# Part I

# A Woman's World

The Cherokees lived in the fertile valleys of the southern Appalachians. Archaeologists think that their ancestors had built villages along the region's rapidly flowing creeks and rivers for thousands of years and that since about A.D. 1000, they had grown corn in the rich alluvial soil.[1] The Cherokees believed that they always had lived there and that their ancestral mother, Selu, had given them the corn on which they depended for subsistence.[2] They conceived of their world as a system of categories that opposed and balanced one another. In this belief system, women balanced men just as summer balanced winter, plants balanced animals, and farming balanced hunting. Peace and prosperity depended on the maintenance of boundaries between these opposing categories, and blurring the lines between them threatened disaster.[3] Such rigidity may well offend modern sensibilities conditioned to expect equal opportunity and to seek the destruction of gender barriers. The balance that Cherokees sought to achieve between their categories and, in particular, between men and women may not have permitted equality in a modern sense, but their concern with balance made hierarchy, which often serves to oppress women, untenable. Men did not dominate women, and women were not subservient to men. Men knew little about the world of women; they had no power over women and no control over women's activities. Women had their own arena of power, and any threat to its integrity jeopardized cosmic order. So it had been since the beginning of time.

Among the first inhabitants of the world, according to a Cherokee myth recorded by the nineteenth-century anthropologist James Mooney, were a hunter named Kana'ti and his wife, Selu.[4] They had one son whom they often heard playing with a mysterious child who came from the river. The parents conspired with their son to capture his playmate and bring him home to live with them. Although Kana'ti and Selu tamed the child from

the river, he was often unruly and mischievous, and so they called him "Wild Boy."[5]

In this family, Kana'ti provided the meat and Selu contributed corn and beans, but no one else knew the source of the food. One day the boys followed Kana'ti into the forest and discovered that he kept the game in a hole. They secretly watched their father release a buck from the hole, shoot it with an arrow, and take it home for dinner. The next day the boys tried to imitate Kana'ti, but they became excited and confused, and they accidentally allowed all the animals to escape. As a result, according to the myth, Kana'ti and all men who followed him on earth have had to hunt throughout the forest for game to feed their families.

The boys returned home hungry, and so Selu went to the storehouse to get corn and beans for their dinner. At Wild Boy's instigation, they spied on her and discovered that by rubbing her stomach and armpits she filled a basket with corn and beans. They decided that she was a witch who must be killed. Selu knew their thoughts and, reconciled to her fate, told them: "When you have killed me, clear a large piece of ground in front of the house and drag my body seven times around the circle. Then drag me seven times over the ground inside the circle, and stay up all night and watch, and in the morning you will have plenty of corn."

The boys killed Selu and began following her instructions. They grew tired, and instead of clearing all the ground in front of the house, they prepared only seven spots, which explains why corn grows only in a few places in the world. They began to drag Selu's body over the circle, and from her blood sprang corn. Failing once again to follow their mother's instructions, the boys dragged her body only twice over the circle, and so the Indians still cultivate their corn but twice a year. The boys did watch the corn all night and in the morning it was ripe. Strangers came to get some of the grain, which was unknown to all other peoples, and the boys told them to plant the kernels and stay awake each night of their return trip. For six nights, they followed these instructions, and each morning they had ripened corn. On the last night of their journey, however, the strangers went to sleep and the corn did not sprout. Consequently, Indians must tend their crops carefully through half the year instead of for just one night.

When Kana'ti returned home and discovered what the boys had done, he vowed to leave home and go to the Wolf people. Wild Boy changed himself into a tuft of down that fell onto Kana'ti's shoulder so that he could eavesdrop when Kana'ti arrived at the council house of the Wolf people. The Wolves admitted Kana'ti to their council and agreed to his

request that they "play ball" against his "two bad boys"—that is, kill the miscreants. Because Wild Boy knew the plan, the boys were able to outsmart the Wolf people and defeat them.

They waited for their father, but he did not return home. After a while, they went in search of him. They finally caught up with Kana'ti and joined him on his journey where they had adventures with a panther and with cannibals, but ultimately the boys lost sight of him. Then they came to the end of the world. They waited until dawn when the sky rose up to let the sun out, and they slipped through to the other side: "There they found Kana'ti and Selu sitting together." In the upper world, beyond the solid vault of the sky, man and woman sat side by side. In the realm of past time, predictability, and perfection, harmony and balance were restored.

Just how long Kana'ti and Selu had been living in the upper world when Europeans arrived is unknown. Cherokees in the eighteenth century, however, constructed gender and created community based on the principles embodied in their account of Kana'ti and Selu. The concept of balance was central to their perceptions of self and society, and the responsibility for maintaining balance fell to men and women. We can discover how they fulfilled this responsibility by paying attention to what the men and women described in historical documents did. By taking Kana'ti and Selu as our reference point in reading these documents, we can learn a great deal about the world of Cherokee women, the lives that they lived, and the ways in which they bonded with others.

ONE

# Constructing Gender

The myth of Kana'ti and Selu provided the Cherokees with an explanation for why men and women in their society lived the way they did, occupying separate categories that opposed and balanced each other. Cherokee men and women performed different tasks, followed different rules of behavior, and engaged in different rituals. They knew little about each other's lives because any intrusion, any crossing of boundaries, involved a certain amount of danger. Yet men and women lived together in villages, they joked with each other, they made love, they shared houses and children, and they joined together in celebrating the harvest. On occasion, men could be found in fields, the realm of women, and sometimes women went on the winter hunt or even to war, normal pursuits of men. But Cherokees always understood their society in more absolute terms and tried to conform to those expectations.

Like their progenitors, the Cherokees divided labor according to gender. Men hunted because the first man had been responsible for providing his family with meat. Women farmed because Selu first gave birth to corn in the storehouse and then became the source of corn, which the Cherokees called *selu,* for all Indians. Men helped clear fields and plant crops, but the primary responsibility for agriculture rested with women. When women accompanied men on the winter hunt, they confined their activities to gathering nuts and firewood, cooking for the hunters, and perhaps preparing skins. By modern standards, such a division of labor was not very efficient. Men spent many summer hours gambling, smoking, or talking while women worked in the fields. And in winter, most women stayed in warm winter houses while men traveled great distances in bitter cold to search for game. But the Cherokees were not particularly concerned with the optimum utilization of their labor supply because for them, tasks involved far more than the production of commodities. A person's job was

an aspect of his or her sexuality, a source of economic and political power, and an affirmation of cosmic order and balance.

