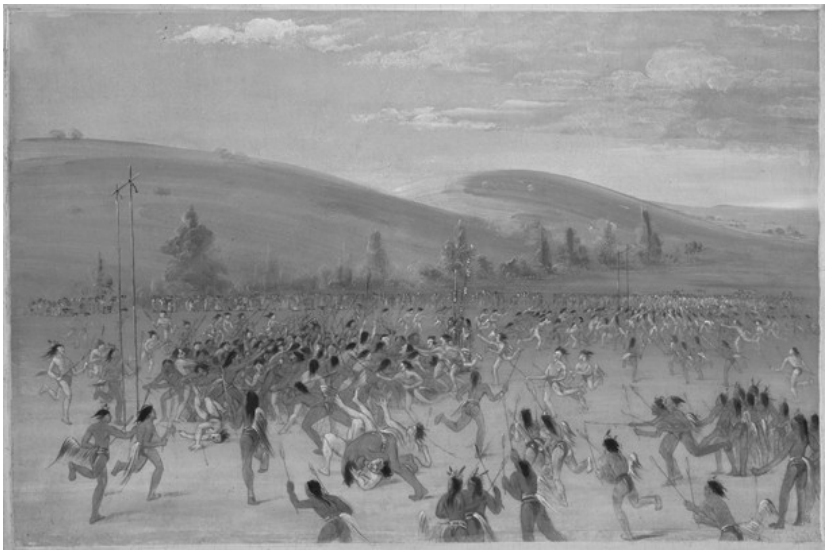

Figure 1.2: *Ball Play of the Choctaws – Ball Up* by George Catlin, circa 1846-50
Courtesy Smithsonian American Art Museum, with permission from the National Library of Medicine
www.nlm.nih.gov

As a symbol expressive of contemporary Choctaw culture, Choctaw Nation prints a calendar with a yearly theme for members that include community photos. I recall one picture of Choctaw stickball that had several men locked into a fierce struggle for a tiny ball, looking much akin to a scrum in rugby with several heads down in a pack trying to gain possession of the ball (*towa*). One year, Choctaw Nation '*Toli'* was selected as the image on the Christmas ornament sent to registered tribal members, which resembles players reaching up for a ball. Choctaw Nation has started using a pair of crossed *kapucha* (racquets) as a symbolic image on published materials with the packaging on the 2015 Series Stickball Trading Cards and new Choctaw license plate being recent examples.

Today strolling through Choctaw Nation's virtual store on the Internet, you will find a varying assortment of *kapucha* themed items ranging from necklaces, shirts, and hats. You can find equipment for playing *Chahta Toli* there also, from nylon towa (ball) to game ready *kapucha* (racquets). Occasionally the website will offer a pair of *kapucha*

from a locally well-known community stick maker. These sticks are usually of higher quality wood and represent the Choctaw physical knowledge and skill of the maker in a superb craft.

I have told you a story about the vulnerabilities communities face when transitioning from socio-ecological changes, but we should pause for a moment. I have not explained how cultural recovery and familial return happened in my life as a result of this project, thus showing how an act of collecting oral stories can uncover deeper associations and connections to a community. It must have begun when I realized I wanted to focus on Choctaw Anthropology and Choctaw Studies. That is how I came to meet Mr. Rick Billy.

Not to diverge, but I must share one of my favorite stories Rick would tell during our numerous conversations over coffee or while sitting in the *kapucha* workshop. Rick would tell a story about discovering his name was really Eric when attending school as a child. Rick's sister gave him a crash course in English two days before classes started. I chuckle thinking about Rick's description of bewilderment during his first days of school realizing that the teacher was calling him Eric. "Huh, oh, who is Eric? He better answer. Oh, I am Eric." Rick's easy disposition in telling the story and his mannerism is a staple of Choctaw social behavior, if you take the words of Cushman (1999), Halbert (1901), and Swanton (2001) to name a few who have offered their views in ethnography or for the Bureau of Ethnology. Rick's story-telling approach is a distinct Choctaw practice of community and family resiliency by telling a story of an event that exposes so much vulnerability in a Choctaw youth's life, but giving it the spin of Choctaw humor.

After a meeting in the Anthropology Department, I decided to stop by Rick Billy's office to say, "*Halito*" (Hello). He was sitting at his desk looking at an old newspaper article. He asked me to come in and visit. I noticed the picture in the newspaper of a very serious looking Choctaw man and something standing beside him. Later on I would learn more from Mr. Billy about the picture and the Choctaw story associated with Dr. Washington and his helper. I briefly introduced myself and mentioned my Choctaw family being Brokeshoulders, but my Uncle Mike Smith had told me a little about our family and said that the Brokeshoulder boys' mother was a Billy. I did not know that my relatives in Mississippi spell it Billie. My ancestry goes back to Eliza Billie, a Brokeshoulder family member recorded in the Bogue Chitto clan at the Yazoo commission in Mississippi during the 1840s. We parted on that day, but Rick seemed really interested in visiting further. There seemed to be a genuine interest in reconnecting me to something, but I remained uncertain why there seemed to be such a quick acceptance.

In *Choctaw Tales*, Tom Mould (2004) describes Choctaw views and sentiments deriving from accounts of the past that parallel values in the present. Mould writes, "Yet stories that can be traced to the past are not ruled out as history sterilized by time; rather, such stories hold power today, helping explain the world then as now (Mould 2004:xxxvii)." Family stories in Choctaw contexts function as a mechanism in a larger social arrangement and network that promote continuation and resilience in a persistence of being and becoming Choctaw. Rick already knew all he needed to know about me from the mention of my family name.

The moment I heard the little voice speaking through the glass door say his name in that particular way, I knew. I will never forget the words my cousin Pat Walters spoke to me. "You know Cammack." And then she simply stated, "I hear we might be related." I entered the field disconnected from the Brokeshoulder family because of circumstances in life, but on that day I discovered my grandmother's cousin who had recently seen my Aunt—my Grandmother Ketchum's sister. Similar to many other Choctaw scholars having the privilege to work on a professional degree, I was able to work on a research project that examined questions concerning the continuation of Choctaw culture and learn more about Choctaw social history. Nevertheless, this did not prepare me for how many aspects of this project intersected with my life and family. However, one of the amazing outcomes of this project is that I have been able to attend the Brokeshoulder family reunion in June since 2014. It was at the first family reunion I attend at Sauk and Fox Nation's community building in Shawnee that I truly understood that the intricate connections and associations of a Choctaw social domain is foundational comprised of the bonds of family.

Introducing the Study and Setting

Calling it the "Granddaddy of all field sports", Choctaw Historian Olin Williams describes stickball as best demonstrating the resiliency of Choctaw people (William 2013). Williams says the game remains important in the education of Choctaw youth because it teaches unity, self-discipline, and anger management (William 2013). Choctaw people can identify with the game because it is a good sport, Williams says (William 2013).

The continual connections Choctaw people have with hickory trees in the forests of the southeast are a part of the preservation and revitalization of an older way of life for the *Okla*—Choctaw word for people and community. Often, a community's vulnerabilities arise from outside stressors as either or both social and ecological forces acting upon cultural mechanism and local modes of transmitting knowledge. Choctaw Stickball is an example of a cultural event that for a time succumbed to invasive forms of acculturation, but emerged uniquely as an activity that represents an indelible Choctaw culture and people.

Choctaw people's ancestral homelands comprised areas that are now located in contemporary Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Alabama. The historical record first places Choctaw communities in the written records of Spanish conquistadors and explorers with the Hernando De Soto Expedition. *Chahta* as a spoken language is a part of the *Mvskoke* language family, a language family with groups situated throughout the southeastern portion of the country. Choctaw culture shares similar semiotics and activities like stomp dance and stickball with their linguistic relatives.

Choctaw lands had been reduced by treaties, but the signing into law of Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act was the catalyst for the signing of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. A treaty between Choctaw Nation and the federal government in 1830, ratification of this treaty would eventually send a large group of Choctaw people to faraway lands in Indian Territory—areas that would become parts of contemporary Oklahoma and Arkansas (Kidwell 1995; Akers 1999; Prucha 2000). Today, the federal government recognizes Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Mississippi Band of Choctaw

Indians (MBCI), and Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, located in Louisiana, as sovereignty entities.

Stickball is a socializing event and an experience that is shared by community members. For the community, stickball represents an opportunity to use a space for an activity that takes a sustained cultural process to generate webs of social relations. Emile Durkheim theorizes that social relations like religion are an enduring aspect of humanity, which stickball culture represents an enduring aspect of Choctaw (Durkheim 2001:3). According to Durkheim, "the idea of society is the soul of religion" or in other words religion is a preeminent expression of the collective life (Durkheim 2001:314). Ball play is a structuring event for participants, whether playing or observing, the experience of playing the game is an eminently memorial and social incident.

Choctaw coalescences in sports like stickball produce and reinforce cultural bonds amongst players. David F. Lancy (2008) describes play as a meaningful vessel for passing culture on to future generations (Lancy 191). Stickball events bring together multiple generations of community members, providing a space for the exchange of cultural affirming interactions. Elders are able to interact with community youth in roles as spectators, participants, and coaches. Youth participants can also serve in these roles; therefore, stickball becomes shared as a trans-generational event.

The prospective loss of the Ball Game of the Southeast would signify the passing of a traceable pre-contact activity for Muskegon language speakers. The potential multitude of loss felt by communities relying on stickball as an extension of their 'Cultural Side of Leisure' is equivalent with any scenario of extinction projected from climate change. Community relations are intertwined in the performativity of

identity that is projected throughout the playing of the ball game, making the cultural loss of stickball analogous to the obliteration of life.

Reason for the Project

This ethnographic report describes the role culture plays in resource management in the Anthropocene by using the 'Game of the Southeast' and tribal interactions to explore several questions. The 'Game of the Southeast' is known simply as stickball among people still playing the game. Hickory trees throughout the Southeast have made playing games possible since time immemorial.

This project contributes to questions concerning ethnography's usefulness as a tool in assessing vulnerability of original cultures to climate change. Ethnography offers varying approaches essential in recording data on the resiliency and vulnerability of culture. However, Ethnography is not found upon a uniform practice or research model, and neither is the procedure and practice of writing ethnography universal within the discipline of Anthropology. This project informs contemporarily notions on Cultural Resource Management, grounded in legal designations and definitions, through subtle differences in research design to include the designations of culture as collective relations and associations negotiated in an ever-changing process.

Studying nature as phenomena configured in Choctaw experiences and rearticulated in social dialogues informs understandings of culture's role in resource management, which in turn will provide new insights on sustainable practices and climate change. The significance of this case study derives from documenting nature as a social unit, which was done by investigating the social role hickory trees play in

Oklahoma Choctaw cultural contexts. Of particular relevance here is the effort to document contemporary Native American interactions in nature that sustain cultural activities, with special consideration given to the growing urban populations in Indian Country that travel through various ecologies.

Limited research has been used to document the material culture aspects of stickball culture making this a contribution to Native North America literature. Also, this project offers the opportunity to use sports to consider large social questions. Sports are an essential medium and worldview by which some make and base their decisions. The Ball Game is an excellent means of examining cultural vulnerability and resiliency because of the social and political forces associated with historical narrative surrounding the game.

Methodology

Participant observation was the bedrock of this ethnographic research. Preliminary data collection concerning the ecology of southeastern and south-central Oklahoma started during the summer of 2011 in visits to riparian and forested areas. Pictures were taken to document ecological changes across time in the southeast. Fieldwork for this dissertation was conducted from June 2013 to July 3, 2016. The bulk of the fieldwork was conducted from March 2014 to July 2016. For this case study, data collection was undertaken through archival work and multi-sited fieldwork in harvesting materials and fabrication *kapucha*, playing, watching, and coaching games, and traveling to Philadelphia, Mississippi as well as forests in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

This research project utilized unstructured and informal interview techniques similar to Gus Palmer Jr.'s (2003) 'A Storytelling Ethnography', which emphasizes the role of community consultants in helping gather data. Palmer dubbed cultural advisors as his 'storytelling consultants', which Rick Billy and Toby Billy very much filled similar roles in this project (Palmer 2003:10). This methodology supported the collection of oral histories during fieldwork with ethnographic collaborators and storytelling consultants.

Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT)(2005) is a sociological approach that became a useful theory for this study as a methodological frame for this project. ANT was a valuable tool for exploring and documenting a *Chahta Toli* social domain in observing Shagbark hickory and *kapucha* as social partners in social arrangements. A Choctaw belief, mentioned previously, concerns *kapucha* and *towa* (Ball) representing a family, thus ascribing Choctaw social attributes onto the sticks. Latour's approach provides a unique methodological frame in regarding objects and things as "agents" or "actants" (Latour 71-73). Latour applies the term "actants" to describe a name for an object recognized to have agency in a material and semiotic relationship with other actors that are social beings in the relational dynamics of social arrangements (Latour 71-73).

Latour names a myopic definition of the social being a major reason research has ignored the role objects play as social agents. Latour explains actants are "any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference" (Latour 71). Latour argues that what is currently assembled in social sciences under the domain of society is saturated from the nuancing of varying discourses from representations to binary

oppositions. Latour offers an alternative to the current impasse created in social science research by reconsidering 'the social' through tracing social arrangements of agents or actants as a domain comprised of social assemblages and connections.

Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) is a 'sociology of associations' that reconsiders "society" or "social ties" to dissolve the artificial bar placed between "the social and the natural" worlds (Latour 109). Stressing a natural performativity of associations, ANT offers a frame to analyze associations functioning in a perpetual network known as a Persistent Identity System like the Shagbark hickory-*Kapucha*-Choctaw Stickball network. Climate variability's potential impact on the health of local forests in Oklahoma supporting cultural activities like *Toli* makes finding a methodological approach integrating cultural resources with natural resource management and that extends non-human actors a degree of agency a significant contribution to Cultural Resource Management dialogues.

ANT, methodologically speaking, was applied in this ethnography to center a narrative on social partners that comprise a social domain. Numerous anthropological tools were applied in producing this ethnographic narrative on the phenomena known as Choctaw stickball. With several theoretical frames and methods in place for collecting and analyzing data, fieldwork was designed to apply an approach more in line with Grounded Theory—a systemic approach in the social sciences where theory is constructed after analyzing data.

Climate change discourses stand to be informed by research on social institutions and social arrangements responsible in the continuation of cultural activities. This project attends to concerns in how research questions regarding climate

variability and culture have the potential to inscribe and promote representations of Native America communities that are a disembodiment of practicing beliefs. As the phenomena of constituting 'the social' became reflective of ideas espoused under the Social Contract Theory, nature was removed from having social influence on human behavior as social institutions were endowed with power. Asking someone to locate 'the social' can be a difficult thing, with responses likely to vary along ideological lines or theoretical suppositions. Often explanations of social phenomena have become more about theoretical substructures and less about identifying 'actants' engaged in active social assemblages.

Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) provides a methodological approach towards analyzing the influences of non-human actors on the world and on social relations. Actants such as Shagbark hickory and *kapucha* have the ability to fundamentally change the way people view and engage in the world. Essentially, ANT contributes to considerations on how the relationship of things adapts other things. As opposed to contemplating being as fundamentally complete in ontological frames, ANT attends to relations in the examination of the subtle interplay between actors and actants and how that influences social behavior. Not to say all objects and things are intrinsically acting upon social domains, ANT is attentive to the interactions of actors and actants and implication of those relations on our understanding of how people perceive their environment and social world.

Study Design

This qualitative study was a multi-sited case study investigating social history and social domains associated with *Chahta Toli* in order to document socio-ecological

practices of cultural significance possibly vulnerable to ecological uncertainty in the Anthropocene. Choctaw Stickball was selected as a primary subject because of the ethnographer's background, being from a mixed Choctaw-European ancestry. The main rationale behind selecting a community of affiliation concerns the call to assess culture in understanding the potential implications of climate variability (Bennett, T. M. B. et al. 2014).

I will argue that the scope and scale of the conceivable implications of climate variability require communities and community members to begin the painstaking process of vulnerability assessment. To support the claim, a set of research questions concerning climate change and culture was considered: 1) How does one go about assessing possible vulnerabilities to Choctaw cultural resources from ecological disruptions? 2) Can ethnographic methods play a role in assessing climate variations' impact on cultures? 3) What cultural resources are vulnerable to climate change that could have implications on Choctaw culture?

This project was not designed to address these questions with specific answers. Instead, this field study documented the social domain and social arrangements of *Chahta Toli.* A network of intersecting social actors and actants was identified in order to document the *Chahta Toli* social domain that includes: Shagbark hickory, *kapucha* (stickball sticks), and Choctaw Stickball.

Actors and actants were identified for being social partners in the production and reinforcement of a *Chahta Toli* social domain. Actors were not limited to just human beings, as Shagbark hickory and *kapucha* were considered agents in a social partnership with Choctaw people in producing a *Chahta Toli* social domain. Nature has historically

been disregarded in ethnography as a social partner (Descola 2013:6-7). The Achuar of Amazonia has a distinct perspective, according to Philippe Descola (2013), regarding nature and living organisms being social partner with humans. Descola says this derives from the Achuar understanding that plants and animals are family. Descola calls on anthropology to cast a more "ingenuous eye" that is free of the "dualist veil" as a rethinking of domains and tools to encompass the "collective of beings" into discourses on social life (Descola 2013:xix-xx).

Descola further explains, "The anthropology of culture must be accompanied by an anthropology of nature that is open to that part of themselves and the work that human beings actualize and by means of which they objectivize themselves (Descola 2013:xix-xx)." Supporting the notion of "anthropology of nature", Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (discussed in further detail in the methodology section below) was applied as a methodological approach for conceptualizing the Shagbark hickory-*kapucha*-*Chahta Toli* network (Descola 2013:xix-xx). Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory will be used as a model to describe the comprised social domains from the three major actors contributing to a persistent identity system associated with *Chahta Toli* (Latour 2005; Spicer 1971). A modified ethnography approach was applied combining Ian Thompson's (2008) experimental archeology method with participant observation in documenting all three actors in the network. Data was collected via participant observation of Choctaw physical knowledge practices or via archival data on social history of the Choctaw ball game. Unstructured interviews were used to document oral histories in a casual conversation approach with cultural informants and stick makers.

Data collection took place in three major physical locations that included forests, workshops, and ball fields. Shagbark hickory and *kapucha* were treated as agents in Choctaw Stickball culture during the participant observation phase. I focused on collecting data on the relational aspects of forests to *kapucha* and relational aspects of *kapucha* to Choctaw social arrangements. The ball game and stick making extends Choctaw social units into social arrangements of relational associations with specific natural resources like Shagbark hickory, as *kapucha* personify resiliency and continuation of Choctaw family bonds.

The majority of the archival data was gathered from online libraries and collections. I focused a great deal of attention on archival research on the social history of the ball game because applying methodologies on reconstituting the social seemed less interesting to the projects cultural consultants. Relationships with cultural consultants are a significant factor in document persistence identity systems. As a result, fieldwork focused on documenting oral histories, social arrangements, and cultural practices consultants felt were central in the continuation of *Chahta Toli* culture.

Chahta Toli started a slow process of regeneration through the efforts of community members starting back in the 1970s in Oklahoma. At the beginning of the project, I asked Rick Billy about what exactly occurred to bring the ball game out of favor with many Choctaw people in Oklahoma that preceded the current revival. Oral histories told by Rick Billy and archival data collected over the course of two years would explain what happened to the ball game in a multi-layered story representing the vulnerabilities and resiliency of a Choctaw community.

Today, community members and tribal governments are supporting efforts to continue the ball game of the Southeast. Renewing cultural activities creates opportunities for community members to gather and produce an event that has explicit healing implications for a community and for people. Data collection on the stickball portion of the project has three specific aims: 1) To explore the material and semiotic aspects of Choctaw Stickball by collecting data on the social history of game and collecting data playing and coaching games in a multi-sited case study focusing on *Chahta Toli*; 2) To document contemporary forested interactions with hickories in the production of *kapucha*; and 3) To document the production of *kapucha* by working with a group of stick makers in a workshop. To better understand the future challenges from ecological changes to Choctaw cultural resilience that is forecasted as part of the Anthropocene, this multi-sited case study documents socio-ecological actors and practices that comprise the associative Choctaw *Toli* network.

Various tribal communities including Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, Muscogee Creek, and Cherokee play the ball game of the Southeast, making anyone of these communities an ideal contributor in coauthoring a project. Early data collected from participant observations in the summer of 2014 demonstrated that stickball culture consists of social arrangement organized beyond national affinities depicted in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983). Choctaw Nationalism as an interpretation of a Choctaw social world have been covered in recent scholarship on Oklahoma Choctaw nation building (Lambert 2007) and in scholarship on Mississippi Choctaw identities and tribal economic development (Sean Gantt 2013).

However, as previously argued, Choctaw notions of social units extend beyond proximity to Choctaw Nation's 10½ counties, thus making selecting a research community less about federally recognized forms of belonging. The persistence of stickball culture among Southeastern indigenous groups belies the notion that changes in Choctaw social structure has shifted understandings of belonging purely around being "enrolled" as a citizen (Lambert 2007:1-2).

What makes a team or a teammate during ball games varies along a multitude of understanding of Choctaw identity that goes beyond sovereign explanations. When Oklahoma started sending teams to play in the World Series Stickball tournament at Mississippi Choctaw Fair in 2009, it was not uncommon for a member from another tribal-nation to be playing with the Choctaw team. The same holds true for local tournaments in Oklahoma as a player from *Okla Hannali* may play for *Chickasha Toli,* and visa and versa, to round out a team for tournament.

This investigation documented oral accounts and observations while playing and observing *Chahta Toli.* These observations took place at weekly practices, occasional scrimmages, and exhibition games for outreach. Weekly practice was held at Brookhaven Park in Norman and involved players from numerous teams including *Okla Hannali* and *Chikasha Toli*. *Okla Hannali,* also called Sixtown—the English translation for the word, is an intertribal *Chahta Toli* team founded by President/Coach Jay Mule in 2004 (DeLaune 2013). Unlike a national team, *Okla Hannali* consists of men and women players from numerous tribes that include: Choctaw, Mississippi Choctaw, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian, Muscogee (Creek), Cherokee, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Kiowa (DeLaune 2013).

This project will advance knowledge through empirically grounded ethnographic research concerning human adaptation to socio-ecological systems following relocation to new ecosystems. Choctaw interact with forests as a space that contributes to a culturally defining social phenomenon. The project will transform knowledge on the role objects play in defining human social domains and social units.

Research Design: Incorporating Stick-makers as Project Stakeholders

The documenting of the Shagbark hickory-kapucha-Chahta Toli Network and subsequently telling this story was not possible without a group of cultural informants knowledgeable of both Oklahoma Choctaw culture and history. Morris W. Foster's (1991) study on the social history of Comanche people describes the importance of cultivating a relationship of trust with a group of informants in order to document the persistence of identity in a world of fluctuating cultural and social frames. Foster explains documenting oral histories requires working with a small group of informants over a period of time (Foster x-xi). This study was no different in that regard, as conversations with Rick Billy occurring from 2013 to 2016 contribute to this ethnography. Cultural informants contribute more than data towards the documenting of social histories, as they open up their lives to anthropologists or researchers when nurturing a mutual relationship towards ideals such as preservation or revitalization of culture.

Contributing to the design of this project, as well as numerous days talking Choctaw culture while fielding questions driven from pure curiosity, I am eternally grateful to Rick and Debbie Billy for creating an opportunity to bring me back into the

Brokeshoulder family fold. It was through the Billy family's generosity and Rick's open door policy that much of this project possible. I recognize the honor and privilege of being able to document family stories and a family's process for making *kapucha*, which was something allowed out of pure generosity in sharing Choctaw culture. Truth be told, this is not a new revelation to anyone from the Broken Bow area or across Choctaw Nation concerning the contributions of the Billy family in continuing and preserving Choctaw culture. It can honestly be said to be a family affair for the Billy family, as this generosity is practiced throughout the family in their efforts preserving the Choctaw language and traditions like social dancing.



Figure 1.3: Rick Billy telling Choctaw stories. (Photo by Scott Ketchum, June 2015)

Rick made sure from the beginning to let me know that this was not going to be just about asking questions and taking notes. It was nothing that he stated outright, but something that became obvious when he started showing up early for coffee and a lesson. He started my education on Choctaw culture from a point of reference that began with the language. I was not expecting to be assigned worksheets in an effort to become familiar with Choctaw language. From there, Rick introduced me to Choctaw staples like wild onion dinners at churches, social dance exhibitions, and stickball

games. And of course I will never forget Rick's admission and constant reminders that a pot of beans is all a Choctaw man needs to be content in life.

Eventually, Rick mentioned that Choctaw culture in Oklahoma really began to flourish with his son Toby's generation because of the reemergence of cultural activities like Chahta Toli. Toby represented Oklahoma Choctaw in the World Series Stickball in Mississippi the first year a team from Oklahoma entered the tournament. Rick suggested we visit Toby's house for a few minutes to see what he was up to. I had no idea that over the next few years I would spend countless hours sanding hickory and talking Choctaw. Toby greeted us from the garage surrounded by power tools and several logs of wood. Rick introduced us and mentioned my interest in researching Choctaw culture, so Toby gave me a crash course on making *kapucha*. It probably went in one ear and out the other at the time. Rick had taken it upon himself to introduce me to varying aspects of Choctaw culture, and at that moment in 2012, I knew very little about the associations of a community and families that make up the community until Rick reintroduced me to my family.



Figure 1.4: Toby Billy inspecting a pair of *kapucha.* (Photo by Scott Ketchum, April 2014)

Rick's son-in-law Luther Ringlero would join Toby to work on sticks and developing techniques. Lu was another vital cultural consultant, as he contributed knowledge and patience in addressing questions concerning designing *kapucha* and techniques. I had the chance to play and watch stickball with Toby and Lu while collecting data, and while playing I was grateful for their watchful eyes on the field after a car wreck. Choctaw *Toli* is a very rewarding sport for participants for numerous health reasons, but it must be acknowledge that it has dangerous moments where injuries are possible.



Figure 1.5: Luther Ringlero is flaring out the *kapucha* cup. (Photo by Scott Ketchum, September 2015)

From June 2013 till March 2016, I spent time working in Toby Billy's stickball workshop, as it was known by a group of Norman stick makers. Toby's workshop was a garage full of various table saws and work areas for sanding wood and wrapping cuppings. It was from this setting that my study benefitted from constant flow of people stopping through to work on a pair of sticks or share techniques. Toby's garage was a nexus for community bonding, cultural exchange, and meaning making similar to the unbounded network of culture and relations depicted in Renya K. Ramirez's (2007)

Native Hubs. Ramirez writes, "The hub offers a mechanism to support Native notions of culture, community, identity, and belonging away from tribal land bases (Ramirez 2007:1-2)". Toby's workshop created a social space where people like myself could learn how to make a pair of sticks and participant in activity that was building and reinforcing community. Rance Weryackwe would join us learning to make sticks at Toby's place and listening to Rick Billy's Choctaw stories, making him another important contributor and cultural consultant on making sticks.



Figure 1.6: Rance Weryackwe measuring *kapucha* length. (Photo by Scott Ketchum, May 2014)

Participants are considered a vital co-author in the writing and assembly of this ethnography. Cultural consultants contributions included time, stories, ideas, and—most importantly—their words that resonate beyond academic interpretations. Participants were encouraged to edit input in the data collection phase and in the manuscript by adding, altering, and/or deleting comments, as recognition of participants' agency as co-authors that often define and contribute to ethnographic texts. Cultural consultants have been encouraged to call for amendments to parts of the text at any point in the process and in future incarnations of the manuscript as acknowledgement of their co-authorship in the conversations in this ethnography.

