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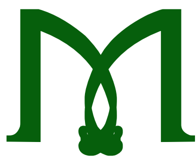

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"Let Your Women Hear Our Words:" Nanyehi's Negotiations

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Abstract

Over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Cherokee Beloved Woman Nanyehi attempted to negotiate multiple treaties with Euro-American officials on the behalf of her people. This paper, through an ethnohistorical approach that interweaves contemporaneous reports and transcriptions of her negotiations with oral histories, argues that: (i) the Cherokee and Euro-Americans held opposing worldviews, especially with regards to gender, (ii) that their conceptions of gender came to head during their negotiations and that they were a driving cause of conflict despite Nanyehi's hopes of fostering coexistence, and (iii) that Nanyehi's call for the Americans to 'let your women hear our words' resulted in the Cherokee matriculture being deemed a subversive threat by American men and subsequently motivated an explicit settler colonial mission to 'domesticate' Cherokee women. In closing, however, this paper reflects on the survivance of Cherokee women and emphasizes the resilience of the Cherokee matriculture despite oppressive forces. In doing so, this paper underscores the ongoing struggles for recognition faced by Indigenous women, offering insights into

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the broader challenges confronting Indigenous communities today.

Keywords: Indigenous Feminist Studies, Settler Colonialism, Ethnohistory, Cherokee, Matricultural Traditions

Résumé

Au cours de la fin du XVIIIe et du début du XIXe siècle, la femme bien-aimée Cherokee Nanyehi a tenté de négocier plusieurs traités avec des responsables euro-américains au nom de son peuple. Cet article, à travers une approche ethnohistorique qui tisse ensemble des rapports contemporains et des transcriptions de ses négociations avec des histoires orales, soutient que : (i) les Cherokee et les Euro-Américains avaient des visions du monde opposées, notamment en ce qui concerne le genre ; (ii) que leurs désaccords sur les conceptions du genre ont atteint leur paroxysme au cours de leurs négociations et ont été une cause majeure de conflit, malgré les espoirs de Nanyehi de favoriser la coexistence ; et (iii) que l'appel de Nanyehi aux Américains de « laisser vos femmes entendre nos paroles » a conduit à ce que la matriculture Cherokee soit considérée comme une menace subversive par les hommes américains, et a par la suite motivé une mission coloniale explicite de « domestiquer » les femmes Cherokee. Cependant, en conclusion, cet article réfléchit à la survie des femmes Cherokee et souligne la résilience de la matriculture Cherokee malgré les forces oppressives. Ce faisant, cet article souligne les luttes continues pour la reconnaissance auxquelles sont confrontées les femmes autochtones, offrant un aperçu des défis plus larges auxquels sont confrontées les communautés autochtones de nos jours.

Mots clés : Études féministes autochtones, colonialisme de peuplement, ethnohistoire, Cherokee, traditions matriculturelles

Introduction

In the heat of the summer and with the Revolutionary War raging on, a Cherokee delegation met with treaty commissioners from the newly-established United States in Tennessee during July of 1781. The Cherokee, who had fought with the British on numerous occasions against the rebellious colonists, must have been concerned about the future of their people. Since first contact in 1540, the Cherokee's way of life—their very existence even—had been under threat by Euro-American settlers. While the British themselves were not innocent of such transgressions, they had, by royal proclamation in 1763, forbade the American colonists from settling further in Indigenous lands beyond the Appalachian Mountains. However, this decree would soon become moot if the Americans won their independence. In either case, this site of negotiation proved to be just as contentious as the war—not simply because of contested lands or questions of

sovereignty, but rather due to the presence of a woman among the Cherokee and the absence of any in the American delegation. This Cherokee woman—Nanyehi—was a *Ghigau* of her people, a 'Beloved Woman,' who sought to preserve peace and find a way for both societies to coexist.[1]

When addressing the American delegation, who were apparently shocked that the Cherokee allowed a woman to speak for them, Nanyehi made an eloquent appeal: "You know that women are always looked upon as nothing; but we are your mothers; you are our sons. Our cry is all for peace; let it continue. This peace must last forever. Let your women's sons be ours; our sons be yours. Let your women hear our words."[2]

Although Nanyehi's call for peace and unity moved some of the men in the American delegation, her words, in the long run, proved to be insufficient protection; the Cherokee suffered setback after setback before their eventual removal to the West along the infamous Trail of Tears. While some could therefore read Nanyehi's negotiations as an insignificant or frivolous campaign, such an account would be remiss as this brief vignette is part of a much larger story of the Cherokee matriculture and its conflict with Euro-American settlers.

This paper seeks to explore the aforementioned conflict by asking: how did the Cherokee matriculture respond to the settler colonial ventures of Euro-Americans over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? As this is admittedly a broad question, one that is certainly beyond the scope of a single article, I intend to focus on the Cherokee's negotiations—Nanyehi's negotiations—with Euro-American treaty commissioners. These negotiations, specifically those surrounding the 1757 Treaty of

[1] Audra Simpson, a Mohawk scholar of Indigeneity and Settler Colonialism, makes the same argument with regards to Indigenous women in Canada. Simpson argues that Indigenous women like Theresa Spence and Loretta Saunders "embodied and signaled something radically different to Euro-Canadian governance" and, as such, they "had to be killed, or, at the very least subjected." See Audra Simpson, "The State Is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty," *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (2016), https://muse.jhu.edu/article/633280. Lorenzo Veracini and Lisa Ford make a similar point, though one that does not necessarily place the catalyst of eliminatory efforts solely on gendered differences. Veracini explains that settler states inherently fantasize about "cleansing the settler body politics of its (Indigenous and exogenous) alterities[;]" see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 35. Lisa Ford, meanwhile, focuses on the settler state's desire to assert "a perfect territorial sovereignty" or "perfect settler sovereignty," by categorically "purging itself of Indian lands and Indian polities;" see Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788–1836*, Harvard Historical Studies (Harvard University Press, 2010), 25. While Veracini and Ford do not explicitly address gender in their analyses; their respective arguments, when combined with feminist theories of Indigeneity and Settler Colonialism, reveal that elimination was a multifaceted phenomenon. At its most simplistic level then, this paper seeks to intervene in the aforementioned dialogue by further positing the role of gender, ensuring it does not fall to the wayside in favor of more popular modes of analysis.
[2] Margaret Jacobs, "Reproducing White Settlers and Eliminating Natives: Settler Colonialism, Gender, and Family History in the American West," *Journal of the West* 56, no. 4 (2017): 14.

Peace and Friendship, the 1781 Long Island Treaty, and the 1785 Treaty of Hopewell, are significant for a number of reasons. First and foremost, they capture the fundamental essence of the clash between the societies: the incompatibility of their worldviews. This incompatibility—between the Cherokee value of balance and the Euro-American emphasis on hierarchy—manifested itself in a variety of cultural practices, though I argue that the dueling conceptions of gender which spawned from these worldviews was one of the chief causes of animosity between the Cherokee and Euro-Americans. This is evidenced by numerous European and American sources ranging from travel narratives to personal records that consistently equate the Cherokee matriculture to a 'gynocracy' as well as several Cherokee oral histories that describe the misunderstanding and ignorance of white observers.

The Cherokee matriculture proved to be a source of constant ire for Euro-Americans. It represented an untenable Other—an inevitable obstacle to Euro-Americans in their pursuit of 'perfect settler sovereignty'—as, if the two cultures were to coexist, the Cherokee matriculture offered a realm of egalitarian possibilities to women and men that could transform Euro-American society by upending the status quo of women's political inferiority to men.[3] Through their complaints, demands and concessions, the negotiations themselves offer a relatively comprehensive view of this conflict as both sides battled over this fundamental disjuncture while attempting to find a resolution. In doing so, however, the Cherokee matriculture—through the words and actions of women like Nanyehi—became a target for Euro-American 'civilizing' efforts and the story of Cherokee women's status and cultural role therefore became one of survivance.

Before delving into this narrative though, it should be noted that the story herein told is not an isolated instance of conflict between an Indigenous matriculture and a settler state. The scholars, activists, and writers that populate the fields of Native American and Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Feminist Studies, and Settler Colonial Studies have long grappled with questions of gender and this paper is indebted to the vast amount of work that has already been compiled in the aforementioned literatures. As such, I seek to build off of and contribute to a number of analyses, though, on the most fundamental level, I aim to join the ranks of others who have sought to problematize and revise the stories that have been told of Indigenous women by the Western academy.[4]

[3] By emphasizing process here and throughout the paper, I am building on the work of Patrick Wolfe, who argued that settler colonialism should be understood as "a structure rather than an event." See Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 390.

