



Spring 4-2013

Singing to the Spirits: Cultural and Spiritual Traditions Embodied in the Native American Gourd Dance

Alicia M. Gummess

Illinois Wesleyan University, agummess@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/socanth_honproj



Part of the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gummess, Alicia M., "Singing to the Spirits: Cultural and Spiritual Traditions Embodied in the Native American Gourd Dance" (2013). *Honors Projects*. 44.

https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/socanth_honproj/44

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by Faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Singing to the Spirits:
Cultural and Spiritual Traditions Embodied in the Native American Gourd Dance

Honor's Research Paper
Anthropology Program, Department of Sociology & Anthropology

Honor's Committee:
Rebecca Gearhart (Advisor), Adriana Ponce, Steve Press, Chuck Springwood

Alicia Gummess
April 2013

"Experiencing, conversing, and writing - this is the work of serious ethnography."
 Luke E. Lassiter, *The Power of Kiowa Song*

Introduction

In the history of the United States, few issues cause more controversy than the colonization of Native American land and culture at the expense of the indigenous peoples. A little over a century ago, U.S. government policies forbade gatherings for dances and ceremonies, leading to the repression of much of the Native American belief system. During the following period of cultural stagnation, many traditions fell out of use. Many of the dances made illegal, such as War Dance and Sun Dance, expressed the fundamental values of the warrior society that underlay the culture of the tribes to whom the dances belonged. For this reason, the government wished to ban these ceremonies in order to eradicate warrior values and make Native American peoples conform more to Western values. Government suppression of warrior dances and rituals caused the loss of warrior values among Plains Indians in particular, and ranks among the most serious violations of Native American culture.

Due in part to a misunderstanding of ceremonial gatherings, however, Native American Gourd Dance was less likely to be banned than other rituals. The Gourd Dance seemed to avoid outward expression of a war-like mentality, and its reputation as a "peaceful" ceremonial integration of singing and movement enabled members of the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache (KCA) tribes in southern Oklahoma to keep the songs alive. During World War II, traditional warrior values underwent a resurgence in response to the fighting, and in this environment the Kiowa people had the opportunity to revitalize the Gourd Dance. They brought it back with societies such as the Kiowa Gourd Clan, whose mission was to maintain the tradition for the Kiowa people. Other societies formed among the Comanche and Apache, and as the Gourd Dance grew in popularity, groups outside of southern Oklahoma began to adopt the tradition as well. In modern times, groups perform the Gourd Dance all over the United States and internationally as well. Its spread has helped fuel and has been fueled by a desire among Native American people to return to past values and beliefs, and to resist the influences of European American society.

Gourd Dance performances usually occur in the context of larger ceremonial gatherings called pow wows,¹ in which Native American communities hold dances to celebrate their culture and practice their religious beliefs and cultural traditions. In the Southern Plains region of the United States, the original location of the Gourd Dance, pow wows occur nearly every weekend.

They can be located either outdoors in a circular clearing, or indoors in large space (such as a gym or community center) depending on the season and climate. An outdoor setting for a pow wow is largely preferred, since it brings dancers, singers, and spectators at a pow wow event closer to nature. Pow wows feature many traditional and more modern Native American dances, such as War Dance, Omaha Dance, Fancy Dance, Grass Dance, Shawl Dance, and Jingle Dress Dance. Typically, the Gourd Dance happens first on the program, and can last anywhere from one to several hours depending on the nature of the ceremony and the energy of the dancers and singers. Often, ceremony planners reserve a several-hour block of time in the schedule just for the Gourd Dance, before moving on to other pow wow events such as the Grand Entry. Gourd Dance occurs in conjunction with the rest of the pow wow, but it occupies a separate place in the schedule, due in part to the fact that it has an entire body, or "repertoire," of songs specific only to the Gourd Dance.

With the proper attire, anyone can participate in the Gourd Dance. For men, the most necessary item is a rattle, formerly made with an actual gourd (the object that gave the Gourd Dance its name) but now usually constructed with an aluminum can. Women wear a shawl around their shoulders and do not dance with a rattle. Importantly, however, men and women who choose to dance must know the steps of the Gourd Dance and must be familiar with the songs so that they know the appropriate moments to move, stop, and end the song. Gourd Dance societies such as the Kiowa Gourd Clan and the Comanche Little Ponies host Gourd Dance ceremonies and pow wows, and the popularity of the Gourd Dance draws such large crowds that people tend to neglect other dances (for example, War Dance) that once shared the Gourd Dance's popularity (Lassiter, 1998, 125).

The Kiowa people frequently claim original ownership of the Gourd Dance, and so for many who attend ceremonies, Gourd Dance expresses Kiowa-specific traditions. Gourd Dance can also be seen as a popular expression of Native American values shared across intertribal² boundaries, however, and as such, it fulfills the role of bringing many different people to pow wows in Southern Oklahoma. Gourd Dance also serves an economic role, since its performance contributes significantly to the money made from benefit dances (Lassiter, 1998, 125-6).

In this paper, I provide a brief overview of the history and practice of the Gourd Dance, and examine the reasons behind its popularity and spread. At the heart of the Gourd Dance's dissemination is its accessibility to anyone who wishes to learn how to perform it. The songs and customs of the Gourd Dance communicate spiritual and cultural values that have a rich and vibrant place in the traditional life of Native Americans.

Literature Review

I accessed both secondary literature and personal testimonies given by consultants to learn about the Gourd Dance and represent it in this paper. I gave primary consideration to information gained in interviews, since my consultants have lived the traditions written about in the scholarly sources. Their personal experiences have provided me with a better understanding of current issues relating to the performance and spread of the Gourd Dance. I have also relied on my own personal experiences attending pow wows at Seven Circles Heritage Center in Edwards, Illinois and learning fundamental teachings about Native American history, practices, and beliefs in performance studies classes. The secondary literature I consulted comes from authors whose field work and expertise in Native American song and dance makes them reliable sources of information. Their work provides a philosophical approach, background information about the history of Native American dance, information about Native American societies, and ethnographic perspectives on song and dance in the pow wow context, particularly among the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache (KCA) people of Southern Oklahoma.

Powwow (2005), edited by Clyde Ellis, Luke Eric Lassiter, and Gary H. Dunham, is a three-part collection of essays focusing solely on the history and significance of the Native American pow wow. The essays cover diverse topics such as an interpretation of symbols and practices at pow wows, the ways in which pow wow culture has moved from the American plains and into other tribal contexts, and how the pow wow can be used as a vehicle for cultural expression. The primary goal of the volume is to show the differences and similarities between pow wow practices of different communities, demonstrating the pow wow's effectiveness in establishing personal and cultural identities. The authors seek to correct the notion that pow wows are a "Pan-Indian" tradition that remains basically the same across many different cultures, and instead to emphasize their "intertribal" nature, acknowledging that many cultures use pow wow practices to establish their own distinctiveness. The information from many of the essays in this volume provides a backdrop to the major topics of this paper. I refer to some of these authors in this paper, since their work provides valuable information on contemporary pow wow culture and the spiritual and/or cultural value of Native American song and dance.

An essential reference has been Luke Eric Lassiter's ethnography *The Power of Kiowa Song: A Collaborative Ethnography* (1998). Lassiter discusses Kiowa song using the technique of collaborative ethnography. Lassiter learned Kiowa songs from singer Billy Evans Horse as well as other men and women from "around the drum," and used his direct experience to write about Kiowa song from a highly personal perspective. The knowledge of members of the Kiowa

community also figures prominently in the text, which was co-developed by Lassiter and his consultants. Lassiter's work offers an ethnographic perspective based on testimonies from consultants and his experiences, using historical archives as supplemental material to support his argument. He observed that previous ethnographic fieldwork, while informative, is based on "salvage ethnography," which assumes that a culture is dying and attempts to preserve its history and traditions in written form. The historical records, however, bore little resemblance to the history as shared among the Kiowa community, and Lassiter sought to narrow the gap between written and experienced history by including his consultants' testimonies in the text. Using collaborative ethnography, an approach in which the anthropologist develops a narrative based in dialogue with consultants, showing them the text in its various stages and asking not just for verification, but for them to alter it to fit their own knowledge and experience, Lassiter attempts to represent the power of Kiowa song through the eyes of those who experience it. Lassiter's method of collaborative ethnography informs my own approach to this research and has provided me with a way to discuss the Gourd Dance tradition while not relying on my own authority, but rather on that of the people who own and practice the tradition.

Several of my consultants endorse Lassiter's book as an excellent source of knowledge for understanding Kiowa song, its function, meaning, and spiritual power. The author is a well-known Gourd Dancer and singer himself, and his extensive field work with the Southern Oklahoma Gourd Dance community makes him an extremely reliable source of information. I cite Lassiter often in this paper, looking to him for historical background, research methods, structure of the Gourd Dance, its spiritual and cultural value, and controversial issues involving inaccurate performance of the Gourd Dance.

I also use materials from Clyde Ellis's book *A Dancing People: Powwow Culture on the Southern Plains* (2003). Ellis and Lassiter have worked and sung at the drum³ together, and their collaboration provides me with a meaningful place from which to gather information. Ellis' book provides a history of pow wow culture on the American Southern Plains, especially during the years between 1890 and 1950. Using the perspectives brought to Southern Plains pow wow culture by various ethnographers, Ellis's collaborative approach draws together a broad history of pow wow culture in the South. The history proceeds in a mostly chronological fashion, with a self-admitted Oklahoma bias on the author's part. Each chapter covers a different period in the history of pow wows, following the development of the culture through its various stages and locations. Topics include the role of society dances, government suppression, resistance movements, and adaptive strategies by the "Indian nation."

Two other important sources were Tara Browner's, in *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-wow* (2004), and Laura Warren's graduate thesis "Central Illinois Powwow Community: A Unique Path of Creation, Cultivation, and Connection to American Indian Culture, Identities, and Community" (2011), which I have consulted with the permission by the author. Her overview of pow wow culture also looks at Native American song from an ethnomusicological perspective. Few scholars have critically examined the musical aspects of Native American and dance, and her conclusions provide an important fundamental understanding of the functions of song and dance at ceremonies. Warren describes the Central Illinois Powwow Community (CIPC) in detail. Sources for the paper include current members of the community with whom I have also had contact. Warren and I consult many of the same secondary literature, such as Tara Browner's *Heartbeat of the People* and Luke E. Lassiter's *Power of Kiowa Song*. Her findings help inform my understanding of the history of the pow wow and Gourd Dance, as well as current issues involving the Gourd Dance's performance outside of Oklahoma.

