

WISDOM OF THE LAND AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN ORAL TRADITIONS:  
BETWEEN CHEROKEE AND NEGEV TRIBES

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English

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April 2021

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## ABSTRACT

### WISDOM OF THE LAND AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN ORAL TRADITIONS: BETWEEN CHEROKEE AND NEGEV TRIBES

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Western Carolina University (April 2021)

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The oral tradition of any native community is considered as cornerstone and a powerful tool for the members. The Cherokee and the Negev tribes have long histories of oral traditions that are important for their members and their survival. The significant aspect of examining both oral traditions is the meaningful intersection that will arise between them, even though the two tribes are in two different continents. So, in my thesis, I will study the oral traditions of the Cherokee and the Negev tribes, and try to uncover the numerous similarities between them. I will start by discussing the backgrounds and histories of both tribes, which are similar in many ways. I will also shed light on the settings in which the oral histories and stories are transmitted. Both tribes have unique settings that storytelling, and other oral tradition practices, take place in, which is important to highlight. The changes that happen to the stories in the oral traditions of the Cherokee and Negev tribes will also be part of my research, as the change is significant and reveals many cultural and traditional values and meanings. Another focus in my research will be on land, and how it is reflected in the oral traditions. The Cherokee and the Negev people live on unique and special landscapes, which were reflected in their oral traditions. For instance, the Cherokee tribe is surrounded by mountains that shaped its oral tradition. Similarly, the Negev tribes live in a desert that strongly affected the values and the images in their stories. However, I mainly argue in my research that the oral tradition is the main constituent of the tribe. The oral

traditions of both Cherokee and Negev tribes carry values and teachings that are highly appreciated by the members. I can also be claimed that the values reflected in the oral traditions of the two tribes create an efficient education system for the members. In the conduct of the research, I will use LeAnne Howe's theory of "tribalography," which provides a framework for the understanding of tribal storytelling. In her theory, LeAnne Howe argues that storytellers use certain elements, such as the land, the people, and the social environment, from the tribe they belong to. Thus, studying and examining the overlapping between the Cherokee and the Negev tribes will provide a better and more solid understanding of "tribalography." Finally, in my research, I aim to enhance the connections between the Native American and the Palestinian communities, which can also invite more research on similar topics.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Palestinians and Native Americans have a long history of solidarity and support through scholarship, organizations, and collaboration. More specifically, the Cherokee nation and Palestine established their first ties, after years of collaboration and solidarity between Palestinians and Native Americans, in 2016, when a commercial office of the Cherokee tribe was established in Palestine, Ramallah (Al Quds Press 8). The relations that were established between the Cherokee nation and Palestine are considered to be the first in the Arab world, which is what Riyadh Malki and Mark Dancan stress (Al Quds Press 8). Many writers, such as Mahmoud Darwish, who wrote “Speech of the Red Indian” (221), were strongly moved by the intersectionality of the Native American and Palestinian histories and experiences to express the spirit of solidarity between the two peoples. The symbolic presence of the Cherokee tribe in Palestine further demonstrates the solidarity spirit that exists between Native Americans and Palestinians, which calls for more comparative studies of both cultures, histories, and literatures, including oral traditions.

A comparative approach will be taken throughout this study to examine the environmental wisdom that exists in the oral traditions of Eastern Band Cherokee Indians in Western North Carolina and Negev tribes in Southern Palestine. The two oral traditions will be juxtaposed to facilitate a better understanding of the impact of their histories on their oral traditions and their relationship and understanding of the land and the environment. The study of the two native peoples will be a continuation and a contribution to the comparative studies conducted on the different native communities around the world. Moreover, the focus of this study is solely the oral traditions of the Cherokee and Negev tribes, as they provide a

comprehensive understanding of their relationship with the environment and landscape that dates back at least hundreds of years.

This study will illustrate the similarities between the oral traditions among the Eastern Band Cherokee Indians in Western North Carolina and the Negev tribes in Southern Palestine, and the role their oral traditions play in constructing, creating and preserving the values, beliefs, perception of their landscapes, and environmental identities. The oral traditions of both peoples reflect their struggles, their experiences, their environments and lands and their presence as indigenous peoples. Thus, the oral traditions, in general, represent resilience, power, and continuation of the people and the land. Moreover, the study argues that oral traditions of the Cherokee and the Negev function as education systems that work independently from any conventional education system. The values that the oral traditions carry are vital to the existence of tribal members, which is why they should be treated as necessary educational tools and methods. Thus, it is key to stress the role that the oral traditions of both Cherokee and Negev nations play on the long and short terms. The place that the oral tradition of both nations holds goes beyond a cultural and historical tradition; it has become a means of survival and healing for many generations. Healing and physical and psychological wellness of the individual, as discussed by Lisa Lefler, is defined by the Cherokees' relationship with the world (5). This relationship with the world that influences the individual's wellbeing begs the question of how does the oral tradition specifically function in the tribe?

### One Struggle

The histories of the Palestinians and Cherokees are characterized by displacement and exile. Both nations have witnessed tragic events of displacement and forced removal that

significantly affected all aspects of their cultures, histories, literatures, and futures. In 1948, Palestinians were forced to walk from their homes to live in exile during the removal of Al-Nakba. Similarly, members of the Cherokee nation were forced to walk and crowd onto boats and stockades what became known as the Trail of Tears in 1838. The shared history of the two nations calls for studies that examine the different aspects of their traditions and the impact their removals had on the two nations. The shared struggles, indeed, brought the two nations closer together, as they were able to understand the struggle better. Consequently, studying the literature of the two nations becomes more feasible, considering the similar histories and experiences. Tracing the changes that took place and how their experiences impacted their relationship with their lands and culture will also contribute to the understanding of many of today's issues. The removals of both nations had a strong impact on their oral traditions and can give good insight on how they function, in terms of relationship and connection to the land.

Through the similar struggles, Native Americans and Palestinians found common ground to share their experiences, remember their histories and ancestors, read each other's literatures, listen to each other's stories and heal together. The oral traditions of both nations preserve not only their experiences and struggles as indigenous people, but also their lands and environments, which are vulnerable to changes and distortions. With a better understanding of the oral traditions, a stronger appreciation of ancestral wisdom also grows among the members of both communities. Therefore, the oral traditions of the Native Americans and Palestinians are powerful tools to help them connect with their histories, ancestors, environments, and other tribes and nations that share similar stories. The tribes from the different parts of the world create what LeAnne Howe calls a "tribalography," in which all tribes form one story (29). The lands and the environments that many Native tribes live on are considered to be sacred and very

important to the spiritual well-being of their members, which is what makes the role of the oral tradition vital to the existence of these Native tribes. In the case of the Cherokee and Negev people, the land is emphasized further, as they both were displaced from their lands.

The displacement of both Cherokee and the Negev communities has significantly affected, not only their oral traditions, but also their relationships with the oral traditions. The oral tradition of both nations became the only tie that connects them with their lands that many of them were uprooted from. Thus, with careful consideration of the common history and struggle will result in better awareness on how the experience of displacement from the land can change the oral tradition and the relationship with it. More evidence on how the oral tradition can be a powerful tool to learn about and connect with the land of the ancestors will also emerge. To a certain extent, the oral tradition becomes the land, with its wisdom, history, and culture.

### Tribalography

One of the many common and most prominent traditions that tribes around the globe share is oral tradition. The oral traditions among the different tribes carry their histories, their cultures, their presence, and most importantly, their values and beliefs as united and coherent communities. As generations pass in a certain tribe, the oral tradition is passed to them in different ways and situations. Oral tradition has always been emphasized across all tribes to the extent that it is believed to be the origin and the root of the tribe, and the establisher of its social structure. Storytelling, which constitutes a major part of the oral tradition, can overlap remarkably between the different tribes around the world. In the Levant, which refers to the countries alongside the eastern Mediterranean and includes Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, tribes share many values, traditions, songs, stories, and proverbs. Similarly, and on a



bigger scale, the overlapping in the oral tradition of the tribes of the Levant and the Cherokee tribe in Western North Carolina is very prevalent and reveals important connections that can establish solidarity and support among the two nations.

It is crucial to discuss what “storytelling” means in the context of this study. Amy Spaulding defines storytelling as “a form of giving. It can be used to impose ideas, but that is something else. You can preach with story or sell with story or teach with story, but true storytelling should be a gift, with no demands that the story be interpreted in a particular way” (8). Spaulding’s definition of storytelling implies flexibility and change that are part of the storytelling tradition or any other form of oral tradition, which is what this study also discusses. Storytelling, in its different forms, is a spontaneous act of passing knowledge in many different forms, with no restrictions or confinements. The audience of storytelling can also be any person within any age group.

Although each tribe around the world has its own unique and specific traditions and cultural elements, storytellers from the different tribes do have common themes and concerns that they pass to each other and live by. In her groundbreaking essay, LeAnne Howe asserts that storytellers from native communities “pull all the elements together of the storyteller’s tribe,” and she mentions the land, the people, and the social environment (42). The common elements that can be found in native stories from the different tribes constitute “tribalography,” which is a term coined by LeAnne Howe in 1999. Understanding the common elements that storytellers from the different tribes share will establish a better understanding of the stories and the cultures behind them. Such an approach to the oral tradition also allows certain nations or tribes to better understand their own oral traditions, as they examine them through a broader lens that sheds light on other traditions around the world.

