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## **Identity and In-Betweenness: Hybridity as Transcultural Mobility in the Music of Native American R. Carlos Nakai and his band Jackalope**

### **Abstract**

In the more than three decades of his career, R. Carlos Nakai, a Navajo/Ute Native American musician, has demonstrated an unusually high degree of transcultural mobility, with an accomplished record in classical and jazz trumpet, Native American flute, the New Age genre and synthesizer music. With his Mexican-Anglo-Native band Jackalope (named for a mythical hybrid animal), Nakai creates sites and states of in-betweenness, constructing a hybrid style with allusions and influences ranging from the Eagles' "Hotel California," through the soundtracks of filmic Westerns, to New Age meditative composition. I investigate the concept of hybridity as it manifests in Jackalope, through which the band members negotiate their flexible identities through their music. They produced four CDs between 1986 and 1993. The two CDs released in 1993 show a split in style and approach: one uses experimental musical elements and is mockingly critical and topical in its examination of the voyages of discovery of Columbus; the other CD engages with genres of mainstream pop or world music with no obvious political undertones. The Western/Native hybridity separates in its parts. By the time the band dissolved, its core idea of a transformative multiculturalism, had not achieved the hoped-for resonance in the wider mainstream of American society. Multiculturalism had been co-opted by a market-driven culture industry and an exclusivist ethnocentrism was ascendant. As the history of the band reflects this societal shift, the impossibility of escaping pre-existing relations of unequal power informs the content as well as the context of this article.

**Keywords:** Hybridity, Jackalope, Music, Nativeness, R. Carlos Nakai.

In the more than three decades of his career, R. Carlos Nakai, a Navajo/Ute Native American musician, has demonstrated an unusually high degree of transcultural mobility, with an accomplished record in classical and jazz trumpet, Native American flute, the New Age genre and synthesizer music. With his Mexican-Anglo-Native band Jackalope (named for a mythical hybrid animal), Nakai creates sites and states of in-betweenness, constructing a hybrid style with allusions and influences ranging from the Eagles' "Hotel California," through the soundtracks of filmic Westerns, to New Age meditative composition. I investigate the concept of hybridity as it manifests in Jackalope, through which the band members negotiate their flexible identities through their music. They produced four CDs between 1986 and 1993. The two CDs released in 1993 show a split in style and approach: one uses experimental musical elements and is mockingly critical and topical in its examination of the voyages of discovery of Columbus; the other CD engages with genres of mainstream pop or world music with no obvious political undertones. The Western/Native hybridity separates in its parts. By the time the band dissolved, its core idea of a transformative multiculturalism, had not achieved the hoped-for resonance in the wider mainstream of American society. Multiculturalism had been co-opted by a market-driven culture industry and an exclusivist ethnocentrism was ascendant. As the history of the band reflects this societal shift, the impossibility of escaping pre-existing relations of unequal power informs the content as well as the context of this article. As a scholar with a personal background in the dominant Western cultural formation, my analysis needs to proceed from the fact that I am already advantageously invested in these inequalities.

I love looking at music with a problem. Not "problem" as in "bad" music, but music which perplexes. [1] This unexpectedness shows up in Native American hybrid music, which mixes traditional and Western musical elements. How do musicians in this genre negotiate the tension between form, aesthetic, and their own personal identities? *Must* they negotiate? In the same way, or differently, than musicians in other genres? And what do they ultimately express through this music?

I follow in my approach the trails blazed by the sociological and aesthetical analysis of popular music pioneered by Dick Hebdige (1997 and 1993), as well as more anthropological approaches like those of Richard Wilk (2007). I also agree with Clifford Geertz's (1973) understanding of culture as semiotics, as something which reveals its meaning (for the society in which it occurs) through a careful process of interdisciplinary analysis and interpretation. Cultural utterances, reaching from collective rituals to individual artworks, reflect a useful spectrum of societal and personal issues. [2] Theodor W. Adorno used this approach, i.e., the understanding of musical form as a kind of "telling" and as a reflection of societal situations, in his interpretations of Mahler and Beethoven and the society and moment in time out of which these artists worked. [3] In

contrast to Hebdige however, I am not looking at entire collective styles of music. By using an individual case study, I aim to map the thoughts and musical expression of individual composers onto our understanding of a specific American subculture, of the country's wider general culture, of the culture's overall menu of musical genres, of the necessities of the market, by examining these artists' creative expressions as a space to negotiate their own individual position in that mix.

My interest in Native American hybrid music is informed by my experience of teaching music and culture classes at the University of Michigan. In these classes I talked about the tradition of homegrown classical European-style music in the U.S., about country and rock, and about the origins of jazz and blues in African-American communities and their appropriation (and mass dissemination) by whites. Native American music—normally talked about only in ethnomusicology classes—became a topic, because we discussed how mainstream white culture has appropriated historically Native melodies in classical music. While showing my class clips of Native powwow music and dancing, I wondered if I could also show them examples of less traditional Native/Western hybrid music, something equivalent to the hybridity manifested in jazz or Tejano music. In digging deeper into this material I also learned that present-day powwow practices and forms actually represent a relatively modern tradition, one that evolved as an intertribal practice out of fragments of various tribal dancing traditions in the course of the 20th century. It actually got a big defining push through urban Indians who performed it in the context of academic research interest in university environments. These performances were already fundamentally hybrid in nature, combining old and new, using modern colors and modern dance steps for example in the invented category of Fancy Dancing. Similarly Native flute music was re-invented or re-vitalized in the 1970s and will never have the form again in which flute music might have been practiced in the 1500s. If we ask questions regarding authenticity and the commodification of cultural heritage it is very important to acknowledge that we are dealing with very recent traditions.

