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Becoming Avian in the Anthropocene: Performing the Feather Dance and the Owl Dance at Pvlvcekolv

Introduction. Scholars have discussed the Anthropocene for over two decades. This proposed latest epoch on the geologic time line broadly reflects human industry that, in an attempt to conquer nature, has equaled or surpassed the processes of geology and become a major source of global destruction (Chin et al.). Although scholars have proposed various start dates for the Anthropocene, several academics compellingly propose aligning the start date with the colonial period, connecting the concept with the dispossessions, genocides, environmental transformations, and severing of relationships that define both colonialism and the Anthropocene (Davis and Todd). Whatever the precise name or start date of the Anthropocene, two points have become clear. First, human agency has reached and moved beyond the point of affecting the entire planet. And second, colonialism continues to be bound up with the realities of the Anthropocene. This entanglement of colonialism and the Anthropocene speaks to the vital need for decolonization.

While Indigenous peoples have worked toward decolonization across the history of the United States settler colony, in recent years a surge of interest and scholarship on decolonizing methods and theorization has blossomed.¹ Often uncomfortable and literally unsettling, decolonization requires the repatriation of Indigenous lands by settlers, Indigenous resurgence, abolition of contemporary slavery, and the dismantling of the imperial metropole. In addition, decolonization involves the recognition and practice of “always already different” relations to land and the “nonhuman kin” such as animals and plants who co-constitute that land (Tuck and Yang 7). The long-standing and diverse multispecies relationships between Indigenous peoples and the plants, animals, and other “naturalcultural” kin who co-inhabit their lands remain vitally important to all involved (Descola). Maintaining these relationships constitutes one key step along a path to decolonization

The simultaneous need for decolonization and the human-centric nature of the Anthropocene concept place into high relief those multispecies relationships built, maintained, and celebrated by Indigenous peoples. Members of Tvlwv Pvlvcekolv, a Muskogee Creek Native American community, maintain a multispecies ritual performance cycle called the “busk.” An example of what Kahnawà:ke Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson has characterized as a “sovereign practice” (2), the busk

functions as a space in which members of this Indigenous community formally and informally maintain relationships with a variety of animals, plants, and additional natural/cultural kin in their local ecosystem. The bedrock of these ritualized relationships is a series of “sung dances” or “danced songs,” such as the Feather Dance and the Owl Dance, the two case studies featured in this article. Many of these events feature melody lines and choreography that connect to and/or derive from the habits of local other-than-human kin. Exemplified in both Feather and Owl Dances, Tvlwv Pvlvcekolv's ritual performance practice features the care and attention to multispecies kinship relationships that are part of the decolonization process.

I write this article as a multispecies ethnography, a genre US anthropologists S. Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich have characterized as writings in the Anthropocene (549). This kind of work brings attention to the “situated connectivities that bind us into multispecies communities” (Rose 87). One cannot fully or accurately describe and/or analyze busk performance practice or, indeed, most activities or relationships at Pvlvcekolv, without taking into account the other beings with whom Pvlvcekolv peoples interact (Morrison). In describing and analyzing rituals I therefore write humans and nonhumans as equals in a non-hierarchical, multispecies entanglement.

Writing a multispecies ethnography on the topic of decolonization features relatively high stakes. “Decolonization” became popular in scholarly and public discourses relatively recently. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg (Anishinabe) scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has pointed out that Indigenous peoples globally have worked toward decolonization across colonial history (246). Despite this fact, this recent and comparatively widespread surge of interest suggests the reaching of a consensus, a potential tipping point. Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe has depicted settler colonialism as a structure and a process, not a single event (388). Likewise, decolonization cannot be a single event, but rather a shifting of structures through multiple, complex processes. The better we comprehend the processes of decolonization, the better we can enact them. As a settler scholar working in collaboration with an Indigenous community I perceive the stakes of this article to be high. Among other processes, decolonization involves repatriation of Indigenous lands by settlers, as I discuss elsewhere in this essay (Tuck and Yang 7). L. B. Simpson has drawn attention also to the fact that Indigenous peoples do not *need* settlers (245). Her statement echoes what A. Simpson has called “refusal,” practices of Indigenous autonomy wherein Native people refuse to accept the authority of a settler state through deliberate actions and/or inactions (106). (I return to refusal below.) Given autonomy and refusal, I walk a tightrope in suggesting that the processes of

decolonization, notably land repatriation, appear to necessitate collaboration and frank Indigenous-led discussion with non-Indigenous populations to address and alter settler colonial structures. In writing this article I work to exemplify one way in which non-Indigenous individuals might participate in decolonization: promoting acknowledgement and understanding of Indigenous sovereign and decolonizing practices, such as ontological multispecies relationships. My goal in writing this article, therefore, has been to increase attention to the ontological processes involved in decolonization during the Anthropocene.

The Anthropocene. Scientists and scholars have discussed the relationships between human-derived destruction and global climate and geologic changes encompassed in the term “Anthropocene” for over two decades. Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen and US ecologist Eugene Stoermer originally popularized the concept in 2000; the International Commission on Stratigraphy is considering including this epoch within the Geological Time Scale following the Holocene era (Zalasiewicz et al.). There is no question that anthropogenic actions and processes have had and are having global effects. In an extremely short period of geologic time, geologic strata reveal plastic, concrete, genocide, radionuclides, coal, plutonium, and other forms of rapid change and destruction because of the direct actions of humans, especially “petrochemical companies and those invested in and profiting from petrocapiatalism and colonialism” (Davis and Todd 765). Unlike every other geologic epoch, the proposed Anthropocene is defined by the detritus, movements, and actions of humans. Discussions of the Anthropocene largely cover three primary topics: 1) critiques of the term and/or concept, 2) whether or not the current geological timeframe ought to be called the “Anthropocene” or by another name, and 3) when the epoch began.

In increasingly transdisciplinary work (Swanson) the concept “Anthropocene” has been critiqued by scholars especially in the humanities and social sciences for its conceptual failure to adequately account for power relations (Davis and Todd 763). The term is misleading: all humans become equally implicated in “the Anthropocene” via the prefix “anthropos.” The word falsely contains an implicit and Euro-centric assertion of human universalism. In fact, not all humans are equally responsible for the degradations that characterize this epoch; western, modern, and capitalist actors are responsible for the global, damaging processes. In an effort to address these power relations and improve the utility of the concept, several scholars have proposed alternative names. Each of these proposed names reflects different aspects and nuances, narrating different stories and emphasizing different features of current realities. Several choices include the

“Capitalocene” (Haraway and Kenney; Malm; Moore, *Capitalism*), the “Eurocene” (Grove), the “Plantationocene” (Tsing et al.; Gilbert and Epel), and the “Chthulucene” (Haraway, *Trouble*), among others.