In addition to secondary literature, I have also had personal contact with many members of the CPIC who have provided invaluable first-hand accounts that corroborate published scholarship. My consultants from the Peoria area have included Carol Lakota, Chip and Jimi Roberts, and Randall Eggers. Much of this paper is also based on telephone conversations I have had over the past six months with Tim Tieyah, a Comanche elder and singer, whose entire lifestyle is formed around the song and dance of the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache (KCA) people of Southern Oklahoma. Tim Tieyah, who currently resides in Kansas, provided me with most of the essential information in this paper, and his consent and input have been invaluable.

I am indebted to each of these people for their time and experience, which together form a multi-faceted and rich narrative of Native American life.

Research Methods

Throughout the course of this project, I have tried to model my approach to the subject on Luke E. Lassiter's philosophy of collaborative ethnography. The purpose of ethnography, according to Lassiter (1998), is to learn about self through the experience of learning about Other (57). It does not seek to objectify or distance subjects from researchers, but rather to place scholars more completely inside the worlds of the people under study. Taking a collaborative angle enables "subjects" and "informants" to become "consultants" by allowing them to have equal, if not greater, input into the outcome of a study. In this way, the people of a

community have the opportunity to directly comment on what the anthropologist says about their community.

In Native American Studies, this philosophy has particular relevance because it allows indigenous peoples a powerful voice in the literature produced about them. Lassiter's survey of Kiowa song (1998) has such lasting influence precisely because he steps aside on occasion and asks the people with whom he has been working to share their personal stories. This stepping aside occurs in particular during the post-production phase of a manuscript, when the author shows the work to consultants and asks them to provide input and to implement changes wherever they feel necessary. This type of ethnography also frees the researcher in some sense from the pain of making obvious or subtle mistakes in describing a culture's traditions. Since each draft of the paper is produced with input from experts on the topic, consultants are able to comment when the author's understanding of the subject falls short of actual experience. The product of research becomes in every sense an effort on both the scholar's and the community's part, and as a result provides material useful to the society under study as well as to the audience for whom the paper is intended.⁴

Lassiter's ethnography has another side-effect that may not be intentional. As I interviewed singers in the Central Illinois area who practice Gourd Dance, I learned a great deal about how the dance is passed along between peoples. In a modern context, the dissemination of the cultural practices and beliefs of one tribe across a wide, intertribal network of people occurs frequently and freely, and the presence of good teachings becomes essential for the proper spread of these traditions. People outside of southern Oklahoma who want to learn how to practice Gourd Dance rely on sources of information such as Lassiter's book in order to gain essential knowledge of what the dance means to the KCA community. By providing reliable teachings by well-respected community elders and cultural experts, Lassiter has facilitated the spread of these teachings to other communities who wish to acquire them. In the Central Illinois community, Gourd Dance is highly respected because it affirms and strengthens Native American identity, and singers Chip and Jimi Roberts referenced Lassiter's book as an excellent place to start learning about the tradition (personal communication).

The Roberts did not just consult a book, however, in order to learn the songs and steps of the Gourd Dance. They traveled to Oklahoma to learn directly from KCA elders, especially Tim Tieyah, a Comanche singer whose entire lifestyle and belief system is formed around an intimate knowledge of the songs and prayers of his people. Tieyah participates regularly in ceremonies throughout the United States, traveling and teaching his way of life to whomever

shows interest. Tieyah eagerly participated in several lengthy telephone conversations with me so that he could teach me the basics of the dance itself and correct some mistaken notions I initially held. This study benefits from these teachings, and we are both hopeful that this paper will be a useful source of information to those who have an interest in Native American Gourd Dance traditions.

In addition to reference to what I learned through collaborative ethnography, I also reflect on my first-hand experiences at Native American ceremonies. In the course of my studies and in direct conjunction to this project, I have attended several pow wows hosted by the Central Illinois Powwow Community (CIPC) at Seven Circles Heritage Center in Edwards, Illinois. At Seven Circles, I have had the privilege of watching members of the CIPC perform the Gourd Dance before the Grand Entry on more than one occasion, but most notably for this research on September 15, 2012, at the Veterans Powwow. These experiences have taught me that much of what popular culture believes about Native Americans has very little basis in reality. One such common stereotype is the notion that Native American tribal customs have been "lost" and are a thing of the past.⁵ I have learned that Native American beliefs and traditions are practiced now as vibrantly as they have ever been, and the culture is growing within, as well as shaping and being shaped by the modern world. The richness and relevance of the Gourd Dance to today's Native American communities is a fundamental argument of this paper.

History of Native American dance in the United States

In the late 1800's, Native American dance fell under increasing attack as the United States government dictated policies that banned Indian tribes from performing many dances and rituals. In *A Dancing People*, Clyde Ellis (2003) details the history of Southern Plains pow wow culture and its conflicts with governmental policy. Regarding the pre-reservation period, or the period predating 1850 in which most Indian societies still possessed their own lands and had not yet been displaced to government-allocated reservations, Ellis reports,

Dances were targeted during the reservation era as vestiges of an uncivilized life; the Indian Office denounced them as lurid spectacles that promoted everything from sexual licentiousness to pagan worship. Indian dance acquired the stigma of being "degraded" and primitive. White society rejected altogether the themes present in the rituals, considering them to be displays of "debauchery," which were "'intended to stimulate the warlike passions of young warriors,' including theft, rape, and murder" (12-13).

Assurances from the Secretary of the Interior, Henry Teller, to the Bureau of Indian Affairs that the gatherings did not occur for amusement and pleasure added to the negative portrayal of Indian dance to the government and the general public. His comment left the bureau with the impression that Native American dance facilitated practices that Christian philosophy considers amoral, including warlike ideologies, licentiousness, and the use of harmful drugs and intoxicants. Teller's influence led to the formation of a Rules for Courts of Indian Offenses in 1883. These guidelines specifically prohibited many customary Native American practices, but most emphatically and significantly, cited dance as a first offense (King & Springwood, 2000, 197).

A large dichotomy between Christian and Native American worldviews contributed to the repressive theme of government policy regarding Native American dance. C. King and C. Springwood (2000) point out that during the period of colonial expansion in the mid to late-1800s, the Christian moral system emphasized the role of physical, emotional, and mental restraint in attaining salvation. Protestant theology had the tendency to read non-Western peoples as representing the opposite of everything a Christian lifestyle stands for and to inscribe the Native American physical self with characteristics of open sexuality, desire, and aggression (195). This led to the perception that Native American dance represented the "heathenish practices" of an uncivilized people (197). The expansion Westward during the period of imperialist ideology was largely motivated by a sense of the white man's duty to "civilize" the lands to the West according to Christian values. King and Springwood state, "In North America, Native American forms of dance were perceived as wild, dangerously spontaneous, hypersexual, and transgressive, and these perceptions were at the core of a colonial construction of the volatile primitivism of the native" (196). As a result of this negative, anti-Christian reading of Native American dance, many official policies condemned it and attempted to stamp it out through imprisonment and military action towards groups that persisted in holding ceremonies.

During this time, certain forms of dance continued to be performed, sometimes in open defiance of government policy. The Kiowa O-ho-mah, a War Dance society that worked to keep Indian dance alive in spite of repression, risked the threat of individual members being imprisoned for continuing to hold gatherings even after they had been made unlawful. Several meetings can be seen on the Society's 1912 calendar after the government had banned performances of the Sun Dance. The words to one O-ho-mah song from this time are insightful: "Do not hesitate to dance; Go ahead and be arrested/jailed" (Ellis, 2003, 18). The relevancy of

the words to the contemporary situation demonstrates the gravity with which members of the Society undertook their task of preserving a sacred dance. Perceiving government suppression as an attempt to obliterate their culture, the dancers made a conscious effort to integrate the dance into their lives as much as possible. Another factor worked in favor of Native American dance as well; the policies dictating restrictions on Native American dance had many complicated consequences for the agency officials whose job it was to carry out the law on reservations. In practice, officials ended up negotiating with many Native American groups to allow them to carry on holding dances and ceremonies while adapting dance to make it more acceptable to the white public. Entertainment fairs and exhibitions, notably Bill Cody's Wild West Show, which featured "Indian dancing" as a "savage spectacle" for the public's enjoyment and consumption, ironically provided one area in which Native American dance could be performed in a manner acceptable to anyone who had objections to it, policy makers and missionary reformers alike (Ellis, 2003, 56-7) Native American dancers used negotiations with officials and participation in exhibitions to adapt the role of dance to the social realities of the time while still keeping its essential principles intact (76).

These efforts continued into the second and third decades of the twentieth century, World Wars I and II had a dramatic impact on how the United States perceived Indians. This was true for the simple reason that Indians enlisted in the military in greater percentages than any other group in the U.S. (Ellis, 2003, 15). The conditions of modern warfare offered warrior societies an opportunity to revive some of their fundamental traditions, which in the absence of warfare, had been slowly dying out. As Ellis (2003) explains,

Martial valor was a critical factor during the pre-reservation era in attaining status and prestige, so the erosion of such opportunities rippled through the entire cultural fabric of tribes... Ironically, modern warfare helped encourage the creation of a new yet traditionally inspired warrior ethic. In the opinion of many powwow people, twentieth-century warfare is the critical link in the revival of many dances and rituals from the pre-reservation period (15).

Native American people saw involvement in the wars as an obligation and a "validation of their continued allegiance to specific and honorable traditions" (21). Involvement in the wars meant that tribes held dances to ask for blessings on soldiers going overseas and to honor veterans who had returned home. The performance of these dances encouraged the significance of old cultural ideals, once again bringing ceremonial dance to the front of Indian life. Ellis (2003) remarks, "The war created a new generation of warriors, and Indian communities rushed to

resurrect old society dances and rituals that now had renewed meaning" (74). The introduction of new war veterans to honor and celebrate encouraged a resurgence of martial ethos that in turn made dances such as the Gourd Dance once again relevant to Native American life and culture. This, in combination with the struggle that had been ongoing since the 1890's to keep dancing alive in spite of government repression, sparked a widespread desire among tribes to re-embrace dance culture as an expression of identity.

As modern warfare swept the world, it also led to important ramifications in Native American resistance to government suppression. Ellis (2003) recounts several stories of Indian elders who attempted to bypass or repeal the Indian Office's legislation against dancing during this time. In 1914, a Kiowa man named Red Buffalo hired an attorney to help him oppose the rulings. Such an act of open noncooperation would not have been considered a generation earlier. But after the onset of World War I, Native Americans began to realize that they had more power to resist government bans on dancing. An Arapaho named Jess Rowlodge actually went around the Indian Office and the President, appealing to the American Red Cross to help him gain permission to perform a Sun Dance to pray for the well-being of soldiers overseas. With the endorsement of the Red Cross, Rowlodge succeeded in this venture (108). The actions of these elders helped to push forward new legislation that eventually repealed all bans on Indian dancing in the 1930's (77).