Discussions working in the shop making *kapucha* were recorded as observations in notebooks and as audio. Themes were identified during observations and explored further in conversations and considered based upon relevance when being deliberated for write-up in this ethnographic report. Participants were provided an opportunity to talk through and review notes from observations and help transcribed quotes from the audio. Participants were also provided with a copy of dialogue and an opportunity to review their contributions selected for the manuscript. Cultural consultants were included in the study following the signing of an artist release form, as a way to indicate their intent to participate in the data being generated and collected for this research project.

Participants were given a brief introduction that explained the purpose of the researcher's participant observations and procedures for collecting data from interactions during the process of producing *kapucha* before being asked to sign a release form. This study was approved by the University of Oklahoma's Institutional Review Board, which was conveyed to consultants. Participants were asked to review the release form and to ask any questions they may have over the form or study. After addressing any questions or concerns, participants were asked to sign a release form with the understanding that they will be provided with a copy of their contributions to the manuscript. The participants' signatures were taken as an indication of their intent to participate in the data being generated for this research project.

The case study designation was a recognition that this project is also about developing relations with cultural informants for longer-term research agenda concerning cultural resources management and sustaining traditional resources for stick

making. This idea excited cultural informants and supported their understanding of renewal and sustainability taking time and dedication. A first step necessary in moving a larger research agenda forward is document associations that comprise social domains that reinforce a culture of persistence. Future project developments from this case study can begin the process of documenting personal Choctaw perspectives from stick makers concerning ecological issues, which was not the intent of data collection for this case study. This project was about documenting a persistent social history reflected in the associations of Choctaw stick makers with Shagbark hickory and what is produced from those interactions both materially and symbolically.

This study was not designed to be a collection of interviews of stickball players or stick makers about their perceptions of climate change. This study was not focused on perceptions of climate change on material practices. Instead, stick makers were significant contributors of information in the preceding step of documenting the social history and cultural significance of Choctaw material practice by participant observation and archival. This project was attuned to addressing questions on how anthropology can participate in research efforts to record cultural vulnerability. Stickball culture is situated in vivisections of Choctaw culture that is vulnerable to outside stimuli. The most recent outside stimulation being Oklahoma statehood, a brief time when the game would seem to lay dormant from legal and religious persecution.

Description of Data Collection

This section introduces data collection split into in three phases based upon the differing methods and focuses employed by the researcher: 1) Data Collection Phase 1:

Observing Game Play from April 2014-July 2016; 2) Data Collection Phase 2: Forests and Stick Making from June 2011-July 2016; 3) Data Collection Phase 3: Stories and Archives from June 2014 till October 2016. This data was collected traveling to sites for harvesting hickory in South Central Oklahoma and South Eastern Oklahoma.

Preliminary data collection critical to the design of the study began in 2011. Travel to field sites in Oklahoma took place from June 2013 until July 2016. Archival research, participant observations, plant and tree observations, and photos are all sources of data that were collected for this project. This study integrates several methods for collecting data during fieldwork including participant observations. Sound ethnographic data was collected to address all research questions and aims of this project.

Study Design Phase and Pre-Dissertation Work 2011-2013

My experience working with data to develop a model for ethnographic mapping at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) informed my awareness on the vital role nature plays in cultural perceptions associated with risk. This is the result of working with Dr. Heather Lazrus, a principal investigator on the project "Water Decisions for Sustainability of the Arbuckle-Simpson Aquifer". Heather's passion for bringing indigenous communities together with science communities to discuss sustainability efforts and produce mutual and new collaborations is reflected in her work through Rising Voices in Climate Change. I constructed a map from letters and interviews conducted in 1937 as part of the Works Project Administration efforts. This

opportunity informed my current projects design to include archival work in constructing a social narrative of Choctaw *Toli* from past interviews.

Before conducting participant observations with Choctaw stick-makers and stickball players, I attended conferences, symposiums, workshops, gatherings, working groups, protests, and consultations that had a central focus on climate change and indigenous and tribal communities. Attending these events provided opportunities to listen to discourses regarding ecological issues facing indigenous communities throughout world and to network with scholars in working in varying capacities on questions concerning climate variations and society.

Data collected also stemmed from notes made during participant observations at Rising Voices in Climate Change I-III in Boulder, Colorado. I attended Rising Voices I-III hosted by NCAR in Boulder, Colorado. The experience afforded me a chance to engage several people that were influential on designing a project that documents local ecological issues. Numerous people proved invaluable to this project. Kalani Souza and everyone with Olohana Foundation brought an inspirational vibe to Rising Voices I-III that provided hope to those in attendance on the possibilities for change when addressing problems as collective communities. Paulette Blanchard, Dr. Julie Maldonado, Dr. Kyle Whyte, and Dr. Dan Wildcat always provided encouragement and advice for navigating the academic world. Dan Wildcat mentioned documenting resilient cultural practices during a discussion on our natural relatives, and I immediately thought of Toby cutting down a hickory for *kapucha* and Rick Billy's words about Choctaw culture flourishing since the revival of *Toli* across Oklahoma. I

also made several trips throughout southeast to collecting observations of the ecologies around the Kiamichi River, Blue River, and Arbuckle-Simpson Aquifer.

Data Collection Phase 1: Observing Game Play From April 2014-July 2016

This phase of the case study was multi-sited and included ball fields throughout Oklahoma with majority of the ethnography focusing on games in Norman and on a youth tournament in Atoka. Multi-sited data collection included trips throughout the State of Oklahoma from attending and observing exhibition ball games and the Jim Thorpe Games held in Shawnee, Oklahoma 2014. In this phase, the focus was on playing game and symbolism of the game, which included documenting the use of *kapucha* as a symbol for Choctaw culture or people. Data collection consisted of practicing stickball and observing games, which included the ability to stream World Series Stickball games on YouTube. A simple search on YouTube will yield numerous games from past tournaments or from various southeastern communities. Practices were held weekly on Thursday night at Brookhaven Park starting in March and running until it is too cold for players, basically when stickball season ends.

Youth and adult players play together as they practice skills and scrimmage, with the majority of practices being a scrimmage. Several local community teams are represented at the Norman practices that include *Okla Hannali*, *Tvshka Homma*, and *Chikasha Toli*. Rick Greenwood and his brother Brad Greenwood help support youth and adult players that practice in Norman and play for one of the competitive teams for Chickasaw Nation: a youth team *Chikasha Bak Bak* (Chickasaw Woodpeckers) and a adult team *Chikasha Toli* (Chickasaw Stickball).

Players from *Okla Hannali* (Sixtown Peoples) and *Chikasha Toli* constituted the bulk of the players practicing at Brookehaven. Occasionally, the two teams would scrimmage on OU's South Oval. Oklahoma Choctaws have two teams: *Okla Hannali and Tuska Homma*. Recently, *Tuska Homma* became Choctaw Nation's team. This phase incorporated helping coach the *Chikasha Bak-Baks* play in their first youth tournament with Choctaw teams in Atoka. Two of my sons, Aiden and Aren, were able to join the *Chikasha Bak-Baks* for the tournament held in June 2014, highlighting the cultural significance of a transgenerational event in the persistence of culture.

Data Collection Phase 2: Stick Making and Forests From June 2011-July 2016

Data collection in this phase of the case study focused on documenting the production of *kapucha* and forested interactions through participant observations and collecting oral histories. Preliminary research documenting dramatic weather shifts' impact on riparian ecosystems in Oklahoma laid a foundation for this project in 2011. Several trips were taken across south central and southeastern Oklahoma to document in photos riparian systems.

I began working on a regular basis with Toby making *kapucha* starting March 2014 and ending around September 2015. Starting by cutting down a tree and finishing with a pair of *kapucha* ready for the game, the process of making sticks was recorded in the completion of four sets of kapucha: a pair for my nephew Colson, two pair for everyone to use in the house, and a pair to hang over the entry way of my house. In addition to *kapucha* for playing game, Toby would make rabbit sticks and smaller pairs for decoration.

The travel from Oklahoma to Mississippi for data collection in July 2016 on making *kapucha* and forests was a drive across a rolling terrain that shows the inspirational space forests must hold in Choctaw culture. It is overwhelmingly on display in the landscape. The trip led me to stops in the Ouachita National Forest in Arkansas, the Tombigbee National Forest in Mississippi, the Homochitto National Forest in Mississippi, the Kisatchie National Forest in Louisiana, and the Atchafalaya in Louisiana. Forested lands and riparian areas form contiguous blocks around Choctaw settlements in the southeast. This explains why some Choctaw experienced a modicum of continuation the instant they arrived in Indian Territory and saw the size of the trees in southeastern Oklahoma.

Today, Oklahoma is starting to see a rise in the number of stick makers when compared with Choctaw communities from Mississippi. For the forested interactions part of this phase of the case study, data collection was multi-sited working with a group of stick-makers. Data gathered from the field when harvesting hickory for *kapucha* took place on private, public, and tribal lands. Saplings and larger trees are selected for production into sticks. This phase of the project is at its core about addressing questions on cultural continuation and preservation of hickory, beginning with documenting natural resource essential in the production of Choctaw cultural materiality. As Olin Williams stated, the ball game may be one of the oldest and most recognized attributes of Choctaw and Chickasaw culture.

Notions of functionality and sturdiness when playing the game determine the value of a good pair of *kapucha*. Stickball images also have an aesthetic value, as it is common to see a pair on the wall in a home or hanging from a rearview mirror. Stick

makers use the term 'hanging' pair for sticks not durable enough for actual game use, and because the game is popular, it is not uncommon to see *kapucha* on a wall or shelf.

Finding hickory to use for making sticks was discussed at stickball practice. It was the first time that I heard someone mention the limited number of places to find good hickories in Oklahoma for *kapucha*. For the Norman community, Little Axe is the closest place to find hickory, which is where we harvested two trees in 2015.

Data Collection Phase 3: Archival Work from June 2014 till October 2016

For this phase of data collection for the project, I collected primary and secondary sources from archives concerning the ball game, other North American indigenous games, Choctaw ecology, hickory, and other Choctaw cultural interactions with plants. During this phase, document research was undertaken at several repositories in Oklahoma and Mississippi. In order to collect local historical data, frequent trips were made to Oklahoma History Center's Research Center. Primary source data was also collected from online archival data hosted by University of Oklahoma and University of Florida.

University of Oklahoma's copy of the Indian-Pioneer Papers is part of the Western History Collection and includes oral histories gathered from the 1860s to the 1930s. Indian and Pioneer oral stories about various topics including stickball were gathered for a project sponsored by the Work Project Administration in 1936, as part of a joint grant project between Oklahoma Historical Society and researchers from the Department of History. In searching the archives, stickball was referenced as the ball game or 'Indian' ball game in oral histories. Documents concerning Choctaw Nation

and land were examined from both the Peter Pitchlynn Papers and the Green McCurtain Papers. Oral stories and interviews from Mississippi Choctaw were gathered from University of Florida Digital Collections, which is located online. Chapter Four will present the findings from this archival research.

Overview of Dissertation Chapters

The Prologue chapter provides a literary review for the project as well as offering personal positionality of the ethnographers in practicing self-reflectivity. In chapter one, I review the research design, methodology, and data collection phases. In chapter two, I describe the methodology in further detail. In chapter three, I discuss Social Ecology, climate change, and the role of ethnography in community research. Chapter four describes data collected from archives, assembled as a social narrative on Chahta Toli. In chapter five, I document the production of *kapucha* from participant observations and observations from playing Choctaw stickball and assisting a youth tournament. Chapter six concludes the dissertation as well as provides policy recommendations and suggests future research projects with stick-makers.

Chapter 2: Applying the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT)

Shagbark Hickory-*Kapucha-Chahta Toli* Network

Finally, at around two or three in the morning, temperatures begin to drop enough to where the conditions are almost bearable— ultimately falling to nearly ninety degrees Fahrenheit only moments before the sun's morning light cracks the Eastern skies. Rising. Driving east to Toby's place to talk, light splatters through the windshield as I fight for a glimpse of the streetlight. Staring into the blinding orange light moving overhead, shadows cast a silhouette resembling a coiled snake twirling onward in a dance with eternity.

It's been one of those summers. Dogs days. These are the days you spend enduring the heat. Sitting at home in front of the AC is the only way to survive it. However, that was not to be the case for us. My shirt and shorts are soaked in sweat, making my legs stick to the plastic chair like it's Velcro. I even make that Velcro sound when I lift a leg.

Sitting there in the garage with Rick and Toby Billy, I had no idea our conversations—or this place—would become the real focus of my ethnography. We sat listening to Rick's stories, contributing our curiosity and questions.

I originally set out to examine Choctaw cultural interactions—in broad terms—with water in an age of human-induced climate change. In 2012, drought conditions were challenging people throughout South Central and South Eastern, Oklahoma. That summer I commenced taking photos of rivers, creeks, and lakes, many I visited with family members when I was younger, to document—in images—the visible outcomes of drought conditions.

As the light poured in slowly, the garage door buzzed and hummed as it strained on its track while opening. With the garage closed, I hadn't noticed what all was in there. The heat outside along with the lack of ventilation made Toby's garage swelter in the unbearable temperatures. An occasional breeze was the only real relief. The air grew stale as a single box fan strained to adjust to the near hundred-degree temperatures.

In spite of the heat, we sat around talking and listening to Rick's stories about Choctaw culture. Tucked between tales of giants, creatures living in the forested homelands of Choctaws, water spirits, and other organisms of unknown origins and places, all now lost to the annals of time, something to do with the ball game from the southeast found its way into the conversation- starting out being less of a spoken thing, as Toby's attention was constantly shifting to work he was doing with a wooden box, to being the central topic of conversation. As Toby worked with pieces of wood in varying degree of sizes, it soon became clear that the type of cultural interaction I was seeking to document was not just about water, but about the cultural materials that depend upon natural resources for their production. Stickball plays a major role in the continuation of Choctaw culture through a reinforcement of community social bonds, which relies heavily upon local hickory and other hardwood trees in the manufacturing of the two racquets used by each player.

Rick was speaking about a type of shape-shifter known in Choctaw culture, when my mind races ahead to the road trip to Boulder. In three days, I'd be on my way to what would be the first Rising Voices in Climate Change conference and an internship for six weeks at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR). I

was full of optimism, but that was before sitting in the furnace-like-conditions that seemed to offer no quarter. I felt zapped of any strengthen, especially after days filled with packing.

Nevertheless, we would experience worse days the next year when working on *kapucha* in the same garage. Before replacing the steam-box with a newer version that Luther would design two years later, the steam-box's rate of water evaporation, possibly influenced by weather conditions, seemed to increase and the water boiled away. The increased heat from the boiling water made it worse in a garage already with intolerable conditions. Regardless of the challenges, Toby's garage had become a space where all attention seemed to be on working with hickory and on sharing stories about Choctaw culture.



Figure 2.1: Choctaw stick maker Toby Billy working on *kapucha*. (Photo by Scott Ketchum)

Can't see the Forests for the Trees: An Anthropological Fire Break

Teaching a stick making demonstration at the Carl Albert State College campus in Poteau, a tradition learned from his father Curtis Billy (Rick's older brother), Brenner Billy, a Cultural Trainer with the Choctaw Nation Learning and Development Department, says, "The sticks are a resemblance of family. The sticks are made in different sizes, standing for a father and a mother. The game ball recognizes a child in the family and the game itself relates to the bond of family (CarlAlbert.edu 2016: accessed 1/2017)." *Chahta Toli* (Choctaw Stickball) is a family affair and, based on Brenner's description, embodies Choctaw familial bonds. Bearing in mind the custom of adding a stick to a bundle to express unity with a representative leader practiced by Mississippi Choctaw communities, Bottomland hardwood forest yield natural resources for materials that are an embodiment of both Choctaw family and Choctaw community.

Before the two Choctaw removals to Oklahoma, it is very likely *kapucha* (racquet) design reflected specific family, clan, and regional alliances in the applied styling. Telling a similar account on the relationship of family knowledge in *kapucha* design, Toby Billy explains sticks are constructed by remembering family stories, thus making the process a vehicle for telling stories that can be repetitively activated during each construction. The story of the Shagbark Hickory-*Kapucha*-*Chahta Toli* Network is a telling of Choctaw social history concealed in previous ethnographic approaches and representations.

Starting this work with an auto-ethnography on the importance of Choctaw family storytelling was a way to convey the complexities of the social history of Choctaw people. In time, ethnographic data produces and reproduces representational

generalities that become subjective presentations that manifest static meanings. James Weiner (2003) identifies this problematic aspect of ethnography as beginning with the practical interplay of the social modes of understanding that an ethnographer carries into the field when collecting data and when framing research for coding. Weiner argues, "every anthropologist makes some assumptions about human nature, assumptions that usually pass themselves off as just the opposite" (Weiner 2003:3).

To remove the restrictive flow of ideas that produces concealment in ethnographic practices, I will follow Heideggerian Anthropologist James Weiner's lead in applying a 'fire break' (Weiner 2003:xi) to the dialectic practices of ethnography. Weiner uses the metaphor—areas cutout in forests to slow the spread of forests fires—to herald an "anthropological 'fire break'" in the discipline to remove ethnographic control over representations and return that authority back to the voice of community interlocutors (Weiner 2003:xi). The dialectic analytics of ethnographers, though usually derived from empirical inferences, should rarely stand in as representative of actual experiences of phenomena when collaborators offer community situated means for measuring authenticity of events.



Figure 2.2: Ouachita National Forest, near Hot Springs, Arkansas. (Photo by Scott Ketchum)

After picking up a few more pieces of the story on the road trip, and with all coming to light for this ethnography, I shake my head and let reality sink in. I am left to ponder what was wrong with wanting to play stickball on your time and in your place. Though an exercise in vulnerability and—surprisingly profound—resilience, my auto-ethnography offers a small glimpse into the silent history of trauma Choctaw families faced during social transitions into a political entity and further informs dialogues on the health impacts of intergenerational trauma in American Indian / Alaska Native communities. The heart attacks my grandmother had and her passing were likely tied to high risk factors associated with the deadly triad of stress, tobacco use, and dietary practice that afflicts many in Indian Country (Pember 2016:1).

However, the real story about my grandmother is how her love and influence shaped my identity, and how her example in continuing her education propelled me forward into higher education. My Grandmother Ketchum was essential in shaping my understanding of being Choctaw, so it became part of my identity. Growing up around her in Ardmore imprinted that feeling upon me. It is what I remember most about her, my Aunt Anne, and my Great Grandmother Connie. Being Choctaw meant something to her, to them, and in turn, meant something to me. These connections are significant parts of the underlying foundations of cultural resiliency. Resilience is defined as "adapting well in the face of adversity" by the American Psychology Association (APA) (https://psychcentral.com/lib/what-is-resilience/ accessed 2/17), which is what I took away from my grandmother's example of the strength of family bonds and continuing education. Times changed with the return of sovereignty to Indian Country

in 1975; families could openly celebrate an amnesty from a long struggle with social engineering projects that pervaded even into the walls of their own homes.

I was fortunate to work on a project tracing the associations in a Choctaw persistent identity system (Spicer 1971:795) that gave me the opportunity to also research my family history. Losses of ancient Choctaw forested lands in Mississippi and recently acquired lands in Oklahoma coincide with a sociopolitical history reflected in relatives' interactions with federal administration. Adding an auto-ethnography on states of liminality Choctaw people face in transitions of their social structures was a method for documenting associations and opposition between nationalized boundaries and cultural persistence. The ability to work on a project with Choctaw people residing outside of the geographical boundaries of Choctaw tribal jurisdiction, though participating nonetheless in community activities, was both an honor and a privilege.

For American Indian and Alaska Native peoples, recovering lost family histories is interwoven into the durable practice of cultural resiliency. Still, it is important for me to acknowledge that taking this approach was not easy, as I sought to illuminate a small piece of a multifaceted social history. Words sat on pages, as empty lines waited for words to fill their spaces, waiting for me to work through the shadows of history now visible in the very real human face of family. For Indigenous students, coursework and discussions can be an exercise in being laid bare to the imperceptible terrains of vulnerability in the production and authentication of history and meaning, annulling any personal sense of durability from encounters avowed as fact concerning one's heritage and familial experiences.

The words Choctaw history scholar Angie Debo, in her book *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (1934), uses to depict Mississippi Choctaws arriving in Oklahoma during the allotments are unforgettable. Debo writes, "They were a primitive people entirely unable to cope with the problems that came to them with their new possessions (Debo 1934:275)." An unnecessary descriptive term, the hollow words 'primitive people' rang with judgment on life ways and social practices and were likely overlooked by professors in the Department of History at the University of Oklahoma. With subsequent editions of the book, the University of Oklahoma Press continues to sell literature representing Mississippi Choctaws in Oklahoma within the discursive frames of savagery impacting my own views of distrust and illegitimacy for academic publications stemming from Norman. Even the walls of campus seem steeped in similar frames fetishizing social evolution.

However, this raises an interesting dilemma when considering the ethnology work of H.B. Cushman (1899; 1999) edited by Angie Debo (1962) where in the foreword Clara Sue Kidwell (1998) writes, "and stickball games that Cushman described in historical Choctaw culture are no longer a part of the daily lives of most Choctaw in Oklahoma" (Cushman 1999:4-5). Many contemporary Choctaw scholars echo Kidwell's words, which happen to echo theses of both Debo and Cushman on the decline of communal practices among Choctaw people. Applying archival data concerning Choctaws sociocultural practices from missionaries' documents and documents of colonial powers, the frames for measuring social activity are often structured around external notions of political, economic, or religion without considerations for Choctaw designations. With these primary sources, researchers make

statements that operationalize a very specific historical trajectory and metaphysic framing concerning Choctaw identity.

When Cushman or Debo declare a deterioration or end to Choctaw tribal practices and structures, they do so without providing a rationale for measuring such statements, while also implicating their own lines of rationale on change and continuation among Choctaw people (Cushman 1999; Debo 1934). It seems actually measuring such a claim is at the imposition of applying ideological frames on contributions to the human narrative from the dominant society, in terms of group theory, to measure contributions for what constitutes society or civilization—both abstractive notions that functionally are operationalized as empty-place holders by researchers. These representative generalities ignore the layered interplay on identity from social institutions practiced and embodied with the ball game, like the potential to earn a social clan name through the game.

For Choctaw stickball community participants, meaning and context is in flux and is being negotiated as a social community, though still very much, grounded in the persistence of landscapes, language, names, and materials from time immemorial. Approaching a research project on Choctaw culture, I had new questions on the role of tribal sovereignty in the authentication and authority of tribal materials and semiotics. Historical representations associated with Choctaw Nation tend to be composited around political interactions with the federal government and European powers, positing a monolithic narrative generalized on the actions of the few.

Persisting social interactions within parts of the community that have become the basis of a habitus and continually embodied in cultural mimesis are seldom the

attention of Choctaw scholars (Bourdieu 1977). This gap in the literature presents an interesting dilemma, especially considering distinctions in the political recognized entity know as Choctaw Nation and the community of Choctaw people engaged in a persistent coalescence around communal activities like stickball. Recent attention is given to the significance of political citizenship to the Choctaw nationalism habitus in Valeria Lambert's study on continuity and discontinuity in nation building narratives for Choctaw Nation (Lambert 2007:8). Lambert places developments in Choctaw nationalism with a movement in 1969 to rescind termination legislation lead in part by the "political actions of a single individual, a then young, working-class Choctaw full-blood named Charles Brown who, surprisingly, lived outside the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma City" (Lambert 2007:9).

Lambert recognizes three periods of rupture and rebirth in Choctaw tribal nationalism which included periods that: 1) broke down the pre-colonial Choctaw structure with an end in 1500s of the Mississippian Chiefdoms 2) demolished the 1700s agrarian culture and evolving tribal political institutions with the removals in 1830s and 3) destroyed the federally recognized Choctaw Nation in 1906 with the allotments and the Curtis Act (Lambert 2007:4-6). Responses by Baxter York in the Preface concerning persistent aspects in Choctaw culture in Mississippi and naming practices discussed by Swanton insinuate a much more storied experience for Choctaw people than Lambert's generalizations of Choctaw nation building might tell concerning Choctaw communities like Okla Hatak Toli (ball playing people).

This ethnographic tale on the relationship of *Chahta Toli* (Choctaw Stickball) and Shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*) is as much a cautionary-tale regarding the past and

how it is represented, as it is an anecdote on cultural resilience embodied in cultural practice. Choctaw people have faced a level of vulnerability in their socio-ecological inputs and thorough flows as a consequence of treaties with the federal government and subsequent federal administration over their lands. Nonetheless, embodied in the transmission of knowledge among Choctaw families, cultural resilience has continued as part of a persistent coalescence around the ball game.

Clarifying the ambiguities and complexities of representing Choctaw ecological interactions in anthropological discourses begins with the fundamental recognition of the significance of social associations that concern being and nature. In socio-ecological literature, little attention is paid to the cultural significance of objects that are in networks of social associations that very much influence custom and manner (Latour 2004; 2005). When researchers frame Native American and Indigenous cultures in discourses of vulnerability and resilience to climate variations, these representations often rely heavily on generalities made from limited field data concerning cultural processes and the persistence of identity.

Previous research has documented representations of Native American cultural and social practices associated with ecological practices (Deloria and Wildcat 2001), with oppositional discourses centering on representing indigenous practices of ecological manipulation and raising questions concerning continuation and culture change (Krech 1999). Generalities mapped as social realities in social science research can obscure narratives derived from community experience. In keeping in line with a 'fire break' (Weiner 2003:xi), my fieldwork is focused less on representing and framing social practice in dialectics, and instead tracing social associations that create a network

as forged alliances between "actors" and "actants" (Latour 2005; Geertz 1973). This research focus on the agency of natural resources and cultural materiality contributes to the understanding of dynamic cultural associations derived from ecosystems. Oklahoma Choctaw communities reside in the natural ecotone between the forests of the east and the prairie grasslands of the west, giving climate variations and ecological change the potential to influence the dynamics of cultural associations.

The future uncertainty in ecosystem health and accessibility of natural resources may once again challenge Choctaw communities to renegotiate natural material and persistent social contexts in consideration of extreme changes in environments. To begin the process of documenting physical forms of traditional knowledge that rely on socio-ecological interactions, borrowing from earlier conceptions on cultural change by Franz Boas (1896), Julian Steward (1955), and A.L. Krober (1944), Edward Spicer (1971) suggests a valuable conceptual frame for researcher concerning identity systems and change.

Methodologically, Spicer proposes participant observation research to document the persistence meanings assigned to certain cultural symbols, materials, or events, and continued in beliefs of individuals about their "personal affiliation with certain symbols" (Spicer 1971:795). Spicer describes these persistent systems as transcending the ends of nation-states as aspects of identity remain with people, which Spicer elaborates on "a people" as "a determinable set of human individuals who believe in a give set of identity symbols" (Spicer 1971:795). Spicer urges students in the field to focus on collecting data with informants participating in the continuation of an identity system (Spicer 1971:795-6).