Independently from one another, several people appear to have crystallized the term “Capitalocene” around the same time. While still a graduate student, Swedish ecologist Andreas Malm first proposed it in 2009; US economist David Ruccio publicized it in 2011; US science and technology scholar Donna Haraway used it in public lectures in 2012; and British geographer and historian Jason Moore, with whom Malm originally communicated his idea, expanded on it in an edited volume in 2016. An “ugly word for an ugly system,” “Capitalocene” constitutes a “world-ecology of capital, power, and nature” that reflects the ways in which capitalism organizes nature (Moore “Acknowledgements” xi; “Introduction” 5). Similarly, in coining the term “Eurocene,” US political scientist Jairus Grove focuses on the key roles played by historic European elite in developing a “mechanistic view of matter, an oppositional relationship to nature, and an economic system indebted to geographical expansion.” His term pushes against the false human universalization of “Anthropocene” and assigns specific blame to historic Europeans for the political orders that result from the exploitation of peoples and resources to create wealth (Grove).

Collectively coined by a group of anthropologists gathered at the University of Aarhus in a recorded conversation for the journal *Ethos* in October 2014, the “Plantationocene” reflects the devastating transformation of diverse kinds of human-tended farms, pastures, and forests into extractive and enclosed plantations (Tsing et al.) These plantations relied on slave labor and/or labor that was also exploited, alienated, and often abducted and spatially transported. Additionally, these plantations were the model for the “carbon-greedy machine-based factory system that is often cited as an inflection point for the Anthropocene” (Haraway, *Trouble* 206). Haraway herself combines all of these terms, histories, and forces into her whimsically macabre umbrella term, “Chthulucene.” She develops her term not from US science fiction author H. P. Lovecraft’s “misogynist racial-nightmare monster Cthulhu (note the spelling difference),” but rather from “the diverse earthwide tentacular powers and forces and collected things with names like Naga, Naia, Tangaroa (burst from water-full Papa), Terra, Haniyasu-hime, Spider Woman, Pachamama, Oya, Gorgo, Raven, A’akuluujjusi, and many many more.” Her choice of a term reflects the need for a name that encompasses the “dynamic ongoing symchthonic forces and power of which people are a part, within which ongoingness is at stake.” She hopes that with intense commitment and collaborative work and play, “flourishing for rich multispecies assemblages that

include people will be possible" (101). "Chthulucene" therefore reflects not just the current status quo, but also a hope that that status quo might feature positive change.

Besides names, scholars have proposed dates for the "Global Boundary Stratotype Section and Point" (GSSP), the term for geologic era start dates. These proposed dates range from the birth of human agriculture before 9,000 BC, to the beginning of the colonial era in the fifteenth century CE, to the start of the steam engine in the nineteenth century CE, to others. US chemist Will Steffan and colleagues argue that the onset of the Anthropocene coincides with the "great acceleration" of anthropogenic changes upon the Earth System, setting the date to 1964. The Anthropocene Working Group, which is affiliated with the Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy of the International Commission on Stratigraphy, echoes this argument, citing the high carbon dioxide levels, mass extinctions, and widespread use of petrochemicals (Zalasiewicz et al.).

However, US anthropologist Kent G. Lightfoot and colleagues and British geographers Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin separately propose colonialism and settler colonization as the start date of the Anthropocene. Lewis and Maslin specifically propose the year 1610. In proposing this date, they contrast the amounts of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) found in geologic strata via ice core samples dating to the years 1492 and 1610, respectively. They record a difference of 7-10 parts per million (p.p.m.) CO₂ between those two years. In 1492 54-61 million Indigenous people lived in North America; by 1610, the European colonial project had resulted in a massive genocide of Indigenous peoples from 54-61 million to an estimated 6 million individuals. At the same time forests and other plants grew to take over landscapes formally lived in and controlled by Indigenous peoples. Carbon intake by those plants combined with the decrease in human-derived CO₂ lowered the amount of atmospheric CO₂ a total of 7-10 p.p.m. (175). Lewis and Maslin define this drastic dip as the "Orbis spike," from the Latin for "world"; their choice of term reflects the ways in which human relations became intensively globalized during and after the colonial era as the so-called Old and New Worlds collided. They note that the Orbis spike "implies that colonialism, global trade[,] and coal brought about the Anthropocene" (177). Broadly, the causative relationship between colonialism and the Anthropocene highlights unequal power relationships between different groups of people, rapid economic growth, the impacts of globalized trade, and modern global reliance on fossil fuels.

Canadian anthropologist Heather Davis and Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd echo the calls for a colonial start date to the Anthropocene. They suggest that a start date in the

twentieth century misses a valuable opportunity to open the Anthropocene concept beyond its Eurocentric framing. In their critique, they draw attention to Crutzen and Stoermer's reliance on the "noösphere" in the seminal article that popularized "Anthropocene." The noösphere constitutes a "world of thought" that marks "the growing role played by mankind's [sic] brainpower and technological talents in shaping its own future and environment" (Crutzen and Stoermer 17). The noösphere places thought above the biosphere and geosphere, suggesting that the biosphere cannot in and of itself constitute an "envelope of thinking substance" (Teilhard de Chardin 151). Davis and Todd state that this assertion contradicts thousands of years of Indigenous philosophies.

Counteracting the noösphere, Mohawk and Anishnaabe sociologist Vanessa Watts notes that Anishnaabe, Haudenosaunee, and many other Indigenous peoples conceive humans to be made from the land: "our flesh is literally an extension of soil" (27). Watts articulates Indigenous "Place-Thought," the "non-distinctive space where place and thought were never separated because they never could or can be separated. Place-Thought is based on the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and nonhumans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts" (21). In essence, land and thought are integral to one another: "biota, geology, and thinking are one and the same," and life, philosophy, and land animate one another (Davis and Todd 769)

The on-going structure that is the colonial project focuses on changing the land: terraforming that transforms animals, plants, soils, and atmospheres (Wolfe 388). Examples of this kind of terraforming include the 1965 Kinzua Dam construction, which flooded 10,000 acres of the Seneca Nation's Alleghany Reservation in violation of the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua (Rosier 345), or the construction of a right-of-way for Interstate Highway 10 in 1971, which forced Pvlvcekolv to re-locate their Square Grounds. Settler colonialism and its contemporary extension (petro)capitalism rest on a foundation of violent altering or severing of relations among humans, soils, plants, animals, minerals, atmospheres, and others (Davis and Todd 770). Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate (Dakota) anthropologist Kim TallBear draws attention to this point when she states that settler colonists "did not know how to do kinship," noting that the settler colonial nation-states of Canada and the United States have violated kinship obligations to nonhuman kin throughout colonial history (TallBear). TallBear describes the settler genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas as a "decimation of [both] humans and nonhumans." She characterizes colonialism as the genocide of humans and other-than-human relatives. Since humans need their kin to survive, the murders of nonhuman kin affect humans as much as the murders of human kin.

