Lindsey Drury

Chapter 8
Memory, Ceremony, Sacrifice: Gene Weltfish, the Pawnee Nation, and the Settler State

An Anthropologist and Pawnee Memories

In the summer of 1935, the American anthropologist Gene Weltfish recorded the memories of Pawnee elders in Oklahoma. Her fieldnotes[1] focused on the reconstruction of an imaginary "year in the life" of the Pawnee people, prior to their forced removal from their ancestral homelands in Nebraska to Oklahoma "Indian Country". The resulting collection of memories was turned into a fictional account of the year 1867, carefully expurgated by Weltfish of the profound episodes of violence, famine, and disease which the Pawnee had to endure in reality and which had been inflicted by settlers and their government in that time. The everyday experiences of elders, the lives they lived while sharing their memories in that summer of 1935, are likewise all but completely redacted from Weltfish's fieldnotes. Weltfish recorded Pawnee lifeways in the mode of salvage ethnography,[2] through

1 Gene Weltfish, *Pawnee Field Notes* (1935), archived in Modern Manuscripts & Archives at the Newberry, in Box: 2, Folder: 12, under the heading "Gene Weltfish Pawnee field notes (Ayer-Modern-MS-Weltfish), Book 11, 171–237 (1935) (Item — Box: 2, Folder: 12). https://archives.newberry.org/repositories/2/archival_objects/6292. I am grateful to the Newberry Library for hosting me as a Visiting Scholar in March of 2023. There, I was able to consult the collection of Gene Weltfish's fieldnotes, without which this writing would not have been possible.

2 "Salvage" ethnography is the recording of the practices and folklore of cultures threatened with extinction, including as a result of modernization and assimilation. It is generally associated with the Franz Boas, Weltfish's teacher and mentor at Columbia. Salvage anthropologies were widely conducted by settler anthropologists within the US's ultimately genocidal vision for the future of Indigenous North Americans. See: Samuel J. Redman, *Prophets and Ghosts: The Story of Salvage Anthropology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021). It is notable that Third Reich anthropologists and "racial scientists" also conducted a vast program of cultural salvage during the war to keep a documentary and ethnographic record of the millions of Jewish lives and their culture which they set out to eradicate and "sacrifice" so absolutely as a (mythic and ritual) precondition

Note: The research for this article has been funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy in the context of the Cluster of Excellence Temporal Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective – EXC 2020 – Project ID 390608380.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111244037-009

which she aimed to provide an ideallic record of Pawnee life to the descendents of those who had consigned them to destruction.

By amalgamating the recollections of Pawnee elders into a sanitized narrative of Pawnee history, Weltfish sought to create an empirical record of what she understood as the last years of the Pawnee's existence as a nation. As she wrote thirty years later in the prologue of her resulting book *The Lost Universe* (1965), "this is the story as told directly by the citizens who were part of it in those last years".[3] Working and researching alongside the Pawnee, Weltfish thus engaged with the then Oklahoma-based community as stateless citizens, dispossessed of the homelands that were integral to their culture and vital to structuring their social and political lives. Yet at the same time, Weltfish understood the Pawnee as original Americans, whose explorers had played a role in the Indigenous discovery of the continent and whose civic structures provided the civilizational groundwork later appropriated by the colonial state that had taken their lands:

> Nations are even now in danger of dissolution, but they are not lost. The knowledge and wisdom of the six-hundred-year-old Pawnee nation is one of the unknown building blocks that was built into the nation of the United States. In the Pawnee nation was summarized the knowledge of a continent that reached back nearly twenty thousand years in time to when mankind first discovered the New World.[4]

In acknowledging the achievements of Pawnee social and political life, however, Weltfish was not making the case for the recognition of Pawnee sovereignty or the return of Pawnee lands. Pawnee lifeways, as she saw them, offered templates for the construction of meaningful social and political safeguards to personal freedom, as well as examples of community childcare and social housing systems. These, she argued, could inform the development of current national American civic imagination and shape new social programs for the colonizer, despite the devastating, not to say genocidal, cost to colonized, which she addressed only fleetingly.[5] She clarified the purpose of her book *The Lost Universe*: "I write now

---

for the survival of Ayran Germans in a new order. See, for example, Spinner, Samuel. *Jews Behind Glass: The Ethnographic Impulse in German–Jewish and Yiddish Literature, 1900–1948*. DPhil thesis, Columbia University, (2012). Accessible at https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?pli=1#search/salvage/FMfcgzGxTFZVkNJmHZXMtlHDTwLHRLkB?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1

3 Gene Weltfish, *The Lost Universe: Pawnee Life and Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), vii.

4 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe,* vii.

5 In *The Lost Universe*, Weltfish briefly acknowledges disease, settler incursion, and raiding from neighboring Indigenous communities as contributing factors to deaths of tens of thousands of Pawnee people. What she does not include, however, are any reflections from elders on Pawnee memory and survival of such a history, or address of what a legacy of US-sanctioned geno-

of the personal arrangements of the Pawnee not so much as a means of reconstructing our past history but rather as a contribution to our future".[6] Her disturbing use of the first-person to evoke a shared American pursuit of futurity tacitly consigns an entire First Nation people to the past.

How can we best address Weltfish's fieldnotes, which extract memories from elders who experienced lifetimes of marginalization and oppression for the sake of an imagined national future that excludes their people? In this contribution to *Marginality and Resistencia,* I work to piece together some of the realities and issues which her notes otherwise so scrupulously cancelled from collective memory and reintegrate the memories of Pawnee elders back into a history of Indigenous survivance[7] of a settler colonial state that systematically marginalized them. In doing so, I do not seek to repair and make whole something that has been irrevocably warped or shattered. On the contrary, my aim here is to contextualize the historical terms which produced in Weltfish's anthropological pursuit an *incommesurability* with Pawnee survivance. The concept of incommensurability, as articulated in this essay, is drawn from the work of Eve Tuck (Unangax̂ Nation) and K. Wayne Yang (settler), whose groundbreaking work in "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" clarifies the tensions and conflicts that arise between the pursuit of social justice by settlers (the colonizers) and the decolonial movement which mobilizes Indigenous communities (the colonized). They write:

> Attending to what is irreconcilable within settler colonial relations and what is incommensurable between decolonizing projects and other social justice projects will help to reduce the frustration of attempts at solidarity; but the attention won't get anyone off the hook from the hard, unsettling work of decolonization.[8]

Weltfish was an anti-racist and feminist activist in her time who made many personal sacrifices for social justice. It is precisely this aspect of her life story – that of sacrifice – which I wish to highlight in my exploration of the incommensurability of these two sets of aspirations. This chapter focuses on how the sacrifices of

---

cide of Indigenous peoples might mean – to the Pawnee people, to her as a researcher, or to the settler state itself. See: Gene Weltfish *The Lost Universe: Pawnee Life and Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 2–4.

6 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe*, 10.

7 'Survivance' is a term coined by Gerald Vizenor in *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1999). As Vizenor writes, "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry". See: Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, vii.

8 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor". *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1 no. 1 (2012): 4.

career and livelihood that Weltfish made as a minoritized Jewish woman and anti-racist scholar advocating for marginalized and racialized populations, nonetheless failed as grounds for her solidarity with the Pawnee, who had long been forced to make sacrifices for the colonial nation that took their lands and killed their people. I concentrate in particular on settler-colonial ontologies of "primitive" sacrifice implicitly reiterated in Weltfish's anthropological work, and the incommensurability of these with Pawnee ontologies of sacrifice which her fieldnotes recorded through the memories of elders. The stories of Indigenous-settler relations in the United States are stories that fracture and splinter at their seams in the process of retelling. Weltfish's fieldnotes do not divert from this repeating narrative structure.

I will further argue that settler colonial history is shaped by the misattribution or displacement of guilt by a settler majority wishing to proclaim its innocence to an Indigenous minority who is sacrificed and whose sacrifices are misconstrued by settler majorities, reframed by being observed through the prism of "primitivity". In settler political life, in other words, sacrificial politics are sublimated, identified with Indigenous otherization, and by consequence, the guilt of sacrifice is itself othered.