LeAnne Howe's work and theory on tribalogy is inspiring for this particular study. Howe lived in Jordan as a Fulbright scholar and had the chance to interact with Jordanian tribes, that many of which come from the Negev of Palestine. Howe saw strong connections between the Arab world, particularly The Levant (Bilad Al-Sham) and Native Americans. During the Arab revolts of 2011, Howe imagined an artistic project that connects The Levant with Choctaw by using different forms of art, including poetry, photography, and music. Howe's project materialized and "Memoir of a Choctaw Indians in the Arab Revolts, 1917 and 2011" was the fruit of her efforts. In that project, a member of the Huweitat tribe, one of the biggest tribes in Jordan, befriends a member of the Choctaw tribe. The two characters, although from different tribes, are able to establish, not only an understanding of each other's struggles, but also solidarity and common ground. As they fight together to drive the Ottomans out of Jordan, the true essence of "tribalogy" is highlighted.

In the southern part of Palestine, the Negev, Bedouin tribes live on its desert. The Negev is the main region in Palestine that Bedouin tribes live in. And since this study is based on Howe's theory of "tribalogy," it was most suitable to choose Palestinian oral tradition among the Negev tribes in southern Palestine. While it is possible to study the oral tradition of the Cherokee tribe in juxtaposition with the oral tradition of Palestinians who do not belong to tribes, it would be more rewarding to see how two oral literatures function under the umbrella of "tribalogy." So, this study primarily focuses on studying oral traditions in two different tribal communities. Tribes around the world have special characteristics that sets the apart from other communities and having the chance to study the Palestinians' and Cherokees' oral traditions from that lens will lead to new understandings and perspectives.

## Significance of the Study

There are many efforts to provide storytellers of the Cherokee with voice and authorship over their stories and oral tradition. In the forward of Barbra Duncan's *Living Stories of the Cherokee*, Joyce Dugan asserts discusses the importance giving the Cherokee people the opportunity to tell stories and practice their oral tradition, as it gives them a strong voice. While there has been good scholarship produced on the oral tradition of the Cherokee nation, after many efforts, the scholarship on the Negev oral tradition remains very limited, especially by Negev natives. It should be stated that although there have been many efforts to trace and document the Palestinian oral history and stories in the north, the Negev remains an uncharted area for many Palestinians.

People of the Negev are just starting to take control over their own oral tradition, as the knowledge almost only exists in a museum that is not administered by them. Upon Sophie Richter-Devroe's visit to the Palestinian Negev townships, she states that the Negev Bedouins are struggling to gain authorship of, not only their oral tradition, but also their culture as a whole (32). Thus, following the lead of the Cherokee model, which gives authorship, power, and voice to the Cherokee people, is crucial to the Bedouins of the Negev. While this study examines both oral traditions as counterparts, it is important to note that there is a need for more attention to the still-alive oral tradition of the Negev. The adequate method of conducting a study of the oral tradition of any nation would be including current experiences of the stories, songs and dances in real situations to further assert the fact that the oral tradition is still alive and exists beyond the books and articles. However, circumstances dictated, and it became challenging to experience the different aspects of the oral traditions first-hand, with elders and youths from both communities.

Examining and studying where the oral traditions in the Negev and Cherokee meet fosters connections and ties between the two peoples. Community for tribes' members around the world is very sacred and thinking of tribal community in a rapidly changing world becomes broader and more global. Thus, building connections between the different tribes, through studying the oral tradition, and other tribal elements, creates a sense of a global tribal community. When Ojibwe author David Treuer discusses the use of digital media in connecting native peoples and share ancestral knowledge that is related to health and wellness, for example, he stresses the importance of having a "holistic culture" (368). Creating a "holistic culture" between the different tribal communities is at the essence of the concept of solidarity and support, which is vital in today's world, where many tribal communities and cultures are being exposed to different forces and, to some extent, stereotypes and misinformation that affect the well-being of the members of the tribes and the perception of the tribal values. By creating a "holistic culture," more collaboration will take place and expertise exchange will become possible.

Many unique cultural and traditional elements and ancestral wisdom from both Cherokee and Negev communities are emphasized throughout the study. The study highlights certain aspects of the indigenous traditions and wisdom that exist in the oral traditions that can be overlooked by many. For instance, some people are not aware of the fact that the Bedouins that inhabit certain parts of Palestine and possess a unique culture and set of traditions that sets them apart from Bedouins in other countries. The role these cultural values and traditions can play in the development and protection of the landscape and environment can be carried to other native communities and be an inspiration for other.

## Methodology

This study mainly explores the oral traditions of Eastern Band Cherokee Indians and Negev people using two main texts. Looking at the stories, songs, and sayings, this study examines how these oral tradition elements reflect the land using descriptions, metaphors and figurative language. There is also a focus on how the wisdom in the oral traditions that is related to the land functions as education systems that can instill certain values and knowledge in the members of the tribe. Movement is also traced throughout the different elements of the oral traditions of Cherokee and Negev tribes, as it closely related to the land and its connection with the members of the tribes. For example, the study explores how characters in the stories move from one place to another, the purpose of their movements, and how it contributes to their relationship with the land.

The two main anchor texts used in this study are James Mooney's *Myths of the Cherokee* and Saleh Ziadneh's *Stories from the Desert*. Both texts provide a good number of stories from the oral traditions of the communities they emerged from and an elaborate background on the history and context of these stories. Basing the study on these two texts makes it more focused and specific. The study's main emphasis is on the oral tradition of Negev and EBCI, and while there are many texts that contain and discuss oral stories of Palestinians and Cherokees, these texts are not specific to the Negev Palestinians and EBCI. However, other texts and works have been considered and used throughout the study, as they can significantly contribute to our understanding of both communities as part of nations that live on their homelands or away in exile.

For the study of the storytelling of the Negev, Ziadneh's *Stories from the Desert* stands to be one of the most credible and reliable sources in the Negev. The stories in Ziadneh's book stem from his first-hand experience with the elders of Beersheba and Rahat. The title of Ziadneh's book sets it apart from the other works in Palestine, as it points to the unique landscape of the Palestinian Negev, on which Palestinian Bedouins have been living. Ziadneh, who is a native of the Negev, is also considered to be a competent speaker of the Arabic formal language (fusha), which gives him more credibility. On the other hand, James Mooney's *Myths of the Cherokee* is considered to be a highly valued source for the stories of the Cherokee tribe. James Mooney, whose parents are of Irish descent, and who maintained a great passion for the Native American stories and culture ("American Anthropologist" 209), collected the stories and the myths in his book in 1888 as an attempt to help save the oral tradition of the Cherokee tribe after it had been threatened. There have also been other contributions to the study and documentation of the oral traditions of the Cherokee tribe, and many of them were conducted by Cherokee scholars and writers.

This comparative study values specificity and focus in the understanding and approach of literature. It is often mistakenly assumed that the oral traditions among the different Native American tribes or Palestinian regions carry the same characteristics and can be studied as a whole. The oral tradition for Native Americans and Palestinians, however, varies drastically across regions and tribes. The same applies to any literary works by Native American and Palestinian authors; authors from the different tribes or regions include different themes and different cultural elements that set them apart from each other. Thus, the study does not consider Native American and Palestinian literatures to be homogeneous, which can be a common mistake. For instance, each Native American tribe maintains a unique culture and identity, which

includes oral traditions and literatures. The same applies to the Palestinian literature, which is often thought to be as one coherent literature, however, similar to embroidery that takes different shapes and prints from one city to another, one can find significant differences between the literature in the north and the south, as the circumstances, culture, and the landscape are different. For instance, the Palestinian literature and oral tradition in the south, which is considered to be the Negev, is centered around the life of the Bedouins and the desert. While Bedouins can still be found in the northern part of Palestine, the oral tradition and the literature of the north can, for example, include descriptions of the famous northern mountains, or the oranges of Haifa, which are confined to that region and affect its culture.

Most of the Arabic texts in this study were written in a mastery of Arabic language, and misinterpretations have been avoided. However, some of the stories and proverbs include colloquial language and vernacular expressions, as they were documented as heard from the people of the Negev. The spoken Arabic in the Arab world, including the Negev, is far from “Fusha” (the formal Arabic). Consequently, many of the expressions were written as they are to preserve the lively nature of the oral tradition and avoid detaching it from reality. In the translation, the words were interpreted to the closest and most accurate meanings in English, unless otherwise stated.

## CHAPTER TWO: PALESTINIAN ORAL LITERATURE

Oral literature of the Palestinians is especially important and crucial, because it carries a history that is overlooked and undocumented. Many Palestinian towns and cities remember and document their history everyday through the telling of the stories that the ancestors and the newer generations witnessed. Oral tradition in Palestine has become an archive that exists on the tongues and minds of people, and it only grows bigger. While it can be relatively challenging to find a reliable source of information about the Palestinian history and past, the oral tradition will remain authentic and everlasting. Today, the different Palestinian regions are making great strides to highlight their oral history and their unique stories. Each region possesses different stories that stem from their experience. The stories are passed to the younger generations and are asserted by the older generations as a form of resilience and healing.

The same efforts are being made in the Negev, as activists are trying to shed light on the history of the Negev, not only for the people who live in that region, but also for the people who were displaced and currently live in exile. Moreover, the current events that are taking place in the Negev, namely the displacement of many Bedouin families from their areas, raises the need for more efforts and attention to that region. The tribal judicial system in the Negev, which is carried through the oral tradition, is also receiving a lot of attention, and in some cases, scrutiny. As the discussion about the tribal laws in the Negev arise, people start to think more critically about their oral tradition, especially after the laws have been considered and used as tools to challenge the alien laws, which were brought by the Ottomans and the British. The importance of the oral tradition extends to even more profound reasons, which will be discussed in this study.



