WISHI STORIES: RHETORICAL STRATEGIES OF SURVIVANCE AND CONTINUANCE IN OKLAHOMA CHEROKEE FOODWAYS

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ABSTRACT

WISHI STORIES: RHETORICAL STRATEGIES OF SURVIVANCE AND CONTINUANCE IN OKLAHOMA CHEROKEE FOODWAYS

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With a focus on the everyday rhetorical practices of American Indian foodways, my research joins conversations with American Indian rhetoric scholars who acknowledge the cultural practices of Indigenous communities as rhetorical traditions (Powell, Driskill, Haas, King, and others). In this qualitative research, I look to the embodied, everyday Cherokee practices of foraging and cooking wishi (hen-of-the-woods mushrooms), a Cherokee delicacy, to argue that American Indians use foodways to survive and resist the ongoing project of settler colonialism, and to carry culture forward for future generations. Using a cultural rhetorics methodology of story, I gathered the oral histories of three tradition-bearers from my own tribal community who shared with me their experiences foraging and cooking wishi. I argue that these stories and cultural practices disrupt Western codes of land and environment. During the data collection, the tradition-bearers in my study shared three teachings from their experiences: 1) the importance of Native foods to our survival; 2) the connections between land, food, and memory; and 3) the realities of the growing distance between younger generations of American Indians and the land. These teachings are important to the discipline of rhetoric and composition because they show us how American Indian communities use embodied, everyday practices to make meaning through storied, reciprocal relationships with the land.

This dissertation is dedicated to the Tradition-bearers: Joe Shade, Albert Shade, Maxine Neugin, and David Stand

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This project is rooted in love. It grew out of family stories and feasts, both personal and tribal historical narratives, and ways of learning and knowing both in my home community and my academic community. My network of support has been invaluable to this project and throughout my academic journey. I am grateful for the love and support of so many folks who helped me to do this work.

The opportunity to learn from the tradition-bearers and their stories has been a deeply meaningful experience. Talking, cooking, and foraging mushrooms with Joe Shade, Albert Shade, Maxine Neugin, and David Stand has taught me so much, both about wishi and about what it means to be Cherokee. I would also like to express my appreciation for the tribal liaisons from the Cherokee Nation, Gloria Sly and Pat Gwin, who offered me guidance and advocated for my project. The conversations that I had with them helped to shape this research and reminded me to take care with the stories and knowledge that I gathered, that I have a responsibility to the tradition-bearers and to my tribal community. I must share my gratitude, also, for Jerrid Miller, the Cherokee Heritage Center archivist, for archiving my work so that it is accessible to my community.

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and live experiences, and they inspired me to reinvision what my own research is and can become. I am endlessly thankful to my mentors Malea Powell and Kimberli Lee for investing in me and for bringing me into the academic home and family that I found within the Cultural Rhetorics Consortium. It means more than I can say.

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"Culture is ultimately lost when we stop telling the stories of who we are, where we have been, how we arrived there, what we once knew, what we wish we knew; when we stop our retelling of the past, our imagining of our future, and the long, long task of inventing an identity every single second of our lives."
--Deborah Miranda, *Bad Indians,* xiv

"What didn't you do to bury me / but you forgot I was a seed."
--Dinos Christianopoulos, *Poiēmata*

I come to this work through my family, and through their stories that raised me. These stories are anything but linear, and though I painstakingly attempt to present these ideas in the linear, formulaic way that is so often valued in academic writing, I am a product of these messy, intertwined, circular narratives and it shows. As a Cherokee, the narrative style that I come from is at times frustrating for the Western audience, with lots of recursivity and side stories added in. I ask you to bear with me. I promise, it is all connected in the end.

I am interested in stories about food, and in the ways that history and culture shape our foodways. I am also interested in the ways that Native people make meaning in everyday practices, particularly in the home. As an American Indian woman in the United States, I know that my body is political, that my existence is political. This is well-documented. It is recorded in government documents and in accounts of the acts of violence continually and consistently perpetrated against Indigenous people and that frequently directly target Indigenous women. I know it from my lived experience. As a politicized body that is part of a larger community of other politicized bodies, I know that our existence--our survival--is resistant, and that practicing our traditions is a strategic form of activism. My larger argument

throughout this dissertation builds upon the work of my scholarly elders Malea Powell, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, and Qwo-li Driskill who make visible how, for Native people, our everyday, embodied practices of material production are rhetorical strategies of survivance. I do this by demonstrating how Cherokee people engage in rhetorical strategies of survivance through the everyday, embodied practices of our foodways, such as foraging and cooking our cultural foods—in this case, wishi—and continuance by carrying these traditions forward for future generations.

What is wishi, and why is it my focus? Wishi is the Cherokee word for hen-of-the-woods mushrooms, da-wi-shi. It is a Cherokee delicacy and a food of significant cultural value. When I began my cursory research about wishi, I was surprised to find that it is not only a Cherokee food, but a mushroom with widespread popularity that grows across North America, China, and parts of Japan. As I was growing up, I had never heard it called by any other name, but my research showed me that this particular species of polypore fungus has many names: Hen-of-the-woods, hen of the woods, sheep's head, ram's head, and *maitake*[1], to name just a few. Its Latin name is grifola frondosa, and it is a perennial fungus that yields substantial health benefits. In Japan, for instance,

Figure 1: Wishi at the base of a tree

[1] In Japan

scientists are conducting research on its immune-stimulating, cancer inhibiting, anti-tumoric properties that they have found in that particular variety of mushroom. I learned that the mushroom is marketed as health product and sold in powdered form as nutrition supplements based on this medical research.

Another surprise in the research was the vast array of recipes that my search revealed. Once I began searching using the other names for wishi that I had just learned, I found an astonishing number of recipes, most of which differed from the ways that Cherokee people typically prepare wishi. As I discuss in more detail in the third chapter of this dissertation, Oklahoma Cherokees tend to cook wishi one specific way: fried. Yet, my searches using English and Japanese terms yields recipes for soups and stews, pasta dishes, curries, tacos, stir fries, even a version of Nashville-style hen-of-the-woods hot chicken[2]. In relation to these findings, Indigenous chefs and cookbook writers, such as Sean Sherman, Heid E. Erdrich, and Andrew George have crafted beautiful recipes that bring their tribal foodways traditions into contemporary kitchens, and their work guides me as I imagine what that might look like for wishi. Imagining other ways of cooking wishi helps me to envision ways of integrating our traditional foods as part of reclamation and recovery of our food systems.

In *Original Local*, Heid E. Erdrich includes a narrative titled “Water Keepers,” in which Erdrich shares with us a story about the Anishinaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy, which guided the Anishinaabeg on their diaspora from the Atlantic Coast to the Great Lakes region, including in this narrative a part of the prophecy which tells the

[2] Which is not too far off from the fried wishi that I grew up with

Anishinaabeg that they “will know the chosen ground has been reached when you come to a land where food grows on water” (48). This story about the Anishinaabeg cultural food manoomin (wild rice) prefaces a statement about land and water rights granted through treaties, leading to the crux of her message that:

> What is at stake for indigenous people goes beyond our treaty rights and our food: what is happening today threatens the essence of our way of being in this world—our ceremonies, tied as they are to harvests, to maple tapping, to animals and plants with which we share the world and without which we cannot survive. (49)

Settler colonialist policies that affect land and water rights disrupt not only our access to our traditional foods but also our ways of practicing our food, the meaning-making of our foods, our cultural foodways. When our cultural practices are erased, so are our identities as Indigenous peoples.

The stories included in this dissertation, each in their own way, speak to the effects of settler colonialist land policy and cultural erasure, as well as the resiliency of the Cherokee people. These stories are rooted in the lands which are home to the Cherokee communities of Northeastern Oklahoma. For Oklahoma Cherokees, the past hundred and eighty years have included several periods of diasporas, of upheaval and relocation. The mid-1800s brought the Cherokee Removal, known as the Trail of Tears, which was actually a series of removals[3] influenced by white settlers and the federal government, who were after the land[4][5] upon which the Cherokee people had made their

[3] some forced and some voluntary
[4] and its minerals, particularly gold
[5] The government then sold Cherokee farmland in the east and paid off the national deficit. The only time in US history that there was a zero deficit was at the bitter cost of the Cherokee people

home. Following the Removal, conflicts between several political factions of Western Cherokees led to a series of shifts across what are now the Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Kansas borders.

Fifty years after the Removal, the federal government sanctioned the Dawes Commission to enforce the Curtis Act of 1889, which effectively separated Cherokee[6] communities living in Indian Territory by parsing out allotments of land based on a roll-taking system[7]. Despite promises[8] to the tribes in Indian Territory that they would not be moved after the forced Removals, the Curtis Act sanctioned allotments for these tribes to open space for white settlers, who were pushing ever Westward and who wanted yet more and more land.

In her iconic book *And Still the Waters Run: the Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes*, historian Angie Debo exposed the corruption of the allotment policy-makers. In the preface in another book, *Oklahoma: Footloose and Fancy Free*, Debo writes that

> Oklahoma is more than just another state. It is a lens in which the long rays of time are focused into the brightest of light. In its magnifying clarity, dim facets of the American character stand more clearly revealed. For in Oklahoma all the experiences that went into the making of the nation have been speeded up. Here all the American traits have been intensified. The one who can interpret Oklahoma can grasp the meaning of America in the modern world. (vii)

[6] Along with the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Muscogee Creeks, Seminoles, and several other tribes in Indian Territory at the time

[7] which serves as the primary source of documentation for tribal membership for the two federally-recognized Western Cherokee tribes, the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokees

[8] in the form of treaties

The story of Manifest Destiny[9] is, indeed, magnified in the history of Oklahoma, and in the history of the Cherokees, as well. One of the many devastating effects of the Dawes Act is that, because allotments were assigned by individual family units, many extended families were separated. This divisive legislation effectively weakened communities and cultures.

Another effect of Allotment is that it distanced the people from the places where food had been grown/foraged/cultivated. To understand this in context, we must remember that the Dawes Act was a mere fifty years after the Cherokee Removal period (1838 and 1839). This means that families who had made the great march from Cherokee Territory in the eastern woodlands of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia were forcibly moved yet again, after having reestablished their lives in the grassy foothills of the Ozark mountains of the Eastern lands in Indian Territory and in the Cherokee Strip, a section of land across the northern border of what is now Oklahoma.

These diasporic shifts from place to place had a disastrous effect on our connections to the land and on the lifeways of Cherokees in Oklahoma, lifeways that were already interrupted and, in many cases, erased by the settler colonialists' assimilation efforts. One of the lifeways that were interrupted are our food systems and food stories. The shift from the vast landscape of Cherokee territory in the southeast to the rocky foothills of northeastern Oklahoma affected both agrarian production and access to traditional wild foods. With the arrival of white settlers into Indian Territory with the Oklahoma Land Run(s)[10], Cherokees were even further assimilated to food practices of the non-Native pioneers. As the Cherokees assimilated to the Eurocentric

[9] The 19th century ideology that the westward expansion of the US was predestined as the will of God
[10] Of which there were several

diet and were distanced from their own foods, many depended[11] on government rations[12]. Many lost their lives due to this reliance on rationed food from the US government. Sometimes, when they did arrive, these rations showed up moldy, damaged, and unusable. Sometimes they showed up late. Sometimes, they did not show up at all.

As described throughout the following chapters, Indigenous food systems across Turtle Island[13] have been and continue to be erased by settler colonialist[14] food systems. Our Native foods have been co-opted by settlers, yet one of the systemic settler tactics of assimilation is and has historically been to separate Native communities from our traditions, including our foodways. Settler colonialist land policy shifted many American Indian communities from their homelands and their established food sources. Native peoples were separated from the hunting and foraging grounds that had nourished them for hundreds of years and moved to different landscapes where they often struggled to adapt to new foodways and spaces.

Indigenous communities, scholars, and activists have been working to restore food sovereignty[15] for Indigenous people worldwide. Economist and environmental activist Winona LaDuke, founder of the White Earth Land Recovery Project (WELRP) and Honor the Earth, argues that "food sovereignty is an affirmation of who we are as Indigenous peoples, and one of the most sure-footed ways to restore our relationship with the world around us" (*"Food Systems").* The Indigenous food sovereignty

[11] and continue to depend, even now
[12] "commodities" or "commods"
[13] The North American continent
[14] Anishinaabe scholar Kyle Whyte defines *settler colonialism* as "a structure of oppression that wrongfully interferes with Indigenous capacities to maintain an adaptive capacity in their homelands" (12)
[15] Kyle Whyte defines *food sovereignty* as "community food self-sufficiency or cultural autonomy in relation to food" (2)

movement is comprised of multiple approaches to restore and reconcile our relationships to land and the cultural foods that the land produces.

I began to understand the significance of this mushroom in a way that connected the local knowledge of wishi as part of Cherokee cuisine to the concept of hen-of-the-woods mushrooms as a global foodstuff. Wishi mushrooms are becoming more prevalent in American society. We can now buy plugs online from retail giants like Amazon to cultivate the mushrooms in a dead log within the convenience of our own backyards, if we are so inclined. I have seen wishi, marketed as *maitake* in grocery stores both in Oklahoma and in Michigan. It has become a fairly common "artisanal" ingredient, used in specialty dishes. I have seen it on television cooking shows, and my father recently noticed it in the background of the Disney movie *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Wishi is far more common than I had realized, yet this has not translated to Cherokee communities, at least not that I have seen. Many Cherokee families cannot afford the high prices of the mushrooms or they prefer to continue the cultural practices of foraging and cooking the food they have gathered in the ways that they were taught by their parents and grandparents because they find it to be enjoyable.

Given my newfound understanding of wishi, I expect that other tribes also eat this variety of mushroom, and that they each have unique cultural practices for gathering and cooking it. I would be so bold as to extrapolate that claim for the peoples of China and Japan who also eat this mushroom. Yet, for me, and for my family and community, what makes wishi meaningful for us is our storied connection to it as a traditional wild food. And though I expect that the other groups that eat

hen-of-the-woods mushrooms also have storied connections to it, I cannot speak to their experiences, only to my own and the stories that were shared with me through the cultural lens of Oklahoma Cherokee foodways.

It is important for me to acknowledge that the traditions that I focus on in this dissertation are not monomythic traditions of all American Indian and Indigenous peoples, but instead are practices that I claim to be part of everyday life for this particular group of Cherokees in this particular land-base. That is not to say that these traditions are not practiced by a larger population of Cherokee peoples or even Native people from different tribes, nor is it to claim that these practices are only tied to this land-base. The reality is that across Turtle Island, there are 562 federally-recognized tribes in the United States, 600 recognized First Nations bands in Canada, hundreds of tribal groups that are unrecognized by the federal governments of both countries, and the Indigenous peoples of Mexico. Each of these groups maintain their own cultural identities, languages, knowledges, and practices. One of the benefits of this research, however, is that we can bring it into larger conversations with scholars and activists in Indigenous rhetorics and across Indian Country who are working to promote food justice in Native communities both in Turtle Island and across the world.

It was at a family gathering a few years ago, during which my cousins and I were telling stories about our fathers and their devotion to wishi hunting, I realized, amongst our peals of laughter, that even though we respected and enjoyed wishi as a Cherokee cultural food, my cousins and I do not share the same knowledge and skill-set with wishi that our fathers have. Our generation, my cousins' and mine, is

further removed from the land than our fathers' generation. We talked about how much harder it is for us to find, and even if we do find it, we feel the need to verify with them that we have correctly identified the mushroom. I began to wonder if they felt the same way when they were younger, or if they still felt like they knew less about wishi than their parents' generation, or the generation before that. How far back that particular cultural food knowledge must go, and how much of it we lose with each passing generation? How much further does the distance grow between us and land with each generation? As my cousins talked a little more, I glanced around at their children and at my then-toddler niece playing on the floor and wondered what that knowledge would look like for them, how this growing distance between our relationships with the land will impact them, their children, and future generations.