As Roberto Calasso[9] has written, sacrifice is about guilt and about experiencing guilt as a precondition of consciousness:

> What is all this about? The gods aren't content to foist guilt on man. That wouldn't be enough, since guilt is part of life anyway. What the gods demand is an awareness of guilt. And this can only be achieved through sacrifice. On its own the law will serve to punish guilt but certainly not to make us aware of it, which is far more important. Sacrifice is the cosmic machine that raises our guilty lives to consciousness.[10]

For Calasso, through guilt, sacrifice produces a spiritual awareness through which consciousness is itself engendered. So too is settler colonial history a story of guilt, but it is one that both produces, and denies consciousness of that guilt. Within the framework of Calasso's argument, what withholds settler violence

9 Roberto Calasso's work on sacrifice draws on antique classical mythology. As I have addressed in a previous article on Aby Warburg and New Mexican Matachines, anti-Indigenous articulations of sacrifice have long compared classical antiquity and Indigenous mythologies and ceremonial practices. Indeed, conflation of the two contributed to discourse on "primitivism" in the North American context. I draw from Calasso conscientiously, as Calasso refuses to otherise sacrificial politics from modernity, but acknowledges their continued relevance. See: Lindsey Drury, "The Transhistorical, Transcultural Life of Sausages: From medieval morescas to New Mexican Matachines with Aby Warburg". *Postmedeival* 14 (2023): 513–541.

10 Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (New York: Alfred A. Kopf, 1993), 313.

from identification as sacrificial violence is precisely the withholding of conscious recognition of guilt.

Placed within the context of settler sublimation, I here define sacrifice as a ceremonial practice by which an act of obliteration – of a life, livelihood, or way of life – gains spiritual justification within a political community through socially and politically organized intervention in the form of narration. Thinking through the notion of sacrifice as politically sanctioned annihilation, I push back against the anthropological articulation of sacrifice of Weltfish's time, which framed sacrifice as a pre-modern or "primitive" ritual practice co-identified with so-called "Indians". I draw on Calasso to reconstruct ideal-typically its meaning as a heuristic device. Calasso writes:

> For all the variegated multiplicity of its forms, the practice of sacrifice can be reduced to just two gestures: expulsion (purification) and assimilation (communion). These two gestures have only one element in common: destruction. In each case the victim is killed or devoured, or abandoned to a certain death. We kill to eat, to assimilate; and we kill to separate, to expel. In every other respect the two gestures are different.[11]

By understanding sacrifice as a multiplicity of practices of destructive expulsion and assimilation – of killing, devouring, abandoning to death – I argue that sacrifice constitutes a central political and ceremonial practice of the US settler state which assumes significant power as a *culture-constitutive* process. This way of seeing sacrifice disrupts the vision offered by Weltfish's early twentieth-century anthropological lens, which tended to frame Pawnee sacrifical practices as ancestral forms rather than as modern lifeways, and to forget – or simply fail to recognize – how sacrifice was performed to directly analogous ends within settler cultural politics.

Sacrifice and Failed Solidarity. An Anti-Racist Scholar and Indigenous Dispossession

Born to German Jewish parents in New York City in 1902, by the mid-twentieth century Gene Weltfish had emerged not only as an important anthropologist, but also as a dissident and anti-racist activist. Her radical pamphlet, *The Races of Mankind*, funded by the Public Affairs Council and written with Ruth Benedict for American soldiers of World War II, was banned for distribution among soldiers

11 Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, 291–292.

by Kentucky Congressman and House Military Affairs Committee member Andrew J. May, who protested against scientific research showing that southern whites received lower scores on IQ tests than northern Black test-takers.[12] As historian David H. Price has described, Weltfish and Benedict's research relied on "qualitative and quantitative data demonstrating that differences between American racial groups were due to cultural rather than biological differences".[13]

Due to this publication, Weltfish was stalked by the FBI for decades, and in 1952 was tried by the Senate members of McCarthy's Subcommittee on Investigations. As Price articulated it, the hearing showed that McCarthy's "committee seemed to believe that those who fought for racial equality should be suspected of being Communists".[14] In 1953, Columbia University responded to government pressure, removing Weltfish from her post in the anthropology department. In her history of early American women anthropologists, Alessandra Link described how Weltfish's

> Activism clearly hindered her career, as institutions like Columbia University and the American Anthropology Association developed an isolationist and protectionist stance that left academics who faced government assaults without the resources needed to maintain their jobs and credibility. The Weltfish case exemplifies how university officials, fearing government intervention, shelved academic freedom in Cold War America.[15]

In acquiescing to Red Scare politics, Columbia University complied with the white supremacist sentiments of a Senate committee that wished to undermine the anti-racist findings of social scientists and punish the authors. Weltfish was an exemplary victim of such pursuits, as her work not only scientifically refuted racist ideologies, but proved popular and accessible. As Price goes on to show, May's suppression of Weltfish and Benedict's work backfired. Press attention to the trial had the effect of increasing the work's popular appeal:

> May's racist sensitivities and his powerful political position led the army to rescind its commitment to distribute Races of Mankind to soldiers, but the publicity resulting from the army affair helped the pamphlet to sell at record levels, with almost a million copies sold in the next decade. In addition to its impressive sales, *Races of Mankind* was widely translated, adopted for use by labor unions, and made into a comic book and an animated film.[16]

---

12 David H. Price, *Threatening Anthropology: McCarthyism and the FBI's Surveillance of Activist Anthropologists* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 114.

13 Price, *Threatening Anthropology*, 113.

14 Price, *Threatening Anthropology*, 129.

15 Alessandra Link, *Political Mavens: Ruth Underhill, Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin, Gene Weltfish, Ella Deloria, and the Politics of Culture* (University of New Mexico: PhD Diss, 2009), 55–56.

16 Price, *Threatening Anthropology*, 114.

Particularly, the animated film *The Brotherhood of Mankind*, sponsored by United Auto Workers, directed by Robert Cannon and animated by John Hubley, speaks to the widespread interest in and support for Weltfish's anti-racist research.

The decades of right-wing political persecution which Weltfish endured are bookended by, on the one side, Weltfish's initial research into Pawnee society conducted between 1928–1935, and on the other side, her later transformation of that research into the book *The Lost Universe* in the 1960s. By the time she was working to transform her fieldnotes into a book, Weltfish had begun drawing on insights she had gained into Pawnee lifeways to dream up a more justice-oriented future for the US settler population. Her vision, while identifiably feminist and socialist, treated the Pawnee not as co-creators of an American future, but as its *future ancestors*. The absence of any substantial passages advocating for Pawnee futurity and sovereignty is, for a scholar who spent a lifetime fighting for equality and justice, a glaring omission.

Indigenous intellectuals have long noted the proclivity of socially conscious actors to instrumentalize Indigenous lifeways, extracting and recontextualizing material for non-Indigenous use. As Dylan Robinson (Stó:lō/Skwah Nation) writes in *Hungry Listening*, "the extraction of Indigenous song, story, and culture is not merely a product of the past; artists and authors continue to mine Indigenous experience and [. . .] at times blatantly describe Indigenous culture as a resource that is there to be mined".[17] As it was, the vast information given to Weltfish, which she addressed in her book as a resource bestowed upon American citizens by the few remaining members of a "lost" Indigenous American nation, was also an archive of American veterans and their families.

The anti–racist research that Weltfish produced for soldiers was thus not her first outreach to members of the American military. Her earliest anthropological research on Pawnee language and culture brought her into direct contact with minoritized veterans who, despite their sacrifice of life and limb in wars overseas for the nation that had taken their lands, continued to endure US government policies of overt racism, oppression, exclusion, and disenfranchisement. One of these veterans was Walter Keyes (Fig. 1), who survived the First World War to work as an interpreter for the Pawnee at the time of Weltfish's arrival in Oklahoma. Keyes worked alongside Weltfish in her studies as a community liaison and fellow researcher for the project.

Weltfish's work with the Pawnee began when she was a graduate student of anthropology at Columbia University in 1928. Founder of American anthropology

17 Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 49.

Franz Boas had encouraged Weltfish to conduct research on the Caddoan Skidi Pawnee language, and so Weltfish inquired with the Pawnee performer, artist, and pipefitter Henry Moses, who was at the time on tour to New York with the 101 Ranch Circus, about visiting the community in Oklahoma. Moses provided Weltfish an introductory letter to his father John Moses, and as Weltfish described, "dictated in Pawnee phonetics so I could read it to him since he was monolingual".[18] After arriving in Pawnee, Oklahoma, she soon met Keyes and Pawnee oral historian Stacey Matlock. She worked with them to transcribe "myths and tales in the Pawnee language" from dictation.[19] Weltfish was next introduced by either Keyes or Matlock to "the few surviving monolingual Pawnees," as well as Henry Chapman, who worked as both interpreter and research assistant alongside Keyes.[20] Weltfish learned Skidi Pawnee as she worked, publishing a series of research texts on Pawnee language.

