

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF PLANTS IN TRADITIONAL LIFEWAYS IN  
A MVSKOKE CEREMONIAL COMMUNITY

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by

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UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF PLANTS IN TRADITIONAL LIFEWAYS IN  
A MVSKOKE CEREMONIAL COMMUNITY

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the members of the *Ekvny*  
*Hvtke* Tribal Town and to modern Native Peoples everywhere  
who are taking an interest in their traditions and heritage  
with a full and good heart. *Mvto!*

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**ABSTRACT**

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF PLANTS IN TRADITIONAL LIFEWAYS IN  
A MVSKOKE CEREMONIAL COMMUNITY

by

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This thesis examines how a particular community of *Mvskoke* Creek peoples in northern Florida perceive the relationship between plants, people, and the natural world and how their participation in the traditional Busks (the ritual aspect of the traditional *Mvskoke* religious system) have influenced the development of those perceptions over time. This thesis will employ the theoretical approaches of phenomenology, situated learning and world-view studies, ethnoecology, ethnobotany, and traditional ecological knowledge. Themes that emerged from his research vary from perceptions of supernatural beings known as the Little

People, to gardening, to traditional Medicine practices.  
Major focuses of this thesis include modern *Mvskoke*  
lifeways and the traditional *Mvskoke* ceremonial rituals.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Introduction: Investigating a People and the Growing World*

This thesis examines two major concepts. First, this thesis explores the perceived relationship between plants and people in a modern *Mvskoke* (pronounced mus-Go'-gee) community by examining the myriad ways that the informants engage the world around them. The second major focus is identifying how participation in the traditional religious ceremonial system has influenced and changed the perceived relationship between plants and people. This research was conducted with informants from the White Earth, or *Ekvnv Hvtke* (pronounced Ee'-gun Hut'-kee), ceremonial community in northern Florida.

This thesis focuses on perceptions of the growing world and the influence of the traditional religious practices of a modern community of *Mvskoke* Creeks in northern Florida. I have attended the calendric ceremonies at this community for several years, and have noticed the high levels of importance that plants hold within the

belief system. This perception received reinforcement by the fact that plants held such high levels of importance within my own biological family. I am also Native American, albeit Cherokee not *Mvskoke*. Some of my earliest memories were of walks in the forest with my grandfather and working in the garden with my mother. These experiences instilled within me a deep respect and reverence for the natural world, which has continued unabated throughout my life. These experiences undoubtedly provided the motivation to begin this research, although the passion and welcoming nature of the community in which I work provided me with the inspiration and motivation to keep going.

The thesis research emerged as a way to discern between two contrasting world-views, the widespread modern Western worldview, characterized by a perception of human stewardship and proprietorship over nature and the traditional indigenous world-view, characterized by a belief system that overlaps animism with an emphasis on fertility and life. Animism is the belief that "life" is not limited to the definition provided by modern science; rather, life is extended to include such things as stones, ritual objects, and even Medicines (Harris 1989:399-401). When "life" is the base standard for determining what to

respect, everything considered alive deserves respect. This is significantly different from perceiving the world around us as resources with which to profit or as recreational areas for our enjoyment. Yet, the clash between these two contrasting world-views exists even in modern *Mvskoke* people, who must transverse these two worlds.

Adding to a discomfit of holding different world-views from the rest of society, the geographic connectedness of the community has diminished over time. Traditionally, people lived in village communities. Today, the community is more dispersed, and, with the rising costs required to travel, many community members are unable to have such close contact. Phones and the internet are widely used throughout the community to increase communication and contact, but a common sentiment is that face-to-face contact is preferable to the technological alternatives.

I intend for this thesis to be more of a presentation of the community in which I conducted this research than an academic achievement. Despite the many problems that are facing modern peoples, there is an increased desire for the promulgation of their cultural knowledge, an act that may have brought death in previous generations due to a ban on divulging sacred knowledge. The *Mvskokvlke* (a term meaning the *Mvskoke* people generally, pronounced mus-go-Gull'-gee)

considered much of the concepts of cosmology and cosmogony to be sacred, including cultural perceptions of what occurs in and through ritual, prohibiting widespread dissemination of such knowledge. Today, the people of the community, who are led ideologically by the Ceremonial Leaders and the elders of the community, have adopted a new position, highly encouraging the teaching of sacred traditions and medicine ways. As an informant stated to me on the subject, "if you don't share it, it will die out... and, if you are willing to let it die out, then what are you doing here?"

#### *Outline of Thesis*

After the introductory chapter, Chapter 1, the second chapter of this thesis will focus on defining the subject matter and concepts of the thesis. I begin by discussing the religious and belief systems intrinsic to the worldview of the *Mvskokvlke*, including conceptions of family and community. I then introduce the community in which I conducted the research for this thesis. I discuss the experiences I had with informants while collecting the research to examine the ways these people engaged the growing world. I also distinguish between what I refer to as traditional "lifestyles" and traditional "lifeways," which provides a firm footing by which to analyze deeper

aspects of my informants' perceptions, especially those relating to ecological knowledge.

In the third chapter, I present the methodological and theoretical backdrop for this thesis. I first describe the foundational epistemic theories with which to frame the analysis of my data, namely, phenomenology and world-view studies. This is necessary in order to define the spectrum of evidence used in this thesis. I then describe the methodological techniques with which I gathered data (participant observation and interviews) and examined my data (content analysis). I finish the chapter by comparing my research and theoretical approach to other investigative techniques, such as ethnoecology, to further anchor this study in the existing literature and research.

In the fourth chapter, I examine the history of research on the *Mvskokvlke*, or only tangential studies that overlap with aspects of this study. I examine the *Mvskoke* in further detail, including their linguistic background. I then describe and provide a review of literature on the ecosystems and ecology of the geographic area of the community (specifically in Florida). This is important to provide insight into the natural world in which these Native Americans live, work, and interact on a daily basis. I finish the chapter by examining the history of research,

both historical and modern, on the Mvskoke and their beliefs, on ethnobotany of southeastern Native Americans, and on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (or TEK).

The fifth and sixth chapters present the themes that resulted from the content analysis of my research. The fifth chapter will explore the informants' perceptions of their traditional ceremonies, or Busks, and of the natural growing world. Subthemes in this chapter explore perceptions of life and death; concepts of health, healing and disease; perceptions of preternatural beings known as the Little People or *Este-Lobockuce* (pronounced Ee'-stee luh-Boach'-koo-chee) that are deeply associated with plants and the growing world; and perceptions of the importance of gardens and the growing world.

The sixth chapter will explore the perceptions of learning and meaning amongst the informants, especially as it relates to participation in the traditional religious ceremonial system. Subthemes for this chapter explore informants' conceptions of culturally proper behavior and perceptions of learning; attitudes toward engaging nature; the concept of duality, an intrinsic aspect of the traditional *Mvskoke* religious system; and informants' various reasons for participating in the Busk.

The concluding chapter of this thesis provides a summary of key points and important concepts earlier, bringing the various themes and subthemes together. Future potential research will be addressed. This chapter will also provide a commentary on the value of this research in understanding *Mvskoke* spirituality.

## CHAPTER 2

### *What is the Busk Ceremonial?*

The focus of this thesis, as previously stated, is on the southeastern Native Americans who identify themselves as *Mvskoke*. I conducted the research for this thesis at the *Ekvny Hvtke* ceremonial community in northern Florida. The central aim of this research was to understand how a group of living Native Americans perceive of the relationship between humans and the growing world. Furthermore, my research also focused on how that perception has developed and how it has changed with participation in the Busk ceremonial, the primary ritual aspect of the *Mvskoke* people's religious system.

The word Busk is an Anglicized form of the *Mvskoke* verb *poskita* (pronounced Bo'-skee-tah), which means 'to fast' (Martin and Mauldin 2000:100). Fasting, which begins about a week before the Busk ceremonial itself, is an intrinsic part of the *Mvskoke* religious experience and functions as a cleansing of the body and spirit, as I have experienced personally through participation in several

Busks. At the community, the word "Busk" also has an alternative meaning of "to pray," which is discussed at every Busk. For this thesis, the word "Busk" refers to the ritual ceremonialism that follows the life cycle of the Sacred Fire, born at Green Corn, maturing throughout the year, and being reborn at the next Green Corn. These Busk ceremonials have been discussed in many ethnographic sources from the historic period and continue to be studied today. However, within the various ethnographic sources, the focus has primarily been only on the Green Corn Busk, rather than examining the entire Busk ceremonial cycle over the course of the entire year (Slaughter 1996:405, Moore 1988:48, Swanton 2000:602-609, Hudson 1976:365-375).

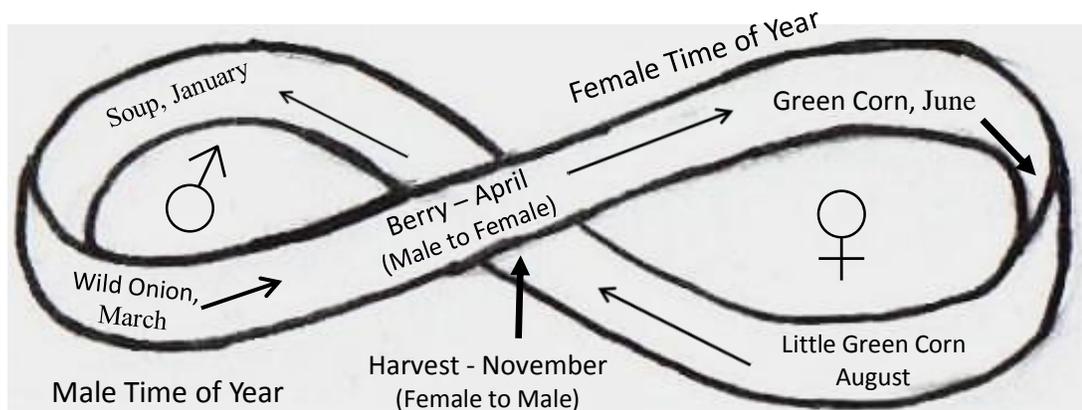


Figure 1 - Illustration of the Busk Ceremonial Cycle  
(illustration by author)

For the *Ekvny Hvtk* community, the Ceremonial Cycle consists of four major Busks every year (Figure 1). Each Busk focuses on different changes in the natural world, which become primary topics of talks that are held at each Busk. These talks come in two major forms: "long-talks" involving the whole community and talks that are restricted by gender (as a male, I have only witnessed these talks amongst males). It is during this time that important Busk lessons are relayed to the community. For example, it is discussed that Green Corn occurs around the time of the summer solstice and serves as the *Mvskoke* New Year. In addition to solar associations, the Green Corn Busk is also associated with the maturation of corn/maize. The feast at Green Corn represents the breaking of the corn fast during the spring. Other associations of Busks to changes in the natural environment that have been discussed in the talks include Little Green Corn generally occurring in August and being associated with the harvesting of corn, and Harvest being held after the first killing frost of the year, which generally happens in November. Berry has also been discussed as being associated with the ripening of Mulberries in the Spring, generally in April.

The Busk is intimately associated with seasonality and changes in the natural environment. These different changes

are signals that the time for Busk is approaching. For example, *wvlane* (pronounced wuh-Lah'-nee, *Chenopodium ambrosioides*) is a signal or "marker plant" because around the time of Harvest Busk the stems of the *wvlane* plant change from green to red. Around the time of Berry Busk, the red stems return to green. Other marker plants with color symbolism are the Flowering Dogwood tree and the sumacs. Gallberry is also a marker plant for Harvest but not because of a color association; it is because the berries of the Gallberry bushes are ripening in late October and November. The fallen leaves and pine needles underneath provide a perfect ambush spot for rattlesnakes to hunt the birds that feed on those berries. Thus, Gallberry is an important medicine plant because it is associated with the behavior of rattlesnakes.

There are also female and male connections with the Busk ceremonials. Berry Busk represents the transition into the growing season and, thus, the female time of year. Harvest, which occurs after the first killing frost of the year, represents the transition into the killing time, or male time of year. The male time of year has traditionally been associated with hunting and warfare and emphasizes the family over the community. The female time of year is associated with horticulture and fertility and emphasizes

the role of the community. Green Corn and Little Green Corn, with their associations to the growing world, take place in the female time of year.

During the male time of year, the ritual Busk cycle is temporarily halted. However, there are social gatherings at the square grounds, in which the community comes together during this time: Soup and Wild Onion. These gatherings do not involve much fasting or ceremonial activity. Soup generally takes place in January. At Soup, the traditional gender roles are reversed when the men cook a large pot of soup for the community. At the other Busks, women cook the feast, except at Little Green Corn (which is a "cold Busk" with no cooking taking place because of how hot northern Florida can be in the middle of August). Wild Onion, the second social gathering at the grounds, is generally held in March. One informant reported while Wild Onion is still a social gathering and not an actual ritual Busk, it does have a symbolic function as the "breaking of winter's back" and the end of freezing temperatures until the next year.

### *The Creek Cosmos*

For the *Mvskoke*, the cosmos is tripartite: with an above world, a below world, and a middle world, where humans live (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 2001:15-18, Reilly

2004:127, Lankford 2007, and Bolfing 2010:17-20). The above and below worlds switch places at dusk and dawn, with the day sky of the above world and the night sky of the below switching places at these periods of transition (Reilly 2004). The middle world is described as existing on the back of a great cosmic turtle (Figure 2).

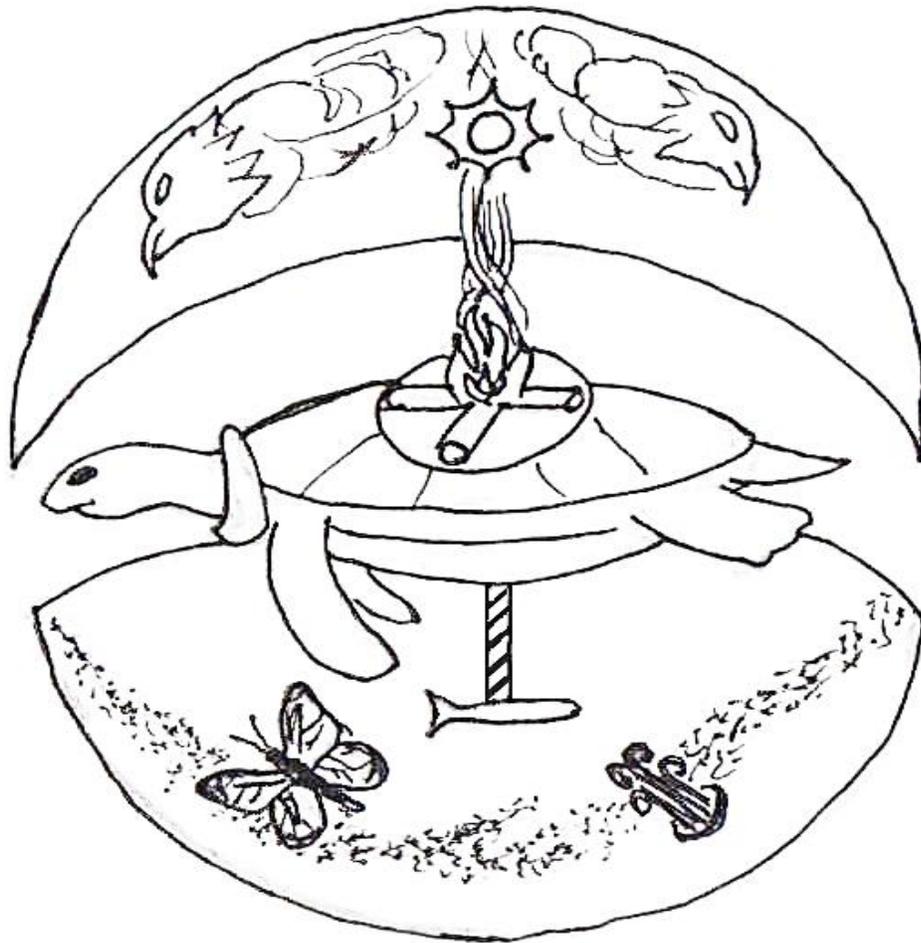


Figure 2 - Illustration of the Creek Cosmos  
(illustration by author, Bolfing 2010:18)

The turtle imagery refers to a commonly held creation myth in the Eastern United States (Mooney 1982:239-240). The people sharing this myth are generally referred to as "People of the Turtle", and include Algonquian, Iroquoian, and Muscogean speakers, at the very least. The tripartite world is centered around the sacred fire, which serves as the axis mundi (Reilly 2004:127 and Lankford 2007:31). The smoke of the sacred fire is a conduit to the above world, while the community ballpole is a conduit to the below world (Bolfing 2010:17-18).