Following TallBear's lead, Davis and Todd narrate the Anthropocene as an extension of the relationship-sundering logic that is settler colonialism (771). Tethering the Anthropocene concept to colonialism via a 1610 start date functions to draw attention to the specifically colonial character of the violence at the Anthropocene's core. The presence of this colonial violence highlights the need to consider and include the peoples directly impacted by the Anthropocene: Indigenous peoples and their philosophies, self-governance, and self-determination (Davis and Todd 763). Davis and Todd critique the propensity of geologists to attribute to "traces" the status of evidence of primary importance. "Traces" refer to phenomena such as Lewis and Maslin's CO2 spike. Davis and Todd call instead for geologists and other natural scientists to focus on the evidence of specific, locally-situated lived experiences of Indigenous people. They suggest that it is more important to examine the ways in which Indigenous peoples engage with Anthropocenic realities. We must feature Indigenous perspectives in these discussions because the "fleshy philosophies and fleshy bodies" of Indigenous peoples constitute some of that which is most at stake in the Anthropocene. This necessity means accounting for "the fleshy stories of kohkoms (the word for grandmother in Cree) and the fish they fried up over hot stoves in prairie kitchens to feed their large families" (767). Understanding the relationship between colonialism and the Anthropocene results in material consequences, which affect specific bodies and specific lands (767). Heeding Davis and Todd's suggestion that we consider the implications of the Anthropocene beyond Western and European epistemologies (764), I turn to a case study of Indigenous performance practice at Tvlwv Pvlvcekolv.

Community and Research Descriptions. Tvlwv Pvlvcekolv (pronounced "Dulwa Palachicola;" hereafter solely "Pvlvcekolv") is a small American Indian community located in what is now northern Florida.² Although the geographic and spiritual center of the community lies near the state capital Tallahassee, members live scattered across the Southeast and beyond, inside and outside the United States. The community encompasses approximately 250 families. Due to a series of colonial-era kinship alliances especially with traders from the British Isles and slaves from West Africa, many Pvlvcekolv people were able to "pass" as white or black by the early 1800s. As such, Pvlvcekolv is one of few Muskogee communities that largely succeeded in hiding in plain sight and avoiding the Trail of Tears, remaining in the Southeast.³ Remaining meant that the community had to create and maintain traditions of privacy that still persist. Unlike the Muskogee (Creek) Nation in Oklahoma, a tribe distinct from Pvlvcekolv, remaining in the Southeast meant that Pvlvcekolv does not have federal

recognition as an American Indian tribe. In the 1960s and 1970s, Pvlvcekolv began proceedings to achieve federal recognition, aided by several helpful bureaucrats from the Muskogee (Creek) Nation. Motivated by a desire to maintain community privacy and autonomous sovereignty while avoiding federal control, elders withdrew the petition after roughly two decades of paperwork and communication (Koons 59). Their decision meant that Pvlvcekolv peoples could focus their time and energies on community and ritual life and resurgence, eschewing what Tsalagi (Cherokee) political scientist Jeff Corntassel has called colonial “politics of distraction” (86) such as state affirmation and recognition.

Of the 250 families in the community, between 10 and 50 individuals now regularly participate in ritual. This annual ritual cycle is called the “busk,” often referred to as “Green Corn ceremonialism” in the ethnographic literature (Ballard; Bell; Jackson; Schupman).⁴ At Pvlvcekolv, the cycle consists of four ritual events scheduled across the agricultural season in proximity with new moons in the lunar calendar. Each busk occurs over a long weekend, Friday-Sunday, on the Square Grounds (see Figure 1), the ceremonial center of the community. These grounds consist of four open, porch-like structures called “arbors,” each of which is aligned along a cardinal point. The community segregates into the arbors by sex and age group: women sit in the East, young men in the South, mature men in the North, and elder men in the West. At the center of the grounds sits the ceremonial Fire atop a small mound (see Figure 2). This entity is the portal through which the community directs their interactions with Ohfvnkv, Creator, or deity. The process of lighting the Fire invites Ohfvnkv to participate in the busk. Pvlvcekolv’s ceremonial Fire pre-dates contact with colonial settlers, a statement of the community’s longevity and cultural importance (Koons 98).



Figure 1. Aerial view of the Pvlvcekolv Square Grounds. (Photo by Ken Koons.)



Figure 2. The Fire at the 2009 Little Green Corn Busk. (Photo by Hakopē.)

Around the Fire and upon the cosmogram of the Square Grounds, community members perform a series of “animal dances” at each busk, such as Buffalo Dance, Feather Dance, Turtle Dance, Owl Dance, and others. Pvlvcekolv members often describe these dances as ways to honor, acknowledge, thank, renew relationships with, and give breath to these and all other animals. Among other things, these dances are iconic of the named animal, either in the steps, the shapes traced onto the grounds, or the song melodies.⁵ For example, the step for the Garfish Dance involves tacking side-to-side in the manner in which the gar swims. Similarly, Buffalo Dance choreographically incorporates bison wallowing behavior and annual bison migration patterns that once upon a time included the Southeast (Koons 272-278).

I have studied these dances and multispecies relationships for over a decade in collaboration with Pvlvcekolv at the express invitation of ceremonial leadership. I am a non-Indigenous, settler scholar who grew up in Lenape, Piscataway, and Susquehannock territories in the mid-Atlantic of North America. The data for this article derives from our collaboration, including observation-participation style

ethnography, audio-visual documentation and participation in ceremonial events, oral history interviews, and archival research around the United States. To date, I have conducted over one hundred interviews; documented and participated in fourteen ceremonies; made twenty-one research trips to archives, museums, and/or historic locations; and spent time with the community across twenty-seven research trips. At the command of the Pvlvcekolv Matriarch, I began actively participating in ritual events early in the research collaboration, and participation quickly became a key component of my broader research. A key individual in this research collaboration is tribal elder and Maker of Medicine Hakopē. In addition to numerous interviews, he has guided and advised my research via weekly phone conversations almost every Sunday evening since 2005. Our conversations form part of the foundation of my understanding of Pvlvcekolv tradition and culture.

As a non-Indigenous scholar collaborating with an Indigenous community living in a settler colonial state on the sensitive topics of sacred performance and worldview, I have worked to maintain an ethical research program in dialogue with the community (Smith). Pvlvcekolv has granted me documented permission to conduct research and to publish material from the project. As per our research agreement, I use Muskogee pseudonyms for living community members to maintain comparative privacy; despite the utility of this online journal format, I honor the research agreement by not including audio and video examples. Ceremonial leadership and other elders have reviewed this manuscript for cultural accuracy and to ensure that it does not feature information that should not be shared.

Becoming Avian. The Anthropocene and the human-centric destructions associated with it mean that relationships between humans and nonhumans become particularly important. Pvlvcekolv community members maintain a series of relationships with other-than-human kin through their busk-based ritual performance practice.⁶ A key component of this performance practice is the Muskogee verb *ometv*. Difficult to translate into English, *ometv* functions as a kind of umbrella term. It can mean “to be like,” “to become,” “to emulate,” “to imitate,” “in the manner of,” or “by means of.” In a ceremonial situation, the verb connotes a sense of physical transformation (Hakopē, interview, 23 August 2015). In his Creek glossary, US anthropologist Albert Gatschet notes the word can mean, “to be alike to” (114). I translate *ometv* into English using the term “becoming.”