In this dissertation, I argue persistence and coalescence are an adaptive capacity of Choctaw people, essential in the age of anthropogenic climate change. This study applies Edward Spicer's persistent identity systems as both a lens and a means for assessing the implications of climate change on cultural systems and cultural materiality. A persistent identity system is the "capacity to survive in constructing sociocultural environment" (797). Spicer's (1971) emphasis that a persistent identity system occurs when conditions give rise to an internal collective consciousness and greater feeling of solidarity as a response to oppositional forces acting upon a group. Spicer further states this produces a motivation for a symbolic expression of persistence. There is little doubt today that *Chahta Toli* represents a motivation for persistence amongst Choctaw people.



Figure 2.3: Pair of *kapucha* made from Shagbark hickory (C. ovata) from Mississippi. (Photo by Scott Ketchum)

Conceptualizing the Shagbark Hickory-*Kapucha-Chahta Toli* Network

In a world driven to view *Nature* as an abstract oppositional space to the highest achievements of humanity, namely civilization, stickball—the ball game of the Southeast—offers a perspective, along with a reckoning of colonial structures positioning of objects, on community associations to natural resources that contribute to the embodiment of culture. For Choctaw people this relationship can be stated simply as being nothing less than the Creator loves the ball game. It is a gift given to the *Okla*—one of many Choctaw words used for *people*.

In this ethnographic story, Choctaw will be used interchangeable with *Chahta* and *Okla*. Whenever I am using a word or phrase in Choctaw, the word will appear in italics; however, I will not apply italics to Choctaw terms published in the works of previous authors, unless the authors apply them. Exceptions to this rule include Choctaw last names now used as an English name, for example Tubby or Tooklo. Also, when using a term in Choctaw, I maintain a consistent orthography with either Cyrus Byington's *A Dictionary of the Choctaw Language* (1915)(Swanton and Halbert edited edition) or Marica Haag and Henry Willis's *Choctaw Language and Culture: Chahta Anumpa* (2001). Phrases or words that come from social media conversations with Rick or Toby may use a type of shorthand for some words—example '*Chata*' (Choctaw).

Understanding numerous words could be examined for subtle distinctions based upon suppositions such as decolonization, but recognizing the temporal indeterminacy of meaning and subjective nature of selecting concepts for nuancing, this case study focuses on collecting empirical data on Choctaw relational experiences with cultural objects. Problematics associated with dialectic binaries for nuance and rupture are

frequently deployed methodologically without applying a similar analytics of interrogation towards tools and concepts; as departure, instead, this ethnography focus on the social phenomena of human actions being modified in relations with objects or non-human agents (Latour 2004:75-76). The meaning of *kapucha* and Shagbark hickory to Choctaw culture is very much layered in the multiplicity of practices and perspectives of participants that produce a 'heteroglossia' of Choctaw Stickball—heteroglossia is the term Bakhtin uses to describe the multitude of languages spoken within a language (Bakhtin 1981).

My initial conceptions for this project focused on potential vulnerabilities to Choctaw culture produced from extreme weather related phenomena such as water scarcity; a result of drought conditions in Southeastern Oklahoma. From the inception of the project in 2011 and lasting through my fieldwork making sticks, beginning in February 2014 and ending in the summer of 2016, this ethnographic project was designed to use participant observation as the primary source for data collection.

If it were allowed, I would hand in a pair of *kapucha* as my dissertation. A pair of *kapucha* is less artifice as a representation of Choctaw culture and more of an artifact when compared with ethnography. The sticks are a better reflection of participant observation fieldwork with cultural informants and lack the appearance of being mired with the application of theory. The sticks are representative of the story about the process of stick making. They also represent a story about the continuation of cultural resilience amongst a community that gathers for a multigenerational event that produces cultural spaces for passing social knowledge and teaching life ways. *Kapucha-toli* is Choctaw and Choctaw culture is *Kapucha-toli.* Also known as Choctaw Stickball,

stickball, or simply the ball game*, Kapucha-toli* is a cultural event and game played by Native peoples throughout the southeast.

Through applying the ball game as a lens for assessing data on cultural vulnerability and cultural resiliency to climate variations, landscapes become reflective of experiential knowledge and cultural contexts. My research indicates cultural materials can stimulate malleable social contexts of persistence that respond to outside pressures, and even to extreme circumstances of fracturing, by emboldening community coalescence. 'Leave it on the field' is a life-ways philosophy practiced by stickball players and community supporters throughout Southeastern indigenous communities. I argue that persistence and coalescence are not only central in the resiliency of stickball culture among indigenous peoples, whose homelands are located in the southeastern part of the United States, but also that cultural resilience is a medium through which community adaptations to climate gradations can occur.

As a cultural event, stickball is intertwined in Choctaw life-ways as a philosophy for approaching the world. It is through learning to leave all of your problems as a person and as a community on the field of play that glimpses of healing and renewal come into focus. The 'Ball Game of the Southeast' is how many Choctaw communities continued to cope with social vulnerabilities from conspiring and contaminating forces associated with modernity.

Cultural sports effects on community behaviors and norms afford games like stickball a degree of community agency not recognized when framed in terms of being solely a recreational activity. This prejudice misses the cultural functions of sports and the associations surrounding and embedded in a game and can play into how culture

activities can be reduced to nothing more than an exhibition for outsiders instead of being recognized as an event steeped with significance beyond entertainment. Sports can be entertaining for competitors and observers. However, sports also reflect values and association in the social practices of a community, as well as providing a social space for cultural resiliency. This makes sports a significant frame for examining both the possible cultural and social dimensions of climate variations on communities like Choctaw stick-makers and stickball players.

A disconnect between requirements and verification in the production of knowledge in an academic setting versus knowledge production in a community became immediately clear after collecting data for analysis and during the write-up phase for this ethnography. It became apparent that all knowledge is relational. In collecting data on the ball game through participant observation and archival research, history has removed much of the agency of Shagbark hickory and *kapucha* from the Choctaw narrative and associative social network. Oral stories among Choctaw community members and the fabrication of stickball sticks elaborate on kinship and biotic associations to geographical proximities. Documenting Choctaw storytelling and stick making offers data from narratives generalized in scholarship that places the continuation of Choctaw culture in discourses on progress and sovereignty (Cushman 1999; Debo 1934; Kidwell 1995; Lambert 2007). Discussions on the social evolution of Choctaw people have ignored associations being actively negotiated in interplay with material objects that inform and contextualize cultural practices.

In writing this ethnographic report one thing should be made clear, 'The Game of the Southeast' is not so much my story as a communal story. It is a cultural and

ceremonial event shared temporally and spatially in a collective network that remains active to this day. From late February to early March players across the southeast get ready for a new season of ball play. With variations of the game relative to each tribal-nation from the Southeastern parts of the United States; the Game of the Southeast, simply referred to as the 'ballgame', is still played by members of Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, Cherokee, and Seminole communities—though it is not limited to these communities in Oklahoma and abroad. J.P. Johnson (2014) says, "Some form of the game will always be played." The ball game is a story of resilience and continuation that belongs to all of the indigenous communities, peoples, and towns of the east. This ethnography focuses on the different agents that intersect in the production of the Shagbark Hickory-*Kapucha*-*Chahta Toli* Network. Choctaw Stickball culture in Oklahoma is a unique topic area to focus a case study concerning climate change. Previously, very little data has been accumulated on the production or harvesting of natural resources for *kapucha*.

Already challenged by residing near the end of the eastern deciduous forest range, hickories may be difficult to harvest in the future may prove difficult for Oklahoma Choctaw stick-makers and face resource challenges brought about from land use patterns and human-induced climate change. The National Climate Assessment (NCA)(2014) states: "The peoples, lands, and resources of Indigenous communities in the United States, including Alaska and the Pacific Rim, face an array of climate change impacts and vulnerabilities that threaten many Native communities." Numerical models projects forthcoming disturbances to bionetworks that will steadfastly implicate indigenous communities and their traditions in numerous ways, with extremes involving

potential removals of communities from flooding in coastal regions (Bennett, T. M. B. et al. 2014). Original communities and their cultures are vulnerable to a host of possibilities from human-induced climate variations as competing interests for natural resources will likely magnify existing socioeconomic issues (Bennett, T. M. B. et al. 2014).

For Indigenous communities, cultural preservation is as much about sustaining natural resources in local ecosystems that provide cultural materials as it is about language revitalization. Forests enable socializing activities like stickball, vital in the maintenance of familial and community relationships, by supplying natural resources for the construction of cultural objects. The NCA report further elaborates on the notion of vulnerability confronting Indigenous communities as ecosystems are disrupted by climate variations. The NCA report observed a broad array of risks starting with "the loss of traditional knowledge" and included: "increased food insecurity due to reduced availability of traditional foods, changing water availability, artic sea ice loss, permafrost thaw, and relocation from historic homelands (Bennett, T. M. B. et al. 2014)." Before understanding future implications, Bennett, T. M. B. et al. (2014) advise that, "The history and culture of many tribes and indigenous peoples are critical to understand before assessing additional climate change impacts."

This call for evaluating both culture and history before assessing implications of climate change on Indigenous peoples influenced the design of this project. Facing a comprehensive range of possible ecosystem dynamics, Indigenous communities are uniquely situated to begin documenting local practices that rely heavily on socio-ecological systems health. How should one go about collecting data to understand

history and culture of an indigenous community? To address this question, I chose fieldwork using participant observations for documenting cultural practices and ethnography as a means of disseminating social histories and cultural data.

Stickball and Forests: A Relationship of Continuation and Resiliency

By looking at Choctaw associations with forests, I was able to observe cultural adaptations in materiality based on changing ecosystems, identified and observed in material relationships as deriving both endogenously and exogenously. Forests provided more than just source materials; hickory usage among southeast tribal communities includes using hickory nuts as a source of food as well as cooking oil (Bushnell 1909: 8). The continuous relationship that Choctaw communities have with hickory trees is apparent in the playing of the game.

Stickball is shown to be more than a modicum of continuation of interactions in forested settings in Mississippi and Alabama. It is an outlet for expressing a material and semiotic relationship to forested homelands that has begins firmly rooted in a pre-history Choctaw episteme. Stickball continues to be the people's sport—a sport for the everyday Choctaw. The ball game continues to bind community members in the advancement of an interactive landscape where everything that is known is a constitution of Choctaw ontology. *Kapucha-toli* is expressive of multiple relations situated in forests that express landscapes as a site of enculturation. Stickball displays resiliency as an act of remembrance embodying community memory in an activity. Acts of everyday members establishes a repository of cultural knowledge, accessible to storytellers in communal retellings about glory in the game.

This research project makes an academic contribution to climate change discourses by considering the vulnerability and resiliency of agents and their associations responsible for the cultural phenomena known as Choctaw Stickball. Removing the understanding that resiliency must be defined as opposition to vulnerability, Choctaw stickball is an activity made possible through numerous linkages in the Choctaw socialization process.

Hickory trees' influence on a process of Choctaw socialization is fundamental in establishing a start point for tracing the associations of a Choctaw social domain. This is not to exclude outside actors and their influence in the process; however, the reorientation of understandings about what constituents the social in situ, both conceptually and methodologically in academia, is necessary to detach normative generalizations on social context from external voices, and placing the spotlight squarely on the network of actors and institutions occupying a social domain. Policy decisions informed by the greatest climate science will not address structural and systemic issues associated with anthropogenic climate change, making data on understanding social domains intertwined with nature a significance contribution to future institutional practices.

Applied *Chahta* Anthropology and Documenting the Production of *Kapucha*

In his dissertation *Chahata Imtikba Im Aiikhvana Learning from the Choctaw Ancestors: Integrating Indigenous and Experimental Approaches in the Study of Mississippian Technologies* (2008), Choctaw Cultural and Heritage Center Director Ian Thompson applies experimental archaeology approaches to document forms of

Choctaw material production including bows and beading. Thompson writes, "This research was designed to document, on a fair holistic level, the physical aspects of the traditional knowledge that Chahta people incorporated into some of the most common tools" (Thompson 2008:xviii). Conscious of the methodological significance in "utility to both groups" in the study of traditional knowledge, Thompson's experimental approach provides a complementary practice to use with participant observation—a form of experimental ethnography—to document contemporary Choctaw physical knowledge. Establishing a foundational approach for *Chahta* anthropology, Thompson's technique delivers a sufficient practice of methodological embodiment for documenting socio-ecological associations in the Shagbark Hickory-*Kapucha*-*Chahta Toli* Stickball Network. Thompson describes physical practice as embodying *Chahta* Traditional Knowledge, which Thompson explains physical knowledge as a traditional knowledge practice (Thompson 2008:xviii).

Ecologies are substantial in the continuation of Indigenous communities' ways of living. *Mvskoke* language family members rely heavily on indigenous forests as source timber in the production of sticks for the game played throughout the Southeast. Reflecting much on the influence cultural materials derived in local ecologies have on the thoughts and behaviors of people, Choctaws' approach *Kapucha Toli* with what Kendall Blanchard (1981) describes as a "Serious Side of Leisure". An ethos and attitude Blanchard observed, Choctaw athletes take sporting events very seriously, and this is why sports are described as a major component in the social maintenance of a Choctaw identity (Blanchard 1981).

Choctaw people playing the ball game have been well documented in ethnographic reports (Culin 1975; Cushman 1999; Swanton 2001), but little research has been done on the production of *kapucha*—racquets that make playing the game possible. Stickball relies on natural materials from local forests. Stickball and lacrosse sticks are, perhaps, two of the oldest items still being produced from wood harvested in the eastern part of the United States by Indigenous peoples. Stickball as an iconic sport represents much more than Choctaw culture, as it represents life, community, history, and the actions of the people. The ball game continues as a cultural expression influenced by local forests and natural resources. What should be acknowledged is *Kapucha* fabrication places a demand on local forests and hickory trees in supplying timber.

Choctaw stick-makers gather hickory wood annually starting around March and concluding sometime in October. This harvest typically overlaps with the commencement of a new stickball season. Cumulating with the World Series of Choctaw Stickball in July, a stickball season is comprised of various practices, pick-up games, exhibition games, ceremonial games, and tournaments. Games are sponsored by different groups and for different reasons in Oklahoma and throughout the southeastern part of the United States. In Oklahoma, teams play tournaments and ceremonial games from Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Seminole, and Creek populations.

Harvesting Shagbark hickory (*C. ovata*) for *kapucha* marks Bottomland hardwood forests as culturally significant to Choctaw people in supplying source materials for cultural production. Multi-sited fieldwork was undertaken to investigate and document the forested interactions of Choctaw stick-makers and their associations

with Shagbark hickory and *kapucha.* This ethnographic report documents how harvesting timber for fabrication translates into objects with cultural significance for Choctaw people. Working with Rick Billy, Choctaw language instructor and cultural consultant, and Toby Billy, a Choctaw stick-maker and cultural consultant, this study explores the Shagbark hickory-*Kapucha*-Choctaw Stickball Network as a process of associations in the production of *kapucha* and continuation of the game.

At first glance Choctaw Stickball might not seem even remotely related to climate change, especially if the agency of forests or *kapucha* is not considered. However, the dependent relationship of the game on forests to make *kapucha,* and the fact that southeastern Oklahoma is at the end of deciduous forest range of the east, makes climate gradations that alter precipitation patterns a real concern. Shagbark hickory trees throughout the Southeast have made playing this game possible, suggesting changes in resources availability or land use patterns might alter the network of agents that continues Choctaw Stickball culture. In order to understand the cultural significance of this game played throughout the Southeast, and to address questions on what Cultural Resource Management (CRM) might entail to preserve the ball game, this case study documents the actors and their associations in the social history of Choctaw Stickball, in harvesting of hickory, in crafting of stickball sticks, in playing the ball game, and in helping assist a team during a youth stickball tournament.

Chapter 3: Choctaw Social Ecology in the Anthropocene

Climate Variations and Choctaw Stickball

Climate change will not only alter the landscapes and homelands of Indigenous peoples, but also the natural resources used as materials for objects relevant to human behavior. Traditional knowledge displayed in the manufacturing of cultural objects is passed on through instructions that are a mix of linguistic and physical aspects of a culture and reflect the skills and techniques necessary for survival in a particular geographical location. K*apucha* are the symbolic glue that holds much of Choctaw social-ecology together as meaning-making agents in the past and present that contribute to both social imagination and identity.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), an institution charged with assessing scientific, technical, and socio-economic information necessary for understanding anthropogenic-induced climate change, reported in 2007 that "warming of the climate system is unequivocal" (IPCC 2007). The IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report Climate Change 2013 offers further evidence supporting physical and biological system changes as a result of human-induced warming of the climate system, which in turn causes stress on hydrological systems impacting overall available and water quality (IPCC 2013). As a result of the global scale of ecological issues, climate change challenges our understandings of social structures and societal organization and is currently creating the need for new conversations about what constitutes culture and cultural knowledge.

Civilization and culture are two components of human historiography that will be significantly affected by climate change. In the age of human-induced climate change, indigenous peoples' cultural resources are projected to face a range of potential vulnerabilities that include administrative forces and politics of land use (Bennett, T. M. B. et al. 2014). Community interests in local ecologies that sustain social domains are vulnerable to exclusion in the formation and deliberation phases of policy discourses on climate change.

Chahta Toli plays a critical role as an event embodying one of the remaining social spaces where Choctaw identity is visibly negotiated and reinforced in a communal manner. In this regard, this chapter contributes to understandings of cultural preservation in era of human influenced climate change and contributes cultural perspectives to social-ecological research concerning the interrelatedness of nature and society

The social history of *Choctaw Toli* provides a perspective on human adaptation and change in social-ecological system interactions that incorporates cultural expressions of nature and society. This chapter discusses the subtleties of institutional engagement with tribal-nations in climate change research and the engagement of persistent identity practitioners as cultural stakeholders in climate change research. Additionally, this chapter attends to the question posed in chapter two concerning the role anthropology can play in climate change research and in informing cultural resources dialogues concerning notions of vulnerability and resilience.

Further, this chapter considers the interplay of research, ethics, and representations in ethnography, specifically focusing on the interaction of climate

change research and ethnography by interrogating some of the concepts in the following questions: what are some of the challenges to be aware of when approaching a tribal community to develop a research project focused on cultural practices? How do you delineate community stakeholders towards documenting sociocultural activities vulnerable to climate variations? How do you ensure local issues do not get lost in global discourses on academic research and in the universal applications of a study? How are notions of vulnerability determined in climate change research, and who defines the concept of resiliency? Finally, who determines those notions?

Based on the outcomes from this study, the answers to these questions are found in the complicated dynamics that play out in identifying a community, developing relationships with informants, designing a project with informants, collecting data, analyzing data, and publishing or disseminating data. Often, it is the problematics of presenting physical knowledge and embodiment in generalized, subjective terms that renders cultural relations with objects irreducible and unintelligible when presented in words. Previously, scholars have considered the nuances associated with documenting subjective meaning of experience and representing that in anthropological research (Sapir 1985: 515; Dell Hymes 1964; Keith Basso 1990:3). Edward Sapir depicts culture as occurring in abstract experiences of individuals participating in-group interactions (Sapir 1985), suggesting oral history as an important way to study the localized contexts of cultural systems.

In chapter 1, a 'fire break' was offered as an imaginative and metaphorical device to generate a discontinuity in ethnographic depictions of Choctaw culture generated from social frames concerned with distance from subject (Weiner 2001:xi).

Instead, this project is focused on the persistence of shared meaning in social domains that reinforce a Choctaw heteroglossia. John H. Peterson (1987), an Archaeologist at Mississippi State University, describes Choctaw people as sustaining themselves by balancing change with tradition. Peterson writes, "History shows a persistent pattern of efforts by the Choctaw to remain in the state and to retain their cultural identity. They have preserved tribal traditions, but at the same time, they have introduced new patterns necessary for survival." (Peterson 1987:3) This is an example of the important function documenting practice through cultural participation serves in the transversal of academic taxonomies that seek to reduce phenomenon to dialectic interrogations of oppositional binaries.

Often, academic taxonomies reduce an experience to a generalized representation that translates into very limited understandings of context and meaning in the speech and signs of a culture. Baxter York introduces the Choctaw communal tradition of *i'yi kowa* and describes it as a practice where everyone works together in the service of the community (York 4/8/1974). *I'yi kowa* is the foundation of understanding communal experience as it is practiced and embodied in a Choctaw Social Ecology. For Choctaw Anthropology, *i'yi kowa* serves as an applied model for partaking in communal activity and documenting phenomena via a traditional anthropological approach of participant observation.

The climate change and ethnography explanations in this chapter are informed from a methodological departure from standardized approaches in current literature such as Susan A. Crate's 'climate ethnography'—a "critical collaborative, multi-sited form" of ethnography (Crate 201:175-176). This project was designed with a

component intended to examine the role sociocultural anthropology plays in research and discourses concerning culture and extreme weather events in two ways: 1) by considering how past approaches have presented physical knowledge; and 2) by applying a experimental approach for collecting data—though possibly more in line with experimental practices in archaeology (Thompson 2008) and espoused in Pierre Bourdieu's "Program for a Sociology of Sport" (1988).

Although anthropology offers a litany of time-tested tools and frameworks for collecting data, many of today's problems require a way of thinking that traverses current understandings on the interrelatedness of social and natural ecologies. Indigenous scholars have worked to legitimize indigenous methodologies in higher education and to rectify knowledge systems that project a corporatized value on nature instead of incorporating nature as an extension of a localized social symbiosis (Cajete 2000; P. Deloria 1998; V. Deloria 1969; L. Smith 1999; Garroutte 2003; Mihesuah 1998; 2004; Watkins 2001; Waziyatawim and Yellow Bird 2005; Wilson 2001).

A possible approach might be a further incorporation of cultural interpretations documented in this study on the interrelatedness of natural resources to human physical practices that transcend current taxonomic understandings. Indigenous peoples in North America have been ascribed identities in social science research via demographics designation such as 'urban Indian', which reveals very little about practice or experience. In the same manner, ecology studies considers the interrelated dimensions of living beings, but usually these approaches leave little room for the participation of cultural perspectives in ecology dialogues. The next section discusses recent Choctaw experiences and perspectives with climate variations and extreme weather events.

Choctaw Forest Ecology and Current Experiences with Climate Change

On October 6, 2015, Choctaw Nation and Chickasaw Nation signed a historic agreement with the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) that brought to an end a lawsuit against the DOI for the mismanagement and sale of lands, resources, and timber held in trust for both nations (Clark 2016). The reason for federal administration of tribal resources is grounded in a complex legal history. Acting as trustee, the federal government safeguards and administers tribal lands, including natural resources, as part of tribal-nations domestic ward status (Wilkins and Lomawaima 2001). In the past, federal administration of tribal natural resources, including timber, was best described as nothing short of disingenuous (Huntsinger and McCaffrey 1995). The loss of capital and income for tribal governments has been estimated to be in the billions, as leases to tribal lands were often mismanaged (Yazzie 2007).

It has been documented that Settler Colonialism constructs and reinforces a form of land tenure that excludes indigenous people from supervising their ancient homelands in accordance with their normative beliefs (Faiman-Silva 2000; Huntsinger and McCaffrey 1995; White 1983; Yazzie 2007; Yazzie-Durglo 1998). Historically, Choctaw values were excluded in the administration of local ecosystems. In the 1890s, as part of the move towards Oklahoma statehood, Choctaw Nation prohibited the cutting of hickory and pecan trees, both source materials for *kapucha* (Choctaw Nation 1894: 222-224). The Curtis Act of 1898 allowed federal officials to take control over millions of acres that included prime forested lands (Prucha 2000). The signing of the recent agreement signaled a move away from a history of mistrust and towards

collaborative preservation of local ecologies and the inclusion of Choctaw social values in local resource management.

Interestingly, this dissertation project did not start out as a study designed to collect data on social units and actors that contribute to how Choctaw people organize, embody, and participate in a persistent cultural domain. Persistence does not function as some specifically definable concept with universal implications for depicting the continuation of experience but in this case, is demonstrative of the visible practice in social domains of Choctaw identity. In seeking to document implications of climate change that might alter cultural behaviors, there seemed to be an ostensible prerequisite to identify and define the unit for measure through empirical research. This is how persistence was identified as a social marker that is a segment of the social domain that is responsible for stickball culture.

Throughout the collection of data on social domains for this study, including preliminary and fieldwork, climate variations during this period hinted at the stress weather uncertainty places on local ecologies and communities. Given that this project began organized around investigating water and Choctaw culture, I continued to observe weather conditions in the Southeastern part of the state from the project design to the end of fieldwork in 2016. The weather activity started with drought like conditions in the preliminary design stage of the project in 2011.

I was initially interested in documenting visual implications of drought through pictures of local creeks and lakes found in southern Oklahoma. By the time I entered into the second full year of collecting data in 2015, southern Oklahoma experienced the end of drought conditions with heavy rains. Rainfall in the Ardmore area and places

around the Arbuckle Mountains reached extreme levels, with Tropical Depression Bill dumping 12 inches of rain in a few places in southern Oklahoma on June 17, 2015 (Fritz 2015).

The extreme precipitation episode was responsible for severe damage to homes and businesses, and floodwaters made accessing recreational areas near impossible. On a drive to the Chickasaw Nation Medical Center in Ada, the aftermath of the storm was noticeable in flooded roads, rushing water in streams once emptied by drought, and the mess of downed tree limbs and branches. The economic impact to local businesses that depend heavily upon summer months for revenue was severe, as much of the Chickasaw National Recreational Area was now inundated with inaccessible spaces.

These events occurred at a time when Toby and Lu ran out of wood for making sticks. Floodwaters presented them with the challenge of trying to access roads to local areas with hickories. While in Mississippi for the World Series Stickball tournament in July, Rick Greenwood was able to attain and generously donate some wood that allowed Toby and Lu to keep working on *kapucha* through the 2015 season. Choctaw stick makers were not alone in negotiating the uncertainty from the intermittent torrential rains that brought an end to several years of drought for south-central and southeastern Oklahoma.

As Senior Water Resource Manager for Choctaw Nation, Tye Baker is no stranger to navigating uncertain weather conditions in Oklahoma. Baker describes the challenge of delivering quality water to Choctaw people living in the nation's service region saying, "Climate change brings uncertainty," and adding, "I'm having to deal with what the climate provides me. All I can do is adapt. (Linn 2016)" Although the

drought ended following heavy rains in 2015, Choctaw Nation is partnering with Chickasaw Nation to develop the Arbuckle-Simpson Aquifer Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) as part of a long-term regional water plan. In preparing for weather uncertainty and potential changes in social-ecological systems, both Choctaw Nation and Chickasaw Nation have become members of the South Central Climate Science Center consortium (Chickasaw Nation Media Relations Office 2016).

Located in Norman, Oklahoma, the South Central Climate Science Center (SC CSC) was founded in 2012 to assist decision makers and stakeholders by providing them with "science, tools, and information they need to address the impacts of climate variability and change on their areas of responsibility (http://southcentralclimate.org: accessed 12/2016). The SC CSC is a collaborative partnership created through the work of USGS scientist, agencies managing natural resources, and a consortium of academic institutions from the area (http://southcentralclimate.org: accessed 12/2016). Choctaw Nation and Chickasaw Nation are among the member institutions that make-up this academic consortium.

With the current Trump administration, SC CSC and funding for climate change research face new uncertainties in coordinating federal-tribal-state management efforts to protect and preserve natural resources. As variations in Oklahoma weather events have demonstrated, and based upon Tye Baker's statement, it is increasingly challenging for communities to adapt. Choctaw Nation has experienced vibrant growth in their economy that helps to fuel and finance a renaissance of cultural activities among their people. However, Choctaw Nation is located in a bioregion that is susceptible to weather extremes like drought and flash flooding.