There are, of course, other cultural foods and food practices that are meaningful to us, yet wishi is the food that my family is most passionate about. It is the food that brings us to tears as we laugh about memories of our fathers abruptly and without warning pulling the cars they were driving over to the sides of busy city streets or backwoods dirt roads because they spotted wishi growing at the base of a tree, off in the distance somewhere. It is the food that MUST be present at holiday feasts and family reunions. It is the food that we think of when we remember our grandfather and our grandmother, him walking in the door with garbage bags full of mushrooms that he has gathered and her carefully cleaning and cooking it in the kitchen. There are other foods that are meaningful for Cherokee communities, and some families may value the significance of dishes such as wild onions and eggs,

kanvchi, “poke salat,” or grape dumplings more, but for my family, unequivocally, it is wishi.

It is, therefore, through this food that I join the ongoing conversation about cultural food rhetorics and Indigenous food sovereignty. My connection to this food situates my positionality as a Cherokee researcher who is seeking to better understand the relationships between my community, the land, and our foodways. I became interested in wishi as a research focus during my doctoral coursework, when I was learning more about the food practices of the Anishinaabeg communities in the Great Lakes region and about the rhetoricity of food, particularly the stories and histories of our cultural foods. I was working as a research assistant for the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program at Michigan State University at the time, and the program director, Dylan Miner, had arranged a partnership with Fenner Nature Center to use their facilities and small maple grove for our urban sugar bush program. Working at the sugar bush was a beautiful and meaningful learning experience. As I stood with a few of my friends, colleagues, and mentors outdoors in the snowy maple grove, I recalled the oak forests where I grew up and the foods that we gather there. I pictured my father walking around the woods looking for wishi. I thought about the conversation that I had shared with my cousins just a couple of months earlier, and the pride of a successful wishi hunt. I remembered how meaningful wishi is for us.

The Project

This project started out as a class assignment, then it became a conference paper, which led to a different class assignment, which led to a chapter. Eventually,

it led to an expanded project: this dissertation. Through this project, I gathered knowledge of Cherokee foods through the stories and practices of my tribal community as an approach to answer my questions about what wishi practices, as part of Oklahoma Cherokee foodways, can teach us about the survivance and continuance of Cherokee peoples. The goals of this project were: 1) to better understand Cherokee foodways as rhetorical practices; 2) to explore the ways that Cherokee peoples make meaning through land-based relationships with food; and 3) to consider how we engage in strategies of survivance and continuance through our food practices. By researching the ways that Oklahoma Cherokees gather and cook cultural foods[16], I work to make visible how Native people make meaning through rhetorical foodways traditions.

One of the primary contributions of this research is to the public and scholarly conversations about Indigenous food sovereignty. This work brings to the forefront the significance of traditional foodways for Indigenous communities and show us what Indigenous food sovereignty can look like when practiced as part of daily life, how it can help us to frame our conversation about food sovereignty from both the large scale (i.e. global) discussions of agricultural production and the smaller scale (i.e. local) discussions of sustainable foraging and material production of cultural foods in the home. It helps us to understand how our foodways help us to practice our relationship with the land every day.

I had originally envisioned this project as a multimodal cookbook, and it might become that eventually, yet what I decided that I wanted to prioritize are the

[16] In this case, wishi

voices of the tradition-bearers and the teachings they shared with me. I wanted to construct a dissertation document in which I work to build theory out of a collection of stories and that can serve as the basis upon which I can produce film and media-based texts. Through both the project described in the following section and future projects that stem from it, I want to produce writing that can be accessible to my community and to the people who helped me to construct this dissertation, and I want to produce work that privileges the knowledge of my tribal community.

The Place

I conducted this research in my hometown, Tahlequah, Oklahoma and in the nearby community of Lost City, Oklahoma, where I live. Located at the foothills of the Ozark Mountains in northeast Oklahoma, Tahlequah and the surrounding region became the diasporic home and the headquarters of the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah band of Cherokees following the Removal from our ancestral homelands in the southeastern woodlands of what is now the United States. As a cultural and political hub for Cherokee peoples, as well as the place where I came to learn about wishi, it seemed the most appropriate place for this work.

It is also a land-base that is rife with stories and resources, both for me and for the people involved in the research. One resource that this location afforded me as a researcher is access to the Cherokee Heritage Center (CHC), which houses cultural exhibits, a model Cherokee village, and the tribal archives. My dear friend Callie Chunestudy, the CHC's curator, kindly guided me through the museum's exhibits and put me in contact with the archivist, Jerrid Miller, who will be accepting the oral history interview footage for the Cherokee Nation Oral History Repository.

Relational accountability, a concept upon which I discuss in more depth in the following chapter, is at the forefront of my interactions with the people and places included in this dissertation. The tradition-bearers, who I introduce in the next section, and the CHC staff who assisted me are part of my community--some are even friends and family. These relationships are as significant to the project as the mushrooms, and it is my aim to attend to them with accountability and care.

A story that I must attend to here is a tragic one. While I was gathering data during the summer months, one of the tradition-bearers who had agreed to be included in this study unexpectedly passed away. Betty Sue Kingfisher was ill at the time of my initial data collection and we were planning to reschedule our interview when she was fatally injured in a car accident while driving from North Carolina back to Oklahoma. Her husband, Jack Kingfisher, was critically injured in the accident, and he passed away a few weeks later. It was a heartbreaking loss for Betty Sue and Jack Kingfisher's family and community. As I wondered how to proceed while still honoring the Kingfishers, the urgency of this work became more visible.

The tragedy reminded me how important it is to teach our youth about our traditional lifeways and our cultural practices, and how by passing these teachings on, we can honor the legacies of our elders and our ancestors. It is a painful reminder that we will all return to the earth one day, and that we are not separate from it, but part of it. Every part of our lives is tied to the ground upon which we walk, and the food that nourishes us. A lesson that I learned, upon which I will discuss further in the chapters that follow, from all the tradition-bearers, is that carrying our cultural knowledge and

practices, including foodways, forward is also a way to carry with us our loved ones and their ancestral teachings.

It also raised for me questions about my priorities for this project, about preservation and continuance, specifically whether it is more important to preserve the teachings that are shared here with me or to focus on strategies for continuing our foodways traditions. I came to understand that it could be both, that by including the narratives of the tradition-bearers in this dissertation and by sharing with them the recordings and the products of those recordings, these materials become part of their legacies, and that in this way, their data stories become archives as well as theory.

The Tradition-bearers

During the study, I conducted oral history interviews with four participants, whom are further designated across this dissertation as *tradition-bearers.* I use this term to recognize them as bearers of cultural knowledge, which, in the case of this study, include foodways traditions. The four tradition-bearers are people who I know to be active practitioners of wishi gathering and cooking, though they are certainly not the only ones. They are part of my network of relations, people who I have known for most of my life and for whom I have a deep sense of respect and responsibility.

I was joined in these interviews with my friend William Thompson, a Cherokee filmographer and instructional game designer at the University of Oklahoma, who helped me with the recordings while I conducted the interviews. William grew up in Tahlequah also, so he is familiar with the foods, culture, and landscape that are part of these stories, and we have been close friends since

childhood, which allows for easy communication as we navigate the data collection and coordinate the filming process.

JOE AND ALBERT SHADE

On an early summer afternoon in Lost City, Oklahoma I was sitting with my father, Joe Shade, and uncle, Albert Shade, to talk with them about wishi. We sat together outside next to my great-grandmother Jewel Warren Steelmon's old corn shucker in the front yard of my house, the house where my dad and uncle grew up. From where we were sitting we can see the land that once belonged to my great-grandparents where my grandfather grew up, just across the street and down the road. My family has been living off these lands for generations now.

My father and uncle are the youngest of four brothers, all of whom grew up hunting for wishi. Of the four of them, I asked my father because he is the one who teaches me about wishi and about life most directly and my Uncle Albert because I have interviewed him for oral history projects in the past, and I know him to be a good sport about it. These two men, along with their brothers and my grandparents, introduced me to wishi and to several other Cherokee foods. Because my first memories of wishi are watching them bring in the mushrooms for my grandmother to clean and cook, it seems appropriate for them to be the first narrators whose stories I gather for this research. We sat together, and I asked them each in turn about their experiences learning to gather and cook wishi as children, how they carry on those practices as adults, and how we can carry the traditions of wishi forward for future generations.

DAVID STAND

David Stand met with me at my home, where we were joined by his daughter, Taleah and his young granddaughter, Harper. David is personable with an easy-going demeanor, though I also know him to be firmly protective of those close to him. He and my father are longtime friends, and wishi is a topic they enjoy discussing together. When he walks into my home with his daughter and granddaughter, David gives me a hug and, like usual, calls me "sis." He asks about my family, and we talk with Taleah and Harper while we get settled into our seats as Will gets the cameras ready to film. Throughout most of our filming, Harper sat quietly[17], near the end of the interview, she cautiously climbed into her grandfather's lap, a not-so-subtle reminder that the teachings that he shared with us that day are just as much about our youth as they are about the tradition-bearers and the ancestors who came before us all.

David introduces himself as David Henry Stand and shares with me that his Cherokee name is Tajuwa and that he was named after his grandmother whose last name was Redbird. He was born and raised in Stilwell, Oklahoma, approximately nine miles west of the Arkansas border. He explains, "right on the Cherokee border is the Arkansas border." David is an educator and a mentor. He has had a long career working with Native youth, and has, for many years, managed the student dormitories at Sequoyah High School, a Native high school that sits near the Cherokee Nation tribal complex.

[17] A difficult task for a young child

MAXINE NEUGIN

William[18] and I visited with Maxine Neugin, an elder, at her home in Lost City, Oklahoma in the early evening in June. As we got out of our car in the driveway, her son, Tommy Jr., was tending to his chickens in the yard and invited us to "go on in." We let ourselves in and Maxine invited us to sit at the kitchen table. As we seated ourselves, Maxine offered us cold beverages and pulled out a small notebook with notes that she had jotted down in advance.

Maxine is soft-spoken, and her subtly-expressive eyes twinkle when she laughs. She tells us about her childhood growing up in the rural community of Lost City, Oklahoma. She describes how hard her family worked to provide food for the household, the crops of corn that her father grew, adding that he always grew black-eyed peas alongside the corn, never wasting any space in their garden. Maxine tells us that she has been keeping a notebook where she writes down memories and stories as they come to her so that she can pass them on to her children and grandchildren. She explains that the kids are not interested in hearing those stories now, that they, like so many of us, are otherwise distracted by digital technologies[19].

The Chapters

The chapters that follow aim to situate the cultural practices of wishi, cooking and foraging, as rhetorical strategies of survivance and continuance while constellating them with the larger issues of Indigenous food justice and sovereignty. Chapter 2 describes storytelling as my methodological framework for this interdisciplinary research in the disciplines of Rhetoric and Composition and Indigenous Studies. In this chapter, I

[18] who assisted me in filming the interviews
[19] One of the reasons why I would like to make these teachings accessible as digital texts

discuss the ways that I use story as a methodological framework for qualitative research that is relational, respectful, responsible, and reciprocal through oral history, embodied knowledge, lived experience, archival, and land-based methods. Chapter 3 is a findings chapter focused on theorizing Cherokee practices of cleaning and cooking wishi as rhetorical land-based material production. A second findings chapter, Chapter 4 focuses on the practices of foraging in the hopes that it makes visible the ways that foraging informs and results from Native peoples' connection to the land. In my conclusion chapter, I discuss the implications of the data that I have gathered, and what it means for both my own community and pan-Indigenous communities as we work to continue our cultural foodways as strategies of resistance and survival. I also discuss the limitations of this study and my vision of the future possibilities for this work, as well as my own agenda for continuing this scholarship.

Hila tsigata: How I Know

"When indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, people participate on different terms."
--Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies,* 193

"Constructing this book has been hard, listening to those stories seep out of old government documents, BIA forms, field notes, the diaries of explorers and priests, the occasional writings and testimony from Indians, family stories, photographs, newspaper articles. It's been painful dreaming of destruction, starved children, bones that cry. But at the end of it, I feel voices present that the world hasn't heard for a long, long time. Voices telling the antidote to lies."
--Deborah Miranda, *Bad Indians,* xx

I begin writing my research story from a maple grove in the lower peninsula of Michigan, a thousand miles from the wooded hills of my home. I am at the sugarbush, iskigamizigan in Anishinaabemowin[20], at Fenner Nature Center[21], where the sap is gathered from the maple trees and boiled for many hours atop a wood stove inside the sugar shack[22]. My friends are inside, tending to the fire and laughing together, while I sit outside amongst the trees, adorned with metal buckets that collect the sap, as the sun rises to thaw the morning frost. As the smoke and maple steam rise out of the sugar shack, I set myself to the task of constructing the framework that guides this project.

[20] The language of the Anishinaabeg, on whose lands I work, write, and live while attending graduate school
[21] A state park in Lansing, Michigan that has partnered with the American and Indigenous Studies Program at Michigan State University.
[22] A small structure (i.e. a shed or "shack") where the sap is processed. Sugarbush season is in the early spring when the sap is most active but the temperatures are still cool, so the heat from the wood stove makes the sugar shack a gathering place where people can visit while warming themselves by the fire.

Cherokee philosopher Brian Burkheart tells us that the land is storied, and that Indigenous peoples maintain storied relationships with the land. That storied relationship includes our cultural foodways and food systems; this means that our foodways are also storied. Story is central to this research, both in terms of methodology and in relation to the foodways described in the chapters that follow. Story is also central to cultural rhetorics research and to Indigenous methodologies. The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab[23] acknowledges that the "practice of story is integral to doing cultural rhetorics" because storytelling helps us to constellate people, ideas, communities, and histories, which is why it is a primary methodology in Cultural Rhetorics[24] (Powell, et al. Act I).

Methodological Structure

In *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know,* Kathleen Absolon describes Indigenous methods of knowledge production through the terminology of food: "searching, harvesting, picking, gathering, hunting, and trapping" (21). She frames her "wholistic" methodology through the metaphor of foodways. Absolon tells us that

[23] The authors, members of the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab, collectively construct an article that is also a performance. They indicate that their "primary methodology in this article is to tell stories" (Act 1). Through the sharing of stories, they craft a framework for doing cultural rhetorics, with an emphasis on practice and relationality. They describe the "constellating" of cultures and practice, situating rhetorics as "both … the study of meaning-making systems and … the practices that constitute the systems" (Act 1). Together, they situate constellating as an active practice, recognizing not only relationships as rhetorical but also the building and maintaining of relationships as rhetorical also. As a collective piece, this text shares concepts across the other readings in this study written by past and present members of the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab.

[24] The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab defines "the project of cultural rhetorics [as], generally, to emphasize rhetorics as always-already cultural and cultures as persistently rhetorical. In practice, cultural rhetorics scholars investigate and understand meaning-making as it is situated in specific cultural communities. And when [they] say 'cultural communities,' we mean any place/space where groups organize under a set of shared beliefs and practices…" (Act III)

> Meaning making is what we do with knowledge, and when we gather berries, we make meaning of those berries by making jam or pies and then we share all that we have gathered with the people. (22)

For her, gathering the knowledge is important, but we must make meaning of the knowledge by sharing it with our communities.