The Gourd Dance escaped the majority of government bans due to its more peaceful nature. Gourd Dance, although heavily associated with more warlike rituals, emphasizes spiritual aims such as thanksgiving and prayer, as opposed to readying warriors for battle (Tim Tieyah, personal communication). Since it did not appear to stir Native American people to rebellious tendencies, in the late 1800's and early 1900's, government ruling accepted Gourd Dance as an alternative to Sun Dance and other rituals (Warren, 2011, 28). Plains Indians continued to perform Gourd Dance into the 1900's, but because it did not have a warrior context within which to root it, it slowly lost momentum. By the 1920's, Gourd Dance performances had grown rare, and all but died out in the 1930's.

The reasons for this are complicated and are embedded in the environment of the buffalo-centric cultures of Plains warrior societies. Lassiter (1998) explains that meetings between military societies provided meaningful settings in which rituals such as the Gourd Dance (known at the time by its less familiar name, Rattle Dance) could be performed. Such meetings were held among the military societies of the Kiowa tribe as part of an annual midsummer gathering known as "K'aw-tow" in which the seven bands of the Kiowa tribe

assembled for several days. These tribal gatherings rejuvenated the spiritual lives of the people through a celebration involving "military society meetings, feasts, dances, and songs; and the K'aw-tow Dance, a four-day ceremony commemorating the bison-centered lifestyle of the Plains" (91). Warriors offered prayers through their dance and left the ceremony feeling rejuvenated and secure in the knowledge that they would return the next year (91).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this lifestyle began to die out as the tribes were moved onto reservations. In addition, government agents mistakenly confused K'aw-tow with the Sun Dance, which was in fact not a Kiowa tradition, and on July 10th, 1890, the Office of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. declared the gathering to be illegal. In addition to this loss, the bison herds were disappearing from the Plains, and assimilation into American society had replaced warfare, removing the two other factors that made warrior societies and the Gourd Dance relevant. "With the decline of warfare and without the K'aw-tow, many military societies lost their traditional relevance," writes Lassiter (1998). "Not until the 1940s and thereafter would some of these societies be revived with new purposes - foremost among these being the revival of the dances" (91-4).

One of the military societies who participated in the K'aw-tow was called the Taimpego, one of three societies for distinguished warriors. Up until the 1930's, the Taimpego had kept a certain dance called the Rattle Dance alive. "Neither the dance nor the Kiowa way of life associated with it had been completely forgotten" (117), Lassiter (1998) writes. The Rattle Dance, though displaced from its traditional context, had presumably been re-purposed by society members to fit in with the changing circumstances of Indian life, a flexibility that preserved it from being lost and allowed it to eventually be recreated as the Gourd Dance. On Armistice Day, November 11, 1946, Kiowas held a Taimpego Rattle Dance at Carnegie, OK in order to honor veterans who had served in the world wars. This gathering had a significant impact on subsequent performances of the Rattle Dance (Lassiter, 1998, 119).

The official revival of the Rattle Dance occurred at the American Indian Exposition in 1955. According to eyewitnesses, the dance brought back strong memories of the lands and cultural heritage of the Kiowa people, and elders reacted to it emotionally with soft crying. This public presentation provided the impetus for the formation of a new society known as the Kiowa Gourd Clan in 1957. The Society defined its purpose in the Kiowa Gourd Clan mission statement of 1976 as "'to perpetuate our Indian Heritage and to revive the Kiowa dance as near as possible from the past original ceremonies'" (Lassiter, 1998, 118). Its primary activity revolved around perpetuating the Gourd Dance, which descended from the Rattle Dance. Both names

refer to features of the dance itself: Rattle Dance associates the movement of the rattle in the dancer's left hand with the overall meaning of the dance (Lassiter, 1998, 119), while Gourd Dance makes the same association with the material that traditionally comprises the rattle, a gourd.

Gourd Dance Societies

Broadly speaking, the spread of the Gourd Dance from Southwestern Oklahoma to the rest of the world can be seen as occurring in two phases. The first phase encompasses its dissemination outward from the Kiowa to the Comanche, Apache, and other tribes of the Southern Plains. This phase, especially from the Comanche point of view, begins in the period before 1850, when the Kiowa and Comanche became allies after a period of competing for land resources. The Comanche and Kiowa allied with three other tribes, the Apache, Cheyenne, and Arapaho circa 1806 in order to face the encroaching Euro-American presence from the East (Meadows, 1999, 253). The second phase begins roughly after the revival of the tradition by the Kiowa Gourd Clan in 1957. In the cultural fervor following the overturning of bans on dancing in the 1930's, it spread rapidly outwards from Southern Oklahoma to the rest of the United States. Plains and Southwest Indian tribes especially have grasped its significance as a readily available, richly adorned tradition rooted in ancient values, and adopted it in various ways into their own customs. Gourd Dance currently is performed on many pow wow programs throughout North America. It also has an international, intertribal presence in communities located in Germany, Hawaii, and Canada.

The current account concerns itself with the first phase of the spread of the Gourd Dance among the tribes of the Southern Plains in the late 1700's and early 1800's. Alliances between the five tribes mentioned earlier led to an intense cultural exchange that had broad ramifications, one of which is the adoption of the Gourd Dance. A debate still exists over who originally began the tradition, and the Kiowa, Cheyenne, and Comanche all claim ownership.

In one version of the story, the dance belonged to the Cheyenne people, and the Kiowa and Comanche acquired it from them at the same time in a battle (Meadows, 1999, 277). In other accounts, the Kiowa had it initially and passed it on to the Comanche and other tribes. In a phone interview, Tim Tieyah gave me a brief history of the relationship between the Comanche and its allies at this time, focusing on the sharing of the Gourd Dance. His story emphasizes Kiowa ownership of the dance. It also illuminates one of the salient points that, for me, define the Gourd Dance narrative: the apprentice-like system by which tribes can acquire

each others' traditions. My notes from this interview, taken on November 6, 2012, paraphrase Tieyah's words as closely as possible:

They [the Kiowa and Comanche] made a pact or treaty or alliance in 1780/90. Before that treaty, we were enemies one to another. We came down from the Rockies, and so did the Kiowa. The Comanche people, according to my elders, had come down first, from the Rockies/Wyoming area. They broke off from the Shoshone and came down here. After that came the Kiowa, they were in the country also. We had fought for different areas and land in Texas and Oklahoma. Our chiefs at one time in the 1780s made a pact of peace with the Kiowa people. We've honored that from that time on; our families have joined theirs in dances and celebrations. We have families (Kiowa-Comanche and Comanche-Kiowa) and we finally settled down in Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Kiowas were along side us (they have their own county, Kiowa County). We are close through family and marriages, and also some of the Apache tribe. The Apache left Florida after 27 years of incarceration. They stopped off in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and some of them, such as Geronimo, liked the country and decided to stay. Others went on to Arizona. These three tribes came to be known as KCA, the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache, and settled together in the southwest area of Oklahoma.

Through that relationship, as well as marriage, we've become very closely bonded with each other. We're pretty well familiar with each other's customs and traditions. We dance at their ceremonies and they dance at ours.

[My question:] *How does that affect Gourd Dance?* Well, the Kiowas have it first (to my understanding). When they would have their dances /ceremonies, we would attend and that's how it affected us. They say: if you come visit me and stay with me a few times, you may learn what I like to eat. If you stay with me for more than a few times, pretty soon you will learn my language. [Tieyah was pointing out to me that this is how the Gourd Dance became known to the Comanche from the Kiowa. They spent so much time with each other that they gained a knowledge and understanding of the Gourd Dance.]

In the old days, the Gourd Dance depended largely on the existence of warrior societies, also known as military societies, within the tribes of the Southern Plains Indians. Warrior societies occupied a position of deep respect among these tribes during the pre-reservation period. Traditionally, membership in a warrior society was only open to warriors, and the society committed itself to honoring their service and lifestyle. In his book *Kiowa, Apache, and Comanche Military Societies*, William C. Meadows (1999) emphasizes, however, that while shaped by a martial ideology, most of these organizations fulfilled a variety of social functions and did not exist solely for the purpose of practicing warfare. The "military" aspect of these groups retained the most significance, but care must be taken to avoid romanticizing their role and thus neglecting their various socioeconomic functions (11).

Meadows demonstrates that warrior societies have existed among the Plains Indians of North America since well before the 1600s. They have rich and diverse oral histories, but very little written documentation, and so determining details such as past structures and membership proves difficult. Their flexibility has enabled them to adapt to a lifestyle that has been greatly altered by white occupation, while still maintaining core historical values. Meadows' analysis demonstrates that it is possible to extrapolate the nature and roles of these societies in the past by examining their continued function in the present.

Male Plains Indian military organizations can be differentiated from more loosely-based, voluntary groups based on several criteria. In the past and present, they have revolved around three spheres of activity: civil, military, and religious. During the pre-reservation period (before circa 1850), these groups' responsibilities included policing large communal hunts, a dangerous activity upon which the community depended for survival. They had voluntary membership, but the ties between members could cross tribal boundaries and always had military significance that went beyond the hunt. Their activities focused on celebrating warfare and the deeds of individuals, and in certain circumstances, they engaged in warfare as collective units (Meadows, 1999, 7-8). Meadows characterizes the most important feature of these societies in his statement: "Plains men's military societies visibly promote the common central theme of a warrior tradition - of a warrior ideology, which at specific times can be argued to be an ethos" (8). The concept of ethos is rooted in the core traditions and values of a community and could be considered central to its identity. Meadows' assessment makes it clear that a military ideology was central to the identity and definition of Plains Indian warrior societies.

With the revival of the Rattle Dance as the Gourd Dance, these organizations underwent large changes in purpose and character. Their martial aspect diminished, and in recent times these groups have become known as dance organizations or societies. Initially, such societies as the Kiowa Gourd Clan only accepted veterans as members, but now many groups have adopted the policy of allowing non-veterans to join, and the organizations have become completely devoted to carrying on the traditions of the tribe(s) to which they belong. Meadows (1999) emphasizes that the martial ethos of the prereservation warrior clans still underlies the philosophy of these societies and informs the behavior of their members in adaptive and powerful ways. For example, many members participate in community outreach and service in their daily lives, and the organizations perpetuate tribal culture in their promotion of traditional language and dance, and of honoring veterans (11).

Each of these organizations functions to fulfill a need in the lives of those who practice Indian culture. In *The Power of Kiowa Song*, Lassiter (1998) lists many of the dance-sponsoring organizations in Southwestern Oklahoma and adds a brief summary of each society's purpose. Although not comprehensive, the list reveals that many of these organizations support the Gourd Dance as a primary activity (87). Some, such as the Reservation War Dancers (a Kiowa society) exist as a "War Dance organization," and their primary role is to host and manage War Dance events. Others, such as the Comanche Homecoming Committee, oversee many of the responsibilities in putting on pow wows. Depending on function, some groups have specifically intertribal-affiliated membership, such as the Southwest Oklahoma Vietnam Veterans Association. Most, however, have tribal-specific affiliations, although in practice these organizations have integrated membership since many of their people have intermarried with non-Indians and the tribal size is so small (Lassiter 1998, 121). Examples include the Kiowa Tai-Piah Society, a well-known Gourd Dance organization, and the Comanche Little Ponies, an important group also centered around Gourd Dance.