We note that hybridity and transcultural mobility are already at play in recent “traditional” expressions of Native culture in the same way as they are present in contemporary expressions of other cultures. However, Native cultures struggle with a double burden; their “normal” patterns of cultural development and cultural interchange were massively interrupted due to the colonization of the Americas and the subsequent decimation of their people. [4] In the U.S., state power restricted some Natives to reservations and simultaneously forced an assimilation agenda on the others. In addition, an ethnological ideology of saving the supposedly dying Native cultures while simultaneously exploiting and elegiacally cherishing their “authentic” products made it difficult for Native communities to develop its culture autonomously.

The result is a variety of approaches to, and expressions of, Native culture, art and music. Rejectionist positions among strict Native traditionalists stand next to positions of engagement among exuberant Native modernists; there are people who now resent everything associated with the dominant mainstream culture and people who want to participate fully in it, and many positions in-between. Natives can be “traditional” in performing at a powwow and “modern,” when they teach modern music at a conservatory. [5]

A parallel with my own personal experience might be useful. As a German female who moved to the U.S. for a while for work, I found myself suddenly “performing” a traditional German beer drinking evening, the so called “Stammtisch,” – although I had never attended such “old fashioned,” largely male-dominated practices in Germany myself. I found a kind of emotional logic to justify this. While I would not go so far as to explain this in the classically idealist (and recently dangerous) terms of preserving some essentialist “Germanness,” I found personal value in being together with other Germans, practicing the language and having a cultural exchange with interested non-Germans. [6]

The challenge I did not face, which confronted Natives seeking to preserve or recreate their culture, was, of course, the problem of constant monitoring of their culture by ethnologists and the related problem of unregulated intervention by interpreters of that culture from outside. If we just look at the evolution of Native art we see how much a white-guided (or even white-fomented) “naïve” stylistic aesthetic was established, as this kind art sold better to whites than more sophisticated efforts by Natives to engage with modernist art from the West. [7] When some Natives did engage with modernism, critics from inside and outside Native culture immediately raised the question: what remained of these artists’ own identity as Natives? Later departures and engagements with postmodern art, even if this was a Western concept, at least left more room for reflecting and expressing Nativeness. [8]

In the '90s, Natives achieved signal successes in the struggle against cultural appropriation. The political and legislative climate encouraged the emergence of a legal regime where predominantly Natives are allowed to profit from selling Native art. [9] In the end however, issues of unregulated money making and selling remain central to understanding the place of Native creativity in Western consumer society. If you are a Native musician who has also trained in many musical cultures and wants to make a living by selling music on the global market, you still have to negotiate the tension between protecting and exploiting your cultural heritage or that of others. Here we deal with an unequal power relationship, because ethnic music derived from Western European cultural traditions will *not* become the “object” of somebody else’s commodification or appropriation regime

in the foreseeable future—the rules of the game for the marketing of world music have been (and will probably continue to be) set by Western (mostly Anglophone) soft and hard global power.

### **Native Modern or Hybrid Music**

Natives participate today in all kinds of traditional and Western musical styles. [10] The Native American Music Award (NAMA) actually takes all music made by Natives into consideration, be it in a traditional style, Reggae or Chicken Scratch. Hybrid efforts by Natives well-known to a broader audience include the work of the folk singer Buffy Sainte-Marie, the rock band XIT or the blues group Indigenous. These musicians sometimes use overtly political lyrics addressing the historical experiences of Natives. In XIT's concept album *Plight of the Redman* for example, the song "Nothing Could Be Finer Than a 49'er" adds powwow music to its ending (a 49'er is not just a hot rodded car or a California Gold Rush miner, but a specific song in the powwow cycle). [11] However, we do not end up with fusion music. More recently rap and reggae have won high popularity on reservations and rappers like Litefood or the bands WithoutRezervation or WarParty are popular. There are classical music composers, musicians and performance artists like J. Luna or Raven Chaconne and a Native composer alliance was founded in 2002. Even powwow releases have engaged in some "updating"—as can be shown by the song "Sponge Bob" for a kids powwow CD by the Black Lodge Singers. They even sometimes alter and mix Native melodies with modern ones, including for example the song "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" in their repertoire. The black Native singer Radmilla Cody shows a certain flexibility in mixing blues influences in traditional (or composed in the style of traditional) melodies; she crosses over when she sings the U.S. national anthem in Navajo language. Singers like Joanne Shenandoah alternate traditional Native songs with folk song styles. Neal Ullestad (1999) observes:

In the face of marginalization by the mainstream, American Indian musicians experience two distinct poles of artistic expression: traditionalist and commercial/assimilationist. Rejecting the idea of having to choose between these two seemingly unbridgeable poles is a broad array of artists who combine the two approaches, those who work within the wide 'in between' category, combining elements of traditional and commercial music, as well as traditional and contemporary themes. (64)

I would like to contest Ullestad's statement that we deal with a "broad array of artists" who engage in hybridity of the music itself. If one looks to the ethnic fusion styles, the level of successful hybridity actually achieved is (from my aesthetic point of view) rather limited, as it results in a mix of pop music sounds with powwow rhythms or fragments of Native vocal lines. The reason for this outcome might be an assimilation to the aesthetic and the stylistic clichés attendant on the already mentioned commercialization of globalized ethnic music in the '90s.

