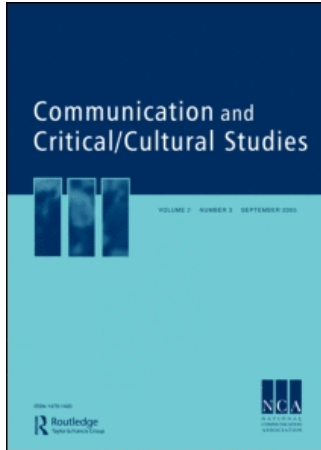


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# Deciphering Kokopelli: Masculinity in Commodified Appropriations of Native American Imagery

Richard A. Rogers

*Kokopelli “the hump-backed fluteplayer” has become an icon of the Southwest as well as a metonym for the region’s Native American cultures. Guided by the trope of the primitive, this essay analyzes contemporary Kokopelli imagery as a projection of Euro-American masculinist fantasies and as a contemporary commodity form, the cipher. Kokopelli imagery models a virile and promiscuous heterosexual masculinity while erasing its anatomical signs. It articulates intersections of gender, race, and culture that simultaneously highlight and obscure primitive masculinity and racial difference, enabling the use of Native American culture and spirituality to (re)vitalize Euro-American masculinity and promote (neo)colonial appropriations.*

*Keywords: Cipher; Commodification; Masculinity; Native American Culture; Primitive*

Indigenous rock art, comprising primarily pictographs (images painted on rock) and petroglyphs (images pecked or incised on rock), is an important source of imagery used to represent Native American culture in general, especially Native cultures of the southwestern United States. Many Southwest tourist destinations expose visitors to a large amount of rock art-derived imagery. Most ubiquitous is the image of the hump-backed fluteplayer commonly (mis)known as Kokopelli. Shirts, hats, socks, paintings, sculptures, pottery, jewelry, stuffed toys, mugs, and an almost unimaginable variety of other tourist merchandise are composed of or adorned with Kokopelli imagery. In their study of fluteplayer rock art, Dennis Slifer and James Duffield describe the image and its appeal: “Kokopelli’s flute, humped back, and prominent phallus are his trademarks. These features and the widely held beliefs that Kokopelli was a fertility

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symbol, roving minstrel or trader, rain priest, hunting magician, trickster, and seducer of maidens, have contributed to his popularity.”<sup>1</sup>

Serving as a metonym for southwestern Native Americans, Kokopelli has also become an icon of the Southwest in general, largely replacing the howling coyote and saguaro cactus over the last twenty years.<sup>2</sup> Hotels, campgrounds, restaurants, tour companies, gift shops, housing developments, real-estate companies, and other commercial establishments utilize the name and/or image of Kokopelli to identify and market their products and services. In addition, the name and image of Kokopelli are used commercially far outside the Southwest, from cafés on the east coast to graphic design firms in western Europe, and the World Wide Web offers a plethora of Kokopelli images and interpretations, frequently in the context of the selling of Kokopelli, Native American, and/or Southwest merchandise. Kokopelli has hit the commercial mainstream, with books, music, jewelry, and entire bathroom sets offered through megaretailers such as Walmart, Target, and Amazon. Southwestern archaeologist Kelley Hays-Gilpin writes that the “so-called Kokopelli, the phallic flute player of the Southwest, . . . probably has more meaning to contemporary Euroamericans than he ever did to Pueblo ancestors.”<sup>3</sup>

Euro-American representations of Native Americans are multiple and dynamic, ranging from the subhuman to the noble savage, from the vanishing race to the environmental steward in touch with the land and its spirits. Robert Berkhofer states, “the essence of the White image of the Indian has been the definition of Native Americans in fact and fancy as a separate and single other.” Berkhofer also notes that “White interest in the American Indian surges and ebbs with the tides of history.” Therefore, “to understand the White image of the Indian is to understand White societies and intellectual premises over time more than the diversity of Native Americans.”<sup>4</sup> As Sander Gilman demonstrates, the primitive Other has long been a site for the projection of Western fears and fantasies, for working through tensions and anxieties while maintaining an illusion of the integrity of Western cultures and identities.<sup>5</sup> Examination of Euro-American representations of Native Americans, such as Kokopelli imagery and its attendant discourses, can help identify not only *what* Native Americans mean in Euro-American culture but *how* those meanings operate in relation to contemporary cultural tensions.

Specifically, Kokopelli imagery provides insight into the gendered dimensions of Native American imagery. While a few scholars have focused on gendered representations of Native Americans,<sup>6</sup> insufficient attention has been paid to the almost exclusively male gendering of the dominant images of Native Americans in recent decades, a pattern that continues with Kokopelli. Analysis of Kokopelli imagery offers insights into Euro-American gender dynamics, particularly tensions over masculinity, highlighting the work that such images and meanings perform.

In addition to its roles as a site of projection and model of masculinity, Kokopelli is an appropriation and commodification of indigenous imagery. Kokopelli is constituted as a fetish, with the many commodities it brands serving as concrete manifestations of its meanings. In addition to identifying gendered meanings circulating around Kokopelli imagery, therefore, this analysis examines the nature

and implications of its commodification using the concept of the cipher, moving beyond what Kokopelli means toward an understanding of how the imagery and its meanings work. Specifically, Kokopelli imagery articulates intersections of gender, race, and culture that simultaneously highlight and obscure primitive masculinity and racial difference in service of (neo)colonialism.

I begin by reviewing Western representations of Native Americans and their relationship to the trope of the primitive. I then discuss a series of tensions and contradictions in Euro-American masculinity, highlighting primitive masculinity. With this foundation, my analysis of commercial uses and interpretations of Kokopelli imagery identifies themes circulating around Kokopelli's masculinity. Through the cipher, Kokopelli's gendered meanings are linked to the process of commodification, cultural appropriation, and colonization. Kokopelli imagery engages discourses of Euro-American masculinity by celebrating a virile and promiscuous male heterosexuality while obscuring both the figure's traditional meanings and the implications of (neo)colonial appropriations. Specifically, racial difference is both highlighted through the deployment of the trope of the primitive and obscured through the abstracted qualities of Kokopelli imagery, simultaneously essentializing racial/cultural difference while unhinging race from culture, enabling the use of Native American culture and spirituality to revitalize Euro-American masculinity and promote (neo)colonial appropriations.

### Representations of Native Americans

Scholars have examined the development of the dominant image of Native Americans through a variety of media representations. Edward Curtis's photographs (1896–1930) depicted “vanishing” American Indians and James Fraser's 1915 sculpture “The End of the Trail” cemented the idea that Native Americans were at the end of their cultural journey.<sup>7</sup> Romance novels play upon deeply embedded stereotypes of Native Americans as both sexual threats and objects of desire.<sup>8</sup> Films and television programs from the Cowboy-and-Indian genre dominant in the 1950s and 1960s highlighted Indians as uncivilized savages while films such as 1990's *Dances with Wolves* reflected a shift toward more positive representations and Western identifications with the Other.<sup>9</sup> With the rise of the counterculture and environmental movements in the 1960s and 1970s, Native Americans became strongly associated with environmental stewardship through a speech attributed to Chief Seattle and, perhaps most prominently, the Keep America Beautiful campaign featuring Iron-Eyes Cody shedding a tear as he surveyed a polluted and littered landscape, an association further developed in films such as *Dances with Wolves* and Disney's 1995 animated *Pocahontas*.<sup>10</sup> New Age commodities and ideologies extend this image, often linking Native spirituality to environmentalism as a primitivist cure for the ills of Western civilization.<sup>11</sup> New Age practitioners, the mythopoetic men's movement, and professional sports teams, schools, and universities have appropriated Native American myths, symbols, spiritualities, and costumes, continuing a long Euro-American tradition of “playing Indian.”<sup>12</sup>

These representations do not stand in for specific individuals or Native cultures, even when they appear to do so (e.g., Chief Seattle and Pocahontas). Elements from specific cultures are appropriated and combined into images and meanings that obscure and distort the existence of distinct Native tribes, identities, and cultures.<sup>13</sup> Euro-American representations of Native Americans cue as well as contribute to an *abstraction* called “Native American” or “Indian,” embodying notions of barbarism, nobility, stoicism, the inevitability of disappearance, harmonious spirituality, environmental stewardship, and other shifting and contradictory themes driven by Euro-American cultural dynamics.