"Square grounds" are the sacred space where Busks take place. At the *Ekvnv Hvtke* square grounds, there is a shell ring (or *taco*, pronounced Dah'-jo) that delineates sacred space with the sacred fire at its center, positioned on a small conical mound. Within the *taco*, four brush-covered arbors are situated at the cardinal directions (Figure 3); it is in these arbors where people are seated during Busk. During Busk, the women sit in the east, which is associated with life and fertility. The South arbor is associated with community and is for the younger men. The North arbor is for older, mature men and warriors. The West arbor is for the oldest men, the *Mekko* (pronounced Meek'-o), the Maker of Medicine (the *Heles-haya*, pronounced He'-liss Hai'-yuh) and his assistants, the *Heniha* (pronounced Hen'-ee-haw).

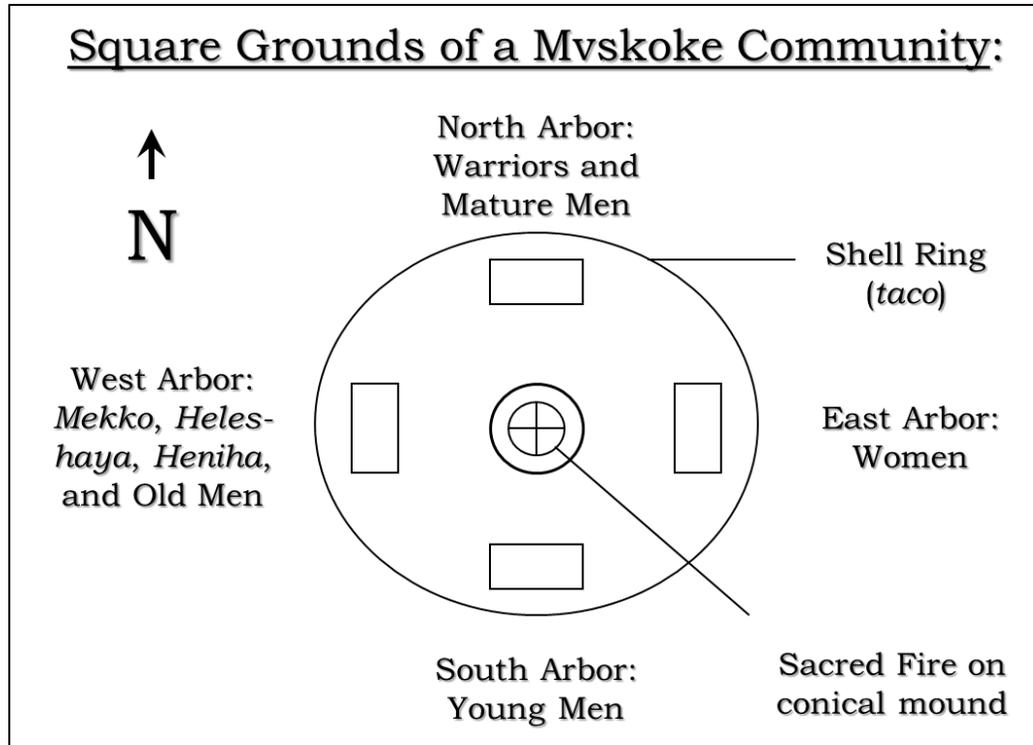


Figure 3 - Diagram of a modern *Mvskoke* square grounds  
(rendered by author)

Symbolically, these arbors represent the locations where the middle world is attached to the above world's sky vault. In the past, clan affiliations determined arbor assignment, and still do for a few people with clan affiliations, but in general, the clan has been replaced by a concept of family. The *Mvskoke* concept of family includes both related and adopted kin. Understanding the importance of adoption is vital for understanding the *Mvskoke* family. In our society, which stresses the nuclear family, formal adoptions are familiar, but the concept of informal

adoption is not as familiar. Yet, I think people can still understand this concept in relation to their close friends. For many people, friends are an informally adopted family, which, in some cases, are actually closer geographically and support-wise than related family.

In the *Ekvnv Hvtke* community, one of my informants discussed informally adopting a member of the community. She described the relationship as the taking in of another child. The person was truly taken into their family, for both good and bad. If the person acted up, they may be scolded like an unruly child, but the adopting family would also vehemently defend them. For the *Mvskoke*, the community itself is a meta-family, with related kin (those who are born to the fire, whose parents were members of the community) and adopted kin (referred to as being "called to the fire").

#### *The Tenets of the Busk Ceremonial*

There are several tenets of the Busk ceremonial. My informants discussed how, in the past, there were only three tenets: "the Fire calls its own", "pay attention", and "Medicine is its own teacher". The reason for having three tenets is that, for the *Mvskoke*, the number three is known as the "medicine number." It refers to, amongst other

things, the cosmological layout of a middle world existing between two rotating worlds, the above and below (such as that depicted in Figure 2). However, the number four also has a high level of importance in the numerical symbolism of the *Mvskoke*. It is related to a concept of wholeness and completion and can also relate to directional symbolism, such as a representation of the middle world identified by marking the corners of that world. The modern importance of the number four has led to a fourth Busk tenet being accepted among the community: "be involved".

The first of these tenets is that "the Sacred Fire calls its own". This tenet relates to the personal connection between individuals and the Sacred Fire that guides people to their participation in the Busk. Newcomers to the Busk are told that they only have to ask permission from the headwoman of the community, or *Emv* (pronounced Ee'-muh) and the rest of the women of the community to attend the Busk the first time. Visitors may ask to come back or the headwoman may invite them to return personally. If they demonstrate a commitment to the community and demonstrate appropriate behavior, they are allowed to return. Several informants stressed the importance of maintaining the centrality of the Sacred Fire in the Busk ceremonial. While every Busk attendee will leave with their

own experiences and meaning of what took place, my informants stated that if the Sacred Fire was not a primary reason for going to the Busk in the first place, then those people were there for the wrong reasons.

As the first tenet of the Busk the concept that the "fire calls its own" demonstrates the importance that this concept of relatedness holds to modern *Mvskoke* people, such as the informal adoptions discussed previously. What presents itself is a series of concentric familial-type relations: family into community into tribe into people of the turtle, and so on. During the female time of year (from Berry to Harvest), the focus is the community, the growing world, and peace. At Harvest, the year transitions to a male oriented focus, emphasizing a focus on the family, hunting, and war. These cycles of war and peace are also symbolized in the red-white color distinction, which will be discussed shortly. Thus, in the times of year that are hardest to procure large amounts of food to feed many people, the religious/social system provided a way to ease the hardships of winter months by reducing the mouths to feed to a single family. A single family is easily fed by a single successful hunt, whereas several successful hunts would be needed to provide enough food to satiate the entire community.

The second tenet of the Busk ceremonial is "pay attention". It might be asked "pay attention to what?" However, this question fails to recognize what is truly meant by this tenet. In our modern world of never ending advertising, television, iPods, and cell phones, people are able to keep themselves constantly diverted from the natural world around them. If a person wants to know what time the sun rises, they do not need to wake up at dawn and observe it, a quick Google search provides them their answer. Since every aspect of the Busk ceremonial is modeled after observations of the natural world, these types of diversions can prevent people from fully taking part in the Busk or fully learning the lessons learned there.

The third tenet of the Busk ceremonial is "medicine is its own teacher". The way informants talked about this tenet leads me to believe that this is the least understood of the Busk tenets. From what I gathered, it seems that this tenet relates to a belief that humans are not in control of the world or even of the medicines they create. Rather, as one informant said, "working with medicine is like working on live power-lines with no gloves." In other words, it is dangerous. To the *Mvskoke*, humans do not control the world around them, they only participate in the

world around them. Humans also naturally create imbalance in the world through their actions. It is this imbalance that humans can affect through participation in the Busk. Medicine serves as a way to bring balance back to the world and its inhabitants.

For the *Mvskoke*, humans are not the caretakers or stewards of the natural world, as is the common sentiment amongst the dominant Euro-American culture. Humans are only participants in a larger system, holding a distinct responsibility to maintain the equilibrium of that system. The concept of medicine for the *Mvskoke* is such that the medicines are more closely related to the needs of the world than to our knowledge of those medicines. Thus, medicine is its own teacher because rather than simply using medicine to achieve a desired result (such as vaccinating or curing), people must learn from the medicines themselves the imbalances that are affected by those medicines.

The fourth busk tenet, "be involved", is a more recent addition to the Busk ceremonial canon. In yesteryears, the community prohibited involvement in the Busk until after the person had observed several ceremonial cycles without participating. However, in recent years, this practice has dwindled and has been replaced by a more accepting attitude

that encourages participation. Now, once accepted to attend your first Busk, you are expected to pitch in and work hard just like everyone else.

*A Brief Background and History of Ekvnv Hvtke*

*From white to red and back again.* The red-white color distinction holds deep meaning in southeastern Native American symbolism. On the most basic level of meaning, this color symbolism relates to the male/female distinction. Red is symbolic of times of war, a masculine endeavor; white is symbolic of times of peace and is associated with the feminine. Every *tvlwa* (translated as "town," pronounced Dal'-wah) has either a red or white association with distinct prohibitions and restrictions on behavior. In a White town, there is a prohibition against killing another person, even if they had committed murder themselves outside the town. Thus, White towns could serve as a *Mvskoke* sanctuary where people could receive political asylum. The *Ekvnv Hvtke* ceremonial community is a White town. However, because of a historical incident, for the past several hundred years, the community was a Red town.

According to my informants, an event that happened in the mid-eighteenth century altered the town's White association. Reportedly, Scottish immigrants were quite

comfortable marrying into the matrilineal Mvskoke culture. However, some hot-blooded young *Mvskoke* men, who were upset at the intermingling of white immigrants with natives, got together and burned a building full of the Scots and their native families. The account of this event from informants is also mentioned in William Bartram's *Travels* (Slaughter 1996:318). He mentions how it had come to the attention of the chiefs that the white traders had been threatened with violence. The chiefs met to discuss ways to protect the traders while they stayed in a nearby building, awaiting the decision of the chiefs. However, while the chiefs were still in council, "Indians in multitudes surrounded the house and set fire to it; they all [the Scots], to the number of eighteen or twenty, perished with the house in the flames" (Slaughter 1996:318).

Consequently, for violating the prohibition upon murder in White towns, a council of Creek leaders decided that the town must become a Red town, holding to traditional ceremonial practices and maintaining a war post on the square grounds for a certain number of years, measured by ceremonial cycles. About ten years ago, this cycle was complete; the town removed the war post, and changed their name to *Ekvvnv Hvtke*, White Earth. With this change, a pride in once again being a peace town emerged,

and white gained primacy in symbolic ornamentation. For example, white feathers became standard regalia, associated with peace and community.

*Changing traditions and a philosophy of learning.* In most Southeastern Native American societies, there was a traditional practice of maintaining the secrecy of sacred knowledge. Several of my informants discussed how this secrecy would have meant death to those who betrayed it. Even two generations ago, it is likely that people of the community would have killed someone for openly talking about and divulging knowledge of what is done in the Busk ceremonial. However, amongst the *Ekvny Hvtke* community, a different philosophy permeates. There is an openness with knowledge of the rituals being performed and why.

The members of the community openly and actively discuss these things. It is a commonly reported sentiment that knowledge of the Busk should be taught and not be so secretive. One informant reported: "We have to pass the knowledge of the Busk on, or the Busk will die. If we are willing to let it die... *why are we doing this* [participating in the Busk]?" Thus, a philosophy of learning has changed the traditional secrecy that shrouded the ceremonial in the past. Additionally, the members of the community, having a

better understanding of what is done in the Busk, report feeling a larger responsibility to learn even more to maintain the knowledge for future generations.

*The informants.* I conducted the research for this thesis with thirteen informants. There were seven men, accounting for all three male arbors (one from the South arbor, three from the North arbor, and three from the West arbor). The remaining six informants were women from the East arbor. The informants ranged in age from about thirty to their late sixties. The primary method of collecting the data was through informal interviews, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

In general, nearly all the informants spend most of their time outdoors. One informant remarked that "Mvskoke don't play well on concrete" and another said "you don't learn about the natural world by staying indoors." There are archaeologists, workers for Parks and Wildlife (and other wildlife and outdoors agencies), contractors, and organic farmers. Several of the informants are retired and spend their time gardening, hunting, or fishing. As mentioned before, nearly every aspect of the Busk ceremonial comes from observations of the natural world, a fact discussed in every long-talk. Having the desire to

work outdoors, and to just be outdoors generally, as reported by multiple informants, reaffirms the lessons garnered through participation in the Busk, as well as coming to a better understanding of the meaning of the Busk itself.

*The experiences.* In addition to conducting informal interviews with the informants, I also spent a good deal of time with each informant, talking and engaging in their daily activities alongside them. These daily activities provided a substantial amount of information about how the informants perceive of the relationship between people and the natural world. These activities were also quite varied from informant to informant. I helped around a farm, I helped install a tin roof on a trailer at the Square Grounds, and I helped install fence gates (and remove the old gates, which turned out to be much more work than installing the new ones).

Food preparation (and eating, of course) took a substantial amount of each day, and I must admit that I ate better while conducting my research than at any other time of my college life. Fresh vegetables were a staple of nearly every meal, usually from the informants own gardens if they had one. While staying with one family, who operate

an organic farm, I even had the opportunity to taste the most delicious heirloom Brandywine tomato I have ever tasted, which nearly spoiled me on all other tomatoes. Different cooking styles and techniques provided a nice topic of many conversations, and having worked as a cook for many years (and having a penchant for haute cuisine) I feel that this was one area in which I was able to return the generosity offered to me by the informants. While foodways and cooking are not specifically elaborated upon in this thesis, it is definitely an avenue of future research that could further elaborate upon how modern peoples engage the natural world around them.

I also spent recreational time with my informants, hiking different local trails, kayaking on the Wakulla river, visiting different archaeological sites, and just spending time outdoors. It was during these activities that conversation became more open and relaxed. Everything from unique personal life experiences to different experiences brewing beer was discussed. Many of the conversations also naturally drifted to aspects of the Busk ceremonial. Plant identification and use were a common topic of conversation.

A rapport developed between my informants and myself during the conducting of the research for this thesis. While I have known these informants for several years, it

was over the course of collecting this research that they become like another family. When I embarked on the fifteen hour drive to northern Florida, I had prepared myself to camp at different locations (due to the lack of funds for a motel). However, I was surprised when my informants took me into their homes. I helped prepare food with them, helped around the house, relaxed with them, and generally felt as though I had been taken in as a part of their families. Their kindness and giving natures made it very easy to come to love every one of these informants as part of my own family as well.

*Lifestyles, Lifeways, and What it Means to be Traditional*

While conducting my research, I encountered a problem in defining what it means to be "traditional." For much of the dominant American culture, what is meant by being "traditional" is engaging in traditional lifestyles. Traditional lifestyles, though, are more of a figment of our collective imagination than an actuality. Traditional lifestyles can be defined as living in the way of the ancestors. However, conceptions of what these lifestyles were actually like are always skewed by modern interpretation, which is affected as much or more by stereotypes and misconceptions as by the actual past.

Another way to define "traditional" involves engaging in traditional practices. Traditional practices include flintknapping, fingerweaving, shell carving, basket and fiber making, the making of bows and ballsticks, and the making of ceremonial items like rattles and shakers (leg rattles that women wear). Among the *Ekvnv Hvtke* community, several informants regularly engage in these practices. However, simply associating the concept of "traditional" with the construction of craft goods does not adequately capture what the informants described as being "traditional."

In the *Ekvnv Hvtke* community, traditionality is expressed in how one perceives of the natural world. It is a matter of interacting with and paying attention to the natural world. One informant commented that "you can be traditional and still use a chainsaw." To the community, being traditional means doing your best to take the lessons learned at Busk into your daily life. Rather than a lifestyle, which is imitative of a conceived past, this concept of traditional is better described as a "lifeway".

The difference between lifestyles and lifeways is that while lifestyles are focused on material aspects of culture being maintained, lifeways are more focused on values and ways of thinking. In a lifeway, new technologies do not

interrupt the continuance of traditionality because new technology simply makes things easier, it does not necessarily change the values or ways of thinking that are involved in doing those things. What I witnessed while conducting my research was that my informants tried to actively involve themselves in a traditional lifeway while engaging in traditional lifestyles (such as the making of traditional craft items) as a way to reinforce their efforts to involve themselves in their traditional lifeway.

Making traditional craft items also forces people to slow down and pay attention, which are both vital lessons for participation in the Busk ceremonial (Dan Penton, personal communication:2011). Many of these items can take hundreds of hours to make, and the moment you fail to pay attention or try to rush things, the entire piece can be ruined. The making of these items also reflects precontact lifeways. For example, fingerweaving reflects pre-loom weaving techniques. When the loom was introduced, fingerwoven cloth was replaced by loom-woven cloth, which required much less time and effort. However, although fingerweaving and fibermaking seemed to be obsolete practices with the advent of the loom, these practices continued.