Theoretically, the sexual division of labor was very rigid, but in reality, men and women often willingly helped one another. Men assisted in several agricultural chores including the arduous task of clearing fields and harvesting the crops. The men chopped down saplings with stone hatchets and burned the underbrush. From large trees they stripped away bark, which they used in constructing houses. When the trees died as a result of this girdling, the Cherokees either burned them or waited for them to fall so that they could use the wood for fires.[1]

Although they did not hoe and weed, Cherokee men helped women plant the large fields that lay on the outskirts of their towns. Nineteenth-century missionary Daniel Butrick, who was unusually interested in traditional Cherokee practices, wrote: "Anciently it was common for a whole town to inclose a large field, in which each family had its particular share, separated by some known marks. In this all the town, men and women, worked together, first in one part and then in another, according to the direction of one whom they had selected to manage the business, and whom, in this respect, they called their leader."[2] The trader James Adair identified this leader as "an old beloved man," or priest, who appointed a day for planting after the wild fruit and berries had ripened sufficiently to entice the birds away from the corn. No one was exempt from labor in the fields at planting, and Adair noted that he had seen "many war-chieftains working in common with the people." According to Adair, the laborers actually enjoyed this annual event: "About an hour after sunrise, they enter the field agreed on by lot, and fall to work with great cheerfulness; sometimes one of their orators cheers them with jests and humorous old tales, and sings several of their most agreeable wild tunes, beating also with a stick in his right hand, on top of an earthen pot covered with a wet and well-stretched deer-skin: thus they proceed from field to field, till their seed is sown."[3]

The Cherokees grew two types of corn in their large fields—a flinty multicolored "hominy corn" and a white-grain "flour corn." They planted these varieties in hills about a yard apart by dropping seven kernels into a small hole. They usually planted beans close to the corn so that the stalks could support the vines. Between the hills, they grew squash, gourds, pumpkins, sunflowers, watermelons, potatoes, and peas.[4] After the first cultivation of crops, either a priest or the head of the household stood at the edge of the field at the cardinal points and wept loudly, perhaps for the death of Selu. At the final cultivation, the owner of the field, either ac-

companied by a spiritual leader or alone, built an enclosure in the center of the field and sang songs to the spirit of the corn. In late summer or fall, men and women once again joined together in the fields to harvest their produce.[5]

Except for ashes from burning underbrush, the Cherokees did not fertilize their fields. Consequently even the rich alluvial soil they farmed eventually became unproductive. As late as the nineteenth century, missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions observed: "When they have exhausted a field by planting it with corn, they know nothing of recruiting it, by sowing other grains and laying it down to grass, and for lack of this knowledge, they are either working their old fields to very little profit, or forsaking them to open new ones." Even so, the soil's natural fertility apparently sustained crops far longer than was acknowledged by the American Board missionaries, who usually had to buy corn from the Indians. The Moravians reported: "Our field which has been used for 30 years still grows an excellent crop of corn."[6] Complementary plantings of corn, which removes nitrogen from the soil, and beans, which replace nitrogen, helped preserve fertility.[7]

Between planting and harvest, the men retired from agriculture and the women assumed total responsibility. Women not only tended the crops in the large fields but also planted smaller gardens near their homes. These they fenced, at least in historic times, with hickory or oak saplings tied to stakes. In their "kitchen gardens" the women cultivated a third kind of corn, which was smaller than field corn and ripened in only two months, and they grew beans, peas, and other vegetables.[8]

Most non-Native observers minimized the effort required to cultivate fields and gardens. According to Lieutenant Henry Timberlake, Cherokee territory was a veritable Eden, "the soil requiring only a little stirring with a hoe to produce whatever is required of it."[9] Adair attributed the brief time women seemed to invest in cultivation to their work habits: "They often let the weeds out-grow the corn, before they begin in earnest with their work."[10] Louis-Philippe, who toured the Cherokee country in 1796 when he was a refugee from the French Revolution, wrote that they dug only the weeds close enough to choke the plant, "but seeing the fields that result, one would not believe that they had been cultivated at all."[11] Women hoed with a sharpened stick or stone mattock, implements that encouraged them to be relatively tolerant of weeds.

Although they probably spent far more time farming than European men credited them with, women did have other means for supplying their

families with the earth's bounty. In particular, Cherokee women were prodigious gatherers. In the fall, they burned the underbrush in the woods and collected vast quantities of nuts, which they used in bread or for oil. In summer, they picked berries and fruit. Throughout the year, they relied on wild plants for seeds, leaves (which were never eaten raw), roots, and stems to add variety to their diet and to tide them over in case provisions ran out before the harvest or the corn crop failed. The women searched for bee trees and collected honey, and they made sugar from maple sap. Benjamin Hawkins, the United States Indian agent, observed Cherokee women using "small wood troughs, and earthen pans to ketch the sap, and large pots for boilers in making sugar."[12]

The responsibility for ensuring a bountiful harvest fell to women. If the Cherokees experienced a drought, the women summoned a priest who tried to produce rain.[13] In addition to ensuring favorable growing conditions, women were also responsible for protecting the crops from predators, one of the most dangerous and demanding chores associated with farming. In the outlying fields, the Cherokees built large scaffolds from which they could watch for crows and raccoons. The task of sitting alone on the scaffolds all summer, the season for war, fell to elderly women, whose vigilance Adair described: "This usually is the duty of the old women, who fret at the very shadow of a crow, when he chances to pass in his wide survey of the fields; but if pinching hunger should excite him to descend, they soon frighten him away with their screeches." Introduction of livestock by Europeans made the work of these sentinels more difficult. The Cherokees thought that fencing fields—"childishly confining their improvements, as if the crop would eat itself"—was ridiculous and a waste of time. When they acquired livestock in the eighteenth century, they permitted the animals to forage for food. As a result, the women had to tether any cows or horses that were near the large fields and pen all hogs.[14] Animals that persisted in escaping and damaging the crops incurred the wrath of the women. In the late eighteenth century, a Moravian missionary reported with some horror: "No cattle are kept except by the traders; for if a Beast comes into the Fields they are used to shoot it."[15]

Because of their association with and involvement in agriculture, it is not surprising that women were also the cooks in Cherokee society. They prepared food in the morning, and since Cherokees had no formal meals but ate when hungry, they simply set it out for whoever wanted to eat. European opinion of Cherokee cuisine varied. John Howard Payne, who visited them in the nineteenth century, thought the Cherokees to be "among the

best cooks in the world," whereas James Adair complained that they overcooked meat and boiled eggs until they resembled bullets.[16]

Europeans did agree, however, that corn was the staple in the Indian diet and that the variety of corn dishes was amazing. Although the Cherokees ate some fresh, or green, vegetables in summer, they allowed most of their corn and beans to dry in the fields. They could then store vegetables in cribs and use them throughout the winter. They soaked dried beans in water and then boiled them. To render dried corn palatable, the women soaked it in lye made from wood ashes, which removed the husks. Then they used a mortar and pestle instead of a mill to grind their meal. The mortar was constructed of a large log in which a bowl was formed by chopping and burning one end. The upper end of the pestle was much larger than the pounding end in order to give it weight. They considered meal made from this corn "not only a luxury, but a great support to nature," and they used it for a variety of breads.[17]