## Setting

A significant aspect of the Palestinian oral tradition is the setting it takes place in. Examining the setting that oral tradition takes place in and the presence of fire within that setting can provide a better understanding of the meanings and the values that the oral tradition in Palestine holds. Moreover, juxtaposing the settings of the oral traditions in Palestine and juxtaposing with other tribes can contribute to the study of the different traditions in many tribal communities, as it can point to patterns among tribes. For instance, fire is considered to be one an essential part of the Bedouin tent across the Levant and The Arab Peninsula. Fire can symbolize different meanings, not only for Bedouins, but also for the visitors and those lost in the desert. The motif of the Bedouin fire can also be found in many different literary works in the Arab world and beyond.

For the Negev tribes, fire is guidance, presence, power, and life. Fire, for all tribes in the Negev and other places in the Levant, must keep going through the night to guide those who are lost in the desert. On the same vein, fire guides the members of the tribe as they gather around it to tell stories and pass the wisdom that guides their lives. Fire brings the tribe members together, as it represents life and existence in an open desert. Evidently, all of the important tribal meetings, trials, truces, and speeches are held around the fire. In a discussion of the meaning of fire for the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula, which can be applied to the tribes in the Negev, Abdallah Al-Ja'ethin asserts that the presence of fire is an indication of generosity, hospitality, and gratitude. The meanings of fire that Ja'ethin discusses are reflected in the oral tradition of the Negev tribes, and telling the stories of generosity, hospitality, and gratitude around fire would be the most appropriate.

It should also be noted that the setting of storytelling, especially recently, is starting to change to be more inside cement houses. The constant attempts to “urbanize” Bedouins in the Negev, and even in the Jordanian desert, has resulted in many changes to the different traditions among the tribes. The “urbanization” attempts started with the British mandate and lasted until today, where there are laws that prohibit Bedouins from roaming and grazing the open desert. Deborah Shmueli and Rassem Khamaisi point out that “maintaining the Bedouin traditional lifestyle within a highly developed urban country is a challenge” (111). While many ceremonies and traditions usually take place outdoors in the desert, slowly, these ceremonies are starting to take place inside halls and cement houses. The changes are receiving a lot of criticism, as Bedouins and their traditions and ceremony are always meant to be in their open land and not confined to a designated area.

### Historical Background

The history of the Negev Bedouins and the origins of the complications that are related to their relationship with the land date back to the Ottoman era. However, the removal of the thousands of Bedouins happened in 1948 during the Nakba (Arabic term for “catastrophe”). Ilan Pappé provides a thorough description of the removal of the majority of the Negev Bedouins, and the attack on the south, which was the last region to be depopulated in Palestine. In his description of the removal of the Bedouins of the Negev, Pappé states that “the month of December 1948 was devoted to cleansing the Negev of many of the Bedouin tribes that resided there” (194). Pappé continues to point out that the tribes of Trabbin, Tayaha, Al-Hajjajreh, and Al-Azazmeh were driven out of the Negev to go to Gaza and Jordan (194). A big number of the Negev Bedouins today live in Gaza and Jordan, and most of them still maintain their Bedouin lifestyle, although their yearning to their land and people still exists.

The removal of the Negev Bedouins continues today, as they are being removed from the vast open desert to live in designated townships. During the Ottoman and British rule of Palestine, landowners there were required to register their lands, which provides them with a certificate of ownership. However, the Negev Bedouins, who only cultivated the northern part of the Negev and roamed further south in the heart of the desert, had agreements and understanding amongst themselves that did not require registration (Ghazi Falah 88). The Israeli forces considered the land of the Negev to be an integral part of their state and disregarded the Negev Bedouins as the owners of the land. Eventually, the Bedouins were forced to live in small townships around the city of Beersheba, which lack of adequate infrastructure.

The history of the removal of the Negev Bedouins from their land and the placement of them in townships has left a toll on them as people and on their traditions and culture. The land is a key component of most of the traditions in the Negev, and the absence of the land can greatly affect the traditions, including the oral tradition. The land is also part of the Bedouins' existence and connection with their past and ancestors. Furthermore, the townships constrain the Bedouins and their relationship with the land. Bedouins of the Negev today live in townships around the city of Beersheba and in exile outside the Negev after the removals of the past. As approximately 45,600 indigenous Palestinians live in the Bedouin diaspora, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Bedouins' misery continues. The removal of the Bedouins was tragic events that will always leave a mark on the Bedouins of the Negev and their culture and oral tradition. Since the removal and the placement of the Bedouins of the Negev, a new oral history that preserves their experiences and traumas was formed.

## Change

To fully understand the oral tradition of the Negev Bedouins, and its unique characteristics that distinguishes it from the oral tradition in other parts of Palestine, it is crucial to trace the changes that happen to it. Storytellers in the Levant share similar stories and, in many cases, the names of the characters in the stories are identical. The similarities among the stories in the Levant can be attributed to the fact that people of the Levant share similar traditions, cultures, and even foods. Moreover, a good portion of the Levant people are/were Bedouins who constantly move from one place to another, and many of the tribes often come in contact with other tribes and peoples. However, the stories in the Negev, owing to the fact that the Bedouins of the Negev have been living in that region without remarkable movement, have given their stories unique characteristics and elements that drastically changed the stories that are told in the rest of Palestine.

One of the main reasons for the change in the oral tradition in the Negev is the unique landscape that the Bedouins of Palestine live in. Palestine enjoys a diverse landscape, with mountains that have snowcaps year-round to the open desert and dry land. Consequently, the stories that are told in Palestine had to be changed and adjusted to the Negev environment, which is constructed of the desert. Zayadneh asserts that stories will change depending on the area they are told in (6). As Bedouins of the Negev spread out across the desert, their needs and desires will vary, hence the changes that happen to the stories in the different areas. To assure the effectiveness of the stories in the navigation of the desert, stories had to change to include and reflect the desert and the elements of the desert.

The change in the stories and the oral tradition in the Negev is also owed to the unique culture of the Palestinian Bedouins. The Palestinian culture is usually thought of as one homogeneous culture, with its people possessing the same traditions, foods, beliefs, laws, etc. However, the Bedouin culture in the Negev is significantly different from the rest of Palestine, hence the change in the oral tradition of the Negev. The oral tradition changes according to the culture it is used in. For example, while many stories in the oral tradition in northern Palestine discuss the values and the life of the village that is based on agriculture, the stories in the oral tradition in the Negev discuss tribal values and the life of the desert that is based on movement and exploration.

#### Landscape and Environment

Most Bedouins in the Middle East and North Africa gain their qualities from the landscape and the environment they live in. The open desert, for most Bedouins, is part of their identity and who they are; it represents their nature and lifestyle. With its animals, plants, and nature, the desert, for Bedouins, has become more than solely a place to inhabit. The Bedouins of the Negev are not different from the most Bedouins in the Middle East and North Africa, in terms of their inclusion of the desert environment and landscape in their identity. Bedouins of the Negev consider the desert as part of their Palestinian identity. Strong connections with the environment were established by the Negev Bedouins to the extent that it inhabits their songs, stories, language, and culture. Until today, the Negev Bedouins prefer to live in tents that keep no barriers between them and their land and allow them to move freely. Being in close proximity to their environment and their surroundings is a crucial aspect of the Bedouin culture in the Negev.

The attachment to the land and to the environment has grown stronger in the recent years, as they are changing drastically. New meanings and connotations for the Negev land have emerged recently, and it acquired new approaches by the people. Preserving and protecting the land and the environment became a necessity. Land for all Palestinians means survival, existence, and presence, thus, appreciating the land and protecting it from the changes is crucial. Today, different species and animals in the Negev are endangered, which also endangers the existence of the people who live there. Spiritually and physically, people of the Negev depend heavily on the land and the environment to survive. The theme of the land is present in all aspects of life in Palestine, not only in the Negev. People find spiritual and material value in the land. For instance, many Palestinians cultivate the land and plant it to live from it, and most of Palestinians connect with their ancestors through the land and the environment.

The Negev land and environment are threatened everyday by different forces, and the only way to save them is to implement more methods that can raise awareness. The oral tradition can be one of the most powerful methods to turn people's attention to their land and environment. The oral tradition carries elaborate descriptions of their unique land and environment that can help people see the threats and the changes. As people listen to their ancestors' stories of the land, the disparity between the descriptions and reality will become clear. Moreover, listeners will ingest the principles and the values that are related to the land and the environment, which can translate into reality and help with the protection and preservation of the land and environment. Many of the stories and the proverbs in the oral tradition of the Negev have the ability to instill true appreciation for the land and the environment and teach people how to live in such a unique and special place.

Across different stories from the Negev, the motif of the desert is very prominent. The desert symbolizes an identity that the Bedouins of the Negev have adopted. Saleh Ziadneh holds that what sets stories from the Negev apart from other stories in Palestine is the strong influence of the desert on them (9). Roaming and connecting with the land they live on is key to the survival of the Negev Bedouins. Stories and proverbs in the oral tradition also drastically emphasize the importance of the land and the environment, as they provide the wisdom of the ancestors, who knew the desert and the environment very well. The wisdom that is passed through the stories is part of the education system that the oral tradition provides. The descriptions of the desert and the Negev environment in the stories are elaborate, that the navigation of that land becomes more feasible and possible for the listeners and recipients of the stories.