As I was a year into collecting data in 2015, the multitude and dimension of issues facing Choctaw Nation and Choctaw people was beginning to be more evident. Previously, the complex issue of Choctaw identity and its historical representation has been introduced. However, histories are often not interrogated before researchers approach a community, which can result in the exclusion of community informants and stakeholders that may not be represented in tribal bureaucracies. For some in the community, there is no illusion about the historical rift and cultural damage done by federally installed tribal bureaucracies and tribal representatives.

In a statement delineating a difference between Choctaw tribalism and Choctaw citizenship, Rick Billy states, "That's what they did. The federal government aimed to disenfranchise and cause a disassociation among families. This is how they tried to control the spread of Choctaw culture among the people." Echoing the notion of *i'yi kowa,* he continues, "That's why there are two Choctaw governments—the community and the political government. People still take care of each other, and tribalism still exists (Rick Billy 11/2015)." This statement also informs and nuances the notion of cultural ownership as being caught between, possibly unbeknownst, oppositional forces of embodying cultural practices versus political and sovereign authority over practices.

The *Preface* offers a statement by Baxter York that takes this delineation a step further by stating the nation remained in Mississippi, thus presenting the beginning of an internal dialogue for the larger Choctaw community to consider over the internal history of power and authority. Additionally, Rick's statement does not mean that the political government is made up of individuals independent of the community, but is

meant to draw a distinction between belongings from Choctaw modes of socialization and from nationality.

This is not to say that Choctaw Nation and Choctaw culture are mutually exclusive, or that stickball players do not participate in Choctaw Nation. The issue is more about recognizing important distinctions in tribal communities when collecting data and recognizing community members that can help inform a project. For this study, this distinction was vital in documenting the social history of *Chahta Toli*, as cultural genealogies function through persistent community situated expressions of community-based cultural resource management (little crm).

Choctaw stickball in Oklahoma has continued to thrive today due to the voluntary efforts of numerous community members working to preserve the ball game. Cultural resource management situated in a Indigenous community context is consistently constructed through social ties and social alliances that begin at the familial level and extend throughout the community into differing structures that includes villages, township, reservation, and tribal-nation. Choctaw Stickball functions as an event and space that links and interrelates each of these spheres, as they are constantly in flux being negotiated in practice by community members.

Raymond I. Orr and David B. Anderson (2012) argue that climate change research can convey a degree of "inherent pessimism" to those who "lost so much in terms of their historical dispossession and social marginalization. (Orr and Anderson 2012:136)" A non-community member suggesting a study on vulnerability and resiliency might be meet with pessimism because of the history of stickball being intertwined with Choctaw cultural resilience and transcending the transitions in

Choctaw political, social, economic, and religious structures. For indigenous groups, there seems to be some inherent tension and contradiction in letting researchers analyze vulnerabilities, a likely source of further pessimism. Orr and Anderson cogitate addressing this pessimism towards outsiders as a prerequisite for indigenous participation as stakeholders in conversations on natural resources (Orr and Anderson 2012:135-136). Collaborative design with cultural consultants is vital for including local perceptions of vulnerability and resiliency.

Based on Orr and Anderson's analysis, American Indian and Alaska Native communities have multitude of perspectives interrelating when it comes to engaging projects concerning resources (Orr and Anderson 130). Community remembrance of manipulation and inadequacies in federal Indian policy cultivates knowledge that informs decisions on partnering with institutional entities. Social scientists have a knack for fabricating the domain they are examining and declaring that world to be an objective construct, and this may be the case. However, a history of manipulation makes clarity over abstraction a virtue when engaging and speaking to communities about research.

Stick makers are stakeholders in local forests, and their claims to land use can be overshadowed by the ideals established when identifying stakeholders. Listening to a presentation at the BIA office in Muskogee, Oklahoma at the end of May 2016 by a firm hired by Choctaw Nation to study community water needs, neither cultural practitioners nor cultural activities seemed to find resonation with the project designer as something of significance as neither was mentioned. Culture can take an unfortunate

backseat to moneymaking activities such as tribal economic development or tribal nation building when it comes to make decisions about the future.

After attending workshops, symposiums, working groups, and conferences focused on climate variations, I identified two prevailing perspectives on Indigenous peoples that are ascribed with the identity as stakeholders: 1) having a recognized claim to a reserve or land; and 2) having a relationship with a place as a site in the production and reinforcement of cultural knowledge. Climate change discourses concerning Indigenous communities tend to include these two distinct identities represented. After finishing my first pair of *kapucha* during fieldwork in early 2014, I accepted that this project would compel me to speak about the significance of forests to Choctaw social networks and the reality of those forests being vulnerable to climate variations being at edge of their ecological range.

Welcome to the Anthropocene: Climate Change and the Human-Nature Split

Today, a new story is being told about the current epoch that points to the global span of human influence on the geology and ecology of the Earth. Anthropocene is the name put forth to label the mark that human social development has left on global ecosystems. The Anthropocene as an epoch is aptly named to call attention to the effects human social development has had on the health of ecological systems and to call attention to the beliefs and practices that produce and reproduce these conditions.

One might ask, is there a risk in situating climate change as the central dialogue of the Anthropocene? Since this era focuses on the global scale of human manipulation to socio-ecological interactions, I often wonder if the problem is putting all of the eggs

in one basket by focusing on the results of human action as opposed to considering the broader assumption associated with those actions. In *Remaking Society: Pathways to a Green Future*, Murray Bookchin (1990) describes the present environmental issues arising from deeper social issues in society that have changed human dynamics resulting in ecological disruptions. In presenting a cogent analysis on the intertwined relationship of the ecological crisis to the social crisis, Bookchin (1990) offers critical analysis regarding making human beings the focal point as a root cause of ecological manipulation and devastation, arguing this does not consider the position and relationship of society and social organization as a source of the crisis.

If, therefore, the Anthropocene is designated to call in question the current human dynamics in social-ecological system interactions, an opportunity is extant to consider the meaning of terms such as social and society and the continuity and discontinuity of these terms as universally representing human organization. Several recent studies have explored new philosophies concerning nature and society to understand human relations to ecosystems and how integral those relations are in cultural continuity and social construction (Delanda 2006; Guattari 2008; Merchant 1992; Hacking 1999;Latour 2004; Descola 2013; Escobar 1999).

Human interactions in the biosphere have become— so numerous, and so vastly—forces of domination, demanding an ecology of subservience to the human condition. In fact, these interactions have become an inseparable influence, as the stretch of human authority is overriding in planetary systems. Whether an intentional influence or influence by externality, human social interactions implicate Earth's biological systems. Another problem in recognizing our current timeframe, as a

moment of intense human participation in dominating ecological and biological system, is that the term Anthropocene does not consider the degrees of responsibility of institutions such as nation-states or transnational corporations, and instead blankets all human interactions in nature as being causal in the dominance. For those living on the margins in nation-states or placed on the margins in global discourses, their complicity in humanity's global influence is more one of omission than actual authority over structures that promote and replicate powers of administration over nature.

Shifting the focus from outcomes such as climate change towards looking at the relationship of input and worldview, the Anthropocene as designation for the current epoch is suggestive of a comparative approach for interrogating the social roots of the global ecological crisis. In this line of analysis, generalizations of the current ecological conditions are not reduced to a specific abstract temporal occurrence. Instead, the interrogation of social domains might offer comparative data on the role socialization plays in shifting our associations in the natural world that may be responsible for elevating human subjectivity over the subjectivity of the natural world. One potential complication with this research is seeking to locate an exact point of rupture or departure, as the moment of change. It can easily become an infinitely regressive endeavor. The problem centers on how do we document and discuss a rupture in a group's socio-ecological or human-nature interactions. To inform this consideration, this project documented practices through a methodological embodiment as a means to record physical knowledge derived in ecological interactions, which contributes to moving Traditional Knowledge(s) research out of abstract discourses and into the realm of empirical observable phenomena.

For Choctaw communities, European contact subsumed their world and subjectivity, which placed them in the global social environmental contributing to the Anthropocene. Choctaw community interactions became less relevant as visible modes of becoming and were replaced with new metaphorical and imaginative affinities (Anderson 1983). Though it must be stated, language is never determinate and meanings changing over time. This is the way words work and communication operates. Although nuancing terms can produce and reproduce segments of continuity and discontinuity, a question that might be asked is how much rupturing can occur if meaning and meaning making are always in a state of flux. Culture is a structure that has the quality of irreducibility because of the subjective nature of experience. Even though science stresses a degree of empirical uncertainty, anthropology's place in academia as a social science continues to push a science of social certainty in taking the social domain as a given structure.

The scope and scale of what the Anthropocene is said to encompass may bring a rupture, challenging contemporary structures as permanent markers of human social history. Will the Anthropocene be an event that ends the historical narrative of capitalism as permanence? The ability to forecast the outcomes of political and economic structures destabilized from ecological decline will depend upon several social issues that stand to be magnified when populations become refugees and must seek relocation. This has become the reality for the Isle de Jean Charles Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw with the disappearance of their island and parts Louisiana's Gulf coast (Hansen 2016: Indiancountrymedianetwork.com)

Anthony Veerkamp (2015), with National Trust for Historical Preservation Climate and Culture, describes relationships to land once conceived in frames of permanence as quickly losing relevance. Veerkamp states, "Climate Change is not merely a physical threat to our cultural heritage; it also challenges our understanding of what it means to "save" a place—indeed, it challenges our notions of permanence itself. (Veerkamp 2015:accessed 6/2016)" If forced to reexamine relationships to place, can examining ecological issues as an extension of a social crisis rupture the metaphysic conditions responsible for a social colonialism in ecological interactions? The Anthropocene challenges the notion of the social, which can begin a reconsideration of the interrelatedness and subjectivity of varying ecological systems. The next section discusses a position for sociocultural anthropology in the Anthropocene.

A Role for Anthropology in the Anthropocene

As mentioned above, my role began to shift as I entered the field while continuing to participate in numerous circles of dialogue on climate change and Indigenous communities. At that point in the study, I did not intend to speak as an advocate for Choctaw stick makers and other Indigenous groups that utilize hickory racquets for field sports. The American Anthropology Association meetings in Washington D.C. in 2014 and Denver, Colorado in 2015 signaled a shift in the Anthropology community towards greater involvement in social dialogues concerning the dynamics of occupation by Israeli over Palestinian groups.

After being handed a flier on the ills of colonialism in Washington D.C., was quiet a surreal experience. Something about it reminded of the two Choctaw Chiefs—

Apuckshunubbee and Pushmataha—who went to D.C. to discuss the further encroachment of lands in Mississippi and died mysteriously. Baxter York provides an account that surmises the entire episode very well. York explains,

> "I'm quoting…grandmother…they say that when they invited him to Washington office, he eat so much till he died. Now our ancestors has handed down to me that they didn't think smart a man as he was that he could eat so much that he died (York 8/22/1975)."

The silence on the part of the activists for similar local issues faced by Indigenous groups across Native North American was deafening. In some cases, concealment can function as a frame of complicity.

In many ways, this project shifted my beliefs about how sovereignty functions in generating relationships for tribal citizen, which may be a reflection of the willingness of my cultural consultants to adapt to events in my life. A car accident in August of 2014 would change the dynamics of this project for better or for worse. For a time, I would look through notes and struggle to identify myself as the author. The words seemed distant as I healed. Rick and Toby did not let that stand in the way of continuing the dialogues we had started. They continued to come over to my house to entertain my questions. Thankfully, my wife Amy accepted Rick and Toby as family as she allowed some visits to continue late into the night.

Rick would reiterate the importance of a community of people working together, which made me conscious of how his visits were very much acts of community resilience. Sitting for hours and talking and listening to Jerry Joseph and the JackMormons helped me feel like my old self again. Though there was something different, the hours of conversation opened my eyes to a deeper interplay of Choctaw symbols in the design of *kapucha*. I begin to see mapping the Shagbark Hickory-

Kapucha-Chahta Toli network as a case study in defining facets and assemblages that constitute Choctaw Social Ecology.

Chahta Toli is a game that belongs to the community. Participants come away from playing with a viewpoint that can only come from a deep commitment to the game. Although I was able to practice and participate in several scrimmages, I was not an expert in stickball technical skills or game strategy. By focusing on natural resources and cultural materials, I started to feel comfortable advocating for stick makers and the significance of local forests to Indigenous games. Anthropology as a discipline can make a greater impact on the Anthropocene by contributing knowledge and methods for documenting materiality practices that are a result of socio-ecological interactions.

Nevertheless, I was left with trepidation over voicing my concerns for Choctaw natural resources because local issues have often become indecipherable in generalized representations of history. This arose as a concern when the focal point of the study became documenting *Chahta Toli* as a persistent cultural structure. Data collected about Choctaw social domains was collaborative, and this is how I approached speaking about hickory and stickball. If extending agency to hickory in order to recognize the influence trees have on Choctaw social behaviors, then natural resources need to be contemplated as collaborators that deserve a voice. The collaborative effort by cultural informants made much of this ethnography a coproduction informed by their experience and physical knowledge.

Although anthropologists have engaged many questions concerning human adaptation and climate, the multitude of contexts, from local to global and from tribal-nation to national, present a real challenge when adopting collaborative and

inclusionary practices with communities. Climate change research is currently in the indelible position of constructing problems that consider significant social questions without deliberation on the broader assumptions made for what constitutes both the social and natural worlds. Social science techniques and approaches for collecting data have a similar problem with assumptions concerning social units and the social domains they represent. This is particularly the case in the application of qualitative methods used in social sciences that proceed to frame social domains derived from normative frameworks.

A researcher's transparency determines if assumptions are operationally defined or written out as defined concepts or parameters of a study. This problem becomes more apparent in the distinctions between climate variations being situated in terms of global scales and temperatures and local weather phenomena impacting local lives. Communities will feel the social dimensions of climate change as the result of specific events. Climate change literature takes situated contexts and representations under general categories with universalizing explanations such as vulnerability assessment, climate adaptation, or resiliency planning without considering the meanings of those categories.

For a time, I lamented over writing portions of this chapter due to the complexities of climate change and culture discourses, especially in applying anthropological methods to document Indigenous cultures vulnerabilities. Community portrayals in academia are projected into landscapes becoming immutable. The group can become represented by an academic distinction or a nuanced term that becomes unchallengeable. In the new age of post-expertise, the correlation between data to fact

is quickly becoming irrelevant, as the threshold for verification is as long as someone you follow has re-tweeted it.

To be honest, I struggle with the interrelated nature of ethnographic writing and the authority to ascribe identity and meaning by representing a community in narratives framed by terms such as vulnerability and resiliency. This is compounded by existing issues and concerns from Native and Indigenous scholars over the representation of their community by researchers and research institutions that include issues of authority, authenticity, misrepresentation and misappropriation, just to name a few. Audra Simpson (2014) takes the position of refusal in presenting ethnographic data concerning Kahnawà:ke Mohawks that "articulates a mode of sovereign authority over the presentation of ethnographic data" (Simpson 2014:105). Simpson provides an undeniable case on past misrepresentation as well as a look into a community that has take a position of refusal in relinquishing their sovereignty.

I agree with Simpson's position of respecting the community's wishes as to what is presented to the outside. The story about the adventures of Tashka and Walo is an example of a Choctaw tale that reinforces a similar ethic (Bushnell 1909). I also agree with her argument that Indigenous scholars should focus on scholarship that re-presents communities. The position of projecting sovereignty as a concept into the past as expressive of a pre-contact social structure for the sake of current social authority is of little value to me. This position is based on the contemporary promotion of national identity and sovereignty throughout Indian Country that accepts both concepts without interrogating the historical trajectory of either. National identity promotion in scholarship can intersect with other institutional forms of knowledge production that

can be come expressed as ideologue, functioning and taking form as a "grand narrative" (Lyotard 1979). For Choctaw people, I would offer the word *Okla* to describe political authority derived before contact because the word was used in the past to represent sociopolitical districts.

Those concerns gave me pause when I attended the first Rising Voices of Indigenous People in Weather and Climate Science—a conference that brought Indigenous community leaders interested in climate change together with climate science community leaders to discuss challenges and partnership opportunities in response to extreme weather conditions. It became apparent many of the contributors—whether representing a voice from an indigenous community or a scientific community—knew each other from previous projects working with tribal-nations, indigenous communities, non-profits, or tribal colleges and universities such as Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas or Colorado State University located in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Then I remembered something that Dan Wildcat would remind each of the attendees at Rising Voices I-III, and that was to not only think about resources as relatives but to treat everyone in attendance like relatives—meaning that we should do our duty as relations and hold everyone accountable as a gesture of respect. I cannot remember if Dr. Wildcat credited Merv Tano with this standard for communication with one another during workshops, but he did at RV II. Wildcat's proposal of speaking to individuals and about natural resources as relatives acknowledges our collective interrelatedness as stakeholders in conversations on climate extremes. Critical dialogue

with relatives takes the potential social hierarchies produced from perceptions of expertise and aligns participant contributions on a symmetrical playing field.

Rising Voices I-III, a set of annual workshops from 2013 to 2015, brought together a diverse group of communities to the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado to enable dialogues on varying cultural approaches for adapting to climate variability and related ecological changes. Heather Lazrus, Julie Maldonaldo, and Bob Gough help organize each workshop around a differing theme to "facilitate cross-cultural approaches for adaptation solutions to climate variability and change (risingvoices.ucar.edu, accessed 12/2016)."

I mentioned the standard Wildcat applied to point to the difficult conversations needing to occur concerning climate change and social networks, requiring many of us to reconsider social-cultural frames. Values and concepts need to be discussed in the light of climate change to understand the broader assumptions operating within them and sustaining them as well as how they structure our lives to relate to and relate in ecosystems. This will not be easy work. Concepts like the social that have been taken for granted in research will need to be reevaluated.

In the case of Indigenous identities, the dynamics of tribal sovereignty, tribal nationalism, and tribal citizenship—in connection with federal and state modes of recognition—cannot be divorced from the wider historical and metaphorical norms that define each of these concepts. Nationalism is still nationalism, whether tribal or not. Nationalism is still an identity system that removes the socializing contexts and domains of cultural events like *Chahta Toli*, replacing them with signifiers for 'imaginative' modes of belonging produced by institutions that aim at severing relations

between nature and humans (Anderson 1983). I. Davidson-Hunt and F. Berkes (2003) in arguing for their "human-in-ecosystems model" recommend, "addressing the environment/society dichotomy, incorporating evolutionary and historical processes into the model, and creating concepts that are sensitive to both (Holling et al., 1998)." Nationalism may very well produce social conditions and social issues analogous to the current environment/society dichotomy that is being recognized as potential sources of the current ecological crisis.

Toward reconsidering social interactions to include objects as social subjects, anthropology has both the methodological tools and technical blueprint for conducting thorough examinations of social domains. Anthropological methodologies can augment our knowledge on society, social organization, and imagined affinities like nationalism by not taking them as conceptual givens. Bruno Latour's ANT establishes a working approach for collecting and arranging data concerning social domains, which Latour envisions ANT less as a theory and more as a methodology for fieldwork on social spheres (Latour 2004).

In the following chapter, I begin to lay out social sentiments of persistence and coalescence that have keep *Chahta Toli* viable through the constant redefining of their government, economic, and education structures. This is a social mechanism for responding to disaster so cultural preservation and cultural resource management operate through a modality of persistence in shared meaning in the continued coalescence of a community. Recognizing the power of the surrounding natural world was very much a part of Choctaw traditions. Choctaw landscapes, community stories, and cultural materials are expressive venues for a coherent continuation of

interrelatedness with proximate ecologies. From depicting cultural power to application in associations between sign and behaviors, cultural objects are more than empty-placeholders waiting to have meaning projected onto them. *Kapucha* not only represent Choctaw culture, but they are representative of the ecological interactions that reinforce Choctaw Social Ecology. The next chapter will examine the social history of *Chahta Toli* for *Okla Toli Hattak* (Ball Playing People).

Chapter 4: Killing the Game to Save the Man

Embodying Bioregional Resilience

Who has sovereign authority to represent or speak for a people, for a community? Does it derive from an individual's history or the history of a collective? Who has the authority to tell a story that may stand in for the whole picture when it is put together from scattered pieces? Who has the authority to speak a disruption into a historical narrative to produce a discontinuity in current social practices, and where does that authority derive? Is it derived from familial lines? Is it derived from a covenant to respect local relations projected across the land in what are now just mound sites?

This chapter presents a dialogue over the social history of *Tolih*, focusing on Choctaw cultural interactions with ecologies as circumstance transitions their communities from encounter to forced removal. The chapter discusses a social history of the ball game in situated contexts of change after external and internal influences. This chapter contributes subtle differences to cultural resource management dialogues by considering vulnerability and resilience in the context of the cultural practice of Choctaw stickball. This brief social history of *Chahta Toli* is written from archival data collected for this case study and information gathered in a review of the literature.

The previous chapter offered a dialogue on association and representation in research contributing to vulnerability. The defining terms of a study are projected onto subject communities and applied in situated contexts that become associated with communities. Textual revelations about a subject community become represented as measurable social facts, while stricken by textual omissions. Most often, definitions in

social science research are selected on the basis of an appeal to universal application. For example in "Climate Change and Social Vulnerability: toward a sociology and geography of food insecurity", Hans Bohle et al. (1994) define vulnerability as, "an aggregate measure of human welfare that integrates environmental, social, economic, and political exposure to a range of harmful perturbations (Hans Bohle et al. 1994:37-38)." Human welfare is situated in a universal context that reduces experience to a measurable quality. This same issue of universalization is problematic when discussing a proto-Choctaw identity and social structure because this analysis requires projecting stability into a living past for description and comparative analysis.

Choctaw life in the pre-contact period, much like the post-contact era, can be characterized by change. Academic research covering the beginning for Choctaw people can only trace the emergence of a name in archival documents in the later part of the Sixteenth Century (Galloway 1995:156-157), and even the meaning of the name is unknown according to H.S. Halbert (1901). In Mapping the *Mississippian Shatter Zone* (2009), Patricia Galloway espouses one explanation for the genesis of a Choctaw social sphere along with several other scholars contributing to a volume edited by Robbie Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall. Patricia Galloway (2009) theorizes that social pressures produced a 'Shatter Zone' in the social network of "Mississippian cultures" resulting in a loose confederacy that aligned from a confederacy of townships. This loose confederacy eventually produced a unifying identity and social sphere reflective of socio-ecological interactions in the local bioregion.

Phenomenological data collected on a topic such as stickball can easily be displaced when specific conditions are represented in coding and are ultimately

representative of broader categories. Another issue is this data becomes a static representation of culture as opposed to the embodied practice represented when actively recorded when in the field. Galloway (1995) challenges Swanton's (2001) ethnography and Swanton's belief of stability in a matrilineal social institution. Galloway's challenge fills a few pages as sound academic analysis, but the reductionist nature produces an erasure of the experiences of Swanton's informants Simpson Tubby and Olman Comby (Swanton 2001:vi). As discussed previously, Mississippi Choctaws saw themselves living and experiencing continuity of a social identity only briefly touched and gazed upon in historical records.

This condition is similar to the divergence created when considering social vulnerability alongside natural system resiliency, as the relational interplay is severed by the reductionism of taxonomy. In this social history, vulnerability is a reflective measure of a practicing community's displacement and disarticulation from persistent and sustaining ecologies. The phenomenon of displacement and disarticulation can also take place in contributing narratives, as an account can be constrained as perspective-based. For example, if a missionary in 1820 in the service of the church was on a mission trip in Mississippi funded by the Civilization Fund Act (1819) wrote a report on conditions and progress, what would be the likelihood of the report including details concerning cultural practices?

The Civilization Fund Act was crucial in shifting the center of social activity from traditional Choctaw behaviors to conduct endorsed by the church. From the time of the removals that brought them to Indian Territory to the allotments that lead to statehood in Oklahoma, the church was directly influencing Choctaw community

leadership, causing a greater rift between those participating in ball games and Choctaws pushing to replace social structures with the civil sphere (Benson 1970; Goode 1863; Kidwell 1986).

Source documents on Choctaw stickball reflect a larger struggle of authority and agency over meaning and image of Choctaw representations. This struggle seemed to rage both internally for Choctaw people and externally in projects to integrate Choctaw communities into the abstracted "present". This struggle resulted in a host of issues for a scholar seeking to write a social history from observations and accounts of the past. The writing of social histories is a negotiation of the assembly of sources because views can be under and over represented for a particular segment of informants.

As a source of social conflict, the civil sphere is a concept of classical liberalism tethering society to an agreement that the social exists at the point of civic interaction made possible by civic institutions that produce, legislate, and replicate social normativity. A conception based upon viewpoints espoused in the modernist works of social theorists like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2008) and John Locke (1948) Thomas Hobbs (1969), culture and civilization are not terms that are interchangeable. Richard Drinnon's (1980) seminal work details a long tradition in American history of consciously deploying images of Native peoples as savage. Frequently, imagery that frames Native people as savages was used to justify expansion of a colonial state that brings order to the violent chaos found in nature.

Missionary documents have depicted the game as 'savage' violence (Beckett 1949; Benson 1970; Goode 1863; Kidwell 1986). In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said argues images of Arab people are represented in manner in the United States and in

Western societies to purposefully emphasize and exaggerate differences to accentuate 'exotic' and incivility in their social behavior. An American narrative was framed that excludes Choctaw social contributions to the 'civilization project' and instead presents their cultural practice as 'uncivilized' behavior to purposefully disassociate them with ancient practices. Showing a correlation between depictions of cultural practice and social vulnerability, Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd (2011) describes "colonial institutions" as depicting American Indians in images that reify and mark them with "primitiveness" and "savageness" to empty them of "any manifestation of identity, history, and culture", replacing them with signifiers "that asserts mastery and control. (Byrd 2011:63-64)"

Vulnerability is not defined by oppositional qualities to resiliency, as both uncertainty and practice function simultaneously. Zoltán Grossman and Alan Parker (2012) define resilience as, "The power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched; elasticity." Grossman and Parker's definition is from their edited volume that draws together contributions from Indigenous peoples, researchers, climate scientists, and social activists. This definition leaves little room to recognize adaptive capabilities in the interplay between ecosystem health and social interrelatedness by stressing an original form. I understand why a definition highlighting an original form is agreeable with a discussion on continuation; however, the definition does not recognize the analogous aspects of persistence and resilience. Stickball has provided Choctaw people with a coping mechanism to systemic changes occurring all around them by expressing resilience via persistence.

For Choctaw people, *Tolih* remains consistent as a cultural expression reinforcing social bonds between community members, thus expressing cultural resilience.

Based on data collected for this dissertation, I argue that cultural resilience functions through a persistence to coalesce around social practice. This argument is not an attempt to address opposition between the elaboration of practice as social fact versus experiential. Instead, this type of resilience is expressive and inclusive of cultural structures that reside in a Choctaw heteroglossia but are not expressed by every voice that contributes to a Choctaw heteroglossia. This chapter is distinctive from previous Choctaw social histories by contributing a narrative from archival data and oral histories with *Chahta Tolih* as the focal point.

Essential to my work with stick makers and stickball players is an interest in documenting oral histories concerning practices of social resilience situated in Choctaw contexts. Oral histories provide more than just alternative version of events; they detail how a group articulates their respective cultural system in response to historical forces. Raymond DeMallie (1993), Patricia Galloway (1995), Keith Basso (1996), Eric Wolf (1982), Raymond Fogelson (1989), Thomas Thornton (2008), and Julie Cruikshank (2005) have all included oral histories or archival data to inform understandings on the distinctive ways cultures navigate and negotiate the forces of change.