[4] For instance, Haunai-Kay Trask, a scholar and Indigenous Hawiian activist, explained that she learned the history of her people twice; the first time from the stories her parents and relatives passed down to her, and the second time from her teachers at school who proclaimed that the Indigenous Hawiians were nothing but "lustful cannibals." See H.K. Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii (Revised Edition)*, Latitude 20 Book (University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 147–60, especially 153-154. Denise Henning, a Cherokee scholar, authored a similar chapter about educating her daughters in the ways of Cherokee women; see Denise K. Henning, "Yes, My Daughters, We Are Cherokee

In addition to being dispossessed of their historic lands, Indigenous communities have been subjected to false representations that still support settler colonial processes.[5] These representations, as Margaret Jacobs has shown, date back to the long eighteenth century and have "served as a key means of justifying the colonization of Indigenous lands" through their gendered messages.[6] For instance, and as I will demonstrate was the case for the Cherokee, Euro-American texts resolutely equated the labor practices of Indigenous women to oppression and used such representations to justify Euro-American 'civilizing' efforts. This reprehensible theme of dispossession carried through to Indigenous epistemologies, as the Cherokee, like other Indigenous peoples, were told that their ways of knowing were inferior to Euro-American standards.[7]

Wilma Mankiller, the first female principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, made this point abundantly clear when she lamented that Western historians either "inaccurately depicted" Cherokee women as "drudges or ethereal Indian princesses" or simply dismissed the existence of the Women's Council and the *Ghigau* as "merely myth" since knowledge of such practices was passed down through oral transmission as opposed to being written down.[8] Mankiller, reflecting on the hypocrisy of privileging Euro-American written accounts, argued that "an entire body of knowledge can be dismissed because it was not written, while material written by obviously biased men is readily accepted as reality."[9]

How can this narrative be ameliorated? How can we, as Mankiller herself yearned to, hear the voices of Cherokee women who have long been silenced? Regrettably, this question is not a new nor isolated one; scholars across the humanities and social sciences have long had to turn to alternative or creative strategies to access the voices of subaltern populations where little to no record of their perspectives exists. After all, as Leslie Harris succinctly argued, there is no such thing as a "perfect archive."[10] Rather, as Harris

Women," in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, ed. Joyce Green, 1st Edition (Nova Scotia & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2007).

[5] Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis, *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 19, https://archive.org/details/mankillerchiefhe00mankrich.

[6] Ibid., 20.

[7] This sentiment echoes throughout the aforementioned literatures. See, for example, Joanne Barker, ed., *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 2–3; Devon Abott Mihesuah, *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*, Contemporary Indigenous Issues (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 8; Nancy Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 1–2.

[8] Leslie Harris, "Imperfect Archives and the Historical Imagination," *The Public Historian* 36, no. 1 (2014): 79.

[9] Ibid., 80.

[10] My emphasis on quilting here is inspired in a large part by Tiya Miles who described her writing process as creating a "quilted chronicle: a chronological but oftentimes broken account of important events that stitches together historical interpretation, context, and causes." See Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of*

suggests, scholars must be willing to move beyond this idealized mirage by thinking through methodological issues with "grounded interpretation, imagination, and interdisciplinarity."[11] In the following pages, I intend to model Harris's proposition by quilting a number of fragmented sources from both Cherokee and Euro-American perspectives together in order to craft a compelling narrative.[12] The analysis I offer here is also informed, in a large part, by the ethnohistorical work of Theda Perdue, who assiduously researched the status and role of women in Cherokee society over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[13]

By listening to Cherokee women like Nanyehi wherever they can be found—mainly in contemporary accounts but also through modern oral histories—I believe that we can assemble a more complete understanding of how the Cherokee matriculture responded to the eliminatory aims of Euro-American settlers. Still, I recognize that this venture will inevitably produce an incomplete story; no degree of historical interpretation can fully rectify the silence and erasure imposed upon the Cherokee and other Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, what follows is an attempt to do just that—to tell the story of Nanyehi, her negotiations, and the aspirations of the broader Cherokee matriculture in the hopes that it will inspire subsequent iterations and bring us closer to the truth.

To briefly outline the following argument then, I begin this exposition by clarifying the difference between Cherokee and Euro-American worldviews (namely, balance for the former and hierarchy for the latter) through the lens of gender. This is specifically accomplished through a comparative reading of origin stories, primarily that of Selu for the Cherokee and Eve for Euro-Americans. After establishing the fundamental incompatibility between the two worldviews, I shift my attention to demonstrating how this theoretical difference was actualized in practice when the two cultures interfaced. This section mostly relies upon evidence garnered from a careful reading of European and Euro-American travel narratives, though the Cherokee perspective is still maintained and juxtaposed through references to Perdue's extensive ethnography. The subsequent section explores these differences in greater detail by focusing on the Cherokee negotiations with Euro-American treaty commissioners. Moreover, it sheds light on how Cherokee women like Nanyehi sought to coexist with Euro-Americans through a union of the two matricultures.

Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits (New Press, 2017), 15.
[11] Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). Nancy Shoemaker also commented on the benefits of ethnohistorical readings, noting that "under the rubric of ethnohistory, historians and anthropologists have developed creative and culturally sensitive approaches to mining the documentary record left by Euro-Americans[;]" see Shoemaker, 3.
[12] Perdue, 13. Mankiller also discusses the concept of balance, stating that the Cherokee believed that "the world existed in a precarious balance and that only right or correct actions kept it from tumbling." See Mankiller and Wallis, 20.
[13] Nanyehi is also known by her English name, Nancy Ward, but owing to her life as a Cherokee this paper will use her former name over the latter.

Unfortunately, however, I argue that this move was seen as a direct threat to Euro-American settlement and, as such, the Cherokee matriculture was deemed a subversive menace that had to be eliminated. The final section focuses on the eliminatory aims of Euro-Americans, explaining why and how Euro-Americans sought to dismantle the authority of Cherokee women. This account, therefore, ends on a bleak note with the knowledge that within the subsequent decades the Cherokee were to be forcibly moved to the West along the Trail of Tears and subjected to mandatory acculturation through a number of deplorable means. While all of this proved to be the case, the Cherokee matriculture still persisted; as the conclusion notes, the story of Cherokee women—of most Indigenous women—became one of survival and that story is still unfolding today.

Selu and Eve

In order to understand the conflict between Euro-American settlers and the Cherokee, one must start at the most fundamental level: the differences between their worldviews. As was previously mentioned, Euro-Americans often saw and explained the world through the concept of the natural order—a series of hierarchical relationships predicated on degrees of superiority and inferiority. Conversely, the Cherokee tended to view the world "as a system of categories that opposed and balanced one another" and they were beholden to maintain that balance.[14] While these worldviews manifested themselves in a variety of cultural practices, this paper is predominantly concerned about how such views influenced conceptions of gender—and expectations of other cultures.

How do we know that our historical subjects like Nanyehi or her Euro-American counterparts indeed held these sentiments? For Euro-Americans, this is a relatively straightforward task as they consistently turned towards the story of Adam and Eve in the Genesis chapter of the King James Bible. Moreover, there is a corpus of didactic literature from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries that relied on theological arguments to justify their claims of female inferiority. For the Cherokee however, this is a bit more difficult since, as Wilma Mankiller noted, "we Cherokees have differing versions of our genesis story."[15] These different versions can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the story was orally transmitted for centuries before being written down first by Wahnenauhi, a Cherokee woman, in 1889 and then subsequently by many others in successive decades. This paper will compare a number of Euro-American and Cherokee texts, despite their having different times of origin. By doing so, I am relying on the integrity of the Indigenous oral tradition. It will become clear that a continuous thread emerges in both cultures: an emphasis on hierarchy in Euro-American didactic literature and a focus on balance in Cherokee oral histories. Moreover, both sets of origin stories

[14] Quoted in Lisa L. Moore, Joanna Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton, *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[15] Mankiller and Wallis, 16.

illustrate how gender differences are conceptualized by their respective cultures and, when compared, hint at why the two cultures would argue over gender expectations.