Upon completion of research on Pawnee language, Weltfish indicated that, "the next step was to record the way of life of the Pawnees of which the language was an instrument".[21] In this task, Weltfish worked primarily with Mark Evarts (Fig. 2), a member of the Pawnee nation, who, alongside Chapman, had been a primary interpreter and colleague in the previous studies of Skidi Pawnee grammar and pronunciation. When Weltfish met Evarts, he had recently lost both his wife and child, and his farm had been repossessed by the bank. Indeed, Evarts was a survivor who by that time had experienced lifelong tragedy and oppression. Born between 1861–1867, Evarts would have been a child when he experienced the US government's systematic ethnic cleansing and removal of the Pawnee people from their Nebraska homelands to Oklahoma Indian Country during 1874 and 1875. With both of his parents dead by 1883, he was sent off to the infamous Carlisle Indian Industrial School, where he endured the forced assimilation policies and corporeal punishment of Richard Henry Pratt until his release at the approximate age of 26 in 1893.[22] According to the account given by the anthropologist (and former husband to Weltfish) Alexander Lesser in his book on *The Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game* (1933), Evarts had remained in Pennsylvania for a time, where he worked as

18 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe,* ix.

19 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe,* ix.

20 Ibid.

21 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe,* ix.

22 The year of Evart's birth is difficult to establish. Weltfish claims he lived in Nebraska from 1861–1875, while school documents list him as 18 years old in 1893 (placing year of birth at 1875). In a letter Evarts wrote dated January 24, 1893, Evarts identifies himself as 26 years old. I lean towards accepting Evarts's own account, which placed his birth year at 1867.

a harness-maker, until the experience of alienation sent him back to his people in Oklahoma:

> A man gifted in adjusting himself to alien ways, he lived successfully in the East. But in the end, it was apparent to him that his life with white people was at best a makeshift, an apology for being an Indian. He returned home to his people, and the consciousness of his past and his fate overcame him. All the promises he had sincerely given to Pratt, a great friend of his, failed to stem the tide of fellow-feeling which surged over him back on the reservation. A Ghost Dance vision reconverted him, he immersed himself in Indian ways, recalled the teachings of his childhood, and became again a Pawnee. Those who returned to the reservation immediately upon graduation from Carlisle were even more rapidly drawn back into the mood of Indian life. Man does not live by bread alone, and the best that the government could claim it had given the Indian by education, was a means of making a living.[23]

If, as Lesser argues, Pratt was "a great friend" to Evarts, records nonetheless show that the lieutenant withheld Evarts' rightful payments from him on the pretext that he did not deserve control over the funds.[24] A full description of the oppression Evarts endured both as a student and worker is missing from in the official record, but the 194 tombstones standing in the Carlisle School's extensive graveyard which mark the deaths of its Indigenous students, all of whom died while enrolled at the school, still stand as silent witnesses to it.[25]

As Weltfish described, it was she and Evarts who "evolved the plan of utilizing one year of Pawnee life in as much detail as possible, covering the round of the year through the four seasons as reconstructed with the help of the surviving Pawnees".[26] The tactic of reformulating the fragments of memories into a single year cycle "proved to be an effective means of developing vivid recall".[27] Pawnee life could thus be mapped through the collective memories of the elders into a single imaginatively reconstructed year, which "we would think of [. . .] hypothetically as 1867" – the plausible year of Evarts' birth.[28] As a work of anthropology, then, Weltfish's ap-

---

23 Alexander Lesser, *The Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand Game* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 44.

24 A series of two letters digitized by the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center chronicles Eldarts' request for the release of his funds and Pratt's subsequent letter rebuking the request. See: "Pratt Responds to Request for Savings by Mark D. Evarts", January 24, 1893 – February 6, 1893. https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/documents/pratt-responds-request-savings-mark-d-evarts

25 The Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center provides a variety of datasets on the Indigenous children who died while interned at the school. See: https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/index.php/cemetery-information

26 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe,* xi.

27 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe,* xi.

28 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe,* xi.

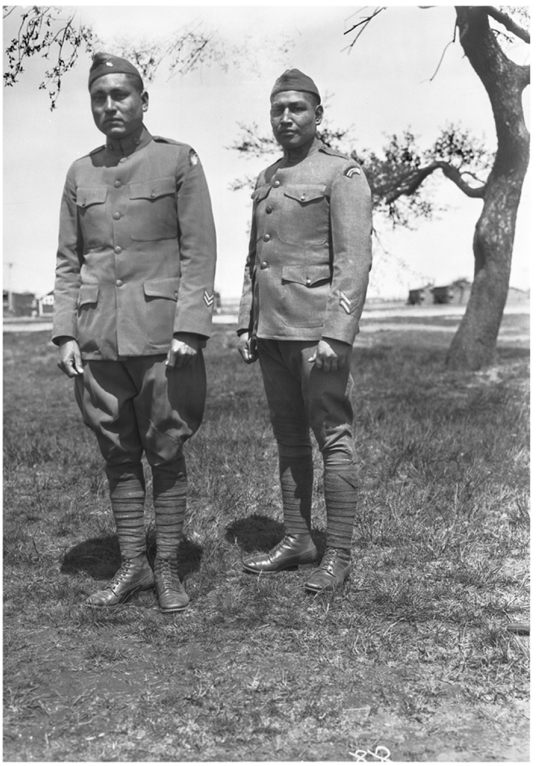

Fig. 1: Walter Keyes and Jacob Leader, May 2, 1919, Camp Mills, Long Island. 165th., 42nd Division, Stokes Mortar Platoon, H.Q. Co. Photographed by Dr. Joseph K. Dixon. Courtesy of IU Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

proach was unorthodox: it was an imaginative exercise of collective memory organized by Eldarts and the elders, translated by Eldarts and Weltfish, and finally recorded as English-language fieldnotes by Weltfish alone. Compiled by Weltfish for publication "a quarter of a century or more after it was recorded", the resulting book promises to have "retained the original language" even as it remixes the particular voices of each elder into a collectivized narrative voice.[29]

The historian David J. Wishart has done much to document the dispossession of the Pawnee from the arrival of white settlers to the enforced removal to Oklahoma. The Pawnee ceded all of their land south of the Platte River in an 1833 treaty with the United States but maintained their rights to hunt there. As Wishart argues, "the frontier also caught up with the once-remote Pawnee in the 1840s, in

29 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe*, xi.

Fig. 2: Mark Evarts in 1885, photographed by John N. Choate, Carlisle, PA. Courtesy of the Cumberland County Historical Society.

the form of the burgeoning stream of emigrants along the north and south sides of the Platte, right through the heart of their country".[30] Thousands were killed by settler violence and diseases introduced by settlers for which the Indigenous communities had no population immunity. As the stream of settlers increased, other Indigenous groups undergoing enforced dispossession and relocation by settlers escalated their raids on the more peaceable and less nomadic Pawnee. Disenfranchisement, war (some of it biological), and displacement contributed to mass starvation. Settler poachers left whole herds of slaughtered bison to rot on the plains after taking their tongues, considered a delicacy at the time. Reduced

30 Wishart, David J. *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 90.

by 1859 to a population of 3400, the Pawnee were forcibly confined by the US government to a reservation in modern-day Nance County, Nebraska.

By 1864, continually exposed to raids by other First Nation combatants, unable to feed their people with such reduced access to land and bison herds, Pawnee men began serving the US army as scouts in the "Indian Wars". This further exposed the reservation to violence and subjected the Pawnee to the derision of neighboring Indigenous communities for their complicity with the US government. While the Pawnee men fought in the US government's wars on the frontier, the military reneged on its agreement to protect their villages. In 1869, US soldiers even attacked fourteen Pawnee who were returning home after they were honorably discharged from military service, killing nine.[31] As Wishart writes, "There would be no peace or effective protection for the Pawnee as long as they remained in Nebraska. Nor would there be peace or justice from their American neighbors".[32] Settlers complained whenever Pawnee hunting bands left their reservation for subsistence work, and thus by the 1870s, official and public settler opinion called the removal of the Pawnee.[33] Any who were working outside the reservation were rounded up, and the government required passes of all Pawnee if they wished to leave the reservation for any reason.