Absolon describes her methodological framework, in the model of a flower, which guides me as a researcher of my own tribal community. The roots are grounded in Native worldviews, with the self at the center of the research (and of the flower), indicating that "Indigenous re-search has meaning because of who we are as Indigenous peoples and our accountability and responsibility to our ancestors, family, community, Creation and the Creator" (50). The leaves are the journeys of knowledge and learning that connect to the decolonizing consciousness for Indigenous researchers, while the petals signify a larger relationship to the diverse array of Indigenous methodologies. The environment, which surrounds and includes the flower, represents the Indigenous researcher within and connected to larger academic systems (50-51). Because this research stems from my own life and relationships, I find the methodology that Absolon articulates to be a useful structural model (12). It serves as the basis upon which this chapter is constructed.

Roots (Worldview): Stories and Sovereignty

In Absolon's model, the methodology is "rooted and informed in varying degrees by Indigenous paradigms and worldviews" (50). Stories shape our histories and our worldviews, and they guide our research paradigms. Our stories can reinforce our

sovereignty and can teach us how ways of survivance[25] and continuance as decolonizing[26] rhetorical strategies[27].

For Native peoples, however, many of our stories have, historically, been ignored and erased in favor of the stories privileged by Western society. King laments that some stories[28], typically the Western ones, become histories while other stories, typically the Native ones, become "entertainment" (*The Inconvenient* 20). When we Indigenous people tell our own stories, though, we have the power to push back against those Western stories. Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz demonstrates[29] what it can look like to revise the imperialist narrative(s) of the history of American Indian peoples by reframing the larger scope of this history, reiterating how these violent events are not isolated incidents, but are instead linked together to form a systemic history of genocide. They remind us that there are other stories than the Western story.

As listeners/readers, we have responsibilities to stories, of which Thomas King reminds us when he says, "But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you'd heard this story / You've heard it now" (89). As a teller of

[25] Which Powell describes "survival + resistance" ("Rhetorics of Survivance" 400)
[26] Qwo-Li Driskill defines *decolonization* as the "ongoing, radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation" (69).
[27]In "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing.", Powell looks to "the written responses to colonialism produced by two nineteenth-century American Indian intellectuals—Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Charles Alexander Eastman" to make the argument that they reframe "Indianess" as a rhetorical strategy ("Rhetorics of Survivance" 396-397).
[28] Through his example of Pocahontas, King demonstrates how even Western stories *about* Indigenous peoples are valued over stories written/told by Indigenous peoples about ourselves (*Inconvenient Indian* 9).
[29] In *an Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, Dunbar-Ortiz interrogates settler colonialism in the U.S., finding land appropriation, racial oppression, and colonial systems of slavery to have systematically contributed to the devastating genocide of Native peoples. She points to the training of imperial forces to enslave and eradicate, to the boarding schools and assimilation movements, to the pitting of Indigenous nations against one another, to Manifest Destiny, and to the political ideologies that facilitated this violence both in the past and in the present day.

these stories, I have responsibilities to the tradition-bearers and to the stories that they share with me, to our shared community, and to "all of our relations" (Wilson 77). In her work on Indigenous research priorities of relationality and relational accountability[30] in cultural rhetorics, Riley-Mukavetz[31] teaches us that "practicing relationality is partly about how we embody and carry stories and relationships with us" (116). Guided by Cree scholar Shawn Wilson's Indigenous research paradigm, Riley-Mukavetz contends that our research practices should make visible our interconnectedness and that we should attend to those relationships with respect, responsibility, and reciprocity ("Towards a Cultural…" 113).

Story as Research Paradigm

As an Indigenous researcher who uses story as the basis of my research, I borrow from Shawn Wilson's paradigm of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology to articulate a research paradigm of story. Wilson describes his approach to research "in a way that is more culturally appropriate for Indigenous people by taking the role of storyteller rather than researcher/author" (32). He defines paradigm as "a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that goes together to guide people's actions as to how they are going to go about doing their research" (175). For Wilson, all four parts of the research paradigm operate in relation with one another, and thus, each one is of equal importance (175).

[30] As denoted in Wilson

[31] Riley-Mukavetz' study with a group of Odawa women shows us what this accountability looks like within a cultural rhetorics frame through her demonstration of responsible, respectful, and reciprocal research practices.

Ontology

As Cherokee writer Thomas King says, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (32). Stories tell us who we are, how we are, how to make sense of the world around us, and what we need to do. We use our stories to explain our past histories, our present realities, and our imaginings of the future. Our stories teach us how we came to be, how the world came to be, and how to survive in it. Choctaw scholar Leanne Howe posits that the story of the United States is a Native creation story, that Indigenous peoples told the European settlers “stories of how to live in our world” (118). Howe asserts that “Native stories are power. They create people. They author tribes” (118).

Western ontology assumes that stories are fiction, that, within the binary of truth or non-truth, stories are not true. Western ontology requires Western scientific evidence, proof, to pronounce the validity of the stories, to distinguish fact from fiction, despite that the past “discoveries” problematize the truth/non-truth binary. As an approach to knowledge, a set of processes through which we can research, storytelling challenges Western codes of knowledge production. Indigenous stories carry knowledge that empirical systems do not acknowledge, both historically and in the present day[32]. Indigenous ontological approaches to story resist the binary of truth and fiction, and, instead, acknowledge stories as knowledge with which we, as practitioners of story, have agency to interpret in relation to our own experiences. Absolon, tells us that “stories are oral landmarks that are passed from one generation to the next. They

[32] An example of this is a fairly recent shipwreck discovery off the Canadian coast that confirmed Inuit stories that Westerners have been ignoring for decades. This discovery of the ship aligned with Inuit oral histories citing its location, yet their stories were disregarded as myths. This story is one of many that have been featured in the media over the last few years.

contain knowledge of histories, traditions, events and life experiences" (137). An Indigenous ontology assumes that stories are relationships—between the storyteller and the audience and the characters—and that relationships are stories.

Epistemology

To maintain storytelling as an intellectual tradition from an oral culture in a discipline devoted to writing and rhetorical scholarly production (i.e. more writing), speaks (1) to the hard work of my academic elders in Rhet/Comp who carve out space for this sort of knowledge production and (2) to the survivance of Indigenous rhetorical practice. As an example of this survivance, Cherokee scholar Chris Teuton cites Lisa Brooks' demonstration of

> how a culturally specific, spatialized writing system changed yet continued after European contact: 'Birchbark messages became letters and petitions, wampum records became treaties, and journey pictographs became written 'journals' that contained similar geographic and relational markers, while histories recorded on birchbark and wampum became written communal narratives. ("Indigenous Textuality…" 3)

Brooks' quotation illustrates the uneasy relationship between storied orality and materiality in Indigenous cultures with the settler colonial[33] forms of writing that so often devastated tribal communities and disrupted Indigenous connections to our homelands.

To interact with story in an academic setting is an act of resistance. In her 2012 CCCC[34] Chair's Address, Malea Powell calls for us to "…tell different kinds of stories"

[33] For scholarly work that addresses settler colonialism as a land-based oppression, see Kyle Powys Whyte

[34] Conference on College Composition and Communication

than the modernist and Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions that permeate the discipline and, on a larger scale, the academy (403). Storytelling in the academy can help us to do the decolonizing work of resisting Western codes of knowledge-making. We can set aside oppressive colonial narratives and tell our own stories of where we have come from and of the people and events that shape the identities of our communities in the present day.

Methodology

Stories are how we know[35]. Through story, we develop relationships with our research. Within his Indigenous paradigm, Wilson describes methodology as "the more relationships between yourself and the other thing[36], the more fully you can comprehend its form and the greater the understanding becomes" (79). Stories, as a qualitative approach to learning, help us build relationships between ourselves, our histories, our world, and our environments.

We can do this by placing our stories in relation to other stories. Teuton explains that storytelling

> invokes a cultural process of interpreting contemporary experience in relation to the cultural truths traditional stories express. This process is characteristically marked by a speculative approach to the meaning of personal and communal experiences and attempts to integrate and explain contemporary experiences within a…cultural framework. ("Indigenous Textuality…" 137)

[35] See Ontology section
[36] The "other thing" that Wilson mentions refers to what is being researched

For Indigenous peoples, storytelling is a way of sharing knowledge across communities and across generations. When we hear stories, we, as audiences, attach our own meaning as interpreters of the stories, based on our own positionality. To these stories, we attach our own knowledges, our own experiences, assumptions, and expectations, which shape the stories for ourselves and for our future re-tellings of the them. Through these shifts in interpretation, the stories themselves shift, creating a network of story, a constellation of relationships.

Often our stories are difficult and painful, and telling the story, engaging with the story, practicing the story, can help us to heal (Riley-Mukavetz 116-117). Story as a methodology makes space for healing and reconciliation through the research process (Smith 115-118). Absolon asserts that “Indigenous methodologies facilitate healing individuals, families, communities and nations” (93). Using our own cultural traditions, materials, memories, languages, knowledges, storytelling can help us to heal from the trauma of colonial violence and erasure (Absolon 93). We can remember and reclaim our knowledges with story.

Axiology

As part of his Indigenous research paradigm, Wilson presents an axiology comprised of the ethical codes of relationality and relational accountability. Within this axiology, he includes the values of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (Wilson 77-78). Smith tells us that

> Particular methods within indigenous methodology have to be chosen in respect to indigenous ethics, explicitly outlined goals of research, and the considered impact of the outcomes of research on the particular

> indigenous people. In the process of disseminating of research results there is a need for reporting back and sharing knowledge. (15)

As researchers, we should abide by cultural protocols, such as offering tobacco[37] to those who share their knowledge with us. This also means being accountable to the people and communities from whom we seek knowledge, taking responsibility for the stories we tell, and understanding that stories should be shared at the right time and in the right way.

Teuton shares with us a story about what these cultural protocols can look like in scholarly research. To summarize, he intended to share a recorded story told by my relative, Hastings Shade, during a talk, but Hastings' low voice was drowned out by the soundscape of a rural Oklahoma summer. Teuton acknowledges that the Cherokee storytellers had taught him that stories can only be heard when it is time for them to be heard, and that during his public talk may not have been the right scenario. Rather than forcing the story by cleaning up the background noises, he recognizes that particular story was not ready to be shared.

Centre Flower (self): Positionality

Absolon indicates that "the centre of the flower represents self and self in relation to the research" (50). In this section, I position myself as central to my research by establishing my positionality and my priorities as a researcher. Instead of the four cardinal directions of the Western world, Cherokee stories tell us we have seven: North, East, South, West, Up, Down, and Inward (the self). We locate ourselves at the center, and then move in a direction from there. To borrow from this metaphor, we, as

[37] See Kovach for more on the offering of tobacco for research purposes

researchers, must place ourselves at the center of our research before choosing which direction to follow. This opposes the way that Western academic research is structured, but, as Absolon says, "[Indigenous] methodology is just as much about the person doing the searching as it is about the search" (74). By locating ourselves in our research, we establish our connections to the stories, to our communities, and to the land.

I come to this work as a citizen of the Cherokee Nation in northeastern Oklahoma, and I attend to this project from two locations: the first, my home in Lost City, Oklahoma and within the tribal jurisdiction of the Cherokee Nation; the second, from the marshlands of mid-Michigan, where I work and live while in graduate school. As Powell often reminds us, "I am where I think and do." I primarily think and do from these two locations, with other locations occasionally featured, and upon reflection, I find that this serves as a metaphor for my positionality in this research: I have a foot in both locations, just as I, as a late Gen-X/early Millennial mixed-blood American Indian, have a foot in both Indian Country and mainstream American society. I cross many lines.

As a Cherokee with a personal, familial, and ancestral connection to our capitol city, my place in the community positions me as an insider in this research. This positionality includes the benefits of an orientation to and understanding of the structures of this community; knowledge of tribal history and privileged access to tribal records and resources; a (limited) language proficiency; and a long-cultivated network within the tribal community, which includes elders, curators, academics, artists, teachers, makers, fluent language speakers, linguists, archivists, librarians, writers, historians, and knowledge-keepers.

I also come to this research from a disciplinary intersection. As an Indigenous scholar of cultural rhetorics, my academic position is at the intersection of Rhetoric and Composition and Indigenous Studies and my research is rooted in a cultural community: my own tribal community. My priorities as an Indigenous researcher are at the forefront of my work within the discipline of Rhet/Comp, and as I illustrate later in this and following chapters, my research constellates connections between the disciplinary area of cultural rhetorics and ongoing conversations, both public and academic, of Indigenous food sovereignty activism.

To gather knowledge and stories, craft them into something, and then to share it "with the people," or, as we call ourselves—aniyunwiya (the principal people)—is my primary goal as a researcher. This aligns with my epistemological approach to community-based research: that the research should be reciprocal, so that the people who contribute to the knowledge production of academic scholarship have access to the products of that knowledge.

Leaves (Journey): Methodological Framework

In Absolon's model, "the leaves are connected via the stem to the ways Indigenous searchers navigate academic channels" (50). Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith[38] tells us "…the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the

[38] Smith refers to alternative histories as "counter stories" (2). Smith articulates a commitment to reciprocal research in response to the long and devastating history of "knowledge poaching" from tribal communities, typically by non-Native academics, which has resulted in a general distrust of academic research amongst Native societies. Smith asserts that "when indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, people participate on different terms" (193). Smith illustrates that reciprocity is key to ethical indigenous research, and that appropriate reciprocal practices differ between Indigenous communities.

Indigenous world's vocabulary" (1). Smith describes the ways that Western concepts of research, knowledge, and literacy have long been used as tools of colonization and argues that, as an Indigenous methodology, story makes space for healing and reconciliation through the research process (115-118). Absolon tells us, "Our own knowledges and methodologies are there and can be applied to the work we are doing in the academy" (47). Indigenous research methodologies offer a culturally relevant approach to knowledge production, and, in doing so, "raise Indigenous voices out of suppression" (Absolon 92). Storytelling is a process that allows us to research through our own knowledge systems and our own cultural protocols.

Story as a Cultural Rhetorics and Indigenous Methodology

I should acknowledge that while I frame storytelling as an Indigenous methodology throughout this narrative, I do not claim storytelling as solely an Indigenous intellectual tradition, but as a practice across cultural communities worldwide. Instead, I see the specific orientation to storytelling as an Indigenous approach to research in Rhet/Comp as one of many possible decolonial options[39] from a much larger array of theoretical options. As Powell argues, "…storytelling isn't just an "Indian" thing…; it is essential in the creation of all human realities" ("Rhetorics of Survivance" 429).

Story and storytelling practices bridge Indigenous ways of knowing and cultural rhetorics methodologies. As a methodology, story allows us to research through our own knowledge systems and our own cultural protocols. Absolon suggests that

[39] to borrow from Mignolo's work on decolonialism and the "colonial matrix of power." For Mignolo, "the decolonial option is not proposed as *the option*; it is an option claiming its legitimacy among existing ones in the sphere of the political, in the same way that Christianity, Marxism, or liberalism house many options under the same umbrella" (xxvii-xxviii).

"Indigenous searchers talk about storytelling as a methodology to help our people tell stories so they can leave their mark. These stories help us to not get lost. We build on our stories and each other's stories, and eventually our stories weave together as we share them" (137). Stories are how we know. Storytelling is both a way of knowing and a way of producing knowledge.