I hope I can illustrate with the example of the music of R. Carlos Nakai and his band Jackalope, the richness of the questions raised by what I have defined as Native hybrid music. It doesn't seem to be coincidence that the Jackalope members abandoned the project exactly at a point in time (the early 1990s) when the wider mainstream culture was undergoing a shift from being potentially open to an unmediated, "real" multiculturalism to co-opting it as a "lifestyle" choice—ethnic music as commercialized aspirational mass product. We need to look more closely at the time between 1986 and 1993 and at the specifics of Jackalope's style to understand this changing attitude in consumer culture to Native material.

### **Musical and Ethnic Crossover in the 1980s**

The 1980s in the United States were a decade when, after the initial convulsions of identity politics in the previous two decades, the phenomenon of crossover between a normative whiteness and an otherness often defined as ethnic seemed increasingly routinized. The agents participating in or profiting from this crossover were mostly white, even if an interest in ethnic music gave non-white performers more chances to make a living with music. Academia, the place to sell such an independent "product" was open to this at that time.

The 1990s however split the perception of what "ethnic" stood in for: one approach led back to an ethnocentric retreat into "authenticity," the other to a more commodified version of ethnic fusion.

The years 1986 and 1992 frame this period of multi-/cross-culturalism: To take only one prominent example from popular music, Paul Simon recorded the best selling *Graceland* album with South African musicians in 1986, marking the moment when world music (as fusion) undeniably went mainstream. Popular (culturally) white musicians could still conceive of a crossover which did not immediately smell like commodification of traditional cultures, but appeared as sincere dialogue or (culturally)white interest in different cultural traditions. In 1987 the Grammy included world music for the first time in the category "traditional folk" (which was split from "contemporary folk") and the South-African choir Ladysmith Black Mambazo, which was featured on Simon's recording, won in 1988. In 1992 world music was established as an individual Grammy category. The first winner was the white ex-drummer of the Grateful Dead, Mickey Hart, who had studied African drumming. [12]

In addition to world music we find in the 1980s a growing New Age music scene, its Grammy category established in 1987. New Age music drew elements from ambient music, classical and traditional music and melded these together to create background music to which somewhat self-involved middle-class consumers could pursue their favorite forms of meditation and a closer

connection to nature. Again the “inventors” of this music were (at least culturally) middle-class whites, who used (or appropriated) traditional non-Western musics and spiritual approaches to create a “Non-Western” mix that had not previously existed.

A third development which also influenced Jackalope was an art music scene, which crossed over in this period from experimental avant-garde approaches to appropriate the aesthetic of more commercially accessible pop/synthesizer/electronic music. Laurie Anderson became famous with her hit “O Superman” in 1981. Of course there had been cross-overs between art music/avant-garde and pop/rock music before; already in the '60s and '70s, bands like The Velvet Underground, Kraftwerk, Captain Beefheart, or Yellow Magic Orchestra were blending minimal music with progressive and experimental rock, psychedelia, avant-garde, or electronic approaches. Indeed, Captain Beefheart’s guitarist Ry Cooder was to later reach out into the field of world music himself. The '80s however, brought the specifically ethnic qualities of this emerging mix to the forefront.

To better grasp what the 1980s meant for multiculturalism on the level of personal identity choices, we could take a prominent example from public political life: 1986 was the year in which the phenotypically light-skinned, blond-haired Elizabeth Warren, who later (2013) became a US senator representing Massachusetts, started to describe herself as “Native American” in response to a call for listings in a “minority” section of the Directory of the American Association of Law Schools Faculty. She claimed this category because according to family lore she was 1/64 Native from her mother’s side (Cherokee and Delaware). 1992 was the last year in which she used that ethnic category in this directory. This self-description eventually became an issue in the 2012 senatorial election, with her opponent claiming that she had used this category to land a job at Harvard mainly due to the minority status (and Harvard actually used this ethnic self-identification in its minority reports) without actually having been an enlisted member of a tribe. Warren’s motivations for declaring herself Native American without being a registered member of a tribe is no longer easily understandable from an early-twenty-first-century perspective on the ensuing decades of identity politics and culture wars. [13] From a contemporary white mindset during the 1980s however, such a personal self-identification was not necessarily seen as a problem. Back then, the perceptions of a border between Native and Non-Native identities in the public discussion were much more blurred. Since the early 1970s it had been fashionable to claim to be Native, even without close ties to a Native community.

### **The Band Jackalope**

The biographies of the two founders of Jackalope help us to better understand the concept and ideas driving it.

R. Carlos Nakai was born in 1946. Growing up as an “urban” Indian in Flagstaff, Arizona in a predominantly white cultural environment, he played trumpet in the high school brass band. His Native heritage however continued to draw sustenance from his continued links to his family roots in the Navajo and Ute people (as well as Spanish, Irish and other Native tribes). He often spent time on the nearby Navajo reservation. [14] His father already was a “modern” Indian, working first as an announcer for a public radio station in Flagstaff preferred by Natives, and later winning election to what now is called President of the Navajo Nation from 1963-70, the highest electoral position in Navajo politics. His father made a name by trying to modernize the Navajo Nation (even if at the cost of significant damage to the local environment, as with the Black Mesa coal mining affair) (Iverson 227-45, esp. 242-44).