Images of Native Americans are bifurcated into the noble and ignoble savage.<sup>14</sup> On one hand are Native peoples as barbaric due to their intrinsic nature or lack of a civilizing influence. On the other is the noble savage who, by living “close to nature and the natural state of things,” retains “a moral purity lost to most of us” when we were “corrupted by civilization.”<sup>15</sup> Specifically, “primitivism” is the ideology that noble savages live in a highly desirable state of purity and harmony, and possess a cure for the ills of Western civilization.<sup>16</sup> This bifurcation parallels Marianna Torgovnick’s explication of the trope of the primitive, in which primitive Others alternately or simultaneously serve as models of the desirable and undesirable based on a shifting set of binary oppositions: emotion/reason, barbaric/civilized, feminine/masculine, nature/culture, pure/contaminated, innocent/corrupt, virile/impotent, violent/peaceful. The Other symbolizes what is desired yet forbidden, attractive yet repulsive, lost but yearned for. The trope of the primitive is deeply sexualized, projecting and displacing Western sexual ideologies, desires, and conflicts while justifying colonialism.<sup>17</sup> The trope of the primitive shapes dominant images of Native Americans not as fixed sets of ideas but as dynamic forces articulated to power, consciousness, and social structure.

Although a variety of scholars have examined representations of Native Americans, they have generally done so without sustained attention to gender. Specifically, little attention has been given to the androcentrism of contemporary images of Native Americans: Iron-Eyes Cody crying in response to a trashed landscape, the warrior of “The End of the Trail” with his downcast eyes and spear, the brave on his horse defiantly raising in his feathered spear, the words of Chief Seattle on an environmental bumper sticker, Geronimo gripping his rifle, and various “Indian” mascots. Elizabeth Bird points out that while, historically, images of Native American women were central to colonialism, “Indian men, more than women, were the focus of the wave of fascination with things Indian that first crested in the 1960s and 1970s when the counter-culture embraced Indians as purveyors of ancient wisdom and spiritual knowledge.”<sup>18</sup> According to Bird, with the significant exception of Disney’s *Pocahontas*, American Indian women were largely absent or relegated to secondary roles through the 1990s. Kokopelli imagery contributes to male dominance in Euro-American representations of Native Americans and articulates a model of primitive masculinity highlighting sexual potency.<sup>19</sup>

### Masculinities in Tension

In recent years, gender and feminist studies have increasingly focused on masculinity. While approaches vary, several analyses converge in identifying a set of tensions characterizing Western masculinities: physical strength versus moral and intellectual capacity, sexual virility versus emasculation/impotence, and blue versus white collar.<sup>20</sup> In her examination of Anglo-American masculinity circa 1900, Gail Bederman identifies the central tension as civilized versus primitive. In racial and national terms, the superiority of Anglo-American masculinity, and hence of whites over racialized Others, was predicated on the deployment of civilized masculinity (based on self-mastery and intellect) over and against the primitive masculinity (based on bodily strength, sexual virility, and a lack of morality) of subordinated and colonized Others. Civilized masculinity, however, was also seen as a sign of the feminization of middle-class Anglo-American men, threatening male superiority and questioning the inferiority of racialized and working class Others. This shaped bourgeois men's desire for what "primitive" males were presumed to possess: strength and sexual virility.<sup>21</sup> Karen Ashcraft and Lisa Flores argue that the basic tension identified by Bederman is in play one hundred years later. Focusing on discourse that "mourns the imminent collapse of the corporate man, over-civilized and emasculated by allied obligations to work and to women,"<sup>22</sup> they identify a "civilized/primitive" masculinity involving both civilized and primitive masculine performances. In supporting an unstable and elastic hegemonic masculinity, these performances leave the underlying tensions unresolved. This lack of resolution, while holding potential for confusion, agency, and even resistance, does not necessarily imply a failure of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>23</sup>

Shifts in and struggles over masculinity are diagnostic of social structure and consciousness, and reveal masculinity as multiple and contradictory—as "a historical, ideological process."<sup>24</sup> Masculinity is culturally relative, continually reconstituted, and a site of struggle, reflecting and responding to social, economic, and political changes. Hegemonic masculinity utilizes and obscures the conflictual and contradictory character of dominant systems and ideologies, operating through intersections with race, class, and other axes of difference. Such intersections are central to the tensions and contradictions as well as instabilities and dominations embedded in, for example, primitive masculinities.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, a long Euro-American history of turning to Native American cultures for a way out of the trap of modern (feminized) masculinity, a trend which appeared again in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the guise of the mythopoetic men's movement, points to ongoing links between Euro-American masculinity and dominant perceptions of Native Americans.<sup>26</sup>

### Reading Kokopelli

To understand the image of masculinity circulated through Kokopelli, I begin by identifying differences between contemporary Kokopelli imagery and the traditional

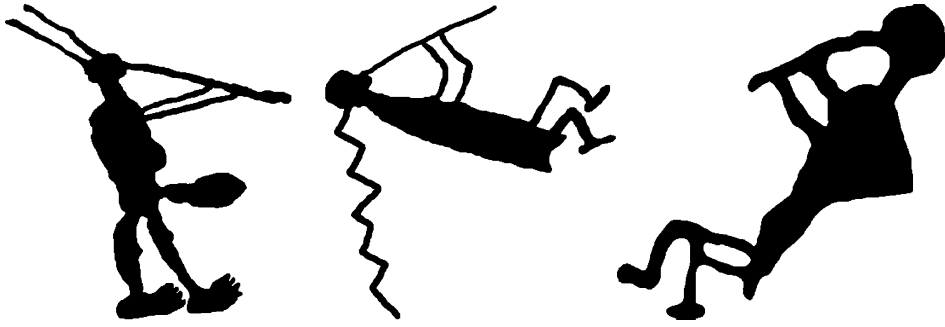
imagery and mythology on which it is loosely based. With this foundation, I analyze commercial Kokopelli imagery and verbal texts circulating around it in order to identify recurring themes, especially in relation to masculinity and sexuality. This focus on commercial Kokopelli images and attendant verbal texts is supplemented by references to literature that identifies differences between traditional fluteplayer imagery and commercial Kokopelli imagery. Some of this literature is produced in the context of academic anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics,<sup>27</sup> while some straddles the academic/popular distinction.<sup>28</sup> All of it, however, is driven primarily by an interest in understanding traditional fluteplayer imagery, and therefore emphasizes distortions and inaccuracies embedded in popular/commercial Kokopelli imagery and literature. While my emphasis is not on correcting such distortions, but instead on understanding their ideological operation, identification of alterations in traditional fluteplayer imagery provides insight into the articulation of Kokopelli imagery with contemporary cultural dynamics.

