CHALLENGING APPROPRIATION:
MODERN MOKO AND WESTERN SUBCULTURE

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By

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The concept of a global village pervades contemporary Western images of globalization. Influenced by the desire for universal community, American culture blends modern living with exoticized cultural elements by divorcing select aspects of traditional cultures from their originating time and place. Meanwhile, the unavoidable impact on the meaning of these traditions within the native culture goes virtually unremarked (Torgovnick 1990). Even when we acknowledge a problematic relationship between our culture and another, we are inclined to explain it away as a sign of the times. No social group, no matter how isolated, is unaffected by the entanglements of cultural adaptations or appropriations. The belief that colonized civilizations are impacted by acculturation, or the systematic cultural change of one society when acted upon by a second, colonizing society, juxtaposes diffusion, which has come to describe a “natural” process of exchange between two or more cultures. The contemporary processes of globalization which lead to the exploitation of a marginalized society’s intellectual property rights are increasingly complicated by new boundaries of identity, place, and culture. With intellectual property, however, boundaries are not as clearly demarcated as they would be if dealing in material artifacts or land rights (which are, in many cases, just as contested). Recent developments in anthropology seek to understand these trends,
which in some cases have outgrown the simplified concepts of diffusion and acculturation, and appear to share aspects of both.

The myriad traditions that make up the modern urban lifestyle are best described as “indigenous and imported,” a combination of both “the native and the foreign” (Torgovnick 1990:37). As Westerners, we enter “primitive” other worlds to do business, sometimes borrowing intellectual property in the form of art and occasionally the accompanying culturally-bound ideologies associated with these practices. This importation process at work is evidenced by the popular trend of “tribal-style” or “blackwork” tattooing. Despite the design’s well-established roots in Polynesia, the stark, black lined style of tattoo is commonly associated with Western pop culture. Exploring the popularity of neotribal tattooing as a possible result of modern cross-cultural exchange may help to produce useful frameworks for addressing processes of transnational identity and globalization.

**The Tattoo and Moko in History**

According to Māori anthropologist Te Awekotuku, archaeological evidence suggests a direct relationship between Māori *moko* and more widespread Polynesian art forms, including body art like *tatau* and traditional woodcarving, which both utilize similar tools and share similar patterns and design components (Te Awekotuku 2007:40). Historically speaking, tattooed individuals existed in Europe long before Captain Cook travelled the Pacific in the 1770s, but written record fails to establish tattooing as a continuous and traditional cultural practice in the West until after 1830, when colonization was well established throughout the Polynesian Triangle. Subsequent world
wars and increased contact with island peoples contributed to the escalating visibility and popularity of tattoos in both Europe and North America. Thomas (2005:22) suggests it was the “souvenir” quality of the Tahitian tattoos that appealed first to sailors, and later resonated with subcultures in Europe and America. Tattoo exchange has a long history in the US. Norman Collins, more famously known as Sailor Jerry, a name he shares with a particularly popular style of American tattoo, was known to have exchanged American tattooing equipment with Japanese artist Horihide and Hong Kong tattooist, Pinky Yum (Demello 2000:73-74).

**Statement of Intent**

The meaning and implications of issues such as appropriation and intellectual property rights will be examined in light of a specific form of body art native to New Zealand, called *tā moko*. The aim of my research is to elucidate how *tā moko* is significant to the native Māori by first analyzing the historical roots of the practice, then engaging in an in-depth examination of the contemporary value and importance of *tā moko* as informed by the sociological concepts of self and identity, as well as gender narratives. I will also address social issues that arise when a dominant culture attempts to adopt the artistic practices of another.

If the problem is widespread, why choose to study *moko* in particular? *Moko* in particular has garnered significant media attention in just the past decade. From the runways of Paris, to the arms, legs, and faces of well-known European and American celebrities like boxer Mike Tyson and musician Robby Williams, the distinctively curvilinear spirals of common, so-called tribal “blackwork” stylistically mimic *tā moko*. 
as practiced by generations of Māori. Some Western enthusiasts even go so far as to make claims to the spiritual and cultural significance of the indigenous art form; Tyson himself described his facial tattoo as his way of asserting a “warrior identity,” but while he and the artist are calling it *moko*, most Māori disagree (Mirams 2003). As Thomas points out: “People in many times and places have made competing claims to land and knowledge, and it would be ethnocentric to suppose that only modernity enables people to negotiate such issues reflexively…” (Thomas 2005:25). The thought that “inauthentic” body modifications communicate inauthentic identity leads us to question how the two concepts are correlated, as well as what distinctions might exist between Māori identity claims and those asserted by Modern Primitives in Western culture.