In a desert, where only the stars in the sky are identifiable, passing the indigenous wisdom about them becomes crucial. The sky is usually associated with desert, not only in the Negev, but also across the Middle East, as it resembles the vast desert. The sky is one of the essential tools that the Bedouins use to navigate the desert and understand it. Many stories and proverbs guide the Bedouins' understanding of the sky and the stars to navigate the desert and gain knowledge about its nature. One of the many stories that teach about the connection between the land and the sky and aid with the navigation of land is the story "A Camel for a Piece of Wisdom," which reveals one of the secrets of the stars (Ziadneh 44). In the story, a Bedouin roaming the desert comes across a wise old man, who offers his wisdom for the camels that the man owns. As the old man passes his wisdom to the man, he mentions a proverb that is used today among people: "If you see Canopus (a star), beware of the flood." The proverb manifests the essence of the Indigenous wisdom that provides an understanding of the land and

the unique nature of the desert. This wisdom has reached the stars and provided a good understanding of how to use them as a guide.

The oral tradition goes beyond the mere representation of the land and the environment to the people's relationship with them. Living and roaming the harsh nature of the desert is usually not easy for people. The oral tradition functions as a doctrine that organizes people's relationship with the land and the environment. For instance, many stories revolve around patience, generosity, chivalry, and knighthood, which are all key to life in the dry desert. The famous story "Windless Villages" clearly demonstrates the qualities that the desert has left on its inhabitants, as it describes the shock Bedouins would experience in the absence of these qualities in different environments and different landscapes that do not necessarily require these qualities (Ziadneh 154). Moreover, the desert is also used as a metaphor in many of the Negev stories and songs to give a more beautiful description and meaning to events and feelings. For instance, sand is used in numerous songs, stories and proverbs to describe abundance, change, and knowledge.

The land is also present in every day's speech, as many proverbs use the land to describe certain aspects of people's lives. These proverbs show how intimate the relationship between the land and people is. These proverbs in the Negev and Palestine in general are always perceived as truths or facts, rather than sayings that people remember on occasions, which means that they require a lot of observation and a special connection with the environment and the people. Among the 1200 proverbs that Clinton Bailey collected from Sinai and Negev is "The womb is a garden" (25). In the context of the proverb, the womb that gives birth to children that develop different natures and traits is seen as a garden that gives different kinds of fruits and vegetables. The land was used in the proverb to help people understand the nature of humans, which further proves the strong relationship that people have with the land.



Additionally, the oral tradition instills a love for the land and strong attachment to it. Land, in the Negev oral tradition, is considered to be sacred. A host of stories in the Negev oral tradition discuss the yearning that Bedouins of the Negev feel towards their land when they are detached from it. For example, the story “A Camel for a Piece of Wisdom” describes the experience of a Bedouin who lived in exile in Jordan and his yearning to be on his land, despite the fortune he makes in exile (Ziadneh 42). Bedouins are usually perceived as people who are not attached to a place or land, but, the oral tradition of the Negev illustrates the strong connection between the Negev Bedouins and their land in Palestine. Today, many Bedouins live in exile, away from their land, and the same yearning that is described in the stories of the Negev oral tradition exists in their hearts and minds and is passed to them and their offspring through the oral tradition.

For the Bedouins of the Naqab, poetry took the form of songs and was carefully composed in the Native language (Arabic). The Arabic of the Negev and other Bedouin regions contains some of the most beautiful terms and images. The most common type of songs is “Hajini,” which stems from the Arabic word for camel “Hajin.” The naming of this type of songs in the Negev tribes, according to Mahmoud Al Biker, comes from the fact that Bedouins, from different parts of the Levant, sing Alhajini songs to the animals traveling with them to help them cope with the difficult nature of the desert (33). Camels were/are one of the main animals used for traveling long distances, hence the name. Thus, in a sense, the songs were used as tools to connect with the animals that accompanied the Negev Bedouins on their journeys, which requires a great spiritual effort. It is also important to note that Hajini poetry and singing is associated with movement and traveling, but was later used on other occasions, as the Bedouins of the Negev were forced to live in one place.

As the wisdom about the land of the Negev is passed from one generation to another, a strong sense of place generates. This strong sense of the land and the desert creates a spiritual connection between the Palestinians and their land, which is best described as terroir. The oral tradition provides the environment, in which people of the Negev absorb values, indigenous wisdom, history, and deep appreciation for their land. The terroir that was created through the oral tradition can help the people of the Negev preserve their lands, protect it from damaging changes, and cultivate it for future generations. Furthermore, the sense of loss of the land and the environment has drastically enhanced the Negev's terroir. The trauma that the Bedouins of the Negev underwent, as the land became scarce and movement on it was constrained, has made them more connected to the land and more aware of its influence on their lives and future. Thus, the oral tradition plays a vital role in bringing more attention to the land and how to perceive it and live on it.

Those who carry the oral tradition in the Negev desert can identify the damaging changes that are taking place today. The most prominent changes that are taking place today in the Negev are the forestation projects that are carried out on large portions of the desert. As soon as the forestation projects started, many of the elders and storytellers warned against them and identified them as projects that will damage the natural environment of the desert. The stories and the indigenous wisdom in the oral tradition offer an adequate understanding of the Negev desert as a region that does not require interference from people and should be preserved and embraced as it is.

Yattir woods is one of the biggest foresting projects in the Negev. The rationale behind Yattir woods according to Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael, is that it will hold back the desert and supply it with moisture ("Turning the Desert Green"). While forestation projects can have

benefits to the environment and the reduction of global warming, carrying out these projects in the desert appears to be unnatural for most Indigenous people of the Negev, who carry the oral tradition. The same unease towards the forestation projects was expressed in an article by Yale Environment School. In the article, Fred Pearce states that despite the claimed benefits of Yattir forest, “the trees, the ecologists say, are obliterating grasslands that contain rare endemic species” (“In Israel, Questions Are Raised about a Forest that Rises from the Desert”). Pearce continues to refute the claims that the forest has reduced the amount of heat in the desert by stating that the trees in Yattir words “have so far caused more warming than cooling, as the dark mass of the Yatir Forest’s trees is absorbing solar radiation, while the lighter colors of the desert once reflected the sun’s heat back into space.”

Many stories, proverbs, and poems in the Negev, as mentioned previously, provide an elaborate description of the desert life and environment. The desert is always associated with the vast open spaces that the people, the animals, and the plants are accustomed to. Moreover, the oral tradition has always described the presence of trees in the desert as odd and unnatural. For instance, the presence of trees in the desert is associated with Jinn (Arabic term for ghosts). The oral tradition establishes an understanding that the environment should remain intact and accepted as it is. So, the Negev oral tradition embraces the desert, with its dry nature, and stresses that some environmental elements, such as trees, do not belong to the desert. One of the many stories that contain such ideas is “Your Headwear was Left Behind you,” which portrays trees in the desert as aliens to it. The tree, being portrayed as a ghost in the story, causes problems to a man who comes across it in the middle of the desert. In the same sense, the stories in the oral tradition asserts that to maintain life in the desert, people should learn how to live with it and refrain from changing it. A desert that, according to the oral tradition, has never contained

forests or trees, is not suitable for such change, and will cause damage to the people and the creatures, who are not accustomed to such environment.

## Movement

Part of the discussion about the land is movement on the land and the motif of movement in the oral tradition of the Negev. Movement, for all Palestinians, is an important issue, as most of them are deprived of it. Movement and the land cannot be separated, as it fosters an understanding of the land and a connection a connection with it. To move from one place to another, for the Bedouins of the Negev, is to learn how to better navigate the desert. Numerous stories from the oral tradition of the Negev revolve around journeys that people take in the desert to explore and learn. Thus, to apply and understand the values and the indigenous wisdom that exists in the oral tradition, people must be able to move and explore the open desert.

The people of the Negev have never known borders; they were constantly moving from one place to another, hence the strong reflection of movement in the oral tradition of the Negev. Many regions even call Bedouins “Rahala,” which means “people who move.” Moreover, stories and songs from the oral tradition have been used as tools in their movements to survive the long distances. Zuhair Balawi notes that the Negev people had certain stories, in the form of songs, that they would sing on their journeys to get water. Balawi also states that the songs reflect the transition from the movement life to the settlement life, which was forced upon the Negev people (“From the Literature of the Bedouins”). The story of “The Guest and the Kite” imagines the journey an individual takes in the desert, and the expectations of his/her journey and what they will encounter. The story provides a thorough description of a unique experience, which many might go through, for listeners to learn from and grow through.

## Oral Tradition as an Education System

Understanding the role that any oral tradition plays in the different communities and tribes can only be possible through understanding how it functions as an education system for the members. Oral traditions instill values about land, neighbors, law, family, and other aspects of life. The members of the tribes in the Arab world grow up listening to stories, poetry, proverbs, and songs that include values that create the tribe. The act of listening to the stories and the poetry in the tribe also teach the best version of the Arabic language, as Bedouins are known to possess the most sophisticated and accurate Arabic skills in the Arab world. Many people used to send their children to live with different Bedouin tribes to learn the correct form of the Arabic language. Therefore, the oral tradition constitutes an education system that fits different times and preserves the values and the principles by which the tribe lives. To an extent, the Bedouin tribes do not produce the oral tradition, but rather, the oral tradition produces the tribe. As will be discussed later, this education system also preserves the unique land and passes the knowledge and wisdom related to it.