To bake bread, the women placed dough on a clay or stone hearth and then heaped coals over the loaf, which was sometimes covered with a pot, basket, or leaves. Cherokee women also boiled small loaves of bread wrapped in corn leaves. Usually bread contained ingredients other than corn, in particular chestnuts, beans, and pumpkin. The most common method of eating bread was to dip it in bear grease or oil made from hickory nuts, acorns, or black walnuts.[18] The women prepared a beverage from fine cornmeal and water, which they let sour and then drank cold. Sometimes they added other ingredients to this broth and served it as a soup. A favorite combination was parched cornmeal and grapes, but they also added beans, hickory nuts, or black walnuts.[19]

A Moravian missionary described a meal consisting of two kinds of soup and bread: "The women had prepared a supper for us. In a large earthen vessel, made by themselves, a cold soup of honey-locust pods and in another sour corn-broth were served. The whole company used a large wood spoon, which was passed down the row. The procedure was very informal. One ate awhile and then, perhaps, warmed himself in between. The locust broth had a sweet, but wild, taste. The bread made of corn and beans, and which consisted by more than half of whole black beans, was pleasant to the taste."[20]

The Cherokees roasted some vegetables, particularly sliced pumpkins, and most meat over open fires. They also parboiled green corn and then roasted the ears. Often corn prepared in this manner was subsequently boiled with venison or other meat. Generally, however, the Cherokees bar-

becued rather than boiled meat and fish. They particularly enjoyed bear fat cut into small pieces, stuck on sassafras skewers, which imparted a sweet taste, and then cooked over a slow fire. They also dried venison over embers or in the sun and then dipped the pieces in oil before eating them.[21]

Cherokee women made a variety of other things not directly related to food but necessary to the well-being of their households or for their own pleasure. They made their cooking utensils and other pottery from native clay.[22] Vessels included pitchers, bowls, dishes, basins, and platters. Adair said that "their method of glazing them, is, they place them over a large fire of smoky pitch pine, which makes them smooth, black and firm."[23] The black color of Cherokee pottery led a Moravian to remark that it "looks like the iron Ware from the Foundaries."[24] Cherokee women constructed baskets, which served as containers and sieves, out of river or swamp cane, which they cut into strips.[25] Adair found their double-weave baskets particularly attractive: "They make the handsomest clothes baskets, I ever saw, considering their materials. They divide large swamp canes, into long, thin, narrow splinters, which they dye of several colours, and manage the workmanship so well, that both the inside and outside are covered with a beautiful variety of pleasing figures; and, though for the space of two inches below the upper edges of each basket, it is worked into one, through the other parts they are worked asunder, as if they were joined atop by strong cement." Dyes for baskets included bloodroot, walnut bark, and butternut. Rectangular baskets, according to Adair, usually measured about three feet long, a foot and a half wide, and a foot deep.[26]

Adair observed: "The women are the chief, if not the only manufacturers; the men judge that if they performed that office, it would exceedingly depreciate them."[27] In addition to baskets and pots, gourds and skins served as containers. Women hollowed out large bottle gourds for carrying water. For storing oil and honey, they turned whole deerskins into flasks by cutting off the head and feet and sewing up all openings except the neck which served as "the nose of the bottle."[28] Women made their clothing from a number of materials, including buffalo hair they collected after the animals had shed, which they wove into garments and pouches. Deerskins as well as fabrics made of hemp and mulberry bark were sewn into clothing with bone needles and thread of sinew. For their houses, women wove cane mats and hemp carpets, which they painted bright colors. They also probably carved the soapstone (steatite) pipes they smoked incessantly.[29] Women provided wood and water for their households. William Bartram

noted that women "undergo a good deal of labor . . . cutting and bringing home the winter's wood."[30] Women also always carried the water, and "it was considered disgraceful for men and boys to be seen carrying water," probably because carrying water, associated with fertility, was a gender-specific task.[31]

As the farmers, cooks, and "chief manufacturers," Cherokee women had relatively little free time. Even in the winter they had to keep the fire going, prepare food, and make any items they could indoors. In addition, some women followed the men on long hunts lasting three or four months in order to perform their customary chores—carrying water, gathering wood, and cooking. Consequently, it is not surprising that Europeans generally believed Cherokee women to be victims of male exploitation. Bernard Romans, who traveled through the Southeast in the eighteenth century, reported: "A savage has the most determined resolution against labouring or tilling the ground, the slave his wife must do that."[32] Louis-Philippe, who visited the Cherokees in 1797 long before he became king of France, also was appalled at what he supposed to be the degraded condition of the women: "The Indians have all the work done by the women. They are assigned not only household tasks, even the corn, peas, and beans, and potatoes are planted, tended, and preserved by the women. The man smokes peacefully while the woman grinds corn in the mortar."[33] It was certainly true that beyond their help at planting and harvesting, Cherokee men had no role in cultivating gardens or fields, a circumstance Europeans attributed to the men's laziness. Native people in the Southeast tried to excuse themselves to a disapproving James Adair for this "long-contracted habit and practice" by explaining that between planting and harvest "the men improve this time, either in killing plenty of wild game, or coursing against the common enemy."[34]

John Norton, a Mohawk who came to the Cherokee Nation in 1810 to visit relatives, was more understanding. Norton readily admitted that Cherokee men were "not so remarkable for steady industry" as were women, but their obligations to the community differed from those of women. Norton explained the contribution of men in his journal: "The Chace was the field of industry for man; and the only necessary preparation was to have his quiver filled with arrows, or, latterly, to provide himself with a gun and ammunition and to arrive at his hunting ground in season. . . . Should the voice of glory, or the defence of the Nation, call them to the field, the talents which hunting has improved, are there

exerted in a higher degree." Norton assured his readers that during the hunting season or in times of war, "there are no symptoms of laziness, or an indolent disposition."[35]

While Norton defended the behavior of men, the missionary Butrick made a remarkable observation on Cherokee women's attitude toward the apparently inequitable division of labor: "Though custom attached the heaviest part of the labour to the women, yet they were cheerful and voluntary in performing it. What others may have discovered among the Indians I cannot tell, but though I have been about nineteen years among the Cherokees, I have perceived nothing of that slavish, servile fear, on the part of women, so often spoke of."[36] Perhaps women willingly performed most of the work in Cherokee society because they also controlled the fruits of their labor, the crops; the means of production, the land; and ultimately, the result of production, the children.

The primary landholding unit in Cherokee society was the household, and the produce from the household's fields went into its own crib. A household consisted of an extended family linked by women, typically an elderly woman, her daughters and their children, the women's husbands, and any unmarried sons. Married sons did not live in the household. They resided with their own wives because the Cherokees were matrilocal; that is, husbands and children lived in the households of their wives and mothers. A husband and wife, therefore, occupied buildings belonging to the wife, or rather to the wife's family, and marriage did not alter a woman's right to her property. An anonymous writer commented: "The property of husband and wife . . . is as distinct as that of any other individuals, they have scarcely anything in common."[37] According to Bartram, "Marriage gives no right to the husband over the property of his wife."[38] Such an arrangement gave women control over the crops they produced and a proprietary interest in their houses and fields.