Theorized by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (237), “becoming” (*devenir* in their original French) constitutes a process and relationship that emerges

from nonhierarchical alliances, symbiotic attachments, and the mingling of creative agencies in multispecies contexts (Kirksey and Helmreich 546). Becomings are not dreams, fantasies, or imitations. Rather, they form distinct ontological categories patterned through “sorcery” or alliance (Deleuze and Guattari 238; Haraway, *Species* 28). What Deleuze and Guattari define as “sorcery” might describe the rituals that comprise the busk in the Pvlvcekolv context. “Becoming” is its own verb, “becoming-X” its own noun — “it lacks a subject distinct from itself” (Deleuze and Guattari 238). In this article, I therefore write of ritual participants becoming “becomings-birds” and “becomings-owls.”

Becoming occurs in concert with multispecies Others. Haraway has criticized Deleuze and Guattari for the misogyny, fear of aging, and incuriosity regarding actual animals in their proposal and discussion of becoming. She notes the concept’s utility, however, and that “becoming is always becoming *with*” (Haraway, *Species* 28, 244). The process neither occurs alone, nor in a context populated with only a single species. Rather, it occurs in mutually constituted ecologies filled with a variety of beings and species. Furthermore, becoming takes place in a situation when “the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake” during situations of great importance (244). Deleuze, Guattari, and Haraway’s “becoming” describes much the same phenomena as ometv: becoming like something/one by means of ritualized interaction with that something/one.⁷

Becoming explains what occurs during certain danced songs in the busk. This ritual cycle constitutes an example of Haraway’s situation of great importance in that it resets social and metaphysical harmony on local through universal scales. During the danced songs named after plants and animals the human performers become becomings-other: becomings-birds, -bison, -owls, -insects, -turtles, and -plants (Abram). These danced songs include: Feather, Buffalo, Owl, Bug, Turtle, Harvest, and Berry and Arbor Dances. As Haraway notes, becoming is always a becoming *with*. Participants cannot become becomings-bison or becomings-turtle without interactions with bison and turtle, respectively. The danced songs themselves comprise these interactions. Although performers might engage in Buffalo or Turtle Dances without the physical presence of a bison or turtle, those beings’ influences are present.

During these ritual interactions, bodies are processes, not static containers or vehicles. US dance ethnologist Deidre Sklar has noted that beings constantly configure and incorporate information (and matter and energy) in a constant process of becoming that is the body (186). In these rituals human participants become *more than human*, or, put

another way, participants become *more human* through these interactions. Haraway and others have proposed that, given that humans live alongside multiple species, our states of humanity partially derive from multispecies interactions (Haraway, *Species*; Kirksey and Helmreich). The fact that our humanities derive from these interactions reveals the foolishness of narratives of human exceptionalism (Haraway, *Species* 244). We do not live in an exclusively human world, but rather in a series of “contact zones where lines separating nature from culture have broken down:” a series of what French anthropologist Philippe Descola calls “naturecultures” (Kirksey and Helmreich 546; Descola). Pvlvcekolv’s animal and plant dances do not therefore form multispecies exceptions to a monospecies rule. Rather, they comprise culturally-specific examples of multispecies interactions that form states of humanity particular to Pvlvcekolv.

These becomings-animal or becomings-other in ritual contexts can occur because of the nature of being and body in this Muskogee context. According to Hakopē, the edge of a being exists not at the skin or physical surface of that being, but instead at the boundary of that being’s influence (Koons 136). When singing certain dances during the busk, humans slip inside the area of influence of specific beings to become becomings-other. As becomings-birds or becomings-owls, for example, participants acknowledge the importance of birds to their mutual ecology, their mutual natureculture. They also enlarge birds’ area of influence and enact these beings. In what follows, I describe and analyze the ritual practice of the Feather Dance and the Owl Dance, examining the processes of becoming featured in both rituals.

Feather Dance. The Feather Dance functions as a space for the Pvlvcekolv men who attend busk to interact and become with avian kin.⁸ By dancing Feather Dance, participants propitiate birds to fulfill their ecological roles. This danced song usually takes place as the first ceremonial action on the Saturday of a busk weekend. The men begin preparations to enter Feather Dance by putting on white shirts, echoing the feathers that top the wands they carry, which in turn reference the white birds that appear in the lyrics in one of the Feather Dance songs. If not white, each man wears the best shirt he brought to busk, regardless of color or design.

After dressing their finest, they each collect a feather wand or pole from where they lean against the South Arbor. Two or three feathers blossom from each of these six- or seven-foot long canes (see Figure 3). As part of his preparations for each cycle, community member Kusko gathers egret feathers he finds along the sides of several north Florida rivers specifically for these wands. The men begin the dance in a circled cluster, shoulder to shoulder, at the northwest ordinal post. At the center of the men’s

formation lies a circle drawn in the sand called the Bird Mound (see Figure 4). In the recent past, the Bird Mound was a physical mound of earth anywhere from eight to fifteen feet in diameter. Now it is mostly conceptual; a ritual leader draws the mound on the ground when needed. It represents the birds and, like them, can migrate, both around the Square Grounds and from location to location (Bloch and Hantman).



Figure 3. The tips of the feather wands as they lean against the South Arbor during the 2009 Harvest Busk. (Photo by Author.)



Figure 4. The Bird Mound drawn on the grounds at the 2008 Harvest Busk. Right: Detail of the Bird Mound. Both images are black and white to render the circle more easily visible; the detail has been darkened for the same reason. (Photo by Author.)

While standing around the Bird Mound, participants name people they want to keep in mind during the dance and to whom they want to dedicate their actions. They name ailing or aging relatives and friends, people suffering recent losses, persons with sudden problems and/or medical issues, and/or individuals unable to be present on this

particular occasion. They then vocalize a repertoire of birdcalls, incorporating a plethora of birds similar to the way they have just incorporated a plethora of people connected to Pvlvcekolv. Many community members maintain intimate connections with their surrounding environments and several are amateur or professional naturalists. The bird calls are quite accurate as a result. Following these bird calls, participants enter the Feather Dance.

From the northwest corner, the men move counterclockwise to the South Arbor, East Arbor, North Arbor, and West Arbor (see Figure 5). This single rotation constitutes a round (see Figure 6). Although they might not occur contiguously, each Pvlvcekolv Feather Dance usually features four rounds on the grounds and a fifth around the nearby Ball Post, with a different song per round. The dance has two primary choreographic components: participants circle together in front of each arbor (and initially around the bird mound) and move in two parallel lines between arbors. As they circle in front of an arbor, the men sing one or two verses of the song of that round. They then raise their voices in a high-pitched cry punctuated with birdcalls as they move between circle formations in front of the arbors. While alighting into the next circle, they raise a beautiful cacophony of birdcalls. Then a moment of quiet, as they fold their ruffled feathers, and they continue into the next verse.



Figure 5. Top to bottom: Standing around the Bird Mound (Harvest Busk 2009); inside the circle, dancing in front of the West Arbor (Harvest Busk 2012); outside the circle, dancing in front of the West Arbor (Harvest Busk 2009). (Photos by Ken Koons.)