Powell often begins her scholarly works with the introduction, "This is a story." This method of introducing her writing as story positions her as a storyteller, and her knowledge-sharing practices as storytelling. In doing so, she situates her audience as listeners and, thus, participants, of story. She makes visible storytelling as an Indigenous approach to methodology in "a discipline has been and continues to be complicit with the imperial project of scholarship in the United States" ("Blood and Scholarship" 11). Powell[40] tell us

> When I say "story," I don't mean for you to think "easy." Stories are anything but easy. When I say story, I mean an event in which I try to hold some of the complex shimmering strands of a constellative, epistemological space long enough to share them with you. When I say "story," I mean "theory" …. ("2012 CCCC…" 384)

Riley-Mukavetz emphasizes, also, that "…story is theory. We can learn from the stories we tell and re-tell what we do with cultural communities and the experiences of working with those communities. Those research stories are data for analysis" ("Towards a Cultural…" 110). This points to how stories, in research, can be both a

[40] Powell acknowledges that she borrows this phrase from Thomas King, who borrows it also from Indigenous storytelling practices.

means to data and the data itself. When Julie Cruikshank[41] notices that, during her fieldwork, her line of questioning shifts from what she calls "secular history" to stories that the people she interviews deem significant and that these stories then become talking points for their own stories, she teaches us that stories work in multiple ways (12-13). Stories are data that can be categorized and mapped and charted—just a few of many methods of analysis—but stories, and storytelling, can also be felt and experienced through the body, which is not as easily measurable, and through an Indigenous approach to methodology, that is also a valuable form of knowledge production, however incongruent this may be with Western academic traditions.

Teuton's work on Gagoga (Cherokee storytelling) rhetoric makes visible storytelling as a public, participatory rhetorical practice. Teuton[42] argues that as a community-based, knowledge-sharing relationship, Indigenous storytelling creates an active discourse between the participants ("Indigenous Textuality…" 136-7). Both the storyteller and listeners are engaged with the story, and both are affected by the sharing of knowledge, however overtly. In this way, the knowledge is constructed by the participants, the storyteller(s) *and* the listeners. This means that as I gather data stories from cookbooks, archival documents, videos, and exhibits, as I join in the practices of foraging and cooking wishi alongside the tradition-bearers and listen to their stories, and

[41] In her chapter, "Oral History, Narrative Strategies, and Native American Historiography: Perspectives from the Yukon Territory, Canada," Julie Cruikshank describes how her oral history work with Indigenous women in Yukon Territory shaped her understanding of how storytelling shapes our histories both individually and collectively.

[42] In his narrative about the Turtle Island Liar's Club, Teuton acknowledges his surprise upon learning that the Cherokee storytelling group whom he was researching included members who told stories only rarely, and some who did not tell stories at all (138). The group recognizes the listener plays a significant role in storytelling.

as I share some of these teachings, I am a participant in the storytelling and, together, we construct the knowledge.

Stem (Analytical Backbone): Theoretical Framework

This work is informed by cultural rhetorics theory and Indigenous theory, and this project is guided by a common factor at their intersection: decolonial theory. Cherokee rhetoric scholar Angela Haas describes decolonial theory as

> an epistemological and ontological approach to examining (1) how we have individually and collectively been affected by and complicit in the legacy of colonialism; (2) how these effects and complicities of historical and contemporary colonialism influence research and educational institutions, theories, methodologies, methods, and scholarship; and (3) how the effects and complicities of colonialism play out in our everyday embodied practices. (191)

Using decolonial theory as a framework for understanding the Cherokee rhetorical practices of gathering and cooking wishi helps us to understand the effects of settler colonialism on Cherokee food systems and to imagine ways of reclaiming our food sovereignty for ourselves and for the generations after us.

When I use the term *survivance,* I am referring to the word that Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor coined in *Manifest Manners*. Vizenor defines survivance as

> an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the

> right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy. (vii)

For Vizenor, survivance is to recognize the present of Native peoples as not relics of the past, nor victims, but people who can shift the power of colonialism. Powell defines survivance as "survival + resistance," and argues that it is as a reimagining of "what it means to be Native after centuries of colonization, genocide, and assimilation" ("Rhetorics of Survivance: 'Recovery' Work for American Indian Writing). She continues by arguing that "rhetorics of survivance" are "the tactics through which they enact that reimagining." When I talk about the ways that the Cherokee tradition-bearers gather and cook wishi, I am talking about those practices as tactics that they use to disrupt imposed settler food systems and to practice their sovereignty as Indigenous peoples who are citizens of sovereign nations within the larger nation-state.

EVERYDAY PRACTICE

The practices of gathering and cooking wishi are part of everyday life for the tradition-bearers and for many Cherokees. Cherokee people have been practicing these foodways for generations, despite the federal government's ongoing attempt to separate us from our traditions and from the land. Like Michel de Certeau's "walkers[43]," the traditions bearers use these everyday practices tactically to subvert the imposition of settler food systems. Through strategies of survivance in their everyday foodways

[43] In *the Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau theorizes the ways that ordinary people practice culture in everyday circumstances. De Certeau distinguishes the "tactics" of ordinary people ("users") as they interact with the institutional "strategies" imposed upon them by structures of power. De Certeau illustrates this through an example of people walking in a city. The city, a maze of structures, is developed by institutional bodies that impose the city as a unified system, yet at the street level, the people ("walkers") navigate it tactically and in ways that subvert the strategic city design. Within the practices of "doing" in everyday life, such as walking, ordinary people engage in tactics that resist the strategies that aim to subjugate them

practices, Indigenous peoples subvert the colonial food systems that settlers attempt to use as weapons of assimilation and genocide.

EMBODIMENT

Cherokee foodways are comprised of embodied practices. Foraging and cooking both involve learned, active movements of the body, as well as ways of knowing in/through the body. Memory and sensory knowledges are fundamental for both practices. From searching in their favorite wishi spots to sensing when to pull fried wishi from the pan of bubbling oil, the practices of foraging and cooking wishi enact embodied knowledges. Embodied knowledge and practice, especially Indigenous traditional embodied knowledge and practice, is the very thing that the Western world seeks to erase. Cultural rhetorics scholars Maureen Johnson, Daisy Levy, Katie Manthey, and Maria Novotny makes visible "*all bodies* and the power dynamic invested in their (in)visibility" ("Embodiment: Embodying Feminist Rhetorics" 39). They argue[44] that bodies signify, that "*all bodies* do rhetoric," and that the study of embodiment intervenes in the objectification of bodies[45] ("Embodiment: Embodying Feminist Rhetorics" 39-41). Colonizers are invested in the invisibility of our bodies and the knowledge that our bodies sustain. There is a long history that illustrates their investment of assimilation and erasure. By continuing our embodied practices and ways of knowing, Indigenous peoples intervene in systemic forces of erasure.

[44] Their work seeks not only visibility of the rhetorics of body, but also for us to "recognize the experience of rhetorics with and through our bodies" (42).
[45] and as such, has the power to expand the study of feminist rhetorics

LAND

Just as embodiment is rhetorical, our ways of interacting with the land is rhetorical. Gabriela Raquel Rìos[46] asserts that people and land "are always-already co-constituted" (65). Rìos indicates that "One implication of landbased rhetorics, then, is the valuing of embodied ways of knowing/being derived from land and from with working/living/being with land" (65). The Cherokee foodways practices of gathering and cooking wishi are ways of making through our storied relationship with the land. Powell defines *space* as "a place that has been practiced into being through the acts of storied making" ("Stories…" 388).

MAPPING

Mapping and mental mapping are tactical strategies that Cherokee tradition-bearers use to navigate the settler landscape as they gather wishi. Mapping is a geospatial tool that can help us to reimagine the boundaries imposed upon us by settler colonialists, and to envision other possibilities for shifting borders, border-relations[47], and nation-building. Seneca gender studies and geography scholar Mishuana Goeman explains that "it is important to see mapping as a means of discourse that mapped an imperial imaginary" (20). Argentinian theorist Walter Mignolo[48] describes how Europeans used cartographic methods to impose their power on geospatial

[46] to Gabriela Raquel Rìos' community literacy study of Orlando farm worker activists makes visible connections between their labor and organizing practices as what she calls "land-based literacies and rhetorics" to resist imposed ideologies that position them as "a-rhetorical" (60, 68).

[47] See Anzaldúa's work with geographical and sociocultural borderlands that theorizes the impact of imposed borders, with the lines drawn between nations and peoples and communities and families.

[48] In *the Darker Side of the Renaissance*, Walter Mignolo traces the imperialist roots of New World colonization to the Renaissance era and European literacies. He argues that language and writing, archive and memory, and mapping are the tools through which colonial powers were able to conquer and oppress the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Mignolo states that by devaluing the oral traditions of the Indigenous people, the European powers were able to link writing to knowledge and, therefore, position themselves as the keepers of knowledge.

representation of the Americas through maps and place names; this enabled them to control historical narratives and shape history in their favor, thus colonizing memory.

Native mapping is a way of resisting the violence of Western mapping. Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks illustrates how, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several Indigenous leaders in the northeast used as resistance the European literacies that were intended as tools for both assimilation and settler appropriation of land. Through Indigenous remapping, Brooks debunks the settler colonial assertion that North America was an "empty" wilderness upon encounter and argues that by remapping Native space as the cartographic center, we can reframe the history. Goeman adds that mapping[49] gives us "the power to rethink the way we engage with territory, with our relationships to one another, and with other Native nations and settler nations" (59).

Petals (Methods): Data Collection Methods

My strategy for this qualitative study was an oral history approach that included interviews and participatory methods, as well as land-based methods, embodiment, and archival research. As the sole interviewer, I gathered interviews from four tradition-bearers from my tribal community. I conducted interviews with each tradition-bearer, with each session lasting approximately one hour. I asked questions about Cherokee foods and practices, specifically on the wishi, and on the subtopics of traditional foods, tools, and methods; contemporary foods, tools, and methods; and on the tradition-bearers' personal tribal food histories. Through these

[49] Through gender and tribal identity as embodied ways of knowing, Goeman interrogates constructed settler colonial spacializations. Goeman "(re)maps" Native women's literature, explaining that "these women's imaginative geographies are the stories that construct, contest, and compose a mapping of the Americas" (15). Narratives by Joy Harjo, Heid Erdrich, Leslie Marmon Silko, Esther Belin, and E. Pauline Johnson frame the sociopolitical rhetoric surrounding boundary-making—allowing for a reimagining of spatial relations through story. As she illustrates the linkages between border-making and policy, Goeman returns each time to racial and gender relations encompassed by these spatial structures.

interviews, I gathered stories of their relationships with Cherokee foods, but also of the embodied experiences of foraging and cooking these foods, of family relationships that shape the meaning of the foods, and of what these food practices look like for the tradition-bearers in the present day. In addition to the interview dialogue, I integrated participatory methods through cooking and foraging demonstrations. I invited the tradition-bearers to perform demonstrations of their culinary knowledge in their homes or in mine, depending on where the interviews were conducted. If they are interested in doing so and are able, I foraged for Cherokee foods in the local region with the tradition-bearers.

I used digital cameras to better document the non-verbal communications and gestures of the participants, as well as the physical practices of cooking and foraging. The interviews and demonstrations were recorded as video and audio files. William Thompson accompanied me to interviews and assisted me with the filming process. Given my selected medium of video to capture data during interviews, tradition-bearers who were uncomfortable with being filmed were given the option to withdraw their participation.

As described in the introduction chapter, the tradition-bearers in my research are enrolled members, including elders, of the Cherokee Nation (CN) and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokees (UKB). The interviews were conducted with the boundaries of the Cherokee Nation jurisdiction in Northeastern Oklahoma. This research also took me to the archives of the Tsa La Gi Cherokee Heritage Center and the Five Civilized Tribes Special Collections in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

I used oral history methods in the interview portion of this study. Through open-ended structure of questions and encouraging the tradition-bearers to have agency in the narrating of their story, this method shifted the tradition-bearers to the forefront and situated myself as a listener. With this open-ended approach to the interviews, however, I found it difficult to recognize when I have gathered enough data, particularly in relation to the timeline limitations of the study. I recursively reflected on the data and adhered to a schedule to ensure that each participant is afforded time to share their stories.

When tradition-bearers shared other materials, including photos, personal papers, institutional records, foods, or tools with me during the interviews, I asked them to describe the item(s) to me during filmed sessions if it was appropriate to include in my research. Cruikshank shows us how making use of "commerative *spaces*" and "significant *objects*" in oral history work can help to facilitate story (23). In this study, some of the objects we used included cooking utensils and other culinary tools, as well as pocket knives used for harvesting wishi. Holding or remembering those objects, as well as the participatory cooking and gathering elements of the interviews, helped the tradition-bearers to recall their connections to those tools as part of their wishi narratives.

I processed completed interviews by reviewing the video recordings and by editing to enhance sound clarity and the quality of the recording. This included editing any interruptions to the interview, such as technological malfunctions, and any content that the tradition-bearers asked for me to omit. The tradition-bearers each received a DVD copy of their interview footage for review and as a token of

my thanks; I will also provide them with copies of any product(s) of this research. As a feminist researcher, I value continued consent, and have therefore informed the tradition-bearers that they may elect that I remove any footage of their interview(s) or content stemming from the interview(s) or may withdraw their participation at any time. Because I am familiar with communication codes in my community, I summarized, rather than directly transcribed, the interviews. Copies of the edited interview videos will be submitted to the Cherokee Nation Oral History Repository at the Cherokee Heritage Center in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, where they will be made available to the Cherokee citizens and to the public.

IRB AND TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

When I began planning this project, I realized that I would need approval from the university's institutional review board as well as the Cherokee Nation institutional review board. To say that coordinating these two processes is complicated would be an understatement. While it took only one week for the university IRB to approve my research project with an expedited status, it took six months for approval from my tribe's IRB, including several full board reviews.

Despite the extensive gatekeeping process, I recognize that the Cherokee Nation IRB is a way for our tribe to practice sovereignty in terms of research. It is of importance that we are able to have some control over how our tribal citizens are implicated in the collection of data and the way that this data is used. With the long history of exploitation of Cherokee people by researchers, our tribe's IRB is intended to protect us.

The Cherokee Nation designated two board members to serve as my liaisons during the process. I met with them to discuss my project before they would advocate for my project at the multiple board reviews. First, I met with Dr. Gloria Sly, who raised some questions as she indicated to me that this lengthy and detailed review process was standard for projects such as mine. I also met with Pat Gwin, the senior director of Cherokee Nation Environmental Resources, who also raised some questions about my project before agreeing to support it. During our meeting, Gwin described gathering wishi with one of my late relatives, Hastings Shade.

Because my study included the gathering of oral history interviews, my IRB application packet was a complicated issue. My position as a data collector was as an insider positionality. The people who would share their stories with me are people to whom I am accountable in my academic life and my non-academic life as well. They are people that I know, and who know me. The community who informs this work is not a community that I walk away from at the end of this project. Instead, it is the community to which I will return once this project is completed. They are my community, they are people who I care about and whom I must answer to, so it is of utmost importance to me that I attend to this work in a good way.

In my gathering process, I collected stories from four Cherokee people from my community: my father, Joe Shade, of Moodys; my uncle, Albert Shade, of Tahlequah; a family friend, David Stand, of Tahlequah; and our family matriarch, Maxine Neugin, of Lost City. Due to the sensitive nature of our cultural practices and to the limited time frame allotted for my data collection, I prioritized the inclusion of knowledge-keepers that I know and with whose communication styles I am familiar.