Both Kokopelli imagery and popular verbal texts, such as books and websites directed at tourists and collectors, are the subject of this analysis. While many of the same themes are manifested in scholarly and popular texts, and while some of these texts blur the scholarly/popular distinction, my analysis focuses primarily on popular texts surrounding Kokopelli imagery. While others have explored fluteplayer images in both Native/(pre)historic and Western/contemporary contexts,<sup>29</sup> this analysis is unique in its focus on deriving insights into contemporary cultural dynamics via contemporary imagery and discourse. While claims about traditional meanings of fluteplayer imagery will necessarily be present, my purpose is less to establish the truth of such interpretations than to use them to identify operations of contemporary Kokopelli imagery.<sup>30</sup>

### *From Fluteplayer to Kokopelli*

The use of the name “Kokopelli,” a Hopi *katsina* referenced in the academic literature as *Kookopölö*, is in the case of most of the imagery discussed here inaccurate but has nevertheless become common usage.<sup>31</sup> The traditional rock art images popularly identified as “Kokopelli” are quite varied (see Figure 1). According to various scholars, these images date from 600–1600 C.E. and occur across the Colorado Plateau and adjacent areas of the Southwest.<sup>32</sup> They are most consistently, but not exclusively, associated with ancestral Puebloan (“Anasazi”<sup>33</sup>) cultures and their descendants, such as the Hopi and Zuni. A fluteplayer—the term used by most rock art researchers instead of “Kokopelli”—can occur with and without a penis (often erect and/or seemingly exaggerated when present), with or without a humped back, with or without “antennae,” and alone or with other figures. In Pueblo cultures, the flute is gendered masculine and is key in courtship, strengthening the graphic parallel between flute and penis.<sup>34</sup>

Hopi ethnography suggests the cicada—generator of summer warmth to ripen crops by playing its “flute” (prominent proboscis)—as a natural model for at least some traditional fluteplayer images. The Hopi *katsina* *Kookopölö*, while inaccurately



**Figure 1.** Three “traditional” fluteplayer petroglyph images. Left: San Juan County, Utah. Center and right: Coconino County, Arizona. Images drawn by the author after photographs by the author.

conflated with fluteplayers, is also based on an insect model (the robber fly, a persistent copulator) and traditionally had a prominent penis but did not carry a flute. Insect models offer one explanation for the antenna-like appendages often present on the heads of fluteplayers. The humped back may also refer to the shape of these insects or to a seed-filled backpack. Fertility is a central theme of *Kookopölö* and fluteplayer images, be it in the former’s insect manifestation or the latter’s erect penis or seed-filled backpack. Linked to the sun and germination as well as courtship and seduction, traditional fluteplayers are sometimes paired with maidens, representing the complementary elements of fertility: female/moisture/rain and male/warmth/sun. “Hump-backed” variations (which occur with and without flutes) may also refer to traders carrying their wares in a backpack.<sup>35</sup>

Turning to commercial Kokopelli imagery, the most obvious deviation from traditional fluteplayers is the consistent removal of the penis and direct indications of sexual activity such as copulation scenes. However, this erasure of the penis has neither neutered nor desexualized Kokopelli. In verbal interpretations, Puebloan myths are used to revive Kokopelli’s virility despite his visual castration. In his book on fertility images in Southwest rock art, for example, Slifer writes that in Puebloan cultures Kokopelli served not merely as a fertility symbol but as a mythical figure whose sexual appetites were a concern for young women.<sup>36</sup> Slifer and Duffield portray Kokopelli as a variant of the trickster: Notorious for his sexuality, according to mythology he cleverly and without her awareness impregnates the most sought-after girl in the village.

In Pueblo myths, Kokopelli carries in his hump seeds, babies, and blankets to offer to maidens that he seduces. . . . As a fertility symbol, he was welcome during corn-planting season and was sought after by barren wives, although avoided by shy maidens.<sup>37</sup>

Regardless of whether the fluteplayer images commonly labeled “Kokopelli” correspond to the figures in these myths, “contemporary artists and producers of souvenirs . . . exploit Kokopelli’s sexual-musical ambiguity.”<sup>38</sup>



*Kokopelli the Native American Rock Star*

This exploitation takes place via codes that are less explicit than a large, erect penis, but nevertheless convey Kokopelli's virility and sexualized masculinity. Commercial Kokopelli images are variable but highly stylized, tending toward an apparently dancing, hunched personage playing a flute with what are described as antennae, feathers, or dreadlocks on the top of its head; a lifted foot, curved back and wavy "hair" imply movement (see Figure 2).<sup>39</sup> This pose evokes the image of the (male) rock star, shown "jamming" intently and, in the mythology of USAmerican culture, always ready to engage in sexual escapades, a figure coded as both attractive and dangerous. Commercial artists also portray Kokopelli engaged in various activities, including playing an electric guitar, riding a mountain bike, driving an off-road vehicle, snow-skiing, scuba-diving, skateboarding, and hiking. The connotations of these activities enable them to serve as displaced expressions of Kokopelli's virility and masculinity.

These meanings can be inferred from visual codes used in the imagery, but are also articulated verbally in works such as Slifer and Duffield's *Kokopelli: Flute Player Images in Rock Art*, as well as in shorter, more popular books such as Wayne Glover's *Kokopelli: Ancient Myth/Modern Icon* and Dave Walker's *Cuckoo for Kokopelli*.<sup>40</sup> Walker's book, though hyperbolic and often tongue in cheek, explicitly articulates the meanings encoded in commercial Kokopelli imagery as well as those advanced in most scholarly and popular discussions, with the dominant theme being Kokopelli's sexuality. To further substantiate that the themes in Walker's book are representative of other popular discourses, I analyzed ten websites identified by searching for "Kokopelli" on two common search engines, taking the top ten unsponsored sites from each, and eliminating sites without substantive information and those not in English.<sup>41</sup> The meanings circulating around Walker's version of Kokopelli (all of



**Figure 2.** Four contemporary commercial Kokopelli images. From left to right: image from Kokopelli.com, image from Earth Studio, image from contemporary Navajo pottery (Cameron Trading Post, Cameron, Arizona), contemporary wooden wall-hanging (Cameron Trading Post, Cameron, Arizona). Images drawn by the author from the originals or photographs thereof.

which can be found in other books and websites) can be placed in three general categories: rock star, trader, and Lothario.

Commercial Kokopelli imagery taps into the US American image of the rock star. Walker describes Kokopelli thusly: “Back bent, dreadlocks tossed skyward—that flute-tootin’ icon was rocking the kiva.” Kokopelli is “the one with the horn, the we-be-jammin’ posture, and the fashionable dreadlocks.” “He’s our oldest rock star, the pre-Columbian Coolio, the charismatic headliner of Mesoamerican Bandstand. As the patron saint of hospitality in the Four Corners states, he’s the guy to call when you want to party like it’s 999.”<sup>42</sup> Walker links Kokopelli to Bob Marley, Keith Richards, Jimmy Buffett, Jethro Tull’s Ian Anderson, Kenny G, Jim Morrison, and Louis Armstrong. The image is not simply that of a musician, but the male rock star, complete with an emphasis on jamming, partying, and sex. While some descriptions of Kokopelli do not directly reference the rock star or sexual activity, they often present similar traits euphemistically; for example, the Kokopelli Kingdom website encapsulates the figure’s meaning as “Fun Loving Native American Scoundrel,”<sup>43</sup> reflecting the moral bifurcation of the male rock star.

Walker also proposes that the hump-backed fluteplayer of ancient rock art may have represented a trader, a theme reflected in over half of the websites and all of the popular and scholarly literature I reviewed. Walker presents the hypothesis that “Kokopelli was puchteca—a traveling trader from the Aztec or Mayan cultures of Mesoamerica. . . . The puchteca played a flute and enjoyed the reputation of a sailor or a traveling salesman: a girl in every village, so to speak.” Kokopelli as trader “uses his wares to seduce young girls.”<sup>44</sup> Both the rock star and trader versions of Kokopelli evoke a potent male heterosexuality that is both appealing and threatening.