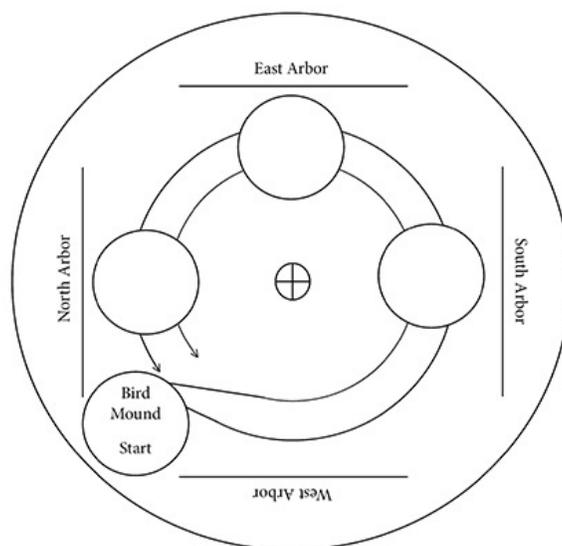


Figure 6. Feather dance choreographic outline, round one.

Dancers seasonally make exceptions to this choreographic outline. Because the Feather Dance intimately connects with avian life, the dance observes and echoes the respective south-bound winter and north-bound spring migrations of many bird species. So as not to impede these seasonal movements, the men do not alight in front of the South Arbor in the winter at Harvest Busk, nor in front of the North Arbor in spring at Berry and Arbor Busk. Not solely symbolic, the Square Grounds encapsulate both the ritual center and home of Pvlvcekolv and, during ceremony, contain the entirety of Creation therein. The space inside the shell ring becomes a microcosm of, a synecdoche for, all that lies outside of it. Actions that take place inside the grounds and in their immediate vicinity during ritual events have very real effects and repercussions (Kimmerer 125-26). Havoc results in the world if the Feather Dance includes a verse danced in front of the South Arbor at Harvest Busk or in front of the North Arbor at Berry and Arbor Busk. Participants take great care to dance with the birds and not against them.

While dancing with birds, the men enact a distinctive step specific to the Feather Dance: the scratch step. It involves a light stomp, pressing first one foot then the other into the circle. This step does not produce a sharp percussive sound; rather, as the foot “scratches” against the sand-covered ground, a soft shush sounds. Harder ground helps the sound resonate more. In places where more sand has drifted downhill with the

numerous rains typical of the area, these steps create an almost hissing sound of the sand rubbing against shoes or bare skin.

The current Pvlvcekolv repertoire contains sixteen Feather Dance songs. Not all of these songs involve birds; some songs fulfill other ceremonial functions (Koons 247-264). During my times at the grounds, song leaders regularly performed the same bird-focused Feather Dance songs, including the three I analyze here: the first song contains only vocables, “*wi hi hi-yo-ni*”; the second song, “*eh-elo v-li-he-no*” (“there are white birds there”), celebrates and names birds; and the third is the vocables-only song “*Hi-yo hi ya*,” typically performed around the Ball Post.

At Pvlvcekolv, much musical meaning derives from the movement of ritual melody lines, though community members might not always agree upon the precise meaning. For example, a descending melody line might indicate a ray of sunshine breaking from behind the clouds (Koons 147-50). Often appearing as the first song in the Feather Dance “*Wi hi hi-yo-ni*” formally brings the men together. Bringing forth this first song visibly formalizes kinship ties as the men dance together as a group with birds. In this respect, this round creates a space for participants to reestablish a ceremonial sense of community. Although the text contains only vocables and has no lexical meaning, the melody line of this first song, “*Wi hi hi-yo-ni*,” aurally represents the flight of birds (see Example 1). Pvlvcekolv recognizes the existence of three cosmological Worlds: the Upper World, which houses ordered beings; the Middle World, which houses we humans; and the Other World, which houses chaotic beings. The melody depicts avian flight between the Middle World, Upper World, and Other World or ground. Participants begin and end the piece on, in this transcription, the pitch F#, which might represent the Middle World, or more likely something growing on the Middle World, like a bush or low tree. Beginning from this bush or tree, the birds launch themselves into the sky, occasionally flapping their wings, as when the melody line dips a third before returning to the originating pitch between measures two and three and between measures eight and nine (see bracketed intervals in Example 1). As the melody descends, so too do the birds, alighting upon the earth (here the pitch C#). They remain grounded briefly, perhaps pecking at a seed or eating an insect, before taking off again and gliding back into the sky. They end where they began, returning to that bush or tree branch. As such, the melody line illustrates their motion and affirms birds’ ability to move between Worlds with ease.



Example 1. "Wi hi hi-yo-ni," the song accompanying the Feather Dance, round one. Transcribed by Ryan Koons. This transcription deliberately excludes shaker percussion and choreography to render the transcription incomplete.

The second song, "Eh-elo v-li-he-no," generally accompanies the second round of Feather Dance (see Figure 7) and further develops the avian theme (see Example 2). These lyrics contract a longer phrase meaning "There are white birds here." Similar to "Wi hi hi-yo-ni," this second melody also mimics avian movement, perhaps mirroring the diving motions of certain water birds. The first four iterations of "Eh-elo v-li-he-no" (mm. 1-4) quickly descend the scale, like four egrets diving into a river after food. In this particular scale, the pitch G# is likely the water's surface. The second four iterations of the line (mm. 5-8) might illustrate how the birds wing for height (mm. 5 and 7) before plunging again into the water (mm. 6 and 8). The final two iterations of this text (mm. 9-10) represent the birds swimming about in the watery depths.

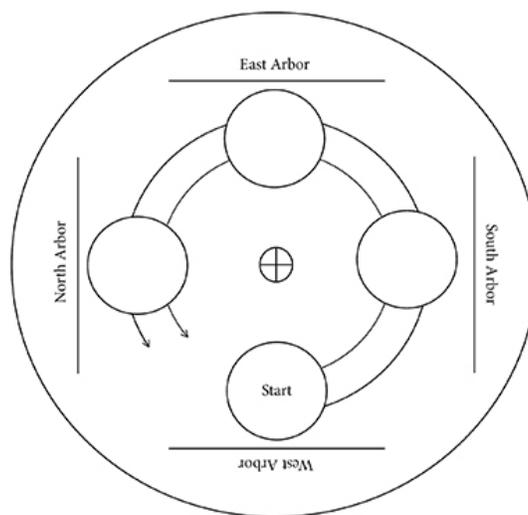


Figure 7. Feather Dance choreographic outlines, rounds two and three.



Example 2. “Eh-elo v-li-hi-no,” the song accompanying the Feather Dance, round two. Transcribed by Ryan Koons. This transcription deliberately excludes shaker percussion and choreography to render the transcription incomplete.

Participants sing these first two songs during rounds in front of the arbors on the Square Grounds. In contrast, the third song “He-yo he ya” typically occurs nearby around the ball post. Just as they have in every other round of the Feather Dance, the men form an inward-facing circle around the Post (see Figure 8). They then scratch-step their way through this song. The text lies somewhere between vocables and contractions. What were once lexically meaningful phrases are now little more than vocables. Hakopē suggests that the lyrics speak about the singers passing or dancing silently by Old Grandfather or Creator (interview, 19 January 2015).