Evarts, Keyes, Matlock, and other elders who remembered the Pawnee's last years in Nebraska were survivors of a period of genocidal settler oppression. When Weltfish met the Pawnee elders in the late 1920s, Evarts and others were responding to their lived history of culturecide by participating in cultural revitalization movements. Meanwhile, practices of ethnic cleansing and the enforcement of white-dictated memory continued. A few years before Weltfish arrived in Oklahoma, a boarding school for Pawnee children was built just outside the town. *The Pawnee Indian School Edition* of the *Oklahoma Indian School Magazine* shows Pawnee children putting up a play called "The Arrow Maker's Daughter", based on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1855 epic poem "Song of Hiawatha".[34] Through the play and its "two Indian dances put on by groups of maidens and young braves", settler re-imaginings of Indigenous North American history were inculcated by the government-funded school. "Song of Hiawatha", involving Ojibwe and Dakota characters, imagines at its end the white settlers as "pale-face" priests bringing the Christian religion to the grateful Indians. After they have arrived in

31 Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 182.

32 Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 182.

33 Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 182.

34 "Annual Thanksgiving Entertainment". Oklahoma Indian school magazine, volume 2, number 4, (April 1933): 25.

the village and spread their gospel, Hiawatha decides to depart, saying goodbye to Nokomis, his grandmother:

> *In your watch and ward I leave them;*
> *See that never harm comes near them,*
> *See that never fear molests them,*
> *Never danger nor suspicion,*
> *Never want of food or shelter,*
> *In the lodge of Hiawatha!*[35]

The Pawnee, forced to depart from their lands, perform Hiawatha departing. The Pawnee, survivors of starvation, dispossession, massacres, and the loss of their homes, perform a Hiawatha who only wishes that they, as hosts, provide food, shelter, and protection for the settlers who have taken their lands and imposed assimilation policies. It is into this context which Weltfish arrives in the summer of 1935 to record memories of life in Nebraska, nonetheless it is a context of which she had little to say.

Among much else, the elders who contributed to *The Lost Universe* shared a marginalized performance-based memory culture antithetical to what settler performing artists would, in the same period, pursue as a nationalist vision.[36] Pawnee elders, including Weltfish's primary informant Mark Evarts, translator Henry Chapman, as well as interviewees Walter and Norah Keyes and Blanche and Stacey Matlock, among others, described Pawnee performance as a zone of interpersonal relations that provided gravitas, authenticity, and grounding to an otherwise infantilized, disenfranchized, and deterritorialized Indigenous American political community. They succeeded in conveying how Pawnee performance culture could be in turns joyful, facetious, playful, heartbroken, reverent, magical, artificial, solemn, and ironic – in other words – rich with free play, aesthetic depth, and alive with social meaning.

However, Weltfish's fieldnotes on the memories of Pawnee elders about their ceremonies are also explicative of the politics of official memory culture in the US at the time built upon the absorption and assimilation of unofficial Indigenous memory culture. Within American history, ethnographic works like that of Weltfish long served as *Ersatz* ancestral accounts used to fabricate a false connection between the lives of "contemporary" (immigrant) setters to narratives of "ancestral" (Indigenous) natives. As Weltfish herself envisioned, the assumed inheritor

35 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Song of Hiawatha* (London: David Bogue, 1855), 293.

36 Lindsey Drury, "The Double Life of Pagan Dance: Indigenous Rituality, Early Modern Dance, and the Language of US Newspapers", *European Journal of Theatre and Performance*, 3 (2021): 340–369.

of Pawnee memory was to be the settler society that had pursued their eradication. The sacrifice of a marginalized people was legitimized insofar as it allowed for the absorption – through violent appropriation masquerading as benign cultural osmosis – of their memories by the dominant group, as self-proclaimed descendents.

After the Second World War, Weltfish's work also exposed her to experiences of sacrifice and marginalization. Her vision of an anti-racist nation and a socially progressive future marked her out for persecution in the McCarthy era. At the end of her life, Weltfish had a keen sense of this. Reflecting on the "relative obscurity" of Weltfish despite her contributions to the field of anthropology, Alessandra Link recorded the bitterness that Weltfish felt in her latter years:[37]

> Two months before Gene Weltfish's death, an MA student, Carol McBride, interviewed her. McBride recalled Weltfish's curt responses at the prospect of re-living her past political controversies. "Don't you think I've been chased enough," she responded to McBride, "in this society I've been kicked in every corner." Ending her angry rebuttal to McBride's queries, Weltfish concluded, "my part is to tell people." The FBI maintained a file on Weltfish until 1972. That same year she was forced into retirement at Farleigh Dickinson University, though she continued to teach and lecture until her death.[38]

From 1952–53, when Weltfish was brought before the McCarthyist committee and fired from Columbia, until her 1972 retirement, Weltfish endured two decades of persecution. Sixteen years later, Arthur Miller, reflecting on his anti-McCarthyist 1953 play *The Crucible*, described "red scare" politics as "human sacrifice to the furies of fanaticism and paranoia that goes on repeating itself for ever as though imbedded in the brain of social man".[39] Miller's piece linked the witch trials of Puritan colonists to McCarthyist persecution of activists, artists, and scholars like Weltfish, and narrated a lineage of persecutive politics in American history through the metaphor of human sacrifice.

Settler Ideations of the Sacrificial

US national identity, shaped by settler interests, has long been informed by concepts of sacrifice. During Weltfish's life, settler narratives of the sacrificial rites of "primitives" influenced anthropology, settler imagination, and popular cultural

37 Alessandra Link. *Political Mavens: Ruth Underhill, Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin, Gene Weltfish, Ella Deloria, and the Politics of Culture*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, PhD Diss, 2009), 95.
38 Link, *Political Mavens*, 94.
39 Arthur Miller, "Why I wrote the Crucible", The New Yorker (October 21 & 28, 1996): 158.

representations of Indigenous people. As Mishuana R. Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca Nation) describes, settler reconstruction and retelling the histories of Indigenous lands used sacrificial narratives to foretell Indigenous dispossession as morally acceptable.[40] National policies such as the Code of Indian Offenses and the Allotment Act further initiated what Steve Talbot has described as "spiritual genocide", and further evidence that the lives of Indigenous peoples have been historically, and remain presently, marked for sacrifice to the continued emergence and Westerward expansion of the colonial state. While the former punished Indigenous religious practices with fines, imprisonment, and enforced starvation, the latter "forced the restructuring of traditional, collective ownership of ancestral lands among Indigenous peoples to the US-American model of private ownership divided into plots".[41] Such policies, argues Talbot, were conceived to erase North American Indigeneity through forced assimilation, or what the former head of the US Bureau of Ethnology John Wesley Powell described as an 'Indian Policy', "based on four principles: destroy the Indian land ethic, break up the clan system, retain Indians in a state of wardship until they voluntarily give up their old ways, and pursue a general goal of complete assimilation."[42]

The sacrifice of ancestral lands for the colonial state was politically "justified" as necessary to the futurity of a nation—to its full promise as a land of plenty and opportunity for its citizens. As Wishart notes, Commissioner Francis Walker, director of the Office of Indian Affairs in the early 1870s, "expressed the prevailing philosophy in his annual report in 1872: 'The Westward course of population is neither to be denied or delayed for the sake of all the Indians that ever called this country home. They must yield or perish'".[43] The settler colonial project of the United States, co-identifying itself with the modernization of the "New World", thus sought to politically justify the cultural genocide of Indigenous North Americans, claiming their sacrifice to be precondition for its settler population's visionary future of modernity. Through the lens of ceremonial sacrifice, scholarly and governmental articulation of Indigenous lifeways as "primitive" can thus be understood as political (rather than descriptive) language.

40 See: Mishuana R. Goeman, "Electric Lights, Tourist Sights: Gendering Dispossession and Colonial Infrastructure at Niagara Falls", in Indian Cities: Histories of Indigenous Urbanization (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press): 95–114.

41 Lindsey Drury, "The Double Life of Pagan Dance: Indigenous Rituality, Early Modern Dance, and the Language of US Newspapers", *European Journal of Theatre and Performance*, 3 (2021): 340–369.