Walker describes the sexually potent Kokopelli as “a rain-making, traveling-salesman love machine,” while mirroring the ambiguity of this potency by emphasizing that “he is not, however, a good mascot for your sixth-grade daughter’s softball team.” “Various interpretations depict Kokopelli as an unrelenting Lothario and a bit of a cad, a guy who’s capable of magically impregnating maidens without their consent,” a theme also referenced by half of the websites I reviewed. “He is a potent fertility symbol. Very potent. Kokopelli brings seeds and rain and crops to the fields, and babies to young maidens. . . . Some of the Native lore about Kokopelli’s sexual escapades would make Casanova blush.”<sup>45</sup> All of the books and half of the websites I reviewed mention the traditional inclusion of a penis in fluteplayer imagery with some but not all highlighting its exceptional size. The emphasis on Kokopelli’s penis and its size (despite its erasure in commercial imagery) is perhaps most evident on the Zodiac Master website. This site’s readers are instructed to roll their pointer over a conventional commercial Kokopelli image to reveal a photograph of an ancient petroglyph. Upon doing so, Kokopelli is replaced with a traditional fluteplayer with an erect penis. The author explains, “Maybe that will help illuminate his reputation as the Casanova of the Cliff Dwellers.”<sup>46</sup> Moving from sexual potency to predation, Max Bertola’s southern Utah tourist information website jokingly warns visitors who camp near a fluteplayer rock art site that “if, during the night, you hear the gentle tones of the flute, you’d better lock up your wives and daughters.”<sup>47</sup>

*Kokopelli and Masculinity*

Kokopelli imagery points to several implications for the contemporary image of Native Americans and its relationship to masculinity. These images continue the trend of diminishing Native American women and placing masculinity at the center of Euro-American representations of Native Americans. Although some discussions do mention Kokopelli's female counterpart in Puebloan mythology, they are only brief asides. In addition, despite the potential for contemporary Kokopelli imagery to be interpreted as androgynous due to a lack of explicit signs of biological sex, all verbal interpretations of Kokopelli imagery identify the figure as male. Kokopelli's visual castration has not emasculated or feminized "him."

Despite a range of alterations to traditional fluteplayer imagery, very few commercial Kokopelli images are gendered female through recognizable codes. One of the few examples of female commercial Kokopelli imagery I have encountered was to sign a restaurant's restrooms. For the women's restroom, the conventional Kokopelli image was altered to signify "female." Following USAmerican gender iconics, the silhouette of a short, A-shaped skirt was added. More subtly, however, the flute was removed, and the figure is instead clapping.<sup>48</sup> This removal is consistent with the code equating flute and penis, but is also significant in that Western codes might then interpret the (male) Kokopelli figure marking the men's restroom as "performer" (active/subject) and the clapping female as "audience" (passive/object). Similarly, in the popular literature's appropriation of Puebloan stories about Kokopelli, women are present only as objects of Kokopelli's magical powers, sexual prowess or tricksterism. Notice, for example, that Bertola's warning, quoted above, "to lock up your wives and daughters" was clearly written from and to a male subject position, positioning women as passive objects. In these ways, commercial Kokopelli imagery perpetuates the active/passive binary of Western patriarchal gender ideology.

This subject/object relationship between Kokopelli and women is linked to the individualistic presentation of Kokopelli's masculinity. Whereas traditional fluteplayers were often presented with other figures, in most commercial imagery Kokopelli stands alone or with other Kokopellis. Hays-Gilpin notes that traditional fluteplayers were sometimes paired with images of maidens, representing the complementary elements needed for fertility. Yet in commercial imagery, we see only Kokopelli (or Kokopellis). Whereas Native cosmologies tend to see masculine and feminine as complementary,<sup>49</sup> the erasure of the feminine half of fertility symbolism perpetuates the concept of fertility as an individualized, not relational, and exclusively masculine trait. Commercial Kokopelli imagery presents a stand-alone image of Native American masculine heterosexuality. In addition, Kokopelli's often-referenced status as a trader or roving minstrel emphasizes freedom from ties and responsibilities. Freedom is enabled by being alone (decontextualized), implicitly referencing the constraints of communal and cultural contexts.

Despite the fluteplayer's castration in commercial imagery, Hays-Gilpin, Slifer and Duffield, and Walker all agree that Kokopelli is a sexually charged image. While Hays-Gilpin holds that "most aspects of the Kokopelli myth as it pertains to popular

culture are ours, not part of traditional Hopi culture,”<sup>50</sup> authors such as Glover, Slifer and Duffield, and Walker appropriate Puebloan stories and anthropological hypotheses to highlight Kokopelli’s sexual potencies and proclivities or, at a minimum, associations with fertility. These alterations of traditional fluteplayer imagery and additions to the image of Native American masculinity can be understood not only as reinforcing patriarchy but as a response to anxieties over Euro-American masculinity. For over a century, tensions between a “primitive” masculinity of physical prowess and unrestrained sexuality and a “civilized” masculinity of mental capacity and self-discipline have characterized the discourses of Euro-American masculinity. Specifically, in the shift from hegemonic masculinity being grounded in physical prowess to mental and moral capacity, sexual virility is called into question.<sup>51</sup> Responses to periodic “crises” of masculinity include a return to physicality, predatory sexuality, homosocial relations, and pre-industrial spiritualities.<sup>52</sup> The “primitive” side of this masculine duality is articulated in Kokopelli, possibly explaining its appeal.

### **Commodification and the Cipher**

Contemporary Kokopelli imagery is a projection of Western “primitive masculinity” built on appropriations that commodify and transform traditional imagery into a fetish with tenuous connections to traditional images and stories produced by specific Native groups. This section, therefore, highlights the implications of the commodification of Kokopelli imagery and mythology in relation to (neo)colonialism. I then use Kent Ono and Derek Buescher’s discussion of the cipher to further analyze commercial Kokopelli imagery and interpretation in relation to masculinity, race, and (neo)colonialism.

#### *Commodification and (Neo)colonialism*

The visual castration enacted by Kokopelli imagery can be taken to symbolize the disempowerment and colonization of Native American cultures through the idolization of a Euro-American construction of a “Native” personage. That is, if “authentic” fluteplayer imagery is representative of “real” Native peoples, cultures and traditions, then commercial Kokopelli imagery represents what Natives are from the perspective of the dominant culture: castrated and otherwise mutated to serve the needs of the dominant. In this sense, commercial Kokopelli imagery performs (neo)colonial domination.

Commodification abstracts the value of an object or action so it can enter the system of exchange. In this process, the specificity of the labor and social relations invested in the commodity are lost: It becomes, in practice, equivalent to all other commodities.<sup>53</sup> To create the appearance of difference (and hence value) amidst this equivalence, meanings are attached to the commodity. These meanings are the (illusory) ends to which the commodity itself becomes the means of attainment, transforming it into a fetish. These meanings are reifications: Their artificiality must

be obscured, collapsed into the object, enhancing the commodity's value as fetish and mystifying the relations and exploitations involved in its production.<sup>54</sup>

As the de facto mascot of the Southwest and ubiquitous inhabitant of tourist spaces, Kokopelli breeds familiarity; the visual and verbal characterization of him as entertaining and celebratory encourages colonization of the region's landscapes and cultures. As a metonym for southwestern Native American culture, Kokopelli welcomes non-Natives and offers them the wisdom, joy, and freedom of an ancient culture and spirituality. To obscure the historic and contemporary realities of colonization (in which tourists themselves participate), Kokopelli represents precontact Native American culture, functioning out of time, in the imagined purity of the primitive, unburdened by complications of European contact and colonization. Kokopelli's status as a mythic figure and cartoon-like qualities enable the mutation and abstraction of the imagery and its meanings, and their redeployment in support of tourism specifically and (neo)colonial relations generally.