Women also tilled the soil because it was their responsibility, a task they performed as part of their sexual as well as social identity. Although biology plays a major role in defining gender in modern society, Cherokees traditionally took a much broader view of gender identity. A common early-nineteenth-century marriage ceremony symbolized the centrality of task to the construction of gender. In 1819 the missionary Cephas Washburn described a Cherokee wedding: "The groom and bride now commence stepping towards each other, and they meet in the middle of the council house, the groom presents his venison, and the bride her corn, and the blankets are united. This ceremony put into words is a promise on

the part of the man that he will provide meat for his family, and on the woman's part that she will furnish bread, and on the part of both that they will occupy the same bed."[39] Similarly, the Cherokee inquired about the sex of an infant by asking, "Is it a bow or a (meal) sifter?" or "Is it ballsticks or bread?"[40]

The connection between women and corn gave women considerable status and economic power because the Cherokees depended heavily on that crop for subsistence. John Norton believed that the relative proportion of meat in the Cherokee diet was so low that game "killed for this purpose did not perhaps equal the natural increase in the temperate climates." James Edward Oglethorpe, the founder of Georgia, reported that the Cherokees were "more accustom'd to labour and live upon corn, then to procure their sustenance by hunting." Certainly corn was the preferred food, particularly by those who faced competition or danger. Warriors carried only parched corn, and the Cherokee excluded from the ball game any who had recently consumed meat because they could not "endure hardships and bear up under fatigue." Menstruating women took only a little hominy, while pregnant women generally avoided meat. Apparently, therefore, the Cherokees considered meat to be more debilitating than corn and its consumption problematic for those who faced various kinds of trials.[41] In the seventeenth century before the advent of the deerskin trade, hunting conceivably had become so insignificant to the Cherokee economy that it was largely ritualistic. Traditional Cherokee ceremonial life may, in fact, reflect the relative importance of agriculture and hunting: most public ceremonies, and in particular the Green Corn Ceremony, were associated with farming; none related directly to the chase.[42]

The association of women with corn found expression in the Cherokees' most important community ritual, the Green Corn Ceremony, which placed women squarely in the center of Cherokee religion. Originally, the Cherokees observed festivals at various stages of corn development, but in the historic era, they held their major celebration in July or August when the corn was first edible. They did not eat any of the new crop until they had performed the appropriate rites. The Green Corn Ceremony also became the occasion for the forgiveness of debts, grudges, adultery, and all crimes except murder. According to oral tradition, in an earlier era, disputes and crimes that could not be settled by the families involved, with the exception of murder, found resolution at the "annual feast of propitiation and cementation." All wrongs were forgiven; retribution was arranged; unhappy spouses were released from their marital bonds. This

ceremony forced restoration of internal order whether or not the parties desired reconciliation.[43] This separate feast became subsumed in the Green Corn Ceremony, and corn became emblematic of community harmony.

The Cherokees began the ceremony with a feast and a rigorous cleaning of the town's public structures and square ground, or plaza. The men swept the council house, made new seating mats, built brush arbors, painted and whitewashed public buildings, carried out the ashes from the council house's central hearth, and covered the square ground with new dirt. The women cleaned their own houses, disposed of ashes, washed their cooking vessels and utensils, and discarded any food left from the preceding year, an act Adair believed "helped greatly to promote a spirit of hospitality" throughout the year.[44] From the previous year's crop, they saved only seven ears of corn that had been put aside "in order to attract the corn until the new crop was ripened."[45]

When everything was in order, the warriors and "beloved women" retired to the square ground where they fasted for two nights and one day. Sentinels prevented other women, children, and "worthless fellows who have not hazarded their lives" from entering the square. Those beyond the bounds only fasted until the sun reached its zenith. During the fast, the beloved women brewed and served warriors sacred medicine that acted as an emetic, purging their bodies of spiritual as well as physical pollution. At the end of the fast, the women brought samples of the new crop to the square ground and washed common utensils. On a freshly swept hearth, the community's spiritual leader kindled a new fire and placed in the fire corn given him by a beloved woman. All those seeking forgiveness could now come forward without fear of retaliation or reprisal. The medicine man called all the women to the fire, spoke to them about their obligations, and gave them new fire to take to their homes. When the women returned to the square ground, everyone joined together in dancing and singing. They feasted on the new crop, which could be eaten safely for the first time, but they were careful not to blow on it to cool it "for fear of causing a wind storm to beat down the standing crop in the field." Finally, they painted themselves with a white clay symbolizing peace and prosperity and ritually bathed in the river.[46]

The Green Corn Ceremony marked the social and spiritual regeneration of the community, and the role of women in the ceremony symbolized that which they played in Cherokee society. Selu was not only the first woman; she also was the spirit of the corn. By honoring the corn, Cherokees paid homage to women. The social renewal that accompanied the Green Corn

Ceremony connected the corn to the community and women to rebirth and reconciliation. Most women observed the occasion separately from men—as indeed they lived most of their lives apart from men—and we know little about their separate ceremonies. Beloved women, however, entered the square ground and joined the men in fasting and purification. They also performed the central act of the ceremony, the presentation of the new crop, corn that, like Selu, linked the present to the past and bound Cherokees to one another.

A communitarian ethic pervaded Cherokee life. The effort to reconcile aggrieved people at the Green Corn Ceremony was one manifestation; another was the redistributive aspects of the Cherokee economy. In a redistributive economy, the people contribute a portion of their goods and produce for the welfare of the community, a kind of voluntary taxation. The naturalist William Bartram described the harvest: "Each gathers the produce of his own proper lot, brings it to town, and deposits it in his own crib, allotting a certain portion for the Public Granary."[47] Cherokee redistribution was not as highly structured or as formalized as that found among other Native people in the Southeast, who depended on their chief to redistribute a portion of the hunt or harvest.[48] Among the Cherokees, women seem to have handled redistribution. Each household set aside part of the harvest to feed visitors, to provide for feasts, and to aid those whose crops failed. By the end of the eighteenth century, women also held special dances "twice a year or oftener" in which participants made contributions for "Use of the Poor who suffer Want."[49]

Community well-being depended on the maintenance of spiritual purity, which often manifested itself in temporal benefits. The Cherokees did not separate spiritual and physical realms but regarded them as one, and they practiced their religion in a host of private daily observances as well as in public ceremonies. Purification rituals cured and prevented disease and prepared people for war, hunting, fishing, planting, housecleaning, childbirth, and other worldly undertakings. The focus of ceremonies, however, was a spiritual cleansing, and the "medicine" Cherokees consumed during these rituals addressed spiritual as well as physical ills. Lieutenant Henry Timberlake, a member of a British garrison at Fort Loudoun in what is today east Tennessee, witnessed a "physic-dance" in which women played a central role:

> A vessel of their own make, that might contain twenty gallons (there being a great many to take the medicine) was set on the fire, round which stood several goards

filled with river-water, which was poured into the pot; this done, there arose one of the beloved women, who opening a deer skin filled with various roots and herbs, took out a small handful of something like fine salt; part of which she threw on the headman's seat, and part into the fire close to the pot; she then took out the wing of a swan, and after flourishing it over the pot, stood fixed for near a minute, muttering something to herself; then taking a shrub-like laurel (which I suppose was the physic) she threw it into the pot, and returned to her former seat.