42 Steve Talbot, "Spiritual Genocide: The Denial of American Indian Religious Freedom, from Conquest to 1934", *Wicazo Sa Review*, 21 no. 2 (Autumn, 2006): 7–39.

43 Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 188.

As Susan Juster argues, settler ideations of sacrifice extend back to the earliest colonists, who drew upon biblical narratives of sacred violence to legitimize and understand their slaughter of Indigenous peoples. As Juster's work has shown, early English settler colonists understood their warring with Indigenous peoples by narrating their violence as a re-experiencing of the Old Testament's bloody trials:

> New World peoples were marked for destruction in the eyes of English colonists in large part because of their typological status as modern exemplars of old testament heathen nations. If the English were the new Israelites, the Indians who stood in their way were the new Amalekites. The biblical allusion to the Amalekites is both precise and prophetic: God commanded the Israelites not only to annihilate the Amalekites but to "blot out the remembrance" of them as a people for all future generations. To kill and to forget—this was the legacy of the Amalekites for English settlers.[44]

The consistent penchant among early colonists to suprimpose Indigenous religious practices onto the narratives of Christian antiquity and to narrate the violence of colonial encounter using the Old Testament as mythopoeic template began with the earliest colonies of England in the New World, and drew from the logics of the Spanish conquest.[45] Colonial justification of Indigenous suppression was, since the Spanish Conquest, driven by the necessity to sanctify settler (Christian) violence while demonizing that of (heathen) Indigenous peoples. Cannibalism and human sacrifice were positioned, since the first Europeans arrived in the Americas, as evidence of the ungodliness of Indigenous peoples, yet these practices were also reminders of Reformation debates about sacrifice – "a heated polemical debate over the spiritual meaning of 'eating' Christ's flesh and 'drinking' his blood" – as well as the bloody violence of Europe's vicious religious wars.[46] The transformation of Indigenous peoples into "savages" within the Puritan mindset was driven by their self-perception as God's chosen people, fighting the devil's legions in holy war. After the Puritan Mystic Massacre, in which as many as 700 Pequot villagers were entrapped by settlers in their village and burned alive collectively, Juster notes that Puritan preachers began to describe the act as "sweet sacrifice", "divine slaughter", and as a "feast of 'bread' provided by the Lord".[47]

---

44 Susan Juster, *Sacred Violence in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 121–122.

45 See: Pedro Mártir de Anglería, *De Orbe Novo* translated by Francis Augustus MacNutt (New York: Putnam, 1912 [1530]).

46 Juster, *Sacred Violence in Early America,* 33.

47 Juster, *Sacred Violence in Early America*, 54.

By the nineteenth century, the systematic and violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples was complemented not only by salvage methods in anthropology and ethnography, but by what Katrina M. Phillips (Red Cliff Ojibwe Nation) has called "salvage tourism".[48] Phillips's research resonates with Goeman's, which has shown how "Haudenosaunee land and lifeways became national sacrifice zones as the 'logics of elimination' produced and circulated myths" that refashioned and retold Indigenous story in ways that supported settler domination.[49] Goeman focuses particularly on settler tourist revisioning of Haudenosaunee narrative, describing the tourist narrative "The Maid of the Mist" at Niagara Falls, a tourist retelling of the sacred story of LeLawala. Goeman explains how settler tourism rewrote an ancestral Haudenosawnee story about a woman saved by the God of Thunder from a suicide attempt over the falls and taught divine knowledge that she brought back to her people. In the tourist narrative "The Maid of the Mist", the Iroquois instead ritually sacrifice LeLawala to the God of Thunder.

Goeman's use of the term "national sacrifice zones" connects a history of settler overwriting with sacrificial logics that have since the second world war also taken shape in zones of toxicity peopled by Indigenous groups whom the colonial government treats as expendable.[50] As Goodman articulates, whereas sites of nuclear testing and dumping, of which "two-thirds are found on Indian lands", are treated by the US government "as expendable and easily sacrificed, indigenous people understand them as sacred geographies".[51] In addition to their political status as a people marked for sacrifice at the altar of settler futurity, Indigenous North Americans have a long history of further sacrifices for the US as soldiers in domestic and foreign wars. Addressing the entanglement of nuclear contamination in New Mexico with the profound sacrifice Indigenous people made as fighters in the Second World War, Tuck and Yang write of how, "the same yellow pollen in the water of the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico, Leslie Marmon Silko reminds us, is the same uranium that annihilated over 200,000 strangers in 2 flashes".[52] Tuck and Yang draw on the work of author Leslie Marmon

48 See: Katrina M. Phillips, *Staging Indigeneity: Salvage Tourism and the Performance of Native American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

49 Goeman, "Electric Lights", 111.

50 For a history of "national sacrifice zones", see: Ryan Juskus "Sacrifice Zones: A Genealogy and Analysis of an Environmental Justice Concept". Environmental Humanities (2023) 15 (1): 3–24. For further address of the settler "logics of elimination", see: Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4) 2006: 387–409.

51 Audrey Goodman, "The Nuclear Southwest", in Nicolas Witchi (ed.) *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American West* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2014), 485.

52 Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony: The Recovery of Tradition* (New York: Peter Lang,1982), 174.

Silko (Laguna Pueblo) to describe Indigenous reckoning with a history of nuclear poisoning and ancestral relations tying North America to Japan – and the erasure of this history within the American education system: "Only curricular materials affirming the settler innocence, ingenuity, and right to America may be taught".[53] Silko's memorialization of the sacrifice of Indigenous veterans preceded US government recognition by almost fourty years.[54] The complex experiences of Native American sacrifice, tying colonial dispossession with military service, are unrecognized within a modern US nation-state nonetheless focused on self-sacrifice in military service.

Political theorist Antonio Cerella, citing the German historian Ernst Kantorowicz, describes the inscription of martyrdom within the military concepts of Christian-majority modern nation-states like the US, by articulating how, "the ideal of martyrdom for the heavenly, invisible city translated into self-sacrifice for an earthly, visible entity: the modern territorial state".[55] The soldier's self-sacrifice becomes ceremonially recognized in funerary procedures, national holidays, ceremony of public commemoration. As a sacrificial memorial, the tomb of the unknown soldier honors innumerable lives sacrificed on battlefields – individuals whose personal existence remains irrelevant to the politicians who sent them to war – with the symbolic grave commemorating a single unidentified person who gave their life for their country. The intervention of terrestrial nation-state in the celestial politics of sacrifice does not end with war and self-sacrifice, however. It can be further evidenced by the ceremony of capital punishment. In the US, execution is often conducted before a small audience of witnesses and in retribution for a perpetrated murder. Such a ceremonial act, as retribution, is supposed to give solace to the aggrieved through the violent political enforcement of a kind of cosmic balance—a life for a life. For the soldier as well as the death row inmate, sacrifice is to be done for the nation-state. If the former self-sacrifices on behalf of sovereignty, security, or interests abroad, the latter is sacrificed for the nation's ultimate legitimacy as a bestower of justice on behalf of its citizens. In nineteenth century Oklahoma, 31 of 39 people executed were Native American.[56] Oklahoma has executed six Native Ameri-

53 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor", 31.

54 According to the Smithsonian, the National Native American Veterans Memorial was dedicated in 2022 with "a procession and ceremony", and honors, "for the first time on a national scale the enduring and distinguished service of Native Americans in every branch of the US military". https://americanindian.si.edu/visit/washington/nnavm. Accessed February 3, 2024.

55 Cerella, *Genealogies of Political Modernity*, 181.

56 Tiana Herring, *Deeply Rooted: How Racial History Informs Oklahoma's Death Penalty*. A report by the Death Penalty Information Center (2022), 9. https://dpic-cdn.org/production/documents/Oklahoma-Deeply-Rooted-Report-10-14-2022.pdf

cans since 1976, and at present, Native Americans compose 19 % of the American military, while they are approximately 2.9 % of the US population. Native Americans are overrepresented as victims in every category of politically sanctioned sacrifice.