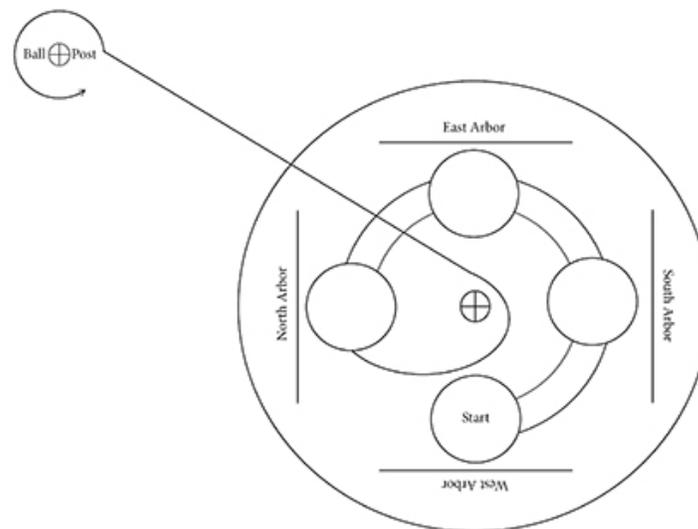


Figure 8. Feather Dance choreographic outline, rounds four and five.

The melody line of “Hi-yo hi ya” might feature birds on top of the Ball Post or perhaps on top of an arbor, fluttering down to the ground (see Example 3). Across each verse, the overall melody line descends. Here too, the melodic leaping motion up and down a third in measure one and up and down a second in measures two-four might depict

wing beats as the birds descend ever lower (see the brackets in Example 3). Similarly, the ascending fifth leap prior to a descending scale paint a picture of a flight pattern wherein the bird flaps its wings once to rise before gliding down (measure five), only to repeat the pattern twice more (measures six and seven). The final measure perhaps illustrates the bird briefly skimming the ground (the pitch C) before again rising.

5 Hi-yo hi ya hi-yo hi ya hi-yo hi ya hi-yo hi ya
yo-han - v - yo - wi yo-han - v - yo - wi yo-han - v - yo - wi ya-ha hi

Example 3. "Hi-yo hi ya," the song accompanying the Feather Dance, Ball Post round. Transcribed by Ryan Koons. This transcription deliberately excludes shaker percussion and choreography to render the transcription incomplete.

The avian beings who appear in the Feather Dance play an important place in Muskogee cosmology. In the Creation Story as told at Pvlvcekolv, Creator or Ohfvnkv creates water. Finding that the beings around her are suddenly drowning, Turtle dives beneath the waters and returns with mud, which she compacts into land. The birds scramble up to this land and spread their drenched wings open to dry them. Some flap their wings, removing the water and drying the land. As Turtle brings up more mud from beneath the waters, more and more birds flap their wings to dry themselves and the new-forming land. Some few beat their wings so hard that they rise to great heights and see Ohfvnkv. Pleased with their work, Creator gives "them songs, calls, and wild cries so all would know of Creator's pleasure" (Creation Story, PAP8.2). Because Ohfvnkv gifts birds with diverse vocalizations, Pvlvcekolv intimately associates birdsong with Ohfvnkv. The phrase "*Fuswv yohiket os,*" "The birds, they are singing," acknowledges birds and their role. Many songs in the Feather Dance repertoire are the musical equivalent of this spoken phrase, as in the case of the songs I analyze above.

Enacting these Feather Dance songs facilitates the men becoming with birds. All three songs melodically depict various bird movements through air and water and upon the ground. In this multispecies context, the men dance with birds, observing their seasonal migrations in the rounds of the Feather Dance. Their scratch-step emulates the movement quality of certain avian species as they forage for food or nesting materials. This Dance features participants taking choreography and song that emulate, depict, and quote birds into their own bodies in a mingling of creative agency. The respect they

performatively demonstrate for avian life speaks to the nonhierarchical alliance in which the men are bound with their avian kin (Kirksey and Helmreich 546). In the situation of great importance that is the busk (Haraway, *Species* 244), these ritual dances facilitate the men's transformation into becomings-birds.

Owl Dance. Where Feather Dance celebrates general human-avian relationships, Owl Dance focuses specifically on human-owl relationships. Owl Dance occurs in the late evening at Pvlvcekolv busks and features quiet and slow choreography. Hakopē, who enjoys nature documentaries, often excitedly explains that even sensitive recording equipment fails to pick up the sound of owl's wing beats, also noting that owls can fly over dust without raising a cloud. They fly in complete silence due to serrated, comb-like structures along the leading edges of their primary flight feathers and soft "fuzz" along the feather top that absorb sound (Chen et al.). As Pvlvcekolv people often say, silence is the voice of Creator; that owls fly silently, therefore, connects the birds to Creator. By virtue of large pupils that let in a lot of light and a larger number of black-and-white detecting rods rather than color detecting cones in their eyes (G. Martin), owls can see very well at night. For this reason, Pvlvcekolv people also consider owls masters of the darkness and the unseen. Yet, Hakopē occasionally notes, human dancers have trouble moving in this way. The slow pace of Owl Dance is iconic of owls' silence in flight, one human way of realizing owlish habits.

When bringing forth the Owl Dance, participants line up in front of an arbor facing the Fire. More often than not, someone will ask those present why the Owl Dance is important. Others respond: owls can see into the darkest of places, and the darkest place of all can be the human heart. Connecting to owls is therefore important in coming to terms with one's own darkest, most hidden parts, as well. Maintaining a line, participants take very small stomp-steps (right-right, left-left, right-right, etc.) towards the Fire while softly singing the Owl Dance song (see Example 4). They then move counter-clockwise to the next arbor and step a little closer to the Fire while repeating the song. They do the same at the next two arbors. After circling the Grounds, they return to the arbor where they began. There they dance a fifth verse, this time stepping away from the Fire. This dance is unusual. Most Pvlvcekolv dances feature even numbered groupings of choreographic actions, not odd numbers.



Example 4. The song accompanying the Owl Dance. Transcribed by Ryan Koons. This transcription deliberately excludes shaker percussion and choreography to render the transcription incomplete.

The Owl Dance's movements image silence, materializing it kinetically and visually through slowness. As a synesthetic metaphor, slow movement becomes a way of enacting silence through the feeling of one's muscles moving, one's voice singing. The song echoes the sonic habits of owls, allowing human dancers to become with owls vocally and choreographically. In bringing the dance forth, dancers traverse paths and gain in-sight into unseen places. According to Hakopē, just as owls hunt in the darkness, so, too, do the dancers step out of the darkness and towards the Fire, towards life. The Fire is also the source of light and wisdom, to which the dancers arrive from a place of darkness and chaos,⁹ and to which they return. Another time, Hakopē humorously noted that, "You sort of quote Shakespeare: 'Feathered friends, ex-Romans, and owl countrymen, lend me your feathered ears, give me your night vision and your eyes, because you see, you are the masters of dark'" (Interview, 23 January 2009). Owl Dance choreography facilitates participants' transformations in hopes of performatively sharing in excellent vision in darkness, silent flight, and other owl abilities through ritual choreography. Besides honoring and thanking owl, this stylized way of moving draws the sensory capacities and bodily habits of owls into the dancers. Moving about in "owly" ways evokes and creates certain embodied perspectives grounded in owl habits and abilities.