A lull in activity followed the mixing of the medicine, and so Timberlake took a walk. When he returned some time later, he discovered that a great throng had assembled. They danced around the pot of "physic" for about an hour before they began to dip a gourd into the pot and drink the medicine. At the insistence of one of the headmen, Timberlake took a drink, although he confessed, "I would have willingly declined." He conceded that the concoction was "much more palatable than I expected, having a strong taste of sassafras." The headman told Timberlake that "it was taken to wash away their sins; so that this is a spiritual medicine, and might be ranked among their religious ceremonies."[50]

The Christian concept of sin does not have a direct corollary in the Cherokee belief system: for Cherokees, sin involved violating basic categories, blurring the boundaries, and upsetting the equilibrium. Purity resulted from the preservation of categories while pollution came from violating boundaries. On one level all Cherokees, both male and female, sought to maintain a state of purity and to avoid sources of pollution, but on another level, Cherokees sought out the very things that seemed to defy their system of categorization. Power in large part rested at the edges of the Cherokees' categories, in the interstices between categories, and with the anomalies that defied categorization. Laurel, for example, was a powerful medicine because it did not drop its leaves in winter like most other plants. Rather than ignore this attribute or identify laurel as something other than a plant, the Cherokees simply imbued it with special power. They also believed in fantastic anomalous creatures that had extraordinary power. The Uktena, for example, had the body of a snake, the wings of a bird, and the antlers of a deer, attributes of three separate categories as well as animals representative of the three levels of the universe—the underworld, the upper world, and this world. Although the mere sight of the Uktena paralyzed humans and its breath killed, people who managed to obtain the sparkling crystal from the creature's forehead acquired extraordinary abilities that included foreseeing the future. Anomalies, therefore,

were the source of both great peril and amazing power. As anthropologist Mary Douglas has pointed out, many peoples respond to emissions or body fluids in the same way as they do other anomalies because these belong inside the body but escape through orifices.[51] Breath and saliva, both belonging inside the body rather than outside, had enormous power and figured prominently in the Cherokees' sacred formulas.[52] The most powerful of these substances, however, was blood, and women by virtue of their periodic contact with blood were both powerful and dangerous.[53]

Cherokee beliefs about purity and pollution help explain their attitudes toward women's life cycle, in particular menstruation, childbirth, and menopause. Because it involved bleeding, the Cherokees regarded menstruation as polluting, that is, the blood flowed outside its appropriate place within the body. During their periods, Cherokee women retired to specially constructed menstrual houses. Adair described these structures as "small huts, at as considerable a distance from their dwelling houses, as they imagine may be out of the enemies reach."[54] Nonmenstruating women left food, which consisted of a little hominy, outside the hut and quickly departed. If a woman's period coincided with an important ritual such as the Green Corn Ceremony, the headmen had ceremonial food taken to her; under no circumstances did a menstruating woman participate. Nor did a woman perform her normal tasks of farming, cooking, and caring for her children. Other women in the household or even men, if necessary, assumed her chores. The Cherokees were most particular that a menstruating woman stay away from the ill. As late as the nineteenth century, James Mooney found that the Eastern Cherokees prevented strangers from entering the house of someone who was sick in order to prevent his contact with either a menstruating woman or someone who might have come from the house of a menstruating woman. The presence of such a person in the sickroom was "considered to neutralize all the effects of the doctor's treatment."[55] Any breach of the rules regarding menstruation was an extremely serious offense. According to Adair, "Should they be known to violate that ancient law, they must answer for every misfortune that befalls any of the people."[56]

Regulations regarding menstruation extended beyond the individual women involved. Men whose wives were menstruating marched and danced behind the others on ceremonial occasions. In order to minimize the danger, the Cherokees prohibited sexual intercourse with a menstrual woman, and violation required her partner to undergo purification rituals: "He was obliged to take an emetic and then dipped himself in a river

and then continue in his uncleanness till night. Unless he did this he was pronounced unfit to hunt and engage in war." Minor infractions of the prohibition against contact with menstrual women had less drastic remedies. Mooney reported that a decoction of skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) was "drunk and used as a wash to counteract the ill effects of eating food prepared by a woman in the menstrual condition, or when a woman by chance comes into a sick room or a house under the tabu." At the end of their menstrual periods, Cherokee women underwent ritual cleansing by plunging seven times in running water and changing their clothes before returning home.[57]

Many Europeans interpreted Cherokee behavior toward menstruating women as reflective of the belief that "females during their monthly courses were unclean."[58] A more accurate explanation for strict rules of avoidance is that the Cherokees believed that menstruating women possessed great power, which made them dangerous. Female physiology, according to the Cherokees, was not the consequence of original sin or divine displeasure. Adair reported that "they ascribe these monthly periods, to the female structure, not to the anger of Ishtohoolo Aba."[59] The seclusion and avoidance of women, which often has been cited as evidence for their subjugation and oppression, actually signified their power.[60] Women secluded themselves; men did not force restrictions and rituals on them. Men, in fact, often observed similar restrictions before and after warfare, and they, like women, regarded seclusion as a practical precaution and a demonstration of the elevated plane they had achieved.

The power the Cherokees attributed to menstruating women is illustrated by the myth "The Stone Man." The Stone Man was a cannibal with skin of solid rock and an appetite for Indian hunters. When a hunter spotted the Stone Man heading for a village, he hurried to the medicine man, who stationed seven menstruating women in the cannibal's path. The Stone Man grew progressively weaker as he passed the women and collapsed when he came to the last one. The medicine man drove seven sourwood stakes through the Stone Man's heart, and the people built a large fire on top of him. While he was burning, the Stone Man taught the people songs for hunting and medicine for various illnesses. When the fire died down, the people found red paint, which they believed brought success, and a divining crystal. Through the power of menstruating women, therefore, great tragedy was averted and good fortune brought to the people.[61]

Pregnancy did not bring the rigorous seclusion of menstruation, but an expectant mother curtailed many of her activities. She did not attend cere-

monies and ball games or visit the sick. The Cherokees did not eat food prepared by a pregnant woman or walk on a path she had traveled. If she waded in a river upstream from fish traps, she spoiled the catch, and if she looked on a person suffering from snakebite, the victim died.[62] Many similar restrictions applied to the father-to-be. Husbands of pregnant women did not play ball and danced apart from other men in ceremonies. They did not dig graves, loiter in doorways, or wear neckerchiefs or hats with folds (which caused creases in the baby's head). Furthermore, some evidence suggests that men did not hunt, fish, or fight during their wives' pregnancies.[63]