In his famous poetry lines, Iliya Abu Madi says, “take the finest of values from the desert.” It has always been known among people of the Middle East and North Africa that the values of the desert have not changed or been affected by the drastic changes that took place in their countries. People resort to the desert to learn from the Bedouins and reconnect with their roots and origins. People have always perceived the desert as a place that has reserved its values over the years. In the tents of the deserts, stories, proverbs, and poetry about the finest values are still being told and reinforced every day. Bedouins of the desert maintain a simple lifestyle that they take pride in. The laws that can be found among the different tribes, for instance, are well-

respected by, not only the members of the tribes, but also others from outside the tribe. People trust the laws of the Bedouin tribes and believe that it will deliver justice.

The oral tradition in the Negev, similar to many oral traditions around the world, is central to the system of values and principles of the people who live there, and it can be said that it forms and shapes the tribe itself. Zuhair Ibn-Ayyad holds that storytelling in the Negev stems from an experience and a long history of living in the desert, and it instills strong values in the members of the tribe (“Story of the Bedouins of the Negev”). It is also worth noting that the values that the stories of the Negev are closely related and necessary to the life of the people. For example, some of the values that are stressed in the oral tradition are values of generosity and chivalry. Life in the desert can be very difficult to people who are not used to it, and even to some who are, so generosity and chivalry are important to guarantee the continuation of the community.

## CHAPTER TWO: CHEROKEE ORAL LITERATURE

Similar to all Native American tribes, the Cherokee people have preserved their history, culture, stories, beliefs, values, and wisdom through the oral tradition that existed before the creation of the Cherokee syllabary. Until even today, the oral tradition of the Cherokee people is considered as one of the most important assets of the tribe, as it represents existence and their presence on their land. For the Cherokee, and all Native American tribes, passing the oral tradition from one generation to another guarantees the continuation of their cultures, histories, wisdom, and values. Furthermore, the oral tradition of the Cherokee people significantly facilitates connection with the ancestors, past, and land. Members of the Cherokee tribe absorb the oral tradition that was passed from their ancestors, who engaged with the Cherokee land and roamed it.

There have been many efforts by the Cherokee people and people from outside Cherokee to shed light on the oral tradition and document it. As the Cherokee people were scattered and displaced after the removal, fears of losing parts of their oral tradition arose among Cherokees. Fearing that the oral tradition of the Cherokee might fade and be lost, there was a need to document it and highlight it. The earliest attempts to maintain the stories in the oral tradition was Sequoyah's invention of the syllabary. Even today, there are still many attempts by Cherokee and non-Cherokee scholars to trace the oral tradition, with its songs, stories, and poems, through its original holders. Many programs were put in place to allow more people have access to the oral tradition of the Cherokee. Some programs also focus on the Cherokee language and the stories that are told in Cherokee, as they possess valuable characteristics that do not translate into English.

Similar to many peoples and tribes around the world, the Cherokee people documented their history and experience through their oral tradition, which gives it more importance. Many stories from the Trail of Tears, which will be discussed in following sections, were only stored and lived again through the oral tradition. The stories of the Cherokee removal have become primary sources to study the history of the Native Americans, and the Cherokee people in particular. As the stories of the Cherokee removal, and other stories in the oral tradition, are being told today, the members live that experience through them and asserts their existence and resilience

### Setting

As visitors enter the Museum of the Cherokee Indians in Qualla Boundary, they are confronted by a virtual fire around which storytelling takes place. The fire in the museum is intended to mimic a tradition of the Cherokee tribe that accompanied the passing of the oral tradition. Moreover, fire in the Cherokee storytelling tradition holds great value and is considered sacred. Christopher Teuton states that fire “was a meeting place where people sat around the sacred fire and discussed politics or took part in ceremonies,” and storytelling can be part of these ceremonies (22). Thus, the setting of the Cherokee oral tradition and the existence of the fire in it adds more social and historical value to it. Bringing it closer to the Negev oral tradition, the Cherokee fire also symbolizes community and wisdom.

Fire is also mentioned in the stories that are usually passed from one generation to another. For example, one of the most prominent stories told in the Cherokee tribe is the story of “The Frist Fire.” The story revolves around the struggles and the collaboration that took place on Cherokee land to bring fire. Thus, fire is central to the Cherokee culture and beliefs in general,



and its presence in the storytelling tradition becomes vital. As J. T. Garrett discusses the place that fire holds in the Native American communities, he states that:

Have you ever thought about how special it is to share a fire with others in a circle?

The fire can be as simple as a candle burning in a room of friends spending time together, or as elaborate as a sacred powwow fire at an intertribal gathering.

Throughout the history of American Indians and Alaska Natives, the sharing of fire has been so sacred that only certain woods would be used, and only certain trained persons would be keepers of the fire. Even the ashes of such a ceremonial fire would be shared as a reminder of this great event, to recall for everyone the ceremony of life and the Universal Circle of Life (38).

Based on Garrett's discussion of the fire, it can be inferred that sharing the sacred stories stems from the tradition of sharing the sacred fire that revolves around life. The setting of the storytelling tradition in Cherokee is also shared with many indigenous tribes around the world, including the Negev tribes.

### Historical Background

The Cherokee tribe experienced a tragic removal from their land that left a long-lasting mark, which can still be seen on recent generations. The forced removal and the detachment from the land are traumas that are very difficult to recover from, and their effects go beyond the mere loss of land. For instance, many Cherokee members today suffer from medical issues that can be traced to the impact of the removal. Lisa Lefler and Roseanna Belt assert that "the soul wounds that were inflicted on [the Cherokee] ancestors generations ago continue to affect us in many ways emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually" (75). The soul wound that Lefler

and Belt discuss is also expressed in the oral tradition of the Cherokee, and specifically, the oral tradition that revolves around the removal and the Trail of Tears.

Such a tragic event that impacted the lives of the Cherokee people and their oral tradition, which is an aspect that should not be overlooked. The oral tradition of the Cherokee should be studied and examined with consideration of their history and past events that shaped a major part of their lives and traditions. Stories emerge from the peoples' experiences and lives, and history plays a major role in the formation of the stories. The awareness of the historical trauma in the oral tradition of the Cherokee nation, or any other ingenious nation, provides a possibility for connections and collaboration between the Cherokee nation and other nations that have been through similar struggles and experiences around the world.

Contrary to the common belief that the removal started with the Treaty of New Echota, Michael D. Green and Theda Perdue state that the removal began between 1808-1810 and 1817-1819 (167). The fact that the removal started in 1808 demonstrates that the trauma and the struggles of the Cherokee people are heavier than one would imagine. Many of the Cherokee people were forced to move west, leaving the land they had lived their whole lives on behind, and stories about their struggle for the later generations. Only a few people remained behind on Cherokee land (Qualla Boundary today). Between 1838 and 1839, the Cherokee people were imprisoned, and the forced removal was conducted in sixteen detachments (Green and Perdue 167). It is difficult to provide the total number of the deaths during the removal, but, according to most scholars, "the death toll was at least four thousand and as high as eight thousand" (Green and Perdue 168).

Similar to the documentation of Nakba, the documentation of the Trail of Tears was possible due to the oral tradition of the Cherokee people. Many of the stories that were

transmitted orally provided details about the struggle and the experience of the removal that the Cherokee people experienced. In Grant Foreman's *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians*, a documentation of the many families' experiences on the Trail of Tears, as told by Rebecca Neugin in 1932 is provided and discussed. According to the book, Rebecca Neugin was three years old when she was forced to leave her land with her family. With the oral expression of her memory, Rebecca Neugin was a primary source for the historical documentation of the Cherokee removal. Thus, the study of the oral tradition of the Cherokee people must be through a historical lens.

### Change

Sharing stories and knowledge is part of the Cherokee culture and tradition, however, not all stories and knowledge are to be shared with everyone. Similar to the stories of the Negev, change in the Cherokee oral tradition characterized the stories. One aspect that is always stressed in the oral tradition of the Cherokee nation is change that is known to many storytellers and scholars, including Christopher Teuton, who notes that although the essence of the story remains, change still occurs (4). It is known among the Cherokee storytellers that the stories they are telling can/should change, as they tell them, depending on the situation and the audience. The change in the stories is not arbitrary in any sense, as it is intentional and serves a purpose. The change that happens to the stories of the Cherokee people is necessary to assure that they continue to circulate among the members of the tribe and remain sacred. The stories, similar to different aspects of the Cherokee traditions, are considered to be private and part of their spiritual life. The stories carry the indigenous knowledge of the Cherokee people and their ancestors, which makes sharing them with people from outside the Cherokee community a sensitive issue.

The knowledge in the stories is unique to the Cherokee people and their land, and it enables them to live on their land, protect it, and make the best use of it. Preserving and protecting the knowledge in the stories means that sharing the stories with non-Cherokee people will have to be different. As Christopher Teuton discusses how many stories contain medicine, spiritual and family knowledge, he stresses that “many Cherokees do not want to share their knowledge with those outside their families and communities” (4). So, depending on the audience, the storytellers will adjust their stories to assure that the Cherokee knowledge remains sacred and private. Also, the disparity that can be found among the stories in the Cherokee or the Negev oral tradition is significant and key to the understanding of the community as whole. The change that the stories undergo can reveal social and cultural values and beliefs about the Cherokee tribe that can be further pursued. Understanding the changes is also key to the understanding of the Cherokee oral tradition, as it is part and parcel of the tradition. Protecting the knowledge and learning how to change the stories, similar to other traditions, is passed from one person to another and considered to be necessary for the existence of the oral tradition.