Amongst the informants, engaging in the crafting of traditional items serves as a way to connect people to ancestral traditions. Furthermore, as reported to me, many techniques and patterns for traditional craft goods were particular to certain families, clans, or communities. The wearing of certain items, then, reflected inclusion into specific cultural groups. Thus, engaging in traditional lifestyle practices (such as creating traditional crafts goods) allows people to strengthen and reinforce their own traditional lifeways through participation in traditional lifestyles and to connect to their family, community, and ancestors through the different identities associated with the crafting of these items.

It is important to recognize that a traditional lifeway can be lived without practicing traditional lifestyles. Many people confuse the materiality of traditional Native Americans with the actuality of traditional Native Americans. However, the way that nearly all of my informants conceived of what it is to be "traditional" was not defined through materiality, it was through the concepts and ways of thinking that define a "lifeway," and may be better characterized as a "way of the heart".

### CHAPTER 3

#### *Theory*

This thesis makes use of multiple theoretical approaches in order to understanding the ethnoecological perceptions of *Mvskoke* people in northern Florida. In general, these approaches can be broken down into two distinct theoretical categories. The first of these categories is phenomenology. The second category consists of situated learning and world-view studies. Essentially, the focus of these two general approaches are what differentiates them from each other.

Phenomenology has, as its focus, the individual. In focusing on the individual, phenomenological approaches attempt to analyze and account for both the variation that is possible within a distinct subjective individual (what might be described as their distinct "life-history") as well as the influence of social factors that bear upon that individual. Thus, phenomenology requires identifying both external and internal factors that affect any individual's consciousness or, really, any meaningful experience of the world.

Situated learning and world-view studies, rather than emphasizing the individual, focus on groups of interacting individuals. In this theoretical proposition, the situated learning focus is upon the ritual community that takes part in the Busks at the *Ekvnv Hvtke* square grounds. The world-views, which are intrinsic to the performance of these ritual Busks, are reaffirmed and strengthened through community interaction and participation in the rituals themselves. By contrasting phenomenological studies with situated learning and world-view studies, this thesis provides a theoretical basis for examining individual perceptions of the natural world and the *Mvskoke* Busk. It also allows various theoretical assumptions and individual perceptions to be placed within the context of the larger social and religious system.

It is also important to mention that, especially as it pertains to this thesis, culture is microscopic and not macroscopic. Investigations of culture, then, must reduce the focus away from broad cultural interpretations and ethnological comparisons and focus on the small-scale community and its members.

*Phenomenology and perception.* The history of phenomenology begins in philosophy, where it emerged from

the Idealism school of thought amongst such notables as Locke (1689-90), Hume (1739-40 and 1748), Kant (1781, 1788, and 1790), and Hegel (1807). Almost a century later, the works of thinkers such as Edmund Husserl (1913) and one of his protégé students, Martin Heidegger (1927), primarily led what became the phenomenological movement. These philosophers dedicated much of their lives to studying consciousness and the myriad ways that individuals actually experience the world around them, with the intention to reduce the study of consciousness to the subjective differences in perception.

Of course, topics like aesthetics, in which sayings like "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," readily acknowledge that different people can have different experiences of the same object. However, the work of the early phenomenological thinkers, later advanced by the works of other notable phenomenological and existential philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), began examining how the perceptual categories that give rise to the meaningfulness of mundane experiences can be just as subjective in nature as aesthetic experiences of beauty. This recognition of the subjectiveness of reality began to correlate with the studies of neural-functioning that were emerging in the

1960s, giving rise to cognitive phenomenology, which associates the variation in subjective experience to differences in brain functioning.

Cognitive phenomenology, basically, can be used to determine a conceptual model to communicate how ephemeral things like subjective experience and learning can be expressed in biological terms. Biological explanations bring phenomenology out of the realm of philosophical pondering, allowing other disciplines to arrive at an understanding of human behavior and experience that was previously beyond their reach. Cognitive phenomenology can, therefore, serve as a kind of liaison between two disciplines of study that have traditionally formed a gulf in the understanding of human behavior: the soft sciences that study culture in numerous ways and the hard sciences that only attempt to quantify culture in some way.

Cognitive phenomenological studies examine differences in brain-patterning responses to different stimuli. These stimuli can be internal (such as an emotional response to a particular memory or simply being tired) or external (such as the effects of dreary weather on a person). Combinations of internal and external factors elicit neural responses that are tied to meaningful experiences. For example, when a certain emotional response like the memory of a loved one

is triggered by a particular smell, such as their perfume or favorite flower, the individual is experiencing a combination of various internal and external factors that produce that particular neural response. Of course, it is important to point out that any memory is always a new experience and that no two experiences of any particular memory will ever be identical to each other (Edelman 2004:53). In other words, because the context of experience is necessarily tied to the combination of unique internal and external factors, memory is actually highly subjective. Conceptualizing subjective experience through neural functioning, and accounting for how people perceive anything at all, benefits explanations of learning processes. Patterns of brain functioning, like muscle memory, are examples of how the brain can replicate the same results reliably although not identically (Edelman 2004:53).

Many cognitive phenomenological approaches have been criticized for overemphasizing the neural components of experience. Gerald Edelman (2004:125) argued that some cognitive phenomenologists have attempted to reduce experience only to neural responses to various stimuli. He argued that in doing so, those researchers are failing to recognize that the identification of a neural response that

gives rise to a particular experience does not fully explain the extensive variability of subjective experiences themselves (Edelman 2004:125). Furthermore, accounting for this subjective experience is necessary for any theory of consciousness, which may explain how people have meaningful experiences of the world around them (Edelman 2004:130).

Even more recently, Peter Carruthers and Bénédicte Veillet (2011:36-37) argued that cognitive phenomenological reductions of experience purely to neural responses do not account for the relational quality of experience. That is, simply reducing experience to specific brain states does not adequately describe the relationship between the actual subjective experiences and their corresponding brain states (Carruthers and Veillet 2011:36-37). This is because brain states include subjective memory and previous experiences, which, in turn, not only affect neural functioning, but also qualitatively alter the subjective experience itself.

*Implementing phenomenology.* Taking the criticisms of cognitive phenomenology into account, I argue, in this thesis, that it is still useful to employ the concepts and structure of cognitive phenomenology in an anthropological manner. In this thesis, I employ phenomenology by examining the ways that people of the *Ekvnnv Hvtke* community have

meaningful cultural experiences, which correlate to their own unique life histories (their history of experienced internal and external factors). To do so, this thesis examines three categories of subjective experiences: experiences participating in the Busk ceremonial, experiences of working with and growing plants, and particular aspects of the *Mvskoke* belief system. The information gathered on these topics forms the data set that can best determine the effect that participation in the Busk, over time, has had on the various community members' subjective perceptual experiences, especially their perceptions of how people, plants, and the growing world are interconnected.

One way that phenomenology was employed in interviews was by using a technique of psychological stimulation. When a sufficient rapport has been developed with the informants, the researcher can offer ideas that cause a particularly positive or negative reaction. The answer to the question is not necessarily important since the objective is to stimulate an emotional response, which allows for a better examination of deep-seated beliefs. Phenomenological questions also help to differentiate between what an experience may mean to the informants and what it means to me. Divorcing my own beliefs and

subjective experience is necessary to accurately relay the information about the members of the *Ekvnnv Hvtke* community, which is the goal of this thesis.

*Situated learning.* Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) explored the use of a social learning theory known as situated learning. The authors focused on how people learn in various work environments. Their basic argument was that as people engage other people and interact within their social environment, they learn proper or appropriate behavior and are thusly drawn into deeper and more meaningful interaction within that society (Lave and Wenger 1991:29 and 121). In a work environment, a person must go through a period of formalized learning or apprenticeship, learning where to go and what to do. However, more intense and more social learning occurs informally, through extensive social interaction.

Situated learning, as described by Lave and Wenger (1991:32-34) occurs after the introductory apprentice period. It is in this social and informal phase of learning that the proper and appropriate behaviors and social conventions are learned and reinforced. This type of socialized learning happens within what the authors call communities of practice, a topic that later became the

central focus of its own book (Wenger 1999). Communities of practice are small tight-knit social learning groups with their own particular social conventions and appropriate behavior for the individuals within that community (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Situated learning and communities of practice are used and examined in this thesis. The form of situated learning that is examined is, primarily, the learning environment of the Busk ceremonial, while the community of practice under scrutiny is the *Ekvnv Hvtke* ceremonial community itself. Some of the themes that emerged from the research involved the investigation of various informants' perceptions of proper or appropriate behavior towards both the social world and the natural growing world, especially in regards to the lessons learned through participation in the Busk.

*World-view.* Known in philosophy as *Weltanschauung*, studies of world-views are a topic of considerable depth in the continental philosophy tradition, having been studied notably by both Hume (1739-40, 1748, and 1751) and Kant (1781, 1788, and 1790), as well as by many others. World-view studies received further development by notables including Hegel (1807), Kierkegaard (1843), Husserl (1913), and Heidegger (1927). World-view studies generally focus on

how groups of individuals, through interacting in both a social and natural world, create a unique sense of understanding of their own place within those worlds, making it quite suitable for incorporation into anthropological research.

It may be recognized that many of the contributors to the phenomenological field of philosophical inquiry are also contributors to world-view studies. However, what differentiates world-view studies from phenomenology and situated learning is that, while phenomenology is focused on individuals and situated learning is focused on tight-knit social groups, world-view studies are focused on how groups of individuals, through their interaction with each other, reaffirm and reinforce the beliefs and social mores of those with whom they interact. In this way, world-views are established through the complexity of individual phenomenological experiences contextualized within the social milieu that is established through all the many individuals that are a part of that social group.

Michael Kearney's book, *World View* (1984), provided the clearest examination of anthropological implications of world-view studies in a kind of synthesis of materialism and idealism. While the majority of the book involves a philosophical analysis of the world-view concept, he

discusses several cases of world-view studies of particular groups. In the implementation of these world-view studies, the first step is to examine the culture's unique history. Only through knowing the past can the present be adequately contextualized in any meaningful way. The next step is to understand the modern issues, both materialistic and ideological, that face the people under scrutiny. Finally, correlations to ideological matters such as religion are situated within the established history and modern issues, formulating that particular world-view.

This thesis borrows heavily on Kearney's approach to world-view studies by following his method of inquiry. I begin by examining the particular history of the Ekvnv Hvtke community that bear upon the informants' perceptions and experiences of the Busk ceremonial and of the natural world generally. I then analyze the current ecological and social factors facing the community, and then correlate these with the ideological lessons learned through participation in the traditional religious ritual of the *Mvskokvlke*.

### *Methodology*

*Qualitative research: informal interviews and participant observation.* The data for this thesis was

collected through the implementation of two qualitative research methods. The first method consisted of unstructured informal interviews. The second method was participant observation.

Unstructured informal interviews are types of interviews in which no set of formalized questions are employed, allowing conversation to flow freely between topics that present themselves throughout the interview. I conducted these interviews with informants individually or in small groups of no more than three. The interviews were recorded using a digital Sony® IC Recorder and transcribed using the Dragon NaturallySpeaking® transcription-assist speech-to-text computer program. The resulting 450 pages of transcribed interviews were informally coded to parse out themes that emerged during these interviews. The interviews themselves usually lasted around an hour to an hour and a half, although some exceptions did occur in both directions (one interview took only forty-five minutes, while several lasted around three hours).

Participant observation took place in a number of ways. Participation in the Busk ceremonial over the course of several years serves as a primary data set under participation methodology. However, participating with informants in recreation spent outdoors, on their daily

chores or work, and in their daily food-ways also contributed to the data for this thesis. Additionally, note taking during the many informal conversations with informants, while engaged in these activities, supplemented the data for the themes established using the informal coding of the recorded interviews.

*Similar methodologies: ethnoecology and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).* Ethnoecology is a general field of research dedicated to the understanding of relationships between people and the natural world. Virginia Nazarea, in the introduction to her seminal work on the subject, wrote: "Ethnoecology is 'a way of looking' at the relationship between humans and the natural world that emphasizes the role of cognition in framing behavior" (Nazarea 1999:vii).

Ethnoecology, including ethnobotany (a subfield of ethnoecology that focuses primarily on plants), has several approaches to gathering data. These different approaches are discussed in-depth in Gary Martin's 1995 methods manual on ethnobotany. Martin emphasizes the collection of data to address research questions that are anthropological, biological, ecological, economical, ethnopharmacological, or environmental in nature, with each requiring a different

methodology for data collection and interpretation (Martin 1995).

Ethnoecology, when blended with folklore studies, also gave rise to what is now referred to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (abbreviated *TEK*). Pierotti and Wildcat (2000:1334-1339) gave a history and explication of the *TEK* concept, which, in general, is a way that particular groups of traditional peoples look at, talk about, and engage their natural environments. The data for this thesis and the interpretation of that data through various theoretical lenses are an example of the *TEK* of the *Mvskoke* peoples of *Ekvvnv Hvtke* Tribal Town.

## CHAPTER 4

To adequately contextualize a study of any particular people, it is necessary to provide some background and history of those people. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are historical factors that affect the way that modern people perceive and contextualize the world around them in any meaningful way. These historical factors include the linguistic and cultural milieus from which these people descended and those important historical events that led these people to where there are today (both geographically and socially).

Descriptions of the various environments that these people live in and regularly engage in establish the counterpart to historical studies. The environment and ecosystems in which people live provide a way for historical and social factors that affect cultural memory and identity to correlate to those people's modern situation in ethnoecological studies.

Finally, a history of research is important to identify the sources of historical information, to better

understand the natural environment, and to disclose the various research studies that influenced or inspired the current research. This Chapter begins by identifying the cultural history of the *Mvsko*ke people. The environments in which the members of the Ekvnv Hvtke community live are then described, followed by a history of research on the various topics employed in this thesis.

*The Mvskokvlke: A Brief History*

*Who, exactly, are the Mvsko*ke Creeks? The name Creek, or *Mvsko*ke, applies to both a specific cultural group and to a linguistic family (see Figure 4). Muscogean languages include a variety of different individual languages including the *Mvsko*ke, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Alabama, Koasati (Coushatta), Hitchiti (Miccosukee), Appalachee, and Appalachicola languages. The cultures tied to these various languages encompassed a large area of the southeastern United States from northern Mississippi to the Gulf Coast, and from the Mississippi River to the Atlantic. Many of these languages have been in decline over the past two centuries; however, revitalization efforts and renewed interests in traditional lifeways are raising hopes that these Native American languages will be maintained for generations to come.

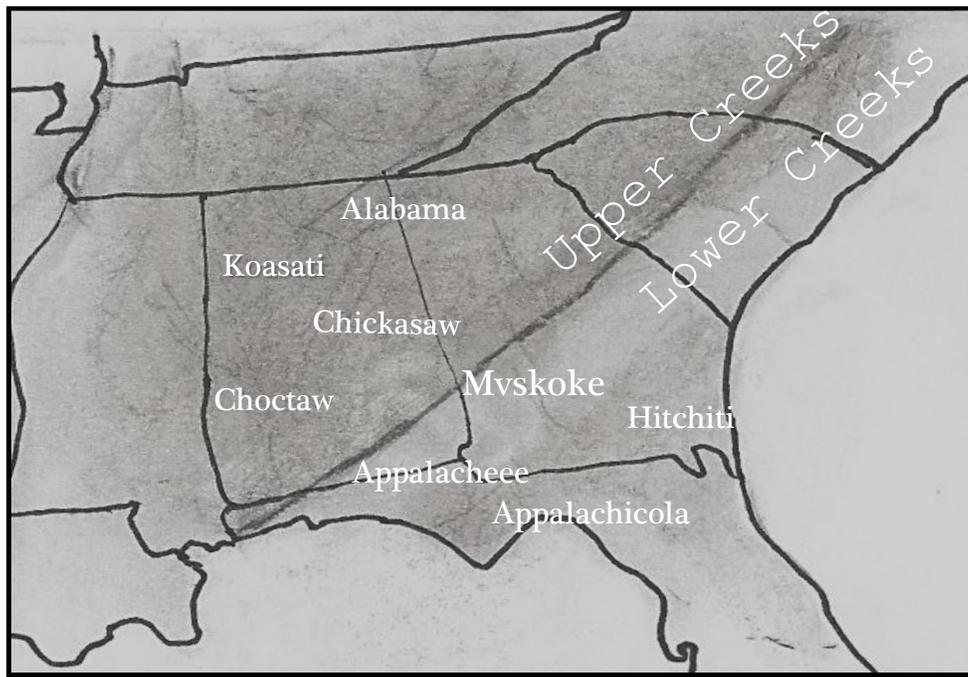


Figure 4 - Map of the Southeast showing a generalized historical distribution of Muscogean linguistic groups (illustration by author)

Most of the Muscogean languages also had various distinctive dialects, sometimes specific to an individual *tvlwa*. With so many dialects and languages, the *Mvskoke* language served the more southern parts of Lower Creek country as a kind of *lingua-franca*, or trade language, for use in both ritual and in secular activities (Bolfing 2010:77). The Alabama language served a similar role amongst the Upper Creeks (F. Kent Reilly, personal communication: 2012). It is likely that this widespread use

of the language to communicate in a multi-lingual world explains overlaps between *Mvskoke* and Cherokee, which is of the Iroquoian language family. For example both share words for the sacred supernatural Buzzard *Sule*, pronounced *Soo'-lee*, and Mooney even mentioned the use of the word "Yahola" amongst the Cherokee, identifying it as a loan word from *Mvskoke* (Mooney 1982:517). *Yahola*, for the *Mvskoke* (as relayed to me during Busk one year), is one of four beings who brought the knowledge and implements of ritual to humans. Additionally, according to informants, Hitchiti-speaking peoples used the *Mvskoke* language in the Busk ceremonial, adding credence to its association with the ceremonialism of the southeast. The various usages of the *Mvskoke* language demonstrate that it was both widespread in its use in ritual contexts. It also suggests that ritual practices of the *Mvskoke* Creeks were shared by many people throughout the larger southeast area.