In modern times, some dance organizations have made use of the internet to create a strong online presence, making it easy to learn about their events and membership. The Comanche Little Ponies, based in Lawton, Oklahoma, have a blog devoted to their activities, and they have posted live videos of ceremonies on www.youtube.com and their blog page. These recordings provide a glimpse into what a Gourd Dance ceremony looks like for those who are curious about the tradition and help to illustrate some of the ways in which dancers, singers, and spectators at a ceremony interact with each other.

The Comanche Little Ponies exist today as a Gourd Dance society, but like other societies, they have roots in the past as a military organization of the Comanche tribe. Though core members live in Lawton, the society has members throughout all of Oklahoma and in neighboring states. Rather than having membership restricted to just veterans or men, the society invites men, women, and children from many walks of life to membership. They were organized into a formal group in the 1960s, and they have been active in the pow wow circle for nearly half a century.⁶ Their purpose is to preserve the Comanche language, customs, and traditions. They refer to themselves as a "Traditional Gourd Dance society" (online news article, December 31, 2009), and their members dance in customary Comanche regalia. Their videos often depict ceremonies crowded with dancers and singers, communicating the energy and excitement with which the society practices Gourd Dance and promotes its role as a vehicle of Comanche culture and tradition for the community. The Little Ponies host and sponsor

ceremonies such as honor dances and benefit pow wows, events that provide cultural and economic support to the community. Figures 1 and 2 (below) are scanned images of fliers announcing both types of ceremonies. The ceremony advertised in Figure 1 is co-sponsored by the Comanche Little Ponies and the Oklahoma Gourd Dance Club, and the ceremony in Figure 2 is sponsored solely by the Oklahoma Gourd Dance club. Announcements of this type circulate the news of an upcoming event to a wide group of people and enable dancers, singers, and spectators to plan their schedules well in advance.

Hannah Grace Nanistayaketu Birthday Honor Dance

COMANCHE NATION COMPLEX
JANUARY 26, 2013

Gourd Dance at 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm
Supper at 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm
Contest Registration at 5:00 pm - 7:30 pm
Grand Entry at 7:30 pm

M.C. - Wallace Coffey
Head Singer - Anthony Monoessy
Head Man Gourd Dancer - Kenneth Cozad
Head Man War Dancer - Kelly Switch
Head Lady Dancer - Rosie Motah
Co-Host - Oklahoma Gourd Dance Club
Comanche Little Ponies
Security - Brian Wahnee
Arena Director - Freddie Banderas
Honorees: Comanche Man Dance

CONTEST

Women's Cloth - Sponsored by the Motah Family
Men's Straight Dance (Old Style)
16 and up Fancy Dance
Special Invite to the:
Comanche Nation Princess
Comanche Nation Princess Jr.

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:
Tonyelle Atavich
580.713.2970 or 580.583.2206

Figure 1: Announcement poster for a dance honoring the birthday of a member of the Comanche tribe

**OKLAHOMA GOURD DANCE CLUB
BENEFIT POW-WOW**

January 12, 2013

"Watchetaker Hall"

Comanche Nation Tribal Complex

Lawton, Oklahoma

**(7 MILES NORTH OF LAWTON ON I-44, TAKE MEDICINE PARK EXIT AND HEAD WEST 1/2 MILE &
TURN NORTH ON MEDICHE', 3/4 MILE TURN EAST ONTO BINGO ROAD)**

SR. PRINCESS- REY ANN NORBERTO

JR. PRINCESS- AMBER ROSE QUIS QUIS

HONORED ELDER

THOMAS BLACKSTAR

ELDEST MALE CLUB MEMBER

HEAD STAFF

MC-----	CY AHTONE
HEAD SINGER-----	GARREL GWOOMPI
HEAD GOURD DANCER-----	SAM REDBONE
HEAD LADY DANCER-----	GLORIA WILLIAMS
ARENA DIRECTOR-----	FREDDY BANDERAS
SECURITY-----	QUINCY TAHSEQUAH
CO-HOST-----	PARKER DESCENDANTS

**NO ALCOHOLIC BEVERGES OR DRUGS ALLOWED ON PREMISES. INDIAN MADE CRAFTS ONLY WITH DONATION. MEMBERS PLEASE BRING ITEMS FOR GIVE-AWAY, RAFFLES ,MEAL AND CONCESSION. ALL TRIBAL AND CLUB PRINCESS' INVITED TO COME. POWWOW IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AND ALL SERVICE MEMBERS. FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: BUTCH TAHSEQUAH AT 405-924-5211 OR LINDA TAHSEQUAH AT 405-758-2326
ALL MONIES RAISED WILL GO TO THE 15th ANNUAL POWWOW MAY 31st, JUNE 1st AND 2nd , 2013. ALL BENEFITS AND THE ANNUAL TO BE HELD AT THE COMANCHE NATION TRIBAL COMPLEX.**

Figure 2: Announcement for a benefit pow wow, sponsored by the Oklahoma Gourd Dance Club

Groups such as the Comanche Little Ponies came about as a result of the revival of the Gourd Dance that occurred in the 1950's with the Kiowa Gourd Clan. Societies formed among the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache in southern Oklahoma, and then groups of Kiowa in other states, such as Georgia and Texas, sought to form their own societies so they could practice the Gourd Dance at their homes. The Gourd Dance also grew greatly in popularity among other tribes such as the Navajo, Cherokee, Osage, and Cheyenne (Lassiter, 1998, 122-3).

The formation of Gourd Dance societies within other Native American tribes was the beginning of the modern-day dissemination of the dance outward from Southern Oklahoma to the rest of the world. The accessibility of the Gourd Dance and the completeness of its tradition and song repertoire make it a favorable choice for Native Americans who wish to reconnect with their heritage but have little cultural memory of their own tribes' ritual practices. The presence of a large body of elders among the KCA (such as Tim Tieyah) who are experts on the Gourd Dance makes it possible for prospective Gourd Dancers to seek them out and learn from their experiences.

Since the Gourd Dance now has such a wide presence with many different practitioners, its history has become even more confused. It is possible that scholars will never be able to clearly establish exactly who originally possessed the Gourd Dance tradition, but on one level at least, that distinction may be a moot argument. Indian dance traditions have a mobile quality that makes them readily available to those who wish to acquire them. In the past, a sign of personal prowess was the stealing of another tribe's dances and songs and claiming them for one's own. Tribes could also purchase rituals from one another through the exchange of horses and medicine bundles. Fictive kinship ties originating with military societies also enabled the spread of traditions across tribes. These last two methods of acquiring another group's cultural practices continue to be applicable in modern times.

Gourd Dance traditions

Story-telling occupies a special significance in Native American culture because it acts as a powerful agent for preserving and carrying on societal values. Members of a tribal society who are fluent in the stories of their people have a vital and vibrant knowledge of their tribe's values, language, and culture, which they can then pass on to younger generations through the re-telling of these stories. Stories, through the actions of their characters, also teach important life lessons, or morals, to their hearers that also help to clarify the values of a society. A rich body of stories exists on many, many topics, and so for the sake of this discussion I will narrow the focus

to stories that speak of the origins of dance traditions.

Several considerations must be taken into account when listening or reading a story for the purpose of learning about a tradition. Firstly, due to the nature of oral story-telling, accounts inevitably vary from person to person. This does not detract from the accurateness of one version or another, assuming each comes from an elder or a respected cultural expert. When speaking about the origin story of any tradition, no two people give the exact same account. Lassiter (1998) explains that each singer tells his own version of the Gourd Dance's origin tale, but the varying narratives do not diminish the Gourd Dance in any way. Singers frequently reference their version of the story, especially in public presentations, demonstrating both the fluidity and cohesiveness of the Gourd Dance narrative (158). If the flexible nature of Indian story-telling appears to detract from its reliability, it should be considered that many of the written histories of Western society are open to as much interpretation as spoken stories are in other traditions. The process by which history is interpreted may vary between societies, but through interpretation of any kind, history reveals its fundamental nature as "story" and not necessarily as "fact."

Secondly, non-Indians who learn a story from Indian oral tradition should remember that understanding much of its significance and symbolism depends on having knowledge of Native American beliefs. Western listeners may find different meanings in a story because the ideals of Western culture differ greatly from the values of Native American society. Therefore, knowing and accurately comprehending the story behind a certain tradition involves much more than simply learning the story itself. It also encompasses learning about Indian history, religion, and symbolism, and applying those teachings to the story.

I present the origin story of the Gourd Dance in three different versions, commenting briefly on their similarities and differences, but otherwise allowing them to stand on their own. Two of the stories were told to me by people I interviewed personally, and I will transcribe these in their full versions. The third version is the one Lassiter (1998) reports as told to a public audience by a Kiowa singer named Ralph Kotay in April 1994 (158-161). Since the full narrative covers several pages and can be found in Lassiter's book, I will only take note of important sections for the purposes of comparison.

In one version of the origin story, a warrior is separated from his group and left for dead. He crawls all night and prays for someone to show him the way. He hears a wolf howling, so he thinks, "Maybe the wolf has come to show me home." He follows the sound up a hill and sees a wolf there with a rattle, fan, and drum, dancing and singing the Gourd Dance songs. He sits and

watches the wolf, and when morning comes, the wolf goes up the hill to the warrior and hands him the rattle. He says, "These dances are yours; they are a gift for you and your people. Go to them - they are just over that rise." The warrior goes home and gives the rattle to this people and says, "We have to sing these songs now. These are a gift from the wolf." That's how the Gourd Dance begins (Randall Eggers, personal communication).

During a phone conversation with Timothy Tieyah on November 15, 2012, I asked him why every Gourd Dance song ends with a wolf howl, and as an answer he told me a story about the role of the wolf and the beginning of the Gourd Dance. A few differences exist between his account and Randall Egger's version, but both narratives contain many similarities and emphasize the importance of the wolf:

"Many, many years ago, when the Indian was free - no fences, no disrespect to Mother Earth, no white man's homes, I was free, my heart was happy. In those days, there was a Kiowa war party. They went out to contest or conflict with another tribe. In the fight, the overwhelming number of the enemy prevailed on the Kiowa fighters. One man was badly wounded and left for dead. Two others were wounded to the point where they could not see. The one who could move helped the other two."

Tieyah was most likely referring to a time when the Kiowa people did not live on a reservation, but had the freedom to migrate as hunter-gatherers. At this point, Tieyah diverged slightly to explain that he disliked using the word "nomad" to describe his ancestors since to him the word implies that they were "wanderers" and didn't know where they were going. Tieyah wanted to underscore that his people were never "lost" during those days. A more apt word to describe their lifestyle would be "migratory."