Kokopelli's timelessness explains the absence of the "vanishing" theme present in many other contemporary images of Native Americans,<sup>55</sup> as the projections into the past enacted on and through Kokopelli imagery allow for erasure of issues related to European-Native contact. Kokopelli is positioned as a mythical, not historic, figure; as a spiritual, not actual, personage; and has become a cartoon-like character whose "animation" (constant re-creation by artists) produces an abstraction, enabling an uprooting from history and a revisioning in the context of (neo)colonial imaginings of the primitive Other. Because Kokopelli imagery projects fantasies onto an imagined past understood as radically distinct from the present, its explicit meanings need not account for dynamics such as colonization, displacement, genocide, and environmental destruction. These images of a mythic Native American figure are constructed for the Western (neo)colonial subject, masking "the *continuing* lived history of people disenfranchised by colonialism by failing to acknowledge colonialism's presence in the US today."<sup>56</sup>

Kokopelli imagery is a clear case of cultural appropriation and commodification. Certain images, stylistic elements and stories are appropriated from Native cultures without compensation, adapted to the needs of the dominant culture and used without concern for the interests of the originating cultures. Meanings with little or no relationship to the originating cultures or their symbols are attached, obscuring the real relations that exist between Native and non-Native peoples in the Southwest. However, the concept of the cipher offers additional insights into the nature and implications of these appropriations and commodifications.

### *Deciphering Kokopelli*

In their analysis of the marketing of Disney's 1995 animated feature *Pocahontas*, Ono and Buescher "illustrate the specific nature of US culture's tendency to appropriate, transform, and then (almost obsessively) reproduce figures and forms through the production of commodities." Specifically:

while a commodity has value as a product and as a social concept . . . a cipher is a figure through which various commodities with multiple exchange values are marketed, *and* it is a social concept that circulates like a commodity.

This basic definition of the cipher demonstrates its relevance to commercial Kokopelli imagery: Kokopelli is the means by which products are sold, and the selling of products is the means by which Kokopelli's meanings are circulated.

Commodities and ciphers mutually support one another in a feedback loop in which the cipher imbues the commodity with a particular kind of value, while the purchase of the commodity in the context of an entire field of related commodities further strengthens the overall desirability of products associated with the cipher.<sup>57</sup>

The cipher highlights the processes by which many contemporary commodities are produced:

What may be at least contemporary about the cipher is the dislocation of the referent from any single material object. In fact, *the cipher itself is the referent*; products refer to it, and its existence depends on its relationship to a field of products. Hence, the cipher is an effect of the many images and discourses referencing it.

This understanding accounts for multiple and contradictory meanings in the construction and circulation of ciphers. "Because the cipher is never fixed, never fully seen in its totality, and always changing, it becomes increasingly difficult but all the more necessary to pinpoint and evaluate."<sup>58</sup> Such multiplicity and indeterminacy can be central to the cipher's function, enabling its deployment in multiple discursive spheres.

"Kokopelli the hump-backed fluteplayer" is constituted by the tourism and culture industries as a hip, mystical and somewhat shady symbol of fertility, as a metonym for the generic "Indians" of the Southwest and beyond, and as a recognizable icon of the Southwest. A diversity of functions enacted by and through Kokopelli—marketing tool, metonym, icon, mascot, lifestyle, identity, commodity, fetish, art—anchor the free-floating signifier that is its recognizable form but still allow for some bobbing about: fun, care-free, adventurous, independent, clever, magical, powerful, threatening, and virile. Kokopelli imagery and mythology is appropriated by the New Age commodity machine to stand in for Native Spirituality, by the tourism industry to stand in for the Mystical Southwest or Adventurous Individualism, by parks and land management agencies to stand in for Native American Cultural Resources, by Euro-American patriarchal culture to stand in for Masculine Heterosexual Virility.

The form and variants of traditional fluteplayer imagery and the contents of apparently (un)related myths have been selectively appropriated and adapted by Natives and non-Natives operating in cultural and monetary economies that constitute a bounded diversity of objects recognizable as Kokopelli and to which consumers are drawn by its status as a fetish. This process of encipherment and the power relations involved in it is a structured but not determined creation, produced from at least partially processed, not raw, materials. Fluteplayer imagery and Puebloan myths are symbols and narratives with pre-existing meanings and cultural

functions; these meanings and functions must be obscured (enciphered) to allow other meanings to circulate and to enable the ongoing processes of (neo)colonialism in relation to Native peoples. Contemporary Kokopelli imagery is, on the surface, polysemic, but Kokopelli is not a blank slate, nor are individuals free to inscribe onto it whatever they want, however they want, in whatever language they please.

As the cipher metaphor implies, the meanings ascribed to Kokopelli images are guided and restricted by Euro-American cultural codes involving images of Native Americans and musicians, gender discourses and ideologies of colonization. While multiple meanings are assigned to Kokopelli, these interpretations are guided by codes operating largely below conscious awareness, at the level of “the natural” and “common sense.” In the case of commercial Kokopelli imagery, traditional forms have been selectively appropriated and adjusted in a process guided by Euro-American cultural codes and dynamics. The (at least sometimes intentional) similarity of commercial Kokopelli’s antennae to dreadlocks; the powerful cue for the rock star provided by his hunched stance as he plays his flute; the other types of activities he is shown engaged in (e.g., mountain biking, hiking, playing guitar); his nicknames (e.g., Casanova of the Cliff Dwellers); his much-discussed missing male member; his oft-repeated association with fertility and Native American culture, spirituality, and mysticism; the contexts within which he is encountered (national parks, tourist shops, Native arts and crafts stores): All serve to limit the types of meanings produced by Kokopelli’s producers and consumers. This process is guided by economies that circulate goods, money, bodies, symbols, identities, ideologies, pleasures, and powers.<sup>59</sup>

This coding process allows ciphers to be a site for the circulation of meanings and, in turn, a means by which texts are transformed to conceal meaning.<sup>60</sup> Through the implicit codes that guide such ascriptions, contemporary meanings ascribed to Kokopelli imagery obscure other meanings and relations, thereby allowing the imagery to do its work on Western ideologies and enactments of masculinity and (neo)colonialism. In this sense, the sheer repetition and ubiquity of ciphers such as Kokopelli are also important. While the history of appropriated symbols may in some minimal sense anchor their meanings and functions, the creation of an almost inescapable, self-reinforcing system of images and products, ciphers and commodities, overwhelms any sense of the genuinely historical, even while creating an illusion of genuine historicity as part of commodity fetishism. The ongoing distortion of Native cultures via commodification is obscured through the presentation of a “pure” (precontact and/or mythical) expression of such (imagined) cultures.

A case of such circular reinforcement in the service of commodification appears in *Cuckoo for Kokopelli*. Walker mentions the theory that hump-backed fluteplayers are traders and then uses this interpretation of fluteplayer imagery to counter criticisms of its commercialization. In an “interview” with Kokopelli in which Walker asks if the commercial use of his image is bothersome, Walker crafts this response from Kokopelli: “Look, one of my jobs on Earth was a trader. I’m a free-market kind of guy. I’m more than happy to help the small businessman make a buck.”<sup>61</sup> While Walker’s book is often tongue-in-cheek, this example lays bare the logic of commodification,

as a Euro-American author creates an imagined conversation with a figure fabricated by commodity capitalism which in turn appropriates part of its “own” past life as an important figure in Southwest Native cultures to legitimate its creation and exploitation by commodity capitalism.

### *Enciphering Masculinity*

In terms of gender, the Kokopelli cipher also obscures past meanings to advance a compensatory model for Euro-American hegemonic masculinity. In crafting Kokopelli as an individual bereft of the other figures which would have often accompanied fluteplayers, this model of “Native” (i.e., Euro-American) masculinity presents itself as lacking any meaningful (inter)dependence, portraying the Native view of fertility as a solely masculine affair. The complementary gender roles involved in fertility in Puebloan cultures are obscured in order to revive a primitive masculinity based on virility, promiscuity, and the denial of women’s value and subjectivity. Kokopelli is one site for working through contemporary Euro-American tensions over masculinity and sexual behavior specifically, recovering the image of the ignoble savage in terms of a virile and unrestrained sexuality but with an attempt to remove negative moral judgments concerning such behavior.