Muscogean cultures are divided into two distinct groups based upon the geographic areas they inhabit (Figure 4). The Upper Creeks (also called the western Creeks) lived on the piedmont of the Appalachian Mountains. The Lower (or eastern) Creeks lived on the coastal plains that extend to the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean. These *Mvskoke*, or Lower Creek peoples, are the focus of this thesis and

originally lived near the Chattahoochee River Valley in eastern south-central Georgia. Over time, and through pressures of white encroachment and struggles between other Native American groups of the southeast (especially the vicious Choctaws, their bitter enemies), the *Mvskokvlke* migrated south, ending up in the northern Florida area near Tallahassee. Both the newly arrived *Mvskoke* and the Appalichicola peoples of the area shared many cultural and religious practices, allowing them to co-exist, more-or-less, peacefully.

*Important events in the history of the Mvskokvlke.* In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, tensions between the ever-expanding whites and the *Mvskoke* resulted in several major transformative events. The incident discussed in Chapter 2, in which a group of young men burned a house containing Scottish immigrants and their native families, is just such an incident. Internal conflicts between *Mvskoke* people who wanted peace with the whites and those that wanted to remove the whites from both their land and their culture continually increased throughout the years. Accompanying this, Christianity (especially Methodism) began to be more common amongst Native Americans, likely due to active proselytization, a practice in complete

contrast with the native religious practices that stress willing individual participation, rather than conversion.

In 1811, Tecumseh, a Shawnee prophet from Lower Shawneetown in Kentucky, began preaching a return to traditional ways at the Tuckabatchee *tvlwa* (an important Upper Creek town). This message inspired many *Mvskoke* people and further increased the tensions between whites, white-supporters, and *Mvskoke* traditionalists (Lewis Jr. and Jordan 2002:9). Eventually, these tensions came to a head in the early nineteenth century during the Red Stick War (also called the Creek War) of 1813-1814. This is the major topic discussed and contextualized in Joel Martin's *A Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees' Struggle for a New World* (1991). In the summer of 1813, a civil war erupted amongst the Creeks between traditionalist Red Sticks and the White Sticks, who supported a closer integration with the Americans.

The civil war quickly moved beyond the boundaries of the Creeks, with Red Sticks actively targeting white settlements in Creek Country. Americans and American-friendly natives from numerous tribes rose against the Red Sticks. The English, who had a renewed vigor in attacking the United States after the War of 1812, supported the Red Sticks, however, with military forces engaged in a northern

theatre, British traders in the south were unwilling to bring down the ire of American militia forces by supplying the Red Sticks with arms or munitions. Because of this reluctance, less than half of the Red Stick forces actually had guns.

In January of 1814, a force led by General Andrew Jackson dealt a crushing blow to the Red Sticks at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, also called the Battle at Tohopeka (Martin 1991:161-163). By the summer of 1814, the revolt had reached its end and the United States sought retribution from the *Mvskoke* peoples. The United States made demands for the Creeks to surrender lands that amounted to approximately fourteen million acres, to surrender their prophets, to allow United States military building constructions anywhere on Creek lands and along waterways, and to have regulations upon their freedom to trade with foreign countries, an act that only benefitted the United States government (Martin 1991:164-166).

These demands, made to *Mvskoke* peoples who had fought the Red Sticks alongside Andrew Jackson, are some of the first signs that Jackson was willing to use Native Americans for his own ends and then turn his back on them when it benefitted his plans. When he later became president, serving two terms from 1829-1836, Jackson's

actions led to what is arguably the most transformative single event for all Native Americans of the southeast: the Trail of Tears.

In 1832, less than a generation after the Red Stick Wars, the Cherokee nation appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States under Chief Justice John Marshall in regards to the encroachment of Americans on their lands. Specifically, the Indian Removal Act signed into effect in 1830 allowed for the removal of Native Americans from state lands. Shortly after, Georgia began usurping tribal authority by imposing their own state laws on Cherokee lands. In 1832, the Supreme Court's monumental decision in the *Samuel A. Worcester, Plaintiff in Error v. The State of Georgia* case fully supported the autonomy of the Cherokee Nation and ordered that Georgia could not impose state laws on Cherokee lands.

However, in an infamous decision that has scarred the culture of Native Americans in innumerable ways, Jackson ignored the decision and ordered the removal of natives to lands in the west, which became Indian Territory and, in 1907, the state of Oklahoma. Jackson's words in regards to the Supreme Court's 1832 decision are known by heart by many Native Americans today: "John Marshall has made his decision, now let him enforce it... Build a fire under them.

When it is hot enough, they will move." With executive power unattainable by the Court, their decision was rendered impotent. Congress, which could have challenged the president's orders, remained silent and forced relocation began in 1835-1836. Martin Van Buren, Jackson's vice-president, succeeded Jackson as president and continued the removal policies throughout his term.

While removal affected all Native Americans of the southeast, not all natives were removed. Some natives hid from the government's relocation officers, converted to Christianity, or married into mixed families to remain in the east. The removal policies, for these people, were a constant threat to their sense of safety and security. It seems likely, then, that secrecy of ritual is, in part, a kind of safeguard protecting natives from removal.

With the exception of the people who hid out, such as the Seminole (who are really a coalescence of people from several tribes who evaded relocation efforts and runaway slaves), converting to Christianity was necessary to remain in the east. One informant mentioned that many Creeks of that time attended Methodist churches but brought the traditional symbolism of the Busk into the design layout of the church itself. According to the informant, many natives did actually convert to Christianity, however, others, such

as his own family, had only feigned conversion and had actually continued their traditional religious practices in secret.

The racial tensions that succeeded the Civil War were also highly damaging influence on the *Mvskoke* people of the southeast. It was not until 1879 that personhood was even granted to Native Americans, in the case *United States, ex rel. Standing Bear, v. George Crook, a Brigadier-General of the Army of the United States*. Until that time, there was little protection for Native Americans under the law and violent crimes were commonplace. However, recognition as people in the eyes of the law for the first time in history did not ease the situation for Native Americans. My family tells stories of these times being dark times, full of fear of persecution that created a mentality that persisted for generations: *pretend to be white*. By pretending to be white, native peoples were able to remain somewhat incognito to the racial tensions of that era.

In 1889, the Land Runs began, in which prospective homesteaders were granted permission by the United States government to go seize lands in Indian Territory. Thousands of Euro-Americans flooded into various tribal lands. In addition, many of these homesteaders convinced many freedmen and mixed-bloods to sell their allotted lands and

swindled many other lands from tribally controlled areas. In 1907, Native American autonomy in Oklahoma ended when it became the forty-sixth state to enter into the United States of America. Over sixty years later, in 1971, Creek peoples in Oklahoma were re-granted nationhood status and jurisdictional control over an eight county area of central Oklahoma.

In the east, several groups managed to gain state or federal recognition (although very few have federal recognition). The Poarch Band of Creek Indians, for example, is the only federally recognized tribe in Alabama, where they operate a reservation in Atwater in southern Alabama and gaming facilities near Montgomery and Wetumpka in central Alabama. The Muscogee Nation of Florida, formerly the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creeks, represents the tribal body of which several members of the Ekvnv Hvtke Tribal Town and informants for this thesis are affiliated. At present, this group only has state recognition; however, efforts are ongoing to gain federal recognition, with the assistance of many people including Dr. F. Kent Reilly, III, who serves as an anthropological consultant and field anthropologist for the tribe.

*Interacting with the Environment: the Ecology of Florida and the Mvskoke People*

Several different ecosystems play large parts in the lives of the members of *Ekvnv Hvtke* Tribal Town. I had the opportunity to spend recreational time with informants in two major ecosystem environments. One of these consists of various pine habitats and another consists of wetlands and riverine ecosystems. Coastal ecosystems also play a role in the lives of many members, but, unfortunately, plans for two fishing trips and a kayaking trip fell through and I was unable to spend time with informants in this ecosystem during my research.

*Pine habitat.* Pine habitats are a primary source for many Medicine plants used in the Busk, such as Button Snakeroot, Gallberry, and Rabbit Tobacco. In Florida, there are two main pine habitats. The first of these is Long-leaf pine habitat, also called high pine; the second is scrub pine, consisting mostly of two pine species: Slash pine, or *cule* (pronounced Choo'-lee), and Loblolly pine.

Long-leaf pine habitats are characterized by its namesake, the Long-leaf Pine trees. When the Spanish arrived in Florida, they rode their horses through old growth Long-leaf pines that towered over a hundred feet above their

heads. The Long-leaf pine is an interesting tree because it is pyric, meaning that it requires forest fires to mature properly (Myers 1990:152). These fires also help clear out the denser undergrowth, creating a matured ecosystem where many traditional Medicine plants grow. Unfortunately, the advent of forest fire prevention destroyed many of these mature ecosystems. As one informant stated, "Smokey the Bear is the worst thing to happen to Florida since the Spanish." Many of these ecosystems are only now beginning to return after extensive controlled burnings and the outbreak of wildfires over the past several years. The future of these environments is now bright, with large stands of Long-leaf pines once again towering majestically over the Florida landscape.

Scrub pine habitat differs significantly from Long-leaf pine habitats. Where Long-leaf pine habitats are quite open, with undergrowth consisting of wiregrass and weedy species, scrub pine undergrowth is extremely dense and consists of species like scrub oaks, hollies, bays, and hickories (Myers 1990:151-152). Like with the high pines, fire plays an important role in the growth and development of scrub pine habitat. However, rather than playing an intrinsic role in the maturation of the trees themselves,

fires clear out the dense undergrowth and allows new trees to grow.

Long-leaf pine habitats that I visited for this thesis research include the Apalachicola National Forest and the Ocala National Forest. Scrub pine habitat visited for this thesis research include Leon Sinks, the *Ekvuv Hvtke* Square Grounds (where I have made many excursions into the woods while collecting Medicine plants for the Busk ceremonial), and the Ocala National Forest near Lake Delancey.

*Aquatic, wetland, and riverine ecosystems.* Wetland and riverine ecosystems have played a large role in the lives of native peoples of the southeast for generations. The name Creek was likely associated with these people because of their fondness for these aquatic ecosystems. Traditionally, dugout canoes were the primary means of conveyance through these areas, but modern peoples have taken to modern ways with vigor, employing kayaks, pontoons, and other boats. The traditional pirogue, a type of dugout canoe that is famous for its use in Appalachia and Louisiana derives its name from the *Mvskoke* word for small boat: *perro* (pronounced bee-Thlo'). During my time in Florida with the members of the *Ekvuv Hvtke* community, I

had the opportunity to spend time in these various aquatic environments on multiple occasions.

These wetland and riverine ecosystems, besides being near waterways and floodplains, are characterized by the presence of mixes between Cypress and hardwood forests. These forests are comprised of trees such as Oaks, Cypress, Willows, Sycamore, Sweetgum, and Hickories. Pines may also be present, but in a lesser amount, since these Cypress and hardwood forests tend to overlap with the scrub and high pine habitats discussed above.

I visited three distinct aquatic ecosystems for this thesis. The first was the Wakulla River, a spring-fed river south of Tallahassee. I went kayaking and went on a guided tour of the park with one informant and swam in the springs (a favorite swimming hole of Tarzan star Johnny Weismuller) with another. The second aquatic ecosystem I visited were lakes. The first lake I visited was Lake Jackson, north of Tallahassee, touring the Mississippian mound site of Lake Jackson and walking through the woods that skirt the edge of the lake. The second lake ecosystem I visited was in the Ocala National Forest in central Florida. The first day in central Florida, informants took me out for a sunset boat ride in their pontoon on Lake Delancey. The following day we travelled across Little Lake George to visit the Mount

Royale archaeological site, which is now located in a wealthy fly-in community. The last aquatic ecosystem I visited was the Leon Sinks area. I went hiking with an informant through the many sinks and marsh areas.

### *History of Research*

This section covers a brief history of research on topics that are relevant to this thesis. While this is not an exhaustive examination of all research ever performed in these areas, it adequately covers material that has been influential in framing the research questions for this thesis and in the interpretations and contextualizations of the data that addresses those questions. This section also provides a set of suggested readings for people interested in researching this topic on their own.

Numerous ethnographic studies have been conducted that provide information on natives of the southeast, who were either Creeks or, at the very least, interacted with the Creeks. The first information on Floridian natives comes from Spanish accounts of the first European expeditions into Florida led by Hernando De Soto (see Clayton et al 1995, Swanton 1985). Other early writings come from French expeditions, most notably by Jacques le Moyne de Morgues, an artist who accompanied an expedition of Monsieur

Laudonnière in 1564 (see De Morgues 1875). The earliest English accounts come from Captain Thomas Nairne's 1708 expedition through the south (see Moore 1988). Another English account comes from James Adair's experiences interacting and trading with natives from 1734-1768, (see Adair 1775). William Bartram, a naturalist, was another early writer on southeastern natives (see Slaughter 1996).

Modern studies provide more substantive information on the *Mvskokvlke*. The most prolific scholar to research these people is John Swanton (see Swanton 1976, 1985, 1995, 1998a, 1998b, and 2000). Ann T. Jordan conducted a modern study with David Lewis, Jr., the great grandson of Swanton's key informant (see Lewis Jr. and Jordan 2002).

Other important research studies have focused on native beliefs, myths, and Medicine ways (see Howard 1984, Lankford 1987, Perry 1998, Hail 2000, and Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 2001) and the history of the Creek people (see Martin 1991, Perdue 1993, Saunt 1999, Wickman 1999, Caughey 2007, Foster 2007, Calloway 2008, and Dalton 2011). Other influential works that have guided this thesis include ethnobotanical and herbology studies (see Vogel 1970, Hutchens 1973, Hudson 1979, Crellin and Philpott 1989a and 1989b, Moerman 1998, Snow and Stans 2001, Austin 2004, Patton 2004, and Conley 2005).

## CHAPTER 5

### *Experiencing the Relationship between People and the Natural World*

This chapter presents a set of themes relating to how my informants perceive of the relationship between people and the natural world. These themes resulted from the content analysis of my research data, discussed in Chapter 3. Although the intended focus of this thesis is plants, as the analysis of my data took place I realized that, for my informants, plants are only a part of a larger whole. While people, plants, and animals may be different categories in *Mvskoke* beliefs, as living beings, there is no difference between them. Thus, the relationship between people and the natural world becomes intrinsic to understand the perceived relationships between plants and people.

The first theme consists of three subthemes relating to the relationships between people, plants, and the natural world. This theme covers the *Mvskoke* understanding of what the natural and growing world actually are, which may be in disagreement with the perspective of the dominant

Euro-American Western culture. The first subtheme focuses on how the informants conceive of the cycle of life, which is modeled after the natural world, specifically plants. A second subtheme emphasizes what the informants consider to be living or alive, covering their perceptions of the role or purpose of living plants as it relates to people. The third subtheme involves perceived meaning in the gender roles of the Busk, which emulate aspects of the natural world.

A second theme focuses on how my informants conceive of illness and healing. Although nearly all informants readily engage in Western medicine for treating certain ailments, there is a difference between what Western medicines are designed to heal and what traditional *Mvskoke* Medicines (as differentiated from "medicines," without capitalization) are designed to heal. This theme illumines traditional conceptions of illness and disease, treated by traditional Medicine and healing practices.

A third theme synthesizes different reports of beings known as the Little People. These preternatural beings are strongly associated with nature in the *Mvskoke* belief system, and are not to be confused with people with different types of dwarfism. This theme includes the roles that Little People fulfill in the belief system and how my

informants talk about their experiences with the Little People.

The last theme presented in this chapter accounts for the ways that informants perceive of and engage in gardening and the growing of plants. Engaging in gardening and growing provides an outlet for informants to establish and cultivate relationships with the natural world. This theme also includes a brief discussion of the role that the Busk has played in this interaction.