Many of the restrictions on the activities of pregnant women protected the unborn child and aided delivery. The Cherokees believed that certain foods affected the fetus: raccoon would make the baby sick, for example, and pheasant would cause death. A child risked a birthmark if the mother ate speckled trout, ridiculously large eyes if she ate rabbit, and a big nose if she consumed black walnuts. Because squirrels climb trees, the Cherokees believed that the consumption of squirrel meat by an expectant mother caused the baby to go up instead of down during labor. Eating crayfish, which run backward, also impeded delivery. Any meat an expectant mother ate had to be trapped rather than killed by arrow or bullet—perhaps to avoid spilling its blood—and many pregnant women refrained from eating meat altogether. A woman who combed her hair backward might have a child whose hair bristled, and if she saw a mask, her baby would have its exaggerated and grotesque features. Wearing a neckerchief supposedly produced umbilical strangulation, and lingering in a doorway slowed delivery. The Cherokees also prohibited a pregnant woman from visiting a menstruating woman or viewing a corpse.[64]

In the late nineteenth century, anthropologist Frans Olbrechts studied Cherokee practices regarding childbirth, and he found that mother and father participated together in rituals guaranteeing safe delivery of their child. Occasionally, a relative of the mother replaced the father, a participation that may hark back to an earlier era for which evidence is unavailable. Each morning, they washed their hands and feet, and every new moon, they employed a medicine man to perform certain rites. The ritual took place at the river, but before leaving home, the woman drank a decoction of slippery elm bark (*Ulmus fulva*), which ensured an easy labor; touch-me-not stems (*Impatiens biflora*), which frightened the child into a quick appearance; and speedwell roots (*Veronica officinalis*) and pine cones (*Pinus pungens*), which, as evergreens, gave the child a long and healthy life. The

parents took a white skin or cloth and two red or white beads, symbolizing good fortune, to the river. The priest and the woman entered the river while the husband waited on the bank. Holding the beads brought by the couple in one hand and black beads in the other, the priest sought answers to questions about delivery, the child's sex, its disposition, and its future. Following this divination, the husband folded the beads in the fabric and presented the items to the medicine man as payment.[65]

Some sources maintain that Cherokee women traditionally gave birth unassisted in the forest or in a special building. Olbrechts found that four women including a midwife attended the mother in her cabin, which all other residents left. Early-nineteenth-century sources suggest that "the presence of men is disgusting on such occasions," but Olbrechts reported that sometimes the husband or medicine man was present, although these men carefully stood behind the mother and, therefore, they did not actually witness the birth.[66] When labor started, the woman drank an infusion of wild cherry bark (*Prunus serotina*). Various formulas existed to speed delivery. According to Mooney, a female relative of the mother recited these while anointing the patient with decoctions. One formula Mooney recorded was intended to frighten the child out of its mother's womb: "Listen! You little man, get up now at once. There comes an old woman. The horrible [old thing] is coming, only a little way off. Listen! Quick! Get your bed and let us run away. Yu!" The person reciting then repeated the formula substituting "little woman" and "your grandfather." Another formula sought to entice the child to make an appearance: "Little boy, little boy, hurry, hurry, come out, come out! Little boy, hurry; a bow, a bow; let's see who'll get it, let's see who'll get it." The next verse appealed to a little girl to come out and claim a sifter.[67]

During delivery, a woman stood, knelt, or sat, but she never gave birth lying down. Usually no one bothered to catch the baby, who simply fell on leaves placed beneath the mother. The Cherokees considered it a bad omen "if the child, at birth, happened to fall on its breast." In this event, they wrapped the baby in a cloth and threw him in a creek. The child was rescued when the wrapper sank and carried away the "ill-fortune." If a child fell on its back, the Cherokees viewed this as a good omen.[68] After delivery, the mother ceremonially plunged the infant into the river, an act she repeated daily for two years. Sometimes the Cherokees also waved a newborn over the fire, the sun's earthly representative, and asked for spiritual guardianship.[69] The father buried the placenta. The number of ridges he crossed between the site of the birth and the interment of the placenta

determined the number of years before another child would be born. The Cherokees believed that if he merely threw away the placenta, another child could be born at any time, whereas if he buried the placenta too deep and covered it with stones, there would be no more children.[70]

The mother and other relatives took immediate steps to form the child's personality and character. In the late nineteenth century, James Mooney observed Cherokee women giving their infants a drink made of pulverized cockleburs and water "taken from a fall or cataract, where the stream makes a constant noise" in order to make their children "quick to learn and retain in memory anything once heard." Mothers also rubbed beans on their children's lips to make them "look smiling and good tempered" or a lizard on their throat and head to make them sleep quietly. Scratching the hands slightly with a crayfish claw produced a strong grip and bathing the eyes with water in which a blue-jay feather had been soaked made them early risers. A child destined for the priesthood received special sustenance prepared and administered by a medicine man, whereas other children were nursed by their mothers or, in the event of maternal illness, by a relative.[71]

Many Europeans credited the treatment of newborns for the absence of deformity among Indians. John Gerar William de Brahm, the Crown's surveyor-general, claimed that he "never met with an Indian who was born a cripple," and Adair found it "remarkable that there are no deformed Indians."[72] Timberlake believed that bathing babies daily in cold water made "the children acquire such strength, that no ricketty or deformed are found among them."[73] Although such rituals may have been responsible for universal good health, another possible explanation is that Cherokee mothers simply abandoned weak newborns in the forest. Infanticide may have been practiced by the Cherokees as the only acceptable means by which people could control population growth.[74] Apparently, the mother alone had the right to abandon a child; for anyone else to kill a newborn constituted murder. Olbrechts found abortion unknown and the use of spotted cowbane (*Cicuta maculata*), purported to be a contraceptive, frowned upon.[75]

The mother's physical recovery from childbirth was rapid, according to European reports. Cherokee women "were not subject to any of the complaints attending modern childbirth, when delivered. They were often able to be in the field hoeing the next day."[76] Timberlake observed: "Though three days is the longest time of their illness, a great number of them are not so many hours; nay, I have known a woman delivered at the side of a river, wash her child, and come home with it in one hand, and a goard full of water in the other."[77] These accounts almost certainly exaggerate post-

partum activity, because Cherokee women normally curtailed their activities for a period of time following delivery. A woman remained apart from her family for seven days following delivery; then she bathed, put on clean clothes, and returned home. A Cherokee woman, therefore, observed postpartum restrictions and underwent ritual cleansing that paralleled those of menstruating women. If she continued to bleed, a priest "took a bird, plucked off the feathers, and took out the innards and then offered it as a sacrifice for her." The treatment for problems resulting from delivery were spiritual because, unlike Europeans, the Cherokees integrated spiritual and physical worlds.[78]