After returning from military service in Vietnam and an unsuccessful attempt to get into the U.S. Army Brass Band, R. Carlos Nakai studied classical and jazz trumpet in Flagstaff and at Phoenix College and completed an M.A. in American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona at Phoenix. If he had not ruined his embouchure in a car accident, we might know him today as a classical musician in a major orchestra. Forced to look for a new career path, he turned to the Native flute. During his studies Nakai had discovered the Native American flute and had started researching its inter-tribal history. The Diné (i.e., the Navajo) had lost their own flute tradition during their southwards migration from Canada to the American Southwest in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Nakai started to reconstruct and reinvent the Native flute tradition with the help of song melodies and surviving flute traditions from other tribes. He is today well-known as one of the pioneers in reviving or reinventing this flute tradition and in creating a musical notation for it. He released his first traditional Native American flute CD in 1983 with a local white-owned independent label (Canyon Records) that specialized in Native music, and went on to release an average of one CD a year for several years. Already in these CDs he had started using non-traditional electro-acoustic effects, like reverb. In 1986 he started exploring the cross-over potential more fully with Jackalope. He then found another niche in 1988 in collaborating with New Age musicians like William Eaton, Will Clipman, Peter Karter and Paul Horn, resulting in Grammy nominations. In 1996 Nakai founded an ethnic jazz band, the R. Carlos Nakai Quartet, with which he continues exploring the hybrid form. Nakai was the first to make a traditional Native American album that went gold, selling 500,000 copies in 1998.



Larry M. Yañez is a Chicano, with Native heritage from the Yuman people. He is a versatile performer, playing guitar, percussion, and synthesizer with Jackalope. He released a solo CD in 1989 called *Sueños* with Canyon Records, in which he “creates a strange and surreal world of carnival-like sounds, ominous synth drones, chugging sequencers.” [15] Yañez is also known as a Chicano painter.

## Music

The recordings of Jackalope are concept albums, addressing the dualisms of modern/traditional and white/native in both their musical form and their conceptual content in the ideas behind the story line, titles and booklet texts (and in the last CD, also the booklet art).

The band name itself denotes a mythical hybrid animal, the jackalope, a cross between antelope and jackrabbit. This animal—like the German *Wolpertinger*—was probably derived from sightings of diseased rabbits, which had grown horn-like protuberances due to their illness. The jackalope does not seem to symbolize “smooth” or successful hybridity, but rather a grotesque, tragic, but also funny mix. These characteristics are also central to the music and the concept of the band Jackalope.

With the band’s hybrid musical material mixing Native flute with pop or world music, while the booklet utilizes predominantly Chicano symbols, one can assume that the two artists divided their responsibilities. The four Jackalope albums can be described in terms of pop music as examples of a certain approach to a low-intensity, chilled-out variant of the world music sound. The stylistic hybridity can be found in the combination of the sound of the Native flute with pop, world and electronic music patterns and motifs that today mark the genre of New Age music. However, the experimental aspects in the music and successive and simultaneous use of multiple styles—one number pop, one jazz, one experimental—do not make it possible to situate the albums in the commercial music realm, but rather on the edge of independent postmodern art music. The sound can be located between art and pop music, pitched to an academic audience. The somewhat self-mocking portmanteau description of the style as “SynthacoustipunkarachiNavajazz”—a “wordplay” on synthesizer and acoustic music, punk, mariachi, Navajo and jazz—in the booklets and on the Canyon Record website is an amusing parody of a marketing move, but it (perhaps deliberately) misleadingly suggests we are dealing here with an existing popular music hybrid genre. The music itself is instrumental, so only the titles, the booklet descriptions, and the music itself, but no lyrics can be taken into account when exploring the meaning of the compositions. I will look at selected musical numbers in particular in which the perception of an ethnic or multicultural identity is

explicitly addressed, evoked or criticized through the choice of the stylistic mix and the extra-musical description of it in the booklet.

## First Album

The cover of the first album (simply titled *Jackalope*) from 1986 features a black and white drawing of the jackrabbit with horns in front of a black background with white crosses. This imagery might be an allusion to the mass deaths and other undesirable results of colonization in the Americas. We are left with uneasy thoughts about hybrid people (here still symbolized as animals) and a heritage of massacres on the indigenous population.

The music is supposed to depict a world of imaginary people and animals reminiscent of, for example, the cosmos created in the Beatles album *Yellow Submarine* or the world created in the Cheech and Chong movies. Among the denizens of this world are the mysterious hybrid Jackalope itself (who later becomes Roadkill), the Chicano Samurai Lord Fumamota—Yañez's alter Ego and a play on the Spanish phrase "fuma mota" (meaning pot smoking—blended with the Japanese sound of the words themselves) and a plant called Coyote Mint, standing in for the Dog Soldier (the alter ego of Nakai). The conceptual arc of the CD is similar to an avant-garde song cycle. We start with the "Jackalope" theme song, which is followed by a "G-Minor Improvisation." The numbers "Roadkill" and the final "Dog Leather" frame the "Festival of the Cows," "Macho Picho" and the three figures "Lord Fumamota," "Lady Toda Awada" and "Coyote Mint." The titles "Roadkill" and "Dog Leather" show that hybrids often go to the dogs or—as a German phrase literally means—"come under the wheels."