Meanwhile, settlers are (and long have been) historically and ceremonially intimate with sacrificial logics despite othering of sacrifice as Indigenous practice. Ever since the earliest colonial activites in North America, this has undermined the visibility of sacrifice as a settler practice. As Juster writes, the consequence is that "scholars have too often been misled by the tone of wonder" that permeated early settler accounts of Indigenous sacrificial practices, by consequence "accepting at face value the "otherness" of human sacrifice for the first European observers".[57] It is, I argue, not the unrecognizability of sacrifice, but the legitimization of colonial political structures at the expense of Indigenous nations that conditions such settler 'wonder' and otherization. Indigenous sacrificial politics and ceremonials, including those of the Pawnee, were delegitimized, while settler sacrificial politics and ceremonials – military service and its memorialization, and the death penalty, for example – found political legitimacy.

Remembering Sacrifice in Morning Star Ceremony and Iruska Dance Preparations

As historian Mahmood Mamdani notes, Indigenous North American peoples have long been understood by the US government as domestic dependent nations.[58] Within such a construct of forced dependency and delegitimization, the only sacrificial politics allowed to Indigenous North American peoples by the US government, both prior and during Weltfish's life, was that of surrendering their *everything* – lifeways, languages, lands, and their very lives. It is within this context of demanded sacrifice that any Indigenous practices identified by settlers as sacrificial became particularly abhorred, fantasized about, and responded to as justification for further extermination and repression.

In forcing the Pawnee from their lands and banning ceremonial culture, the US government also actively suppressed methods of intergenerational exchange which had culturally conditioned memory and brought it into social practice. As Weltfish's work acknowledges, Pawnee memory culture is intertwined with perfor-

57 Juster, *Sacred Violence in Early America*, 37.

58 Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021).

mance culture, which Weltfish described as "the thing that made life most worthwhile to the Pawnees".[59] Pawnee sovereignty is entangled with performance culture in a way that conflicts with the similarly memory-centered fieldwork of Weltfish, which was a "salvage ethnographic" method designed to document a culture prior to its presumed annihilation. Weltfish's methods in Pawnee Oklahoma aligned with a settler colonial program of action describable as what Achille Mbembe calls *necropolitics*.[60] Directly and indirectly, the political oppression of the Pawnee people under US occupation reduced an estimated 60,000 whose lands once included parts of Nebraska and northern Kansas to the approximately 700 known tribal members who still remained in Pawnee Oklahoma when Weltfish arrived. "To kill and let live," writes Mbembe, "thus constitutes sovereignty's limits, its principal attributes".[61] The sacrificial performance is the aesthetic expression of this colonial limit placed on the sovereignty of the colonized.

Weltfish's book *The Lost Universe* describes the ceremonial sacrifice of a human being and an animal. For the former, she articulated cosmic balance as central. "In the creation story", wrote Weltfish:

> Fruitfulness and light had come into the world because Morning Star and his realm of light had conquered and mated with Evening Star in her realm of darkness. Out of that contest, the first human being was conceived—a girl. From time to time the Morning Star demanded a girl in return.[62]

The Pawnee creation story that Weltfish positions human beings as direct descendants of the stars, and thus as indebted and answerable to stellar requirements. Weltfish emphasizes the depth and specificity of Pawnee astronomy, describing the Pawnee traditional Earth Lodge, which also served as a venue for ritual performance, as "an astronomical observatory" from which priests "could observe the stars in certain positions through the smokehole and through the long east-oriented entranceway. They also kept careful watch on the horizon right after sunset and just before dawn to note the order and position of the stars".[63] Star knowledge creates access to self-knowledge.

In the sacrifice to the Morning Star, cosmic balance is sought through a life for a life. The ceremony was rare, ocurring only a few times in settler records. Weltfish reports that prior to the discontinuation of the practice, between 1817–1838, there

59 Weltfish, The Lost Universe, 8.
60 Achille Mbembe, Necropolitics (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
61 Mbembe, Necropolitics, 66.
62 Weltfish, The Lost Universe, 106.
63 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe*, 79.

were four attempted sacrifices, only one which was carried out.[64] These were given sensationalized, anti-Indigenous treatment in settler newspapers of the time.[65] The narrative of the Morning Star sacrificial ceremony given by Weltfish is not clearly tied to the living memory of any particular elder Weltfish whom engaged with, as the ceremony ceased to be practiced before any living elder was born. Nonetheless, a limited account of what Weltfish has to say about the ceremony in *The Lost Universe* is useful to bring the description into its contextual relation to the wider discourse of sacrifice in settler-colonial North America and the controversies and issues it generated. The entanglement of ceremonial sacrifice with heightened awareness or consciousness of guilt is immediately reflected in the grief which characterizes the beginning of the narrative:[66]

> The Morning Star ceremony is initiated by the dream of a warrior, who sees the Morning Star, appearing as a man, and who claims to have been forgotten by the Pawnee people. The warrior awakes and rushes to the Morning Star priest, weeping, and is embraced and joined in sorrow by the priest for the task at hand. The priest and warrior go through a period of contemplation and preparation and gather a group of men for the journey to capture a youth from an enemy community for the ceremony. The group takes off on a multi-day ceremonial journey, finally approaching a community with the intention to harm no one, but to abduct a young girl.[67]

Once abducted, the girl would remain under the care of the Morning Star priest and attend the winter hunts with the Pawnee. The priest would watch the Morning Star for signs that the sacrifice should take place, and alert the warrior to the aupicious moment, namely when the star was ringed with red. During the building of the sacrificial scaffold, ceremonies often directly involving the capured girl

---

64 These include: of a Comanche girl in 1817, a ten year old Hispano boy in 1818, as well as of a Sioux girl in 1820, all of which according to Weltfish's reports failed due to the intervention of "Knife Chief", who is named more widely among historians as Petalesharo. Weltfish further describes the planned sacrifice of a Cheyenne woman in 1833 (identified by others as 1827), explaining that "the Indian agent, Joh Dougherty [. . .] took five men with him" to the Skidi village to ransom her life, and failing to do so, attempted to forcefully take her. She died in the fray of conflict. Finally, in the midst of a smallpox epidemic, Haxti, a fifteen year old Oglala Sioux girl was the last Morning Star sacrifice in 1838. See: Weltfish *The Lost Universe*, 9, 79, 106; David F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 14.

65 See: Frank Kalderman *Authorized Agents: Publication and Diplomacy in the Era of Indian Removal*, 52–58.

66 Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, 313.

67 In mythologies of sacrifice, Calasso writes, "the conflict begins with the abduction of a girl, or with the sacrifice of a girl. And the one is continually becoming the other". So it is with the Morning Star Ceremony. See: Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, 7.

were undertaken over a series of days and nights, consisting of dancing, singing, and periods of contemplation within the Earth House of the Morning Star. Once complete, another series of ceremonies were performed until finally the time had come to process to the scaffold. After the sight of the Morning Star in the twilight hours, the victim would mount the scaffold and be tied. Priests made burnt offerings around the scaffold, and she was shot through the heart with an arrow. Her blood was collected on a consecrated buffalo tongue, which was also proferred as a burnt offering. The entire procession of men who had accompanied her to the scaffold would also shoot arrows into her. In full daylight, her body was removed from the scaffold, was laid upon the ground in the east and songs sung around her. Weltfish's book records these words from one of them:

> She will turn into a bunch of grass; the ants will find her, the moths will come and find her, the fox shall come and find her, they coyote, the wildcat, the magpie, the crow; buzzards will come and find her, and last of all will be the bald-headed eagle who will come and eat her.[68]

After this, the entire community would share a feast of consecrated buffalo meat.

The ceremony makes a number of connections: between girl and buffalo, between Pawnee futurity and the stars, between care and violence, and between death and renewal. The girl and the Buffalo are, as sacrifices, transfigured into sacramental food, giving up their lives for the sake of the futurity of other living beings. As the process unfolds, the Pawnee ceremonially show intimate care for the girl and involve her in the spiritual and contemplative process that will result in her death. The practices that lead her to her death, in other words, do not shield her captors from recognition of what they are perpetrating. While provided with special clothes, eating utensils, and a place of honour within the ritual, the youth's terror must have been palpable and profoundly disturbing to the celebrant-captors convinced of the necessity of her ceremonial death. The final acts of the ceremony as recorded by Weltfish show the deep link between death and new life through what Calasso calls assimilation. The animals that will eat the body of the girl are like the Pawnee themselves, eating the bodies of animals in their feast on consecrated Buffalo. As Calasso describes, the sacrifice of assimilation further seeks a "mixing of the two worlds, divine and human [. . .] but with a response that is merely human, the response of creatures living in the realm of the irreversible, creatures who cannot assimilate (or expel) without killing".[69] The Morning Star Ceremony grapples with a multi-species, multi-ethnic living world in which the ritual of taking lives becomes necessary to survival.