"The three injured warriors were searching for home, camp. They would go one direction and then sleep. These warriors began to pray to Daw-Kee (Grandfather). Each night as they traveled to camp, they would pray. One of these nights, they heard a wolf on a knoll or hill nearby. They heard the same wolf the next night in a different direction. The warriors put two and two together and said, maybe the Almighty is sending us a sign. These warriors would go wherever the wolf howled.

"One early morning, they went to where the wolf was howling over the hill and saw their encampment. All the people were happy to see them and ministered to them and they became well, whole again. When they were whole, they spoke to the chief saying: when we were badly wounded and we prayed, the Almighty sent a messenger – and that child was a wolf.

The medicine people prayed and sang a song. 'I was wounded. I was lost. I was close to

death and the Almighty sent us a messenger: a wolf and he guided us back home. Every time I sing these songs, we are going to howl. The Almighty gave us our life again – us three warriors.'

They [the warriors] have family ancestries that go way back. The songs pay tribute to the Almighty for the messenger that He sent."

Ralph Kotay's version contains many similarities to Tim Tieyah's, although as usual, a few differences exist. To begin with, Kotay dates the story to the 1800's and comments that it might be possible to trace it exactly to 1838. Instead of several warriors, Kotay only identifies one warrior who got lost from his group and was looking for his people, the Kiowa Tribe. "And he walked for days, nights... looking for the Kiowa encampment - where they camp, you know. You've seen pictures, movies of these, where they were camping out."

This last point relates to Tieyah's comment that his people were not "nomads," or "lost." Like Tieyah, Ralph Kotay seems to be indicating that the people were not mere wanderers, but that they had a familiar and particular lifestyle. Kotay continues:

"And this young warrior, he had come up to a small hill, *knowing* that his tribe was encamped over the hill, somewhere. As the warrior climbed the hill, or mountain, he heard singing coming from somewhere, a song he had never heard before. As he came to the top of the hill, he looked over and saw in a ravine a red wolf. There was a red *wolf* there in that ravine. He had this in his paw. A gourd [Ralph shakes his rattle]. And he was keeping time with the music."

The warrior's amazement at what he saw kept him from leaving, and the next day, the red wolf came to the warrior and explained that he was giving the warrior the dance and the songs he had heard to share with his people. The red wolf sang song after song, and the warrior remembered all of them and after finding his encampment, he told his people about what he had experienced. Well, they went ahead and accepted it... And to this day we are still dancing this particular dance... These songs that have been passed down from generation to generation, today [*sic*] we have many of these songs" (Lassiter, 1998, 158-61).

This last version is not meant to be a traditional or authoritative retelling of the narrative. Rather, it is meant to be an example to show that although in many ways accounts of the Gourd Dance's beginning may differ, an authentic telling will credit the wolf and Creator for the gift of the Gourd Dance to the Indian people. Gourd Dance songs may always be identified by their closing "wolf howl," a "YO OOOO AH" vocalization accompanied by a shaking of the rattle, which honors the wolf's role in passing on the dance to the people. A specific Kiowa Gourd Dance song that is still sung at ceremonies, called "Red Wolf," forms an integral part of the

narrative since it is believed to have been the first song that the lost warrior heard the wolf sing (Lassiter, 1998, 158).

In answer to my question, then, Tieyah explained, "*That's* why the difference – no other songs have that wolf howl. Only Gourd Dance songs. The Indians didn't forget Great Grandfather; over two hundred years of remembrance. All those people singing Gourd Dance in the sacred circle – it will 'click.' The closer they get to the sacred circle, the stronger it will be."

Gourd Dance performance involves a simple set of basic movements that male and female dancers both execute, and several additional, gender-specific steps. In order to describe the steps correctly, I refer to my participant-observation notes taken during a powwow held in Peoria, Illinois in September 2012, which featured a performance by a local Gourd Dance society. I also refer to notes taken from personal interviews with Gourd Dancers Chip and Jimi Roberts and Tim Tieyah. Finally, I consult important secondary sources, such as videos from the internet recorded and posted by Gourd Dancers from Oklahoma, and descriptions of the Gourd Dance from Lassiter's *Power of Kiowa Song* (1998) and Laura Warren's graduate thesis "Central Illinois Powwow Community" (2011). Lassiter and Warren base their descriptions on dances they personally attended in the areas they conducted their research. Warren mainly studied the pow wow community of Central Illinois and observed the Gourd Dance as performed by a Gourd Dance society based in Peoria, the same one that I observed at the pow wow in September. Lassiter's observations come from ceremonies he attended and sang at in the 1990's. Though certain aspects may have changed since then, I found that the description he gives matches what I have seen and what has been described to me.

At the pow wow I attended in September, I sat on the outside of the dance circle to the right of the Grand Entry opening, on an uphill slope with an excellent view of the proceedings. Figure 3 is a diagram of the sacred circle during the proceedings of the Gourd Dance. The diagram itself, however, only depicts the dancers at one moment in the dance. They moved around freely, taking up different positions, this diagram is merely a static image of an ever-moving tableau.

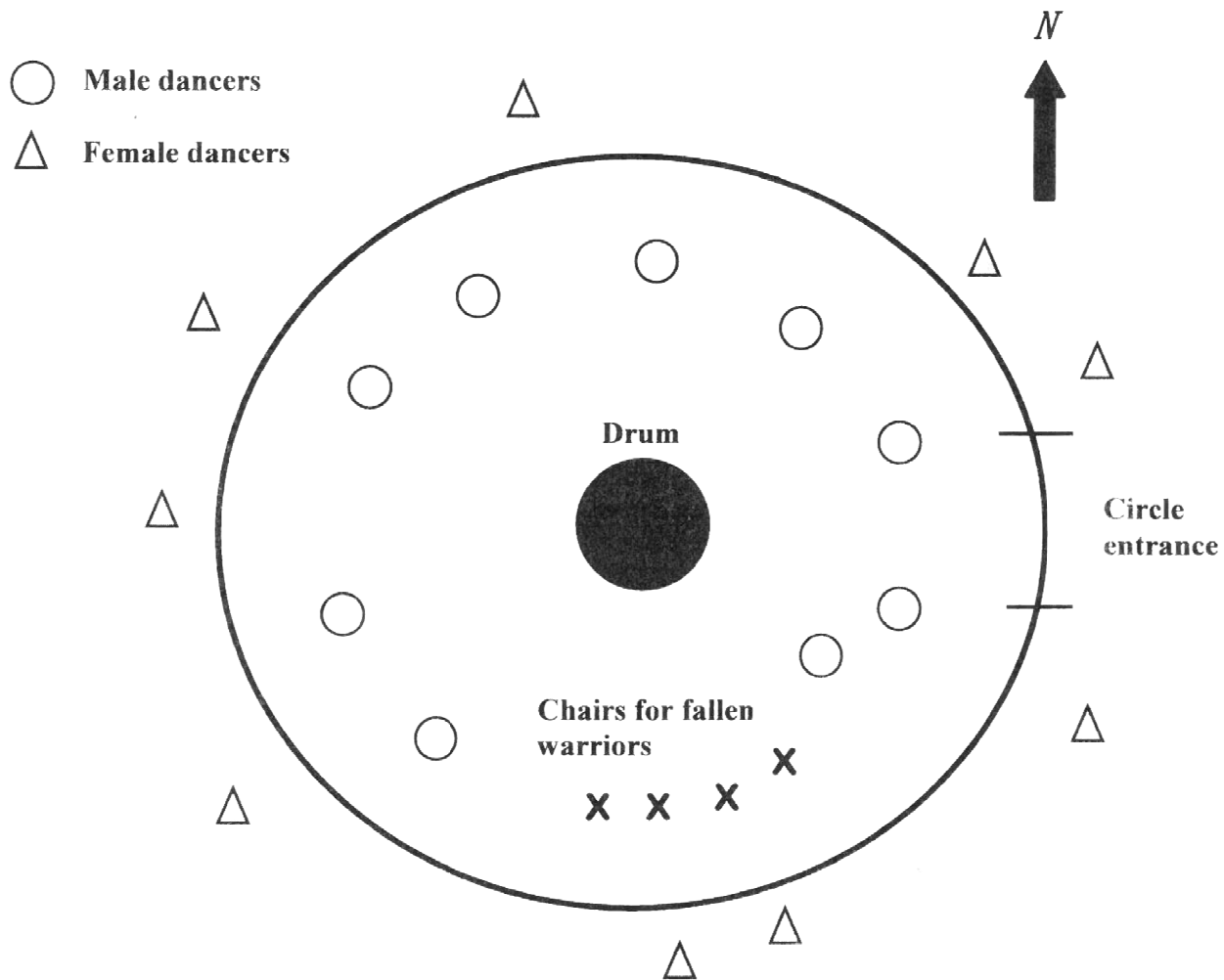


Figure 3: The dance arena during the Gourd Dance at the Veteran's Powwow on September 15, 2012.

For comparison purposes, I have also incorporated Lassiter's (1998) diagram of the choreography of a typical Gourd Dance (Figure 4). Lassiter's image (111) depicts a Gourd Dance ceremony in Southern Oklahoma, and his notes closely match my own observations. Lassiter orients his circle to the north, but does not mention the location of the circle entrance. At Seven Circles, the entrance, an important feature of the dance circle, stands to the east facing the rising sun. Dancers always move in a clockwise direction once they enter the circle, since counter-clockwise movement opposes the natural world.