Material changes in *kapucha* are possible indices of transitions in Choctaw culture. These changes represent a divergence from the past in aspects of continuity expressed in the current ball game. However, they are not analogous to some original state. Cultural discontinuity can occur in transitions that express cultural continuity because of the asymmetrical nature of historical forces. As previously discussed,

Edward Spicer (1971) elaborates on the robust nature of persistent identity systems withstanding discontinuities in times of national discontinuity. Spicer backs his claim with the example of Roman cultures sustaining through times of discontinuity in political and economic structures following the decline of the Roman Empire and Roman state.

Stickball is an example of a bioregional practice as communities with similar ecologies and languages play the game. This is evidenced in the correlation between people speaking related languages (for example, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Mvskoke Creek, and Seminole) and living in locations with similar ecologies also playing field sports with two racquets. Jonathan Loh and David Harmon's *Biocultural Report* (2014) make a compelling case for linguistic and biological preservation being regarded as relational. Loh and Harmon pronounce, "There is an opportunity for biodiversity conservation and the conservation of indigenous languages and cultures to go hand in hand. Most of the world's linguistic diversity is found in areas of high species richness and endemism. (2014:49)" The conservation of Choctaw physical knowledge and practices is linked to the conservation of local biodiversity and conservation of *Chahta Anumpa (*Choctaw language). Choctaw stickball gives language speakers a space for conversations situated in social contexts of practice.

Thomas F. King (2008) champions Cultural Resource Management by expanding the term to incorporate "those aspects of the environment—both physical and intangible, both natural and built—that have cultural value of some kind to a group of people. (King 2008:3)" Kings continues, "(CRM) ought to mean managing all these sociocultural aspects of the environment, and all the contemporary world's impacts on

them. (King 2008:3-4)" This chapter contributes a discourse over a social history that identities cultural values attributed to forests and to *kapucha* by Choctaw people.

Sports anthropologist Kendall Blanchard's (1981) formative study documents sports and recreational activities as more about "seriousness" than leisure for Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI). Blanchard discusses the significance of *Tolih* in influencing a serious approach toward athletics in the eight Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian communities: Bok Cito, Bogue Homa, Conehatta, Crystal Ridge, Pearl River, Red Water, Tucker and Standing Pine (Blanchard 1981). Blanchard says the devotion of Mississippi Choctaws to sports is observable by the "way in which these pursuits are interwoven with basic elements of their total life-style (Blanchard 1981)." Blanchard's analysis delivers an extended commentary on the relationship of Choctaw team sports to social behaviors maintaining a Choctaw tribal cultural. In this assessment, Blanchard does not focus on *Tolih* as the sole source of continuity for Choctaw culture.

This discussion of the social history of *Tolih* addresses the significance of participation to the continuity of Choctaw Social Ecology and to the sustainability of practice. The archival and oral story phase of the case study is about identifying future research foci concerning transitions in Choctaw culture. This limited telling of a few events in the social history of Oklahoma *Chahta Toli* is organized with a few determinations in mind: 1) to begin to address explicit gaps in ethnography on the dynamic interplay of cultural sports to social norms 2) to intertwine data cultural consultants consider significant as contributions to gaps in community knowledge of events in Choctaw social history as a form of collaborative knowledge production.

The social history of Choctaw stickball is a topic that could fill the pages of an entire manuscript- if not volumes. However, a major setback is limited data because seldom is data compiled with the ball game as the central focal point of the study. Indelibly, a few events and dates become subjects replicated in ethnographies and histories. Originally included in H.B. Cushman's *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez Indians,* H.S. Halbert's "The Great Ball Play and Fight on Noxubee" illustrates this point with the subsequent excerpt by Swanton (2001) that becomes reiterated when stories alluded to ball play as a dispute resolution mechanism (Cushman 1999).

Details in the account given by Halbert place the game in 1790 being played to resolve a dispute that arose between Muscogee Creek and Choctaw communities over territorial ownership for land near the Noxubee River. A fight follows the game after the Muscogee Creeks win and, reportedly, utter a term of offense followed by flinging a pettitcoat at the Choctaw (Cushman 1999). The violence and resulting loss of life in Halbert's portrayal finds replication in two major source materials—Cushman and Swanton— concentrated on Choctaw social life. Halbert's depiction produces a tension between violence situated as a product of the ball game and instead situated within the historical context of encroachment and territorial dispute.

Violence and gambling were major themes in narratives found in archives from the Indian-Pioneer Papers collection of The University of Oklahoma's Western History Collection. Often, these depictions came from sources that admit to attending very few games to none. These accounts provide little comparative data in studying physical knowledge and social practices such as restraint and adaptation. Although covered in

the following chapter, the youth games observed in this study indicate restraint is also a ball game practice evidenced when younger players are given a chance to contribute without fear of being harmed by a much older player.

The Edward M. Everidge Collection is a collection of letters found on a desk in Hugo, Oklahoma on May 11, 1937. Fieldworker Hazel Greene recorded this information. Edward M. Everidge was a relative of former District 3 Choctaw Supreme Court Justice Joel Everidge, who served Choctaw Nation prior to the allotment. A depiction from the Everidge Collection discusses violence as strategy saying,

> "The surgeon was always in attendance, and always needed. The games were so rough. If opposing players could do no better they'd knock the fellow in the head with his stick, in order to get the ball. They never touched the ball with their hands, but always caught it in the cup-like end of the ball sticks of which each player held two (Edward M. Everidge Collection May 11, 1930:29-30)."

This account makes an important delineation in the use of aggression as a strategy of last resort, implying both a type of restraint and adaptability. The account comes from a Choctaw community, and the distinction was possibly conscious, though obviously not a verifiable claim.

Mississippi Choctaw Director of Cultural Affairs Ken York (1994) says, "There has been recent interest in the revival of our stickball games. When the settlers first came, they thought the game was too brutal (*The Native Americans: The Southeast,* TBS Documentary Pat Mitchell Collection 1994)." York identifies a reemergence among Choctaw people that has transpired following the onslaught brought about by a label that misrepresented stickball. Although not offering a dialogue on the specifics, *Tolih* has been represented in narratives expressing a game in decline with a magnificent past that rivals games in Ancient Greece (Cushman 1999). Past

representations of Choctaw culture ignored the 'mundane' aspects of Choctaw socialization at the expense of a researcher's interrogations.

In 1834, famous 'Old West' painter George Catlin recorded the earliest account of Oklahoma stickball in his western travels. Catlin produced a series of paintings depicting *Tolih* including his *Ball-play Dance* (1834) and Ball-play of the Choctaw-Ball Up (1846-1850). Catlin's *The Boys Catlin: My Life Among the Indians* (1909) describes and portrayed pre-arranged social dances that occur at specific intervals with game as aspects that made the game a "school" for artists. Frank H. Goodyear III (2006) analyzed a group of paintings of *Tolih* by George Catlin felt these "images of Native American ball-play should be seen less as romanticized records of tribal life and more as highly polemic statements about contemporary interactions between native peoples and dominant culture (Goodyear 2006:138-139)." Catlin, according to Goodyear III, imagined *Tolih* as "comparable to the storied battles of ancient Greece or Rome (Goodyear 2006).

The 'imaginative' narratives from missionaries or the child of missionary parents, as was Cushman's case, supporting colonial structures represented the ball game in decline. In talk with members from the other 'Five Tribes of Oklahoma', Gary White Deer, a Chickasaw who resides in Ada, Oklahoma, proclaims a possible distinction in practice and semiotic authority. White Deer (1994) says,

> "It must have been the case, even in our Classic Late Mississippian period, when we were all running around with copper spools supposedly and stuff. That there was probably only ten percent, a core group anyway that you would call, or want to call, culture-bearers—folks that really have the spirit of that mindset that I'm talking about (*The Native Americans: The Southeast,* TBS Documentary Pat Mitchell Collection 1994)."

Gary White Deer statement takes an interesting stance on embodiment and contributions to the meaning making activities significant to Choctaw and Chickasaw culture. As opposed to an ideal of total cultural participation, his remark draws a distinction concerning community members with a degree of knowledge that actively participate in disseminating and promoting cultural information. White Deer's statement is probably not quantifiable, as I am not confident in measuring culture bearing in numbers to verify if ten percent is significant of Choctaw people. This case study, however, identifies ancestry is a relevant aspect of cultural-bearing.

Today, the fruits of the labor of Choctaw cultural-bearers can be seen in the visibility of Choctaw practices like stickball, social dancing, beading, basket-making, and the all important continuation of the Choctaw language. Preservation efforts can be seen as part of the promotion of the Choctaw Nation brand with the example of the new Choctaw license plate. *Chahta Sia Hoke* is a phrase that means 'I am Choctaw' in the Choctaw language. A phrase you may notice as it goes speeding by in a purplish-yellow flash. This is the current phrase being elucidated in contemporary discourses as an affirmation of the familial connections between today's Choctaws with yesterday's *Chahta*. Choctaw and *Chahta* can express separate forms of self-reference for *Okla* (People) that alludes to the polemics of traditionalism versus progressivism. Regardless of the profounder acumens illuminating ontological positions than the back of a car, Choctaw Nation sponsored license plates distinguish enrolled members, who have purchased a tag, from non-enrolled members in Oklahoma.

The preceding section is an introduction to Indigenous field sports played with racquets in North America that includes a social history of *kapucha* and hickory for

Choctaw people. The next section is an introduction to the current social history of Oklahoma *Tolih* and discusses cultural consultants influence on the design of this chapter. The following section is a dialogue on a Choctaw social history before European arrival based on archival data and oral stories. Lastly, the section provides a brief social history from a few periods post-European contact until the time when the game is placed on the shelf, so to speak.

A Forest Full of Racquets: Indigenous Field Sports in North America

Among Choctaws, stickball is described as the elder sport or "grandfather of all field sports (Williams 2013)." The games origins are perhaps best described as left over insights found in traditional stories. Choctaw Stickball blends varying aspects of ceremony, tradition, celebration, and dispute resolution in a resilient cultural activity. Simpson Tubby says that the first *Chahta* to "manufacture ballsticks was named Musholeika ("to go out" or "to put out" like a light)" (Swanton 2001:153).

Shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*) has a long storied history as source of cultural materials for Eastern Indigenous peoples. Hickory (*uksak api*) produces a dense, shock-resistant wood. However, being ideal, Shagbark hickory is not the sole source for *kapucha.* Oklahoma Choctaw Stick-makers often will not differentiate hickories species for source material and even included pecan (*Carya illinoinensis*) and bois d'arc (*Maclura pomifera*), also known as Osage Orange. Overtime these new woods were introduced in the making of sticks as a likely response to relocation to an environment with less hickory. Based upon durability, Shagbark hickory continued to operate as the

primary choice of material for *kapucha*. In the Northeast, Shagbark hickory is also the choice source material for 'woodies' for outdoor lacrosse.

All across eastern parts of North American, communities turned out when the opportunity for a ball game presented itself. There were many differing styles of Indigenous ball games. For example, ball games were played with as few as two people playing, while other games are described as having participants throughout numerous towns getting involved in the action (Culen 1975; Cushman 1999). I guess the saying "some things stay the same" could be said to be evident in the number of ball fields found in any town across the North America, whether a sanctioned field for organized games or just a field enjoyed by players.

Eastern North American indigenous communities all play variations of field sports. Some play a sport with racquets made from wood, having a head or cup that resembles a ladle or spoon and wrapped at the end with leather or grasses (Culin 1975). Game variations can be regional suggesting possible differences in cultural affinity for the game by tribes. One example of regional difference is *Tolih* in the southeast and the use of two sticks to play with to score points and the use of a pole as a goal versus the use of a single stick in Lacrosse for northeastern communities that shoot in-between two posts to score a goal.

Indigenous ball games in North America were played with clubs, rackets, and hands. Stewart Culin (1975) classifies Indigenous ball games into three classes that are "First, racket in which the ball is tossed with a racket; second, shinny, in which the ball is struck with a club or bat; third, double ball, a game … played with two bills or billets tied together tossed with a stick" (Culin 1975:561). In terms of the beginnings and

influences of racket games, Culin contends that Choctaw sticks and other Indigenous ball games are "no doubt…an aboriginal invention (Culin 1975:563)."

Culin writes, "The game of ball with rackets is distinctly a man's game (Culin 1975:561)." However, this does not represent today's game. Choctaw Stickball can be played with a *kapucha* (racket) by anyone. Possibly, Culin's observations reflect a time when social institutions continued to install social norms and taboos surrounding the game. Culin divided North American racket games into two classes: 1) single racket games very similar to Lacrosse; and 2) two racket games very similar to *Kapucha-toli*. Culin says the rackets "origin is not clear" (Culin 1975:562).

Interestingly, 'conjurers' made miniature replica *kapucha* (Culin 1975:563). These *kapucha* were used as part of their magical rites and spells employed to gently coax a ball to their team. Ceremonies were held pre-contest as rites and prayers for "success in the contest" (Culin 1975:563). For Choctaw people, a social memory associated with a deeper ceremonial complex surrounding stickball is present, but little is known about the game previous to contact.

Looking through Culin's work on racquets and various *kapucha* observed in archives and in fieldwork, similarities in sticks found throughout the southeast suggests exchange of the game along with other unifying symbols with neighbors and replication. Toby often talked about the importance of every home, especially Choctaw's homes, having a hanging pair of *kapucha* on the wall. Is it possible that stickball function as a structure to assimilate other communities to avoid regional conflicts? This seems to be in line with the 'Little Brother of War' moniker associated with the ball game.

In the same way the game was associated with social resolution, the ball game may have established a motive for monitoring local forests health or in selecting which trees flourished during controlled burns. Elaborating on a time of scarcity for hunters in Mississippi, Cushman describes a Choctaw socio-ecological management practice of controlling the overgrowth in the forests, **"**The forests were burnt off the latter part of every March, and thus the ground, was entirely naked and a deer's horn, if above ground, could have been seen a hundred yards distant, but they were not seen. (Cushman 1999:139)"

Although nowhere near as forested as Choctaw ancient homelands, The Oklahoma Forestry Services Website (A division of the Oklahoma Dept. of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry) describes a vast forested region saying, "The Ozark hardwoods of oak and hickory finger their way into the pine forests of the Ouachitas and the cypress swamps of Louisiana." The websites continues, "Oklahoma's forest is a huge asset to our state, the nation and the world. Proper care and management is essential (Accessed 12/16)." Removal has forced some adaptations towards materials due to ecological surroundings.

Based upon White Deer's statement on cultural knowledge one could ask, does every Choctaw in Oklahoma need access to forests to make sticks? First it should be asked, did everyone make sticks in the past? Was it something done between every Choctaw uncle on the matrilineal side did with their nephews? Mississippi Choctaw Jesse Ben, workforce development coordinator for Pearl River Resort, says, "Even young men can make sticks. So, it's going to be here for ever (Gantt 2008:film)." Ben's statement makes a proclamation of longevity for stickball among Mississippi

communities while drawing a large distinction concerning practice in Oklahoma. Is stickball representative of Choctaw culture as a practice or just as an iconic symbol?

Thomas Vennum (1993) expresses admiration for the craftsmanship on display in the "Ontario hickory crosse" that was once owned by Alexander T. General's Grandfather from Six Nations Reserve, Ontario. Based upon Vennum's depictions, a handle that is carved with hands grasping one another demonstrations an extraordinarily intricate detail that in some cultures is usually reserved for art intending to produce a sensory experience. (1993) The Cayuga stick saw action in the 1840s suggesting the detail carved in the wood was done for functional reasons, mainly giving strength to the player wielding the lacrosse stick. Vennum describes the handle as having a "usual dark patina that developed overtime"(1993). It is this type of detail that reflects Tim Ingold's distinction that cultural materials do not emerge from making, but instead are grown "within the relational contexts of mutual involvement of people and their environments (Ingold 2011:88).

In an article discussing the frustration Iroquois lacrosse players felt being penalized in a recent game for playing with "woodies" (traditional lacrosse sticks) against the U.S. team at Dick's Sporting Goods Arena in Commerce City, Colorado, Alf Jacques, an Onondaga stick-maker for over 52 years, alludes to problem in expanding current production efforts of sticks made from hickory (Chambers 2014). Jacques mentions a problem with mass production efforts is that "in two years there would be no hickory trees, with all the players now (Chambers 2014)." Jacques continues, "For a good hickory log, it would probably be about 130-140 years to get a tree that big…You

can't plant them and grow them that fast (Chambers 2014)." A similar dilemma faces Choctaw Nation as the ball game increases in popularity.

Hickory was not just significant to Choctaw culture because of stickball. Swanton writes that Choctaw people chose to cook with hickory wood because it "conveys the best taste to the food. (Swanton 2001:48)" A certainty if driving through the deep south, you will likely run into a few BBQ joints still echoing a similar verdict on this age old regional cooking secret. Another use of hickory was in food preparation. Pounded in mortars made from "burning hollows in the side of a prone log", hickory nuts were included with corn, potatoes, and meat (Swanton 48).

Rick Billy describes the social significance of forests for a group he describes as Choctaw traditional chemists. Rick states these were people that had a close enough relationship with rocks and minerals that they understood how to use different elements to do things like making rain. Rick explains his curiosity after hearing stories on their practices. Rick says,

> "The path is out there. People search, path will appear. It's in the wind. Sometimes nature makes connections. It's out there. You have to go out there. Them old Chahtas, they use to go and listen to the wind. So, we would go into the woods, where it seems the wind was stronger. It'd (wind) pick up and blow through the trees. You could hear voices in the wind. I wasn't scared. It was the closet you could come to that spirit. There are lots of spirits out there, but this was the closest to that spirit in nature you could come. It was just out there with the wind (Rick Billy 3/2015)."

The Choctaw held beliefs that there are spirits populating the woods without our acknowledgement.

The connection Rick describes is an interesting take on the social associations between Choctaw people and the ecosystems that sustain them. Conservationists Tim Flannery applies the term "wood wide web" to describe the intimate network of soil

fungi that connects and promotes data sharing amongst vegetation and trees in forests (Flannery 2016:Foreward). It is an interesting idea to consider an interrelation between people with trees and other plants in sharing in the production of ecological knowledge. Flannery continues, "But the most astonishing thing about trees is how social they are. The trees in a forest care for each other, sometimes even going so far as to nourish the stump of a felled tree…"(Flannery 2016:Foreward).

The idea of a tree network working together for the greater good of the forest to share data for common survival is analogous to the Choctaw social practice of *i'yi kowa.* In the same regard, *Flannery's* depiction of domesticated plants losing their ability to communicate via natural systems and processes is very much analogous to experiences of Choctaw people with the decline of social networks like *Choctaw Toli* (Flannery 2016:Foreward).

Trees are both a symbol and relative in the worldview of many Indigenous communities. In Native North America, trees are symbolic of pacts made to resolve disputes. From the origins of the phrase 'bury the hatchet', a connection between the white pine and peace originated from the actions that brought the Iroquois Nations together to form the *Haudensaunne* or Great Law of Peace (Turner 2006:53-54; America's First Nations: The Dark Times 2008). In burying their weapons under the tree, a peaceful confederation of people from five nations emerged (Turner 2006:53-54). For Choctaw people, the pole was a symbol of a cosmological unity that connected community to surrounding ecologies and beyond. The next section introduces a return to the ball field and a reawakening in Choctaw cultural practices in Oklahoma.

Setting the Record Straight Northward: Semiotic Disruptions from off in Left Field

The late MCBI Chief Phillip Martin speaking back in 1981 at the Choctaw Heritage Council at the Choctaw Museum of the Southern Indian expressed the need for a new social history saying, "Our Choctaw views, our history, our people, have too often been ignored. (Mould 2004:xv)" Martin's words express much of the sentiment that began to influence my decision to reevaluate my project. Throughout data collection, a conscious deconstruction began for aspects of the project in order to cover and to focus more on data generated with cultural consultants. This was expressive of my comprehension of collaborative research with communities and cultural consultants through the Choctaw concept of service expressed as *i'yi kowa.*

Although not obvious, Michel Foucault takes a radical departure for scholars of his time by arguing power is not concentrated in a single location, instead arguing power has multivalent locations that are embodied in places like knowledge and discourse (Foucault edited by Rabinow 1984). Intriguingly, Foucault discusses 'regimes of truth' as institutions that employee scientific knowledge as a technology of power, and the subsequent rules they produced to verify truth claims (Foucault edited by Rabinow 1984). Foucault applies the term *power* to describe the control over the production of rules that govern scientific knowledge and the narratives that sustain them. Even though I was not able to disperse all of my authority in producing this ethnography, I reevaluated the selection and application of social theory as something that can be collaboration between researcher and consultants as an act of embodying *i'yi kowa*.

While not stressing where the site of participation should reside in the co-production of knowledge, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is an alternative to research that is conducted on the community (Mohammed et al. 2012: 116). Choctaw social practice of *i'yi kowa* offers a community model of what collaborative research could resemble if collaboration was situated in a community context. The approach of *i'yi kowa* applied by a researcher in a community dynamics alters expertise as authority over a subject and represents expertise as technical skills. *I'yi kowa* is applicable as a Choctaw social theory because it covers practice and embodiment.

The discussion of social practice as a component of a persistent identity becomes obfuscated in the process of ethnographic writing as embodiment moves from a documented act to analyzed data to a product for dissemination. Does this process produce a representation of a continuity that replicates into a state of ethnographic discontinuity?

Foucault (1972) describes discontinuity as being historical as opposed to an influential moment directing contemporary events in an evolutionary fashion. Foucault's depiction of discontinuity emphasizes a rupture in history as opposed to a transition, suggesting that for a rupturing of a grand narrative like the social to happen it must be a clean break in localized moments (Foucault 1969). Choctaw scholar Valerie Lambert applies a binary of discontinuity and continuity to analyze Choctaw Nation through phases of nation building, but the central location of continuity is unclear when suggesting a persistent identity system is analogous to the history of a political institution and identity.

For Foucault, discontinuity has neither evolutionary qualities nor discernible moments as suggested by Lambert's trajectory of Choctaw Nation emerging from three periods of discontinuity. Lambert's analysis of Choctaw Nation building ascribes the nation the role of master signifier over cultural signs and symbols in phases of continuity. However, Lambert's thesis conceals the evolutionary argument that functionally obliterates any association of cultural persistence in the varying transitional phases of Choctaw Nation's institutional evolution. This is where a collaborative production of social theory provides an experiential definition to further inform social histories, as opposed to temporal abstractions of structure.

Like the call to address questions of climate and culture, there was a heralding to no longer ignore Choctaw people and their perspectives. I visited with Rick and Toby in the garage in the summer of 2013 about several project ideas concerning Choctaw culture and climate change. Toby was telling a story about the cultural significance of Oklahoma Choctaws returning to play stickball against Mississippi teams. Although no exact answer was given, Rick and Toby alluded to a very recent revival of the game in Oklahoma. The more we talked in 2014, the more I was convinced making Choctaw stickball the focal point of this case study was the right thing to do to address constant unknowns about the game. For example addressing the question, what caused the game to be deserted in Oklahoma? Or the question: is the game a part of a larger cultural complex or religious structure?

The current renaissance the game is experiencing can be traced to the efforts of numerous Choctaw people. The most notable contributors are Curtis and Clelland Billy. In addition many others associated with Chief Gardner's administrations worked

to sustain Choctaw culture in the 1970s (Choctaw Nation *Biskinik* 2011). "In Oklahoma, the Billy family has worked to ensure the cultural traditions of Choctaw stickball are not lost (Maisch 2010:13)." Before the 1970s, Choctaw stick-maker Sydney White played a major role in the continuation of the game by making sticks and sharing techniques with the community (Reed 2014). His inspiration can be seen in the cup styling of many *kapucha* made in Oklahoma.

Something more is there, I am sure of it. There are words displaying something; I was certain. I am getting ahead of myself again. Sorry, it is a habit. I have so much to tell you in words that have been crafted wisely to covey just enough. We shall begin with the must important part—a declaration of reemergence. Choctaw Stickball resurfacing in Oklahoma can be traced to events in Broken Bow around 1976. Curtis Billy started organizing a stickball exhibition for the Labor Day Festival in 1976 and continued every year since (Maisch 2010:17). Curtis Billy is "in many circles, is credited with reviving stickball among Choctaw youth." For Curtis, the game is "a family tradition—and a cultural legacy."(Maisch 2010:13)

During a discussion about what contributed to the game becoming almost taboo, Rick explained two events that left me with more questions than answers. Speaking on the reappearance of the ball game, Rick Billy says,

> "My brother (Curtis Billy) had two trucks, and we'd go pick up all the boys, filling up the back of both of the trucks. We'd drive them around. This was the first stickball team. I played occasionally, but my brother didn't always want me to play. I played the game like football. I liked hitting people. Maybe, that wasn't always the best way to play (Billy 11/2014)."

This was a year after the federal government re-recognized tribal sovereignty with the passing of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (Public Law 93-638).

Although things really started in 1972, Choctaw people finally had the right to select a Principal Chief, previously a power retained by the federal government (Noley 2001:x). David Gardner became the "first popularly elected" Principal Chief voted in by Choctaw people (Noley 2001:x). After only serving a few years in the actual position because of his untimely passing, Chief Gardner's legacy is alive and visible in the contemporary resurgence of culture and development of the current governance structure. Chief Gardner's leadership and grant writing skills are examples of *i'yi kowa* and satisfying a role when the community has a need.

One event in 1976 signaled an end to any open persecution against the game by the federal government. Rick recalls, "Yes sir that was my uncle that was heading that group, Cleland Billy, under Chief Gardner (Billy 11/2014)." Chief Gardner Administration supported a team— that included Cleland Billy, Folsom White and many others—on a trip to D.C. to play stickball in front of the U.S. capital. Rick talks about Chief Gardner's support for Cleland, Curtis, Folsom and others working on preserving Choctaw culture as a major factor in getting the ball rolling and players back on the field. Choctaw people were reawakening to find *Tolih* waiting for them to come play in the forests and on the ball fields.

In Oklahoma, the reemergence transitioned into preservation and the formation of adult and youth *Chahta Tolih* teams. In Mississippi, Curtis Billy describes the game as "Choctaw Stickball was being revived by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians a

few years prior to the 70's with the World Championship held at their annual Choctaw Fair in Philadelphia, MS. (Maisch 2010:15)." Curtis Billy makes an important distinction in the ball game of today versus yesterday saying, "Istaboli is the ancient Choctaw name for the game of Choctaw Stickball. Today, we refer to the game as Choctaw Stickball (Maisch 2010:15)."

Curtis Billy explains the number of participants on the field is the major difference between the game played today and the game played by Choctaw in yesteryears. The game of the past had no limitations on how many players could be on the field for either team nor was there a concern for equity in number of players on each side (Maisch 2010:15). Curtis details the significance of the ball game to the social and political history of the Choctaw people. Curtis Billy says the game was played to settle disputes as the "winner would win the diplomatic decision (Maisch 2010:15)."

The Billy family's efforts to preserve Choctaw culture is not just limited to stickball as their efforts span various areas including social dance and language. Most important is the cultural aspects of the game according to Curtis. Mr. Billy says,

> "For the Choctaw, it is a cultural activity that was important to maintain cultural revitalization. The game identifies the Choctaw culture in a way that is unique among other tribes. The uniqueness lies in the game itself which is played more aggressively than other tribes that play a similar game." (Maisch 2010:15)

As I learned through this project, they are also major influences on a generation that happens to be continuing their efforts to preserve and sustain Choctaw stickball culture in Oklahoma.