#### Landscape and Environment

The mountains of Western North Carolina were the home of the Cherokee tribe, and the home of the Eastern Cherokee Band today. However, it should be noted that the Cherokee people have never seen or considered any fixed boundaries in the past, as their territory extended along the states of North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia. The oral tradition of the Cherokee people strongly reflects the landscape of the mountains of the Cherokee land in the Qualla Boundary and beyond and presents the relationship between the Cherokee people and their land. The landscape of Qualla Boundary has changed dramatically over the years; however, it remains intact in the oral tradition of the Cherokee people. A close look at the oral tradition

reveals the essential indigenous wisdom related to the land. Additionally, this indigenous knowledge in the oral tradition provides a strong sense of the land that some Cherokees still live on and others were detached from.

As the importance of the presence of the land in the Cherokee oral tradition stems from the fact that it enhances the sense of the place and fosters strong ties with it, it becomes pivotal for the Keetoowah Band and Western Band Cherokee or anywhere outside Qualla Boundary. Although they were detached from their land a long time ago, Cherokees who live away from the mountains of Western North Carolina can still connect with their ancestors' land through their oral tradition. Evidently, there are a lot of efforts being made by Keetoowah Band and Western Band Cherokees today to reconnect with and shed light on the oral tradition of the Cherokee people. The oral tradition can help Cherokees of Oklahoma, and especially the new generations, to connect with the mountains that their ancestors lived on and roamed. As they hear the stories that manifest the landscape and the environment, the Cherokees living away from the mountains of Western North Carolina can still spiritually connect with the land of their ancestors, and other members of the Cherokee nation. The work of Christopher Teuton and the Turtle Island Liar's Club is one of the prominent examples on the attempts to shed light on the Cherokee storytelling that help members connect with other communities and lands. In Teuton's book that collects stories from the Turtle Island Liar's Club, he states that "The stories, teachings, and crafts are a means of keeping the sgadug strong and of sharing Cherokee culture with others in the hope that the knowledge will continue" (3).

The Cherokee people have honored their environment and considered many elements of their landscape to be part of their identity and their daily lives. The rivers, the mountains, and the animals were not merely environmental elements they had to live with. Living in such a rich

environment meant learning to how to connect with it, discover, preserve it, and respect it.

Seeing how several stories in the oral tradition of the Cherokee people mention the name “Selu,” which means “corn,” demonstrates the strong presence of the environment in their life.

Cherokees passed their knowledge of the environment from one generation to another, assuring that all members enjoy a strong sense of the place and a connection with the environment. The strong sense of the place and the connection that Cherokees establish with the environment aids the preservation of the environment, which is what today’s attempts to save the environment lack. Thus, the Cherokees relationship with their landscape and environment goes beyond any traditional standards or understandings. In the discussion of the “spiritual forces” that can be found in the oral tradition of the Cherokee people, and their connection with the land, Theda Perdue states that:

Spiritual forces shaped the world in which the Cherokees lived, and knowledge, ceremonies, and rules enabled them to call on those forces when they needed to do so. The Cherokee associated spiritual power not only with plants and animals but also with rives, mountains, caves and other land forms (4)

The Cherokees perceived the environment and the landscape as elements that they can interact with and communicate with using “spiritual forces.” These spiritual forces can take the form of songs, dances, and other ceremonies, and stories in the oral tradition can provide the necessary knowledge for implementing these spiritual forces.

Establishing a connection with the land and the surrounding environment, for Cherokees, took different shapes and forms. The oral tradition, however, has always been one of the most prominent and effective ways to foster that connection with the land and the environment. With

songs, stories, and names, the Cherokee people were able to communicate with the land and the environment, develop a strong sense of it, and foster an understanding of how the world around them works. Through the oral tradition, the mountains that the Cherokee people live on became part of them to the extent that the name “Cherokee” is derived from their inhabitation of the caves of the mountains long time ago. According to James Mooney, the word “Cherokee,” although it does not come from the Cherokee language, means “inhabitants of cave country” (18).

One of the main tools to communicate with their landscape for Cherokee people are songs. The Cherokee people used songs and dances to honor and communicate with the animals, the land, the plants, and other peoples. This tradition intersects with other tribes’ traditions, especially the Bedouins of the Negev, as mentioned earlier. J.T. Garrett holds that:

The celebration and ceremony of life with traditional dance, drumming, and songs are truly powerful, whether among Alaska Natives in the North or the Yaqui in the South; the intertribal groups in the Indian country of Oklahoma, or the Cherokee in the East. We need to find that common ground for coming together, feasting, and celebrating life for all people, all over the world (40).

Thus, dancing, singing, drumming, and other traditions become tools of communication between the different Native American tribes, and, of course, between members living in exile and members living on their homeland. This “common ground” also asserts Howe’s theory of “tribalography” and the large community it creates.

Another crucial role that songs play in the Cherokee tribe is to facilitate meditation, healing and balance. Balance, which means “Tohi” in Cherokee language (Heidi Altman and

Tom Belt 13), is an important concept for the Cherokee people, by which they lived and conducted their affairs. Cherokees' relationship with the universe is principally defined by the concept of balance. The Cherokee songs help members connect with and understand the world around them, and thus, grow and heal through. The understanding of the world and connecting with it also creates balance, which is a key state for the Cherokee tribe. For example, when Garrett discusses the language and the specific terms found in the songs and poetry of the Cherokee people, he notes that "words such as respect, honor, and pride seem to come out in those messages with the clear life energy of plants, flowers, and trees" (19). Garrett also provides some examples of songs and messages that encourage listeners to go outside and connect with the universe. Therefore, songs constitute a powerful tool to speak and connect with other creatures

A good example of the songs that were used to communicate with the surroundings on Cherokee land are corn songs, bear songs, dear songs, etc. The bears, for example, are considered part of the mountains and the Cherokee land, thus, there was an emphasis on communicating with them through songs and dances. The bear songs, according to the story "Origin of the Bear: The Bear Songs," were used to call for bears and communicate with them, and was sung as:

*He-e! Ani'-Tsâ'gûhi, Ani'-Tsâ'gûhi, akwandu'li e'lanti' ginûn'ti,*

*Ani'-Tsâ'ûhi, Ani'-Tsâ'gûhi, akwandu 'li e'lanti' ginûn'ti—*

*Yû!*

He-e! The Ani'-Tsâ'gûhi, the Ani'-Tsâ'gûhi, I want to lay them low  
on the ground,

The Ani'-Tsâ'gûhi, the Ani'-Tsâ'gûhi, I want to lay them



low on the ground—Yû! (Mooney 377)

In the story, however, the bears that the songs are sung for are originally humans (Mooney 376), which further stresses how communicating with animals is considered to be similar to communicating with humans. It is also possible that the method of using songs to communicate with the landscape and the environment is inspired from animals, like rabbits and birds. For instance, in the story “The Rabbit Escapes from the Wolves,” rabbits are portrayed as great singers that used their songs to influence other animals (Mooney 348).

Stories, on the other hand, have always been utilized by the Cherokee people to foster a connection with their land and the place they live in. The stories that were told the different sites and places on the Cherokee territory make these places more personal and relatable. The land, thus, becomes part of the Cherokee story and shares the same history that they honor and learn from. When Mooney describes the stories that the Cherokees have told about the land they live on, he states that:

As with other tribes and countries, almost every prominent rock and mountain, every deep bend in the river, in the old Cherokee country has its accompanying legend. It may be a little story that can be told in a paragraph, to account for some natural feature, or it may be one chapter of a myth that has its sequel in a mountain a hundred miles away. As is usual when a people has lived for a long time in the same country, nearly every important myth is localized, thus assuming more definite character (270)

So, according to Mooney, the Cherokee stories give “more definite character” to the place and the land they live in. The stories about the land also help Cherokees connect with their ancestors,

who told the stories and were part of the same land. The stories about the different places in the mountains of Western North Carolina are still being told today, and it is important to be aware of these stories, especially as more people are visiting them and trying to learn about them. The stories can be one of the most accurate sources of knowledge about the region, so more emphasis should be placed on them.

One of the many stories that were told about the Cherokee landscape is “The Great Leech of Tlanusi’y,” which revolves around “the spot where Valley river joins Hiwassee, at Murphy, in North Carolina,” [which] is known among the Cherokees as Tlanusi’y, ‘The Leech place’” (Mooney 381). The story starts with an elaborate description of the place, which only the people of the region (Cherokees) would be able to identify. The story not only gives the place the unique Cherokee name “Tlanusi’yi” (The Leech Place), but also gives it more meaning and historical depth. The Cherokee stories that are told about the different places create a strong bond and connection between the place and the Cherokee people, and consequently, the region will always be associated with the Cherokee people. Most importantly, these stories assert the sovereignty and presence of the Cherokee people. When Cherokee people and non-Cherokee people roam the mountains, every spot they encounter will carry Cherokee stories that stress their presence and history.