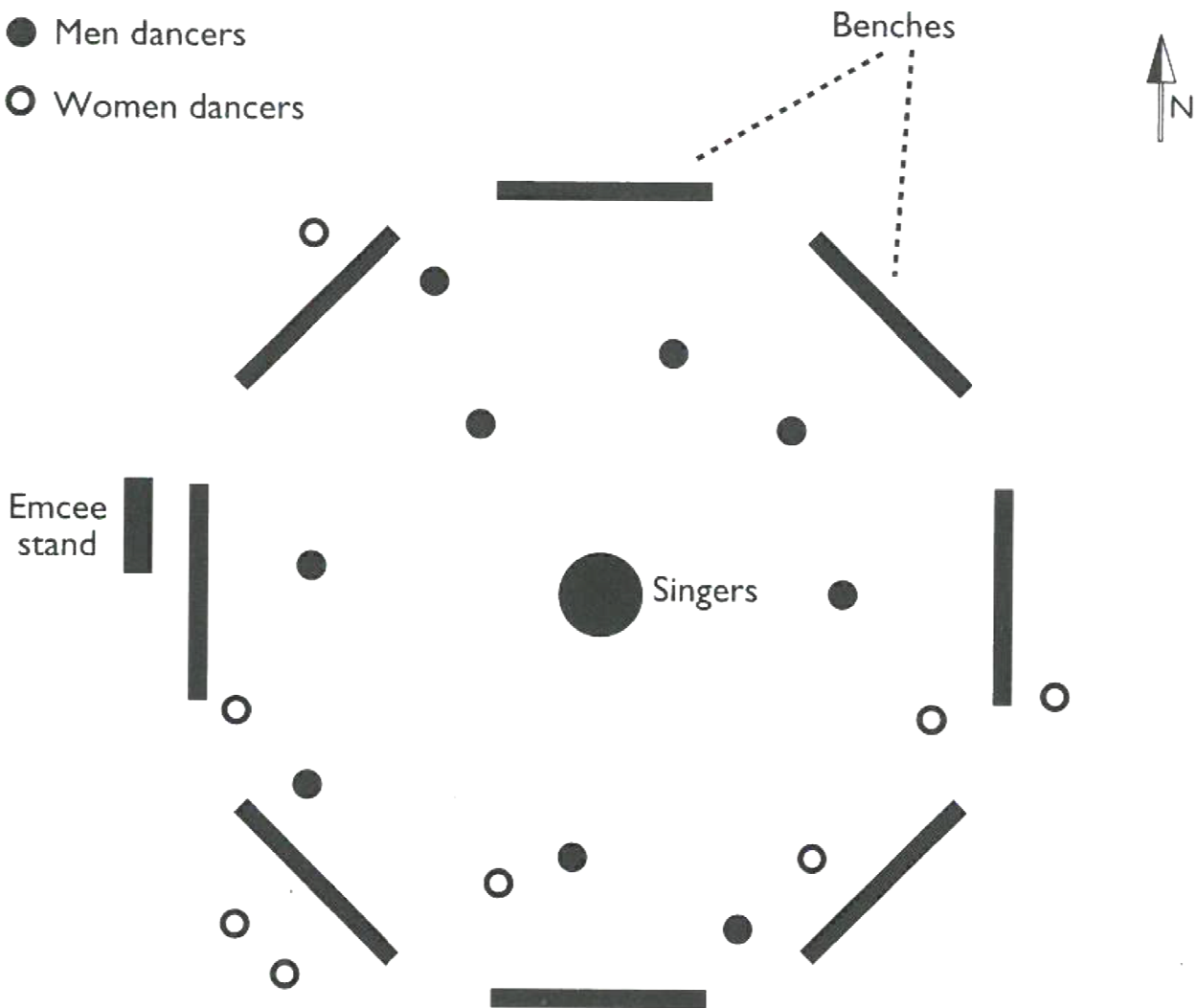


Figure 4: General choreography of the Gourd Dance in Southern Oklahoma, as observed by Lassiter (1998, 111).

Male dancers moved around the central drum, mostly keeping to a clockwise direction. Their footwork consists of lifting one foot after the other in time with the beat of the drum, one step per beat. Female dancers stood on the outside of the sacred circle and danced in place, their footwork much more constrained than the men's. All dancers kept their movements simple and unadorned. The men shook a rattle with a brushy "tail" affixed to the end in one hand, and in the other they carried "spikes," or a fan of eagle feathers. The women wore shawls over their shoulders, and some also held spikes. At the time, I did not take note of which hand, right or left,

held the rattle or the eagle feather fan. The significance of that fact later became clear in my research, however, as I learned that custom dictates that the fan be held in the left hand, close to the heart, and the right hand (for male dancers) holds the rattle. As they dance, men shake the rattle back and forth in time to the beat of the music. As the rattle moves, its fringe swishes to and fro, imitating the buffalo's tail (Warren, 2011, 36).

At the time of this observation, I had only a preliminary understanding of Gourd Dance structure. I did not realize that the movements of the dance relate directly to the form of the songs, nor did I have sufficient knowledge to be able to pick out when song sections began or ended. I did notice, however, that at key points in each song, the men stopped moving forward and began to bob in place. The women, too, stopped making step-like motions with their feet and began to bob up and down. From reading a similar description of a Gourd Dance written by Lassiter (1998), I learned that the key moments seemed to come when the song reached an important cadence and the drum's buildup had reached its highest point. At these moments, the singers struck the drum with greater force than before, and the beats (called "honor beats") carried more emphasis. After a minute or so, the song's intensity decreased suddenly, and the beats subsided into a steady pattern. The male dancers stopped bobbing up and down and began to move forward again, and the female dancers resumed walking in place (113).

At the conclusion of each song, the men moved backward quickly, uttering a wordless vocalization in imitation of the wolf howl. Lassiter (1998) has quoted the howl as sounding like "YO OOOO AH" (109, 113, etc.), a transcription that closely matches the actual sound. The howl at the end of each song identifies it as belonging to Gourd Dance repertoire. No other dance tradition contains songs with that howl (Tim Tieyah, personal communication), since it honors the wolf in a special way and returns listeners' attention back to the Gourd Dance's origin story.

At the beginning of a Gourd Dance program, the drum renders four songs in a specific order. "The first song in a Gourd Dance program is the Calling Song," said Tim Tieyah during a personal interview. "The next song is called Chief White Bear":

'My brother died fighting in Texas.
There's no one to mourn him.
Coyotes pick his bones.
I'm going to die too.'

"[The third song is the] Barking Song. [Earlier, Tieyah mentioned this song as one of his

favorites.] The fourth song belongs to my uncle Johnny Reid. When these four songs are rendered in that way, then the Gourd Dance is open."

My understanding of the meaning of "open" is that any singer sitting at the drum can then put a song "on the drum," or he can request to sing a certain song and begin it if approved by the head singer. The singers are free to select from any of the many songs that exist in the repertoire, and a Gourd Dance can last as long as the performers wish for it to continue. According to Tieyah, of all the songs in the repertoire, the only ones required of singers are the four opening songs. Without these songs sung in the correct order, the Gourd Dance loses part of its meaning. "These four songs are sung in order, 'ABCD,' and you don't go 'ABXYZ,'" Tieyah explained to me. "It becomes tainted and confused." Gourd Dances will continue, building up momentum by transitioning from slow to medium to fast-paced songs at the end. The highest moment of the dance's buildup when singers sing a series of fast or rhythm songs (known as *bhawl dawgeah* in Kiowa). These songs provide the dance's "grand finale" and inspire many spectators to come up and participate with the dancers, sharing in the energy of the music (Lassiter, 1998, 176-80).

In the course of a Gourd Dance, individual dancers may wish to pay respect to one another in a gesture called honoring. To honor a fellow dancer, it is customary to come and stand beside him during a song. Dancing beside an elder shows support for that person and also invites other dancers to come and honor that elder if they feel moved to do so. After dancing together, the person doing the honoring bends down to place a dollar bill in front of the dancer he wishes to honor. Words may be exchanged, but speaking is not compulsory. At the heart of the gesture is the action of giving something away. The most common gift is cash, but other objects may be given as well, such as blankets, cigarettes, and other items (Lassiter, 1998, 188).

Male and female Gourd Dancers have different roles to play, which are reflected in the different ways they dance and dress. Female dancers wear a shawl and carry spikes, and they dance behind the men in the dance circle to provide a protective barrier for the male dancers and singers. Traditional dress for male dancers is more elaborate by comparison. Male dancers typically wear jeans and a simple shirt; boots, moccasins, or dress shoes; and possibly a hat. The rattle and spikes are obligatory, along with a cloth sash that wraps around the waist and ties to the right. The sash surrounds a bandolier, traditionally named a *Tia-Piah-g'aw*, which goes across the left shoulder and ties to the right hip. Sashes, which may be made of velvet, have different colors, including red, blue, green, and purple. The colors determine tribal affiliation

(Lassiter, 1998, 110; Tim Tieyah, personal communication).

Upon my asking about the significance of the *Tia-Piah-g'aw*, Tim Tieyah explained, "It means 'unafraid of death.' Many hundreds years of ago, our warriors donned them on - put them on. They were medicine. The *tia-piah* has what we call medicine beads. The beads come from the southern part of Texas (part of old Mexico), and our elders go down there twice a year to pick them out of the area and bring them back to make this *Tia-Piah-g'aw*." Sometimes, a bandolier will have a silver concho attached to it the size of half-dollar or quarter, depending on the person or tribe making it (Tim Tieyah, personal communication). Since the *tia-piah* has a warrior-specific connotation, only male dancers wear it.

Gourd Dance singers sit in a circle around a large drum and strike it with drumsticks. The drumsticks have fiberglass rods and leather heads and handles. The drum's body is made out of wood, steel, and fiberglass, with a cowhide head stretched across the top (Lassiter, 1998, 105). Four cords and a wooden frame suspend the drum (Warren, 2011, 32). The frame keeps the drum off the ground and minimizes any dampening effects so that it vibrates fully with a deep sound. All songs have a simple drumbeat accompaniment, and the repetitiveness of the drum provides a steady rhythmic foundation for the vocalizations of the song, reminiscent of the heartbeat of Mother Earth.

Like all Native American songs, Gourd Dance songs have a beginning, middle, and end that are easily discernible to the practiced ear. As a classically trained musician, I am tempted to assign definitive values to these sections in order to make easy sense of the song form. However, unlike in Western tradition, which considers musical form as a collection of individual segments, singers do not view Gourd Dance songs as a collection of set "parts." They experience songs aesthetically and spiritually as holistic entities, which include the words and underlying meaning along with the actual sound.

Although I am a relatively new student of Native American music, I am not the only person to assume that it can be analyzed in terms of its structure. Talking about the "form" of Native American music implies that the songs can be broken down into constituent parts, as in Western classical music's sonata form. In the past, scholars have attempted to quantify Native American music by dividing it into sections labeled "A," "B," "C," and so forth. Anthropologists often refer to the structure of pow wow songs as "incomplete repetition," a pattern in which the musical phrases of a song are all repeated with the exception of the first phrase (Browner, 2004, 69-70). Regardless of the accuracy of this type of analysis, however, its use does not result in any meaningful explanation of Native American song. Instead, it contributes to distancing the

music from its own reality, in much the same way that a model of the sun distances viewers from the actual sun and makes it seem more artificial.

This method of analysis falls short of a complete understanding of Native American music because singers themselves do not break down songs. Tara Browner (2004), who has extensive experience studying and participating in the music and dance of Northern pow wows, asserts that Native singers and dancers conceive of songs as being "complete entities" and not as being divided into smaller parts "according to the rules of Western formal analysis" (67). Browner further states that "many may reject this kind of analysis completely and consider it to be a kind of intellectual or musical colonization" (67). Breaking songs down into separate parts, therefore, automatically contributes to make them artificial.