Les Willinston is a stickball coach and an employee of Choctaw Nation Council House Grounds who is continuing efforts to preserve Choctaw culture, giving credit to

Curtis Billy as "a real big influence" on him back in Broken Bow, Oklahoma (Thompson 2008:469). According to Willinston, Curtis Billy's work as an "Indian education counselor and also helped us form a club called the American Indian Youth Leaders Council (Thompson 2008:469)." Willinston is dedicated to getting "young people involved in our culture (Thompson 2008:468)."

The Billy family example of Choctaw generosity has influenced a new generation of cultural preservationists and revivalists. Rick speaks about cultural revival among Choctaws, saying,

> "I wanted to know about ancient times, so I prayed about it, and it came to me in a dream. It told me that we needed to be able to dream past European contact. See they told us, and wrote so much about us, since the 1800s, that we could only think about what they told us about culture. We have to dream past that, through dreams, these kids will be able to understand their culture. It was with Toby's (Billy) generation that the kids, finally, really focused on bringing our culture back."

Rick stressed the significance of exposing Choctaw children to culture through dreams.

After being around Rick and other members of the Billy family, I realized dreaming to understand culture might be inferred as both metaphorical and literal in terms of giving Choctaw children visible cultural role models. In 2009, Josh Willis coached a team made up of players from across Oklahoma stickball playing communities in the World Series of Stickball (Choctaw Nation *Biskinik* 2011). Since its inception, this marks the first time a team representing Choctaw people in Oklahoma participated in the tournament held in their aboriginal homelands.

This all seemed really odd to me. The first time an Oklahoma team played in a major *Tolih* tournament was 2009 and the revival of the game began around 1976. If the full story of why the game was placed on the shelf in Oklahoma was not known, I

decided to inquire about the game being played prior to the 1970s. Rick told a story about one of community gatherings at *Tvska Homma* (Red Warrior), saying,

> "Bernard—probably in his 80s—told me a story about 1940 when it was illegal to play stickball. At *Tvska Homma* (Red Warrior) they were waiting for dinner, some one said, "Let's play stickball", so they made sticks right there. They lived near Sydney White, so he probably taught them, showed them how (Rick Billy 4/12/2016)."

The game at *Tvska Homma* in the 1940s was likely played with hickory saplings, since greenwood would be stronger for a quick game. One word he used stood out above the rest—illegal. Before discussing a social history behind *Tolih* becoming almost cultural taboo, the next section ponders the ancient name of the game *Isht aboli*.

Leaving a Mark: Considering the Sacredness of Terms

In the preliminary design stage of this project, I asked Rick several questions about cultural associations to water. His first response was perhaps the most impactful. Rick said, "*ishko*" (to drink), but that is not how he said it. He said, "*i-ssshh-ko*". He explained how the word reflected the gift of life "Chihowa" breathes into you. It was thought-provoking to consider water as a breathe of life from the Creator. The repetition and rhythm when repeated had an interesting quality about it. I kept it in the back of my mind for a year, but I recalled it when I heard the word *isht ahullo*. Rick had used the word once in a discussion about Choctaw tales on giants. This time I heard it explained on the ball field in terms of practicing magic. Aware of the connection of missionaries to internal and external representations of the game and an eventual period of social taboo, I became intrigued with the idea of linguistic markers expressive of a social structure represented in terms reflecting social practices and

social agents. Rick piqued my interest further when he used *Isht aboli* to describe *Tolih* before the removals, saying it was a word not really associated much with the game being played today.

Rick also shared a term that people around McCurtain County, OK use when referencing the game. Rick described *Ubba Binili* as another ancient name associated with game (Rick Billy 9/2015). The game had different names, so it is reasonable to infer each term may have represented a different social, ceremony, and political uses of ball games. *Ishtaboli* is possibly the referent to the ceremonial and social aspects of the game, though said to translate into the "striking game" (Rick Billy 9/2015).

The following is a list of vocabulary related to the ceremonial sphere containing the prefix *–isht*. These words are also found in aspects of the game, suggesting a connection between the game and ceremonial sphere. The glossary assembled comes from definitions in Cyrus Byington's *A Dictionary of the Choctaw Language* (1915).

***Chahta* to English**

isht aboli, n., a small ball playground for practice. (201)

isht aholitopa, n., the glory, Matt. 6:13. (202)

isht ahullo, v. t., to perform a miracle, John 4:54; to witch. (202)

isht ahullo, a., magnificent; majestic. (202)

isht ahullo, n., one who performs miracles; a wonderful being; a witch; a demoniac; a sorcerer. (202)

isht yopula, n., a game. (207)

isht yopula, v. a. i., v. t., to flout; to fool; to fleer; to gibe; to jeer; to scandal; to scandalize; to scoff; to traduce; to trifle; to vilify.

ishto, v. n., to be great; (207)

English to Choctaw

Pray for, to; *aba isht anumpuli* (523)

Preach to; *anoli, anumpuli, aba anumpa isht anumpuli, aba anumpa isht atta, aba anumpuli, aba isht anumpuli*. (524)

Preacher; *aba anumpa isht anumpuli, aba anumpa isht atta, aba anumpuli, aba isht anumpuli* (524)

Tribute; *aba isht aiokpachi, nush kobo atobbi, nushkobo chumpa, nush kobo isht chumpa*

(588)

Triffler, *isht yopula (588)*

Interestingly, *isht ahullo* has a multitude of uses with all representing use where -*isht* represents a spiritual authority or spiritual action. The prefix -*isht* is used in words that designate exceptional quality. The terms *isht yopula, isht atobli,* and *isht aboli* all show a connection of -*isht* to terms representing social activities. The words in the English to Choctaw glossary all show a relationship in the use of *isht* to religious authorities and religious activities. Triffler translates in the Choctaw language as *isht yopula.* This word and the use of *isht ahullo* as a noun suggest a negative connotation became associated with these spiritual practitioners and with words containing the -*isht* prefix. This is an example of an attempt to use Choctaw terms to analyze Choctaw social

structure. The following section is a brief social history about Choctaw stickball players.

A Brief Social History of the Ball Game

Oklahoma statehood brought intolerance for the ball game (Conley 2008). Violence and gambling made the game vulnerable to the growing church community that was now as much apart of a Choctaw social domain as was *Kapucha Toli.* Stories among families living in Mississippi recount a similar thrust to end the game during the late 1800s when missionaries arrived and gathered the *kapucha* to burn them (Mould 2003). Bogue Chitto was alone as a defiant community refusing not to hand over their *kapucha* to missionaries (Mould 2003). Choctaw *Tolih* became vulnerable enough to be put on the shelf so to speak because several forces of history that had as much to do with internal transitions as it did to do with a colonial ideology.

Prior to Oklahoma becoming a state in the 1890s, the General Council of the Choctaw Nation passed two laws that specifically targeted ball play: an ordinance banning games on Sunday and an ordinance prohibiting the cutting down of both hickory and pecan trees (Choctaw Nation 1894: 222-224). H.D. Low, who came to Oklahoma Territory in 1873 from Kansas and settled in Blue County near Caddo, gives a further account on legislation passed by Choctaw Nation that impacted the game. Telling a story on August 26, 1937 about events leading to the legislation, Low mentioned,

> "The enmity become so great between Tobucksy County and San Bois County that Governor Green McCurtain issued a proclamation prohibiting different counties from competing with each other in these games. They could play ball in their own county, but not with players from other counties (Low 1937)."

Although the church played a role in producing an internal image that may have influenced this legislation, this was a time when the Curtis Act threatened to do more than establish individual allotments by ending the nation as a center of social activity. The game had always been under a constant internal threat by the ideals of progress, but in kind would always find empathy with various parts of the community

In a discussion in the Prologue, Simpson Tubby is mentioned describing a social practice with the game where teams are establish to reduce tensions in townships, which he called "the peace game". It is not known if this game was practiced in Oklahoma after the removals, as the *iksa* (clan) system did not seem to travel with them in 1830. Greg O'Brien (2002) describes a ball game in 1778 where Franchimastabé's war party had an opportunity to release tension after being in battle for weeks. Moreover, the event boosted Franchimastabé's status as a leader as his warriors "wagered the goods the British paid them" (O'Brien 2002:42). O'Brien's depicts a relationship between the game and the distribution and diffusion of goods, as Franchimastabé gained cultural capital and influence within the system of exchange. He writes, "The reward to Franchimastabé and other war leaders took the form of recognition from others for their command of spiritual power and appreciation for the goods they distributed (O'Brien 2002:42)." This shows a time when the game was a source of culture capital for leaders in gaining favor through distributing goods to the community. Choctaw leadership would seem less interested in the ball game as a site for distributing goods as social protocol when the church and political state became the sources for a Choctaw social identity.

In “Searching for the Bright Path”, James Taylor Carson (1999) describes efforts in the 1830s by mixed-blood Choctaws to promote progress, Christianity, and individual wealth across Choctaw Nation by diminishing cultural activities deemed no longer pure. Social dances and ball plays were a burden to those pushing Choctaw Nation to model the organizational structure of the nation-state because of the authority they held with the people. Carson further elaborates, “Robert Folsom identified drunkenness, ball games, and dances as barriers to Choctaw’s purity and power.” (Carson 1999:106) Missionaries verify that Folsom’s message resonated with countless Choctaw people, as ball games and dances began to be less frequent in the community (Carson 1999:106).

Franklin L. Riley’s article in the 1904 volume of the *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* begins, “So far as is known to the writer, no historian has given even a meager account of the unfortunate episode in Mississippi known as the Choctaw Land Fraud” (Riley 1904:345). Scholars have documented in some detail the application of the Dawes Act to Indian Territory and the subsequent Curtis Act that reduced Choctaw Nation’s lands to individual allotments, thus leading up to Oklahoma Statehood. Riley lays out a solid case on why this episode, known as the “Choctaw Land Fraud”, was part of a trend of defrauding Choctaw people of their aboriginal homelands. Making the point that this not being the first occurrence of fraud in the acquisition of Choctaw lands, Riley writes that this was “a speculation second in importance only to the iniquitous Yazoo Land Fraud of almost a half century. (Riley 1904:345)”

Riley's statement echoes the precarious position Choctaw people face, as they become subjects of a historical narrative that casts their story aside in favor of a purely 'American' account of this continent. From the onset, Riley asserts that negotiations between federal officials and Choctaw leaders at Dance Rabbit Creek to the passing of the treaty can be summarized as "violence, intimidation, and fraud on the part of white people" towards Choctaws. Finding little support in Choctaw Nation among members, with the departure of the larger community of leaders, federal officials made a deal with "a comparatively small number of chiefs" to surrender their remaining lands in Mississippi (Riley 1904:345). Halbert's (1902) "Story of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek" details how coercion was behind "the causes that promoted the Choctaw councilmen to sign the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit (Halbert 1902)."

Around this time, according to Lincecum's autobiography, he devised a moneymaking scheme to take a company of Choctaw ballplayers on tour to exhibit the ball game and some Choctaw dances. Lincecum wrote a letter to his good friend John Pitchlynn Sr. about getting a "feel of the Choctaws on the subject and to communicate to me the result of his effort. (Lincecum 1904:483)" Lincecum saw an opportunity present itself with Choctaw leadership signing away their aboriginal homelands in Mississippi (Lincecum 1904:483). Pitchlynn returned word that he selected forty "choice ball players" to "assemble at the Oaksbush spring the ensuing Monday, 28 November, 1829" (Lincecum 1904:483) and would come for Lincecum to take him to the meeting.

At the council, Lincecum was astonished to see the growing dissatisfaction with leadership and uncertainty in the future amongst Choctaw people, as upwards of four

hundred ball players assembled with aspirations of traveling for food and clothes. Upon pleas to let them all go, Lincecum faced a dilemma that was certain to cause a fuss. Asking Pitchlynn to slaughter several 'beeves' to feed the hungry ball players, a draft was proposed to determine the players to travel with Lincecum. Calling it a lottery in name, Lincecum and Fulahooma devised a plan for a drawing that would ensure the Pitchlynn ballplayers were selected (Lincecum 1904:485). Satisfied with the results of the drawing and with full bellies, ballplayers not picked returned to their homes to face the uncertainty in the aftermath of the signing of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek.

The company of ballplayers selected started out east for eight months of travel and exhibition with Lincecum, of which, he said, "they watch and treated me with great care and tenderness." (Lincecum 1904:485) Lincecum bought them each "five pounds of bacon" upon returning home in Mississippi (Lincecum 1904:485). Vulnerability is an inevitable part of the uncertainty and risk of social interacts. In a community context, vulnerability is an implicit part of social relations. Happening in explicit moments fluctuating around acts of power and agency, vulnerability is the extent of the composite of relations in the dynamics of a group. For the collective Choctaw citizenry during treaty negotiations with federal officials and previous colonial officials from European Nations, trust in the leadership to speak on their behalf and to make decisions regarding the future of Choctaw lands rendered the community vulnerable to the historical peculiarities in the character of a small concentrated group of people.

Feeling betrayed by the small group of Choctaw leadership signing the treaty, many Choctaws sought to stay in Mississippi and dwell in the lands of their forbearers. This brought a new wave of vulnerability to the lives of Choctaw people who

commonly trusted Choctaw social institutions and social structure to preserve and sustain community welfare. Now the Choctaw who probably had less interactions with federal officials, with their primary contact to outsiders likely being missionaries or traders, were left to navigate outside administrators in registering for a script of land with one of the designated land offices. Article 14 of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek secured allotments of land for Choctaws wanting to stay in their homeland. Riley (1904; 1909) explains how provisions of Article 14 that allowed Choctaws to stay in Mississippi and Alabama were not carried out. From late communication with Colonel William Ward concerning his duty of registering Choctaws living in Mississippi to the little supervision he received on the process, Choctaw families suffered disqualification for numerous reason from a system rigid against them from the start.

Under oath, Gabriel Lincecum, resident of Lowndes County, stated that, "I saw the representatives of some of these Indians go forward to the agent with a large bundle of sticks, as is the Indians custom, and offer to register the families this represented; but the agent refused to receive them, and threw them away, saying that there were too many of them, and that they had sold their lands, and must go west (reprinted in Riley 1904:328)."

At the time of Lincecum's chronicle, Choctaw applicants seeking to get claims recognized could file at one of six offices located at Chocchuma, Columbus, Clinton, and Augusta for those residing in Mississippi and Tuscaloosa and Demopolis for the Alabama area (Riley 1904:350). Colonel Martin had the dubious job of finding those that registered on time and could produce "Colonel Ward's certificates" and other applicants who would "not be allowed reservations." (Riley 1904:351) Numerous

families were disqualified for one reason or another during the process and left to file complaints with the U.S. Department of War. In the end, many Choctaws were left deciding between joining their kin west of the Mississippi and becoming 'squatters' in the forested homelands of their ancestors.

Ball Play and Fight Songs

H.B. Cushman declared the ball game a shell of its former self, which assumes the game might be traceable to stable time in a community likely in constant flux. George Catlin in 1834 documented that ceremony was very much a social aspect of ball games in Oklahoma. Is it possible that game was transitioning with a people in transition? In a discussion with Rick about changes in Choctaw communities, I asked him if it was possible the 'Little Brother of War' went away as the sticks became thinner and no longer resembled two war-clubs. Rick responded,

> "Good work on that. I'm not up on the change but will check into it—that do have significant meaning or the change of thoughts on the game. The game and whole history of the people in different generations reflect what the Choctaw was doing and mindset of game of the Iksa."

Rick was always good about letting me know if he did not have an answer, but would mention who might. His response illustrates the game as a symbolic reflection of contemporary embodiment, as opposed to just continuity of a past. A document in the Peter Pitchlynn Papers in the Western History Collections at OU shows the ball game in Oklahoma still having a connection with the former social structures in Mississippi.

John McDonna's (1842) "Chief Fletcher's Ball Play Song"

In the Tune –"Scotts oer the Border"

"Play-Play Sons of Pushmataha
Up *Puknasabee* Lads
~~*Okla Falya* lads~~ whoop and fall in
Hiopott tokolos- Koonchas and Chickasaws
Okla Hanalis—make—ready—begin
Rattle the terrapin—shuffle the moccasin
Follow your conjuror—he'll win the day
Bet all your plunder and meer knuckle under
Because a few bullies are mighty in play
Chorus play play (symbol)

Oknetha! Rush to the halfway grounds
Measure your ball sticks and see that they're right
Make an agreement that those who do fall around
Quit if they're hurt but not offer to fight
Many a blow and a fall the poor player gets
Many a kick that he never did earn
Many a tumble and roll in the grass and
But cunningly dodger the more he does learn (Peter Pitchlynn Collection 1842)"

The above exert of "Chief Fletcher's Ball Play Song" (1842) is like any fight song you would hear at a local sporting event, except this one is played in the tune of the traditional Scottish song "Blue Bonnets over the Border". John McDonna is listed as the author, which an online blog lists a McDonna from Manchester, England marrying in the area in 1840 (http://earnestlawrence.com).

I quickly typed a copy of the song since it was hand written. Upon showing it to Rick he said, "Good one on your research, *Appuknasatubbe* is the chief of the clan of *Okla Hannali*, group mix with *Pushmataha*. That name *Puknasabee* means suddenly, quickly, and surprisingly on top of the enemy." Rick continued, "*Hiopott* could be a unnamed group, which it means in one definition. Other could be a command, word meaning ya'll come matching the *tokolos,* meaning by twos." This is followed by a

social distinction he makes based on the song saying, "Conjurors were blood of the other tribes hired to bring victory." Social districts and social clan leaders are referenced in the song showing an acknowledgment in Oklahoma of continuity with Mississippi in regards to social structure and social activities. This would all change a century later, as stickball goes in the dark. Games would be played in fields throughout the state under moon lit skies— a story for another time.

Muriel Wright discussing the state of Choctaw culture in the early part of the 1950s provides analysis on the shift in culture to becoming more of something observed at an exhibition. Wright says,

> "Choctaw tribal dances are no longer held in Oklahoma. Choctaw ball games and old customs are now seen only as a part of educational and entertainment programs given by the Choctaw schools to present tribal history. Within recent years, such programs have been given during the meeting of the Choctaw Advisory Council at the old Council House near Tuskahoma, in Pushmataha county, often with several thousands visitors in attendance." (Wright 1951:118)

Is it possible that stickball education activities Wright talks about share deeper associations to ceremonial games played as exhibition at events like a funeral? We may never know for certain if the game may have been part of a large ceremonial and social structure, but it would be an oversight to avoid considering any similar social etiquette.

Wright's description of cultural practice and efforts to educate local students reminds me of Gary White Deer's statement of a small group of cultural-bearers being responsible back in the Mississippian times. Although the statement tested my initial belief, I see how the commitment of the Billy family to preserve Choctaw culture through reviving and sustaining social activities has contributed to a new *Tolih* social domain.

In a reversal of fate, *Tolih* is growing in popularity as an event that increases community bonds by bringing members of all ages together for a cultural activity. *Tolih* is an opportunity for elders to gather with youth to share stories and cultural events. Stickball provides a place where the Choctaw language is spoken between community members. Choctaw Nation has helped encourage the resurgence by sponsoring activities such as a youth league and cultural demonstrations for the public. The next chapter documents two forms of Choctaw practice stick making and playing stickball.

Chapter 5: Playing in Forests and Ball Fields

"We fall down we get up
Yah a saint is just a sinner who fell down and got back up
We get up
(Everybody get back up)
Yah we get back up
I know I know
We get up
I Know" – lyrics for *Good Sunday* by Jerry Joseph

Playing with Sticks

This chapter is comprised of field notes from participant observations organized around three significant events in the data collection phase that including: stick making from 2013-2014- the beginning of the process, stick making from 2015-2016- the end of the process, and various times playing the ball game. The data presented in this chapter is organized around visual data representing the process for making sticks to honor cultural consultants commitment to preservation of Choctaw culture, as a possible document that can inform individuals interested in continuity of Choctaw cultural practices.

From 2014 till 2015, I made four pairs of *kapucha*. However, I also sanded my fair share of *kapucha* while visiting with Toby, Rick, Luther, and Rance. There was always some type of preparation work to be done from removing bark to sweeping up pile after pile of sawdust. The first pair I made was a hanging pair; the reason for this being a combination of Toby teaching me his technique and realizing my first pair would likely reflect inexperience. The wood used for the four different pair of *kapucha* came from the previously harvested wood and wood gathered in the southeastern part of Oklahoma. I completed two pair from a tree we harvested and have a pair of sticks

from the tree waiting to be processed. One pair was a smaller pair of *kapucha* for my nephew Colson Ketchum (Figure 5.1).

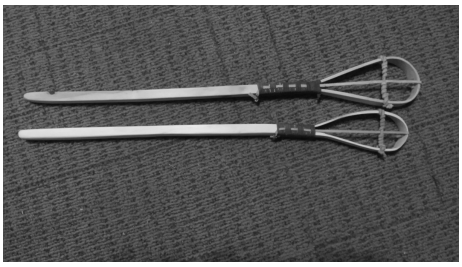

Figure 5.1: Small pair of *kapucha* (Photo: Scott Ketchum 7/26/2014)

The final pair was fabricated from a log given to Lou and Toby from Mississippi that Rick and Brad Greenwood shared after attending the World Series of Stickball in 2014 Choctaw. Brad mentioned sticks made from Mississippi timber lasted him and his brother for approximately two years of intense competition, signifying the species of hickory plays a fundamental role in the production of quality *kapucha*. During the harvesting of timber, it is possible to distinguish potential issues with the quality of wood before taking down the tree. Tree disease or knots can impact the quality of the wood making it unworkable. However, we still tried to work around any knots so as not to waste wood. Toby was always trying to find a use for hickory scraps making miniature *kapucha* and rabbit sticks.

This study identifies two physical aspects of working with hickory that inform Choctaw traditional knowledge: 1) Interacting with natural environments as a means to observe local conditions 2) Getting to know the world intimately through the practice of working with natural resources in the production of cultural materiality. Knowing how to identify weaknesses in the wood comes from repetitive social interactions with forests and from the embodiment of practice. Some forms of traditional knowledge are

embodied and expressed in physical practices. Choctaw woodworking techniques are demonstrative of such a practice.

Currently, there is a tremendous gap in the literature concerning *kapucha* and Choctaw forested practices, which both are social agents influencing acts of persistence. Consistent descriptions of *kapucha* have appeared in past ethnography describing size and source material (Culen 1975; Cushman 1999; Halbert 1901; Perdue 1988; Swanton 2001). Possibly, these are the only sources. The most significant source of information on *Kapucha ikbi* (To make sticks) appears in a two-page document under the same name written by Clelland Billy in 1975. This document detailing the process for making *kapucha* was written by Rick and Curtis's uncle and was likely used often by Curtis and his wife Teresa 'Terry' with the American Indian Youth Leaders Council in 1975. Terry was instrumental in promoting the reawakening of Choctaw social dance along with Curtis and all of the contributing Billy Family social dancers.

In the past, literature on Choctaw social ecological practices is scant. Robert Bowman (1909) speculates that Choctaw prescribed burning of forests, a "custom of the Choctaw every fall or winter in order to prevent forest from becoming too dense to destroy the undergrowth by setting fire to and burning off the woods." (Bowman 1909:429) Bowman goes on to describe a practice Choctaws had for organizing data in local ecosystem on weather events like an episode of extreme precipitation. Based on Bowman's account, Choctaws practiced a custom of using an arrow to mark the highest point reached in the overflow of a river. According to this method, a flood on the Yazoo River 1814 was the highest mark with floods in 1828 and 1882 being close rivals

(Bowman 1909:429). This case study contributes to preliminary data towards a larger research agenda of convalesce towards literature gaps on Choctaw social practices.

Recreation as Ecological Knowledge

Ecosystems in transitions zones like the forested areas in the eastern region of Choctaw Nation are environments vulnerable to extreme weather events and climate variations. In a fact sheet discussing issues facing forests, indigenous peoples, and their life ways in the Northwest, Sue Wotkyns et al. (2013) writes, "Conversely, some forest species will have difficulty adapting to rising ambient temperatures. (Sue Wotkyns et al. 2013)" These weather pattern changes to ecosystems bring potential long-term impacts to cultural recreation that emerge as a result of human activity in ecosystems.

Recreation is often defined in terms that seem oppositional to work as in "play, leisure, or enjoyment" (Merriam-Webster.com accessed 6/2016). This definition places land use that supports the natural resources sustaining the game as analogous to land use for any recreational activities. This might reason enough to consider nuancing the term recreation to express the value of cultural and social recreation in the definition in land use plans. For participants, Choctaw Stickball is implicitly understood as a cultural activity, or social recreation.

A.P. John's definition in "Recreation trends and implications for government" expresses recreation as an experience that "in the real sense of the word, 're-creates' the individual" (John 1986: 167). This notion of recreation suggestions activities like stickball have transformative qualities for players and are analogous to the process of growth between people and their local ecosystems when making things from natural

resources. Tim Ingold (2011) eloquently describes this in interplay writing, "the forms of artifacts are not given in advance but rather generated in and through the practical movement of one or more skilled agents in their active, sensuous engagement with the material (Ingold 88)." Ingold continues to elaborate that cultural knowledge is a process of growth with environments, which instead of producing materials from natural environments, things are grown from the mutual involvement of actors and actants (Ingold 88).

Climate science is often focused on disruptions to place as a disruption to a relationship of permanence between people and ecosystems. In terms of the interplay of space and human development one might ask, do cultural identities and knowledge systems require a permanent relationship to a place? Can cultures evolve, adapt, and assimilate to new bioregions and areas with the same relationship built on previous cultural foundations such as reverence and reciprocity? Data collected for this case study on a Choctaw persistent identity system infers that recovery from the biological shock of relocation does not inhibit the growing of cultural things.

Adaptations in practice and meaning may occur, which is inclusive of Choctaw practices of being and becoming. When arriving in these domains, community interactions generate a continuum that binds the past and future to the present in endless negotiations and exchanges in the meaning of cultural symbols and acts. Community norms are generated and sustained through these social interactions and relationships. This is ensured when Choctaw people establish songs, games, and dances to celebrate their forested and agricultural ways as a method to reinforce the prominence of this lifestyle with future generations. Culture knowledge is the accumulation of a group's

communal developments that encompass a relational dynamic with local ecosystems and reflects a dynamic exchange within local biota. Choctaw stick makers attain an enormous amount of knowledge through repetitive interactions in forested environments.

Sidney White: Setting a Standard of Excellence in the Preservation of Culture

Choctaw Nation Capital Museum is home to a pair of *kapucha* that represents more than a standard of excellence in craftsmanship. The pair of *kapucha* stands in remembrance of the contributions of a cultural bearer that was a vital source in sharing the physical knowledge to generations, who have now shared it with another generation. Sidney White was born in 1889 (Reed 2014). Lisa Reed's (2014) article "Sidney's Sticks" (Choctawnation.com 5/2015) surmises what many in the Oklahoma *Tolih* community have known for some time. ""Sidney White sticks"—It's a term synonymous with perfection to most who play stickball." (Reed 2014) Rick describes Sidney as a link to the present. The cultural genealogy of Oklahoma stick making in the present is rooted in techniques that can be linked to Sidney's methods. Reed writes about the splendor of a pair of sticks he made saying, "There aren't many of Sidney's sticks around anymore. Those in possession of them know what a treasure they have." (Reed 2014)

Interestingly, those teaching a process similar to the Sidney White's method do so freely to anyone wanting to participate as an example of Choctaw cultural generosity. You may have to take a journey to visit the stick maker somewhere in Southeastern, Oklahoma, but somewhere, someplace, and at some time, a *Chahta* is going about their

daily routine with the willingness to share their culture. In the current revival of Choctaw culture, the next step is really up to the person to decide to engage. It is a conscious decision to affirm through action.