Beginning with stories that have been told of Eve's creation, a litany of Euro-American men have written of female inferiority in their works, mainly by citing the Genesis story; one author, Sir John Pettus, focused exclusively on this concept. In his 1647 treatise *Volatiles from the History of Adam and Eve*—which was penned long after biblical documents had been written in Hebrew, translated into English and then reworked by King James—Pettus scrutinizes biblical verses and offers a much deeper explanation as to why women were apparently subservient to men. Pettus begins by describing woman's creation; he explains that "to prevent that solitariness… God did make the Woman to be the Wife or Consort to Man."[16]

While Pettus's choice to describe women as wives may seem obvious or insignificant, it speaks volumes of the expectations placed on Euro-American women – especially as compared to the Cherokee. After all, in Great Britain and her colonies, women were theoretically considered subjects, not citizens, within their marriages due to the common law doctrine of coverture. Under coverture, husbands retained their rights and liberties while "the very being or legal existence of a woman [was] suspended" upon marriage.[17] An eighteenth century treatise book, *The Lady's Law*, justifies the doctrine of coverture by reasoning that a married woman, a so-called *feme-covert*, is "under the protection or influence of her husband, her baron, or lord."[18] Since she was under his 'protection,' she did not need to retain her legal rights; she was bound to her husband much like a medieval serf to their lord and was expected to remain obedient or servile lest she incur his wrath. Pettus expands on this description:

[16] John Pettus, *Volatiles from the History of Adam and Eve Containing Many Unquestioned Truths and Allowable Notions of Several Natures...* (London, 1674), 69.
[17] *The Laws Respecting Women: As They Regard Their Natural Rights or Their Connections and Conduct in Which Their Interests and Duties as Daughters, Wards, Heiresses, Spinsters, Sisters, Wives, Widows, Mothers, Legatees, Executrixes, &c. Are Obligations of Parent and Child and the Condition of Minors. The Whole Laid down According to the Principles of the Common and Statute Law...and the Substance of the Trial of Elizabeth, Duchess Dowager of Kingston on an Indictment for Bigamy before the House of Peers, April 1776. In Four Books.*, xxiii, [11], 449 [13] (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1777), 65, Accessed May 10, 2022, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001063626. It is important to note that while Englishwomen were bound by the doctrine of coverture under common law, the necessities of daily life often overrode legal theory. Oftentimes too, women utilized other legal jurisdictions, mainly equity law, to circumvent the apparent harshness of common law. For more on this see: Matthew Cerjak, "Navigating the Courts: The Ingenuity and Resourceful Prowess of Female Litigants in Early Modern England" (University of Chicago, 2023), https://doi.org/10.6082/uchicago.7232. Still, in drawing this comparison between Euro-American and Cherokee women, I hope to demonstrate that while the former found ways to overcome obstacles like the doctrine of coverture, the latter were empowered in both personal and public relationships from the beginning.
[18] *A Treatise of Feme Coverts: Or, the Lady's Law. Containing All the Laws and Statutes Relating to Women*, ... ([London]: In the Savoy: printed by E. and R. Nutt, and R. Gosling (assigns of E. Sayer, Esq;) for B. Lintot, and sold by H. Lintot, 1732), 78.

> She is to be a meet Help, a Help meet, for him for whom she is made, & to whom she is conjoyned, and that is her duty; and to this end woman was made, to be a Help meet for him, (adjutorium) an helper, a delight and ease to Man, and that in the most meet, apt, fit, and agreeable manner.[19]

He refers to women as helpmates, mere beings whose sole purpose is to cater to the whims of their husbands. He makes it abundantly clear that the ultimate—or rather only—reason women were created was to serve the men in their lives, making them easier and more pleasant.

Later, Pettus shifts his attention to the intricacies of women's creation, expanding on his justifications for their inferiority. He refers to God putting Adam to sleep and taking one of his ribs to make Eve, writing that:

> she shall be called Woman, saith he, Because she came out of man: And this was to teach her, her original, and also how she should demeane her self towards him. It shews Mans superiority to the Woman; because that which is derived cannot be equall to that from which it was derived.[20]

Here, Pettus quotes Genesis 2:23, reasoning that a woman cannot be equal to a man because she was made from him and, therefore, not made directly in God's image and likeness. Moreover, in attempting to explain God's intention, Pettus insisted that Eve's creation from Adam's rib was to teach Eve her place as a subordinate and to ensure her behavior reflected her inferior place.

Pettus expands on this argument:

> And it is here observable, that she was not said to be created as Man, in the Image of God, or after his likeness, nor formed, nor framed; but Made, a word of a lesser signification, relating to the temperament of her body only. Nor was she made of the dust or purer part of the Earth, but of a Bone, which is the hardest, dryest, coldest, and most terrestrial part of Man, according to Physicks. Nor had she the Breath of Life breathed into her Nostrills, but that Life Eve had went with the Bone. Nor is it said she became a Living soul, her soul being as it were the same, or a Ray of his.[21]

In dissecting the details of Eve's creation, Pettus asserts her inferiority by pointing out the lexical significance of the word 'made' while describing the creation process itself as dark and joyless. His depiction suggests women were not made to compliment men, but rather that they were necessary evils, devoid of God's love.

[19] Pettus, 57.
[20] Ibid., 69.
[21] Ibid., 65.

Further, Pettus points out that God had not breathed life into Eve and that her soul was only a fraction of Adam's, meaning she was more animal than human. This illustrates her existential purpose as an object of man, much like the animals that he would hunt for sustenance or the earthly materials used for housing. Later, Pettus expands on the belief of a lack of female intellect, using Eve's consumption of the forbidden fruit as the primary justification for her subjugation. He describes her disobedience, pointing out that "when she strays from her husbands dictates (for she had none from God) we see what a curse she brought upon herself."[22] Pettus clearly blames Eve for the curse of original sin, but absolves Adam of any wrongdoing, describing him as "her tender and complying husband."[23] Through this description, Pettus begs the question of why Eve simply did not listen to Adam and God. Moreover, he uses Eve's disobedience as a warning sign, illustrating the dangers of female autonomy and agency.

In all, Pettus' work exemplifies arguments for the hierarchical structure of Euro-American societies. He describes society in terms of obedience to one's superior, for example, "from a Servant to his Master [or] from a Wife to her Husband."[24] To justify these relationships, he illustrates Man, not Woman, as God's treasured creation and places men firmly above all of God's other creations. Consequently, Pettus represents women as objects, mere helpmates whose only purpose is to serve their husbands. If a woman resists this interpretation, he labels her as 'dangerous and deserving of punishment.' Moreover, Pettus points out that by rejecting the supposed natural order, 'she shall know more sorrow then Eve' since she beckons God's wrath.[25] He declares that the greatest sin "against God and Nature is disobedience" and cautions individuals "not to be intic'd or to go out of the Limits [imposed by] either."[26]

While Euro-American authors emphasized hierarchical relationships through their creation stories, the Cherokee sought to maintain balance in theirs. This theme is continuously, albeit variously, depicted in Cherokee oral histories—from those first transcribed in the late nineteenth century to more recent renditions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Beginning in 1889, then, the first written version of a Cherokee creation story was, as mentioned earlier, authored by a *Cherokee* woman named Wahnenauhi.[27] She explained, "in telling of the Creation, the plural number 'They' is used for the Creator" and that "the story of how the world was made is this:"

[22] Ibid., 97.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 105.
[25] Ibid., 58-9.
[26] Ibid.
[27] I emphasize Wahnenauhi's Cherokee descent because some have falsely claimed that James Mooney, an American ethnographer who lived among the Cherokee in the late nineteenth century, was the first to transcribe oral histories but such a statement would be incorrect as Wahnenauhi's manuscript precedes Mooney's publication by eleven years.

> It is said, They took a turtle and covered its back with mud. This grew larger and continued to increase until it became quite a large island. They then made a man and a woman, and led them around the edge of the island. On arriving at the starting place, They planted some corn and then told the man and the woman to go around in the way they had been led, this they did; returning, they found the corn up and growing nicely. They were then told to continue the circuit; each trip consumed more time, at last the corn was ripe and ready for use. Then fire was wanted.[28]

In the first portion of the story, Wahnenauhi reveals several important details about the Cherokees' beliefs. First and foremost, she makes the point that their Creator is neither male nor female—a simple yet equally significant difference when compared to Euro-American claims about God's gender. Next, when discussing how men and women were created, Wahnenauhi makes no hierarchical distinction between the two sexes; rather, the two seem to work together to follow the Creator's instructions about growing corn. This is strikingly different to Euro-American texts, like Pettus' volume, that go to great lengths to justify female inferiority by Eve's physical creation and misdeeds in the Garden of Eden.