Yañez employs a semiotic play of meaning-fusion in the booklet to emphasize an interrelation between tradition, modernity, fantasy and humor. I want to focus on the number entitled "Macho Picho"—the "fabled home of Lord Fumamota." Labeling the number "Macho Picho" implies irony—the old Inca city is correctly called Machu (with an u) Picchu (with double c and u)—and Macho Picho could also be translated as talkative macho/male, if we read "picho" as a play on "pico," meaning beak. In bringing a sense of whimsical irony to his treatment of the Latin American cultural heritage Yañez makes a statement against taking the anthropological, historical heritage of Latinos too seriously, pointing rather toward the modern, living Chicano.

Musically "Macho Picho" starts with a choir humming chords in which a bass voice singing in a Gregorian chant style intones the indistinct but profound-seeming wisdom of a shaman. Then a guitar chord progression resembling that of the Eagles' "Hotel California" starts a loop and is joined by a flute with a melody which could be Native or Blues. In the music we do not find the same kind

of irony which was implied in the booklet. It refers to the act of ethnic border crossing. The music evokes the culturally white mainstream act of ethnic identity shopping and re-mixing, along with an apparent attitude of faux-seriousness. The possibility that the entire thing is a parody of the clichés the sounds evoke—the clichés of the lonely and sad Native, the cliché of the native flute sound from the Andes, the cliché of Gregorian chant—is hard to pin down. Sometimes the sound, approaching but not reaching cliché itself, seems to be engaging positively with these evoked images—as if these sounds were neutral and did not involve white exploitation of the ethnic other.

The techniques employed by Nakai and Yañez include loops of early electronic music patterns, simple synthesizer chords and melodies, chord progressions and tonal moods from California rock, Ennio Morricone filmic western soundtracks, New Age motifs of nature and animals, east Asian sounds, African drumming, Gregorian/Shaman chant, and blues and jazz progressions. The sound approximates a summation of the “house sound” of the contemporary Putumayo world music label, then on heavy rotation on millions of middle-class CD players. However, Jackalope’s sound has a consistently higher level of musicianship, and thematically, addresses abstract and uncomfortable concepts more enthusiastically than the sound of the Putumayo label. Death, irony and self-referentiality mark Jackalope’s iteration of hybridity.

We should however not underestimate the musicians’ ability at the same time to have fun while making this music. They both seem to take on the classic cultural personae of coyotes, tricksters, who know that the very act of consuming any kind of ethnic music (and not only by whites) inevitably means some form of exploitation. They accept this consciously. They actually are not producing “authentic” ethnic music. The awareness of the power imbalance, and of the reality of a cash-mediated value exchange shelters them from being culturally exploited. [16]

The music of the first CD already puts the Jackalope project on a certain track: specific ethnicity is no longer essential for the identity of the jackalope (for example Anglo, Native, Chicano), but rather the constant flux of different ethnic features (including musical figures from Asia and the Arab world) is welcome. The booklet writes: “The jackalope’s song is improvisatory and ever changing. Jackalope’s music follows that of its namesake and this is a typical sample based on ethnic themes.” The creators of this music and CD concept welcome all kinds of ethnic fusion, as they themselves are fused in their identities. To celebrate ethnic fusion or multiculturalism allows Nakai and Yañez to imagine a world in which they are the insiders, not the outsiders. There is however a contradiction or unavoidable paradox attached to this agenda.

The compulsion to engage in ethnic lifestyle shopping, the mixing and combining of ethnic signifiers for fun, had started as a white postwar consumerist attitude among ex-suburban members of the 1960s counterculture (cf. Smith 2012). What for Nakai was a status forced upon him by growing up in a white mainstream society as Native (with a limited range of life chances and highly structured life options), was for more fortunate members of mainstream postwar American society a deliberate lifestyle choice, as it also became for the musicians from the mainstream culture engaging with New Age or world music in the coming decades. Unequal power relationships are (still) in play when Nakai engages in making and participating in such music.

In the Western world view a white body is easily and whimsically transformed through appropriation of “otherness” signifiers—which can happen in fashion (Hippies with Native buckskin pants or Indian saris), in religion (Buddhism, Zen), or with the consumption of music, with participation in the “ethnic.” But when hybridity is practiced by non-whites for mainstream audiences it forces the former to start at their core with an involuntary reception of Western identity, which they then garnish with some of their home “ethnic” styles (meaning, in this case, with Nakai’s Native flute playing). Starting with a core of a Native identity and adding other ethnic melodies does not work in the same way—it all must be channeled through the white central cultural exchange, to make sense in the wider culture market. Nakai and Yañez do not however exploit “authentic” ethnic melodies of other traditions. They play rather with Western stereotypes of Asian and Arab figures, perhaps even reflecting with this Brechtian distancing the real exploitation of other cultures by whites. In the wake of world music’s success, culturally white audiences have become increasingly reluctant to consume these cultures only through outdated and mediated Orientalizing stereotypes, but rather demand unfiltered access and freedom to consume them in their “original,” unmediated forms (even if still channeled through a white musician’s more polished and accessible performance).

## **Second Album**

The second album, *Weavings*, from 1988 has a stronger and even wittier storyline: the two protagonists embark on an imaginary journey from the Aztec capital city Tenochtitlan/Snake Island to the outer (white) world. As Dog Soldier changes to non-traditional clothes, the music now uses classical trumpet instead of Native flute. They meet up with friends; a Chicano referred to as Haiteca-Manteca (a hightec guitar player—on the CD represented through Richard Carbajal, who today is a musician in a Caribbean music ensemble, playing calypso and reggae), [17] and a Waspteca (a WASP, or White Anglo-Saxon Protestant—on the CD represented by the Canadian indie-rock player Darrell Flint). They travel to the modern tribe of the Naugahyde. Naugahyde is of

course not a real tribe, but was a kind of artificial leather popular in stereotypically white mainstream suburban home furnishings and automobiles around 1950-70. The company developed an advertising campaign around the invented Nauga—an imaginary animal from which supposedly this leather came.