There is certainly space for a more expansive project with a broader scope of wishi practitioners as an area for future study. For this particular project, however, the oral history stories are one, albeit the most important, of several qualitative methods of research, which include archival methods as well as lived experience.

Environment (Academic Context): Disciplinary Contributions

Storytelling as an Indigenous methodology provides for multiple ways of seeing and imagining the world, and, thus, for interpreting and making sense of the research. Absolon suggests that

> Indigenous searchers talk about storytelling as a methodology to help our people tell stories so they can leave their mark. These stories help us to not get lost. We build on our stories and each other's stories, and eventually our stories weave together as we share them. (137).

It offers an expansive set of options for doing research. Our stories may not always align with Western scientific knowledge, or with Western histories, but they are how we Native peoples understand the world. In relation to my research in Native foods, these stories tell us how we came to be, how our foods came to be, why they are important, and how we can use them in the right way.

For the areas of Indigenous rhetorics and Cultural Rhetorics, story as a methodology gives us the opportunity to approach our research through a theoretical lens that accounts for the intellectual traditions of Indigenous peoples in a way that honors relational accountability, respect, and reciprocity. Powell argues that considering the rhetorical strategies of Indigenous peoples who have repurposed the tools of colonialism to resist colonialist projects can help us to "reimagine ourselves, our

pedagogies, our scholarship, our discipline in relation to a long and sordid history of American imperialism" ("Rhetorics of Survivance" 428). An Indigenous methodology of story contributes to the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition by offering a decolonizing framework through which we, as researchers, can work together toward a more inclusive and just world.

Storytelling as a methodology has implications not only for cultural rhetorics and Indigenous rhetoric[50], but also for the field of Rhetoric and Composition on a larger scale. Everyone has stories, narratives, histories. By engaging in research through story as a methodological frame, we can begin to imagine different worldviews and new possibilities for our work in the discipline. From this framework, we can include more stories, different kinds of stories. We can listen to these stories, tell these stories, and use them to theorize when and how they are told. Storytelling as a methodology can help us to build upon the disciplinary body of knowledge and enrich the ways that we, in Rhetoric and Composition[51], theorize story.

[50] I rely on the inclusion of Powell, Riley-Mukavetz, and Teuton to represent some of the ways that storytelling as methodology is used in Indigenous rhetoric scholarship
[51] Hereafter designated as Rhet/Comp

Anadasdayvhvsgv: Cooking

The Way In

Sometimes the way to milk and honey is through the body.
Sometimes the way in is a song.
But there are three ways in the world: dangerous, wounding,
and beauty.
To enter stone, be water.
To rise through hard earth, be plant
desiring sunlight, believing in water.
To enter fire, be dry.
To enter life, be food.
--Linda Hogan, *Rounding the Human Corners*, 1

"My ancestors' work was guided by respect for the food they enjoyed. Nothing was ever wasted, every bit was put to use. This sparked creativity as well as resilience and independence. Above all else, they were healthy and self-reliant."
--Sean Sherman, *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen*, 4

In the spirit of theorizing through story[52], I will begin by sharing with you one of my own stories, a distant memory: "Why do you have to clean the mushrooms like that?" I remember asking my grandmother as she lowered an armful of wishi into the water-filled basin of her kitchen sink. I was eight years old and had recently moved with my parents from the arid desert valleys of southern California to the foothills of the Ozarks in northeastern Oklahoma. As a mixed-blood Cherokee growing up in the age of supermarkets and shopping malls, I was confused by the large, layered mushrooms that my dad and uncles hauled into the kitchen in black plastic garbage bags. They were so different from the small, white button mushrooms that we usually bought from the grocery store. My grandmother responded, "We've got to wash them to get the bugs

[52] See Lee Maracle and Malea Powell

out. Lots of bugs live in them." My already-culture-shocked eight-year old self was even more shocked by the concept of little bug villages hidden inside the food we were preparing to eat. I pushed aside with my fork the unfamiliar fried wishi that my grandmother cooked that evening and did not eat it for several years afterward. It was not until I grew up and recognized the pride and loving care that my grandmother[53] invested when she placed a large bowl of wishi on the table at family gatherings and the delight of my relatives as they devoured it that I began to eat it and appreciate the significance of wishi as a Cherokee cultural food.

As I sit, now, many years later, with the oral histories that I have gathered from tradition-bearers, with photographs and videos, cookbooks, wild food guides, I remember those lessons I learned long ago in my grandmother's kitchen, in the home where I now live: that our food comes from the land, that our foodways are a set of rich cultural traditions, and that our Cherokee foods are important to who we are as Cherokee people—to our history, our present, and our future. I learned also, from the rows of white-and-black-labelled cans which were, and continue to be, distributed by the federal government to our community[54], that our Native foods are subordinated as a form of erasure, and yet, despite this, Cherokee people continue to cook and eat our cultural foods.

As I write this, there is concern in Indian Country that the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), which distributes subsistence food rations

[53] Though my grandmother was non-Native, she married into my "full-blood" (a term that indicates the degree of Indian blood as recorded in federal records) grandfather's family and was taught to cook by her Cherokee mother-in-law.

[54] Also referred to as *commodities*, which are "USDA Foods [distributed] to income-eligible households living on Indian reservations, and to American Indian households residing in approved areas near reservations or in Oklahoma" ("Food Distribution Program…")

commonly referred to as “commodities,” will be ended or reduced under the Trump administration due to a proposal included in the White House’s 2019 fiscal budget that calls for the distribution of the Department of Agriculture’s “America’s Harvest Box.” The box would replace some of the funding that is currently distributed under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly referred to as “food stamps.” In Indian Country, we are concerned.

We Native people have long endured the FDPIR and the health implications of commodity foods, foods that are typically not part of our traditional, cultural food systems. In response to a list of foods included, as well as the exclusion of fresh meat and produce, in “America’s Harvest Box” posted by NPR, Cherokee scholar Adrienne Keene tweets on February 13, 2018, “For everyone who is appalled by this (you should be)—just also know that this is the model used on Native reservations. Still. Today. If you’re wondering what the health impacts would be, we have hundreds of yrs of data.” It begs the question, why are our bodies, our health, and our nourishment less of a priority than those of other Americans’? Why were Americans not concerned with the quality of food that the federal government distributed to American Indian peoples for decades? Why is this only worrisome now that the larger United States populace might be subjected to the same conditions that Native communities have endured for so long? These questions are rhetorical. I already know the answers. It is because of that thing that enables centuries of genocide, assimilation, removals, and erasure: the continued[55] dehumanization of Indigenous peoples and the commodification of our land[56].

[55] As Brian Burkheart explains, “the project of settler occupation is never complete.”
[56] See Mignolo, Burkheart, King

In this chapter, I apply these teachings to the rhetorical practices of cooking wishi, which I have gathered through oral history, embodiment, participatory, and archival methods, to argue that Cherokee peoples use embodied, storied, land-based cooking as everyday strategies for survivance of settler food systems. Then, I show how Cherokee wishi cooking practices can teach us about practicing Indigenous foodways in our own kitchens in everyday life, and how this can help us to reclaim our food sovereignty.

What cultural theorist Luce Giard calls "the nourishing arts,"[57] in this sense, are at the intersection(s) of culture, physical movement, sensory experiences, and human connections with land. Cooking is a part of everyday life, a set of practices that arises from our daily needs for nourishment and sustenance. Cooking wishi is part of everyday life for many Cherokee communities, particularly during the autumn season, and it is one of many foodways practices that are part of Cherokee traditions.

Storied Foodways

Anishinaabe poet, scholar, and cookbook writer Heid E. Erdrich tells us that "a recipe is a story" (12). Wishi is a recipe, and within that recipe is a set of teachings that show each generation of Cherokee peoples how to nourish themselves, how to survive through a relationship with the land, and how to pass that knowledge along to the generations to come. The recipe(s) for cooking wishi are stories that can teach us about the histories of Cherokee peoples, the realities that we face both in the present day and in the future, and the landscapes upon we have lived and travelled for thousands of years.

[57] In *the Practice of Everyday Life Vol. II*

As I consider the making processes of cooking wishi, I gather stories from tradition-bearers. These tradition-bearers share with me the knowledge that they have gained through their lived experiences as Cherokee peoples through interviews and through participatory methods, which include cooking and cleaning wishi alongside them as part of the data collection. They have gained this knowledge through their bodies and through embodied practice. Their lived experiences and their cultural knowledge and practices stem from a long history of Cherokee tradition, and it is linked to their tribal heritage, as well as to the history of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island[58].

In this chapter, I include the tradition-bearers' recipes and cooking practices, which have been passed down to them across generations to show how Cherokee peoples use the rhetorical practices of cooking and preparing wishi as strategies of survivance and continuance. The Cherokee tradition-bearers describe how the embodied, everyday cultural practices of cooking wishi has helped them to survive when other food sources were scarce, to resist the ongoing settler project of assimilation and erasure, and to use foodways teachings to carry culture forward for future generations.

Storied Kitchens

The work of processing and cooking traditional foods usually takes place in kitchens; thus, the stories in this chapter are situated in kitchens. As Powell reminds us, "stories take place" (384). The tradition-bearers shared their stories with me in kitchens,

[58] The Americas

in my own kitchen or in theirs. The kitchens where we gathered[59] are all located in Lost City, Oklahoma, a small community within the boundaries of the Cherokee Nation jurisdiction where I live. Though not all the tradition-bearers are from Lost City, my own orientation to wishi is rooted there, so it seems an appropriate place to begin these conversations.

As we move through the tradition-bearers' stories, we move from kitchen to kitchen, from place to place, through both memory and physical geography. Giard links geography to social codes in relation to cultural foodways:

> Humans do not nourish themselves from natural nutrients, nor from pure dietary principles, but from cultured foodstuffs, chosen and prepared according to laws of compatibility and rules of propriety unique to each cultural area …Foodstuffs and dishes are arranged in each region according to a detailed code of values, rules, and symbols, around which is organized the alimentary model characteristic of a cultural area in a given period (De Certeau et al. 168).

These temporal and geographic shifts across kitchens, land, past, and present, are part of the theory-building process. Kitchens are sites of storied making and of teaching, and are, therefore, the appropriate spaces for the production and sharing of knowledge and wishi.

Ancestral Knowledge and Practice of Cooking Wishi

In her *Osiyo* video, Betty Jo Smith, Cherokee National Treasure for cooking, explained, "somebody had to make the meal. When I was growing up, there was no

[59] The tradition-bearers were offered the choice to either meet in their homes or in mine; One of them, Maxine, chose to meet in her kitchen, while the others elected to meet at my house.

store to go get anything like that. And that's how we lived. And everybody tells me, 'Well, how did you manage?' and I says, 'You managed.'" When I asked the tradition-bearers why wishi is significant to them, they each told me a version of what Maxine said most succinctly: "It was our food!" Likewise, Albert began by describing its significance as a Cherokee food:

> It's good to eat, and wishi is just a native food that we grew up with. It was just a natural thing for us to grow up eating, and it wasn't something that we stumbled on and found one day. It's something that been passed down over generations, you know, and it's just a food that the Cherokee people eat.

Albert points to the ancestral connection to wishi, to its practices that are transferred from one generation to the next. He describes the importance of passing down his knowledge about cooking wishi to his daughter and grandchildren, so that they can teach their children and grandchildren.

He tells us that his and Joe's recipe for wishi "was passed down from probably elisi[60] and from her family." Albert explains that this method is, in his experience, the most common amongst Cherokee communities:

> In the Cherokee way, that's the way it's always been cooked and from my mom cooking it and eating it at other gatherings and at other people's houses, it's always cooked the same. Now, I know some people from different areas, I've seen, where they've cooked it a little different but that's just the Cherokee way, the way I know.

[60] the Cherokee word for *grandmother*

After our discussion, we decided it would be a good time to cook some of the wishi we had been talking about. We reconvened inside the kitchen of my house, the childhood home of Albert and Joe. The two of them have eaten hundreds, if not thousands, of meals, in that kitchen[61]. It carries for Albert and Joe the memories, and probably some of the oil residue, of six decades of wishi preparations.

David tells me the reason that wishi is significant to him is because "It kept us alive." He explains that

> It was a value growing up, I think, in the times when the Native Americans didn't have a lot of materialistic things. We lived in poverty most of the time, and I think just learning the value of what it meant to understand what the Creator had given us to survive on—that was the good part.

David points to the limited resources of Native communities. He makes the argument that this lack of material possessions has facilitated the need to maintain a reciprocal relationship with the land because of a need for sustainable, land-based resources.

Nourishment and Survivance

The tradition-bearers each mention that wishi was often eaten in place of animal meat when game was unavailable. The mushrooms have texture, flavor, and heartiness to them that is like that of animal meat. It is often described as having a chicken-like taste. Either way, the stories point to wishi as a valuable form of sustenance when other food sources were scarce.

Cherokees, as one of the Five Civilized Tribes, were one of the earliest tribes to succumb to the assimilation project of the United States government. They had made

[61] which is much in the same state that my grandparents left it when they walked on a few years ago

the shift to an agrarian lifestyle well before the Removal, and those who could and were able continued those agricultural practices in Oklahoma. While the scope of my data collection does not include oral histories from Eastern Cherokees[62], we do know that wishi grown in what was once the Cherokee Nation lands of the southeast; it is possible that wishi was also prepared by the same cooking techniques and with similar, if not the same, ingredients as it has been cooked by Cherokees in the west.

Wishi can be prepared in any number of ways[63], yet Cherokees most commonly use flour to batter and oil to fry the wishi they have gathered from the land. Though the tradition-bearers each acknowledge that there are other ways to cook wishi, they each defer to fried wishi, and each share recipes with many common features. As such, the recipe that I share here is a combined version that is constructed by the recipe narratives that they shared with me.

Fried Wishi

Ingredients:
All-purpose flour
Salt and Pepper to taste
Oil

After wishi has been cleaned, boil it in a pot of water until it is soft. Remove it from the pot and allow it to dry. Tear or slice the wishi into ¼ inch strips. Place about 5 cups of flour in a bowl, add salt and pepper to taste, and combine. Heat about 1 inch of oil in a skillet. Gently dredge the

[62] An area for future study
[63] The Cherokee Nation website lists only one way of cooking wishi under their culture section: "Sauteed Wisi (a type of mushroom): - Goi gvtsatlanv"

wishi pieces through the flour mixture and carefully place into the hot oil. Do not crowd the pan. Cook until golden brown and serve.

A misconception that I had about these ingredients before collecting oral histories is that the oil and flour used to fry wishi were solely products of the commodity rations distributed to Native communities. Wishi are mushrooms with a variety of nutritional benefits[64], but the way that we usually prepare them in the present day is akin to frybread, or, as Choctaw scholar Devon Mihesuah refers to it in her cookbook and health guide *Recovering Our Ancestors' Gardens*, "death by fried bread" (55). Like the frybread that has become ubiquitous in Native culture, I viewed fried wishi as symbolic of the subtle stronghold of colonialism that infiltrates even in our kitchens; while we are making the effort to recover and retain traditional foodways, we have trouble delinking[65] the preparation of our food from Western practices. Like Latino rhetorician Victor Villanueva tells us in *Bootstraps,* we "people of color carry the colony wherever we go. Internal colonialism: a political economy, an ideology, a psychology" (xiv).