---

68 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe*, 114.

69 Calasso, The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony, 293.

Pawnee epistemologies entangled their terrestrial place as a human community with wider metaphysical ecologies of victimization and perpetration, life and death, in part through their practices of conscientious violence conducted to ensure the renewal of a society under constant threat. Historian of North American settler and Indigenous slave trades David F. Brooks argues that, prior to contact with European settlement, networks of Indigenous captive exchange extended across North America, and created deeply entangled communities, ethnic and ritual, through practices of adoption, kin replacement, and sacrificial practice.[70] After this "system connected to the Euro-colonial world", argues Brooks:

> "Panis" (Pawnees) came to predominate among the several thousands of Plains Indian captives transported throughout its increasingly market-driven conduits to French Canada and British America, some even to the Spanish Caribbean.[71]

Brooks here used the term 'Panis', which was a term for an Indigenous slave corrupted from 'Pawnee' among French Canadian settlers, as the Pawnee were the most numerous Indigenous slaves in North America.

Brooks theorizes that the Morning Star Ceremony engaged both ceremonially and physically with the capture-captive Intertribal network of kinship, tying – literally incorporating – its non-Pawnee victims into the Pawnee creation story, thereby interweaving the performance of Pawnee origins myths with those of outsiders and others, while both bringing "honour to the individuals and the lineage they represented" and initiating the necessity for retribution.[72] Weltfish's account supports this idea, writing that the Pawnee assumed that, due to their capture of the sacrificial victim, "retribution would be visited upon the whole tribe later on in a regular war party".[73] Brooks turns to a wider range of Indigenous performing arts and ceremonial culture to build his concept of spiritual networks fostered through capture and inter-community exchange, arguing that these shaped the special dance dramas including "Los Comanches" and the "Matachinas" enacted by Pueblo Indigenous communities.[74] Relating the Morning Star Ceremony to other pantomimic dance and processional dramas, Brooks links the

70 Brooks, Captives and Cousins, 14.

71 Brooks, Captives and Cousins, 14–15.

72 Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*, 16.

73 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe*, 109.

74 For further analysis on New Mexican Hispano Matachines and Pueblo Indigenous Matachinas, interpreted by the German art historian Aby Warburg as cognates of antique "blood ceremony", see my article Lindsey Drury, "The transhistorical, transcultural life of sausages: From medieval morescas to New Mexican Matachines with Aby Warburg", *Postmedieval* 14 (2023), 513–541. Accessible at https://doi.org/10.1057/s41280-023-00275-1

histories of war, capture, kidnapping, and adoption, with Indigenous performance culture.

However, the arguments which Brooks developes on captive exchange networks and sacred violence seem somewhat simplistically aligned with typical theories of "primitive exchange", such as the settler and European discourse on Potlatch, which widely framed Indigenous Americans as ultimately engaged in pathological, pre-capitalist economies of unwieldy accumulation.[75] What Brooks' historicization does contribute, however, is a refutation of Wishart's articulation of the Pawnee as remote from colonial incursion prior to the 1840s. Prior to the arrival of settlers, the Pawnee had been subjected to the impact of the European slave trade in the Americas as early as the seventeenth century, so that their practice of ceremonial capture and sacrifice did not preceed the experience of the West's culture-cidal forces of occupation, explotation, enslavement, forced displacement, and extermination, but was in part a response to them.

If Weltfish's account on the Morning Star Ceremony does not acknowledge the contribution of any particular elder, her fieldnotes at least connect memories to specific individuals, thus grounding elder memories in particular, rather that generalized, accounts of ceremony. Her fieldnotes on the Iruska (or "war dance") are exemplary of this.[76] They discuss the induction of John Moses and his relations – including his father, and a cousin – into new roles within the ritual. As the father of Henry Moses, John Moses was the person who first allowed Weltfish access to Pawnee elders after she had showed them the letter of introduction written by his son.

Moses's induction into the Iruska dance is exhaustingly chronicled in the fieldnotes which describe in detail the rituals of preparation, the symbolic payment for the right to roles within the ceremony, the activities of performers, hosts, and organizers, the positions and movements of performers within the rite, and the series of associated official gatherings and feasts. It is an account specific to Moses's life and experience. As a result, the Iruska is recollected from the perspective of boyhood, when Moses participated in the Iruska Dance as an initiation process. Weltfish's fieldnotes on the Iruska carefully chronicle how the complexity of ritual and symbolism combined with the delicate balance established in relationships between performers imbues the preparations for the dance with multilayered meaning and builds up a communal sense of anticipation for danced and performed events. Moses emphasizes the political savvy of women in con-

75 Bracken, *The Potlatch Papers: A Colonial Case History*, 1997.

76 While the Iruska was extensively addressed in the fieldnotes, the ceremony is reduced to a short commentary at the end of Weltfish's book *The Lost Universe*.

vincing elder male knowledge-bearers to initiate their sons and grandsons into the Iruska dance. The three wives of an elder named Tirarikaksa, for example, invite him to sit down to a special snack of coffee and bread to convince him to involve his son Josie in the dance. The fieldnotes record that, "they wait to tell him until he's thru eating so that after he has eaten he owes something and having eaten the food he cannot retract".[77]

Women also give gifts to their husbands to bargain for their son's initiation into the dance. Moses' own mother gave his father Brave Chief a blanket when requesting that Moses learn the dance.[78] After this, Brave Chief chose a white puppy, which he began to raise. Dogs were usually kept as pets by the Pawnee, but this one was to be cooked in a stew and eaten in the feast associated with the Iruska dance.[79] A dog set aside for the Iruska would be given extra care until full grown, indoors or near the home, and was not allowed to wander about. The special care caused Brave Chief's neighbors to wonder whether the dog might sense that an Iruska was being planned. So, speculation abounded, intrigue grew, and the community began to piece together the evidence that dance which had not yet been announced was about to take place.[80]

Anthropologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Weltfish, tended to interpret the role of the dog in the Iruska as an example of "sacrifice".[81] As a sacrifice, however, the dog – being "fattened up" and given special care – is as a sacrifice resemblant of a Christmas goose or Thanksgiving turkey (whose political "pardoning" by the US president gestures lightheartedly at the "sacrificial" role of that animal on dinner tables across the country). What separates the Pawnee sacrifice from the Thanksgiving meal is the ceremonial recognition of an ontology of care between Pawnee and the beings whose deaths provided for their survival. The memories of elders consistently showed a recognition of the intimacy of eating and being eaten and acknowledged the entanglement of care and sacrifice. An animal who becomes a pet and loved one can also have its life sacrificed to provide a nourishing meal on a cultural and metaphysical plane, as in the case of all sacramental food.

Weltfish's fieldnotes on ceremonial culture show a Pawnee people contemplating human and animal bodies as living flesh requiring care, subject to violence and death, consumable as sustenance and food. Pawnee cosmology entangles earthly

77 Weltfish 1935 fieldnotes, 831.

78 Weltfish, 1935 fieldnotes, 827.

79 David H. Kelley and Eugene F. Milone, *Exploring Ancient Skies: A Survey of Ancient and Cultural Astronomy* (New York: Springer, 2011), 423.

80 Weltfish, 1935 fieldnotes, 825–6.

81 Weltfish, *The Lost Universe*, 476.

living with the divine through the stellar observation. The gift of life, bestowed by the Morning and Evening Star in their creation of the first girl, draws the Pawnee into a beholden relation with the divine. These relations are irreconcilably composed of hope and despair, the guilt of unforgivable violence and the elation of survival and futurity. They ceremonially bind the Pawnee as a people, by whom violence is enacted externally – upon others – and upon whom violence is received as collective experience. An ontology of violence, its control, and its limits of justification is embedded within Pawnee sacrificial ceremonies.