In the second part of the story, Wahnenauhi explains that the animals were called together to figure out who would bring fire to the humans. Interestingly, the animals that volunteer to do so—a possum, buzzard, and spider—are gendered. The possum and buzzard, both male, are sent by the Creator but fail and are burnt in the process. After their return, no other animal had the courage to make the dangerous journey until "a little spider… said, 'I will go and get fire.'"[29] This female spider then "made a little bowl of mud and placing it on her back started, spinning a thread as she traced her way over the water… on arriving at the fire, she carefully placed some coals in her cup and returned."[30]

Wahnenauhi also told another story in the same manuscript— one that touches on the gendered division of labor in Cherokee culture and continues to develop the worldview of balance. In the second story she explains that, originally, "a man and woman brought up a large family of children in comfort and plenty, with very little trouble about providing food for them."[31] Every morning the father would go out and soon return with some sort of meat while the mother also went out and returned with a sizable amount of corn. While this simple story may seem insignificant, it explained real practices, since, as Perdue explained, "men hunted because the first man had been responsible for providing

[28] Wahnenauhi, "The Wahnenauhi Manuscript: Historical Sketches of the Cherokees, Together with Some of Their Customs, Traditions, and Superstitions," ed. Jack Frederick Kilpatrick, *Bureau of American Ethnology (Smithsonian Institution)* 196, no. 77 (1966): 187, https://repository.si.edu/handle/10088/22138.
[29] Ibid., 188.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

his family with meat [and] women farmed because Selu first gave birth to corn in the storehouse."[32] Moreover, in this labor configuration, men and women both shared equal yet opposite responsibilities for procuring sustenance. Overall, both of these stories demonstrate the fact that the Cherokee did not believe that women were neither inferior nor incapable of acting on their own—a sharp contrast to their Euro-American counterparts.

A century later, in 1993, another Cherokee woman, poet and author Marilou Awiakta, retold the story of Selu and Kanati, the first Woman and first Man respectively. Similar to Eve, Selu is created to be Kanati's companion, though their relationship and interactions are markedly different from those of Adam and Eve. Awiakta begins her rendition by explaining Kanati's loneliness and boredom, which led to him overhunting animals. In response to this overhunting, the animals gather themselves into a council and ask the Creator to intervene on their behalf. The Creator does just that, creating Selu:

> [He] caused a corn plant to grow up beside [Kanati], near his heart. The stalk was tall and straight, the leaves curved and gleaming green. From the top of the stalk rose a beautiful brown, black-haired woman, the First Woman. From the top of the cornstalk she came—strong, ripe, tender. And singing... Respectfully, he asked Selu to come down and held up his hand to help her. She smiled, but signaled him to wait... Politely, Kanati waited while she reached behind her for an ear of corn... Then she gave Kanati her hand and stepped down. They went home together.[33]

Unlike Adam and Eve, Selu and Kanati are depicted as equals that balance each other. At first, Selu is created since Kanati is lonely and missing a part of himself; this imbalance causes him to overhunt but Selu's companionship fixes that. Moreover, Selu is not created from Kanati but rather from the Earth itself and by the Creator. Following her creation, the two act amicably towards each other, respecting boundaries and decisions while not asserting superiority. Awiakta offers her own interpretation of the significance surrounding Selu and Kanati's harmony by pointing out that within the story, "woman and man represent cardinal balances in nature."[34] Moreover, she asserts that the Cherokee focus on maintaining this balance in both historical and contemporary settings as well as on interpersonal and societal levels since "even a basic imbalance, a lack of respect, between genders disturbs the balance in the environment."[35] Perdue makes a similar point about the emphasis of balance, noting that it "made hierarchy, which often serves to oppress women, unattainable."[36]

[32] Perdue, 17.
[33] Marilou Awiakta, *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother's Wisdom* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Pub., 1993), 24–25.
[34] Ibid., 25.
[35] Ibid., 25-26.
[36] Perdue, 13.

Some years later in 2007, Denise Henning, a Cherokee scholar and mother, also put her version of Selu's story into print. Similar to Awiakta and Wahnenauhi, Henning's version affirms the importance of balance and harmony between Selu and Kanati while also explaining the division of labor between men and women. Henning, hoping to start at the beginning, explained that:

> Selu lived with her husband, Kanati, and two sons. Every day, she would go away from the house and return with a basket full of corn. The boys wondered where the corn came from, so they followed her one day. They saw her go into a storehouse, and they got where they could peek in and watch her. There they saw her place her basket and shake herself. The corn started falling from her body into the basket. They then thought that their mother must surely be a witch! Selu could read the boys' thoughts. She told them that after they put her to death, they would need to follow her instructions so that they would continue to have corn for nourishment.[37]

Like the previous readings, Henning's adaptation illustrates why women were responsible for farming corn and how the story of Selu influenced historic and modern conceptions of gender. She touches on the personal reason she decided to author her chapter, writing that when her daughters asked her why girls cannot dance inside the circle with men during the Gourd Dance she believed that "the time had come to ensure that the teachings of the women who had gone before me were passed on to my daughters."[38] She explains that her daughters "needed to learn about the roles of Cherokee women, our place, where we fit within our society and our worldview."[39] Henning's reasoning here is dually significant: on one hand it demonstrates the survivance of such stories in spite of the eliminatory aims of Euro-Americans colonizers and, on the other, it is indicative of Cherokee oral tradition.. After all, it seems fair to say that Henning's justification here is illustrative of Cherokee women more broadly; Nanyehi and other Cherokee girls must have heard similar stories from their clan mothers growing up to learn about their responsibilities as women in Cherokee society. In any case, the fundamental worldviews of Euro-Americans and the Cherokee are clear; what follows is an exploration of how these views were actualized and contributed to the development of a discourse between the two societies.

The Cherokee Matriculture through the Eyes of White Men

Throughout the eighteenth century, a variety of settlers, missionaries, and explorers interacted with Cherokee communities, documenting their reactions and experiences

[37] Henning, 187-88.
[38] Henning, 187.
[39] Ibid.

regarding the matrilineal system. Their biased perspectives, especially flawed if considered as authentic sources of Cherokee life, still prove to be quite valuable as they reflect the attitudes and misconceptions of Euro-Americans quite broadly. As Perdue pointed out, these male authors were largely shut out of the private lives of Cherokee women and often focused on the perspectives of men even when they had the opportunity to interact with women.[40] Still, as Cherokee women were often very vocal in public, the authors were able to witness and document many practices, traditions, and conflicts, etc. While these male authors commented on a number of cultural practices, this paper is primarily concerned with their testimony on labor and familial dynamics as well as women's power in public - areas in which Cherokee women demonstrated significant authority much to the confusion, disgust, and angst of white observers.

Among the Euro-American individuals who interacted with the Cherokee and documented their experiences, most were taken aback by differences in the gendered division of labor as Cherokee women farmed and men hunted. These observers often recounted their initial shock when they noticed women were *solely* responsible for farming—a task which, in their culture, was considered to be the responsibility of men (though women often assisted).[41] This attitude is perhaps best demonstrated through the writing of Bernard Romans, a Dutch explorer who encountered the Cherokee while traveling through parts of the southern colonies in the eighteenth century. He described the Cherokee agricultural system, lambasting the male "savages" for their "most determined resolution against labouring or tilling the ground" while pointing out that "the slave his wife must do [it.]"[42]

While Romans may have initially seemed concerned for the women, equating their situation to slavery, he quickly proves otherwise by referring to them as a "she savage[s]."[43] Instead of espousing concern for women, Romans seems occupied with illustrating the Cherokee as uncivilized, as one page later, he asserts that "a savage man discharges his urine in a sitting posture, and a savage woman standing," adding that "I need not tell how opposite this is to our common practice."[44] While Romans clearly held little regard for the Cherokee, his analysis illustrates a common theme among white observers: the inability to look beyond the supposed backwardness of Indigenous peoples - especially when they acted contrary to the gendered expectations of European colonizers.

The alleged underdevelopment of the Cherokee continued to perplex some white observers like Gilbert Stuart, a traveling Scottish historian and writer. Stuart, who

[40] Perdue, 4–6.
[41] Alice Kessler-Harris, "Household Labor," in *Women Have Always Worked*, A Concise History (University of Illinois Press, 2018), 21–60.
[42] Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida* (Pelican Publishing, 1776), 41.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 42.

described the 'issue' in gendered terms, explained that Cherokee women were "the chief, if not the only manufacturers."[45] Moreover, Stuart explained that "the [Cherokee] men judge that if they performed that office, it would exceedingly disgrace them."[46] Although Stuart chose to not expand on this point, he unknowingly touched on the Cherokee's worldview of balance. As Awiakta previously explained, the Cherokee division of labor—like every other aspect of their culture—revolved around maintaining the balance of nature.[47] Other white observers, like Daniel Butrick, however, picked up on the dichotomous relationship between Cherokee men and women and described Cherokee labor practices in a more accurate way:

> But though custom attached the heaviest part of the labour to the women, yet they were cheerful and voluntary in performing it. What others may have discovered among the Indians I cannot tell, but though I have been about nineteen years among the Cherokee, I have perceived nothing of that slavish, servile fear on the part of women, so often spoken of.[48]

Butrick, a missionary who lived among the Cherokee for thirty-three years, understood their division of labor and pointed out that women themselves did not feel oppressed within it. Unlike the writers who preceded him, and even most of his successors, Butrick was able to make an informed conclusion after actually interacting with Cherokee women over his lifetime among them. Unfortunately though, Butrick proved to be an exception; other Euro-American men continued down their path of ignorance and disbelief—one that perpetuated false and antagonistic representations of the Cherokee matriculture.