During my data collection, however, two of the tradition-bearers, David and Maxine, remind me that Cherokees often used cornmeal and animal fat to fry foods. David mentions that he often adds a little bit of cornmeal to the flour batter to give the wishi a crispier texture, and that he usually used bacon grease instead of commercially-produced oils to fry wishi. Likewise, Maxine shares that she adds cornmeal to her wishi batter, and she shares with me how, as a child, she drove the team while her father

[64] Maitake mushrooms have been studied extensively in Japan for their anti-tumoric properties and additional health benefits.
[65] I borrow this term from Mignolo

harvested the corn they grew on their allotment land, which they took to be milled into cornmeal.

This experience of reconciling the distinction between a traditional ingredient and a dish that carries the markings of settler violence shows me that what I was viewing as assimilation[66] could also be framed as adaptability, which can also be means for survival. I have another data story to share that adds to this point. Recently, while visiting the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, I stood in the gallery that houses their current exhibit, entitled "After Removal: Rebuilding the Cherokee Nation," reading a placard which attributes the resiliency of the Cherokee people to adaptability[67]. *Resiliency* and *adaptability* are often used to depict Cherokee culture, and as a Cherokee citizen, are quite familiar to me. Yet, those words often are supplanted by *survivance* and *continuance*, those active words. To see *resiliency* and *adaptability* in relation to the Cherokee people and Cherokee culture reminds me that these ideas are fundamental to our worldviews as one of the Five Civilized Tribes. These words remind me what it means to be Cherokee and how that is represented in our food.

David points out that, in decades past, there was no way of storing it for lengthy periods of time. Wishi tends to reach maturation in the fall, and without the contemporary conveniences of freezers that allow us to have wishi for months after harvesting season ends, it had to be cooked and eaten soon after harvesting. He says, "it's a seasonal food. In the old days, we didn't have the material things like we do now, to put it in the freezer. You had to cook it or store it as fast as you could before it went

[66] And it may have been
[67] to Euro-American ways

bad." He tells of storing wishi temporarily in well houses and spring houses built alongside creeks and streams.

Due to its seasonal nature, wishi is typically served during the autumnal months[68]. Albert recalls the memories of wishi as part of their holiday feasts:

> I remember Mom always cooking it at Thanksgiving and Christmas in a big skillet, and when we run through the house on Thanksgiving, you could smell it cooking and you know that you're fixing to get into some good eatin' right there.

It is often served during Thanksgiving and Christmas meals, and has become a staple of holiday feasts and family gatherings.

Culinary Tools and Material Production of/through Wishi

The culinary tools used to prepare wishi are linked to memory and to the relationships that the cooks have with their utensils and cooking materials[69]. Sutton and Hernandez explain that "cooking tools, as the durable objects that we take with us from place to place, or hand down in a family (usually maternal) line, come to be the storehouses of memories which help tell stories of people's lives" (67). The tradition-bearers in this study describe the use of knives, skillets, and buckets, yet they each indicate a specific utensil used for stirring the wishi: For Joe and Albert, this is a spatula; for David, a long fork; and for Maxine, a slotted spoon.

Albert recalls the tools that his mother used to cook wishi:

[68] Near the end of the eighteenth century, missionaries began converting Cherokees to Christianity, and though some communities have held on to the old ceremonies, many Cherokee peoples observe Christian holidays and U.S. feast days.
[69] See Sutton and Hernandez' work on culinary tools and memory

> Just a big skillet--as far as I know that's about all the tools that it takes, you know, a big skillet with a lid on it. [Mom] just used a spatula and turned it like you would frying potatoes and put the lid back on to keep moisture in. And that's how it was prepared.

Much like with Albert, David connects the tools that he uses to cook wishi with watching his mother cook it when he was younger. David describes the primary tools that his mother used in the kitchen:

> Mom had three tools that she used for everything she did. She had her right butcher knife, her right paring knife, her right spatula, and her long fork. She used the fork for everything she stirred with. She separated them. She said, “it cooks faster, cooks evenly.” She’d take that old fork, stir it one way, then turn it back and stir it the other way, then she’d go cross-ways, crisscross it. It loosened everything up. Same way she did with wishi. She said, “if you don’t stir it up, it’s going to cook in one big ball, so you’ve got to separate it.” That’s what she did with the long fork. I don’t know what happened to the long fork. I watched that old Indian woman cook a lot of meals with that old fork. That’s what she basically used. And I still use a fork when I cook.

Both David and Albert emphasize that they cook their wishi the way that they learned from their parents. For them, the cooking tools are linked to memory, and the tools that they learned to cook wishi with are the tools that they continue to associate with the cooking practice.

Maxine has a slightly different method. She explains, “I use just whatever is available. I do have this one spoon with holes in it, a slotted spoon. I use that pretty often when I’m frying wishi.” In Maxine’s experience, the tools are adaptable to the situation. If she is cooking wishi at a family or community event, or at a someone else’s home, she must use the tools that are available and accessible. For her, the ingredients are more significant than the tools she uses.

It comes as no surprise to me that Maxine’s orientation towards culinary tools differs from those of Joe, Albert, and David, who each look to the tools that their mothers used. As the primary cooks in both the home and in community gatherings, Cherokee women occasionally must cook in kitchens other than their own. My lived experience watching my grandmothers and women relatives bustling around the kitchens of our community centers and local churches while preparing feasts for our extended family reminds me that cooking methods are often adapted to the setting of the kitchen and the tools that are available at any given time.

What the stories that Joe, Albert, and David share about their wishi cooking tools adds to the conversation is in line with traditional gender roles in our community: as a formerly matriarchal society in which women were owners and caretakers of the home, cooking is a responsibility that is generally performed by women, whereas men, whose power lies outside of the home, are typically responsible for providing the food; as such, the tradition-bearers who identify as male uphold the cooking practices, including their choice of culinary tools, that they observed from their mothers and grandmothers. Women, on the other hand, as Maxine demonstrates, are more utilitarian in their wishi cooking practices, using whatever is available at the time.

Land-based, Embodied Making

Cooking is embodied; it requires not only a set of physical movements, but also of sensory experiences; smells, sights, tastes, and sounds all play a role in the processes of cooking. The sensory experiences of cooking are learned through memory, through observing our mothers and grandmothers and the generations that came before. Just as the tradition-bearers describe the culinary tools that their mothers used, they too learn the physical processes of wishi cooking by years of observation.

As a cultural rhetorics scholar, I am focused on the relationships between cultures and bodies. Cherokee scholar Qwo-Li Driskill explains that "decolonization is learned through embodied practices that restore cultural memory to our bodies and communities" (57). Embodied rhetoric disrupts Western codes[70] of knowledge[71]. When we consider the rhetorics of sovereignty, of nationhood, we are talking about which bodies will be governed, and by which bodies of government. In the context of Indigenous food sovereignty, it is a discourse about the rights and access of Indigenous people to "healthy, culturally-adapted foods"[72]. This includes access to the stories that teach us how to prepare the foods in accordance to our own cultural cooking traditions.

Cooking wishi, like cooking most foods, involves the production of materials through multiple processes. In this case, the materials are the mushrooms, and the ways that they are processed are through cleaning, cutting, boiling, breading, and frying. In "Rhetorical Powwows," Malea Powell theorizes the relationship between rhetorical practices of making and embodiment as she makes the argument that our

[70] See Mignolo
[71] knowledge as felt or experienced vs. knowledge that is tested and observed
[72] As defined by the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Network

relationships to material objects and making are “translated through the body.” The embodied experience is part of the rhetorical production. Whether we are weaving baskets or slicing wishi, the body is an agent in that relationship. The basket does not weave itself, nor does the food cook itself. Instead, the body produces the baskets and meals, alike, by interacting with the materials. The embodied practices of cooking wishi are tied to ancestral ways of life, but also to cultural memory.

Figure 2: Preparing Wishi

The act of preparing and cooking wishi is an involved process. The labor of cleaning and tearing or cutting wishi into small pieces for cooking is intensive work with one mushroom, let alone with several. The rough texture of the mushroom can irritate the cleaner’s hands, occasionally leaving them raw, especially when cleaning several wishi at a time. It also involves the lifting of heavy buckets of water for cleaning, and water for boiling. Albert describes the painstaking process of cleaning and preparing the wishi for the cooking:

> Well, when I bring it home in the sack, I put it outside in five-gallon buckets and if it’s too big, I break it in pieces and I'll sink it in the bucket outside and let the bugs crawl out of it because it’s got a lot of bugs and spiders in it, and they'll crawl out of it. When they crawl out of it, well then I take it and put it in the sink, and just break it up and wash it real good and then just starting pulling it in strips, and when you get it all worked out, your

> fingers are gonna be sore anyways, but then you take it and put it in a big pot and boil it down and drain all the water off because you'll have the oak bark. The oak bark will dye the water and you wanna drain it all off and let it cool. And its best when you do that, well, if you're gonna freeze some, just put it over to the side and let it cool off before and then put it in freezer bags. But the best way to do it is just to cook a big mess of it right then because there's nothing better than when it's brought in fresh, but just roll it in flour and salt and pepper and fry it like you would potatoes, and chow down.

As Albert's narrative indicates, cleaning wishi is time-consuming and labor-intensive. It requires care and attention.

David tells us, "Before I do anything to it, I put it in a big pan with salt water in it and everything in there, it brings it to the top. You know, it gets rid of it. I wash it real good, let it drain it, then wash it again, and anything left in there after that, you just cook it and eat it." We laugh, and he jokes, "maybe that's the good part. Maybe that's what gives it the flavor, those little bugs left in there."

That cultural knowledge of wishi survives, that we do have Cherokee people who carry on the traditions of wishi, who know how to find it and how to cook it in the Cherokee way, and who could cook wishi with me is a form of resistance. It is political. It means that during the systemic project[73] of the Assimilation Era[74] and its sociopolitical aftermath, which resonates to the present day, generations upon generations of Cherokee people strategically adapted the practices of white settlers while still

[73] which began with the violence of settler colonialism
[74] which became a series of United States policies that lasted until the New Deal

maintaining some of their traditional lifeways, such as wishi and other foods, despite and in resistance to forced federal policies that sought complete assimilation.

As I watch the tradition-bearers carefully and mindfully drop the battered strands of mushroom into the bubbling oil on the stovetop in my grandparents' kitchen, the place where I first came to learn about wishi all those years ago, I recall the words of Chickasaw poet Linda Hogan: "Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me. Be still, they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands" (*Dwellings* 155). The tradition-bearers and I, engaging in participatory research over a pan of frying mushrooms on a hot stovetop in an old kitchen in rural Oklahoma, we are all "the result of the love of thousands," and so, too, is the wishi sizzling on the stove.

Cooking Lessons

What my research of Cherokee wishi practices has helped me to understand is the significance and impact of the wishi teachings that have been shared with me throughout my life. The stories that the tradition-bearers shared reinforce and support this knowledge and add greater what to what I have learned through lived experience. It shows me not only how wishi knowledge is inherited, but also how knowledge is inherited across generations of Cherokee peoples. When this is placed in conversation with what I have learned through my academic studies, what I find is that cooking wishi is rhetorical, and that that the processes of cooking wishi are everyday, embodied, storied, land-based rhetorical practices of material production, of making--through the body and of the land—nourishment for ourselves, our families, and our communities, and that these rhetorical traditions are strategies of resistance, survival, and continuance.

At the beginning of this chapter, I shared a story in which I acknowledge a detachment of myself from our Native foods. The distance between myself and the cultural foodways of my tribal community is not coincidental, but rather is rooted in a long history of colonialism. One of the ways that settler colonialist[75] policies of erasure and assimilation impacts Indigenous foodways is by separating Native peoples from our traditional ways of cooking and preparing Native foods. After hundreds of years of imposing imperialist food practices, much of the knowledge about cooking traditional foods has been erased, and with each passing generation, we lose more and more of this knowledge. With the rise in scholarship that focuses on Indigenous food sovereignty, there is also an increasing scholarly interest in revitalizing traditional cooking practices. Cultural cooking practices are vital for the work of Indigenous food sovereignty[76]; without this knowledge, we do not have the means to process the culturally-relevant foods in a culturally-relevant way.

Cooking traditional foods is one way of enacting food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples. When we cook our native foods, we are subverting the settler colonialist institutions that seek[77] to separate us from our traditions, from our cultures. When we prepare and eat the foods that we have gathered from the earth, we are not participating in commercial agribusiness. By cooking wishi, we are surviving and resisting the ongoing Western project of assimilation and erasure. By bringing cultural foods into our kitchens and using those foods to nourish our bodies, we are engaging in

[75] Anishinaabe scholar Kyle Whyte defines *settler colonialism* as "a structure of oppression that wrongfully interferes with Indigenous capacities to maintain an adaptive capacity in their homelands" (12)
[76] Whyte defines *food sovereignty* as "community food self-sufficiency or cultural autonomy in relation to food" (2)
[77] Both historically and presently

culturally-relevant foodways; and by choosing to nourish our bodies with cultural foods, we are resisting the ongoing efforts of settler colonialists

Cherokee cultural foodways can teach us about ways of interacting with the land in sustainable, relational, and reciprocal ways. They can teach us how to use the resources provided by the land to sustain ourselves, our families, and our communities. They can show us what it looks like when Indigenous peoples can have access to culturally-adapted Indigenous foods and help us to envision what Indigenous food sovereignty can look like in practice.

While this chapter focuses on Cherokee ways of cooking wishi, this theoretical framework can be carried forward to the rhetorical cooking practices surrounding other Cherokee foods, as well as to the foodways of other Indigenous communities. As indicated by the recent increase in Native cookbooks, restaurants that feature Native cuisine, and scholar-activist work in the area of Indigenous food sovereignty, there is burgeoning academic and public interest in the revitalization of Native cooking practices. By using a cultural rhetorics frame to analyze the everyday, embodied cultural cooking practices of pan-Indigenous foodways, we can theorize the rhetorical material production of food in connection to reciprocal relationships between tribal communities and the land. We can theorize how the meaning-making of Indigenous foodways takes place in kitchens across communities, across Turtle Island, and across the world, and how Indigenous peoples, armed with spoons and spatulas, practice decolonizing activism in their own homes every day.

Anitlisisgv: Gathering

"Our bodies, like compasses, still know the way." --Deborah Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 208

My father loves wishi. Every autumn, he heads out into the woods to gather wishi from the bases of oak trees. He usually has several spots to harvest wishi because he spends months tracking them every year. Wishi can grow to be very large, so when my father finds young wishi, he puts a stick into the ground near the wishi to indicate that someone (he) has claimed it, and then he waits. He mentally maps the location of the wishi and returns periodically to check on it. Once the wishi has matured, he harvests it, using care to do so sustainably, and leaving an offering to the land so that the wishi will return next year.

Figure 3: Tree with wishi from a distance

As I was growing up in Oklahoma, my father and I would be driving along a country road, and he would suddenly pull the car over and point into the woods and say, "Look! There's a wishi over there," gesturing with his lips, as Native peoples are apt to do. I would look in the direction that he indicated, but I was never able to see them at first. He would say, "over there!" and point again, this time using his chin to point in a more exaggerated gesture. I would look and look, squinting out into the groves of oak and maple that line the roadsides but still not see it. I still have much more

Figure 4: Tree with wishi close up

difficulty spotting wishi that he does. My eyes are not trained as his are. He and his siblings went out harvesting wishi with the parents, who went out with their parents before them, all from the time they could walk. He has been foraging wishi his entire life. I never had to rely solely on foraging for food like he sometimes did growing up.