As tourists at the Bering Strait, the alter egos of Nakai and company see woolly mammoths—in a culturally cross-coded-narrative these are, as I understand them, white people skiing. This time whites, not Natives are the objects of anthropological curiosity.

The album ends with a composition alluding to the title of an Agatha Christie mystery; *Then There Was None* (itself derived from the now-unsingable children's song "Ten Little Indians"), here modified to read "... then there was wood"—thereby rejecting the idea that the Indians can vanish. The booklet reads: "Returning home, the group hears of tourists visiting the land of the Maya bringing horses, disease and bingo. They eventually take over the neighborhood. The travelers are stranded. There is no home to return to. They must learn to function and survive in the outer culture." In a clever double play on the colonization by the Spaniards and on today's neocolonialism or exploitation through tourism, the lyrics assert that there is no way of returning to old ways of being (incidentally noting that the concept of Natives on horseback as an "old" way of being is of course a misconception).

We can find an example of Nakai's openness to a friendly musical multiculturalism in the number "God Save the Queen." Instead of mocking the topic with blasts of fuzzed-out electric guitar barre chords as the Sex Pistols did, the symbolic melody here is caressed by different instruments and blended into the world music sound. I believe the melody is meant to evoke Canada, the land the Navajos came from. The booklet text reads: "Dog Soldier's story is of his people's traditional homeland, Canada. For Americans this melody is also familiar as "My country 'tis of thee." The U.S. version goes on to celebrate a "Land where my father's died, land of the pilgrim's pride." The Native activist Vine Deloria refers to this melody in his book *Custer Died for Your Sins*, where he remembers Natives singing these lines during a convention and then bursting into laughter—because North America was really the land where their fathers had died at the hand of the pilgrims (cf. Deloria 1988, 3). As Nakai refers to Deloria's book as a source of inspiration, he might have had this double take on the song in mind (cf. *Voyager*).

### Third Album

The third album, *Dances with Rabbits* from 1993, showcases the most pop-ified side of Jackalope. Overt critique is almost totally absent. The sense of an ethnic in-betweenness, as imagined by

Nakai and Yañez in the first albums, could here not be maintained, possibly due to changing circumstances in the music business and cultural perceptions of ethnicity as a marketing tool by the time of the album's release. Ethnic music had gone mainstream; far clearer genre separations now existed between pop with an ethnic tinge, world music, and the New Age market.

*Dances with Rabbits* alludes in its title to the contemporary film *Dances with Wolves*, a vehicle for the actor Kevin Costner to portray himself as a white person on the nineteenth century frontier successfully able to integrate himself into Native tribal life. For Nakai however, Natives are not wolves, but funnily distorted rabbits, i.e. hybrid Jackalopes. The title cover of the CD makes that clear. It does not feature the Native nicely dressed in beadwork and buckskin, but a comical drawing of four rabbits with horns, in buckskin pants and colorful skirts. Jackalope examines on this CD the idea that Natives can do the same as Costner in reverse; i.e., successfully integrate themselves into white culture.

This album has a looser story line, emphasizing the “modern” aspects of life in the song titles and engaging in self-reflection about musicianship as a lifestyle: the title “Sausage Fingers” describes how hands feel after playing a lot of guitar numbers. The title “Noh Tango Nada” again includes a musical wordplay on “Yo Tengo Nada”—“I have nothing” (Tango instead of Tengo). This statement is supported by the booklet text asking: “Hey, you gotta a job? Support me!” In the last number the musicians pretend that they and the listeners are in a live performance situation in the tent of an art show, where grease from fried bread fills the air and creeps into the singer's voice.

#### **Fourth Album**

The last album, *Boat People*, subtitled “A Musical Codex” features the harshest critique of all four. It engages fully in the cross-coding of ethnic relations, in which whites are the ones to pity. They are the boat people landing for the first time on American soil, showing their dumbness in dealing with natives. The booklet is designed in the form of a Mesoamerican codex, alternating painted vignettes with cryptic booklet descriptions. The amusing storyline of Spaniards running around, bringing Bingo and having a succession of embarrassing troubles in a new country turns serious in the last three numbers. Here Nakai and Yañez question the American Dream of a decent life of material security that seems open only for whites of skin or affiliation, criticize the relentless suburbanization of “asphalting and paving the country” and point to the irrationality of the U.S.-Mexican border. The music, so far having stayed in a world music genre, becomes again experimental. Whistles and electric screwdrivers take center stage. The last musical number addresses the border and the celebration of Columbus Day by Anglos. Its musical form mocks

history with a grotesque soundscape of a carnival gone wrong. A music style stemming from a nineteenth century western popular tradition speaks to the absurdity of conquering other ethnicities. The CD was one of the reactions from the Native side to the Columbus quincentennial celebrations of 1992, which triggered a wave of protest by Native communities who didn't find it appropriate for the country to celebrate their conquest. [18]

### **1990s: Co-optation of Ethnicity through the Market**

It is interesting to note that Jackalope ended its run in 1993 with the release of not one but two CDs, portraying opposite ways of dealing with white society. One approach supporting full integration, the other vehement protest. What had changed in Jackalope's cultural field, and why did the band end its catalogue in this way?