This pattern is especially clear in *Cuckoo for Kokopelli*; Walker exhorts us not to apply our own systems of morality to Kokopelli’s sexual escapades because “shame” is a European import. After recounting a Hopi story in which Kokopelli impregnates a desirable but aloof young maiden by digging a tunnel and using hollowed reeds to inseminate her as she urinates—a favorite tale of authors of popular works on Kokopelli<sup>62</sup>—Walker states, “When it comes to this type of legend, the issues of consent versus nonconsent that our shame-enlightened minds beg to be addressed just don’t apply.”<sup>63</sup> The sexual threat Kokopelli poses is dismissed as a result of the importation of shame-based Western sexual morality, maintaining the image’s positive valence in the face of moral ambiguity. This image of masculinity manifests primitivism in its belief that precontact non-Western cultures existed in a natural state, uncontaminated by civilization and its morality, and were thereby sexually free and innocent. Glover and Walker both use the primitivism articulated to Kokopelli imagery to call for the suspension of Western sexual morality, obscuring or at least dismissing the implications of Kokopelli’s sexuality for contemporary masculinity and gender relations. In an era in which sexual harassment and rape are ongoing topics of discussion and a means for critiquing as well as reinforcing forms of hegemonic masculinity (from Bill Clinton and Kobe Bryant to the Duke lacrosse team and the University of Colorado football team), some of the meanings circulating around Kokopelli imagery imply that promiscuity or even sexual predation is acceptable. Indeed, the popular literature often rewrites these behaviors as fun-loving tricksterism and the moral judgments against them as cultural baggage to be tossed aside in the attainment of a free-roving, independent, and virile masculinity. The message, reinforced by Kokopelli’s individualized (decontextualized) masculinity, is that (Western) culture constrains the essence of masculinity.



Kokopelli taps into ambivalent and contradictory attitudes regarding male sexuality by simultaneously idolizing and excusing, minimizing or erasing male sexual potency. As mentioned earlier, many authors discuss the traditional fluteplayer's penis, its size and its frozen-in-time erection. Yet, the penis (which appears on some, not all, traditional fluteplayers) is not included in any commercial Kokopelli image I have seen (with the minor exception of photographs of some fluteplayer rock art). Kokopelli images have had their literal penises erased, while symbols of their sexual potency have been retained or even highlighted. These symbols include not only the flute, but those surrounding the male rock star. Commercial Kokopelli imagery, by erasing the penis but retaining its symbolic meanings, redefines sexual virility as linked to *symbolic* potency. The absence of the *penis*—the physical, “primitive” site of masculine power—is accompanied by the retention of the *phallus*, defined as any central symbol of masculinity, its privilege, desirability, and potency. The primitive is overtly rejected insofar as the penis is inappropriate for a public, commercial, and widely used image such as Kokopelli while a “primitive” masculinity is retained through indirect symbolism. Primitive masculinity is thereby detached from its anatomical manifestation and displaced from the physical to the social and the symbolic. Arbitrary symbols of masculinity replace its anatomical sign, while that sign remains the (hidden) anchor for such symbols.

The erasure of the fluteplayer's penis in contemporary Kokopelli imagery obscures the role of such imagery in articulating a primitive Euro-American masculinity through displacement onto symbolic domains such as music, dance, sports, and outdoor recreation. The need, presumably driven by “civilized” cultural standards, to sanitize Kokopelli by erasing signs of sexual potency (the penis) and sexual activity (e.g., copulation scenes) helps to displace and obscure through encipherment the work the imagery is doing—recovering and revisioning a “primitive” masculinity. In this sense (as well as in economic terms), Kokopelli imagery is constructed for non-Natives, projecting “desirable” but morally ambiguous forms of virile masculinity onto Native imagery. Through commercial Kokopelli imagery and popular interpretations thereof, virility and promiscuity are linked to positively coded attributes—freedom, playfulness, and individuality—and male heterosexual prowess is (re)centered as a key element of masculinity. That a populace primed for the marketing of prescription drugs to treat “male erectile dysfunction” would embrace a figure that traditionally displays a large, erect penis is unsurprising. Advertisements for such drugs parallel Kokopelli imagery, associating a commodified image of virile masculinity with their products via sports metaphors and sexual innuendo while avoiding direct representations of (erect or flaccid) penises. Hence, as with Kokopelli, symbols of virility replace its anatomical sign, enabling the symbolic (re)construction of Euro-American hegemonic masculinity. Commercial Kokopelli imagery allows for both the resignification of Euro-American masculinity and the distortion and colonization of Native culture while appearing to do neither.

*Race, Culture, and Caricature*

The relevance and evaluation of Kokopelli's masculinity and sexuality for contemporary Euro-Americans raise questions of race; the cipher's operation can be further clarified by examining intersections of gender and sexuality with race, culture, and (neo)colonialism. Kokopelli is constituted in the model of primitive masculinity via its (missing but nevertheless large and erect) penis as well as its proclivities for sexual promiscuity and predation. Kokopelli's masculinity parallels Euro-American images of the black male rapist and the Latin lover,<sup>64</sup> not to mention the Indian warrior who abducts white women,<sup>65</sup> embodying the sexual ambivalence of many images of the primitive.<sup>66</sup> Kokopelli is clearly Native: Whether a puchteca from Mesoamerica or a figure from Puebloan mythology, he is or is closely linked to a racialized Other. However, unlike many other ambivalent images of primitive masculinity, Kokopelli does not rape, abduct, or seduce white women—confined to a mythical past, in the stories told about him he only interacts with Native peoples, reducing the figure's role as a sexual threat and enabling its function as a fantasy of potent and promiscuous masculinity.

The abstract nature of Kokopelli imagery allows it to be racialized and not racialized at the same time, and this ambivalent racial status is crucial to the imagery's function as regional icon, primitivist fantasy, and fetish. Kokopelli imagery can be understood as a caricature,<sup>67</sup> not of Native Americans per se but of traditional fluteplayer imagery. Fluteplayer imagery is widely varied, but commercial Kokopelli imagery selects and emphasizes certain features, such as the flute, "antennae" and the hunched posture, which necessarily involves the erasure of some of the traditional imagery's traits, such as the erect penis and accompanying figures. Such selections and erasures create an image appropriate to its various purposes, creating a friendly, fun, and (overtly) nonthreatening caricature.

Kokopelli imagery is an abstraction, and it refers only to an abstraction. First, unlike "The End of the Trail" or Edward Curtis's photographs, the image does not operate under the guise of realism; its widespread use and popularity may be linked precisely to its cartoonish nature. Following traditional fluteplayer imagery, Kokopelli is most often presented as an outline, a profile lacking significant or "naturalistic" internal detail (see Figure 2). In short, there is an absence of overt racial signifiers in the imagery itself. So while Kokopelli is a "Native American" figure—specifically, a mythical or spiritual personage—the imagery itself is not directly and explicitly racialized. Second, the referent of Kokopelli imagery is not any specific Native American culture, but an idea(l) of "Native American" and "Southwest" history, spirituality, and culture, which is necessarily abstract. Kokopelli images do not stand in for "Native American" as a racial category (which would include living, colonized Native peoples) so much as they stand in for "Native American" as an abstracted and far-removed spiritual/cultural tradition. Kokopelli represents not a group of (especially living) people, but a set of imagined projections about Kokopelli specifically (morally unencumbered, virile, and independent) and Southwest Native Americans or the Southwest generally (pure, spiritual, and mysterious).