#### *Life, Living, and the Growing World*

*The cycle of life.* This theme introduces some associations between conceptions of the growing of plants and the growing of people, embodied in the cycle of life. One informant described her concept of the cycle of life in the following terms. When you return the dead to the earth, they become the soil that nourishes the medicine plants. "Therefore, the love of family comes back to us through plants. It is a cycle." That same informant also said that there is no difference between the growing of plants and the growing of people, as both are living beings, deserving of respect and love.

Another informant described his concept of the cycle of life, which agreed with the previous comparison between

plants and people. He commented that plants and people are both living beings that need care when they are young. If you treat them well, and provide what is necessary for them to grow, they can in turn grow up to produce another generation of their own. Thus, the informant describes a plant based model for describing the cycle of life and human reproduction.

Many of my informants reinforced these sentiments when discussing the need to care for the young. Several informants described children's interest and participation in the Busk ceremonial as a kind of seed, germinating within the children of the community. While not every seed may sprout, and since many "seedlings" are lost in adolescence, those that do germinate need to be coaxed and guided on their path. Like plants, they cannot be *forced* to grow; they must be *allowed* to grow, *encouraged* to grow. Perceptions such as these illustrate how a cycle of life modeled after plants and their yearly growing cycle can provide a basis for conceiving proper behavior.

*What does it mean to be alive?* The qualities or characteristics that constituted what was living or alive were in discord with the scientific definition of life. For one, several informants described the soil and stones as

living. The stones were described as the ancestors, the soil as a kind of transitional or connecting life between living bodies and living plants. When asked to elaborate upon what constituted being alive, several informants described a lesson learned at the Busk ceremonial. This lesson teaches that all living things consist of four things: substance, form, place, and purpose.

Informants characterized "Substance" and "Form" as interrelated aspects of being that accounts for dual nature of living beings as existing in both the physical and non-physical or spirit world. "Substance" was described as the essence of a person that is more metaphysical in nature, while "form" is the physical essence of a thing. "Form" is what gives the "substance" of a being a recognizable shape, such as a skin and skeleton, or parts of plants such as the trunks, stems, branches, and even the midribs and veins of the leaves.

"Substance" and "form" come together in living beings, which all have physical and non-physical aspects. As described to me, this dual nature is best exemplified by the looped cross, or "Mvskoke cross" (Figure 5), whose design is specifically representational of the Sacred Fire (which is considered to be alive). Informants described how one loop of the *Mvskoke* cross represents the physical

"form", while the other represents the non-physical "substance".

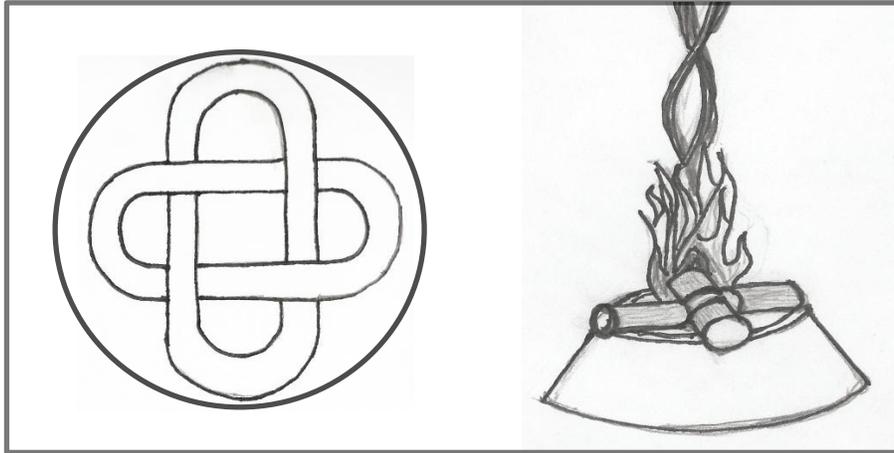


Figure 5 - Illustration of a Mvskoke Cross  
and Sacred Fire (illustration by author)

Among the informants, "place" is the location in space that a living thing is connected to. Several informants discussed that for humans, who are quite mobile, the connecting space embodied by "place" is a sacred place in the landscape. For the *Ekvny Hvtke* community, the square grounds serves as this sacred place. Some informants also described how the particular environments of the southeastern United States (described in Chapter 4) are also their "place."

"Purpose" is less easily defined, since it can change for every living being. Purpose is what gives living beings

direction and focus. While conducting my research, one focus was trying to understand how the informants conceived of plants' purpose, especially in relation to people.

Some informants discussed how the purpose of plants relates to the myth of the origin of medicine. The myth of the origin of medicine is common throughout the native peoples of the American southeast. In this myth, as discussed during a long-talk at the 2011 Green Corn Busk, the animals got angry with humans for killing and eating too many of them. The animals decided to inflict disease and illness on the humans, with each animal inflicting a different disease or illness. The plants took pity on humans and decided to counteract the effects of the diseases created by animals, with each disease or illness having a different plant remedy. Informants reported that a significant purpose of plants that related to humans illustrated by this story is that they are the balancing force between the opposition of animals and humans. It is worth mentioning that this correlates to stories collected ethnographically, most notably by James Mooney amongst the Cherokee (Mooney 1982:250-252).

Many informants also discussed other purposes of plants that related to human beings. Some reported that for humans, understanding the role of plants is learning plants

as food, fiber, and medicine. Understanding the use of plants for possible food value, utility value, and healing value was considered to provide a more intimate knowledge and understanding of plants than simply being able to identify the plant by a Latin name or scientific classification. This conception coincided with descriptions of plants as the means of survival, discussed by several informants who said that plants can keep you alive, help you stay alive, and can save your life. These accounts also related to a description of plants provided by many of the informants.

Informants reported perceiving of the purpose of the plants as giving or providing humans with what they need. These informants continually connected this concept to the sacred space of the square grounds, where only sacred trees and medicinal plants are allowed to grow. Informants talked about how the sacred and medicinal plants that grow on the grounds provide the ceremonial community with what they need to perform the Busk, which is seen as affecting the whole world.

*Gender roles and the natural world.* Perceptions of gender roles in the Busk ceremonial are an important aspect of this theme. Understanding the gender roles as perceived

by the community will illustrate ways that my informants perceived of relationships between humans and the natural world. All informants discussed how they perceived gender as switching when one enters the shell ring, called a *taco* (pronounced Dah'-joe). The females engage their masculinity when on the grounds, and males engage their femininity, becoming agents of the women. Men wearing ribbon shirts with floral patterns are a common sight on the square grounds for this very reason. One informant said that because flowers are not a food, nor are they particularly useful, but are simply pretty, they allow men to connect with a feminine side that is not readily encouraged in the mainstream American society. As for the women, they wear ribbons that are symbolic of war trophies and are the only people allowed to carry weapons on the square grounds (i.e., within the shell *taco*). Additionally, a primary role of the women in the ceremonial is to "purge the grounds of ne'er do wells, so that the men can do their job" (Dan Penton, personal communication:2012).

Other informants also discussed their perceptions of the men's role in the ceremonial as relating to females. While most of the ceremonial activities of the Busk have many different layers of meaning, as three different male informants described to me, nearly everything that the men

do in the ceremonial can be interpreted, at one layer or another, as providing support to the women. For example, men clean and prepare the square grounds, gather plants and make medicines, set the sacred fire, and do the Feather dance all so that the women can be enticed into doing their dance. Of course, these activities hold many meanings. For example, several informants discussed how the cleansing and preparing of the grounds is also associated with providing a clean place for the One Above, a creator deity, to sit during the Busk. However, if taken in context of the role of men as agents of the women, all these activities can be conceived of as a type of courting behavior relating to deeply rooted sexual metaphors in the *Mvskoke* belief system. One informant discussed that *Mvskoke* stories, which relay many of these deep rooted metaphors of the belief system, would "be rated R for sex, violence, or both." Other informants mentioned how these types of metaphors are also based upon observations of the natural world. Sex, of course, is necessary for procreation but, amongst *Mvskoke* people is not interpreted via the Victorian sensibilities that render the topic rather taboo in Western European culture. Violence, too, can be seen in every day goings-on, such as in warfare or simply killing for food.

The role of men as agents of the women is also expressed in how informants describe the reasons for particular behaviors during the Busk. For example, there is a depth of meaning in the calls made by the *hamatlv* (pronounced huh-Mot'-luh). The *hamatlv* are men chosen as representatives of the males of the ceremonial. One of their responsibilities is to call to the women and ask them to come into the sacred space of the *taco* to perform their dance. One informant described the role of these calls to me as the *hamatlv* "courting the women into the shell ring." In this way, she said, the men performing the feather dance (including the *hamatlv*) are similar to egrets building their nests. Other informants agreed with this interpretation, explaining that this is the reason that the egret feathers are the proper feather to be used on the feather wands used in the Feather dance.

The Feather dance is a men's dance, and among its many roles in the Busk ceremonial, a primary role is preparing the ring for the women to do their dance, the Ribbon Dance. Observations of the natural world provide a basis for some of the many meanings of these different items. It is commonly discussed amongst the ceremonial community that there are at least sixteen interpretations for anything in the Busk ceremonial, if not more. One explanation or

conception of the Feather dance is a metaphorical analogy in which the men imitate behavior seen in nature. As mentioned above, the men who participate in the Feather dance traditionally use egret mating plumage on reed wands. Egrets do not get elaborate mating plumage; their mating plumages are just long downy white feathers. The males attract their mates by being good hunters and fishers, and by constructing their nest.

Egrets build wood stick nests, which, in Florida and southern Georgia, are often constructed in river cane reed beds. This is the same reed used for the feather wands for the Feather dance. River cane reed is also used in the construction of baskets and as bubbling tubes by the medicinal leadership. These reeds were also traditionally used as dart and arrow shafts. With associations to warfare and hunting, as well as to virility (as medicine bubbling tubes), these reeds have a notable masculine association. Informants' accounts of the feather wands and bubbling tubes as metaphorical penises further supports masculine associations of cane reeds. This penile metaphor is often the butt of many jokes and sexual innuendoes amongst both the men and the women, which is another expression of the deeply rooted sexual metaphors of *Mvskoke* beliefs.

Most informants described the women's role in the ceremonial as being nurturers. One female informant described this as follows: "the woman's role in the ceremonial, our major role, is to support the men in being there. Men, in spite being the stronger of the species, still need a lot of support. So, therefore, they need our support and our love." She continued, "We come to the grounds, not because we *have* to, we fix food for the men and not because we *have* to, but because we *want* to. That part, preparing the food and everything, it's not really a sacrifice for us, but yet, at the same time, it is because we do not have to do it. We could say, "You guys go and do your thing," but the grounds belongs to us and we are still responsible for it. That is another reason why the women are there. We are responsible."

Informants also described their conceptions of the feminine role of nurturer through women's connection to the sweetgum tree. Sweetgum is one of the seven trees considered sacred to the *Mvskokvlke*. These seven trees are the sweetgum, sycamore, white oak, pine, dogwood, cedar, and cypress trees. The sweetgum has a strong feminine connection. When placing greenery on the arbors before Busk, the women's arbor (in the east) is the only arbor that has more than just willow. Sweetgum is placed above

this arbor because it is able to carry the burdens of people. It is only on the women's arbor because, as several female informants described, men are able to put their burdens aside when at war or when hunting, but women, whose biggest burden is nurturing and caring for the well-being of her family, can never set their burdens aside. Sweetgum is able to help women carry their burden and make their lives a little easier. This ability to take on the burdens is also a reason that sweetgum is sometimes used in the sacred fire, and was also described as the cause of sweetgum's gnarled wood.

Ceremonial names also illustrated how the informants perceived of the relationship between gender and the natural world. Informants described how males are named after animals and females are named after plants. Primarily, this was described as an association gender roles. For example, men's domain is generally regarded as hunting, which takes place in the wilds (giving a stronger association to the animals), while the women's domain is is generally regarded as "cultivated" areas (including both plants and people). One informant discussed her perception of this connection between women and the natural world, saying, "In nature, things take on a meaning to you... a blooming plant is like another mother to us." Thus, we see

that giving names that associate a person to perceived gender roles establishes a rapport between that person and that role, strengthening the social milieu of the community.

*Disease vs. Dis-Eased*

*Defining Medicine.* When investigating *Mvskoke* people's perceptions of the role of plants in traditional lifeways, one of the most important roles discussed was as medicine. However, it was quickly explained that traditional Native American "Medicine" (*heleswv* in *Mvskoke*, pronounced he-lee'-swuh) differs greatly in meaning from that of western medicine. Thus, it is crucial to elaborate upon how the informants conceived of and defined "Medicine."

In western medicine, physical substances are used in the treatment of illness, disease, or abnormalities. In this way, medicine is used for curative purposes. My mother, who is an oncology nurse, has discussed with me at length how symptoms are used to identify ailments and that it is these symptoms that are treated using medicine. In western medicine, then, the physical manifestations of ailments or illnesses seem to be the focus of treatment. In this way, western medicine could be described as reactive, responding to the discomfort of the patient.

In traditional Medicine, physical substances that have been "doctored" by a medicine man are used. Rather than reactively treating only the symptoms of illness or disease, however, the informants described how *Mvskoke* Medicine is more proactive, establishing a proper balance in the patient, thereby eliminating the root cause of the symptoms. Imbalances are described as the underlying cause of the symptoms that cause discomfort, which will be discussed further below. Traditional Medicine was described as treating these imbalances, but was also described as preparing people for the future. In this way, Medicines were described similarly to vaccinations by the informants, with traditional medicines as preventative, rather than simply curative or reactive.

Several informants discussed specific examples of how traditional *Mvskoke* Medicine is preventative. During the Busk, ritual scratching is performed using scratchers, or *essapetv* (pronounced ee-Saw'-pee-tuh), which are made with the jawbone and teeth of the garfish. Before scratching the skin, a Medicine called *passv* (pronounced Boss'-uh), which uses Button Snakeroot (also called *passv*, latin: *Eryngium yuccifolium*), is used to moisten the skin where the scratches will be made. *Passv* is also called "warrior's medicine" and is one of the first medicines men are

introduced to when beginning their participation in the Busk. Informants described how, using this Medicine in tandem with the scratching, serves to inoculate the person against what they might encounter between Busks, like a kind of spiritual and physical vaccination.

Button Snakeroot also has traditional healing uses according to some informants. Several informants discussed how a tea made from the Button Snakeroot plant can be used as an antiseptic wash to prevent infection. Another informant described how her grandmother used rags soaked in a Button Snakeroot tea to clean up after births in her midwifery practice. These antiseptic qualities were described as another reason for why the *passv* is poured over ritual scratches during Busk.

*Doctoring.* For substances to be considered Medicine in the Mvskoke beliefs, they must be "doctored" by a maker of Medicine, either the *heles-haya* (pronounced He'-liss Hai'-yuh), one of his assistants (the *heneha*, pronounced Hen'-ee-haw), or by someone under their direction. Doctoring is when one of these agents recites Medicine formulas and, using a bubbling tube of river cane, blows into the concoction, imbuing it with his breath.

The informants discussed how the breath of a maker of Medicine is considered able to imbue a metaphysical essence (or "substance") into something with a physical "form". Thus, a "doctored" Medicine, then, possesses both physical and non-physical aspects; it is alive. These living Medicines are the potent healing agents used in traditional Medicine ways. Several informants even discussed how the plants used in the making of Medicines (called Medicine plants) cannot reach their full effects without the doctoring process, which gives Medicine this living power.

One informant went on to explain that the only thing needed for doctoring a Medicine is the breath of a maker of Medicine. Some informants mentioned that water, as the first existing substance in the Creek cosmology and with its life giving properties, is considered the first and most basic Medicine of the *Mvskoke*. However, having defined Medicine as those physical substances that have been doctored by a maker of Medicine, water only serves as the physical medium to contain the non-physical breath of the maker of Medicine. Other informants, who described that a maker of Medicine can make Medicine out of water and breath, shared this conception. They described how Medicine does not necessarily need any particular plants, but went on to describe how different plants have their own power

and healing properties, which can make Medicines even stronger in their effects. Specifically, Medicine plants have particular relationships to those diseases believed to have originated from animals.

*Perceptions of sickness and balance: dis-ease.*

Informants described how leaving the Busk is like being cast into a different world. The ways of thinking between these two worlds are so different, that moving back and forth causes what several informants described as "dis-ease in one's spirit" (i.e., their spirit is not at ease). This imbalance between ways of thinking led many informants to express a desire to be a part of the Busk forever, to never want to leave.

The Medicines of the Busk and taking the lessons of the Busk into daily life are unanimously described as ways to reduce this imbalance, or dis-ease. Many people do this by increasing their engagement with the natural world and by remembering to continue practices learned in the Busk, such as making tobacco offerings.