Incommensurability and Sacrifice

Tuck and Yang clarify that "decolonization is not equivocal to other anti-colonial struggles. It is incommensurable. There is so much that is incommensurable, so many overlaps that can't be figured, that cannot be resolved".[82] They further elucidate that the ethic of incommensurability "stands in contrast to aims of reconciliation" and of "rescuing a settler future".[83] In chronicling Pawnee memory, Weltfish pursued a social and political goal of settler futurity incommensurable with any vision of Pawnee futurity. There remains by consequence much that is unresolved and unresolvable in the history of sacrifice that I have brought to light from the collision of Weltfish's life as a settler who sought to understand a culture whose annihilation she was naturalizing, with the memories of unnamed Pawnee elders, including Walter Keyes, Mark Evarts, John Moses, and others who became, in her work, the embodiments of the culture being "disappeared" from history.

So what then does it mean to reckon with a history conditioned by incommensurability and its manifestations in the works of feminist and anti-racist scholars like Weltfish? Her work with the Pawnee stands as a testament to the dangers of social justice work that aims to repurpose Indigeneous lifeways for social justice goals that center settler populations. As a feminist and anti-racist, Weltfish spent her life committed to social justice, sought to work in solidarity, and sacrificed much to do so, but still failed to give voice to Pawnee experiences of being sacrificed by and to the settler state. Her work is instead expressive of her instrumentalization of the Pawnee people, Weltfish documented memories to preserve Pawnee lifeways, in an assumed future absence of the Pawnee people, to ensure that in the future settlers would be able to 'use' such cultural knowl-

82 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor", 3.
83 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor", 35.

edge toward what she envisioned as future informed by greater social justice. Her work thus participated in a settler politics of sacrifice.

The incommensurability that emerges between Pawnee survivance and Weltfish's research arises from her participation in the privileging of settler futurity and sublimation of violent, mass-scale settler political sacrificial enactment. This mix of privileging and sublimation produces the political devalidation of Pawnee survival, which has long been "justified" in settler narration with with descriptions of Pawnee sacrificial violence. While Weltfish's work does not participate in a settler tradition that labeled Pawnee sacrificial ceremony as "primitive" and "savage", she perpetuates settler understanding of it as such by refusing to politically contextualise it. The Pawnee were, within the violent domination of a settler state, subjected to a large-scale sacrificial system of expulsion, displacement, and extermination (the purification politics of the white settler state), while themselves engaging in a smallscale sacrificial ethic of (re-)assimilation (the communion of Self and Other through adoption, ritual surrender of the body and its blood to earth and animal consumption, the eating of consecrated buffalo and dog: all acts of reincorporation). While both approaches to sacrifice take account of the body of the victim, the settler mindset of expulsion distances itself from the victim's body, pushing victimization out of sight and out of mind, while Pawnee rituals of assimilation draw it near, into intimacy, integration, and contemplation.

The implicit settler anthropological argument differentiating between a tradition of Pawnee sacrificial ceremony and necropolitical settler pursuits of futurity is best understood as an argument comporting so-called "primitive" versus "civilized" reason. It goes like this: While Pawnee methods of sacrifice are symbolic and thus unable to truly impact the conditions of harvesting and hunting, the strategies of the settlers were rational in that every Indigenous body that stood in the way of sole settler use of lands of herds, was sacrificially, and ultimately nihilistically, removed. Within such a context, Weltfish's anthropological account of an imaginary Pawnee year-in-the–life, and the memories of elders, was collected as a salvage ethnography that reframed the memories of Pawnee elders into a lens conditioned by the purpose Weltfish assigned to them. The collected memories of Pawnee elders nonetheless bear witness to the intricate, quotidian relations through which Pawnee political solidarity and national identity have been practised and performed. They stand, incomensurably, against Weltfish's appropriation of them for settler use – as memories integral to the performative enactment of Pawnee sovereignty.

Bibliography

Anglería, Pedro Mártir de. *De Orbe Novo* translated by Francis Augustus MacNutt. New York: Putnam, 1912 [1530].

Anonymous visitor. "Annual Thanksgiving Entertainment". Oklahoma Indian school magazine, 2, no. 4, April 1933: 25. https://digitalprairie.ok.gov/digital/collection/culture/id/2365

Bracken, Christopher. *The Potlatch Papers: A Colonial Case History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Brooks, David F. Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Calasso, Roberto. *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*. New York: Alfred A. Kopf, 1993.

Cannon, Robert, with John Hubley, Ring Lardner Hr., Maurice Rapf, Phil Eastman, and music by Paul Smith. *The Brotherhood of Mankind*. Film produced by United Auto Workers, 1946.

Cerella, Antonio. *Genealogies of Political Modernity*. London: Bloomsbury, 2020.

Drury, Lindsey "The Transhistorical, Transcultural Life of Sausages: From medieval morescas to New Mexican Matachines with Aby Warburg". *Postmedeival* 14 (2023): 513–541.

Drury, Lindsey. "The Double Life of Pagan Dance: Indigenous Rituality, Early Modern Dance, and the Language of US Newspapers". *European Journal of Theatre and Performance*, 3, (2021): 340–369.

Emery, Jacqueline. *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.

Goeman, Mishuana R. "Electric Lights, Tourist Sights: Gendering Dispossession and Colonial Infrastructure at Niagara Falls". In *Indian Cities: Histories of Indigenous Urbanization*, edited by Kent Blansett and Cathleen D. Cahill. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022.

Goodman, Audrey. "The Nuclear Southwest". In: *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American West*, edited by Nicolas Witchi. Hoboken: Wiley, 2014.

Herring, Tiana. *Deeply Rooted: How Racial History Informs Oklahoma's Death Penalty*, edited by Ngozi Ndulue and Robert Dunham. A report by the Death Penalty Information Center, 2022. 9. https://dpic-cdn.org/production/documents/Oklahoma-Deeply-Rooted-Report-10-14-2022.pdf

Juster, Susan. *Sacred Violence in Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

Juskus, Ryan. "Sacrifice Zones: A Genealogy and Analysis of an Environmental Justice Concept". Environmental Humanities 15 (1) (2023): 3–24.

Kalderman, Frank. *Authorized Agents: Publication and Diplomacy in the Era of Indian Removal*, 2019.

Kelley, David H. and Eugene F. Milone. *Exploring Ancient Skies: A Survey of Ancient and Cultural Astronomy*. New York: Springer, 2011.

Lesser, Alexander. *The Pawnee Ghost Dance Hand, Game*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1933.

Link, Alessandra. *Political Mavens: Ruth Underhill, Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin, Gene Weltfish, Ella Deloria, and the Politics of Culture*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, PhD Diss, 2009.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *The Song of Hiawatha*. London: David Bogue, 1855.

Mamdani, Mahmood. *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020.

Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

Miller, Arthur. "Why I wrote the Crucible" *The New Yorker* (October 21 & 28, 1996):158.

Phillips, Katrina M. *Staging Indigeneity: Salvage Tourism and the Performance of Native American History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021.

Pratt, Richard Henry. “Pratt Responds to Request for Savings by Mark D. Evarts”. National Archives and Records Administration. RG 75, Entry 91, box 950, 1893-#4848, February 6 1893. https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/documents/pratt-responds-request-savings-mark-d-evarts

Price, David H. *Threatening Anthropology: McCarthyism and the FBI’s Surveillance of Activist Anthropologists*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Redman, Samuel J. *Prophets and Ghosts: The Story of Salvage Anthropology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021.

Robinson, Dylan. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony: The Recovery of Tradition*. New York: Peter Lang 1982.

Spinner, Samuel. *Jews Behind Glass: The Ethnographic Impulse in German-Jewish and Yiddish Literature, 1900–1948*. DPhil thesis, Columbia University (2012).

Talbot, Steve. “Spiritual Genocide: The Denial of American Indian Religious Freedom, from Conquest to 1934”. *Wicazo Sa Review*, 21 no. 2 (2006): 7–39.

Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization is not a Metaphor”. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1 no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

Vizenor, Gerald. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1999.

Weltfish, Gene. *Pawnee Field Notes*. 1935. Archived in the Modern Manuscripts & Archives at the Newberry, Box: 2, Folder: 12, under the heading “Gene Weltfish Pawnee field notes” (Ayer-Modern-MS–Weltfish), Book 11, 171–237 (1935) (Item – Box: 2, Folder: 12). https://archives.newberry.org/repositories/2/archival_objects/62921

Weltfish, Gene, with Benedict, Ruth. *The Races of Mankind*. New York: Public Affairs Committee, 1994.

Weltfish, Gene. *The Lost Universe: Pawnee life and culture*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977 [1965].

Wishart, David J. *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.

Wolfe, Patrick. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4) (2006): 387–409.