As a mixed-blood Native, I was raised in a space between tribal culture and Western mainstream culture, and in the intersections of Cherokee food traditions and contemporary American food culture. When I was growing up, most of my food came from the supermarket and, yes, sometimes federally-subsidized commodities. With the growing distances between tribal people, our land, and our foodways throughout Indian Country, I see this happening on the local scale in my own family. My father has a closer relationship with the land than I do, and his father's relationship with the land was closer still. With each passing generation, we seem to shift further and further from our tribal foods and from the lands on which they grown.

In my story, the concern is for the survival of our cultural knowledge and practices of our foodways, yet the fight for food sovereignty and food security for Indigenous peoples has even deeper implications. Lives are at stake. With many Native communities facing or currently experiencing the poisoning of their water and land (and, therefore, food), the aim of this work stretches beyond the recovery of our traditions—it is about physical survival.

In this chapter, I will look to the land-based gathering and foraging practices of Cherokee wishi hunters to better understand how they navigate the settler landscape, mentally map their wishi trees through memory, and use codes to engage in stewardship protocols. Further, I will discuss the ways that these wishi hunters pass

their teachings on to future generations. I argue that foraging is an everyday, embodied, land-based practice that is rhetorical. In doing so, I also constellate wishi hunting to the work of the lndigenous food sovereignty movement.

Like cooking, foraging for the foods that we eat is an everyday, embodied, land-based practice. Though wishi foraging is typically isolated to the autumn months, the practice of gathering food as part of daily life is an ancient one for Cherokees and many other Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island. While most Oklahoma Cherokees have shifted to foods that are acquired through retailers such as grocery stores and supermarkets or subsidized foods such as commodities, many still supplement their diets with wild foods gathered from the land. For Cherokee wishi hunters[78], foraging is a set of practices that provides them ways of finding food to feed their families, a way "of being in the world"[79], of surviving in a colonized society that has demonstrated on numerous occasions that it does not value their survival.

For Cherokee wishi gatherers, the embodied practice of foraging involves interacting with the land, but also building sustainable relations with it. Rìos affirms that "Indigenous relationality recognizes that humans and the environment are in a relationship that is co-constituted and not just interdependent. Additionally, Indigenous relationality recognizes the environment's capacity to produce relations" (64). Likewise, in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, biologist Robin Kimmerer weaves Indigenous knowledge production with science as she calls for humans to work towards reciprocity with the land, hoping for "the day when we can hear the land give thanks to the people in return" (117). These two scholars ask that we work to maintain our relationship with

[78] i.e. foragers
[79] As Levy suggests

the land and with our environment. In the work of Indigenous food sovereignty, this means to come to the land with respect, to impose upon it as little as possible, to harvest our foods and our materials from it in ethical and sustainable ways, and to give back to it as much as possible.

A long-standing cultural tradition in the hunter/gatherer ways of the peoples of Turtle Island well before European contact, foraging is critical to the survival of Indigenous communities. The skills of finding, identifying, and harvesting our traditional foods are vital for upholding our cultural foodways. When we gather our own cultural foods using our own cultural practices, we can build relationships with the foods and with the land from which they are gathered. We can resist the power of Big Agriculture and corporate farming, which disrupts the environment with pesticides, genetic modifications, erosion, and waste byproducts while simultaneously disrupting its biodiversity by superimposing monoculture crops. We can, instead, use our cultural knowledge to sustainably harvest our foods from the earth.

To contextualize this, let me briefly remind you of the Curtis Act of 1889, a complex part of Cherokee history that I described in the first chapter. Through the Curtis Act[80], Cherokee Territory[81] was parceled out into allotments of land as a means for separating tribal communal lands. With the aim of dismantling the tribal nations through land allotment, the Curtis Act was (mostly) unsuccessful; however, it did bring about a shift in our view of land ownership and property lines, and, in that sense, it was

[80] An amendment of the Dawes Act
[81] Along with the territories of the other Five Civilized Tribes: the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee Creek, and Seminole

a victory for the ongoing assimilation project. Fence-lines and property markers (both real and imaginary) appeared, separating formerly communal lands with little borders.

I recall, when I was growing up, watching my dad knock on the door of strangers to ask if he can harvest the wishi he spotted growing in their yard as he drove by. Usually, they did not know what he was talking about. After he explained that it is food we eat, they would, at least sometimes, say, “sure!” and let him into their yards. Other times, they would look at him distrustfully, unsure whether to let a strange Indian talking about mushrooms onto their property. Occasionally, they would say “no” and quickly shut the door. At least, that is how it often worked in urban spaces, within the city limits; in rural areas, however, property lines are often not so clearly defined, and the residents tend to be familiar with one another, so the borders are easier to navigate, so the wishi is more accessible.

As Malea Powell calls to our attention, "stories take place." They are connected to a location. I am writing these words from my home, a cinderblock house built by my Cherokee grandfather in 1958, the home where my father and his siblings grew up, the home where my family has gathered together to celebrate holidays and to share meals for the last sixty years, the place where I was introduced to wishi.

I remember watching my grandfather walk into the house with bags full of giant mushrooms, which he handed over to my grandmother to clean and prepare. I remember her soaking them in the kitchen sink and in buckets of water sitting on the kitchen floor. I remember watching her carefully cleaning them, cutting them up, and parboiling them on the stove in big pots of bubbling water. It was laborious work, but I never heard her complain. That is one of the interesting aspects of wishi--people must

stop whatever they are doing to tend to it when someone walks in with it, yet they are so grateful to have it that the often-unexpected work and inconvenience is not bothersome. Cleaning and preparing wishi is often a social activity. Household members tend to work together to process the mushrooms. Due to its complex, multilayered structure, wishi is particularly labor-intensive to clean and cut into small pieces before it is parboiled and either stored or cooked.

The stories of my narrators are also linked to northeastern Oklahoma, to Green Country, to their communities in Tahlequah and the surrounding area. They have their own memories of their own kitchens and their own relatives painstakingly gathering and preparing wishi. These memories tie us to these homes, to these spaces where wishi is gathered and cooked, to our ancestors and to our ancestral ways of life.

The wishi came in late this year. October is typically the month for gathering wishi, but this year, they came in November. Local weather patterns, in conjunction with our shifting climate, affect the wishi harvest. We are tied to the earth, as are our foods, and the impacts of climate change are of great consequence to our food systems. The Honor the Earth site emphasizes that “Native people are climate change victims, and we have also been forced into being climate change perpetrators.”

As I follow my father into the woods on a damp November morning, the crackling of fallen leaves underfoot, I cannot help but think of the Cherokees of the mid-nineteenth century who walked all the way from our homelands in the Blue Ridge mountains to the foothills of the Ozarks and made their homes amongst these oak forests. How daunting this unfamiliar landscape must have seemed to them, along with the prospect of developing new settlements to replace the ones that they had left back

in Southern Appalachia, even more so in the autumn months, when the copperheads[82] nestle amongst those dry, rustling leaves.

Like I always do when walking on crackling brown leaves in the woods of Oklahoma, I keep my eyes hyper-focused on the ground, watching out for those copperheads. I remember when I was young and my uncle Albert, one of the tradition-bearers in this study, had taken me with him to Fourteen-Mile Creek, just down the road from my grandparents' house, the house where I now live and where I am writing this story. He took me to catch crawdads, and because I did not know anything about crawdads, I was digging for worms on the bank. He told me to watch out because just a few weeks before, a young boy was out digging for worms while fishing with his grandfather and unearthed a nest of baby copperheads that struck him repeatedly--killing the child--before his grandfather could save him. Last summer, the same uncle told me about a copperhead nest near my house, where during summer rainstorms they would watch for the snakes exposing white bellies to the coolness of the rain, so he, his brothers, and my grandfather could go out and kill them. My uncle is the only person who tells me stories like that. It is difficult to tell if they are true or not. Either way, I know too many stories to tromp carelessly through those woods.

My father pauses every once in a while to give me a chance to glance around towards the bases of the trees that surround us. He does not need to explain. I know that he is trying to train me to spot the wishi more quickly, instead of wildly glancing around like I do. I lack his laser-focus wishi-finding skillset that comes with time and experience.

[82] A species of aggressive, poisonous pit viper

Wishi hunting and other types of foraging practices are passed from one generation to the next. Hunting for wishi does not only involve finding trees where they might grow. Instead, it is includes being able to read the landscape, to have a literacy of the land. Ecologist Tom Wessels tells us that "reading the landscape is not just about identifying landscape patterns; more importantly, it is an interactive narrative that involves humans and nature." Cherokee wishi hunters know the mushrooms require particular weather patterns, that they grow best in the early fall and are ready for harvest in the late autumn, when the leaves begin to change and the ground begins to cool.

Typically, parents and relatives teach Cherokee children to hunt for wishi, and as such, these teachings develop as land-based literacies[83]. David describes the way that he was taught by his parents:

> by observation growing up and watching our parents do things, they would say, 'Pay attention!' They would never involve us. They would only say, 'Pay attention!' And when they did involve us, you'd wait for them to say you were doing it wrong. If you were doing it wrong, they'd tell you.

Maxine credits her parents for teaching her how to gather wishi. She followed them when they went out to look for them: "Sometimes we would go in the wagon. Dad would hitch up the horses [to] the wagon and we would take tubs to bring them back in, and we would find great big mushrooms, wishis, and we would take them home and clean them and have 'em for supper. That's how I got started." She continues:

[83] A term I borrow from Gabriela Raquel Ríos

> We'd always look forward to them. I don't know if it was getting to go out and ride in the wagon, 'cause that was fun, you know, as a kid. But they were good. They were real good to eat. As a child, that's when I liked to go out in the woods, swing on the grapevines and stuff while they were looking for mushrooms.

Maxine explains that her mother often "put her rubber boots on" and gathered watercress while the rest of the family was gathering wishi, so they would have "watercress and wishi" for dinner. She also recalls helping her father harvest corn from their fields to help feed the family.

Maxine laments the sociocultural shift from primarily growing and foraging our food to our late capitalistic lifestyles: "We were out walking and working. We've got it too easy now."

Citing both a lack of interest and a lack of foraging knowledge, she acknowledges a decline in wishi hunting, saying "I don't there are too many people looking for them. And they're kind of poisonous. Mushrooms are kinda poisonous." Ultimately, this is the reason that the land-based literacies developed through guidance from more experienced wishi gatherers is important: eating the wrong mushrooms can have deadly consequences. While wishi are distinctive mushrooms, there are other poisonous species that could easily be mistaken for wishi. Learning to read the landscape is vital for gathering wishi.

Mapping through Memory

Rather than marking on paper, the oral histories that were shared with me each indicate that "wishi spots," the places where wishi gatherers find their wishi, often

returning to the same places, to the same trees, year after year and sometimes generation after generation, are mapped not on paper, but through memory and story. Mapping, however, is surprisingly absent in food sovereignty texts—surprising because I know it to be an important geospatial tool for foraging and tracking food. Mapping is an important tool, also, for decolonial land-based rhetorics.

As ecologist Jeremy Siegrest indicates in a blog post following his keynote talk at the 2015 Science, Practice & Art of Restoring Native Ecosystems Conference,

> Successful foragers develop a mental map and a mental calendar of where and when to find food. However, this [mental] database includes more than just edibles because details about other plants and animals offer clues to a potential meal (for example being able to identify a dead elm could lead you to a morel).

The tradition-bearers indicate that they do not mark their maps on paper. A reason for this might be that they do not want to share the locations where they know that wishi grows. Some wishi knowledge is not meant to be shared.

Maintaining Sustainable Relationships with the Land

A priority for wishi gatherers, one that the tradition-bearers identify and that I know from lived experience, is that foraging practices must be sustainable. As strategies of survivance and continuance, care should be taken for the wishi to return each year so that it can continue to provide nourishment. Robin Kimmerer asks: “If we are fully awake, a moral question arises as we extinguish the other lives around us on behalf of our own. Whether we are digging wild leeks or going to the mall, how do we

consume in a way that does justice to the lives that we take?" (177). She answers that "we are told to take only that which is given" (177). Kimmerer explains that

> The traditional ecological knowledge of indigenous harvesters is rich in prescriptions for sustainability. They are found in Native science and philosophy, in lifeways and practices, but most of all in stories, the ones that are told to help restore balance, to locate ourselves once again in the circle. (179)

In the stories of the tradition bearers, they each remind me to leave the roots when harvesting wishi so that it can grow back again next year.

My father is continually trying to teach me to watch for the cues of the plants and animals around me. He will say things like, "Look at where the wasps build their nests. That's how you can tell if it will be a wet summer." I try to listen and learn. I try to remember. For my father, Joe, his cultural memory, and knowledge of the land will guide him to the oak trees, perhaps in a wooded area full of oak trees, where he knows that wishi grows. His body, his senses, have the knowledge, and they show him where the wishi are. His mapping is imaginary; he mentally notes the location of the wishi in the map he carries in his mind. With his trained eyes, he sees in the landscape more detail than the average passerby. After all, he has been foraging most of his life. Through his orientation to the land and the various forests and foliage that mark the landscape, he mentally marks the location of his wishi trees, and knows how to find them when he returns the following year.

Albert explains that he tells his family where he finds wishi so that they may go out and find it if he is unable to. This knowledge is kept within the household to ensure

the preservation of the mushroom and its location both for the current season and for future harvests. Albert's children will know the location of his wishi spots, and they can share them with their children, and that storied, land-based knowledge can become a legacy, feeding generations of his descendants for as long as the mushroom grows there.

David also describes memory as his primary tool for returning to his wishi spots. Each year, he returns to his wishi spots before seeking out new ones. This is pragmatic, of course, to go first to known places where wishi grow before hunting for new places, yet it is also a practice that builds the relationship between a wishi gatherer and the land. For the gatherer to return to the place, to tend to it and to use sustainable foraging techniques, is an act of stewardship. Each time that he returns is another story, another way of knowing and interacting with the land.

Maxine relies on memory also. When asked how she finds her wishi spots, she says, "you remember it. You just remember. To find them, you just walk through the woods." For Maxine, her embodied memory leads the way. She described learning how to find them with her parents: "We went to the same trees every year, we went to the same place." She recalls

> That was our food and we looked forward to them coming on. And they don't come on until around October through November, so we always looked forward to going out and gathering 'em, just being out, you know. And you have to know where they grow. You can't just go out and look anywhere. They grow around red oak trees. And usually we know where they grow.

The Cherokees who forage for wishi this way have a shared code that one should not harvest food that has been "claimed[84]," as indicated by the presence of a stick or place marker staked into the ground near it. This stake marks that someone has a connection to that food (in this case, wishi), and so foragers who practice this code will look elsewhere for their food. Without some sort of marker, any forager may come and take the food. Even with the stick, this happens sometimes, more frequently now that foraging for mushrooms has become a popular pastime with the widespread shift towards artisanal and local foods in North America.

Typically, non-Native foragers, or the ones who do not understand the cultural importance of our foods or our foraging codes, just take them. Often, they do not take the care to harvest the wishi sustainably, nor do they leave offerings to the earth, so that the wishi will grow back next year. They do not realize--or care--that someone has cultivated a relationship with that tree, with that mushroom, that someone has been tending it for months.

Maxine mentions that her son Tommy said, “Once you see a wishi, you better pick it. I don’t know if someone else will beat you to it.” She adds, “And they say that once you see a wishi, it won’t grow no more. They quit growing if you see them.” This speaks to both the codes of foraging, the changing nature of foraging, and the agency of the land that is vital to our understandings of relationships to the land.