Marc Priewe (2007) writes in his study about national imaginaries in Chicana/o narratives that “[t]he so-called backlash of the 1990s—e.g., the reversal of affirmative action in some parts of the U.S. ...was accompanied by a Latino boom as part of the commercial craze for anything that appeared ‘multicultural’” (222). In looking at the audience responses to Gómez-Peña's performance art *Temple of Confessions*, Priewe detects a “paradoxical coexistence of the marketability of Otherness and the socio-political reprisals against minority groups, the decline of the transformative and the rise of corporate multiculturalism” (ibid.). [19]

It sounds like a paradox then; the culturally open-minded Clinton years, with even a stronger and broader general societal push to foster meaningful trans-cultural exchange in the U.S. than the 1960s counterculture, actually brought the final co-optation of what can be labeled “ethnic” music through mass consumption. By the 1990s, the consumers of such music were no longer just countercultural members or specialist gatekeepers based at academic institutions. They now also included a much larger group of people seeking to add moral virtue and cultural tone to their relentless consumerism, a group that the conservative cultural commentator David Brooks (2000) has labeled “bourgeois bohemians.”

Acknowledging this shift of multiculturalism from transformative critique to corporate marketing tool might help us understand why Nakai and Yañez had to abandon their project to imagine an ethnic hybrid music. Ethnicity could no longer serve as a playground for trying to define an in-between space, for developing the latest American in-between identity. In the last two CDs the hybrid separates in its parts—into jackrabbit and antelope, the Anglo and the Native—now both coexisting at the same time-space coordinates, but no longer mixed. The native performance artist James Luna describes this identity split as such: “I truly live in two worlds. This ‘two world’ concept once

posed too much ambiguity for me, as I felt torn as to whom I was. In maturity I have come to find it the source of my power, as I can easily move between these two places and not feel that I have to be one or the other, that I am an Indian in this modern society” (McFadden and Taubman 12). [20]

Even if Nakai and Yañez fail to permanently hold the jackalope together, they succeed in another task: That of making a “modern” Native identity as visible as “traditional” Native identity. Nakai and other modern Native spokesmen such as Philip and Vine Deloria resist a default anthropological attitude to creativity inside and outside the Native community, which restricts them and their culture to the status of cultural artifact or object of study (as I am treating them here, for example).

Vine Deloria (1988) writes:

The more we try to be ourselves, the more we are forced to defend what we have never been. The American public feels most comfortable with the mythical Indians of stereotype-land who were always THERE. These Indians are fierce, they wear feathers and grunt. Most of us don't fit this idealized figure since we grunt only when overeating, which is seldom. To be an Indian in modern American society is in a very real sense to be unreal and ahistorical. (2)

Nakai seeks to make palpable through his art the experience of the “real” Native, of whom the large majority live in cities and engage with white culture on a daily basis, in addition to whatever form of their own Native culture remains accessible to them. He is an outspoken supporter of the Nammy, the Native American Music Award, exactly because there all styles traditional and modern are welcome. He was critical of the introduction of the category “Native Traditional Music” into the Grammys in 2001 (abolished in 2012), as he felt this perpetuated the stereotype of the “traditional” Native (cf. Brockman). Nakai performed at the inaugural gala of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, a museum which, on one hand, has been criticized for its seeming hodgepodge of exhibitions and its alleged lack of interest in explaining Native history. The museum has on the other hand been lauded for its focus on the “living” Native, and its refusal to endlessly reflect on the Indian as victim—an approach which is very much in line with Nakai's intentions.

## Conclusion

Nakai's and Yañez's main goal with the Jackalope project was to show Natives as complicated, modern people. In criticizing the exploitation and stereotypization of Native people the music of Jackalope did not play the card of overidentification, as did for example the Slovenian art and music collective Laibach/Neue Slovenische Kunst and its sublime parodies of the fascist aesthetic. Rather Jackalope presents itself as having the same right to use, abuse, and manipulate all kinds



of ethnicity to create art. This attitude, the belief in borderless multiculturalism and the assumption that it is possible for non-whites to do the same kind of cultural cut-and-paste consumption in this regard as what whites do, seems slightly naïve from today's point of view. The examples of Paul Simon and Elisabeth Warren show that the '80s might have suggested more choices for deliberately creating an identity than today—but also more chances to participate in forms of mainstream exploitation, pretending that they were not exploitation.

To achieve a full picture we need to relate the individual artistic positions to trends in the various interpretive communities active in late modern U.S. culture. In a consumer age in which music is produced for selling, it seems a needless restriction to understand the music of the community as only the music played in community situations themselves. Benedict Anderson's description of a musical situation as "an experience of simultaneity," or an "echoed physical realization of the imagined community" (145) assumes a unified society and a music detached from market value. However, even music produced on CDs creates an imagined community, and in Jackalope's case it is an imagined multicultural society, including Native, Chicanos, and Anglos. Since the 1990s this multicultural, cosmopolitan (and sometimes neo-Marxist) worldview has lost its universal power. Once-radical countercultural ideas have been routinely co-opted into system-supportive lifestyle choices, as Thomas Frank (1997) has ably demonstrated. In the wake of identity politics, a certain ethnic particularism, even ethnocentrism or ethnic nationalism has once again arisen. Stephen Greenblatt (2010) therefore believes that "[t]here is an urgent need to ... understand the vitally important dialectic of cultural persistence and change" (1-2) as neither the newer concepts of "hybridity" nor the older of "rootedness and autochthony" seem to fit with the contemporary reality in which cosmopolitanism, hegemonic nationalism, and rejectionist identity politics all exist at the same time in the same social formation. As Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (2002) point out, the re-emergence of the idea of cosmopolitanism is fuelled by the experience that neither "ethnocentric nationalism" nor "particularistic multiculturalism" is a solution for creating a world democracy. Cosmopolitanism can be invoked to advocate a "non-communitarian, post-identity politics of overlapping interests and heterogenous or hybrid publics in order to challenge conventional notions of belonging, identity and citizenship" (1).