While many Euro-American observers were preoccupied with lambasting the Cherokee's division of labor, others sought to criticize their marriage practices. A telling example is provided by John Lawson, an English surveyor and explorer, who authored a travel narrative titled *A New Voyage to Carolina* in 1709. This book, the product of his eight-year expedition to explore the Carolinian interior, described a number of interactions with Indigenous peoples. Of these interactions, Lawson detailed many encounters with the Cherokee and overwhelmingly depicted them through an unsavory light, most obviously by referring to them and other Indigenous peoples as "savages" nearly seventy times.[49] Later, Lawson goes into greater detail and specifically describes Cherokee women as "of a

[45] Awiakta, 25.
[46] Gilbert Stuart, *A View of Society in Europe in Its Progress from Rudeness to Refinement: Or, Inquiries Concerning the History of Law, Government, and Manners* (Edinburgh: Printed for John Bell and J. Murray, 1778), 173.
[47] Ibid.
[48] John Howard Payne and Daniel Sabin Butrick, *The Payne-Butrick Papers*, ed. William Anderson, Jane Brown, and Anne Rogers (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 21–22.
[49] John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina; Containing the Exact Description and Natural History of That Country: Together with the Present State Thereof. And A Journal of a Thousand Miles, Travel'd Thro' Several Nations of Indians. Giving a Particular Account of Their Customs, Manners, &c.:* (London, 1709), https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/lawson/lawson.html.

very hale Constitution; their Breaths are as sweet as the Air they breathe in," insisting that "they were design'd rather for the Bed then Bondage."[50]

Beyond his sexual objectification of women, Lawson described Cherokee customs focusing on marriage and its implications. First, he attempted to explain Cherokee courting procedures, pointing out that a marriage proposal is considered by both the woman and her parents. Apparently disappointed by this, he noted that "these Savages never give their Children in Marriage, without their own Consent."[51] Lawson continues on this line of inquiry, disparaging the equality espoused in Cherokee marriage by asserting that "the Marriages of these Indians are no farther binding, than the Man and Woman agree together… either of them has Liberty to leave the other, upon any frivolous Excuse they can make."[52] This, of course, sharply contrasted an English marriage, in which a wife was considered the subject of her husband and her options for divorce were severely limited even in cases of physical and/or psychological abuse. Still, Lawson goes on to air his greatest grievance against the Cherokee matriculture:

> But one great Misfortune which oftentimes attends those that converse with these Savage Women, is, that they get Children by them, which are seldom educated any otherwise than in a State of Infidelity; for it is a certain Rule and Custom, amongst all the Savages of America, that I was ever acquainted withal, to let the Children always fall to the Woman's Lot; for it often happens, that two Indians that have liv'd together, as Man and Wife, in which Time they have had several Children; if they part, and another Man possesses her, all the Children go along with the Mother, and none with the Father. And therefore, on this Score, it ever seems impossible for the Christians to get their Children (which they have by these Indian Women) away from them; whereby they might bring them up in the Knowledge of the Christian Principles.[53]

Here, Lawson completely overlooks or disregards the matrilineal system of the Cherokee. He attributes their matrilineal kinship to "a certain Rule and Custom," not paying any attention to the significance it holds for the Cherokee.[54] Instead, he focuses on its impact for the Euro-American men that have children with Cherokee women, pointing out the supposed injustice the white men face. Moreover, Lawson claims that it is not only the men who suffer, but also the children themselves since they will not be brought up according to the Christian faith.

Perhaps the most offensive aspect of Cherokee life for white male observers was the power women wielded. While authors like Lawson voiced their disgust with regards to the

[50] Ibid., 188.
[51] Ibid., 186.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 185.
[54] Ibid.

interfamilial power of Cherokee women, they also made similar comments about their political acts as well. Many Euro-Americans, such as the Puritans and other Protestant sects, cited 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 to justify this political oppression.[55] Therefore, when these men encountered Cherokee women who acted contrary to their expectations, they deemed the women's behavior an affront to the so-called natural order. For instance, a North Carolinian trader named Alexander Long described a scene in which a Cherokee woman beat her husband, explaining that "the man will not resist their power if the woman was to beat his brains out."[56] Later, he concluded that "the women rules the roost and wears the breeches."[57] Long's metaphor, interestingly akin to the modern metaphor of 'wearing the pants,' illustrates his opinion, and that of Euro-American men quite broadly, that the Cherokee matriculture was a joke. Like his intellectual successor Bernard Romans, Long portrayed Cherokee men as uncivilized and weak since they allowed women to dominate their lives.

Other white observers, like the Irishman-trader James Adair, noted that "the Cheerake... have been a considerable while under petticoat-government, and allow their women full liberty to plant their brows with horns as oft as they please, without fear of punishment."[58] Here, like Long, Adair facetiously labels the Cherokee matriculture, this time as a "petticoat-government." In doing so, both he and Adair mockingly contrast the status of Cherokee women to her white counterpart, the helpmate. They equate the matriarch to the 'impervious woman' often found in Euro-American literature, suggesting that the Cherokee man is uncivilized since he has not yet "awakened to assert his right."[59] At this point though, their rhetoric does not move beyond just that—classifying the Cherokee as perverse, uncivilized, etc. It would take the 'subversive' alternative to the Euro-America's gender hierarchy offered by the Cherokee matriculture to change that.

The Cherokee Negotiations

While there are a multitude of documents illustrating Euro-American perspectives of the Cherokee matriculture, the same cannot be said of the inverse. As such, the majority of accounts that describe the Cherokee view of Euro-Americans come from records of their negotiations on warfare, peacemaking, and trade. These records reveal the same initial confusion that the Euro-Americans faced, though contrary in nature. For instance, while men like Adair or Romans were surprised to see women in positions of power, the

[55] The verse reads: "*Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law*."
[56] Alexander Long, "A Small Postscript on the Ways and Maners of the Nashon of Indians Called Charikees, the Contents of the Whole Soe That You May Find Everything by the Peages" (1725), 30, http://www.rla.unc.edu/Publications/NCArch/SIS_21.pdf.
[57] Ibid.
[58] J. Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (E. & C. Dilly, 1775), 145–46.
[59] Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling* (Oxford: Printed at the Theater, 1673), 200.

Cherokee were equally surprised to note the absence of white women. This dissimilarity, one that boils down to the incompatibility between each side's conceptions of gender, is conspicuous through the negotiations in which both societies attempted to discern how they would interact despite their obvious differences. Although there are numerous treaties and negotiations between the Cherokee, British, and later Americans, this paper is specifically concerned with the 1757 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the 1781 Long Island Treaty, and the 1785 Treaty of Hopewell. Throughout the negotiation processes, the Cherokee hoped to stave off the encroaching Euro-American settlers and peacefully co-exist. While they may have been successful by some measures, especially at first, this paper seeks to use the negotiations as a means to understand how and why the Cherokee matriculture was deemed a threat as well as to contextualize the subsequent political decline of the Cherokee women.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Cherokee and Euro-American settlers had been engaged in skirmishes over land ownership and sovereignty, regularly taking each other's lives in cycles of reciprocal violence.[60] In 1757 though, Attakullakulla, the principal speaker of the Cherokee delegation, met in Charlestown with the South Carolinian council hoping to put an end to bloodshed.[61] Upon his arrival, Attakullakulla was surprised by something; he asked the council, "since the white man as well as the red was born of woman, did not the white man admit women to their councils?"[62] After all, within the Cherokee's culture, men and women solved their conflicts alongside each other and he had expected the same to be said of the Euro-Americans. The council, and specifically Governor William Henry Lyttelton, was allegedly taken aback by Attakullakulla's question, as Euro-American women were certainly not expected to speak on the behalf of the citizenry. Still, Lyttelton was pressed for a response, one that took several days to ponder. He later replied to Attakullakulla, assuring him that "the white men do place confidence in their women and

[60] For details on Cherokee conceptions of justice see Perdue; Rennard Strickland, *Fire and the Spirits: Cherokee Law from Clan to Court* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 10–35. Lisa Ford, in her account of the conflict between the state of Georgia and the Cherokee, also explores the contestation of legal jurisdictions between the aforementioned societies; see Ford, especially chapters one to five.