Just as the slowed steps of the dance are iconic of the silence of an owl's flight, so is the slow and subdued song, according to Square Grounds teachings. The lyrics consist of two words: *Wi-yo*, a vocable without semantic meaning, and *O-pv*, "owl." A verse consists of three iterations of a two-measure phrase (measures 1-2, repeated in measures 3-4 and 5-6 in Example 4) followed by two iterations of a single-measure phrase (measures 7-8). Measures 1-6 in this transcription might follow the owl's motion as it soars through the air, perhaps beginning in a tree and hunting across a meadow. The last two measures might echo the bird's wing motion while slowly flapping, or they might indicate its sudden loss of height onto its next meal.

The Owl Dance song resembles the calls of owls, but again, slowed down. Elders suggest that the song derives from their ancestors' observations of owl vocalizations. Hakopē recommended I examine recordings of the call of the Eastern Screech Owl, whom scientists have named *Megascops asio*. Eastern Screech Owl calls exhibit a series of distinct sonic features. These features include even pitched "trills," which mated pairs or families use to maintain contact; descending "whinnies," which individuals use to defend territory; low barking calls that indicate alarm or agitation; and screeches with which individuals or pairs defend nests or fledglings (Cornell Lab of Ornithology). The Screech Owl's call closely resembles the Owl Dance song, but only after slowing down the recording. After reducing the speed of one Eastern Screech Owl call recording to 60%, the descending whinny closely resembled the descending melodic motion of measures 5-7 of Example 4. The even pitched trills approximated the half-step melodic motion of measures 1, 3, and 5, and the vibrato or pulsations in both descending whinny and trill sounded not unlike the Owl Dance participants' sung word articulation. Owl Dance is always the last danced song of the evening. Community member Yvhv stated that the Owl Dance "doesn't close the grounds, but it says, 'We are done here for tonight.' And ... we'll just honor the owl and then go to our place" (interview, 30 November 2008).

Ritual Participation, Relations, Decolonization. The Owl Dance and the Feather Dance as enacted at Pvlvcekolv function as steps along a route to decolonizing the Anthropocene. As discussed earlier, the Anthropocene is an extension of the structure we call colonialism, characterized by Indigenous dispossession, genocide, and environmental transformation, among other traits. No matter the precise name we use to describe or depict it, this era directly connects to settler colonialism. The two are perhaps not directly synonymous, yet the "tightly wound set of conditions and racialized, globalized relations" of both mean that we cannot untangle one from the other. Processes of decolonization, therefore, have the potential to affect both the settler colony and the Anthropocene (Tuck and Yang 7).

Unangax (Aleut) education scholar Eve Tuck and US education scholar K. Wayne Yang explicitly warn against turning decolonization into a metaphor, which would serve to re-center whiteness, extend innocence to the settler, and entertain a settler future: all antithetical to true decolonization. Rather, defining decolonization requires the "repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted." In addition to the repatriation of land, therefore, the path to decolonization involves Indigenous people

embodying relationships with one another and with the nonhuman persons who co-constitute their communities and lands.

L. B. Simpson discusses decolonization in relation to Indigenous resurgence. She brings the work of Kwagiulth (Kwakwaka'wakw) geographer Sarah Hunt and Canadian interdisciplinary scholar Cindy Holmes into conversation with that of Tsalagi (Cherokee) political scientist Jeff Corntassel. In their discussion of decolonizing queer politics, Hunt and Holmes challenge Indigenous peoples to embody and practice decolonial politics in their daily lives, propelling “us to live in our bodies as Indigenous political orders in every way possible” (L. B. Simpson 191). These political orders also feature nonhuman persons who co-constitute community and land. Similarly, Corntassel encourages Indigenous peoples to eschew settler politics of distraction — such as state affirmation, federal recognition, and the performance of rights-based discourse — in favor of renewal. He proposes Indigenous people focus on “everyday practices of renewal and responsibilities within native communities today” (86).

Corntassel's depiction of settler politics of distraction resonate with A. Simpson's concept of “refusal.” She frames refusal as an alternative to federal recognition and other politics of distraction. From her perspective, refusal “comes with the requirement of having one's political sovereignty acknowledged and upheld” (11). Upholding Indigenous sovereignty necessarily raises the question of the legitimacy of settler sovereignty. She notes that, in colonial contexts, Indigenous sovereignties are “nested and embedded” within the overarching sovereignty of the settler colonial state. A goal of the ongoing and structural colonial project is simultaneously to acquire and maintain land while eliminating the Natives who hold original title to/relationship with that land. Indigenous sovereignty in a settler state, therefore, necessarily exists in great tension in relation to settler sovereignty. Refusal as a set of “sovereign practices” functions to uphold Indigenous sovereignty against the colonial project (A. Simpson 2). These sovereign practices might include the refusal to vote in federal elections, the refusal to pay federal taxes, or the refusal to destroy or alter ontological and epistemological relationships with nonhumans. Pvlvcekolv community members maintaining ecological relationships via the busk exemplifies refusal: by enacting those relationships, community members refuse colonially-imposed worldviews, upholding their sovereignty. Like Tuck and Yang, the trio of A. Simpson, Corntassel, and Hunt and Holmes speak to the need of connecting with relatives and the naturalcultural kin who co-inhabit the land.

L.B. Simpson braids these ideas together, finding that the combination of living decolonial politics and everyday acts of resurgence “can be a force for dramatic change in the face of the overwhelming domination of the settler colonial state” (102). She notes that her Nishnaabeg “Ancestors are not in the past. The spiritual world does not exist in some mystical realm. These forces and beings are right here beside me — inspiring, loving, and caring for me in each moment and compelling me to do the same. It is my responsibility with them and those yet unborn to continuously give birth to my Indigenous present” (192-193). These responsibilities encompass human and nonhuman kin in Indigenous multispecies spaces. L. B. Simpson states that these practices and relationships “will create flight paths out of colonialism and into magnificent unfolding of Indigenous place-based resurgences and nationhoods” (193). Although, in the words of Tuck and Yang, complete decolonization requires land repatriation, the process of decolonization also requires care and attention to the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the nonhumans who co-constitute those lands.

Pvlvcekolv’s ritual processes of becoming with avian beings and others in the matrix of the busk constitute a step along this path to decolonization. The Indigenous space that is Pvlvcekolv’s Square Grounds exists on land owned by community members. This land has not been repatriated to the community but was instead purchased by the Matriarch and her husband in 1999 for the purposes of ceremony. They own it outright, live on it, and are caretakers on behalf of the community. Although the land was never repatriated, community member ownership means that Pvlvcekolv has autonomous sovereignty on the land. Drawing on Corntassel and A. Simpson, Pvlvcekolv is a sovereign tribal town that has eschewed the politics of distraction by refusing the process of federal recognition. Instead, the community focuses much of its energy on maintaining relationships with each other and with nonhuman kin via everyday and ritualized processes of renewal and responsibility.