Similarly, stories were also told about the plants that exist in the region. An example of the many stories told about the plants that the Cherokee people closely observed and connected with is the story of “the linn or basswood (*Tilia*).” Cherokees believe that the linn or basswood in the southern mountains can protect from lightning, as they cannot be struck by lightning” (Mooney 488). Even the names of these plants possess unique stories that shows the deep connection that the Cherokees have established with them. The May-apple (*Podophyllum*) is

called *u'niskwetu'g*, meaning “it wears a hat,” due to its shape that resembles an umbrella (Mooney 486). The naming of the plants went even beyond the mere shape or function; many plants were named based on their relationship with animals and other creatures. The wild rose, *tsist-uni'gist*, “the rabbits eat it,” is a one example that shows how the relationship and connection between creatures was also taken into consideration in the naming process of the plants.

Storytelling among the Cherokee tribe members was significantly influenced by the beauty of the mountains in tangible and intangible ways. The mountains that the Cherokees have lived on influenced them as people and their culture and traditions. The distinct identity that the Cherokee people have formed, which Barbra Duncan discusses in her book (9) can be attributed their location in such a unique environment and lush mountains. The mountains dictated a certain lifestyle, which the Cherokee people embraced, and “began developing a distinctively Cherokee way of life, with patterns of belief and material culture that survive to this day” (Duncan 9). For instance, the rich environment of the mountains has significantly determined the kind of food and clothes the Cherokee people had. Donald Edward Davis discusses in details how the environment had a key role in determining the food and the clothes of the Cherokee people (60). Until today, the Cherokee women practice basket weaving with great passion and pride, as it is part of the mountains culture.

The influence of the mountains spilled over to the language by which many stories describe the mountains. The elaborate language matches the Cherokees' perception of the mountains. Therefore, listening to the stories of the Cherokee people gives a vivid image of the mountains and the environment they live in that shapes their culture and traditions. Balance for the Cherokee people was also highly valued, and their lives depended on balance (Duncan 10). It

could be said that balance was partially inspired from the mountains and the harmony that exists in the mountains. The harmony, the rhythm and the balance that, which is found in their lives and even in their oral history and storytelling tradition can be indicative of the influence the mountains had on their lives. The same rhythm and balance can be seen in the language that was used in the oral tradition. The mountains provided a balanced ecosystem that provided everything necessary for living (Davis 60), which is at the essence of the Cherokee culture and traditions. From the balanced ecosystem the mountains possess, strong beliefs in sustainability also grew in the Cherokee culture, which can be seen in their respect to the plants and to the animals. For example, they would leave a gift for the plants to show gratitude and to help maintain balance (Duncan 11). The environment also shaped the storytelling tradition, which expressed their beauty and nature, and the change that happens to them. For instance, many stories told by the Cherokee people in Western North Carolina or in Oklahoma describe the mountains with a beautiful language that matches their perception of them, thus, the mountains and the environment they lived in became part of their culture and their tradition.

The story “ᏅᏍ ᏈᏗᏗ ᏈᏗᏗᏗ” (“Nvgi Aditla Tsunilosvhi), which is told among the Keetoowah Band and Western Band Cherokees, describes the beauty of the mountains and the changes that happened to the mountains (Teuton 63), which reflects the history of the Cherokee tribe and the landscape that surrounds them and the continuation of the influence of the mountains even among displaced Cherokees. The mountains are still consistently mentioned and described in several stories in the Cherokee oral tradition, as they have always been part of the Cherokee identity. Such stories are also a historical record of what happens to the mountains throughout the years, as drastic changes start to take place and influxes of people started to happen.

Today, an urgency to have a real and elaborate employment of the Cherokee oral tradition in Western North Carolina has emerged, as many animals and plants that were considered sacred have become scarce and extinct. The landscape around Qualla Boundary has changed over the years, and it is affecting the different aspects of the Cherokee lifestyle. To maintain the balance in the Cherokees' everyday life, an awareness of the environment around them has to be maintained, and their oral tradition can be a powerful tool to achieve that. The buffalo is one of the environmental elements in Western North Carolina that no longer exists. The absence of the buffalo in the region should be an eye opener for many people, as it was part of the Cherokee tradition, including the oral tradition. The Cherokee people have always honored and welcomed the buffalo in different ways. The buffalo dance is considered as one of the main expressions of respect and honor to the animal. However, the absence of the animal should not necessarily mean the absence of the traditional dance. The continuation of the traditions, including the oral tradition, that helped Cherokees communicate with their environment can be vital today in the efforts to preserve it and protect it.

## Movement

With the abundance of land and resources, movement for the Cherokee nation has always been essential to their everyday life. The Cherokee tribe stresses movement as a way of learning about others and themselves and gaining new experiences. Consequently, movement became a prominent motif in the oral tradition of the Cherokee people. A host of stories in the Cherokee oral tradition revolve around movement and being away from home in the midst of the mountains. In these stories, people exhibit strong desire to roam the mountains and learn more about what lays behind them. These stories also illustrate the place that movement holds among the Cherokee people, which is similar to what the stories in the Negev oral tradition suggest.

Both nations emphasized the importance of leaving one's own circle and discovering new possibilities. Being away from home, in the oral tradition, is portrayed as necessary for self-fulfillment and growth. Teuton describes movement in the Cherokee oral tradition as a "processes of maturing, growing, learning, leaving home, and returning home" (83), which is reflected in their oral tradition and stories, in particular. Numerous stories from the oral tradition of the Cherokee tribe describe the journeys they embark on in the woods and the lessons they learn from these journeys.

Given the nature of the Cherokee people, being in the woods and the mountains and roaming them was a necessity for survival, and this is significantly manifested in the oral stories. It should be noted, however, that The Cherokee people were farmers, as well, but their love for exploration and learning has always pushed them to travel. Numerous stories describe the adventures that Cherokee hunters embark on These adventures are not merely geared towards hunting and forging, but also, they are about knowledge, and self-discovery. The need for movement and mobility, as the oral tradition presents it, is inspired from nature and the environment. Animals, thunder, plants, etc. can be seen as the main source of inspiration for movement among the Cherokee people. The Cherokees are good observers and seeing the movement of the nature elements urged them to follow the lead and discover what lays beyond the boundaries of their towns and dwellings.

One of the Wonder Stories is "ŪÑTSAIY ', the Gambler," tells the story of a child whose father is Thunder, demonstrates the strong influence of the environment on people in regards of movement. Thunder's movement in the story is described as a "journey," who lives in the west, "where the sun lives" (Mooney 360). On one of his trips east, a boy was born and was thought to be the thunder's son. The Thunder's son had scrofula sores and was told that only his father can

cure him, as he is a great doctor (Mooney 361). In the story, the boy takes on an adventure to find his father, or the cure for his condition. Only through the journey the boy is able to find a cure, and only through being away from home he is able to learn about himself and who he is; lightening. Thus, the boy's adventure is a journey of self-discovery, healing, and learning, which was also inspired from nature (thunder).

“The Magic Lake” is another story that tells listeners about the Cherokee boy who travels through the mountains and follows an injured bear to a holy lake that can heal those who love the animals and the earth (Barbra Duncan 42). The movement between the mountains and the different places in the story is key to the understanding of nature, healing, and the place. Movement, in the story, forges an understanding and a connection between the boy and the animals and the mountains. It is also evident in the story that movement is the key to knowledge, as the boy had to follow the bear to the top of the mountain to learn about the secrets of the place.

#### Oral tradition as an Education System

Being sent at the age of five to a boarding school and having her sense of place, tribal identity and values jeopardized and almost broken, Sarah Sneed discusses her mother's experience at the boarding school as a Cherokee (49). The education system that the Cherokees at the boarding schools were exposed to was never sufficient to maintain the Cherokee culture and values. There were many policies and conditions that attempted to detach the Cherokee people from their culture, traditions, language, and values. Sneed states that the policies regarding the Cherokee tribe had a “devastating effect” (51) on the short and long run. Thus, it is necessary to guarantee that Native Americans have control over their own education. In the

context of this paper, the oral tradition provides an opportunity for the Cherokees to combat the impact of the past and current experiences with education.

The Cherokee language was targeted by different laws and policies to marginalize it, and, to an extent, eradicate it. Boarding schools and colleges prohibited the use of the Cherokee language amongst the tribe members, as language has always been a significant part of any identity. By perceiving the oral tradition as an education system, revitalizing the language will become more possible. The oral tradition carries the language with its rhythm and images, and makes it possible to transmit it through listening, reading, and speaking. The effects of this history of marginalization of the language caused the Cherokee, according to Sneed, to become endangered (53).

In her introduction, Barbra Duncan elaborates on the values that members of the Cherokee tribe learn from stories, and she asserts that “Cherokee stories were and continue to be used to educate children in cultural values and to reaffirm those values for adults.” Thus, it can be stated that the oral tradition, and storytelling in particular, constitute an education system that forms the tribe’s principles and values. Through the oral tradition and stories, generations absorb the values and the principles that create the tribe as a whole. The stories present images of how the tribe should function and perceive and interact with the surrounding. Similar to the knowledge in the books today that create nations and guarantee their continuation, the oral tradition of the Cherokee has always been the backbone of the tribe. Bravery, curiosity, respect, hospitality, and other values are greatly stressed in the oral tradition and adopted by the recipients of it.