One informant recounted a personal story about making tobacco offerings when hunting and fishing. A friend of his had asked why he makes these offerings. He told his friend that "if you don't do it, you might get sick." His friend

commented that he never made offerings and had not been sick in years. The informant responded, "every time you turn around you got a broken bone. You and your wife are fighting all the time. You've got cholesterol problems, stress, insomnia... You've got dis-ease."

Informants described how Busk is when they feel that they are in perfect balance. Several recounted how they experience the harmony of the universe and their place in it, which many describe as a spiritual experience. This spiritual experience is many say draws them back to the Busk.

One informant described how he had seen and had many different spiritual experiences in his life, and what he had noticed about Busk was the amount of time and effort involved in the Busk ceremonial. He explained that, to him, there is an important aspect of this experience that is steeped in the difficult and challenging aspects of the Busk, such as the fasting, hard work, sweating, and dancing. He said that these challenges allow us more opportunity to move beyond the world we create around ourselves and become part of something larger than ourselves in a spiritual experience. "When people only go to church once a week for an hour," he said, "they are less likely to have these spiritual experiences. It takes time

and it takes effort, and the Busk definitely provides that.”

*Healing plants and Medicine.* The concept that Medicine is proactive and preventative rather than curative does not preclude the use of plants for healing as curative agents. Informants discussed how they know of or make use of many plant remedies, which they referred to as healing plants. Many of these healing plants are also Medicine plants, however, the informants did not refer to the usage of plants in this way as “Medicine” because healing plant remedies are not doctored by a maker of Medicine.

Willow was the most discussed healing plant, which is understandable with willow being one of the most readily used Medicine plants in the Busk ceremonial. Informants discussed how a tea made by boiling the leaves of the willow produces a ready-made “liquid aspirin.” *Salix* species have high levels of salicin that are transformed in the intestines into salagenin, which is then oxidized in the liver and blood and becomes salicylic acid, a key ingredient in acetyl-salicylic acid or aspirin (Foster and Duke 2000:322). When used like aspirin, willow tea can reduce fever, alleviate pain and soreness, and be used to treat headaches. Another use of willow tea is as a “hot-

weather" medicine that will help lower a person's body temperature when experience heat stress.

In the Busk, yaupon holly is used to make the "black drink" or *asi-hvtke* (pronounced Aw'-shee Hut'-kee, translates as "white drink," a descriptive term arising from the white foam that forms in the medicine when being doctored by the ceremonial leadership). Several informants mentioned that yaupon holly can be used as a "poor man's coffee" due to its high caffeine content, although they tended not to use it much anymore. Informants agreed that using yaupon holly as a coffee substitute was more common during the Great Depression. Today, many people use yaupon holly sparingly, and indeed most Medicine plants, because of their close association to the sacredness of the Busk Medicines.

Other healing plants included using a tincture of Dogwood berries to treat upset stomach and ulcers. One of the informants had some of this on hand when I had a particularly bad flare up of a peptic ulcer, and after taking two doses over the course of several hours, I was able to be comfortable for the rest of the day. Other informants discussed using plants like Echinacea (also known as coneflowers) as a panacea. It can be used as an antiseptic wash, to treat sore throat, and to relieve

symptoms of colds like congestions and coughing. Rabbit tobacco (latin: *Gnaphalium obtusifolium*) is also used to treat coughing, as well as being able to relieve asthma flare-ups. St. John's Wort was identified as a sleep aid and anxiolytic. Button bush (latin: *Cephalanthus occidentalis*) can be used to treat diarrhea and dysentery (usually from impure drinking water).

While the informants had a lot of knowledge about traditional healing plants and Busk Medicines, I could not identify any condescension against members of the community who use non-traditional healing practices. Sometimes healing requires multiple cures, and as one informant said, "we (Creeks) are a pragmatic people." Informants readily use both western medicine and eastern medicine (such as traditional Chinese medicine) in tandem with traditional cures.

Although many different cures are used by members of the community, it is always important to differentiate between Medicine, which is alive (because it was given life by the breath of a Medicine maker) and cures using healing plants. Medicines consist of both physical and nonphysical properties. Healing plants, on the other hand, are only physical. They can alleviate symptoms, but do nothing for what causes those symptoms.

*Symptomology, the cause of illness, and getting healed.* As mentioned previously, informants commonly discussed how traditional Medicine treats the dis-ease that results in identifiable symptoms. Informants mentioned how western medicine may consider the cause of certain diseases or illnesses as being environmental (such as catching a virus, bacterial infection, poor diet, etc.) or genetic. It was considered that western medicine, therefore, never truly accounts for why those things happened in the first place. For example, many people go outside every day but do not catch a cold. Not everyone who is exposed to a contagion will contract an illness. This was used as supporting evidence that illness and dis-ease arise from how individuals are living and interacting with the world around them.

Informants described how the root cause of illness for informants was imbalance. Balance with the world around us consists of paying attention to a giving respect for the natural world, as well as engaging both physical and metaphysical sides of ourselves. For the *Ekvnv Hvtke* community, an important discussion topic at Busk revolves around seeing the world as a system in which human beings are one small part. This is quite different from a view of nature in the dominant Euro-American society, which

purports that nature is the dominion of human beings to be modified or used to our advantage. The support for such a view is usually made through a reference to Genesis 1:26 in the King James Version of the Christian Bible: "and [God] let them [people] have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth". In this view, that which people cannot change, they must endure (such as floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes). Additionally, those parts of nature that are considered pretty should be preserved exactly as they are so that more people can come enjoy it. This view relates humans to nature only in that nature is a resource to be used or enjoyed by humans.

When humans are only one part of a larger system, we are removed from the position of dominating nature, to being in balance, or in tune, with nature. The Cherokee have a notion of this type of balance called *tohi*, (pronounced Doe'hee), which can be translated as "fluid, flowing, gentle, or peaceful" (Altman and Belt 2009:14-16). *Tohi* can be conceived as a person sitting in a boat on calm water, perfectly balanced between the air and water, and neither struggling nor despairing, but just existing. Informants expressed a similar notion when discussing that

humans are responsible for doing certain things, and not doing others. When people do what they are not supposed to, or fail to do what they ought, their actions bring themselves into imbalance with the equilibrium of the world around them. This imbalance is the source of one's disease.

When a person is out of balance, and therefore experiencing symptoms arising from that dis-ease, they must approach the makers of Medicine and request healing. A conversation with the ceremonial leadership explored the process of receiving healing. They described a four-step process necessary to get healing.

The first step in this process is to approach and ask. One informant clarified this by saying that, for the *Mvskoke*, there are no missionaries. If you want spiritual healing, those who have the ability to help are not going to come find you; rather, it is the responsibility of the person seeking healing to seek out and request it. The ceremonial leadership also discussed how people must be careful about self-diagnosing. They said "don't try to heal yourself: if you need healing for something, you are already out of balance, therefore, the medicines you make for yourself will be skewed by that imbalance, and cause further problems. This also tied into the need for distance

between healer and the person receiving healing. Informants talked about how it is not good to work healing on family members because you might be too emotionally involved. You need detachment to fully engage the powers of the universe that imbue Medicines with power.

The second step in getting healing is to make an offering of tobacco (*hece*, pronounced Hee'-chee). According to informants, tobacco is one of the most sacred plants to the *Mvskoke*, and is used for establishing contracts, communicating with the divine (the smoke is considered to open a direct conduit to the above world), and as offerings to the natural world. Tobacco is necessary for the contract with the maker of medicine to perform the healing and also to honor the ceremonial elder. The importance of the tobacco plant cannot be overstressed.

The third step in receiving healing is to ask what plants need to be gathered, or ask elder to gather medicine and provide some form of compensation. Makers of medicine do not have salaries, and do not charge money for their healing services to the community. Money may be offered in rare circumstances, but the most appropriate traditional forms of payment are, first and foremost, tobacco, then beads/buttons, cloth/hides, and meat.

The last necessary requirement for healing is that the person must truly believe that the healing will work. Informants discussed how, if a person does not believe that the healing will work, then, in all likelihood, it will not. This belief component is a common requirement between many different healing and curing practices, including western medicine, where many studies have delved into the phenomenon of the placebo effects (see, for example, Ernst and Resch 1995, Deyn and D'Hooge 1996, Welch 2003, and Wager 2005).

#### *The Little People*

Native American beliefs abound with tales about small beings associated with the natural world, though the topic has received relatively little attention in historic or modern academic ethnographies (likely because they were assumed to be children's stories, though this is purely speculative). To the *Mvskoke*, these beings are known as *Este Loboockuce* (pronounced Ee'-stee luh-Boach'-koo-chee), the Little People. The Little People are an integral part of the *Mvskoke* belief system. They are beings that live in the woods, generally regarded as the guardians of the natural world by my informants. It is a commonly discussed

topic at Busk that these beings also make use of the ceremonial grounds to hold their own Busks.

According to my informants, there are different categories of Little People. The first, and most commonly discussed, are about a 1½ feet to 2½ feet tall, standing about knee height to an adult. In the second category of Little People, they are reported as being much smaller, only standing a few inches tall. Some informants reported other categories, but these were not substantiated by other accounts and will not be discussed in this thesis. For the most part, it is those of the first category (who stand about knee high) that the name *Este Loboockuce* refers. These Little People are also referred to as tricksters.

Nearly all informants shared stories about how the Little People are also mischievous tricksters. Offerings of food, especially strawberries, are made to the Little People as a way to appease their trickster ways. As one informant reported, "the Little People are thieves, if you don't feed them." Every informant relayed at least one story about how something went missing, and after giving an offering to the Little People, the missing item was found in a conspicuous location. For example, one informant talked about how a pair of eyeglasses went missing, leaving her nearly blind for several days. She eventually made an

offering to the Little People, asked for the glasses to be returned, and later that day found them on the middle of her bed, right out in the open. Another informant relayed a similar story with a nice jacket. He said that after making an offering and asking for it to be returned, he found it at the very front of his closet, where he had looked a dozen times.

My informants also commonly discussed how the Little People protect children in the woods. Several relayed stories about their own childhood experiences with the Little People, such as dancing, feasting, or just playing. One informant discussed how she stopped playing with the Little People as a teenager, when the human world took a primary focus in her life. This lead to the supposition that the Little People protect children because they are not yet spoiled by the ways of humans. This also hints at a distinction between the woods and the cultivated world and relates to the more intrinsic role of the Little People as guardians of the woods.

Several of my informants clarified the Little People's role as guardians of the natural world, describing their guardianship as being particularly focused on the edge on the woods. The reference to the edge of the woods in the *Mvskoke* belief system differentiates between the wild-lands

or deep woods and cultivated areas of human habitation. These two areas create a liminal space of the edge of the woods, which is protected by the Little People. It is because Little People protect and guard this liminal space between the wild and the cultivated that the different offerings to the Little People are always made at the edge of the woods.

It is important to remember that such beings are profuse not just in Native American beliefs, but also in Western European beliefs as well. Several of my informants discussed how belief in the Little People seems to be a cross-cultural phenomenon. One informant discussed how they had come across people from Ireland and England who recognized small trickster beings, although they had different names. She said that to the Irish they are known as "Wee People", while to the English they are known as fairies. Such a cross-cultural presence raises several questions. For example, is it possible that such a widespread phenomenon as the Little People relates to a sort of mental template to understand the world and is therefore a type of human universal?

Another possibility exists, which does not usually receive a legitimate consideration in scientific minded communities. It could be that the Little People are real,

but are currently outside of explanation or confirmation by science. Yet, even if the Little People are dismissed as merely mythical beings, it is crucial to understand that whether other people believe that these beings exist is not as important as whether the *Mvskoke* do believe they exist.

Among my informants of the *Ekvnnv Hvtke* community the answer to the question "are the Little People real?" is yes, of course they are. However, actual experiences with the Little People were actually rare. For several of the informants, these experiences were seeing the Little People in their peripheral vision but when they turned to look directly at them, they would disappear.

This mysterious kind of behavior was ascribed to the Little People existing simultaneously in the physical world and the spirit world. The spirit world mirrors the physical world. To the *Mvskoke* existence itself is comprised of two complimentary forces, the physical and the spiritual. These two forces are united in living beings (a concept that will receive further elaboration in Chapter 6). The Little People are beings who could be described as having a stronger metaphysical than physical presence. Some of the informants suggested that this allows them to shift in and out of the physical world, like a person shifting their weight from one leg to the other. Thus, the mysteriousness

of the Little People is ascribed to their ability to shift from one world to the other.

Only a few of my informants talked about actual experiences with the Little People. Several of the female informants talked about how they had spent time with the Little People in the woods or in a hidden closet. However, as mentioned, these experiences dwindled as they grew older. One of the male informants from the West arbor talked about several experiences he had with Little People. He discussed how he had one experience where he wrestled with some Little People. He described how while they were small, he knew that they were powerful beings. He said he was afraid to throw them around or wrestle too rough, not because he was afraid of hurting them, but because he was afraid *they* would get too rough with him! This same informant talked about another experience in which he walked outside one morning after a hard freeze and saw the smaller type of Little People, who are only a few inches tall, skating around on the ice that had formed when a bucket of water froze solid overnight.

Most stories of the Little People I received, and from nearly all informants, were more indirect experiences, such as the missing and returned items discussed previously, than direct experiences with the Little People. Several of

the informants used a specific language when referring to some of their experiences with Little People. These informants did not say they actually *saw* the Little People; they only reported having experienced an *impression* or *feeling* that they interpreted as the Little People. One informant discussed an experience with the Little People that occurred as he was getting out of a sweat lodge. He reported having the "impression of a long line of Little People that were waiting for their turn to use the sweat lodge." So, while reports of direct experiences of the Little People are rare, identifying the Little People with indirect experiences only proved to be sufficient for the *Mvskoke* informants to fully believe in the reality of these beings. This also relates to what is actually considered "real."

For the most part, scientifically minded communities do not generally regard impressions, feelings, dreams, or hallucinations as rational explanations of reality. While these emotionally charged experiences may have an impact on the reality perceived by a certain individual, they are not considered a viable explanation of reality itself. However, for the *Mvskoke*, "reality" is not so easily boxed within the confines of empiricism. Dreams, impressions, feelings, and the like are ephemeral experiences representing the

non-physical or metaphysical dimension of reality, and are considered to impart valid information about reality. Thus, for my *Mvskoke* informants, the indirect experiences of the Little People are just as valid and confirmatory as direct experiences, which lead to the common belief the *Este-Lobockuce* are indeed real.

#### *Gardens and the Growing World*

*What is being grown and used?* Informants grew many different things in their respective gardens, which generally fall into four categories. The first category, which overlaps with most conceptions of gardens, consists of edibles, while the second category consists of durables. The third category consists of Medicine plants. The final category is flowers. These categories also overlap with reports of what informants described as constituting a knowledge of plants (i.e., as food, fiber, and medicine). These categories are not mutually exclusive as several plants fall into multiple categories.

The members of the *Ekvnv Hvtke* community grew a number of edible plants in their respective gardens. Many informants grew assorted varieties of tomatoes, from grape and cherry tomatoes to heirloom cultivars like Brandywines. Potatoes and melons, too, were common edible additions to

gardens. Other edibles included various berries, grapes, and various fruiting and nut bearing trees such as mulberries, persimmons, oaks (especially white oaks with large acorns that contain less tannins than other oak species), hickories, walnuts, and pecans.

Since trees are slow growing, and are therefore not quick additions to a garden, informants handled these in different ways. Some members of the community planted young saplings and allowed them to slowly mature, which takes years to see profitable results. Other people constructed their growing and gardening spaces around existing trees, which were mature enough to produce fruit and nuts. Other trees are also made use of in different ways. Sweetgum (Latin: *Liquidambar styraciflua*) produces a sweet sap, known as liquidambar that has been traditionally used like chewing gum (Crellin and Philpott 1989b:419). Yaupon holly is sometimes used as a "poor man's coffee," in addition to being an important Medicine plant used in the preparation of the "black drink," or *asi-hvtke* (pronounced Ah'-shee Hut'-kee).

Corn, or *vce* (pronounced Uh'-chee), was considered to be a prized crop, with several informants attempting to grow different types. For example, at Harvest Busk, members are given several kernels of community corn, which is the

traditional crop of the *Mvskoke* people. Some informants have discussed trying to begin growing other traditional varieties of corn, mainly flint corn, a hard kernelled variety used in the preparation of *safke* (pronounced Soff'-kee, a traditional southeastern dish that resembles something between creamy grits and runny gruel). Sweet corn and Indian corn (the multi-colored varieties seen in grocery stores in the fall) are also potential garden inclusions. Unfortunately, the prolonged droughts and excessive heat of the past several years has reduced the ability of the informants to successfully grow any substantial amounts of corn.