Sidney White's affirmation of Choctaw social practices influenced a generation to reawaken sleeping *kapucha* and *towa* and to become the ball field family once again. Stick making with Sidney in Tuskahoma was a family affair as his wife Mary and son Folsom would join him harvesting tree and preparing the wood (Reed 2014). Folsom says Sidney did not have a chainsaw to cut down trees in 1960 or 1970 (Reed 2014). Instead, he says, "Me and Mama would use the crosscut saws to cut down the trees (Reed 2014)." *Cultural Bioregionalism* is identifiable in cultural genealogies sustained via social interactions in proximate spaces where communal events are occurring. This is exampled in the social history of Choctaw cultural preservation efforts. Carrying *Tolih* traditions forward, Sidney White lived close enough to Choctaw Nation Capital Grounds at *Tvshka Homma* (Red Warrior) to transmit physical knowledge to interested parties.

The transmission of familial knowledge through physical acts functions to educate consequent generations on culturally resilient practices. Choctaw cultural symbols are able to retain a degree of continuity—if only briefly in narrative form—by these meanings being continually passed via family stories. Another possible source of meaning resides in cultural objects, Toby explains *kapucha* serve as family records saying,

> "They carved their own history into those sticks (Figure 5.2). They told their family (story) on them, so they'd never forget. And, you take care of that like a wallet. The story on the sticks was so you don't forget it. You might be captured

> or sent away. It was a way to remind you of where you came from and where you were going."

Toby depicts a symbolic quality held in *kapucha* that references an inherent indexical sentiment of home that seems timeless. For Choctaw ball players, home is where every you happen to carry your sticks. Home is a place where *kapucha* are found hanging on the wall.

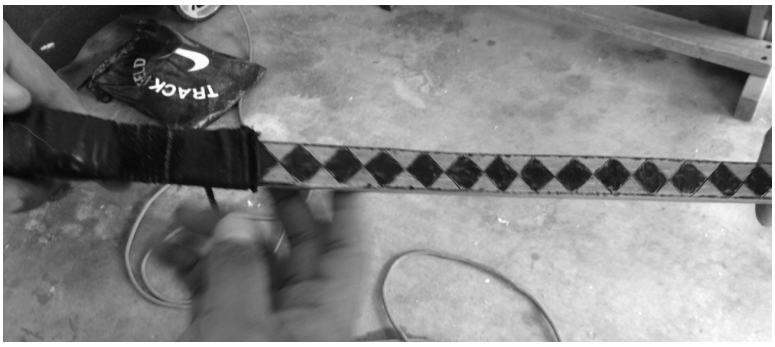

Figure 5.2: Stylized *kapucha* (Photo: Scott Ketchum 6/2/2014)

It is not significant to this document, but further attention should be given to the different meanings ascribed to how sticks are displayed. One example is the customary act of crossing *kapucha,* done by both Choctaw and Chickasaw ball players, as Jim Tubby's picture (Figure P.1) from 1908 shows this symbolic action is not a recent practice for Choctaw people. However, the ball cap Jim Tubby is wearing and possible symbolism expressed with it have been lost to the game for now (Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.3: Mississippi Choctaw Hat/Cap, circa 1900, National Museum of the American Indian, Catalog number 1/8852 https://siarchives.si.edu/blog/telling-story-illuminating-native-heritage-through-photography (accessed 8/15)

Akwe:kon Press published a book under the title *Native American Expressive Culture* (1994) that examines Ponca HeThuska Soicety using expressive culture as an approach "looking beyond dance as simple entertainment" to document cultural enactment and manipulation of symbols in meaning-making acts. Mark Allen Peterson (2005) defines *Expressive Culture* as, "institutions and practices through which people enact, display, and manipulate symbolic materials." (Peterson 18) Stickball operates as a social domain where practice and social institutions intersect at the point of coalescence around a material symbol producing continuity in local meanings and inferences.

Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins (2008) emphasize culture and material share a symbolic relationship, where material objects inform the daily lives of practitioners. Morphy and Perkins write,

> "Through their material possessions people produce an image of themselves in the world, and these material possessions also operate to create the stage on which people lead their daily lives—they are markers of status, gender relations and so on." (10)

Material possessions provide context on the social relationship and status of individuals established in a culture and how interrelatedness between cultural actors and material objects assign degrees of value. Morphy and Perkins describe cultural material possessions as a body of knowledge that encompasses the metaphysical essence of a society and how values become framed as a result (Morphy and Perkins 2008:10). Sydney White's contributions to the preservation of culture through sharing physical knowledge on Choctaw material culture set a standard of excellence in cultural resiliency practices.

Turn the Power Back On: Talking about making *Kapucha*

It's springtime. *Kapucha* craftsmen resume their work with hickory. Stick makers have begun carving *kapucha* for a new season. Players come together and get ready for a new season by honing their skills and technique. For Choctaw, a new stickball season begins at the end of spring in prep for the summer tournament season and for the Mississippi World Series of Stickball Championship. Toby explained he would be getting ready himself, but a knee injury was sidelining him. Instead, he was making *kapucha* while attending an occasional practice. It was late April in 2014. The weather gave a nice breeze, but the steam-box made the temperature in the garage a little higher.

Suggesting we get something to drink**,** Toby and I jumped into the car to make a quick run to a convenience store. He had suggested I come over sometime to watch and learn how to make a pair of *kapucha*, so today was that day. I am not sure I was totally

prepared for all the wood particles about to fly around the room, showing up after teaching a class still dressed in my work clothes.

Cruising down the street, we come to a stop at the light. A quick glance left and my eye is drawn to two sticks that resemble odd spoons. The motion of the car caused them to spin and bounce around while hanging from the rearview mirror. It was a tiny pair of *kapucha*, which Toby called "hangers" or "hanging pair". The term usually describes a pair of sticks made for aesthetic value, but a broken stick can relegate a pair to the wall of player or collector. Stick makers tend to value function over aesthetics when it comes to the ethics of production.

Kapucha is a reoccurring symbol of Choctaw resilience and adaptation that is no longer obscured by being situated in the historical context of "Killing the Game to Save the Man". External influences from missionaries planted a seed that correlated playing the game with community impurity. The ball game was viewed as competition to the authority of the Church over a Choctaw social domain.

Missionaries used association with the game to get community members to deem the game both violent and child's play. Choctaw Nation's legislation to ban the cutting of hickory trees before Oklahoma statehood is correlative in distinctions in community knowledge on fabricating *kapucha* between Oklahoma and Mississippi Choctaws. Missionaries in Mississippi gathered and burned *kapucha*, which also likely impacted physical practice and knowledge. Timber companies played a role in separating both Mississippi and Oklahoma Choctaws from social interaction in forests. Toby's garage took on a new meaning situated in the historical context of where a century ago this work would be persecuted and frowned upon, especially in the open.

Although I disclosed that I have family from the Ardmore area that are from Oklahoma Mississippi Choctaw ancestry, I did not mention this community in tracing their ancestry to the group in Bouge Chitto that refused to relinquish their *kapucha*. Their story and history of *Tolih* is a little bit different than the history of Choctaw Nation. James H. Howard and Victoria Lindsay Levine (1990) started fieldwork in 1974 and continued to gather data until 1978 not too far from where my grandmother Ketchum's 'Chickasaw home' was located. Buster Ned served as a cultural consultant to Howard and Levine, and Ned's account addresses Choctaw symbols, songs, social dance, and the ball game. Like stickball, Ned describes social dancers facing community persecution in the 1930, so they "put the dancing to sleep." (Howard and Levine 1990: 14).

While having their own history in playing a variation of *Tolih* with no sticks, David Bushnell's (1909) study of Choctaw of Bayou Lacomb in Louisiana documents a change in the game because of a decline in quality source material. To inform knowledge on the relationship of material and social change to ecological change, this case study suggests further development of studies with Choctaw communities on social practice and social ecological interactions.

Tolih survived community erasure from oppositional forces discounting the social value of the game. Strange enough, Rick says it was a voice from the Choctaw church community that started to bring *Tolih* back out in the open to be played in the light of day. Pastor Samuels and several other Choctaw members of the clergy, according to Rick, were instrumental in speaking with other Choctaw Pastors about the significance of activities like stickball to the health of the community.

Political, social, religious, and academic institutions all masked intentions of authority as acts of altruism towards a population struggling post-allotments to recover a sense of self. Choctaw social elites occupied positions in the state of Oklahoma in the 1930s that celebrated an ideal of progress, as evidenced by Debo's (1934) polemic comparative language on the 'backwardness' of some Choctaw. Is it coincidence that Debo's book is published in a year that FDR passed the Indian Reorganization Act? Is it coincidence this was also the time several Choctaw tribal members begin to realize allotted lands do not necessarily transfer to family members (especially when there is natural resources of value on them)? One outlet for Native people was a movement called the Four Grandmothers Society, which included Cherokee, Muscogee Creek, and Seminole members.

The Choctaw churches in Oklahoma by the 1930s had become a getaway space from the social conflict over symbolic control and political authority over resources. Choctaw church produced a social space that began to sustain culture. Rick describes the significance role the churches played in keeping Choctaw language alive. Hymnbooks introduced Choctaw words and gatherings like wild onion dinners brought out the conversations. Choctaw language spoken in a house built to liberate persecuted souls was not going to find persecution in an openly Christian leaning state. Choctaw stickball is sustained through a social process that is a feature of Choctaw social institutions. This social process is used to introduce and reinforce community knowledge among community members.

We grab a few things at the store and head back to Toby's house. He explains that he was taught hickory trees have always been bound to Choctaw cultural identity.

The more we were suppose to visit about water and resources issues for Choctaw people, the more I was conscious of the weighty influence stickball was having at the moment on the daily lives of players and stick makers. I knew Choctaw Stickball was a significant part of Choctaw culture, but this was the moment I noticed the persistent influence it had on the life of stickball players. Riding in the car and seeing the symbolic relationship *kapucha* held firmly rooted my understandings of Choctaw Stickball as a socializing aspect of Choctaw culture that still produces episodic moments of coalescence on a cyclical basis. It is a time for families to gather around the pole and on the grounds, as the sun begins to produce our longest days.

We get to the house and Toby explains the wood that is being used at the moment is terrible, but it is for an event and the wood was donated. It is a type of cedar, most likely an Eastern Red Cedar (Figure 5.4). Toby was working with a few others putting on stickball and other craftwork exhibitions. These events were sponsored by Chickasaw Nation or organized for other events and purposes like cultural education at a university or teaching a youth group. I was being induced to *Tolih* via Toby's love for the most recognizable Choctaw activity and culturally defining symbol—*kapucha.* Toby explained his desire to see every person in Oklahoma, especially Choctaw people, have a pair of sticks hanging from their window. The work was cut short because of the usual sign of an Oklahoma spring—a thunderstorm in the late afternoon. The winds swirled as lightening flashed across the sky. Toby suggested we stop and step inside. The storm decided our fate. Power is out, a perfect time to quit.



Figure 5.4: *Kapucha* made from cedar (Photo: Scott Ketchum 4/30/2014)

Playing in the Forests: A Story about the Process of Making *Kapucha*

Meeting on Saturday, we drive towards Little Axe to look for a few hickory trees. I am told that we are looking for a tree with a leaf pattern that looks similar to a menorah (Figure 5.5). We talk about methods his Uncle Curtis Billy would use. Toby references the use of a horse trough to age (steam) the wood. The heat and water in summertime makes it easier to bend and to shape the wood. Climate probably has a lot to do with the workability of staves.



Figure 5.5: Hickory Leaf (Photo: Scott Ketchum 6/21/2014)

In Mississippi, the riparian areas with surrounding hickory trees likely produce a variant wood compared with Oklahoma hickories (Figure 5.6). I have been told that harvesting Shagbark hickory tended to coincide with the cycles of the moon, which may have been a component of a previous belief or ceremony when getting timber for *kapucha*.



Figure 5.6: Tombigbee Forest, Mississippi (Photo: Scott Ketchum 7/2016)

You need a minimum of four foot long sections of wood that are straight, which can be a challenge to find in Oklahoma when compared with the wood found in the forests of the Southeast (5.7). We are going for a tree that will yield two such sections. Clelland Billy (1976) writes, "The ideal raw material is a green river bottom hickory sapling (Billy 1976:1)." A larger sapling might yield two pair of *kapucha*.



Figure 5.7: Hickory ready for bark to be stripped (Photo: Scott Ketchum 8/26/2015)

There was no real plan that morning. It was late June, and it was hot. The lack of planning had a lot to do with the chainsaw being a loaner. People loaning tools or borrowing vehicles for hauling the wood are two ways making *kapucha* can be a communal effort from a group working in a stickball hub. I am riding with Rance in a larger suburban type vehicle. We are heading out to some land in Apache that is owned by a Chickasaw family. I am told that they do not mind if we take a few hickory trees from the property for the sake of making sticks. The winding roads wrap around hills and duck around endless corners. You can see the hills and trees that dot the landscape in the distance as you climb to the top of each hill. Upon plunging to the bottom, with the enough speed, you can feel it in your stomach as you descend downward.

At the right time of day, a back road drive across Oklahoma is nothing but painted horizons with deep tones of orange and purple as either the sunrises in the east or sunsets in west. No doubt about it, if one gets away from the city, you can watch some of the most amazing dances between the clouds, sun, and sky splatter across the horizon. I recall driving down dirt roads kicking up tons of dust as a teenager learning to drive back roads that wound endlessly across the Oklahoma landscape, roads that slithered like snakes across the prairie grass. This is what is meant by the term open spaces.

We turn at a road tucked in between the trees. It is the kind of turn off you would not realize was there unless you have been there a few times, previously. The trees are thick in the area and provide a perfect cover to the entrance for unwelcome guests. I ask Toby about the owner of the property, and he assures me the family knows we are going to cut down a hickory tree to use as material for *kapucha*.

We step out to an accompaniment of sounds from life hidden in the trees. Hews of purple and orange splatter across the eastern sky. The light flickers through the dimness created by a canopy of branches and leaves, as a forest of shadows hides everything except the cacophony of sounds from inhabitants. Before we begin working, Rance says a prayer to thank the Creator for the day's blessings. We start on a journey heading eastward that leads us deeper and deeper into the trees. Toby's cousin has been carrying a chainsaw the entire time, so I know there is no plan to turn around anytime soon. It seems like we have walked for a few miles, but the June heat in Oklahoma can bend the strongest of wills. Toby points to a grouping of tree several yards ahead. He says these are the right trees.

We approach the one Toby considers our best option. However, the density of trees in the immediate area is considered, and we decide upon another tree that was much easier to access. The bark on the tree forms a vertical pattern that could be either shallow or deep, depending on whether or not the bark was raised. The bark pattern added a depth to the tree. The Hickory nuts in the area were small in appearance and looked as though they have a wooden shell. Stick makers describing hickory leaves as resembling a menorah. This could be because of a faint resemblance to the six or eight branches of a menorah to a hickory stalk. These stalks are commonly called the rachis, which includes 5 to 17 leaves that grow in direct opposite pairs. Hickory leaves give stick makers a symbol of association toward passing knowledge on how to identify a tree for harvest.

The height of the tree is in the 30 feet range (Figure 5.8). We cut into the trunk of the tree using both a chainsaw and an axe. Despite being dry from the heat, the

ground feels damp as my feet slip and slide, unearthing clumps of bottomland. I look down and notice the ground is moving every time loose piles of dirt become exposed. The darkness has been hiding a ground covered in ticks. I mention it. Everyone is determined to get these logs out because at this point we are at the beyond commitment stage and reached the borderline of obsessed with completing the task.



Figure 5.8: Discussing the dimensions needed for *kapucha* (Photo: Scott Ketchum 6/21/2014)

Chainsaw issues made the work challenging. There was no turning back because some of the sticks are needed for an upcoming youth tournament. Then a large whack produced a big crack and the tree toppled. We got to work removing branches to get the log ready to be split one more time before the four of us carried everything out of the woods (Figure 5.9).



Figure 5.9: Harvesting a hickory tree (Photo: Scott Ketchum 6/21/2014)

The ticks will tag along in our shoes and clothing making their presence known in my house for the next few days. They remind me that—beyond the cutting tools and large blocks of wood—there are numerous dangers lurking beyond our sight in the woods.

After harvesting the wood, the next step is to let the wood dry. Taking time for the wood to dry is perhaps a drawback of working with larger logs. Choctaw ball players likely used saplings when time was of the essence and a stick was needed immediately for a match. Rick Billy says people have practiced using either larger trees or saplings for *kapucha*.

The shaving off of the bark can be done as a way to try to speed up the drying time. Much of the bark comes off when the wood is split using a wedge. This was a very labor-intensive part of the preparation process of crafting sticks. The waiting period for the wood to dry can fluctuate with time of year and weather patterns. The drying of the wood insures the wood will resist cracking and breaking while working with it. We have removed the bark and have been letting it dry out a few weeks. I check in with Toby, but with the hot weather, it is hard to gauge a standard drying time. You "just kind of know when the wood is ready to be worked", according to Toby.

Toby called the day the wood was ready. I would add that this stage is labor intensive, but that speaks of the whole process. The main tools are a sledgehammer and wedges to separate the log into smaller pieces and remove the bark. A drawknife is one method for removing the bark and wood shavings (Figure 5.10). Anyone looking for a workout guaranteed to cause back spasms should spend an afternoon working with a drawknife. The drawknife can be characterized as a blade and two handles, with the blade in the center.



Figure 5.10: Drawknife (Photo: Scott Ketchum 9/2/2015)

The wood blocks are split into four different four feet long staves (Figure 5.11).

The blocks are carved into specific desired shapes. You work with the shape of the wood; therefore, straight sticks can be slightly bent at the end where the cup will be located. The side of the stick is also thinner than the bottom part that will serve as the handle. This is all prep work to get the wood ready. When splitting the log based on the size of the trunk each log should yield about 8-10 pairs of *kapucha*, maybe less. It could also yield numerous 'hanging pairs'- in addition to countless wood splitters that will be everywhere including but not limited to eyes and noses.

The cup is bent 2 ½ feet long starting out from a 4 feet long plank. Time is required to intricately carve and sand the wood into the necessary form. A table saw and a pencil was all it took really to make sure a pair has equivalent dimensions.

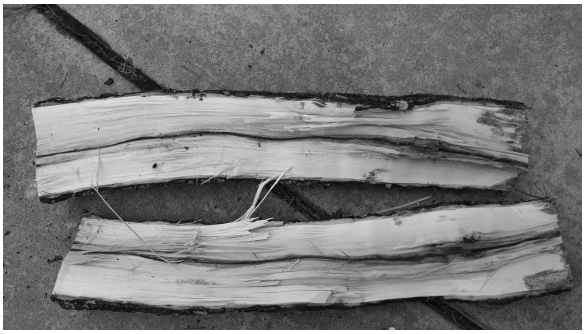

Figure 5.11: Hickory split to prepare for use (Photo: Scott Ketchum 7/18/2014)

The bending and eventual flaring out of the cup can be one of the hardest parts to replicate without the correct jigs (Figure 5.12). Lou tackled this problem by engineering a jig out a roller and wood block to wrap the lip of the cup around.



Figure 5.12: Phil's jig for bending *kapucha* (Photo: Scott Ketchum 6/2/2014)

Stick makers have utilized varying methods to get the wood around the cup to bend outward. Mississippi Choctaw Stick maker John Chapman relies on grease to moisten sticks when working to manipulate them (6/21/1973 Mississippi Choctaw Archive: 6). Toby and Lou made use of a steam-box (Figure 5.13; Figure 5.14) to add moisture to sticks for bending and manipulating. Grease or motor oil can be used to moisten the wood to flare the sides of the cup outward.

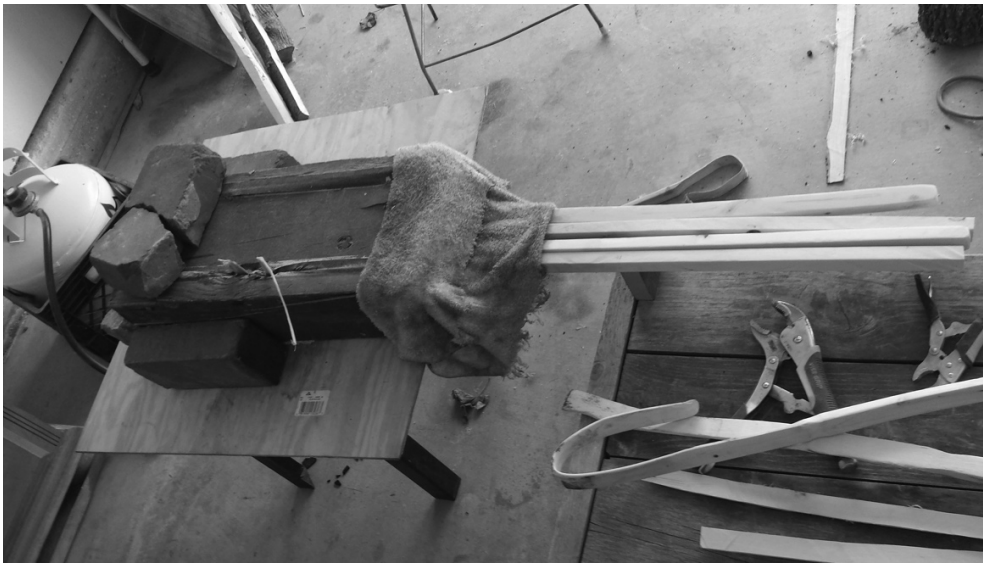

Figure 5.13: Steam box used to make hickory workable (Photo: Scott Ketchum 5/21/2014)



Figure 5.14: Steam-box II (Photo: Scott Ketchum 7/20/2015)

The cup is flared open, giving the racket a distinct design (Figure 5.15). A flared cup (Figure 5.16) is fundamental to a *kapucha*'s performance in catching, pick-up, and trapping a ball. John Chapman speaks about one technique to achieve this desired result. Chapman says, "You got to tie it down. You tie it before you flare it open (the ends). Once you tie it down and the ends open up, all you do is shape the sticks, fasten it down with leather, and you're through (sic)." (6/21/1973 Mississippi Choctaw Archive: 6)

Chapman uses a "Knife, little ax, and we use wire sometimes. I don't know what they used a long time ago." (6/21/1973 Mississippi Choctaw Archive 5) He continues, "Also, we used fire in the process of making stickball sticks. Oh, we use lard, grease, and fat." (6/21/1973 Mississippi Choctaw Archive: 5) On the fire technique, Toby says, "Yeah sure…it maybe the original technique before the use of water."

Toby explains one approach was using cooking oil like Pam. I asked Toby if he ever uses this approach and if it worked well. He states, "It did, and it seemed to work. The key thing to that technique is the heat or fire, I think. Maybe longer in an open fire compared to the propone burner to work the cups. When the *bila* develops small bubbles on the surface…they say it's soaked its way into the middle and ripe for bending."

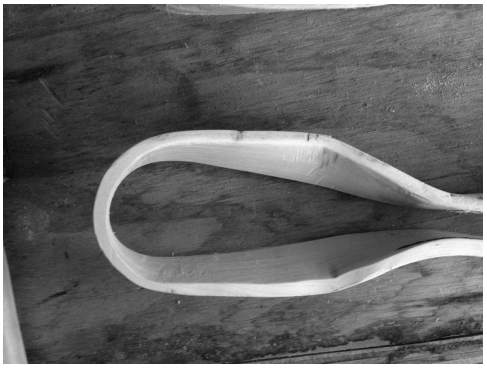

Figure 5.15: Flared out cup for *kapucha* (Photo: Scott Ketchum 9/2/2015)



Figure 5.16: *Kapucha* waiting for the cup to be strung (Photo: Scott Ketchum 9/2/2015)

In the first year, a clamp was used after the paddle side is wrapped to form a cup (Figure 5.17). One method to hold the form of the cup is putting a baseball bat in the center and wrapping it with rope for leverage. The second year Toby and Lou learned a technique that improved all of our abilities in forming the cup. After the cup is set, the

holes for wrapping the cup depend upon the style of wrap the stick maker desires. However, this is an area that reflects cultural difference, so as an example compare the more common Choctaw design that resembles a circle and cross with the Cherokee style cup or Muscogee Creek style cup.

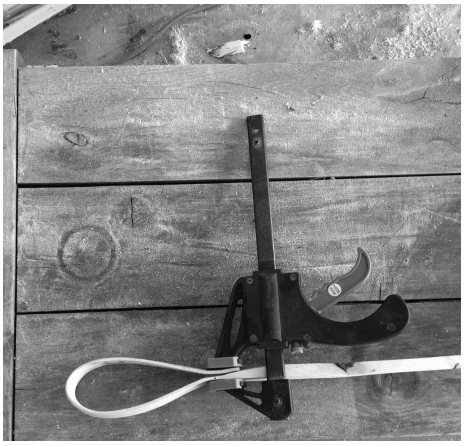

Figure 5.17: Clamp applied to hold *kapucha* after bending (Photo: Scott Ketchum 4/30/2014)

Chapman was asked about how many pairs he might make in a day. He responded that he felt like he might be able to make "about two pairs a day. (Mississippi Choctaw Archive 1973: 5)" This would likely still require considerable skill as well some preparation work. It is evident that making *kapucha* requires a considerable amount of time. With the other commitments in life, stick making is a commitment to a way of life that is transcending. Rance says that it's not as easy as one might think. There is an intense level of preparation before one makes sticks and can start playing in communities. Rance points to a dilemma people that work face today saying, "It's hard. It's hard because it all takes time. Time to get the wood. Time to cut the wood and carry logs through the woods."

The labor involved in making sticks is another significant component that makes this work both physically demanding and time consuming. Two or three hours of hand-

sanding the handles of a pair of *kapucha* can translate into stiff hands and blisters for a person not accustomed to labor intensive work. Brenner Billy expounds on the physical nature of manufacturing *kapucha* because everything is done "by hand" (CarlAlbert.edu 2016: accessed 1/2017). Brenner continues speaking on the amount of physical labor that goes into making sticks. He says that, "No machines are used, just muscle, oil, fire, and water (CarlAlbert.edu 2016: accessed 1/2017)."

Hickory trees as a source material in Oklahoma present several challenges. The natural range of hickory puts *Chahta* living McCurtain County, Oklahoma in a prime spot for accessing quality source material, showing the proximity of cultural-bearers to source materials intersect to produce and reinforce conditions necessary for sustaining a cultural bioregion. Field notes gathered for this case study show stick makers harvest hickory on public, private, and tribal lands. Saplings reduce prep time in production, but reduce the likelihood of future hickory populations. *Kapucha* are valued for their functionality and steadiness when playing the game, which is another dimension to consider when deciding on source materials in terms of using saplings verses staves from a larger hickory tree.