Within the context of Native American music, then, song meaning must first be considered as including more information than the music itself. In our correspondence, Tim Tieyah generally described song in conjunction with its language and meaning. When he wanted for me to know what a song sounds like, he would sing it rather than attempt to define it, often translating the words for me afterward. Even a singer's linguistic description of a song contains terminology relating to physical shape and contour, as when Lassiter (1998), a seasoned singer, describes songs as having "breaks, cuts, and curves" (155). Speaking about a song's "shape" in this way forces one to conceptualize the song as a complete object made up of more than just sound or vocalization.

During the warm months in Southern Oklahoma, Gourd Dance ceremonies occur almost every weekend (Tim Tieyah, personal communication). Arranging the logistics of a ceremony involves the cooperation of the whole community, and typically one group, either a family or society, takes most of the responsibility in seeing that a ceremony has everything it needs to be successful. The ceremony's sponsors must determine the time of day and location for the dance. They also consider who to invite, how long to hold the dance, and what food to serve (if a meal is included). They hire leaders for the dance: for example, an emcee, a head singer, and a head Gourd Dancer. The emcee fills a particular role in the ceremony by keeping the proceedings moving and injecting humor into the day's events. An emcee must be knowledgeable about dance traditions since at any given moment he may be required to explain the movements and songs to observers.

Gourd Dance traditions are taught to newcomers by an apprentice system centered mainly on knowledge gained through experience and understanding. If I were to learn the dance from Tim Tieyah, for example, I would go to his house and stay with him while he taught me the

meaning behind the songs, movements, and stories. "If you would to come to visit me in my home, or I come to visit you," Tieyah told me, "to help start, I would say we're doing just what we're doing now, just teaching you. I'm not teaching physically, the body movement. I'm teaching you upstairs, mentally what it means, what it signifies. How does an American Indian feel about what it says?" I would learn the physical steps of the dance when I attend a ceremony with Tieyah. As a woman, I would wear a shawl and dance behind Tieyah, and though I might feel uncomfortable at first with the unfamiliarity of the movements, I would grow to understand how they fit with the spirit and strength of the songs. Central to the learning experience is repetition: without attending many dances, I would never be able to learn the songs and would have only a poor grasp of the intensity of spirit and emotion that define the Gourd Dance experience for Tieyah and many others.

For a singer, the learning process would be even more involved. Lassiter's (1998) personal experience as a new singer enables him to provide deeper insight into the extensive training of a new singer learning to recall and sing many Gourd Dance songs. His account points out several important ways in which groups transfer song knowledge:

When a prospective singer wishes to learn how to sing, say, Gourd Dance songs, he must first learn their sound, their structure, and *how* [*sic*] to sing them. This instruction, however, is not a clear-cut process. In most cases the new singer must learn by trial and error, by listening to more experienced singers in the context of public events. Hence, to learn how to sing Gourd Dance songs, one must sit with the singers at Gourd Dances. Within a few months the experienced singers will expect the new singer to 'start' a song on his own, thus contributing to the group's effort to recall and sing the many songs necessary for any given Gourd Dance. In the course of this learning, the new singer learns how to recognize a song's sound, its 'breaks, cuts, and curves,' and its uses and restrictions. This is the kind of basic knowledge that all singers must have to give life to song (148).

Lassiter highlights the necessity of learning the structure, sound, and meaning of every song, information that not only demonstrates personal expertise but also honors the family that owns the song and the song's composer. The learning process, however, does not occur by any set method; instead, it happens over an extended period of time ("a few months") and by repeated exposure to more experienced singers. It also involves a significant amount of trial and error, and learning by making mistakes seems to be an important way by which expertise is gained. A prospective singer, then, has to accept his status as a beginner and be unafraid of failure.

This style of learning may seem foreign and nonsensical to those of us who are used to

the tight structure and definitive pattern of a school curriculum. Far from being ineffective, however, the apprenticeship of Gourd Dance singers yields impressive results. By the time he had written *The Power of Kiowa Song*, Luke Lassiter had become a respected head singer among the Southern Plains pow wow community, with song knowledge extending beyond the Gourd Dance. Singers store impressive amounts of information in their minds and can access pieces of it at will on any occasion. During our phone interviews, Tim Tieyah spontaneously sang, translated the words, and explained their meaning without referring to any source other than his memory. When I asked him how many songs he knows by heart, he answered that he knows about sixty to sixty-six Gourd Dance songs, and many more besides, including around 150 War Dance songs (about half of the total 300 songs in the War Dance repertoire), and songs from other dance traditions such as Oklahoma Straight Dance. Tieyah's knowledge extends beyond sound and lyric, however; he also knows the stories behind each song, to whom each song belongs, and when it would or would not be appropriate to sing at a ceremony. At a later point in the same interview, Tieyah sang part of a Straight Dance song and then translated the words: "I feel good, my spirit is strong, well-nourished. I feel good when I sing these songs. They're a blessing to me."

Tim Tieyah learned his songs from his grandfather, also named Timothy Tieyah. When Tim was eight, the elder Tieyah elected to teach him the language and traditions of his people. When his mother passed away, a Kiowa woman adopted him in an official adoption ceremony, and through her and other associations he learned Kiowa and Ponca traditions as well (Tim Tieyah, personal communication). Tieyah's story demonstrates another important aspect of the learning process, that of having a close relationships with a knowledgeable elder in order to gain an accurate understanding of traditions and culture. In Tieyah's case, several elders took him in and taught him tribal languages, songs, and stories. Lassiter (1998) also makes note of the importance of having a close, personal relationship with other older, more experienced singers, whose willingness to teach and availability to help set the context for learning (149).

Purpose of Gourd Dance

The spirit and vitality of the Gourd Dance tradition has contributed greatly to its popularity and accessibility to those who promote it. Based on my personal observation, even to those who know little about the tradition, performances of the Gourd Dance have the power to nurture the soul. People approach the dance with different expectations as to what they will hear and feel, but all seem to agree that it communicates wellbeing. Some attribute this effect to the Gourd

Dance's ability to transport one into the sacred or spiritual realm. Others, however, dislike referring to the tradition as "religious" and prefer to see it as a form of community, entertainment, and cultural expression. Still others find themselves somewhere in between, acknowledging that the dance has sacred properties while not assigning to it any particular religious meaning. The various ways in which people perceive the Gourd Dance affect their interpretation of its meaning and their motivations for attending or promoting ceremonies.

One source for the dance's religious connotations may be seen in the origin story. According to Tieyah's telling, Gourd Dance songs come from Creator as a gift mediated by the wolf. This version of the story strongly supports viewing the dance as a sacred tradition centered around song. The backbone of the Gourd Dance, according to Tieyah, is its religious nature, and the purpose of the dance is to give thanks to Creator for giving us life and song with which to praise Him. For others as well, the quality of song that most contributes to its life-giving power is that it comes from Creator (Lassiter, 1998, 135). Performing the Gourd Dance honors the gift of song by using it to thank Creator. It also allows Gourd Dance society members to pass along the gift to their community, building up a sense of wellbeing that comes from a personal encounter with the spiritual. The positive energy gained from a Gourd Dance ceremony strengthens the people's bonds to one another and enables them to practice their beliefs in a powerful way.

Song appears to be the conduit by which dancers, singers, and spectators experience the sacred. Tieyah routinely advocated this interpretation of the Gourd Dance in our conversations, stating, "Gourd Dance songs are about our elders, the Almighty, and how we came along as a people" (personal communication). He also characterized the dance as "spiritual" and a "blessing," and told me that a composer does not in fact "own" the song he or she composed. "That's why we say, this person composed that song, but nobody owns that song and nobody made that song. The Almighty gave that song to us." This last statement shows that it is believed that even today, every time a singer composes a song, he or she receives the inspiration from Creator.

Others do not feel that the word "sacred" adequately describes the Gourd Dance. Part of the disagreement stems from the fact that "sacred" has different connotations within and without Native American tradition. "In using exclusive applications of *sacred* or *religious*, academics and other outsiders may ignore the fact that these meanings are contested, situational, and multifaceted," says Lassiter (1998, 134). Outsiders frequently assign one specific meaning to religious traditions and another to secular activities, but to understand the Gourd Dance experience one must also consider that dancers may not make clear distinction between

spiritual and secular. In other words, the concepts may intersect and affect each other in ways that do not occur in other traditions. With these boundaries blurred, then, the Gourd Dance must be considered as complicated and multi-dimensional.

Participating in the Gourd Dance provides the community an opportunity to celebrate its cultural heritage in a well-kept and rich tradition. Ellis (2003), a longtime scholar of pow wow culture in Southern Oklahoma, observes of the annual Gourd Dance and pow wow held by the Kiowa Tiah-Piah Society during the Fourth of July festivities, "People gather to celebrate shared experiences through song and dance that maintain preciously guarded ways of life" (4). By promoting and sharing the Gourd Dance, people enable their heritage to continue playing a relevant role in their lives, which then feeds into the passing on of tradition to younger generations and outsiders. Native American symbolism and beliefs enrich the Gourd Dance, and to those who understand its purpose and effects, it reinforces and deepens their way of life despite living in a country dominated by Western values.

Singing Gourd Dance songs also gives many the opportunity to practice using the native languages in which they are written. Songs composed in the Kiowa language dominate the repertoire of "songs with words," since the Kiowa people have the strongest ties to the tradition, but some exist with Comanche words as well (Tim Tieyah, personal communication). Singing "songs without words" naturally does not provide the same chance to engage with the native language, although songs without words have their own significance, which does not suffer from lack of words.⁷ Learning the native languages of their tribes enables Native Americans to use it as a powerful tool for the preservation of their way of life as passed down by their elders. For this reason, singers such as Tim Tieyah advocate singing songs with words as often as possible. This is to honor the elder who composed the song a certain way (with words) and to contribute to the passing on of language (personal communication). For many Native Americans who practice their culture, language is all they have left over from the days of their elders, and therefore it is especially important (Lassiter, 1998, 128). Song is especially effective since it is such a powerful conduit for cultural expression.

Lassiter (1998) describes these two types of songs, those with words and those without words. Songs with words are said to have the same meaning as songs without words. The use of language adds a slight emphasis to the song, but does not make it more or less superior to songs without words (in the same way that vocal music and instrumental music are held in equal regard in the Western classical music tradition [Lassiter, 1998, 156]). Since language is believed by many to be a sacred gift from God, and languages differ between tribes, songs with words

have a tendency to create controversy more so than those without words, especially if the words are mispronounced or the singers don't know their precise meaning. In addition, many songs with words are owned by certain families, and it is considered disrespectful to sing them without permission of the family. This creates an area of thin ice in the drum world, and for Chip and Jimi Roberts, sometimes the best solution is to avoid it by singing songs without words. Their teacher, Tim Tieyah, wants them to sing the songs he's taught them with the words so that they can be preserved and heard by others. The Roberts mentioned that keeping a balance between their teacher's wishes and the community's sensibilities is sometimes difficult (personal communication).