[61] The historical record often refers to Attakullakulla in a variety of different spellings and names; for instance he is named as Atagulkalu, Attacullaculla, 'Little Carpenter,' and 'Leaning Wood.' Virginia Carney argues that his name should be spelled as Atagulkalu, which is better translated as 'Leaning Wood.' See Virginia Carney, "'Women Is the Mother of All' : Nanye'hi and Kitteuha: War Women of the Cherokees," in *Native American Speakers of the Eastern Woodlands*, ed. Barbara Alice Mann (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2001). However, more recent scholarship, like Kelly Wisecup's monograph on Indigenous complications, spells Attakullakulla's name as such and so this paper will follow suit; see Kelly Wisecup, *Assembled for Use: Indigenous Compilation and the Archives of Early Native American Literatures*, The Henry Roe Cloud Series on American Indians and Modernity (Yale University Press, 2021).

[62] Quoted in David H. Corkran, *The Cherokee Frontier: Conflict and Survival, 1740–62*, The Cherokee Frontier: Conflict and Survival, 1740-62 (University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 110. Corkran cites the South Carolina Council Journals, specifically entries from February 1, 2, 9, 12, and 17 of 1757.

share their councils with them when they know their hearts are good."[63] While this lackluster response may have been accepted at face value, contemporary Cherokee scholars like Marilou Awiakta suggest that Attakullakulla's question and Lyttelton's response hold a deeper, implicit significance. Awiakta, for instance, argues:

> To the Cherokee, however, reverence for women/Mother Earth/life/spirit is interconnected. Irreverence for one is likely to mean irreverence for all. Implicit in their chief's question, "Where are your women?" the Cherokee hear, "Where is your balance? What is your intent?" They see that the balance is absent and are wary of the white men's motives. They intuit the mentality of destruction.[64]

Although the Cherokee may have felt uneasy with Lyttelton, and the Euro-Americans in general, they continued their negotiations, eventually concluding that there would be "firm peace and friendship between all His Majesty's subjects of this province and the nation of Indians called the Cherokees."[65] Though they had struck a deal this time, Attakullakulla's negotiations had shed light on the role of women within the Euro-American society, offering the Cherokee a glimpse into their disregard for balance.

In subsequent decades, other Cherokee negotiators took Attakullakulla's position in dealing with the Euro-Americans. One prominent leader, Nanyehi, Attakullakulla's maternal niece, took the forefront. Nanyehi had emerged as an influential woman early in her life; she had been awarded the title of War Woman or *Ghigau* after avenging her husband's death in battle and leading her fellow warriors to victory against the Creek.[66] Later, given her increased status, Nanyehi became particularly involved within the political world of the Cherokee. Her status as a *Ghigau* provided her with a seat alongside war and peace chiefs at Chota, the de facto capital or mother town' of the Cherokee.[67] Nanyehi also headed the Women's Council of Clan Representatives, one of the two main bodies that governed the Cherokee Nation, and could vote within the other, the Cherokee General Council.[68] With her political influence, Nanyehi continued the work of her uncle by seeking a peaceful co-existence with the ever-encroaching settlers.

[63] Ibid., 111.
[64] Marilou Awiakta, "Amazons in Appalachia," *Sinister Wisdom* A Gathering of Spirit, no. North American Indian Women's Issue (1983): 114.
[65] Issac Kimber and Edward Kimber, eds., *London Magazine, or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*, vol. 29 (London, 1760), 144–45, https://www.google.com/books/edition/_/-NQWtwEACAAJ?hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwig1oDhgJr3AhWJVt8KHffZAusQre8FegQICxAI.
[66] Margaret Supplee Smith and Emily Herring Wilson, "Nanye'hi/Nancy Ward," in *North Carolina Women: Making History* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 16–17.
[67] Gerald F. Schroedl, "Chota," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia* (Tennessee Historical Society, October 8, 2017), http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/chota/.
[68] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Nancy Ward" (Encyclopedia Britannica, January 1, 2022), https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nancy-Ward.

At first, the Euro-Americans recognized the influence of the *Ghigau*; one of these observers, Henry Timberlake, pointed out that "many of the Indian women, [are] as famous in war, as powerful in the council."[69] This recognition offered Nanyehi some respect in the eyes of Euro-Americans, though she was likely just considered an 'extraordinary woman,' a term used to classify woman who supposedly acted beyond their sex (i.e. displaying so-called masculine qualities such as bravery or courage).[70] In any case though, Nanyehi used experience from both of her marriages - the first to a Cherokee and the latter to a white man - to bring the Cherokee and Euro-American settlers together during her speeches. As Perdue argues, Nanyehi believed "peace could be sustained… only if the Cherokees and their enemies became one people bound by the ties of kinship."[71] On 26 July 1781, she spoke to this end at the Long Island Treaty negotiations in Eastern Tennessee, one of the many peace processes that sought to settle land disputes between the Cherokee and Euro-Americans, addressing the United States commissioners:

> You know that women are always looked upon as nothing; but we are your mothers; you are our sons. Our cry is all for peace; let it continue. This peace must last forever. Let your women's sons be ours; our sons are yours. Let your women hear our words.[72]

Here, Nanyehi directly calls out the Euro-Americans for their treatment of women, asserting that they are "looked upon as nothing" when they should be respected as mothers.[73] Concurrently, she asserts that the Cherokee and Euro-Americans should be considered one people, unified by the ways of their women, their mothers. Nanyehi's rhetoric seemed effective at first; the leader of the American delegation, Colonel William Christian, apparently moved by her speech, answered: "Mothers, we have listened well to your talk… Our women shall hear your words… We will not quarrel with you, because you are our mothers."[74] While Colonel Chirstian's response certainly would have impressed Nanyehi, he did not have the capacity to alter his society's viewpoint. He could not alter the supposedly divine order that made women helpmates or placed them under the

[69] Henry Timberlake and D.H. King, *The Memoirs of Lt. Henry Timberlake: The Story of a Soldier, Adventurer, and Emissary to the Cherokees, 1756-1765*, Distributed for the Museum of the Cherokee Indian Series (Museum of the Cherokee Indian Press, 2007), 36, https://books.google.com/books?id=vHr-cf5j0AEC.
[70] Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, New Approaches to European History (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 328.
[71] Perdue, 101.
[72] Quoted in Moore, Brooks, and Wigginton, 180, The authors explain this speech is located in the *Report of Proceedings of a Commission Appointed by General Nathaneal Green on 26 February 1781 to Conduct Talks with the Cherokees*, Nathaneal Greene Papers, 1775-1785, folder 5, Library of Congress.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Quoted in Carney, 134. Also see the above chapter for an excellent rhetorical analysis of Nanyehi's speeches.

subjugation of their husbands, much like the Americans hoped to do with the Cherokee. Moreover, his words clearly did little to stop the conflict since, only four years later, Nanyehi had to speak again.

At the Hopewell negotiations of 1785, Cherokee leaders sought to address the fabricated claims and subsequent illegal seizure of Cherokee land by the United States. Simultaneously, Nanyehi hoped to continue advocating for peace, again by connecting women from both sides. Nanyehi almost did not have the opportunity to do so; the United States commissioners had no interest in hearing her testimony this time, instead electing to finalize the talks despite the objections of the Cherokee men. Fortunately for Nanyehi, "prominent Cherokee men refused to continue… until Cherokee tradition was honored and the voice of their Beloved Woman was heard."[75] As such, Nanyehi spoke directly to the commissioners:

> I am fond of hearing that there is a peace, and I hope you have now taken us by the hand in real friendship. I have a pipe and a little tobacco to give the commissioners to smoke in friendship. I look on you and the red people as my children… I am old, but I hope yet to bear children, who will grow up and people our nation, as we are now to be under the protection of Congress, and shall have no more disturbance. The talk I have given is from the young warriors I have raised in my town, as well as myself. They rejoice that we have peace, and we hope the chain of friendship will never more be broke.[76]

Once more, Nanyehi conjures up the image of unity through motherhood, this time through common children. Again though, this is predicated upon the belief that white women would be able to advocate for the same unity amongst their own children, an act much easier said than done. Still, Nanyehi remained hopeful that peace had actually been achieved although it had come at a large cost; the Cherokee had ceded even more land in exchange from another promise of protection from the American government.[77] In reality though, it had not. The Cherokee would be forcibly evicted from their land and forced to migrate west only a few decades later in the infamous Trail of Tears.