In Cherokee cosmology, fertility, change, and future time were all within the province of the underworld, whereas purity, order, and past time rested with the upper world.[79] Good as well as evil could come from the underworld, but venturing into this realm was dangerous because the possibility of disaster existed. Even fertility was not an unmixed blessing since the Cherokees believed that there could be too many people. In one of the origin myths recorded by James Mooney, "At first there were only a brother and sister until he struck her with a fish and told her to multiply, and so it was." The Cherokees associated fish with the underworld and fertility because they swam in rivers, which led to the underworld. The pair's experience with fertility soon threatened disaster because the sister produced a child every seven days "until there was danger that the world could not keep them. Then it was made that a woman should have only one child in a year, and it has been so ever since." As the myth illustrates, fertility could be both a blessing and a curse. Furthermore, any contact with the elements of the underworld demanded extreme caution.[80]

The similarity of attitudes regarding menstruation, pregnancy, and parturition is not surprising because the Cherokees associated menstrual blood with childbirth: menstrual blood was, they believed, a child who had not been born. Menstrual blood, therefore, was invested with the power to bring about change, and while the Cherokees did not actually fear new things, they recognized that innovations could be for better or worse. Consequently, they regarded any potential change with some apprehension and attempted through rituals to control its direction. Because they were the embodiment of fertility, women occupied a particularly precarious position in Cherokee society. They were dangerous because they were powerful: that is, they were capable of bringing about change in the family and in the community through the addition of a new, unknown member. Chaos could accompany that shift since both chaos and change

existed within the domain of the underworld. The restrictions and rituals surrounding procreation formalized the community's apprehensions, as well as any personal anxiety women might have about childbirth, and allayed fear. Through sexual abstinence, avoidance of the sick and menstrual women, and other practices, women attempted to control the danger and to minimize its negative effects.

Men underwent similar periods of seclusion before going to war and after their return from battle. For several days after the organization of a war party, the members remained in the council house, where they fasted and purged themselves with specially prepared emetics. Through these actions they hoped to attain a state of ritual purity that would ensure their own safety and bring them success in battle. Upon their return from war, the men retired to the council house, which had been carefully cleaned in their absence, and remained secluded until they presented no danger to the community or to themselves. Men or women captured by the enemy and freed also underwent a period of confinement and ritual purification.[81]

A warrior's avoidance of women stemmed largely from beliefs about sexual intercourse. The Cherokees believed that if a warrior slept with a woman after the prebattle purification rites, "the medicine lost all its virtue, and he was easily killed in battle."[82] Men observed a similar period of celibacy after battle. James Adair found this practice to be universal among southern Indians, even the Choctaws, whom he thought particularly susceptible to pleasures of the flesh: "Although the Chocktah are libidinous, and lose their customs apace, yet I have known them to take several female prisoners without offering the least violence to their virtue, till the time of purgation was expired;—then some of them forced their captives, notwithstanding their pressing entreaties and tears."[83] Young Cherokee men training to be hunters also abstained from intercourse, perhaps to prepare them for the hunting season in fall and winter, and while hunters were away from the village for months at a time in search of game, they refrained from engaging in sex even though a few women accompanied them on the hunt.[84] Pregnant and menstruating women adhered to the same sexual taboo as hunters and warriors.

War, hunting, childbirth, and menstruation required strict rules of behavior because they all involved blood. James Adair maintained that the Indians' aversion to blood stemmed from their belief that "it contains the life, the spirit of the beast."[85] Unleashed, the spiritual power that blood contained was dangerous. In myth, children sometimes sprang from blood; these children exhibited wild natures and upset the normal order.

Wild Boy, for example, came from the blood of game that Selu had washed in the river. He forced radical change: instead of an effortless subsistence, men subsequently had to hunt for game and women had to farm.[86] Good as well as evil, however, resulted from Wild Boy's actions: all men—not just Kana'ti—gained access to wild animals and all Native people received kernels of corn to plant. Nevertheless, human beings had to be wary of blood and its power. Consequently, hunters performed special rites when they killed animals: to appease the spirit of the deer, for example, and to prevent the rheumatism that spirit could cause, hunters asked forgiveness and cast bloodstained leaves into the river and a piece of meat into the fire.[87]

Human blood, of course, posed even greater dangers, and the distinct ways in which Cherokees encountered human blood helped define them as women and men. Menstruation and childbirth, hunting and warfare deeply embedded a person in a category: these were the times when women were most female and men were most male.[88] The categories of woman and man were so opposite at this point that they could not risk contact. Cherokees recognized these categorical extremes in other contexts: for example, they extinguished fire with soil rather than water because fire represented the upper world and water the underworld, opposites so powerful that they needed the soil of this world to mediate.[89]

Although women could not avoid the physical and spiritual dangers brought on by menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth, they could gain a spiritual power through these trials.[90] Perhaps in recognition of that power, the Cherokees held postmenopausal women in high regard, and they became responsible for tasks requiring a high degree of purity. Adair reported that the war ark that accompanied military expeditions contained "consecrated vessels, made by beloved superannuated women." The trader also observed that six "old beloved women" sang and danced with the priests and warriors. During the Green Corn Ceremony, an "old beloved woman" carried medicine to the women, children, and "worthless fellows" waiting outside the square ground.[91] Timberlake reported that old women brewed the ceremonial medicine, and Norton noted that "their principal superstition is pretending to foretell events, by casting some kind of die which is performed by men and old women." Elderly women nursed wounded warriors, and an old woman cared for Norton after he sprained his shoulder. Furthermore, the Cherokees had traditionally held a special ceremony every seven years to purify the high priest, a ritual under-

taken by "a very aged and honorable woman" who washed the priest with warm water.[92]

Despite the Cherokees' rigid construction of gender, they could not maintain impermeable boundaries. Some men and women, by circumstance or choice, crossed the line between them. Cherokee beliefs about menstruation and the female role in child rearing prevented women from becoming full-time hunters and warriors, but men sometimes did opt for a life of farming rather than one of hunting and warfare. Native reaction to such behavior is difficult to ascertain. European observers, of course, brought to the subject their own culture's expectations of men. Adair, for example, derided men who farmed as "worthless fellows" or "He-hen-pickers" and recounted how a beloved woman gave them only a child's portion of sacred tobacco "because she thinks such spiritless pictures of men cannot sin with married women."[93] Some evidence suggests that a kind of sexual reclassification occurred for men who preferred to farm and that these men functioned sexually as well as socially as women. Reflecting European homophobia, Romans mentioned transvestites in Choctaw society: "Sodomy is also practiced but not to the same excess as among the Creeks and Chickasaws, the *Cinaedi* among the Choctaws are obliged to dress themselves in woman's attire, and are highly despised especially by women."[94] Cultural similarities with the tribes mentioned by Romans make it quite likely that such individuals existed in Cherokee society. In the nineteenth century, a Cherokee recalled in far less pejorative terms that "there were among them formerly, men who assumed the dress and performed all the duties of women."[95]