The expectation of a cultural shift in the 1980s and 1990s towards a positive, open, and tolerant multiculturalism, creating something of a general global culture, has not been fulfilled. Stuart Hall (1996), in a chapter section titled "The Global, the Local and the Return of Ethnicity," points out: "It has consequently become apparent that globalization is not necessarily coterminous with a uniform world culture, but also causes the assertion and reproduction of difference as well as the re-

drawing and policing of certain cultural boundaries, often to the point of a (violent) ‘return of ethnicity’” (623-24).

The dream of an open and accessible world culture didn’t take into account that the access to this global lifestyle shopping mall was only open mainly for a certain kind of “enlightened,” at least culturally white, person. As long as the physical flow of people from the global South to the West is restricted, there will be only ever be a limited exchange of cultural ideas, an exchange mediated and dictated on largely Western terms. As standards of living continue to decay in the industrial world, multiculturalism in the West—EU and USA—will be sorely tested, and racialized thinking inside the nation states and towards the outside will rise. Solidarity inside the nation-state will once again only be made accessible to those belonging to the “folk.” It will be interesting to see what cultural role, influence and form cosmopolitan cultural consumerism (and its associated ideas of hybridity and exchange) will take in this scenario.

The musical output of Jackalope reminds us of a specific point in the recent past of U.S. culture in which it seemed that the path to the future could develop differently—as a playful multiculturalism. However, already the way hybridity was shaped in Jackalope’s work made clear that the partner cultures—white and Native—had never been negotiating on the same level of power.

## Endnotes

[1] I am using here the category of “unexpected” in following Deloria 2004.

[2] Geertz (1973) writes: “The concept of culture I espouse, and whose utility the essays below attempt to demonstrate, is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (5).

[3] Paddison (1997) summarizes Adorno’s approach: “By 1932 Adorno was writing to Krenek ... that the task of sociology ‘is not to ask music how it functions, but rather, how it stands in relation to the fundamental antinomies of society; whether it confronts them, masters them or lets them be, or even conceals them’” (96). To quote Adorno (2002) himself: “Music will be better, the more deeply it is able to express—in the antinomies of its own formal language—the exigency of the social condition and to call for change through the coded language of suffering. It is not for music to stare in helpless horror at society: it fulfills its societal function more precisely when it presents social problems through its own material and according to its own formal laws—problems which music contains within itself in the innermost cells of its technique” (393).

[4] Gilroy (1993) challenges us to not immediately think that being part of a minority culture means being at a disadvantage. This kind of thinking just manifests the power order of strong perpetrator and weak victim.

[5] Cf. the composer and author John-Carlos Perea (2014).

[6] I use the word performing here in relation to Erving Goffman’s (1959) idea of *performing* everyday life. I restrain from the word “playing,” especially in connection with Native performances, as this means some kind of intended staging. Indianness was staged for a white audience in the Buffalo Bill Wild West Shows (at least with bringing some Natives on the pay lists) or with fake Natives at the German Bad Segeberg Karl May performances. Cf. Deloria 1998.

[7] Cf. Archuleta 1994. Interestingly, but not surprising, one can find a lot of literature about the development of (modern) Native art, but not about the development of (modern) Native music.

[8] Cf. here for example the artwork of Marcus Amerman or that of R. C. Gorman, whose success impressed Nakai as a juvenile.

[9] Indian Arts and Crafts Act from 1990.

[10] For an overview see Perea 2014.

[11] Cf. a discussion of this song by Gray 2005.

[12] One could argue that it was necessary to have a white front-man to bring the style to a bigger white audience, but it has the same feeling like the argument, that Paul Whiteman was important to bring Jazz to a white audience. The moves undeniably also helped to foster the sales of non-whites, but whites got the biggest stacks in the market sales.

[13] Some tribes recognize the proof of 1/32 Native as enough to become an enlisted member of this tribe and the tribe gets money from the government for enlisted members. Elvis Presley for example was 1/32 Cherokee—however not registered, as at that time the ethnic category “Native” only brought disadvantages. That Warren looks “white” is another issue which complicates the circumstance in the discussion, as the assumption that Natives need to look different is of course racially stereotyping.

[14] Nakai self identifies as multicultural or “hybrid” with this long list of heritage. Cf. the video of his performance in the Library of Congress “Homegrown” series (Nakai 2010).

[15] Backroads Music/Heartbeat Rovi. <http://www.answers.com/topic/sue-os-album-by-larry-yañez> (accessed: 8 Jan 2014).

[16] To the issue of strategic use or disguise of Nativeness see Harmon 2002, 258-60.

[17] None of the band members seem to have family ties to the Caribbean. They are just playing this music for the fun of it—and they have teamed up with a Swedish band of that style.

[18] I would like to thank Michelle Habell-Pallán for guiding my attention to this issue.

[19] Priewe refers to Martin 1998.

[20] Cf. to the question of multiple identity: Harmon 2002.

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