The Cherokee Matriculture's 'Threat' and Turn Towards Survivance

The Cherokee negotiations of the eighteenth century acted as a turning point in the cultural conflict that had been ongoing since the Cherokees' first interactions with Euro-Americans. While the journals of earlier observers like Henry Timberlake and Bernard Romans hinted at an inevitable conflict, these negotiations illustrated the direct ideological confrontation between the two opposing cultures. The Euro-American

[75] Ibid., 126.
[76] Ibid., 127.
[77] Ibid.

patriarchy had concluded that the Cherokee matriculture was a threat, a subversion by which white women could have stepped firmly into the political world. Nanyehi directly advocated for this; in fact, it was her mission to unite the Euro-Americans and Cherokee by engaging with their women. Unfortunately for her though, this was an impossible task. She may have been able to convince some men, like Colonel Christian, but she was by no means capable of enacting wide reaching social change, especially that expeditiously, and in a culture that was not hers. Moreover, the Euro-Americans had already been suspicious of the 'corrupting' influence of the Cherokee matriculture.

This suspicion manifested during the negotiations themselves; one of the points of contention revolved around the practice of Cherokee women adopting captives into their families. These captives were often freed in the resulting treaties—yet many chose to remain among the Cherokee. Christina Snyder, a historian of colonialism, race, and slavery, focused on this trend in her recent monograph, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America*. Snyder discusses the process behind the 'adoptions,' explaining that after a symbolic purging in which captives shed their Euro-American identity by taking Cherokee clothing, jewelry, etc., they would be raised and treated as if they were fellow kin.[78] Although the historical record contains many of such stories, one, described by Henry Timberlake, stands out. Timberlake recalls the story of a woman who refused to return after being freed by one of the aforementioned treaties, writing that "among those prisoners... was also a woman whose husband had been murdered and who had afterward married his murderer. The Indian, though reluctant, was disposed to comply with the terms of the treaty, but she absolutely refused to return with her countrymen."[79] Tom Hatley, a historian of colonial North America, wrote of this woman, arguing that her "betrayal in marrying her husband's killer was both familial and cultural... she had turned her back not only on her husband's memory but also on her society."[80]

This sentiment - the belief that the Cherokee and other Indigenous peoples were capable of converting educated, pious, and/or 'civilized' women to their 'savage' ways - was rife throughout the colonies and demonstrated through the captivity narratives of adoptees. These stories, authored by individuals who had been captured and lived among Indigenous peoples, like the Cherokee, offered Euro-Americans an unparalleled perspective from which they could view what native life for women was like.[81] After all,

[78] Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 105–7; see also Jennifer D. McDaid, "'Into a Strange Land': Women Captives among the Indians" (Williamsburg, VA, College of William and Mary, 1990), https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4581&context=etd.
[79] Timberlake and King, 115.
[80] Tom Hatley, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Era of Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 149.
[81] Despite these stories often being considered autobiographies, narratives that were written by women were often heavily edited by men who sought to portray female captivity through the lens of religion, an internal battle between civilization and 'savagery,' good versus evil. See Kathryn O'Hara, "Female

through the aforementioned adoption process that contemporary scholars like Christina Snyder have described, these women took on Indigenous identities and were considered kin within their native communities. Therefore, their lived experiences go far beyond the descriptions of eighteenth-century male observers, such as Bernard Romans or Gilbert Stuart, by depicting the aforementioned freedoms women practiced whilst living in Indigenous communities. Some of these narratives, like that of Susannah Willard Johnson, even went as far as contrasting their experiences among Indigenous peoples with their lives in colonial or Euro-American society. In her narrative, Johnson points out that:

> In justice to the Indians, I ought to remark, that they never treated me with cruelty to a wanton degree; few people have survived a situation like mine, and few have fallen into the hands of savages disposed to more lenity and patience. Modesty has ever been a characteristic of every savage tribe; a truth which my whole family will join to corroborate, to the extent of their knowledge. As they are aptly called the children of nature, those who have profited by refinement and education, ought to abate part of the prejudice, which prompts them to look with an eye of censure on this untutored race. Can it be said of civilized conquerors, that they, in the main, are willing to share with their prisoners, the last ration of food, when famine stares them in the face? Do they ever adopt an enemy, and salute him by the tender name of brother? And I am justified in doubting, whether if I had fallen into the hands of French soldiery, so much assiduity would have been shewn to preserve my life.[82]

Here, Jonson argues that despite their appearances, her adoptive family acted more civilized than Euro-Americans. In doing so, she illustrates a life in which women are treated better by the so-called 'savages' than members of their own society, therefore indirectly illustrating a sort of role-reversal in which Euro-Americans are the actual savages.

Other narratives, such as Mary Jemison's, further this end. Jemison herself had been captured, and adopted, at a young age and proceeded to live among her new kin for the rest of her life. In her narrative, Jemison recalled the moment she had been granted freedom to leave her adoptive family; she had contemplated leaving but reasoned that even if she found her white relatives they would "treat [Jemison and her Indian children] as enemies."[83] Jemison's account further contrasts Indigenous peoples and Euro-

Captivity Narratives in Colonial America," *The Gettysburg Historical Journal* 8 (2009): 33–52.

[82] *A Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Johnson*, Indian Captivities Series (H.R. Huntting Company, 1907), 76–77, https://books.google.com/books?id=UbbVAAAAMAAJ.

[83] J.E. Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison, 1824*, Garland Library of Narratives of North American Indian Captivities (Garland Pub., 1824), 95, https://books.google.com/books?id=zJDQHFtA5zsC.

Americans; her adoptive kin, the alleged ‘savages’ of captivity narratives, treat her better than her biological family.

Other testimony - for instance from Benjamin Franklin - attests to the influence Indigenous societies had on adoptees. In a 1753 letter to Peter Collinson, a fellow Quaker and intellectual, Franklin argued that:

> When white persons of either sex have been taken prisoners young by the Indians, and lived a while among them, tho’ ransomed by their Friends, and treated with all imaginable tenderness to prevail with them to stay among the English, yet in a Short time they become disgusted with our manner of life, and the care and pains that are necessary to support it, and take the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them.[84]

Franklin acknowledges the fact that many adoptees who had the option to return to Euro-American society chose not to even after numerous attempts at convincing them to stay. In effect, they had become just like the ‘savages,’ returning to their home in “the Woods” instead of ‘civilization.’[85] This act clearly concerned Franklin and other Euro-Americans who believed that Indigenous peoples had effectively stolen and converted their women and children. This viewpoint is further demonstrated in the artwork of Benjamin West, a well-known British-American artist during the late eighteenth century who went on to be patronized by King George III. In one of his early prints, West depicts a scene (Figure 1) in which Indigenous people return children and other captives to British forces following treaty negotiations.

[84] Benjamin Franklin, “From Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson, 9 May 1753,” May 9, 1753, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0173.
[85] Ibid.

Figure 1: Canot, Pierre Charles, Engraver, and Benjamin West. The Indians delivering up the English captives to Colonel Bouquet near his camp at the forks of Muskingum in North America in Novr./ B. West invt. ; Canot sculp. , 1766. [Philadelphia: William Smith]

In the foreground of the print, West depicts a young, white child who appears to be grabbing an Indigenous woman, likely the child's adoptive mother, while she attempts to push him towards the British officers. Simultaneously, the officers themselves seem upset and confused as the children do not run into their arms; the rescuers are portrayed more as captors-to-be.

In all, Indigenous communities like the Cherokee offered an alternative to Euro-American women. Many of the women who were able to experience its freedom chose not to return. These women, especially their stories, posed a direct threat to the status quo of the Euro-American patriarchy. As such, in the eyes of Euro-American men, the system that turned their wives or daughters into 'savages' could not be allowed to continue.