The popularity of game has increased the aesthetic value of *kapucha* for Choctaw, as it is more common to see a pair hanging on the wall in a home or a small pair hanging from the rearview mirror of a car. 'Hanging pair', or a pair not durable enough for actual use in the game, also known as 'hangers' (Figure 5.18) can be made from any source material. Toby describes hangers as a great teaching tool at exhibitions. This is because one can prepare them to the point attendees can complete the rest of the work in less than an hour. Exhibitions provide associational knowledge

to Choctaw participants as cultural meanings of shapes are connected with the designs in materials. Brenner Bill says, "Traditions such as stick making were fading, but the Choctaw Nation has worked hard to revitalize many cultural experiences." (CarlAlbert.edu 2016: accessed 1/2017)



Figure 5.18: 'Hangers' or 'Hanging Pair' of *kapucha* (Photo: Scott Ketchum 9/2/2015)

Toby and Lu do not limit their work to making just *kapucha* from hickory. A rabbit stick (Figure 5.19) is another traditional Choctaw tool crafted from hickory. Choctaw Nation holds an annual festival on Labor Day weekend in Tuskahoma, Oklahoma. This is another opportunity to share with family, friends, and interested parties an enduring Choctaw symbol, so Toby makes several extra to take with him. Rick and family assist with numerous cultural activities being offered at the traditional campgrounds.



Figure 5.19: Choctaw Rabbit Stick (Photo: Scott Ketchum 9/2/2015)

Choctaw Nation hosts a Stickball tournament that accompanies the Labor Festival. This is an example of how much times have changed since Clelland, Curtis, and the rest of the Billy family started contributing to the preservation of Choctaw culture. It was the late 1970s when Curtis started arranging exhibitions events at the festival, now teams travel from Mississippi to play in Oklahoma. Stickball may have been what been what socially bound Choctaw people in the past, but today it has become the catalyst in bringing communities and relatives together again to coalesce and persist around the game. This game reflects Choctaw resilience and influences acts of cultural resiliency from community members.

Rick does offer some cautious words on the current resurgence surrounding the ball game. He is especially cautious of putting the cart before the horse, so to speak, in terms of playing the game. Rick starts, "They edit that part out, just learning the game and not the culture."

Rick is referring to a concern about the game losing cultural grounding and context in Choctaw ways. He continues, "The tribe has influenced the game into a competitive sport—before it stood for *ubba binili*. The credit went to the creator for

preserving the game that is what the *Chatas* of McCurtain County says." The data collection phase with Rick and Toby gave me an understanding of what people mean in southeastern Oklahoma when they say, "Choctaw generosity and hospitality". The Billy family has been one of many Choctaw families that model and embody this social ethic.

The most difficult aspects of making *kapucha* are both the bending and flaring of the cup. This is due to the possibility of the wood breaking during the bending process. Smaller sticks with thinner cups may mark a shift in design, which may be inferred as a greater focus on efficiency and functionality. This is potentially an identifying mark that is correlative with ecological changes influence on material practice (Figure 5.20).

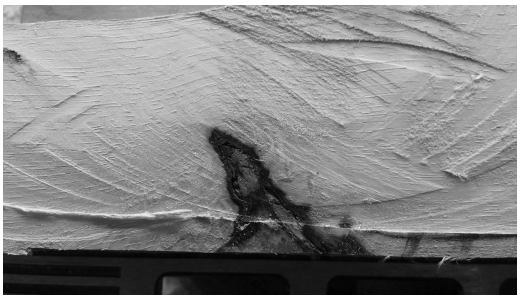

Figure 5.20: Picture of issues with hickory staves (Photo: Scott Ketchum 7/18/2014)

It will not take long for a pair of *kapucha* made from lower quality wood to snap in a scrum for a *towa* (ball). The neck of the cup will come under stress in game play, which is one of the first areas that will crack from fierce competition. A quality pair of kapucha can snap from the right striking blow. Several times during a game it is likely to observe a stick getting snapped after a crowd struggles for a loose ball. The health of forests is observable and intertwined in the quality of timber available to be producible into *kapucha* in Oklahoma.



Figure 5.21: *Kapucha* can snap (Photo: Scott Ketchum 9/2/2015)

Stick making 2015

This is the second *kapucha* season we have been working on sticks (Figure 5.22). It has taken about a year to improve quality, mostly through a lot of trial and error in my regard. We are all getting better at determining the quality in wood when harvesting trees. There are two significant factors when working with hickory to make stickball sticks: technique and wood quality. A solid pair of *kabocca (kapucha)* will require excellent technique from a craftsperson and hickory that is producible into a material capable of absorbing contact.



Figure 5.22: Toby after bending a stick (Photo: Scott Ketchum 6/22/2015)

The improvement in technique and quality by Toby and Lu is observable in the development of tools they have used in fabricating sticks (Figure 5.23). They gained knowledge from exchanges with other stickball makers about new techniques, sometimes derived from older techniques, to enhance practices. A jig for working the wood and bending it, after it is steamed or burnt, has improved the ability to better flare out the cup than when using clamps that can damage the wood in the process (Figure 5.24). This network of sharing cultural knowledge is a major component in the continuation of *Tolih*.

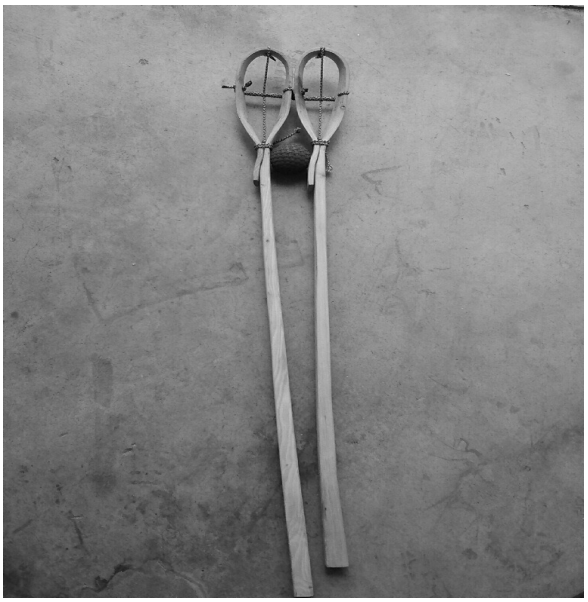

Figure 5.23: *Kapucha* and *Towa* (Photo: Scott Ketchum 7/21/2015)

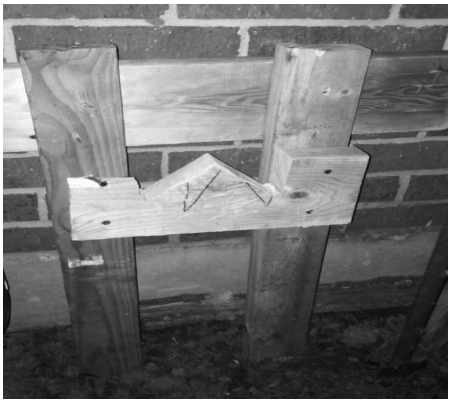

Figure 5.24: New tool for flaring out cup in second year (Photo: Scott Ketchum 7/20/2015)

After making sticks in the field, there were many reasons cited why someone would learn to make sticks besides culture. Stick players tend to be motivated to save the family money by making sticks for children and relatives. There is the opportunity to make sale *kapucha* for cash, but as a sustaining career that is limited in Oklahoma when compared to Mississippi. This is an area that I suggest requires further research, as it easily is an examination worthy of coverage in theses or dissertations. The final section of this chapter documents the first youth *Tolih* tournament in Oklahoma played by teams sponsored by Chickasaw Nation and Choctaw Nation.

Playing on Ball Fields in Atoka

Gathering by the long pole protruding about 8 to 10 feet out of the ground, thirty some-odd people stood in a circle. Each one of them clutching a pair of hickory sticks, seemingly straight but curling around the end to form a cup. Leather or nylon straps, reflecting an array of colors, bind each lip of the cup to the shoulder of the stick and crisscrossed in the center or form a loop in the center of the cup.

This gives the stick's cup the appearance of being snug and resembling a little circular basket on the end, kind of like the head of a spoon- some baskets looking

similar to a turtle shell while others reflect cultural symbols, whose past meaning may be scattered with the Oklahoma winds.

A few stick sport carvings of elaborate geometric patterns on them. Each stick varies in size ranging from under two feet to about two and a half feet long. With the cups of each stick forming the inner circle (Figure 5.25), together, the body of each pair of sticks when placed together in a circle resembles the sun's rays. One of the men shouts, "Chukma!" In unison, the group replies, "Ome".

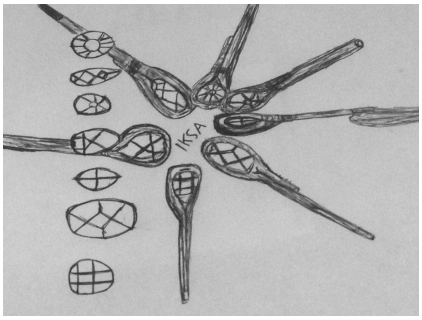

Figure 5.25: *Kapucha* wrap variations in a circle (Drawing: Scott Ketchum)

The first youth stickball tournament held in Atoka, Oklahoma between Choctaw and Chickasaw teams was about to begin. The name Atoka derives from the word *hitoka,* meaning ball field, so it is literally possible to play on a ball field in ball field. The sun hung high overhead, and being late June, we were ensured a day of unbearable heat. Children have a way of not letting stuff like that distract them, but parents were still running around trying to make sure every player had plenty of water and some protection from the heat. Canopy tents line the field to give parents and children a little shade. I observe the younger players on the bench with the energy to play chase, talk video games, and eat the occasional snack. This is all while events are transpiring all around them. This is a family event, so plenty of grandmothers and grandfathers would

prefer to attend than let the conditions stop them. Intergenerational exchanges on topics concerning cultural knowledge and cultural history provide a chance to affirm a sense of belonging and a sense of shared meaning within the community for participants.

Choctaw Stickball continues as a result of formal and informal community-based institutions that create and maintain forms of cultural resilience. Stickball is an activity that can be embodied by the entire Choctaw community. The cultural health of a community relies heavily on the maintenance of the social and political organization of a tribal community. This study identified that stickball, as a cultural activity has been sustained through individual action, organizational action, tribal nation action, community action, and spiritual-religious action.

This is a game shared by all Choctaw people and welcome to all people interested in playing. Sport allows for cultural interacts that produce social bonds that bring communities together. Thus, Stickball becomes a venue in the transmission of culture. Players are still able to play without their own pair of *kapucha*, as Chickasaw Nation Toli issued players in need a pair to use and share with other player (Figure 5.26).



Figure 5.26: *Kapucha* for *Chikasha Bak Bak* (Photo: Scott Ketchum 6/22/2014)

The phenomenon of sticks getting smaller and incorporating new materials make it easier for a person with limited experience to make the sticks in order to play the game. Some of the new materials reflective of this efficiency can be seen on the ball field and include a type of nylon tape—usually used for tennis grips—for wrapping grips on the *kapucha*.

Youth *Tolih* does not ascribe an inclusive or exclusive identity to players besides players being eligible in terms of age. Possibly health conditions may limit a player for organized play due to liability concerns. Parents sign a release form for children to be eligible. This also provides safety rules including the strict requirement of a mouthpiece. *Kapucha Tolih* is distinct from other variations stickball because the game does not have restrictive norms on touching *kapucha* established around ascribed gender role. In adult tournament play, there are gendered divisions, but youth teams include all children of eligible age. Chickasaw Nation did not limit membership to play based on tribal rolls. Rick Greenwood, and his brother Brad Greenwood, help support youth and adult players that play for one of the competitive teams for Chickasaw

Nation: a youth team *Chikasha Bak Bak* (Chickasaw Woodpeckers) and a adult team *Chikasha Toli* (Chickasaw Stickball). Local children were able to meet at established transport areas to ride down to Atoka. That was how we got here, a story worth telling.

The moment the car passed the Canadian River heading southbound it was obvious we were in for more than just a few hours of practicing stickball with the boys. We were in for an unusually spacious drive across lands dotted with barbwire fences running parallel to the road that weave across and divide land all across Chickasaw Nation. Our goal was to rendezvous in Ada with a larger group of people and the team, from which, to depart directly for Atoka. He said, "Team." I felt my throat tighten considerably. What was I going to tell my wife? I did not really give her much warning- just that I was taking the boys with me. I just knew Rick said something about all of us getting together so the boys could play stickball.

I was assured it was all right for them to play because I was their father, and I am also a Choctaw living in or near Chickasaw Nation jurisdiction. Giving little thought to what that meant, after breakfast, we got in the car and drove to the Wal-Mart parking lot around the designated time. I was asked by Rick Greenwood to sign some release forms for the boys to play. Now, I was getting a better understanding what Rick was meaning about giving permission for the boys to play. That probably should have been a tip that we were about to embark on a journey. We got in the vans provided by Chickasaw Nation and started off southbound.

Repeating what was spoken in my head, "Team, team? Wait a minute, what team in Ada?" Amy let me leave with our sons under the impression we were going to play around with stickball sticks, most likely at the park. This was technically was true,

but we were headed far from the park in town. Stopping at the Chickasaw Nation truck stop, we learned more about joining the rest of the *Chickasha Bak Baks* (woodpecker) in a youth tournament in Atoka, Oklahoma.

Upon arrival at the Choctaw Nation community center in Atoka, the scene was buzzing and alive with anticipation from coaches, players, soon-to-be players, and spectators. A ball field with two poles sits east of the community center. Rows of canopy tents cover the side of the field closest to the road and parking lot. The other side of the field has a fence running beside it with a field, small airport, and a cemetery that looks familiar from days past.

Toby points to a few people with a large assembly of boxes, who were instantly engulfed by the eager children waiting in line to get a uniform. Chickasaw Nation generously provided every player and person assisting the team and coaches with a pair of black and gold shorts and shirt with a *Chickasha Bak Bak* team logo (Figure 5.27). The shirt has an amazing rendition of a woodpecker (*Bak Bak*) looking fierce. Sparing no expense in providing quality uniforms to players, Chickasaw Nation is creating a sense of identity and unity among participating youth that is empowering them to discover and practice cultural traditions.



Figure 5.27: *Chikasha Bak Bak* uniforms in action (Photo: Scott Ketchum 6/22/2014)

The tournament played in Atoka that summer was the first time organized Choctaw and Chickasaw youth teams competed in a round robin style tourney. This is not a game played with conjurers or strict taboos to "not eat flesh of a rabbit" described by ethnologists James Mooney in his article "The Cherokee Ball Play" (Mooney 1899 reprinted Culin 575). This game is a social event for attendees and players. Choctaw and Chickasaw children have a chance to engage in an activity that brings out entire families and local community members to show support.

Choctaw Stickball is a family event as much as it a community activity. It is not uncommon to have two or three generations of players from the same family on the *hitoka* (ball field) during a game. Choctaw Principal Gary Batton writes,

> "The formation of the Choctaw Youth Stickball League is generating a lot of excitement this year. Building on the success of the men's team and the popularity of the stickball summer camps, we thought a small group of kid's practicing and competing for a few months would be a good way to teach the tradition. It is surpassing our expectations." (Biskinik "From the Desk of Assistant Gary Batton" April 2014:2 Accessed May 17, 2015).

Batton describes noticing how popular the sport had become while driving around and saw a group of children playing Stickball instead of other sports like football, baseball, or basketball (Biskinik "From the Desk of Assistant Gary Batton" April 2014:2 Accessed May 17, 2015).

The Choctaw Nation Youth Stickball celebrated their inaugural season in 2014. The first season's games were played every Saturday from February 22nd to April 15th. The first year saw four teams made up of children age 8 to 17 years of age (Choctawnation.com Accessed 3/20/2015). Sponsored by Choctaw Nation, the league is open to enrollment for both tribal and non-tribal members, as well as being open to

Native and non-Native people. Choctaw Nation provides all uniforms and gear, with the exception being a mouthpiece to be provided by the player's family. "The league is made up of four teams in locations across the Choctaw Nation: Koi-Iskitini in Talihina, Hiloha Ossi (Little Thunder) in Broken Bow, Nashoba Homma in the Hugo/Antlers area, and Osi Heli (Flying Eagles) in Durant (Choctawnation.com Accessed 3/20/2015)."

Play is essential to the social health of a community. Knowledge transmission can take place during play, and play increases the reception of that knowledge. Play is a Choctaw method of resilience. Playing Stickball produces a behavior that is affirming of culture for the purpose of continuation. Choctaw stickball provides participants with formal and informal moments to be introduced to aspects of culture. Coaches and other volunteers take moments to teach the youth players about the relationship of Choctaw culture to the game.

Most significantly, youth ball games are an opportunity to strengthen the sense of self and becoming among members while enhancing relationships and bonds of the community. Jared Tom, who coaches the youth team Ossi Heli with Ryan Spring and Ryan Impson in the Durant, says, "The main thing is getting kids active in their culture and language," continuing he says, "We want to bring it back together and keep it going. It's about teamwork, pride, and attitude." (Maxwell 2014:1)

During practice or competition, it was not uncommon to hear Choctaw words being spoken. This allows the game to be a site of resilience and healing for Choctaw culture. The ball game becomes a space to practice a culturally specific adaptive response to cultural vulnerabilities as means of recovering from adversity. Community

healing is one of the many adaptive responses intertwined within the fabric of the ball game for Choctaw people.

Stickball is inseparable from Choctaw as an expression of the essence of culture. Catching a *towa* (ball) in the air while on the run was, and still is, a difficult technique to master; learning to trap the ball between the two *kapucha* is analogous to cupping a baseball glove when making a catch. These types of comparisons are an extension of the referents coaches use to teach physical practice. They also give coaches a chance to use the game to teach Choctaw words as cultural descriptions and associations with game, which extends outward into the community. The interplay between players and observers is both culturally structured and contemporarily informed, creating an event from intergenerational contributions. The ball game extends and integrates Choctaw culture and history to participants and to observers.

There is an extra layer involved with competition when cultural preservation is intertwined into a game. Culture is continued across time through the tiniest strand of connection, which is familial lineage. There is no guarantee that this will ensure the passing of cultural knowledge with future generations. Cultural protocols still dictate how knowledge is shared in the future and with whom that knowledge will be shared. Choctaw Stickball culture is a living vessel of traditional Choctaw culture. It is happening now, but has overtones from the past. However, like all sporting activities or events that happen to model and influence one's lives—a statement perhaps only an athlete may truly experience, Choctaw stickball players often view the world through a lens informed by the game, blurring ontological lines in the meaning of terms such as practice.

The occasion to play a game is never practice it is a real event.

Much like the ethos of Choctaw athletes discussed in Blanchard's *Serious Side of Leisure* (1981), practice can be a serious endeavor as an extension of an event that is intricate to the formation of identity. A scheduled practice, an exhibition, or a tournament is approached with the same voracity for players. Like anything consuming, playing the game can become an unsustainable hunger for more. Players will drive across the state for the opportunity to get out on the field and play. Stickball generated a sustaining network through community acts of cultural resilience and through a persistence to coalesce. Choctaw Stickball has come a long way since finding a home in Oklahoma, and as long as there are hickory trees there to make *kapucha* home is where it shall remain.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Vulnerability of Holding on and The Resiliency of Letting Go

In story telling, the ending must bring the current dialogue to a close to ensure a beginning for others. Tom Mould (2004) takes an interesting approach to Choctaw language and meaning in his study on prophecy. Mould describes prophecy as something used by Choctaw people to interpret the social world by connecting the present in stories about the past that give a vision for a future. There are prophecies about what is to come next; including prophecy on climate change, but that is not the point I am making from his work. Mould describes tribal custom being a major theme in the Choctaw oral tradition saying, "Here people talk about iyi kowa, when neighbors would gather together to help a sick farmer get his crop in before the first frost." (Mould 2004:xxxii) Choctaw people will continue to adapt to climate variations as a community through *iyi kowa*, as persistence to coalescence is foundational to cultural resiliency.

This story of possible vulnerabilities to *Chahta Tolih* in a world of shifting climates is no different, but it is a story that comes with its own notable version of resilience situated in an enduring cultural practice. Rick eloquently speaks about the status of 'becoming Choctaw' as no longer constrained by historical obstacles and instead heralds the new day facing Choctaw people. Rick states,

> "Now, they have money. The little ones went to college and learned. In the 90s, it starts. You start seeing work on it—on Choctaw. It's in the process it's starting. Language is important—tells us how to live that we came from the seed of the most high. There is protocol for caring for this land. Someday creator said it will come back to us those things we can never forget. For, we go through adversity; adversity is good for us so we don't forget who we are— if make it a Choctaw thing."

The story may come to a close, but data collected for this case study lays the groundwork for further studies over the social history of Choctaw people as well as continued collaborations with stick maker throughout the southeast. This dissertation focuses on *Chahta Tolih* situated in the multilayered context of cultural resource management in the Anthropocene.

I contextualize Oklahoma stickball players through a lens focusing on both social history and contemporary practice. The social history of *Toli* contributed to this text is a lens contextualizing the multilayered implications of internal and external change on social domains. This study investigated the historical context of identity and semiotic struggles among Choctaw people over *Tolih* and the supporting social domain associated with the game. This study also contributes to dialogues on resilient practices by addressing gaps in the literature on Choctaw social relations configuration to encompass Indigenous methodological concepts concerning relations with objects. Actants matter to the people who engage in social interactions with them, as this interplay is incorporative as "a process of growth" as opposed to cultural "transcription" (Latour 2005; Ingold 2011:88).

This case study examined social assemblages that comprise and intersect to become Choctaw stickball by applying Bruno Latour's ANT. Through this application, this case study recognized the game as coming into being via a transformative relationship with surrounding ecologies. Choctaw relationships with Shagbark hickory reinforce a reciprocity becoming emergent in the development of both Chahta and living beings. This project extends ANT's theoretical basis to conceive of dimensions of the social at the level of interaction and working outward from there. From this, I

argue we must not overlook the socializing context of Choctaw stickball for participants when describing the significance of the game for Oklahoma communities. Internal and external colonization diminished the cultural role Choctaw stickball played as a healing activity of social resilience, but cultural bearers continued to develop a sustaining cultural genealogy through embodied practices of Choctaw generosity (*iyyi kowa*) (Williams and *Iti Fabvssa* 2013). This informs current understandings in academic literature concerning indigenous polities and social organization.

The significance of this research lies in its contributions towards developing Indigenous research methods, Choctaw anthropology, sociocultural anthropology, and socio-ecological research. My analogy of research collaboration being similar to the Choctaw social practice of *i'yyi kowa* posits the site of collaboration around service on community-driven concerns as opposed to knowledge-based outcomes. This approach will generate knowledge while clarifying a relational role for a researcher to a subject community. Research communities and subject communities often have different meanings ascribed to research and authority. Academics stress a degree of expertise from specialization, but subject communities are often more likely to situate researching as the site of expertise as opposed to subject matter.

The application of *i'yyi kowa* takes a social practice Choctaw people used to sustain as a community living in riparian and forested areas and expands the notion to incorporate other sites of communal work such as collaborative research. *I'yyi kowa* is Choctaw cultural resiliency in practice, as Choctaws work as a group to sustain and preserve stickball as a persistent identity. Though no longer a formalized social practice with actual days set aside for agricultural and forest work, the tradition of *i'yyi kowa* is

a practice that embodies and expresses becoming Choctaw (Williams and *Iti Fabvssa* 2013).

The practical implications of situating collaboration in frames of research are reconfigured to focus on inputs instead of disseminative outflows. This helps to protect communities from being reduced to study subjects to be examined in a multitude of theoretical frames. Dr. Beatrice Medicine (2001) spoke about her concerns for the respect extended to cultural informants and their contributions, as they are often diminished to note-takers for 'real' academics that used these source documents throughout their carriers. This project made a conscious effort to acknowledge cultural informants who informed various studies when identified, like the work of Ella Cara Deloria referenced by Dr. Medicine.

My future research agenda intends to build from work begun in this case study by collecting additional data concerning past social structure and Indigenous games. In this future research, the focus will be contributing to social knowledge on the southeastern pre-history period. This will further inform my research on the social relations produced through Choctaw *Tolih* between stick makers and hickories. The longer-term goal of this research agenda is to contribute a new volume on Indigenous games and material relations. This research will expand upon Culin's (1975) work, but it will depart to document games situated in contexts that will contribute to knowledge from the interplay of sports and social issues.

Material shifts as indices of environmental shifts, henceforth show how cultures adapt their surroundings as surroundings adapt to them. This statement is recognizable in observations of the coalescence of indigenous communities to bring back the Ball

Game in Oklahoma by the spread of stickball teams and leagues. This is not to say that this relationship has to be one driven by disrupting nature, but that cultures tend to extend and project their meanings, significance, and worldview onto the landscape. Case in point, if we look at western societies' adaptation of civilization and nation-states, we can clearly see a pattern of humans projecting their understandings of relationships with biological systems onto the landscape.

This will provide an opportunity to expand upon dimensions of cultural resilience associated with Indigenous games. I argue that persistence is exampled in the coalescence producing a *Tolih* social domain, which I contend provides a frame for investigating human adaptations that is more flexible in identifying and mapping resilient social domains when compared with continuity or stability. Persistence as a frame will inform expanded conceptualizations of Cultural Resource Management with the flexibility of incorporating stakeholders that represent a persistent identity system, which will inform policy decisions via integrating cultural perspectives on the social value of natural systems.

Knowing the past mistakes of the approaches taken by salvage anthropologists in the birth of Cultural Resource Management (CRM) is essential for Climate Science Centers to avoid replicating issues created by researchers working with indigenous communities in regards to research focused on cultural knowledge. Partnerships are essential for future successful cultural research management. How can researchers overcome the mistrust from the past? Research networks' inclusion of Indigenous Anthropology is one potential response to resolving past tensions.

Structures will reform following a stimulus-like situation that causes a breakdown of linkages. External influences occur implicating the durability of a structure. Whether a new system breaks purely with past associations that produce and reproduce shared meanings in terms of reposting cultural symbols or there is a continuation of previously structuring occasions, community members retain degrees of cultural knowledge not always expressed in generalities appealing to a universalization representations. Cultural knowledge is not always recognized in monolithic abstractions correlated to be representative of identity in academic research. The existence of these material practices or cultural actions affords recognition as a degree of resilience. In this scenario, resilience is founded upon individual actions of persistence.

The relationship of vulnerability to persistence in this frame has a lot to do with the concept of loss. This story began with the depth of loss families can face. Loss is something that is hard to deal with, even, or especially, if you do not know what it is that you have lost. Maybe in the past Choctaw people did not consider the social world and social life in this way. Choctaw people use the phrase *chi pisa li chikki* (I will see you soon) to identify relations not at a point of departure, but to identify a opportunity to see one another in the future. There was no goodbye just a promise to take up were we left off.

A divine awareness for the things that surround us can inspire vision in the landscapes that comfort us. *Leaving it on the Field* is an ethos that provides Choctaw Stickball participants an outlet to uncontrollable forces acting upon their lives. Political, economic, religious, and social changes all occurred in events surrounding the

social agents Shagbark hickory, *kapucha*, and Choctaw Stickball. Together these three agents connect as associations that produce an embodiment of Choctaw Stickball culture.

The ability to let go of the greater struggle for community authority by *Leaving it on the Field* is a victory for community resilience *Tolih* players can celebrate. My great-great grandfather Cammack Brokeshoulder made that trip as a child from Indian Territory to Mississippi to get back to a familiar way of life amongst the forests and ball fields, as opposed to facing the vulnerability of being told what his culture should mean. In honor of his action and actions of *Tolih* players in Bogue Chitto refusing to give up the things that matter and to honor things that matter like *kapucha*, I will end with these words. No, we will not let go of our things and what they mean to our families, and in the end— that is all that really matters.

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