Although somewhat unsuccessful, several informants still described how the few ears of corn that did manage grow were "the best corn they ever ate." They explained this as follows:

"I just think that growing a garden and understanding that relationship in that effort that you have to put in to food makes you appreciate it a little more. It also gives you that knowledge. There may come a time in your life where you need to know how to get food. There may not be a grocery store nearby for whatever reason..."

This final statement explains a common sentiment amongst informants as to why edibles are grown at all. Being close to your food, and having the knowledge to grow plants, should something happen that makes that knowledge necessary, were considered extremely important for all informants.

Informants also grew several durable plants, used in the production of fibers. Several informants grew Beargrass (a species of yucca), which was reported as the most valuable and important durable plant. Beargrass, after an intensive preparation and many hours of labor, can be used to create very strong and durable fibers. The leaves of the Snakebutton root (latin: *Eryngium yuccifolium*) are also used in a similar manner, although this plant is not a common addition to the informant's gardens. Rather, as this plant grows naturally in many of the piney woods of northern Florida, it is admired in its natural state. Leaves for fiber construction are either collected from the wild or the plants used to make the warrior Medicine, *passv.*

Some trees also fall into the category of durables. Hickory wood, especially heartwood, is extremely dense and strong and is used to construct ballsticks, bows, and tool handles. White oak also has a very strong and dense wood

that is used in a similar way as hickory. Other uses of trees as durables are related to fire. For example, hardwoods are able to be dried out and cured fairly easily without rotting. When burned, these hardwoods burn down into coals that are useful for cooking (as opposed to soft woods like cedar that burn down to ash). Pine trees are also an important tree used for its wood. The tars and resins of pine trees, especially Long Leaf pines, slowly recede into the base of the trunk over time. Informants referred to this wood as "lighter wood," which is collected from dead or felled trees and break it down into splinters. This lighter wood easily takes a spark and burns at a high temperature, similarly to parifinated wood that is used as a modern fire starting agent.

Medicine plants are grown in many gardens, but are mostly not being grown for actual use. Rather, most Medicine plants are grown and cared for so that the person can be close to and familiarize themselves with particular plants. Most plants that are actually used in the preparation of Medicines are gathered from the wild. Several exceptions include tobacco (latin: *Nicotiana rustica*), hece in *Mvskoke*. Many informants described tobacco as one of, if not the most, important of the various Medicine plants. As previously mentioned, this

plant is smoked and used as ritual offerings to the Sacred Fire and as offerings when gathering and collecting plants. According to informants, this is a way to give back instead of simply taking from the natural world. *Hece* is also used to seal negotiations and make agreements binding, and is the traditional gift to the ceremonial leadership and makers of medicine for their services. The flowers are occasionally used as offerings as well. Tobacco seeds, among the smallest in the plant kingdom, are regularly collected and distributed amongst the community, when available. Just for a reference, a single teaspoon of seeds would likely be enough for an entire field of tobacco.

Mint plants, such as sweet mint, horsemint, pineapple mint, and others, are believed to have the inherent property of being able to chase away ghosts and are also common additions to the informants' gardens. Several male informants discussed how mints have a feminine association, which they regard as the cause of their continued failure to successfully grow these plants. The informants who do grow mint successfully furnish the Busk with cuttings, as well as distributing cuttings to other members of the community.

One informant also grew American ginseng (latin: *Panax quinquefolius*) or *heles-hvtke* in *Mvskoke* (pronounced Hee'-

liss Hut'-kee, translated as white Medicine). This plant is increasingly rare due to being over collected for markets, especially in China, where American ginseng is considered a superior variety (Dan Penton, personal communication:2011). Additionally, American Ginseng is quite difficult to cultivate. The informant received his initial seedlings from a Cherokee man in North Carolina, which yet again highlights the way that plants are traded and exchanged regularly within and between communities.

Other Medicine plants that are seen in gardens amongst the community are grapevine (*pvrko*, pronounced bu[thl]-Ko', which is used in Grave Medicine), dogwood and sweetgum trees (two of the sacred trees both of whose small stems and bases of leaves can, interestingly, be used as a toothbrush), and yaupon holly. Community members commonly bring yaupon to the Busk to be used in the black drink, or *asi-hvtke*, which actually translates to white drink (referring to the white foam created through the bubbling of the concoction). In short, many Medicine plants are grown, and although not used personally, are commonly collected and brought to the Busks as a contribution to the community.

Many informants also grew assorted varieties of flowers. One informant described how growing flowers

connects people to the natural and growing world because, in general, flowers are not used for any specific purpose. Rather, flowers are usually just considered to be pretty and provide an important connection to the feminine. One informant (Emv) said: "it also gentles a man, to admit that he likes flowers," connecting the growing of flowers to Men's role as agents of the women in the Busk ceremonial.

While most flowers are grown as a connection to nature, and as a way to connect to the feminine, some flowers have other uses for the *Mvskoke*. The roots of the Echinacea, also called coneflowers, can be used to make a kind of panacea. Southern Blue Flag Iris, which has become a popular ornamental plant due to its large blue flowers, is a native plant to the north Florida area and is also a Medicine plant, although special preparation is necessary to avoid poisoning (Foster and Duke 2000:189-190). The roots of this plant, when prepared properly, can be added to ground-nut breads in place of eggs, due to a certain protein that facilitates the binding of ingredients. The roots of the cattail plant, which grows near water, can be used in the same manner.

*Datura* (latin: *Datura stramonium*), also called Jimson weed, grows wild in many areas and is sometimes grown as an ornamental for its pretty flowers. However, this plant is

considered a very powerful medicine and is even referred to as "the Medicine you don't come back from" due to its hallucinogenic properties. There are other uses that were reported by informants, such as in the preparation of salves for insect stings or inflammation but most people rarely use it in such a way, due to its extreme potency.

Spiderwort (latin: *Tradescantia virginiana*) was yet another common flower that informants encouraged to grow in and around their gardens or growing spaces. This plant forms pretty purplish or bluish flowers with bright yellow stamen. Besides being pretty to behold, several uses of this plant were known amongst the community. As an edible, the young shoots are reported to taste like asparagus. A salve can also be produced by boiling the roots and flowers that reduces the pain and itchiness of insect and plants stings. Yet another use of spiderwort, and by far the most amusing for informants to talk about, is as a kind of Native American Viagra in which a salve is applied to the penis to make it enlarged. Spiderwort's name in *Mvskoke* is even a reference to this use: *pvkpvke holati tihvs rakita* (pronounced Buk'-buh-Gee' ho-Lah'-tee Day'-huss Thlah'-keetah), which translates as "blue blossom makes penis big."

*How has Busk participation influenced gardening?*

Informants, when asked how participating in the Busk ceremonial has affected their perception and engagement in gardening, generally responded very similarly with "a lot". The first common sentiment shared amongst informants was that, through continued engagement in the Busk, they began to pay more attention to the natural world, and, specifically, to plants. Several described how, before learning the Busk lessons, they simply saw a bunch of plants. Then, over time, they began seeing individual plants, recognizing those they worked with at Busk. The informants then began working with these different plants in a more personal way, learning about *that* plant: what is good for it, what is bad for it, how much light and water it needs, and so forth. Some informants talked about how they had never really gardened before going to Busk, but the longer they went, the more important plants seemed until they were growing gardens of their own.

One informant mentioned that she was quite surprised at the prevalence of the various Medicine plants, which she had simply not recognized before. She had studied Native American history and culture in college and had known of several plants, such as yaupon holly, but until becoming a regular attendee of the Busks, had not been able to

identify it. She had thought that Medicine plants, because they are so powerful and important, would be quite rare, which makes a certain amount of sense when one considers that, in most of the world, the more rare something is, the higher the perceived value is, in general. However, as one informant described, *Mvskoke* medicine is not perceived as having high value because it is rare, it is valuable because it is powerful, whether rare or common.

Another informant also described how, through learning more about plants, she began recognizing more plants. She had always known some plants, such as being able to identify poisonous plants and specific trees. Going to Busk and learning about the role plants play in the Busk ceremonial, she began to recognize more and more plants, eventually replacing the strangeness of unknown plants with a comfort drawn from the recognition of familiars. Thus, as informants reported, the Busk can serve as a way to inspire participants to engage the natural world, which is, in turn, crucial in understanding the Busk. This sentiment was unanimously expressed by informants. One informant made the following comment, which exemplifies many of the perspectives on the matter:

“If the young people are not making a connection to the natural world, they’re not going to make

much connection to our grounds. I think it all ties together. And with anybody, if they don't have a connection to the natural world, the grounds are not going to mean that much because the symbolism and in the rituals are all tied in with the natural world. If you have a garden and so forth, it keeps you more in touch with what the grounds are about. We are very agricultural, so it keeps the connection going that way, to growing things."

For the members of the *Ekvnnv Hvtke* community, participation in the Busk also helped establish a new perception of plants. Several informants made comments about how, after participating in the Busk, they came to see plants as living beings. One informant discussed how she began to take the children she teaches out to the playground to identify and look at plants. Another informant discussed that Busk inspired him to learn his plants better to get to know his plants individually, behaviors that correlate with the adage "pay attention," which is vital for the Busk.

Other informants described an increased desire to involve themselves with plants that accompanied their increased participation in the Busk. Some were simply more

likely to go out into their gardens, while others expressed how they were more likely to stop and smell and even *feel* the plants. Yet another example of people perceiving plants as living beings deserving of respect was an informant saving a poplar sapling while installing a fence gate, which we later replanted in a different location. This particular informant has been organic gardening for about forty or fifty years. He discussed how he had always engaged plants with respect and that participating in the Busk did not greatly affect his perceptions of plants and gardening in that regard. Rather, he discussed how Busk serves as an outlet for expressing and experiencing ideas and beliefs of a spiritual nature and that having that outlet helps with being able to be more aware of plants.

Another commonly expressed sentiment, especially among the women of the community, was that men need a connection to the feminine. As previously mentioned, the growing of plants, flowers in particular, provides men with this connection to the feminine, which informants generally regarded as a connection to the growing and living things in the world. This connection is important because the men must engage their femininity during the Busk ceremonial, while men's traditional masculine gender roles were associated with death (i.e., hunting and warfare). Thus, a

connection to the growing world "tempers a man," as one informant remarked. Another informant summarized this sentiment as follows:

"If a man has a love of growing things, it helps keep him connected, with Mother Earth and also with the sun and the sky. It takes it all to work together. We are just one part of the creation. So, since we were the ones given the ability to work, to make decisions, that, often, the plants and animals don't have, then, it gives us a responsibility to do those things."

## CHAPTER 6

### *Living, Learning, and the Lessons of the Busk*

This chapter presents a second set of themes that emerged from my research. In the *Ekvnnv Hvtke* community, learning the lessons of the Busk is an interactive and observational process. This process has a large impact on how the informants interpret and come to understand the lessons of the Busk ceremonial and apply what they have learned in their daily lives. This chapter covers several themes that best elaborate upon how participation in the Busk ceremonial has affected the development of different perceptions of what constitutes proper behavior, with an emphasis on the relationship between people and the natural world.

The first theme addresses a concept of intentionality and impact as criteria for determining proper behavior. This theme highlights a concept of "good heart" that is prevalent among the informants accounts of proper behavior. The second theme highlights informants' perceptions of a concept of active living and learning that is prevalent at

the *Ekvuv Hvtke* community, building upon the concepts of proper behavior discussed in the first theme. A third theme covers a concept of complimentary duality that is a large part of *Mvskoke* beliefs and the Busk ceremonial. The last theme of this chapter provides an account of informants' reasons for participating in the Busk, including what they hope to accomplish by their participation.

#### *Intentionality and Impact*

*Intentionality and acting with a good heart.* When discussing good or proper behavior, the informants shared a common description of acting with a "good heart." "Acting with a good heart" was a primary expression of proper behavior in terms of Busk behavior, but also persisted into the informant's daily lives as well. The metaphor of acting with a good heart also encompassed informants' ideas of what it means to be a native in the modern world.

One informant explained her concept of being native, saying that there are bloodline, headline, and heartline Indians. Bloodline Indians were described as those people who are focused on the blood relationship to Native Americans. With proven direct descent a necessary requirement for nearly every tribal affiliation recognized by the government, an emphasis on blood relations is a kind

of by-product of finding one's identity as a Native American. However, as discussed previously, adoption is and has always been a very important aspect of *Mvskoke* culture, which complicates the emphasis on blood relations.

Bloodline Indians were described by some informants as "card-seekers," who are more interested in getting tribally affiliated for the monetary aspects (such as casino profits or the like).

Headline Indians were described as those who simply want to be recognized as natives. These are people who talk in screams and protests about indignity. Many also described headline Indians as people who want to profit off their "Indian-ness," trying to get governmental monies for school or using their indigeneity as a way to sell trinkets for more money (because they were "genuine hand-made Indian artifacts").

The last category, Heartline Indians, are those people who act in accordance with traditional values. These natives are described as acting with a good heart by not engaging in traditional lifeways for profit or out of some perceived inherent right, but because they feel that those traditional values and ways of being is right for them. One informant stated that people have to do what is right for themselves. "What is good for one person," she said, "may

not be right for another. If a person just follows along with what other people think is right, they may end up doing something that is actually bad for themselves.”

What it means to act with a good heart was defined by several informants as a state of mind, heart, and soul. With a proper state of mind, a person is not fixated on material objects, rather, they are aware of the natural world around them and, taking a lesson from the Busk, paying attention to that world. Amongst the informants, the proper state of “heart” referred a certain intentionality behind one’s actions. Reportedly, people acting with a good heart are not simply acting without thought; they try to understand what they do and why they are doing it. Understanding why people do what they do also ties in to the concept of a proper state of soul, which refers to the intent behind one’s actions. Informants qualified acting with a good heart and soul as having acting with both good intentions and a motivation to do good by their actions. For many, this motivation included a willingness to give respect and love to others, especially in the context of the Busk.

*The impact of one’s behavior and lessons learned from the Busk.* Among my informants, the intention behind their

behavior was only half of the equation. The other half was impact. Informants described how even if you are doing something with a good heart and intent, if the impact of that behavior hurts someone else, then the behavior was harmful. Good behavior, then, would be acting with a good heart (as discussed above), but doing so in a way that does not harm others and paying attention to both the intended and unintended consequences of one's actions.

Several informants described the impact of one's actions and the intentionality behind those actions as being interdependent categories. One informant remarked: "It isn't the things that you do, necessarily, it is 'how' the things you do emerge from your being, as something different." This same informant had made another statement that she does not care about people's intent; she cares about what they do. These may seem discrepant statements, but, in actuality, are complimentary ways of describing a concept of proper behavior. If a person is not acting in way that their actions "emerge from their being," they are not acting with a good heart because their heart is not in it. It is not just what you do, but how you do it.

Most of the informants discussed interpretations of acting with a good heart that agreed with an inseparability of the intentionality behind some action from the impact of

that action. These accounts suggested that a person who acts with proper intentionality (i.e., with a good heart), will be aware of the consequences of their actions, thus their impact will be positive. A person who acts in a way in which the impact of their actions is positive will also be acting with a good heart. However, when a person does something with positive consequences, but does it with improper intention (i.e., with a bad heart), it is improper behavior. Likewise, when a person does something with a good heart that has negative consequences, it is also improper behavior. Thus, for many informants, when they use the term "good heart," they are referring both to the intention behind one's actions as well as the consequences of those actions.

#### *Active Participation in Life and Learning*

Active participation is a perfuse concept embodying the vitality of engaging in an interactive role within the community, not maintaining a place on the sidelines. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, this concept became more profuse when community became more open to teaching aspects of the Busk to attendees. Before, people could observe the Busk from an observation bench, but were not allowed to actually participate. In the present, with a new emphasis

on the fourth tenet of the Busk ceremonial ("be involved"), active participation has become more important. Most informants commented about how people attending Busk have the responsibility to actively participate, or they should not be there.

*Active living.* Many informants talked about this active participation concept in one way or another. For example, one informant was asked to make a profound statement while sitting around a fire one evening. He slowly stood up, and in very serious voice, commented, "The point of life is not to arrive safely at death." While everyone who heard this statement could not help laughing, his comment reflects the concept of active living in one's everyday life.

Several informants expressed this active living concept as living life to its fullest. For example, one informant discussed how participation in the Busk had taught her that, for the *Mvskoke*, life is lived in and for the present. She compared this to other religions such as Christianity, which focus on an afterlife, stating that by focusing on an afterlife, the here and now is ignored. Yet, she explained, "it seems like the now is where you can make a difference with the world, especially in the lives of other people." People who focus only on an afterlife, she

described, are just waiting and are not living life to its fullest, and therefore not actively living.

Informants also discussed how part of active living embodied giving full effort, especially when participating in the Busk. As one informant stated, "if you give a half-ass effort, you get half ass results." Giving less than full effort weakens the integrity of the entire Busk the way a transformer that works at only half capacity weakens the integrity of a circuit. Active living, then, encourages people to take part fully, by being fully in the moment and giving a full effort at whatever one does.