However, these projections are linked to a group of people defined as a “race”: Native Americans. Kokopelli imagery derives its meaning from its linkage to this race because images of the primitive are essentialist: While it may be the (imagined) culture of Native Americans that is appealing, that culture is linked to what is projected as the essence of a people, even if that race/culture configuration is assumed to no longer exist due to genocide, colonization and/or assimilation. Just as Kokopelli’s penis operates through its simultaneous presence and absence (its presence in much of the attendant verbal discourse and in displaced expressions such as sports, its absence in the imagery), Kokopelli’s racial associations work by being simultaneously present (through its cultural affiliations,) and absent (in terms of overt racial signifiers in the imagery). The specific forms Kokopelli imagery takes (drawings, paintings, carvings, engravings, sculptures) enables its abstraction, and hence the commodification and fetishization of the imagery. Kokopelli’s “animation” (abstraction) is ideal for the cipher, as it enables the imagery’s dislocation from its historic and contemporary contexts, making it largely self-referential, unanchored by specific cultural traditions and histories.

The dynamic combination of the presence/absence of Kokopelli’s gender/sexuality and race, and the intersections between gender/sexuality and race/culture enhances the imagery’s role as a cipher as well as its support of (neo)colonialism. Kokopelli imagery can stand in for a model of virile and predatory primitive sexuality, and it can not. Kokopelli imagery can be linked to real Native peoples, and it can not. Its virile masculinity is linked to cultural traits which are racialized by the essentialism involved in the trope of the primitive, but those racial traits are erased through the process of abstraction, enabling Western identifications with and/or desires for primitive masculinity while ignoring the complications involved in idealizing a racialized Other and its association with living peoples. Kokopelli’s racialization is coded into its (present/absent) virility and its association with Puebloan mythology and spirituality, but abstraction allows this to be linked to a projected cultural configuration (the innocence and naturalness of the primitive) without the baggage of both race and history (i.e., colonialism and genocide). For Kokopelli’s articulation of the trope of the primitive and its role as fetish to operate effectively, culture is essentialized as race. For the encipherment process to obscure the contradictions involved in the projection of Western masculinist fantasies onto Kokopelli, race and culture are unhinged, and race is erased through the construction of Kokopelli as cartoon caricature.

## Conclusion

Through this analysis, I support a materialist approach to cultural criticism<sup>68</sup> by examining the work representations are doing and how they are doing it. A materialist approach must certainly include an analysis of content—What does Kokopelli mean? How does contemporary Kokopelli imagery distort Native American cultures?—but within such a framework, the critical questions are about social structure, material practice, and performances of power. In the case of fluteplayer

imagery, an analysis focused on projection, abstraction, commodification, and encipherment as processes carried out in the construction and circulation of Kokopelli imagery enables a move beyond what to how. More importantly, Kokopelli demonstrates that such a move requires the interrogation of multiple lines of power and difference, such as gender, race, and (neo)colonialism.

Interpretations, appropriations, and circulations of fluteplayer imagery can be understood as responding to and intervening in the contemporary status of Native Americans in Euro-American culture as well as, via projection and displacement, anxieties over Euro-American masculinity. In its erasure of (neo)colonial issues, contemporary Kokopelli imagery suggests that embracing (consuming, collecting) Native cultures, myths, and/or spiritualities without acknowledging or taking action to address ongoing cultural destruction and colonization is coherent and sufficient. Kokopelli imagery represents the act implicit in films of the 1990s such as *Dances with Wolves* and *Last of the Mohicans* as well as long-standing practices of “playing Indian”: Westerners legitimately inherit Native American culture because that culture contains qualities deemed in need of preservation (for Westerners).<sup>69</sup> If the logic of many narratives about Native American cultures is that Westerners can, should, and must keep (what they define as) Native culture alive without concern for living Native peoples, then commercial Kokopelli imagery is the enactment of that logic. At the same time, it works to recover a potentially “primitive” masculinity while obscuring the uncomfortable implications of doing so: the contradictions structured into Euro-American hegemonic masculinity.

Dynamic intersections of race, culture, gender, and (neo)colonialism are vital to the (re)production of systems of power and exploitation. This analysis demonstrates the importance of projection and intersectionality in the processes of commodification and consumption. The discourses which constitute Kokopelli position Western culture as antimasculine, hindering the expression of “natural” masculinity. Images of primitive masculinity are used to (re)construct a virile and potent masculinity, and thereby (paradoxically) maintain Western dominance. The desire for primitive masculinity feeds the commodity machine and justifies the appropriation of colonized cultures, using difference (race, gender, sexuality) while erasing it. The simultaneous presence and absence of Kokopelli’s sexuality and race demonstrates an important dynamic in the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, whiteness, and (neo)colonialism, and is vital to understanding the role of both intersectionality and a variety of markers of difference.

The hybrid caricature known as Kokopelli enables and performs colonization and consumption of the Other. The visual, semiotic, cultural, and economic consumption of Kokopelli is in many ways akin to practices such as listening to rap or world music, eating “ethnic” food, and others described by Stanley Fish as manifestations of boutique multiculturalism.<sup>70</sup> But such racialized acts of consumption are not merely liberal celebrations of diversity covering deeper hegemonic homogenizations; the celebration of Southwest Native culture serves as a legitimating rationale for consuming the Other, in the case of Kokopelli through a primitivist and, optionally, masculinist fantasy. In addition to its relatively obvious functions and operations

(appropriation, distortion, commodification, and consumption), Kokopelli imagery enables participation in a range of fantasies—of being the life of the party; of being an independent trader free of social obligations; of sexual virility, promiscuity, and even rape without moral misgivings—in ways that entail a range of dominations and exploitations. Such fantasies are accessed through the literal and metaphoric consumption of Kokopelli commodities, and through tourism more broadly, and they work to achieve multiple but particular ends by means of such fantasies.

This analysis demonstrates the importance of grounding discussions of the floating signifiers, polysemic symbols, and self-referential systems of meaning which seem to characterize our postmodern world, reminding us that they are not hermetically sealed in the world of the purely symbolic or ideational but are instead products and processes of material social systems. Kokopelli is a fascinating figure, a bizarre cultural hybrid: the Native American rock star. But understanding how its diverse meanings articulate, how they enable concrete social realities and systems of power, involves more than identifying pastiche, fragmentation, or multiplicity. Kokopelli imagery is certainly a product of the postmodern condition, but its role in the ongoing production of patriarchy and imperialism is what needs to be illuminated and resisted.

## Notes

- [1] Dennis Slifer and James Duffield, *Kokopelli: Flute Player Images in Rock Art* (Santa Fe, NM: Ancient City, 1994), 3.
- [2] Wayne Glover, *Kokopelli: Ancient Myth/Modern Icon* (Bellemont, AZ: Camelback/Canyonlands, 1995); Dave Walker, *Cuckoo for Kokopelli* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland, 1998).
- [3] Kelley A. Hays-Gilpin, *Ambiguous Images: Gender and Rock Art* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004), 12; see also Ekkehart Malotki, *Kokopelli: The Making of an Icon* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).
- [4] Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1978), xv, xiii, xvi.
- [5] Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985). See also Marianna Torgovnick, *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- [6] S. Elizabeth Bird, "Savage Desires: The Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media," in *Selling the Indian: Commercializing and Appropriating American Indian Cultures*, ed. Carter Jones Meyer and Diana Royer, 62–98 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001); Derek T. Buescher and Kent A. Ono, "Civilized Colonialism: Pocahontas as Neocolonial Rhetoric," *Women's Studies in Communication* 19 (1996): 127–53; Peter van Lent, "'Her Beautiful Savage': The Current Sexual Image of the Native American Male," in *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, ed. S. Elizabeth Bird, 211–27 (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996); Kent A. Ono and Derek T. Buescher, "Deciphering Pocahontas: Unpackaging the Commodification of a Native American Woman," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18 (2001): 23–43.
- [7] Van Lent.
- [8] Bird; Van Lent.
- [9] Bird; Torgovnick.
- [10] Buescher and Ono; Torgovnick.
- [11] Torgovnick.