Busk participants’ becoming with nonhuman kin function as acts of refusal that maintain Pvlvcekolv’s sovereignty. These acts of ritualized refusal speak to power balances between human and nonhuman busk partners: the multispecies assemblage of the busk is a nonhierarchical structure. In becoming with nonhumans, busk participants emphasize human dependence upon a larger web of relationships. Ritualized recognition of that dependence serves to decenter “the human.” This web of relationality is directly antithetical to the Anthropocene concept. As a derivative of colonial logics and histories, the Anthropocene is partially defined by the lack and/or destruction of relationships between humans and nonhumans. Busk processes of becoming call attention to participants’ intentions, purposes, actions, and agency in a

form of refusal. Participants' intentionality renders becoming a process not merely for the sake of becoming, but also as an act of refusal against the Anthropocene. Maintaining relationality with nonhuman kin functions to refuse that colonial-derived sundering of relationships that defines the Anthropocene. Becoming refuses power dynamics imposed by agents of the colonial project in what is perhaps the most egregious denial of Indigenous sovereignty: the Anthropocene itself. Instead, busk ritual practice resets power dynamics to its nonhierarchical balance via refusal, upholding Pvlvcekolv's Indigenous sovereignty.

Busk ceremonial practice — sovereign processes of refusal and ritualized becoming with avian and other kin — embodies Hunt and Holmes's practice of decolonial politics. Becoming with birds and others facilitates an Indigenous multispecies political order: a refusal "to stop being themselves" (A. Simpson 2). This Indigenous multispecies political order functions as a mechanism to see, hear, and think differently. This "difference" encompasses the distinctions between Pvlvcekolv's Indigenous ways of being and knowing the world, and the Western ways of being and knowing that resulted in and maintain colonialism and the Anthropocene. Pvlvcekolv members embody processes of seeing, hearing, and thinking that vitally feature kinship relationships with nonhumans. The Feather Dance, the Owl Dance, and indeed all of Pvlvcekolv's ritual becomings constitute an Indigenous practice of refusal. In a settler colonial nation state, Indigenous people practicing refusal by seeing, hearing, thinking, and acting differently on sovereign land in embodied relationships with nonhuman kin constitutes a step along the path to decolonizing the Anthropocene and colonialism. Maintaining those ritualized relationships and the non-Western ontologies and epistemologies upon which those relationships predicate, Pvlvcekolv maintains a process that begins dismantling some of the control of the settler colony. This dismantling functions to refuse the Anthropocene. In L. B. Simpson's words, "Placing Indigenous bodies on the land in any Indigenous context through engagement with Indigenous practices is direct action" that leads to decolonization (236). Pvlvcekolv's regular renewal of multispecies relationships through the busk forms a sovereign process of refusal and decolonization of the Anthropocene.

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Notes

1. I use several terms interchangeably to refer to the people who appear in this study, including “American Indian,” “Native American,” and “Indigenous” because community members of Tvlwv Pvlvcekolv, the American Indian group featured in this case study, use these terms to describe themselves. Following a convention in Indigenous Studies internationally, I capitalize “Indigenous” as a matter of respect and, as US ethnomusicologist Victoria Lindsay Levine once noted in a conversation on the Society for Ethnomusicology’s Indigenous Music Special Interest Group email listserv, to achieve parity with the way scholars represent other groups in writing. For the same reason, I include tribal or community affiliation when introducing the ideas of Indigenous scholars; I introduce non-Indigenous scholars by noting their nation-state of origin. I offer my sincere apologies if I inadvertently misrepresent any scholars whose ideas I feature in this article; errors in depicting identity are unintentional and mine own.

2. The Muskogee language spelling in this document reflects Moravian-derived orthography. The sometime-relationship between Creek communities and Moravian missionaries during the colonial era resulted in the adoption of the Greek letter upsilon (v) to represent the English “ou” as in “tough.” In 1843 the US Presbyterian minister Rev. Robert M. Loughridge replaced the upsilon with the Roman letter “v,” which denotes schwa sounds like the “u” in “but.” Similarly, the letter “c” denotes “ch”

sounds like the “ch” in “chunk,” and “r” denotes a lateral fricative, such as the “thl” in “athletic” and “Bethlehem.” I render the community’s name, therefore, as “Pvlvcekolv,” and not the anglicized “Palachicola” or “Apalachicola” (Martin and Mauldin xvii-xviii). Following Pvlvcekolv convention, I capitalize ceremonially important positions, objects, and concepts: Creator, Maker of Medicine, Matriarch, etc.

3. Since the Trail of Tears, some community members have traveled or moved away from the Southeast for career, family, education, or other reasons.

4. In addition to other, pre-colonial definitions, the English word “busk” derives from the Muskogee *posketv*, “to fast.” The sung and danced rituals of the busk occur atop a foundation of fasting from food during the daylight hours. The busk as intangible cultural heritage belongs to other communities in addition to Pvlvcekolv. As well as Muskogee or Creek communities, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Yuchi communities have performed their versions of this ceremonial cycle for centuries and continue to do so.

5. Busking community members say that these dances are “brought forth” rather than “performed.” Some say the dances are ongoing and that people merely join in. The implication is that certain dances always exist in some form but are materialized or activated through the actions of particular persons at particular times. For this reason, I avoid using the terms “perform,” “performer,” and “performance practice” in the remainder of this article.

6. I avoid using the terms “religion” and “spirituality” when referring to Indigenous peoples. The terms — especially “spiritual” — avoid clarity at best and sustain colonial authority over Indigenous realities at worst (Shorter 433). Following US interdisciplinary scholar David Delgado Shorter, I replace the terms with “related,” focusing on relationships between humans, and between humans and others-than-human.

7. Ometv and becoming at Pvlvcekolv relate to the concept Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has called “perspectivism.” This concept, prevalent in Amazonian Indigenous cosmologies, describes worldviews in which humans understand that animals and spirits perceive themselves as anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages, and experience their own habits and characteristics as culture (470). In many Muskogee stories told at Pvlvcekolv, owls and

other birds have their own societies and cultures. Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism assumes that "bodily attributes" such as beaks and feathers are "envelopes" that cover internal human forms. These envelopes or "clothing" are "privileged expressions of metamorphosis," speaking to the "transformability" of beings in these cosmologies (470-71).

8. US ethnologist Frank Speck described one of the few other Feather Dance performances to appear in the ethnographic literature, a performance at Taskigi Town, and included two different transcriptions of Feather Dance songs (186-190). The differences he observed between those two songs demonstrated the ways "the various towns differed from one another" (189). One hundred years earlier, US naturalist William Bartram similarly noted that "Every Tribe which constitutes the Muscogulge [sic] Confederacy has separate customs and many of them different Systems of Legislation" (369). The differences between Speck's thick description and the traditions I have witnessed at Pvlvcekolv echo these observations.

9. Chaos does not have an exclusively negative quality in this context.

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