*Active learning.* For all the informants, active learning, that is, learning what to do and actually doing it, were necessary for proper behavior. For example, many informants considered doing something (such as gathering or preparing medicines at Busk) without trying to understand why it was being done as constituting improper behavior. One informant described that doing something at the Busk without any understanding is "just going through the motions." He described how this may be acceptable for newcomers to the Busk, who are encouraged to participate and be involved (the fourth tenet of the Busk ceremonial), but are not expected to be fully knowledgeable of the lessons of the Busk. However, over time, people are more

encouraged to understand *why* they are doing what they do. This sentiment was shared amongst all of the informants who expressed a desire to learn about why they did certain things at Busk.

*Responsibility and active participation in the Busk ceremonial.* For the *Ekvnv Hvtke* community, active learning is intrinsically tied to active participation in the Busk. Many of the informants described how people who know what and why certain things need to be done at the Busk have a responsibility to the community to actually do those things. These responsibilities were typically discussed in reference to the Busk, such as fetching water, firewood, the moving of chairs, and other things that help the Busk go smoothly.

Other informants also discussed how responsibilities to do certain things, especially at the Busk, exist even if people are unaware them. One informant made this point with a reference to plants. She said that "plants do not behave in isolation; they are affected by what we do and what we do *not* do, whether we know it or not." Other informants made similar metaphors using plants to conceptualize proper behavior towards living things. One must be aware of their responsibilities to fully engage in proper behavior. This necessitates the adherence to the first tenet of the Busk

ceremonial: pay attention. If people are not paying attention, they may behave improperly by neglecting responsibilities or otherwise acting in discord with the *Mvskoke* concept of proper behavior. One engages in proper behavior by paying attention, actively learning, and fully engaging in what one does with a good heart.

However, sometimes, as several informants described, people get lazy and slack off on the responsibilities expected of them. When these responsibilities are not met, and the problem gets severe enough, there is a community outlet for these actions to be addressed. Every year before Green Corn, a community meeting is held, which is called "Court." Court provides the community a public outlet for discussing proper and improper behavior. At Court, people have the opportunity to share grievances about other members, brag about people, or discuss any community business. For example, one time, the women had noticed that they were having to clean the kitchens more and more, a South Arbor responsibility. The women brought this up at court, chastising the men of South Arbor and urging them to do what they are expected to do. In this case, the community had a grievance against the men of South Arbor for failing to perform tasks that were expected of them. Although the men of South Arbor wanted it known that since

then, they have increased their work in their kitchen duties considerably).

What emerged from the research was that the informants conceive of proper behavior as active participation in life and in learning. This active participation requires learning what to do, actually doing what is learned by putting it to use, and learning the *whys* rather than "just go through the motions." Active learning, then, goes in tandem with active living. In turn, active living goes in tandem with giving full effort with a good heart and good intention. Thus, active participation in life and learning is complimentary to the proper behavior determined by the intentionality and impact of one's actions.

*Slow Learning, Observation, and Engaging the Natural World*

Active living and learning are a part of proper behavior, especially towards engaging the natural world, which is the source of symbolism and ritual in the Busk. However, when discussing the interaction with plants, informants added to this process the concept of slow learning. Informants discussed how modern society has the tendency to look for quick answers, about the plant world. Several informants reflected on this issue. Informants talked about how most people in Western society are looking

for quick answers. These quick answers, one informant said, are exemplified by most books on plants, which provide all kinds of quick and easy facts about the plants (like Latin names, when the flowers will bloom, whether it is or is not poisonous, etc.). However, informants described how those quick facts are not really a knowledge of any of those plants. Rather than being a way to develop a relationship with particular plants, informants described, this type of searching for quick answers is actually a way for people to not have to pay attention (in contradiction to the second tenet of the Busk: *pay attention*).

The informants all agreed that if you want to understand a plant, you must build a relationship with that plant. That relationship is not built by knowledge of a name or through understanding how and when that plant flowers. Rather, as informants described, each plant interacts with the surrounding environment in its own way, just like a person and, also like with people, just because you know one, does not mean that knowledge is applicable to others. Instead, each plant is unique and a person must cultivate personal relationships with particular plants. This relationship building, just as with people, does not happen immediately; it takes time, and a lot of it (hence "slow learning"). One season of growth cannot provide a

person with intimate knowledge of a plant. Every season is different, with its own particular environmental factors that the affect plants in a multitude of ways. Thus, learning about plants is a continual process, always requiring one to pay attention and encouraging one to actively engage the natural world.

Several informants succinctly summarized this sentiment of slow learning and observation and engagement of the natural world as "living in the here and now." As several informants pointed out, you can learn from the past and prepare for the future but right now is where people are able to make a difference in the world. Another sentiment that arose in tandem with slow learning was the concept that you are *always* learning. When you are paying attention, observing the natural world, and actively engaging in developing relationships with plants, you learn more and more about those plants. However, as one informant said, "the more you learn, the more you need to learn, forcing you to pay attention even harder".

*The Answer is C: Duality!*

While participating in the Busks and through many in-depth discussions with the informants of the *Ekvnv Hvtke* community, a concept emerged that is vital to understanding

*Mvskoke* perception of the world and of reality: *duality*.

The particular type of dualism that is employed by the *Mvskoke* is not the familiar concept of oppositional dualism that is so common in Western society. For most of Western society, dualism takes the oppositional form of ["A" OR "not A"] (see Buckham 1936:176-178). Examples of these oppositional categories are on/off, good/evil, up/down. Dualistic categories of thought for the *Mvskoke* are not oppositional; they are what might be called reciprocal and complimentary (see Buckham 1936:181-183). Furthermore, the two categories that compose the dualistic equation are joined in some way.

There are many examples of complimentary dualisms that are joined together that emerged from discussions with informants. First, and foremost, is the Male and Female dichotomy, which suffuses nearly every aspect of *Mvskoke* beliefs. The two categories are complimentary because both Male and Female are needed for the continuation of life, joined together through the act of sex. The dualistic breakdown of Male-Female joined in sex serves as the base metaphor for most of *Mvskoke* beliefs, explaining the profuseness of sexual metaphors and humor mentioned in this thesis already. Other important complimentary dualistic dichotomies discussed by informants included a distinction

between the physical and metaphysical aspects of reality, which are joined together by living things. Secular-space and sacred-space are joined by the shell ring, or *taco*. Cultivated areas and wild areas are joined together by the edge of the woods (which is guarded by the Little People). The above world and below world are connected by the middle world; the water and sky by the surface of the water; and the earth and sea by the beach.

It is important to understand that the theme of dualism, in regards to the Busk ceremonial, encompasses the concept of balance that is vital to a *Mvskoke* understanding of health and Medicine, as mentioned in the Chapter 5. Many informants described how participating in the Busk more and more helped them to begin to recognize and understand these complimentary dualistic categories more and more, in both the Busk and the natural growing world. One informant even went so far as to characterize the Busk as a way to "de-program the brainwashing" of modern society, which is too focused on materialism and consumerism.

*Separating Personal Desires from Community Needs:  
Understanding the Role of the Busk and the Reasons for  
Participating*

The final theme discussed in this thesis illustrates the reasons that participants participate in the Busk, and

what the participants conceived as the role of the Busk ceremonial. This theme is the natural culmination of the myriad of perceptions of the Busk that exist in the *Ekvnv Hvtke* community. For the informants, it was crucial to understand that the Busk serves the needs of the community and even the world. Personal desires have little place in the rituals of the Busk.

While it may seem that a man's movement from one arbor to another may be based on personal dedication to the fire and to the community, it does not. Rather, because an individual's desire to be in any particular Arbor is irrelevant, a person is moved when it is considered to be of value to the community, a decision which is made between the ceremonial leadership and the Mother of the Grounds, or *Emv* (pronounced Ee'-muh). For example, a man may stay in the South Arbor for many years because of the role he fills in that Arbor, or he may be moved to the North Arbor after a very short amount of time because of a deficiency that he may be able to fill in the North. Both of these situations occurred amongst the informants.

The informants of the community readily discussed their perceptions of the scope of the Busk ceremonial, addressing such questions as "Who and what does the Busk affect?" While a substantial amount of effort of the Busk

ceremonial is concentrated around the community and its members, such as the making and taking of Medicines, the informants made it clear that the scope of the Busk is much larger, including the whole world. One informant stated, "What we do affects the whole world. I fully believe that." Another informant stated, "When we dance, we dance for the whole world, for everybody and everything. If we let the fire die, I fully believe that the world would too."

Another informant discussed how the Medicines of the Busk also have repercussions that extend beyond the community. He said, "My feeling about the medicines is that it is what keeps the world in harmony. It is the power of medicines when they are used properly, especially when used in conjunction with each other. It, figuratively, keeps the wolves at bay."

The sense that the Busk is vital for the continuation of life is a significant aspect of the *Mvskoke* belief system, which refers again to the concept of health and well-being as a state of balance. As previously discussed, because humans have the ability to affect that balance through the rituals of the Busk, humans also have the responsibility to do so, since the world can be just as affected by what we do not do as it is by what we actually do. This concept expanded beyond the Busk ceremonial as

well. One informant made the statement that as human beings, we all have a "responsibility to go to sacred places, and a responsibility to give thanks."

This concept of giving thanks is a very important aspect of the Mvskoke worldview, expressed by the word *mvto* (pronounced *muh-Doh'*), which translates as thank you. One informant commented on this concept as follows: "Sometimes, you have to learn to say "Mvto!" and leave it at that. Don't get mad that your car broke down, because, maybe if it had started you would have been at the wrong place at the right time and would have gotten into a car accident." Interestingly enough, the following morning after hearing this statement, my car broke down while the informants I was staying with were at work. Rather than become upset at losing a day of research collection, I remembered the lesson from the day before and simply said "Mvto!"

## CHAPTER 7

### *Conclusions*

While investigating the ethnoecological perceptions of people of the *Ekvuv Hvtke* community, certain qualities of their beliefs seemed to be ubiquitous to spirituality in general, including a common emphasis on peace, integrity, and honesty. At the *Ekvuv Hvtke* community, these qualities are pervasive in both the lessons taught at the Busk ceremonial and the various informants' personal experiences of the Busk ceremonial. Additionally, these qualities were also commonly associated with perceptions of the natural growing world of plants in various ways, such as informants perceiving willow as bringing forth honesty and true-heartedness. Thus, being active in the natural world, by gardening or simply spending time outdoors, turned out to be a way for the members of the *Ekvuv Hvtke* community to engage these intrinsic features of their spirituality in different ways.

Understanding spirituality requires determining where the focus of attention of that spirituality is directed.

Many faith systems maintain a focus on some conception of an afterlife, which is generally contrary to the *Mvskoke* spirituality expressed through the Busk ceremonialism. For the Native Americans of the *Ekvnv Hvtke* community, the focus is not on what happens after death; the focus is on life, on what happens *before* death. One informant said that focusing on what happens after death is "just waiting while ignoring the here and now. It seems like 'now' is where you can make a difference with the world and, especially, in the lives of other people."

In my experiences interacting with native peoples throughout my life, focusing on the present and on the natural world seems to be an intrinsic part of the nature-centric religion of many native peoples. In ecologically focused spiritualities, the natural world is a living world, in which people are only a single part of a much larger whole. Many of the informants described this type of naturally oriented belief system as a fertility cult. In this context, cult is not a derogatory term; rather, it is making use of the anthropological definition of a cult: a *node of ritual intensification within an existing religious system* (F. Kent Reilly III, personal communication:2009).

With an emphasis on the natural growing world and the high importance of the feminine in the ceremonial arena,

fertility and life are paramount in the *Mvskoke* belief system. In this way, a fertility cult is really a cult of *life*. One informant provided an interesting point on the matter. When asked if he thought of the Busk ceremonial in the *Ekvny Hvtke* community as a fertility cult, he stated:

"Do I see us as a fertility cult? No. I don't think of it that way. What I think it is, is a survivalist instinct... If you don't think of it this way, then this whole way of life, this whole way of thinking is not going to exist. So, yeah... maybe we are [a fertility cult]. But, it is done for a reason. It is not just done for the sake of [worship]; it's for the survival of the culture."

### *Living in Two Worlds*

Participation in the Busk ceremonial has, amongst all informants, had a significant impact on how the members of the community interact with the natural world, and with their fellow humans. The more informants participate in the Busk, and in the community, qualities such as tolerance and open-mindedness increase in their importance. However, these people must live and move between two different worlds: the world of the Busk ceremonial and the modern world. As mentioned several times in this thesis, balance

(both internal and external) is achieved through participation in the Busk. The modern world, however, is not balanced. Thus, these two worlds are at odds with one another. For this reason, leaving Busk is always hard. When informants leave the Busk, and return to the modern world, there is a strong sense of being thrown into imbalance. Being cast back into a world, which is at such odds with the worldview and lifeways reinforced by the Busk ceremonial, is a culture shock. Generally, the people of the community describe how it takes about a week to return to their normal lives. As a result, there is a common feeling of wanting the Busk to continue, as informants described, of wanting things to stay as they are in the Busk, in the balanced state. There is also a strong desire to stay in that other world of the Busk amongst the informants. When these people have a strong connection to each other, to the *Ekvnv Hvtke* square grounds, and to the natural world itself, they feel a sense of completeness and happiness, which is usually lacking in their life outside the Busk.

The Busk mentality, for the members of the *Ekvnv Hvtke* community, tends to persist in their interaction with the natural world. This may reveal itself through recognizing a certain plant and taking the time to actually spend some

time with that plant, or by stopping to listen to a bird singing and say *Mvto*. Technologies like iPods, smartphones, and wireless internet are all diversions, preventing people from being active in the world around them. Many informants discussed how people need to remove the earphones, turn off the iPods, and pay attention to the real world, rather than the world "in the cloud" that permeates American society.

So, then, what is the role of plants in traditional lifeways? It is obvious that plants play a big role in the people's lives. It is also clear that participation in the traditional Busk ceremonial has been highly influential in how people perceive of the relationship between people and plants. There is variation on a theme. To begin, plants are living beings who deserve respect. For the *Mvskokvlke*, all living beings deserve to be treated with respect (not just humans). Additionally, the living, growing world is what is important. For the informants to this thesis, plants serve as proxy for the entire natural growing world.

#### *Lines of Future Research*

I would like to continue my research at the *Ekvnyv Hvtke* Tribal Town, hopefully focusing my dissertation on community members' ecological knowledge and perceptions. In future research, I would like to expand the data set beyond

the relationship of people and plants to include animals and, perhaps most importantly considering the importance of sacred spaces, the landscape itself. Understanding the many interrelationships between people, plants, animals, and the land allows for a more thorough examination of the ethnoecological perceptions and knowledge.

One of the initial goals of this thesis was to compare the perceptions explored through this research to available ethnographic accounts of Native Americans, especially the *Mvskoke*. Unfortunately, I was unable to accomplish due to time and space restraints. Future research will delve into such comparisons, which can enlighten studies of Native perceptions and world-views, and can also assist in identifying when ethnographers' own world-views are expressed in their observations and descriptions of Native cultures.

There are also several ways to further investigate the traditional lifeways and lifestyles of the *Mvskokvlke*. These include investigating foodways and cooking practices, engagement in traditional craft making, traditional healing practices and plant use, and engagement in recreation. Finally, the intersections of sacred and secular activity in and out of the context of the Busk ceremonial will be crucial to future research.

*Lessons Learned*

To conclude, I address some of the things I learned personally through the research for this thesis. First, although this has always been an important part of my life, we have to step away from seeing the world as our potential property or as a source of recreation. Nature is not here for us. If anything, we are here to be a part of nature. The next lesson that I have learned relates to being asked to pay attention when we go to busk. The common thought upon hearing these words is: pay attention to what? That, however, is the wrong question. It is not about paying attention *'to something'*; it is about getting out of our own heads and recognizing that we are a part of something much larger than ourselves. The mother of the grounds, *Emv*, perfectly summarized the last lesson that I learned: "There are lots of mysteries in this world. Sometimes we know a lot less than we think we do."

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## VITA

Christopher B. Bolfig was born in Freeport, TX in January of 1983. He graduated from Columbia High School in May of 2001, and after receiving an honorable discharge from the United States Marine Corps due to an injury in recruit training, began his college career at Brazosport College, a local community college. After completing his Associate of Arts degree, he began attending Texas State University-San Marcos, where he received his B.A. degree in 2010 with a double major in Philosophy and Anthropology, a double minor in Psychology and Sociology, and graduating in the University Honors Program (Honors Thesis: *The Paradigm of the Periphery in Native North America*). Christopher entered the Master's program in Anthropology at Texas State University-San Marcos in August 2010, in the Archaeology and Iconography program under Dr. F. Kent Reilly, III. Christopher will pursue his Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology under Dr. Justin M. Nolan at the University of Arkansas as a Doctoral Award Fellow.

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