- [12] Jason Edward Black, "The 'Mascotting' of Native America: Construction, Commodity, and Assimilation," *American Indian Quarterly* 26 (2002): 605–22; Ward Churchill, *Indians Are Us?* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage, 1994); Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
- [13] Churchill; Lesley V. Kadish, "Reading Cereal Boxes: Pre-packaging History and Indigenous Identities," *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900–present)* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2004), [http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/fall\\_2004/kadish.htm](http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/fall_2004/kadish.htm) (accessed 29 August 2005); Mary E. Stuckey and Richard Morris, "Pocahontas and Beyond: Commodification and Cultural Hegemony," *World Communication* 28 (1999): 45–67; Laurie Anne Whitt, "Cultural Imperialism and the Marketing of Native America," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 19, no. 3 (1995): 1–31.
- [14] See, e.g., Berkhofer; Bird; Van Lent.
- [15] Van Lent, 211.
- [16] Hays-Gilpin.
- [17] Gilman; Torgovnick.
- [18] Bird, 75.
- [19] For a related discussion of androcentrism in rock art interpretation and its connection to the crisis in masculinity, see Richard A. Rogers, "From Hunting Magic to Shamanism: Interpretations of Native American Rock Art and the Contemporary Crisis in Masculinity," *Women's Studies in Communication* 30 (2007): 78–110.
- [20] Karen Lee Ashcraft and Lisa A. Flores, "'Slaves with White Collars': Persistent Performances of Masculinity in Crisis," *Text & Performance Quarterly* 23 (2000): 1–29; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993).
- [21] Bederman. See also Robinson; Rotundo; Harry Stecopoulos, "The World According to Normal Bean: Edgar Rice Burroughs's Popular Culture," in *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*, ed. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 170–91.
- [22] Ashcraft and Flores, 2.
- [23] See also Bederman; Robinson.
- [24] Bederman, 7.
- [25] Relevant examples of intersectional analyses of masculinity include Ashcraft and Flores; Bederman; Eric Lott, "All the King's Men: Elvis Impersonators and White Working-Class Masculinity," in *Race and the Subject of Masculinities* (see note 21), 192–227; Robinson; Stecopoulos.
- [26] Bederman; Robinson; Rotundo.
- [27] Hays-Gilpin; Malotki.
- [28] Ekkehart Malotki and Donald E. Weaver, Jr., *Stone Chisel and Yucca Brush: Colorado Plateau Rock Art* (Walnut, CA: Kiva, 2002); Dennis Slifer, *The Serpent and the Sacred Fire: Fertility Images in Southwest Rock Art* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico, 2000); Slifer and Duffield.
- [29] Hays-Gilpin; Malotki; Slifer; Slifer and Duffield.
- [30] I do not wish to leave Hopi and other indigenous voices out of this essay, but I choose not to solicit and represent indigenous knowledge not already publicly available. One implication of this analysis is precisely how such information is appropriated, even if dealt with responsibly by authors. Therefore, I work to de-emphasize claims about the "true"/"authentic" meanings of both fluteplayer imagery and associated figures from Puebloan mythology. Instead, I examine what the available literature says about both the Native and non-Native, historic and contemporary meanings of traditional fluteplayers and (un)related figures; I am interested in the implications of meanings in circulation regardless of authenticity. I respect

the desire to avoid additional exploitation of indigenous spiritual traditions as well as the belief that “religion is a private matter and that there is already too much information available to non-Hopis about Hopi spirituality.” Hopi Staff, “Cultural Theft and Misrepresentation,” The Hopi Tribe, 22 August 2004, [http://www.hopi.nsn.us/view\\_article.asp?id=20&cat=1](http://www.hopi.nsn.us/view_article.asp?id=20&cat=1) (accessed 26 January 2006).

- [31] Hays-Gilpin; Malotki.
- [32] Hays-Gilpin; Malotki; Slifer and Duffield.
- [33] The “prehistoric” culture most associated with fluteplayer imagery is commonly known as “Anasazi.” However, “Anasazi,” derived from a Diné (Navajo) word meaning “ancient ones” or “ancient enemies,” is challenged by contemporary Pueblo cultures such as the Hopi. Archaeologists, national parks, and others have begun adopting the apparently more neutral “ancestral Puebloan,” but its acceptance is by no means universal. See Harry Walters and Hugh C. Rogers, “Anasazi and *Anaasázi*: Two Words, Two Cultures,” *Kiva* 66 (2001): 317–26.
- [34] Hays-Gilpin.
- [35] Hays-Gilpin; Malotki.
- [36] Slifer.
- [37] Slifer and Duffield, 7.
- [38] Hays-Gilpin, 142.
- [39] Ironically, while Kokopelli is verbally linked to Puebloan cultures of the Colorado Plateau, the prototype for commercial Kokopelli imagery appears to be a Hohokam pottery design from southern Arizona (Malotki).
- [40] My use of these and other “popular” verbal texts is twofold. First, these texts articulate meanings produced through application of Euro-American cultural codes to Kokopelli imagery, and therefore support my verbal interpretations of the imagery. Second, they provide additional information that both guides and adds to meanings inferred from the imagery itself, e.g., what fluteplayer imagery symbolized in various indigenous cultures. My use of these texts, therefore, is due not to the extent of their circulation but to their reflection of Euro-American interpretations of the imagery as well as the types of information provided in tourist literature, art galleries, trading posts, and gift shops.
- [41] In the analysis to follow, I quote from five of the ten websites: Max Bertola, “Kokopelli: Anasazi Casanova,” <http://www.so-utah.com/feature/kokopeli/homepage.html> (accessed 24 August 2005); Earth Studio, [http://www.earthstudiomoab.com/home/es1/page\\_55\\_17](http://www.earthstudiomoab.com/home/es1/page_55_17) (accessed 5 July 2005); Kokopelli Kingdom, “Welcome to Kokopelli Kingdom,” <http://www.angelfire.com/ny4/HOMEPAGE/kokokingdom.html> (accessed 24 Aug. 2005); Kokopelli.com, <http://www.kokopelli.com/kokopellidotcom/kokdec.html> (accessed 5 July 2005); Zodiac Master, “Trickster,” [www.thezodiac.com/koko.htm](http://www.thezodiac.com/koko.htm) (accessed 24 August 2005).
- [42] Walker, ix, 2, 45.
- [43] Kokopelli Kingdom.
- [44] Walker, 11, 12.
- [45] *Ibid.*, 4, 18, 5.
- [46] Zodiac Master.
- [47] Bertola.
- [48] Rockin’ V Café, Kanab, UT, 19 June 2005.
- [49] Hays-Gilpin.
- [50] *Ibid.*, 19, 21.
- [51] Bederman.
- [52] Ashcraft and Flores; Bederman; Churchill; Rotundo.
- [53] Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: The Essential Writings*, ed. Frederic L. Bender, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1986).
- [54] Whitt.
- [55] Bird; Torgovnick; van Lent.

- [56] Buescher and Ono, 130.
- [57] Ono and Buescher, 24–25, 26.
- [58] Ibid., 27, 37.
- [59] Robert Scholes, *Protocols of Reading* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).
- [60] Ono and Buescher.
- [61] Walker, 42.
- [62] Glover; Slifer and Duffield; Walker.
- [63] Walker, 5.
- [64] Bederman.
- [65] Bird; van Lent.
- [66] Gilman.
- [67] Cf. Stuckey and Morris.
- [68] Dana Cloud, “The Materiality of Discourse as Oxymoron: A Challenge to Critical Rhetoric,” *Western Journal of Communication* 58 (1994): 141–63; Ronald Walter Greene, “Another Materialist Rhetoric,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 15 (1998): 21–41.
- [69] Torgovnick; Deloria.
- [70] Stanley Fish, “Boutique Multiculturalism,” *Multiculturalism and American Democracy*, ed. Arthur Melzer, Jerry Weinberger and Richard Zinman (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 69–88.