The Cherokees' response to men who became women is unclear. They may have ostracized such people for upsetting the cosmic order. The trader James Adair reported an incident in which a young man whom the Cherokees considered too effeminate and suspected of homosexuality was scratched and ridiculed.[96] Within the Cherokees' carefully categorized universe, anything that did not exactly fit, such as men acting like women, elicited one of two reactions. Some anomalies, such as the mythical dragonlike *Uktena,* inspired fear and respect while others prompted joking. Bears, for example, appeared to defy categorization by exhibiting many characteristics, such as grasping and walking upright, that seemed more appropriate to humans than animals. As a result of their appearance and behavior, these humanlike animals became the object of jokes and represented inept and humorous characters in many myths.[97] The Chero-

kees probably regarded effeminate men or men who preferred farming to hunting in a similar way. Joking did not necessarily imply scorn. Instead, Cherokees used joking to recognize deviant behavior and incorporate it into the repertoire of acknowledged behaviors. By drawing attention to men who did not conform to their notions of manhood, Cherokees confirmed what they considered to be normal behavior for men.

When women crossed the gender boundary, however, the Cherokees responded in precisely the opposite way. War parties sometimes included women whose primary responsibility was to carry water and prepare food. In 1751, for example, the colony of South Carolina commissioned 12 Cherokee women along with 128 men to go to war against enemy tribes. Occasionally women actually became warriors. In the American Revolution, one of the casualties of the Cherokee defeat by General Griffith Rutherford at Waya Gap was a woman "painted and stripped like a warrior and armed with bows and arrows." The Moravian missionary John Gambold had an opportunity to converse with one of these women warriors, whose age he estimated to be one hundred: "The aged women, named Chicouhla, claimed that she had gone to war against hostile Indians and suffered several severe wounds. Vann's wives verified this and said that she was very highly respected and loved by browns and whites alike." One of James Mooney's informants in the late nineteenth century had known an old woman whose Cherokee name meant "Sharp Warrior." The Wahnenauhi manuscript, which Mooney obtained from a Cherokee medicine man, contained an account of a Cherokee women who rallied the warriors when her husband died defending their town against enemy attack. This woman, Cuhtahlutah (Gatun'lati or "Wild Hemp"), saw her husband fall, grabbed his tomahawk, shouted, "Kill! Kill!" and led the Cherokees to victory.[98]

Women who distinguished themselves in battle occupied an exalted place in Cherokee political and ceremonial life. William Bartram translated the title accorded female warriors as "War Woman," and he noted that a stream in north Georgia bore the name War Woman's Creek. A trader told him "that it arose from a decisive battle which the Cherokees formerly gained over their enemies on the banks of this creek, through the battle and strategem of an Indian woman who was present. She was afterwards raised to the dignity and honor of a Queen or Chief of the nation, as a reward for her superior virtues and abilities, and presided in the State during her life."[99] Mooney heard about a woman who had killed her husband's slayer in battle during the American Revolution: "For this deed she was treated with so much consideration that she was permitted to join the war-

riors in the war dance, carrying her gun and tomahawk." War Women also participated in the Eagle Dance, which commemorated previous victories. Athletic young men actually performed the dance, but in one part, old warriors and War Women related their exploits. These women sat apart from other women and children on ceremonial occasions and partook of food and drink not normally given to women. War Women also decided the fate of war captives. Some sources use the terms *War Woman* and *beloved woman* interchangeably, and they may have applied to the same women. But Cherokees distinguished between pre- and postmenopausal women, and evidence suggests that beloved women were elderly while War Women were of indeterminate age. War Women probably became "beloved" when they passed menopause.[100]

Why did the Cherokees joke about men and honor women who crossed gender lines? Both were anomalies, but only women acquired considerable prestige by crossing the line. Perhaps women who excelled in battle presented a greater challenge to the Cherokee categorization of humanity. Women were not supposed to engage directly in warfare; only men who had carefully prepared themselves for war through fasting and purification could expect to meet with success. How then could they explain a woman who killed enemy warriors and led Cherokee warriors to victory? Such a woman was obviously an anomaly: she was no longer merely a woman nor, of course, was she a warrior. As an anomaly, she possessed extraordinary power: through war and menstruation she had male and female contact with blood. Each experience singly was a source of power and danger; when the two came together, the power was phenomenal and permitted these women to move between the worlds of men and women. Men who farmed had neither opportunity—war or menstruation—to obtain power, and therefore the Cherokees had no reason to fear them.

Two anomalies of myth, the Uktena and the bear, provide parallels. The Uktena drew victims to it with the crystal on its forehead and then choked them to death, but according to Mooney, whoever managed to obtain the crystal was "sure of success in hunting, love, rainmaking, and every other business" and able to see the future. The Uktena, therefore, was the source of both good and evil because it possessed great power. The bear, on the other hand, was unable to kill humans even to avenge the loss of its own kind. Consequently, "the hunter does not even ask the Bear's pardon when he kills one." The bear had a place in the world, but it had little power.[101]

The Cherokees understood what it meant to be a woman or a man even when individuals confounded that understanding, but because gen-

der did not shape their organization of the world, they were able to incorporate individuals who defied gender into their social organization. Language provides clues to that organization. In the Cherokee language *asgaya,* "man," and *agehya,* "woman," are distinct words that apply to different human beings. Cherokee is not a gendered language, like French or Spanish, nor is it a language that has gender-specific pronouns, like English. Linguistically, gender implies hierarchy, and languages that do not use gender as a "universally applicable classification" have "no implicit assumption of hierarchy or ranking of the categories just because they are different." According to linguist Durbin Feeling, "forms like ga²wo³ni²ha can be translated either 'he's speaking' or 'she's speaking,' depending on the context."[102] Indeed, the context revealed all one needed to know. Cherokee women farmed and men hunted; women spilled blood in menstruation and childbirth and men in hunting and war. Female and male, feminine and masculine, women and men had no real meaning apart from the context in which they lived.[103]

The Cherokees' conceptualization of the cosmos helped them understand their place in the world. The anthropologist Peggy Sanday has suggested that the existence of an important female deity indicates the acceptance of female rights, privileges, and even power. Although the Cherokees did not have "deities" in the sense of physical representations of spiritual beings they worshipped, they did personify many things in the natural world and assign them religious significance. A female spirit sometimes appeared as corn, while the Cherokees regarded thunder and rivers as male spirits. The most important "deities" were the sun and moon: the sun was female and the moon was male. In some ways, this depiction of the sun and moon epitomize Cherokee gender roles. The day belongs to the sun, the night to the moon. Rarely can both be seen in the sky at the same time. Similarly, men and women had separate and distinct responsibilities. But the Cherokees viewed the tasks both women and men performed and the contributions they made as essential to their society and, like the sun and moon, to the integrity of the universe.[104]