One of the numerous examples of stories that are rich with values and resemble many of the values that can be found in the Negev stories, is the story “Hatcinoñdoñ's Escape from The



Cherokee” (Mooney 362). The story is perfect demonstration, not merely of the important values that the Cherokee tribe preserves in stories, but also of the overlapping between the values of the Cherokee and the Negev tribes. The story is about a Seneca man, who was leading a group of warriors to attack Cherokee, but he was captured by the Cherokee people. The Seneca man was saved by a frog and released, because he had saved the frog from fire in the past. The value that is being emphasized in the story is the value of compassion and empathy with others. The story also illustrates how small deeds will come back to who makes them when they need them the most. It is also worth noting that the story is told from the perspective of the Seneca, which further demonstrates that good deeds will come back to anyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from. Moreover, the story includes a frog, which further urges listeners to be kind to humans and animals.

Understanding the perception of the land and the environment among the members of the Cherokee tribe starts by understanding their oral tradition that carries essential values, which they adopted. Navigating, interacting, and connecting with the landscape and the environment, for Cherokee people, stems from the implementation of the principles and values of the oral tradition. Consequently, saving and preserving the environment today will require Cherokees to resort to their oral tradition and the wisdom of their ancestors. The oral tradition has protected the environment for the longest period of time. Perceiving the Cherokee oral tradition as an education system that is capable of, not only teach the members about their relationship with the land and the environment, but also preserving the culture and the tribe should be stressed.

### CHAPTER THREE: COMPARATIVE CONCLUSION

The overlapping between the oral traditions of the Negev and the Cherokee tribes is significant on many levels. Fostering an understanding between the two peoples and highlighting the fact that they share similar values and systems of thought will pave the way for future collaboration. The connections and the ties that will be established through examining the oral traditions through a comparative lens will not be confined to the Cherokee and the Negev tribes, but will also cross them to include other tribes and peoples from the Middle East and North America. The comparative study also provides a new approach to reading the literatures of the two peoples, as it suggests a new approach to understanding their cultures and their histories. Moreover, for members of both communities, an understanding of their own traditions and cultures can be enriched through learning about the other culture, which is at the essence of any comparative study.

What must always be taken into consideration when examining both Negev and Cherokee tribes in juxtaposition is that both tribes share similar circumstances and histories that are worth discussing and emphasizing. As tragic events and history have happened in the past, both the Negev and the Cherokee nations are fragmented, and many members of the tribes are living the diaspora today. Moreover, it is important to note that the common history and experiences establish great basis of solidarity and support between the different nations. Solidarity and support movements around the world today make significant accomplishments and changes in the lives of people, which is what this study builds on. Oral tradition can be one way to bring the two peoples together and create a global community. The removal of the two native nations and their resistance and attachment to the land create a solid grounding for the study that focuses on a shared oral tradition.

Approaching the traditions and cultures of the different tribes across the world requires the use of a specific lens that gives a different perspective and a better understanding. Thus, developing and building on Howe's theory of "tribalography" can become more feasible through comparing different tribal traditions. Studying and analyzing the oral traditions of the Negev and Cherokee peoples asserts many of Howe's concepts and ideas. While Howe's theory focuses mainly on Native American tribes, such studies can expand the scope of her theory to include tribes from around the world. It should be stressed, however, that the similar histories of both tribes made the comparative study more possible and feasible. Many of Howe's ideas can be used as tools to understand the different tribal communities under the umbrella of "tribalography," which gives the understanding and approach a more unique and richer meaning.

The setting that the oral traditions of the different tribal communities reveal important significance related to the connections between them. An important part of the oral tradition of both the Negev and the Cherokee tribes is the setting that storytelling and other forms of oral tradition takes place in. Understanding the setting of the oral tradition in the different tribal and native communities will provide a better understanding of their oral traditions. The setting of oral traditions carries meanings about the social structure of the communities and the place oral tradition holds in the different tribes. For both Cherokee and Negev tribes, fire is central to storytelling and any other forms of oral tradition. The presence of fire in both Cherokee and Negev storytelling settings has great significance, which needs to be emphasized and considered. Fire, for example, is not merely a symbol or a tool for the Cherokee and Negev tribes, it is culture, community and spirituality.

The landscape for both communities has always been a central motif in their oral traditions. Having lived in unique landscapes and environments, maintaining a strong sense of

them is key for both the Negev and Cherokee communities. A strong sense of place only comes through a feeling of sovereignty and belonging, which has been proved to be problematic. The oral tradition, in the context of the land, can significantly help both communities develop and maintain a sense of the place, even while being away from it, or confined to a limited portion of it. The oral traditions of the Negev and the Cherokee communities carry their landscapes through images and narratives that were passed from one generation to another. Negev and Cherokee communities can also see what their ancestors saw and experienced long time ago. In a way, maintaining a sense of the place also means maintaining a connection with the ancestors, who live on the same landscape.

The tradition of connecting and communicating with the environment and the landscape through songs and stories, which crosses both communities, is significant to our understanding of indigenous communities. With the Negev people singing “Hajini” to their camels to help them endure the harsh nature of the desert, and the Cherokee people dancing and singing to corn, buffalo, and other creatures, a manifestation of how indigenous communities relationships go beyond merely human relationships is created. The relationships that the two native communities establish are key, not only to their survival, but also to their environments’ continuation, as well. The communication the Negev and the Cherokee communities establish and foster with their environments mainly creates a mutual understanding between them, which is key to the continuation of both the communities and the environments. Today, many experts and environmental activists are urging people follow the lead of indigenous communities and make effort to communicate with the environment and the landscape, in an attempt to help preserve them.

Songs and poetry have always been an important part of most native communities around the world, as they carry the culture and beliefs of the community in a unique and enjoyable manner. A significant part of the oral tradition in both Cherokee and the Negev tribes is songs and poetry that hold an important place in the communities until today. For instance, stories, in both cultures, were told in the form of songs, which made memorizing and remembering them easier for the members of the tribe. Songs were also considered a method of communication with the world, including animals and plants, and a spiritual tool for both the Negev and the Cherokee tribes, which is an indication of the how sacred they can be considered. Both communities also include songs in sacred rituals and ceremonies that were an integral part of life, as they bring people together and create an atmosphere of peace and growth on different levels.

As the members of both communities use songs as means of communication with each other and their environments, they can acquire the language of their ancestors. Songs can be powerful tools to teach and learn a certain language, as they are very appealing and fairly easy to memorize. For both the Negev and Cherokee tribes, there are many attempts to revitalize the languages, and many methods have been adopted. Many educators today support the claim that songs can help language learners master the rules and the sounds of the language. In untraditional settings, members of both communities are exposed to songs that are being used in real-life situations, which makes learning the languages more meaningful and influential. Thus, with more attention paid to the oral history of both communities, language and values are also being instilled and emphasized.

As both oral traditions demonstrate the impact they can have on the members of both communities, a perception of them as education systems comes to the surface. The need and the importance of possessing a unique education system for many indigenous communities makes

the oral traditions of the Negev and Cherokee nations vital. The oral traditions, as discussed previously, carry, not only the necessary tools to live with the environment and the landscape, but also the language that is endangered today. Some of the most important tools that both oral traditions introduce are values and principles that regulate the relationships among the members and between the members and the environments they live in. Although both communities live in drastically different environments and landscapes, their oral traditions provide them with adequate tools to maintain strong relationships among themselves and with their environments, which many of them revolve around respect, hospitality, generosity, and bravery.

Tribal education has always been associated with movement, which is part of the lifestyle of the different tribes around the world. For many peoples, movement means learning and growing, and for others, it is surviving and existing. Movement for the different tribes in the Levant, and Cherokee, is key to their survival and existence. When members of the tribe move from one place to another, they are always in search, not only for resources, but also for experiences with people and nature, which can help them become more knowledgeable and skilled. The theme of movement and the knowledge gained from movement and exploration is expressed in the oral traditions of Negev and Cherokee people. Movement is also closely connected with the land the experience and sense of the land. However, movement should be understood through the lens of the forced removal of the Cherokee and the Negev tribes, when they were removed from their lands. The movement that Negev and Cherokee peoples experienced during the Nakba and Trail of Tears gives a different perspective on the experience, which also affects their sense of the place.

Many environments and lands that are inhabited by native communities around the world have faced, and still face, threats and damage. Solving and addressing these threats and damages

can be more possible with the collaboration of several native communities. With the environmental and land changes taking place on Negev and Cherokee lands, oral tradition provides a solution and a way out. Seeing how both oral traditions can address and respond to the environmental changes and threats can help members recognize the importance of their oral traditions and can allow for better employment of them. Communication is at the essence of the Negev and Cherokee oral traditions, and through these oral traditions, both communities can communicate with their environments and lands, and with each other, as well. Understanding the function of songs and dances in the Negev community, for example, can be more rewarding when seen through the lens of the Cherokee tradition.

This study mainly focuses on the reflection of the environment and landscape in the oral traditions of the Negev and Cherokee tribes; however, it is recommended that future research examines the other aspects of their oral traditions. Both oral traditions intersect in many ways and studying these intersections will pave the way for a better understanding of both communities. For instance, a study that is focused on tribal law can yield substantial findings about the roots of today's issues that are related to social harmony and balance, and land ownership and sovereignty. There is a need for a thorough examination and documentation of tribal laws in both communities, as misinterpretations can arise. Moreover, given the fact that many members of both the Negev and Cherokee tribes live in exile, there is a need to study their relationships with the oral traditions, how they use it, and how they adapted it to fit their lives in exile. It is also intriguing how foods, songs, games, dances and other cultural elements are essential parts of the Cherokee fair and the Negev weddings. Considering how the Cherokee fair and the Bedouin weddings can be events where many of the traditions are exhibited, a study that analyzes what takes place in these ceremonial events would be very influential today.





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