My father no longer needs to forage wishi for sustenance. He could just buy maitake mushrooms from a store—or he could buy plugs online and grow them in a log—but that is unthinkable for him. Like his father before him, he will probably be out

[84] A seemingly colonialist practice

collecting wishi every autumn until he is no longer able. He forages wishi because he likes it—yes—but also because he has always done so. For my father, gathering wishi reminds him of his family and their foodways traditions, of his history. It is a way for him to participate in our culture, and for him to continue the work of the generations before him. It is his way of resisting.

In *the Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen,* Sean Sherman explains that "long ago the tribes were sovereign over their food systems, maintaining food security with a rich knowledge of the land and its food resources. They cultivated crops, foraged wild foods, hunted, and fished as good stewards. They relied on complex trade, held feasting ceremonies, and harvested food in common sites" (4). As I mention earlier in this chapter, the work of Cherokee wishi gathering is not a new enterprise. It is ancient—a lifeway that has been practiced for centuries. Our land accesses have diminished drastically and continue to do so. With federal land policies that continue to restrict our access to even federally protected land, such as national forests and nature preserves, Native peoples are struggling to maintain connections to traditional gathering places. This affects our access to ancestral foods and cultural ways of nourishing our bodies and our spirits. To say that settler colonialist policy disrupts our connections to the land is to say that our displacement from our ancestral homelands and our landbases is imperialist violence. These policies impact our health, our spiritual practices and ceremonies, and our overall ways of being.

Foraging wishi is survivance. It is a way of enacting survival and resistance. Foraging for our Native foods, such as wishi, is a way of surviving the long history of settler violence. It is a way of resisting the colonial efforts to assimilate Native peoples

to imperialist food systems, to erase our identities and to distance us from our respective cultural foodways. It is a way for us to maintain our cultural identities in the face of late capitalism. We could easily buy the maitake mushrooms from specialty stores and even large chain supermarket retailers. Well, that is to say that some of us might be able to afford to purchase them from such stores. Some of us are still steeped in the poverty that comes with centuries of settler violence. As I am writing this, large chain retailer Walmart has priced them at $47.73 for 8 ounces. Not many Cherokee folks are willing or able to pay over $45 for one cup of wishi when the land provides them for us for only a little work on our part.

Aside from the cost of buying the mushrooms, the participants acknowledge that they enjoy the practices of walking in the woods, finding the mushrooms using their land-based knowledge, and gathering them from the land. They have been doing this work for their entire lives, and have pleasant memories associated with these practices. Hunting for wishi was, at least in the past, primarily a family or community activity. The participants recall venturing out onto the land with their families to gather the mushrooms, working together to harvest enough food to feed the whole family for as long as possible.

What I learned about wishi gathering from listening to the tradition-bearers, walking in the woods, visiting the archives and museums, looking at photos, and reflecting on my lived experience is that that in the Cherokee diaspora, finding it is a celebration. Wishi is a particularly dense mushroom, and just one can feed a large family. For Oklahoma Cherokees to find wishi in the wild is to be providers, to find food that can help families survive outside of their homelands. And to teach our youth to find

wishi is to teach them to provide for themselves and their families, to survive on/from the land, to provide for the future—that "teach a man to fish" biblical adage. *Feed a man some wishi and he will eat for a day, but teach a man to hunt wishi and he will feed seven generations.*

I am sitting in a lecture hall in East Lansing, Michigan listening to Cherokee philosopher Brian Burkhart describe his "Trickster Methodology" which situates Indigenous knowledge at the forefront while bracketing "the underlying conceptions of Western theoretical apparatus." He describes Diné and Cherokee concepts of "what it means to be of the land." Using the Cherokee word elohi (which means "land" or "earth"), he explains how the term correlates to not only an understanding of the land itself, but also as knowledge of the land, and, because "knowledge is a form of kinship with the land" (and the agency of the land), with the Cherokee people and Cherokee history that are in relationship with the land. He explains that "land is storied, so part of building relationship to the land is to build relationships with the people who know its stories." Citing Cherokee stories of Selu, the Corn Mother, and Diné stories of sage as examples of elohi relations, he argues that the land uses its agency to make itself available to those who are in storied relationships with it. He describes how sage "makes itself available" to the Diné people and how the ways that Cherokees "interact with Selu is in context with our connection and relationship to the land."

As I sit in an uncomfortable, plastic seat in that graduated, auditorium-style hall, I wonder about how those concepts translate to our foods. If I carry those concepts into conversation with the gathering of wishi, what we can see the connection that the land can also make itself available to the Cherokee tradition-bearers as they gather wishi. If

the land has agency, and wishi is a part of the land, the wishi can have the agency to give of itself for those in storied relationship with it.

Gadousdi soi: What Comes Next

> "To resist is to retrench the margins, retrieve what we were and remake ourselves. The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices –all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope."
> --Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies,* 4

"We should be the answer to our ancestors' prayers." --Sean Sherman, *The Sioux Chef*

I am sitting in a lecture hall at Michigan State University with my colleague and friend, Everardo Cuevas, who asked me to join him. We are listening to Shane Bernardo present "Food is Medicine" about food justice projects in Detroit and about his story as a food justice organizer from a diasporic community. He cites James Corbett as saying "The revolution begins in the kitchen." As he talks about the importance of cultural foods for his own community, the meaning that it held for them and how it was part of their identity, and the devastating impact of Biocolonialism on foods such as taro and pineapple, staples of southeast Asian and Pacific Island cuisine, I am reminded that the food security issues are not isolated to the Indigenous peoples of this continent but are effects of colonialism and Westernization on a global level. This shift from local to global is represented through my community's relationship with wishi, from the microcultures of fungal growth that spawns the wishi through the connection to Cherokee culture on a macro level.

When I began researching wishi, I viewed it as a food that was specific to Cherokee foodways. Then as I learned more about it, such as its English and Japanese names and its health properties and medicinal uses that are recognized outside of Cherokee culture, it has become ubiquitous for me. I see it everywhere now: in grocery

stores, in cooking programs on television, even occasionally on restaurant menus. Once, when I was trying a meal kit subscription, it even arrived at my doorstep in an insulated shipping box alongside portioned bags of gnocchi and corn. What I once viewed as a unique relationship to this mushroom is, in reality, part of a larger set of relationships.

An important feature of the research design is that it is not focused on wishi as an object or an artifact, but instead as a food that is part of a complex, constellative set of relationships between a community of people and the land. What this means for the study is less about the species of mushroom itself and more about its relationships with people and places, and those relationships are not quantifiable. It is about cultures and sovereignty and nourishment and stewardship and history and genealogy and love. It is about a relationship with the land that is so ancient and powerful that it provides Indigenous peoples with enough nourishment to survive genocide. It is about resisting the capitalist, consumerist, settler food systems that are not interested in our well-being. It is about maintaining those relationships with the land so that it continues to nourish us and it is about teaching our children and our children's children and their children's children to remember, maintain, and honor those relationships so that the land will continue to nourish them long after you and I are gone.

One of the teachings of which I was reminded in this study is a concept with which many of us are familiar: that our elders have stories to share if we show enough interest to listen. The tradition-bearers who shared their stories with me each expressed gratitude for the opportunity to recount their stories and that someone was interested in hearing about their lives and cultural knowledge. The tradition-bearers

have all been trying to teach their children and grandchildren about wishi and about other Cherokee practices. Some of their descendants are interested in learning and continuing the tradition, yet some are not. This is representative of the continually growing distance from the land as our children and young adults navigate their Indigeneity in a rapidly shifting America.

My family and the people in my community are often surprised when I tell them that I research wishi. I think it surprises them that something they do on a daily basis, something that is ingrained into their everyday lives, is what I am interested in researching. But more importantly, I think they are surprised that something that they know so much about, something for which they have expertise, can be valued as scholarship in Western academia. Much like the public's enthusiastic response to Steven Alvarez's taco literacy course when articles about it spread across social media in 2015 (or at least that appeared in my news feeds frequently during that time), they are surprised that something with which they are so familiar, that they cook at home, something that is part of their lives, can be an area of knowledge production. In many spaces, this sort of research is not valued. In many academic spaces, Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous rhetorical practices are the stuff of myth. In some spaces, academic or public, Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous bodies are still written out of existence.

Given the context of the brief[85] historical narrative that I shared in the first chapter, I often find myself wondering how I got here, how in the long history of humanity, I came to exist. I sometimes like to imagine that it is serendipitous, and then I

[85] Brief to me, though it may not seem so to the reader

can simply marvel at the wonderment of it all, of millennia of happenstance that led to me. Yet, what I know, from all the historical accounts and theory, from all the stories I gathered and all the archives and exhibits that I visited, is that through tactical strategy[86] my ancestors endured hundreds of years of genocide. I know that they survived horrifying acts of systemic violence and hardships beyond my imagination, and I know that as their descendant, I benefit from their survival. As Deborah Miranda writes, "sometimes our bodies are the bridges over which our descendants cross, spanning unimaginable landscapes of loss" (74). I look through the window out onto the old allotment land where my great-grandparents built their home, and I am also filled with wonderment, but at how they knew and how their parents and their parents' parents knew to be so rhetorically strategic to provide for generations upon generations of descendants.

When I was in my first year of graduate school, back in my hometown of Tahlequah (the setting of this research), I attended Northeastern State University, an institution with its origins as the Cherokee Female Seminary, a boarding school for Cherokee girls. In one of my first graduate courses, a survey course in literary theory, we read selections of the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, only one of which was written by an Indigenous person—Paula Gunn Allen. After having patiently treaded through Lacan and Marx and Bloom, I was thrilled to read Indigenous theory, particularly Indigenous feminist theory, which Allen calls "tribal feminism," at the very end of the semester. Later, I realized that in that university in the capitol city of the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah band of Cherokees, built on Indian land

[86] And, yes, perhaps also through good fortune

and that markets its history as an Indigenous institution, and that has one of the highest ratios of Native students in a public university, that course reading list was representative of the way that Indigenous knowledge and scholarship is valued both in and outside of the academy. I understand why Indians in my community are surprised that I am able to research Indigenous rhetorics.

I am grateful to have the space here where I can build upon scholarship in the disciplines of rhetoric and composition and Indigenous Studies that privileges decolonial theory and affirms Indigenous methodologies. I am grateful to have a space where I can prioritize Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and some of the people who have been teaching me throughout my life. To recognize the tradition-bearers as theorists and their cultural teachings as theory disrupts the Western hegemonic systems of knowledge that have historically and continually been used as weapons to dehumanize Native peoples as a means of asserting dominance and power.

When we look to the third chapter on cooking, what I have shared with you is not only a recipe, or merely stories about cooking. Instead, what I am sharing is one example--more accurately, a set of examples--of how Indigenous food sovereignty can work in our home kitchens as part of our daily lives, at least what it looks like as part of my daily life and the lives of the tradition-bearers. I am interested in finding ways to develop more recipes for wishi that include other Cherokee ingredients and foods. Within the last few years, several Native cookbooks[87], as well as Indigenous restaurants, culinary demonstrations, and workshops, have become popular as part of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, and what this expansion of Native cooking

[87] See Heid E. Erdrich's *Original Local*, Andrew George's *Modern Native Feasts*, and Sean Sherman's *the Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen*

culture offers to the public, the culinary world, and Indian Country is a reimagining of Native cuisine. In addition to joining in on the rising popularity of "foodie culture," these Native cookbook writers and chefs are bridging a connection between the Indigenous food sovereignty movement's work to help Native communities reclaim access to their cultural foods and the need to incorporate our food traditions into our contemporary lifestyles.

In the fourth chapter, I discuss the ways that foraging figures into Cherokee food practices. Much like the work that is happening in Native cuisine to help us regain our relationships with cultural foods, more and more resources are being developed that stem from Native foraging knowledges and practices. In addition to Native gardening and cultivation efforts through tribal seed banks[88], as well as gardening workshops[89] and demonstrations, many Native communities are working to revive foraging skills and wild food knowledges as part of initiatives to reclaim their food systems. What the stories included in the fourth chapter add to the reclamation of food sovereignty and the rights of self-determination of our food systems is a framework for maintaining reciprocal relationships with the land. As the tradition-bearers share their ancestral teachings, they show us what it can look like to gather traditional foods in sustainable, respectful, and responsible ways.

Looking Forward

I have many visions for the future of the data that I have gathered here. I would like to see a cookbook constructed from the stories included in this dissertation, as well as imaginings of contemporary approaches to cooking wishi and other Cherokee foods

[88] Such as Native Seeds or seed banks operated by individual tribal governments
[89] Hosted by organizations such as the Great Lakes Tribal Food Summit

might look like. My friend William, the filmographer and game designer who helped me record the interviews, and I have been discussing possibilities and approaches for developing a Cherokee foodways game guided by the teachings we experienced during the oral history interviews. And, perhaps the most intriguing of these ideas for me is my initial concept of this project: a multimodal digital text that incorporates the filmed interviews, photos, soundscapes, and recipes. Ultimately, it is a priority for me that I build or help build scholarship that can return back to my community, that can be accessible to my fellow Cherokees, and that can benefit them somehow.

With a focus on the diasporic culture of Oklahoma Cherokees, the location is limited to the fourteen-county jurisdiction of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, with the research concentrated in Cherokee County. Because this research was designed with a particular cultural community and particular participants in mind, the location of Cherokee County is implicit to the study. These stories and these practices are tied to the land. They are part of it, and part of my story and my own relationships as well. As I have mentioned in previous chapters, Malea Powell says "I am where I think and do." This land is where *I* think and do.

The study could be expanded to include a broader scope of Cherokees from across the fourteen counties and from our ancestral homelands in the Qualla Boundary region in the Southeastern United States. This would enrich the study through a more diverse inclusion of narratives and for comparative analysis between the two land bases. To expand the study to include the Eastern Band of Cherokees would allow for a deeper inquiry into the history of Cherokee food practices and a broader understanding of land-based relationships for Cherokee peoples.

Another limitation of the study is the range of the tradition-bearers during the collection of oral history. Due to limitations of time, I followed the advice of my dissertation chair to limit my study to include only a few subjects. I was advised to limit it to three people, yet I expanded the study to include a fourth person, my uncle, because while many of their stories coincided, they also affirmed and added to one another's stories in a way that I found to be fruitful for the data collection. Limiting the oral history collection to four people ensured that I was able to spend several hours with each of them, and that I had time to edit the videos and transcribe the interviews for the Cherokee Nation Oral History Repository. Additionally, while the interviews were a priority for me, there were other methods of data collection involved in the production of this dissertation and, considering the unexpectedly lengthy tribal IRB process which involved six full board reviews of my proposal and application materials, my timeline was prohibitive of extending the interviews beyond the four tradition-bearers.

Reflections in Closing

I have recently learned, while constructing this dissertation, that I have an allergy to mushrooms, that my blood has an allergic reaction to the proteins in mushrooms, and I was advised to eliminate all mushrooms from my diet. I also learned that I have a gluten allergy, so fried wishi is no longer an option for me. I cannot ignore the paradox of learning about my mushroom allergy after months--even years--of researching it, eating it, gathering it, writing it. As a person who enjoys eating mushrooms, giving them up is an inconvenience. As a Cherokee who has been studying the cultural significance of wishi, it is a painful loss.

Next week, on Memorial Day, my extended family will gather at our family cemetery, at Keener's Church in Lost City, Oklahoma, like we do every year and have done as far back as anyone can remember, to feast with our relatives, both the ones who are with us and those that are in the spirit world. There will certainly be wishi. There always is. I will not be able to join in the feast due to my changing relationship with food, so this year, I will offer up my share as a spirit plate for my ancestors.

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