The 'corrupting' influence of the Cherokee and other Indigenous communities acted as a justification for the 'civilizing' efforts of the United States during the nineteenth century. As settlers continued seizing Cherokee land, an obvious question arose: what do we do with the Cherokee themselves? Although a multitude of voices shouted out answers, one interesting letter from an anonymous 'gentleman of Virginia' to Robert Walsh, dated 1 June 1817, directly addressed the Cherokee matriculture.[86] The gentleman began his tirade, explaining his objective:

> In order to reform them, we must know what reformation is needed. I act the part of a candid, though not of a flattering physician, when I suggest that much, nay, that almost everything yet remains to be done… Civilization relates more to the moral qualities of *man*, and to *his* social institutions.[87]

He portrays himself as a doctor, one that seeks to excise the problematic or 'uncivilized' aspects of the Cherokee (in his eyes nearly all of it). This gentleman specifically takes aim at the Cherokee matriculture, plainly pointing out that civilization is about men, not women. To cure this 'disease', the author proposes a variety of solutions, beginning with the institution of the Euro-American "order of nature."[88] He expands, arguing that "the first personal relation in the order of nature, and the nearest which individuals can have, is that of husband and wife." In his view, the Cherokee lack just that.[89] Instead of husband and wife, the gentleman explains that the "word in their language nearest to *husband* is aus-te-kee—(the man who lives with me)" and that this role is often occupied by multiple men.[90] As a result of this, he claims fathers do not know who their children are, meaning the "order of duties [that] connect[s] individuals, and families, and nations, and

[86] Anonymous, "Reflections on the Institutions of the Cherokee Indians," *The Analectic Magazine*, 1818, 36, https://books.google.com/books?id=U5REAQAAIAAJ&dq=%22the+property+of+husband+and+wife%22+AND+%22is+as+distinct+as%22&source=gbs_navlinks_s.
[87] Ibid., 46; emphasis added.
[88] Ibid., 51.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid., 45.

generations" does not exist.[91] After detailing all of the perceived flaws of Cherokee marriage, the author asserts that all of this (the matrilineal kinship system) should be replaced with a "reformation [that] institut[es] marriage as a solemn and inviolable compact."[92] Should principles outlined by the anonymous gentleman of Virginia be pursued through legislation and practice, the Cherokee matriculture would be quelled and rendered ineffectual. The cosmic balance they sought to uphold would be replaced with a natural order that categorized women as subsidiary beings, ones whose ultimate, and arguably only, purpose would be to serve men. The 'gentleman' author concluded his letter by explaining that the eventual "euthanasias of the Cherokees… will be to lose every characteristic which distinguishes them from the European race," especially their matriculture, in order "to be incorporated into the American republic."[93]

Only nine years later, in 1826, a letter from John Ridge, a Cherokee educated in a mission school in Cornwall, Connecticut, to the Honorable Albert Gallatin described the "success of civilizing the Cherokee." Within it, Ridge, who was later executed for treason against the Cherokee, explained the 'civilization process,' dating back to the United States' initial governmental plan in 1795.[94] He begins by recalling the arrival of Christian missionaries, as well as Col. Silas Dinsmore who "was appointed to the Agency of the Nation by Gen. Washington" and "laboured indefatigably to induce the Indians to lead a domestic life by distributing hoes and ploughs among the men, and cotton cards, spinning wheels and looms to the women."[95] Ridge refers to the United States' intent to *domesticate* the Cherokee and other Indigenous peoples, that is, to make them fall into place within the hierarchical structure of Euro-American society and its gendered-division of labor in which women were largely confined to household duties like spinning cotton.[96] He goes on to address this shift in ideology directly, pointing out that "the females were the first who

[91] Ibid., 51.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 55.
[94] John Ridge, along with a small contingent of Cherokee men, signed the Treaty of New Echota in 1835 despite not being legally authorized to do so. The treaty relinquished all Cherokee land east of the Mississippi in exchange for land in the "Indian Territory," modern day Oklahoma, as well as monetary compensation and other benefits and acted as the legal justification for Cherokee removal and the Trail of Tears. The Cherokee principle chief, John Ross, attempted to object to the treaty and gathered the signatures of about 16,000 Cherokee protesting the treaty but the Senate ultimately ratified the treaty. As such, many Cherokees considered Ridge to be a traitor and, in 1839, a large group hunted him down and summarily executed him for treason.
[95] John Ridge, "Success of the 'Civilizing' Project Among the Cherokee," March 10, 1826, https://www.teachushistory.org/indian-removal/resources/success-civilizing-project-among-cherokee; George Washington, "From George Washington to the Commissioners to the Southern Indians," August 29, 1789, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-03-02-0326.
[96] Henry Knox, "To George Washington from Henry Knox," July 7, 1789, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-03-02-0067. This plan is discussed primarily between George Washington, the President, Henry Knox, the Secretary of War, and Thomas Jefferson, the Secretary of State and is evidenced through their correspondence, available through the Founders Online portal of the National Archives.

were induced to undertake domestic manufactures, and they are still *confined* to them."[97] Later, Ridge expands on the changing role of women:

> Justice is due to the females of the poorer class of whom I now speak. Duties assigned them by nature as Mothers or Wives are well attended to [as far as they are able & improved] and cheerfully do they prepare our meals, & for the family they sew, they spin and weave and are in fact a valuable portion of our citizens.[98]

Ridge refers back to Pettus' comment, viz the Euro-American ideology, that a woman's natural role was that of a helpmate, a woman who embraces her role as the servant of her husband and *his* family. In doing so, he signals support for the erosion of the matrilineal kinship system. When describing the shift in the division of labor, Ridge states that "every head of a family has *his* own farm and House."[99] Implicitly, he indicates that the head of a family is now a man, not a woman. This acts as a testament to the evolving 'civilization' of the Cherokee, especially since the aforementioned 'Gentleman of Virginia' believed a society's level of civilization could be ascertained by the morality and social position of its men.[100] Ridge follows the gentleman's argument when explaining changes to Cherokee law:

> The laws of our Nation from time immemorial recognizes a separate property in the wife and husband, and this principle is universally cherished among the less informed Class and in fact in every grade of intelligence… If they are so disposed, the law secures to the Ladies, the control of their own property [Property belonging to the wife is not exclusively at the control & disposal of the husband, and in many respects she has exclusive & distinct control over her own, particularly among the less civilized.[101]

Here, Ridge is effectively arguing that "less civilized" communities allow women more control over her property, suggesting a direct correlation between how 'civilized' a society is and the level of a woman's social and/or legal status.[102] Ridge builds on this concept later when discussing marriage itself, writing that:

> [Although] we have no law regulating marriage—and Polygamy is still allowed to native Cherokees…Time will effect the desired change, and it is worthy of mention, even now in the advance of law, & unrequired, the better class of

[97] Ridge; emphasis added.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid; emphasis added.
[100] Anonymous, "Reflections on the Institutions of the Cherokee Indians."
[101] Ridge.
[102] Ibid.

> our female, prefer to be united in Marriage attended by the solemn ties of the Christian mode.[103]

He again refers to a more 'civilized' woman, this time describing her as one that marries as a Christian instead of the traditional Cherokee practice. Simultaneously, Ridge argues that it is only a matter of time before the rest of the Cherokee women embrace Christian marriages, and along with them, their theoretical role as helpmates.

Despite the aforementioned 'civilizing successes' of the Cherokee though, it appears change was not enacted quick enough for President Andrew Jackson. In 1830, President Jackson, a long-time proponent of Indian removal, wrote directly to the Cherokee, stating that "it is impossible that you can flourish in the midst of a civilized community. You have but one remedy within your reach. And that is, to remove to the West."[104] That same year, Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, beginning the formal process of forcibly relocating Indigenous communities. Later, in 1838, federal and state troops evicted the Cherokee from their land, placing them in temporary internment camps before forcing their westward migration. This geographic removal was coupled with continued efforts to 'civilize' the Cherokee and render them culturally homogenous by forcing individuals to dress and look like white Americans, convert to Christianity, and embrace their 'natural roles' according to the Euro-American doctrine of hierarchy.[105]

Conclusion

Although Cherokee women like Nanyehi sought co-existence, they were only met by empty promises and eventual excision. A system predicated upon balance could not simply merge with one that emphasized hierarchical relationships, especially one in which women were not considered equal citizens. Moreover, the rhetoric and practices of the Cherokee matriculture resulted in it being considered a subversive influence; Euro-Americans would not allow their women the opportunity to speak as openly as the Cherokee and had no intention of changing their stance. Instead, Euro-Americans sought to minimize the influence of the Cherokee women, preferring to deal solely with the men. Later, this turned into a governmental effort, one that sought to *domesticate* the Cherokee matriculture. The results of these endeavors are best described by Theda Perdue, when she declares that "the story of most Cherokee women is not cultural

[103] Ibid.
[104] Andrew Jackson, "To the Cherokee Tribe of Indians East of the Mississippi," March 16, 1835, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, https://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc07377.
[105] This often took the form of separating Indigenous children from their communities and placing them into boarding or day schools that mandated they dress in Euro-American clothing and only speak English. The United States government recently released a report detailing the history and abuses of such institutions. See Bryan Newland, "Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report," May 2022, https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf.

transformation… but remarkable cultural persistence."[106] Cherokee women did not give in to the proposed "euthanasias;" instead they persevered and are still attempting to restore the matriculture today.[107] Hopefully this paper furthers that end by illustrating the remarkable agency and challenges that Cherokee women like Nanyehi faced as well as the world they hoped to introduce to Euro-American culture.

About the Author

Matthew Cerjak is an incoming PhD student in History whose research focuses on the lives of women in the British Atlantic World during the long eighteenth century. While he mostly writes on topics related to women and the law, his work also extends to studies of Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity.

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[106] Perdue, 9.
[107] Anonymous, "Reflections on the Institutions of the Cherokee Indians," 55.

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