Performance Controversies

Despite the popularity of the Gourd Dance among practitioners of Native American tradition, its spread has frequently resulted in its misrepresentation among communities outside of the KCA peoples of Southern Oklahoma. Organizations in and outside of the United States that have picked up on the tradition do not always implement its customs accurately, leading to performances of it that many among the KCA consider incorrect. Examples of inaccuracies include improper choices in song order, incorrect rendering of song language, inappropriateness in song selection, and misrepresentation of dance steps.

This issue came up many times in my conversations with Tim Tieyah. He informed me of places he had visited where he had seen the Gourd Dance performed with mistakes that he feels diminish the tradition. Among the Navajo in the Southwest, for example, he witnessed ceremonies in which the singers mixed up the initial song order that he had told me about (Calling Song, etc.). Elsewhere, he heard drum groups attempt to perform the Gourd Dance using a limited song repertoire. Some groups, like the Eagle Ridge Singers directed by Chip and Jimi Roberts, he took under his wing to teach them the correct songs, steps, and guidelines for the dance. These situations created opportunities for him as an elder to reach out to groups outside of the KCA area and spread awareness of a tradition he believes to be extremely important to his people.

While the Gourd Dance's misappropriation can occur for a variety of reasons, differences of opinion over the interpretation of the tradition can lead to debates even among Gourd Dance societies in Southern Oklahoma over what constitutes a "correct" performance. During the first days of the Gourd Dance revival in Southern Oklahoma, disagreements developed in the Kiowa Gourd Clan over who could be a member of the society, leading to the formation of the Kiowa

Tia-Piah Society of Oklahoma in 1962. The Tia-Piah Society invited a more integrated membership so that Kiowa families who had intermarried could still participate in the dance (a radical move at the time). Both societies still exist today and promote their individual philosophies while still supporting each other. According to Lassiter (1998), antagonism and conflict of this sort commonly occurs among societies, although in the past it was more divisive (120-2).

Not all individuals outside of the KCA area perform the Gourd Dance incorrectly. Some, such as Chip and Jimi Roberts of the Eagle Ridge Singers, have the approval of Tim Tieyah and other Kiowa and Comanche elders because they have learned the dance correctly and perform it with the right spirit. Their desire to learn the songs and spirit of the tradition stems from a dislike of "playing Indian," a behavior that they identify as taking the surface artifacts of Native American life, such as wearing feathers and making music with drums, without delving deeper into the lifestyle that informs these traditions (personal communication). They also acknowledge that they are borrowing the tradition from a culture other than their own, and they wish to borrow it correctly to pay respect to their teachers and to the society from which it originates.

One way they show their desire to learn correctly is the way in which they seek the approval of the elders who teach them. The Roberts described a memorable occasion in which Tim Tieyah invited them down to Oklahoma to show his fellow drums what he had been teaching them. They attended a ceremony and used the songs they had learned, and left with Tieyah's and the other elders' blessing to continue performing in Illinois. Later, when they felt they had to stop singing for a time, they first sought Tieyah's permission, knowing that they had a responsibility to continue if he wanted them to. Only after they received his blessing did they stop singing for a time (personal communication). Even at a distance, they felt obligated to respect Tieyah's desires because they were carrying on his culture's tradition.

Conclusion

The complexities of song meaning and power within the Gourd Dance provide an excellent field for the discussion of the practicing of Native American values in modern times. Looking critically at how groups represent the tradition to each other and to outsiders can provide a wealth of information about what it means to pass on a tradition from one group to the next without tainting or confusing it. The Gourd Dance narrative can be seen as a case study in a larger, ongoing story. As Native American values resurge, develop, and react to the circumstances of modern society, it becomes all the more relevant to look at how they can be

expressed through ceremonies such as the Gourd Dance so that they are not forced to alter in response to misapplication.

This paper does not address many questions about the Gourd Dance that could be explored in further research. The formation and maintenance of Gourd Dance societies among the KCA is only briefly touched upon, and another study might take a more in depth look at how and why societies form, what kinds of disagreements can cause divisions among the members, and why in spite of large differences in philosophy, these societies still support one another. What elements do members disagree on, and what in their eyes makes the ceremonies of a rival society worth supporting? This paper also takes a critical glance at the Gourd Dance's misrepresentation among some groups, but it does not delve too deeply into the details of the subject, leading to further questions such as what makes a ceremony "correct" and what makes it "incorrect?" What reasons exist for people to perform the Gourd Dance incorrectly, and how can such situations be rectified? What do singers such as Tim Tieyah have to say about what makes these performances "wrong?" Another area of research that could be explored much more extensively is the spread of the Gourd Dance overseas to Germany, Hawaii, and Canada. It would be interesting to learn who has established the dance in these places and how it came to practiced there.

The dissemination of the Gourd Dance has been influenced by a growing desire among Native Americans to affirm and assert their identity in a society that advocates Western values. The practice of Native American dance and song at Gourd Dance ceremonies gives groups the opportunity to express their heritage in powerful and meaningful ways. When properly acquired, the Gourd Dance also gives societies outside of the KCA area an opportunity to participate in the sharing of an intertribal culture, aided by a tradition with a rich and vibrant heritage.

Notes

1. Throughout the course of this paper, unless used in a title or quote, I spell "pow wow" as two separate words instead of the traditional one-word spelling "powwow." This is out of deference to one of my consultants, Tim Tieyah, who told me that "pow wow" has two words and comes from an Algonquin people's language. Its meaning, according to Mr. Tieyah, is a "gathering of elders" (personal communication, Nov. 14, 2012).
2. "Intertribal" refers to customs and beliefs that cross tribal boundaries and could be said to apply to several distinct groups of Native American people. A common substitute for intertribal is "Pan-Indianism," but this word communicates the formation of a new ethnic group that makes no distinction between tribal boundaries and therefore is not appropriate to use in the context of pow wow traditions (Ellis & Lassiter & Dunham, 2005, ix).
3. A "drum" can be the actual instrument used by singers to keep time with the song; it can also refer to the group itself, comprised of the instrument and the singers. Being "at the drum" means joining a drum group and singing at ceremonies.
4. Collaborative ethnography does have detractors, particularly those who criticize its tendency to "relativize" discourse, placing it in a subjective rather than objective context. Researchers who use collaborative ethnography can seem like they are opting out of any voice of authority in the presentation of their work, and the presence of multiple voices can have a blunting effect on the results of a study (Tyler, 1986, 127).
5. The word "lost" has special significance to my Comanche consultant, elder Tim Tieyah. To him, something lost can never be found again. In terms of tribal customs, a lost tradition is one that has been forgotten irrevocably. Therefore, he would never consider the Gourd Dance to be a "lost" practice.
6. The pow wow circle, also called the pow wow circuit or trail, refers to the ceremonies held every weekend in different locations throughout the Southern Plains. People will often go on the pow wow trail in the spring and summer and travel to pow wows in different cities every week.
7. In other published works on Native American music, songs without words are said to be sung with "nonsense syllables," or "vocables." I avoid using these terms in an effort to bypass their implication that songs without words have no meaning because they use "nonsense" words instead of "real" language.

References

- (December 31, 2009). Little Ponies Plan Pow wow. Retrieved from <http://chickashanews.com/local/x546096239/Little-Ponies-plan-pow-wow>
- (January 17, 2010). The Last Gourd Dance song of the night [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.myspace.com/comanchelittleponies/blog/526193715>.
- (February 24, 2011). Cozad, Gourd Dance 1 BEST 2011 Comanche Community Ctr [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2GBkiK46wY>.
- (May 14, 2012). Gourd Dance (2) BEST 2012 Comanche Little Pony [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzElGcJW3cY>.
- Aldred, Lisa. (2005) "Dancing with Indians and Wolves: New Agers Tripping Through Powwows." *Powwow*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 258-274.
- Browner, Tara (2004) *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-wow*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press
- Eggers, Randall. Personal interview. Edwards, IL, 16 September.
- Ellis, Clyde (1990) "'Truly Dancing Their Way': The modern revival and diffusion of the Gourd Dance." Theme issue, *American Indian Quarterly*, 14(1).
- Ellis, Clyde (2003) *A Dancing People: Powwow Culture on the Southern Plains*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas
- Ellis, Clyde. (2005) "The Sound of the Drum Will Revive Them and Make Them Happy." *Powwow*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 3-25.
- Ellis, Clyde, Luke Eric Lassiter, and Gary H. Dunham, ed. (2005). *Powwow*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Gilley, Brian Joseph. (2005). "Two-Spirit Powwows and the Search for Social Acceptance in Indian Country." *Powwow*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 224-240.
- Kavanagh, Thomas W. (1993) "Southern Plains Dance: Tradition and Dynamism." *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions*. Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian with Starwood Publishing, Inc.
- King, C. and Charles Fruehling Springwood. (2000). "Choreographing Colonialism: Athletic Mascots, (Dis)embodied Indians, and Euro-American Subjectivities." *Cultural Studies: A Research Annual*, 5. JAI Press, 191-222.
- Kracht, Benjamin R. (1994) "Kiowa Practices: Continuity in Ritual Practice." Theme issue, *American Indian Quarterly* 18(3).
- Lakota, Carol. 2012. Personal interview. Bloomington, IL, 13 September.

- Lassiter, Luke E. (1998) *The Power of Kiowa Song: A Collaborative Ethnography*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press
- Lassiter, Luke E. and Clyde Ellis (1998) "Applying communitas to Kiowa powwows." Theme issue, *American Indian Quarterly*, 22(4).
- Mattern, Mark. (1999) "The Powwow as a Public Arena for Negotiating Unity and Diversity in American Indian Life." *Contemporary Native American Cultural Issues*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 129-144.
- Ridington, Robin, Dennis Hastings, and Tommy Attachie. (2005) "The Songs of our Elders: Performance and Cultural Survival in Omaha and Dane-zaa Traditions." *Powwow*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska press, 110-129.
- Roberts, Chip. 2012. Personal interview. Edwards, IL, 3 November.
- Roberts, Jimi. 2012. Personal interview. Edwards, IL, 3 November.
- Theisz, R. D. (2005) "Putting Things in Order: The Discourse of Tradition." *Powwow*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 85-109.
- Tieyah, Tim. Telephone conversation, 4 November.
 -----. Telephone conversation, 15 November.
 -----. Telephone conversation, 17 November.
 -----. Telephone conversation, 21 November.
 -----. Telephone conversation, 4 January.
- Torrie, Jeremy (2004) *Powwow Trail - Episode 1: The Drum*. 50 min. Arbor Records Ltd. Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Tyler, Stephen A. "Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document." *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 122-140.
- Warren, Laura (2003) "Central Illinois Powwow Community: A Unique Path of Creation, Cultivation, and Connection to American Indian Culture, Identities, and Community." Masters thesis, Southern Illinois University.
- Watchman, Renae Watchman. (2011). "Powwow Overseas: The German Experience." *Powwow*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 241-257.