Adaptation and change in society is often reflected in debates over notions of collective and individual identity, which call into focus art’s cultural significance, and how it links the present to a traditional past while also serving as a marker for newly emergent boundaries (Thomas 2005:25). Investigating *moko* provides a microcosmic view of body art phenomena as well as an opportunity to dissect how modern interpretations by native practitioners play a role in how the art is understood both intra- and extra-communally. As most media coverage on tattooing focuses on the contemporary American practice and its importance as a pop culture phenomenon, this study differs in that it seeks to understand contemporary cross-cultural connections between an American fringe culture, Modern Primitivism, and culture-specific practices developed by the Māori of New Zealand. Moreover, this examination is particularly
useful when exploring broader notions of authenticity and intellectual property (IP) rights as they concern contemporary anthropology.

Though Chapter Two of this thesis will provide a general background on the history of moko in New Zealand, more thorough examinations of this sort can be found in the book length works of Gell (1993), Te Awekotuku (2007), and Ellis (2008), all of which have proved invaluable to this inquiry. Straddling the division between tattooing and scarification, moko sets itself apart from other forms of body art practiced in Polynesia and elsewhere, using a technique unknown in any other part of the world. However, it is hard to completely disengage moko completely from the word tattoo; this thesis takes the clear stance that facial moko is a category of modification unique to the Māori culture, but the universal categories of tattooing and body modification and the use of the word tattooing to describe a specific modification practice are more ambiguous.

To further complicate this: moko performed on the rest of the body is called by the same name, but this particular practice is shared by other Pacific Island groups and is similar in method to tatau, classic Polynesian tattooing which is not carved, but punctured or tapped into the skin. The traditional tools and basic techniques of tatau were reintroduced to New Zealand by modern Samoan artists (Te Awekotuku 2007: 20). In New Zealand, tā moko survived the onslaught of missionary condemnation and colonialism as well as internal changes to the structure of Māori society. Disruption in the practice did occur in some parts of New Zealand, while in others, the practice ceased entirely. The brutal process and the fearsome appearance of completed moko made it an ideal target for missionaries as well as European headhunters who traded in mokomokai,
the sacred heads of warriors ordinarily preserved as family treasures. This chapter will look at the social and historical context of moko, and how social conditions necessitated a shift in the meaning and understanding of moko, in order that it would continue to act as a viable source of information within the culture.

Gell (1993) theorizes that tattooing practices express patterns of either cosmological or sociological significance. Even in contemporary settings, body modification and tattooing are performed for a common host of reasons: to commemorate loved ones and ancestors, lay claim to aspects of the self, or mark significant social or personal milestones. In many cases, the process itself is considered a rite of passage, proving the individual’s strength and resolve in the face of physical pain. As part of a system of traditional cultural practices within Polynesia, differences in tattoos may also express differences in hierarchal systems of social order. In Chapter Three, I will investigate how non-traditional forms of transmission contributed to the survival of moko, meanwhile advocating the position that individuation, completeness, and social perfection, established through the contemporary use of moko, are indicative of its continuing significance to modern Māori society. The ways in which moko is used to make identity claims within the Māori community will also be expanded upon, determining the importance of moko as a culturally specific phenomenon.

**Modern Primitivism and Body Modification Practices in the West**

In Chapter Four of this thesis, I analyze the use of facial tattooing by Modern Primitives residing in the US, particularly those designs which mimic or make claims to the cultural heritage of tā moko. Modern Primitivism is a distinct practice, combining
notions of futurism with a cyberpunk mentality, and the philosophies of non-Western tribal cultures. According to Fakir Musafar, considered to be the founding father of the subculture movement, a Modern Primitive is “a non-tribal person who responds to primal urges and does something with the body” (Vale and Juno 1989:13). For this portion of the work, I will often defer to the 1998 Vale and Juno volume, *Modern Primitives*, considered the foremost source of information on the subject. As a side note, Siorat points out that few people appearing in Juno and Vale’s volume would actually call themselves “modern primitives” and such a term is limited in use to Fakir Musafar’s following on the west coast of the United States (Siorat 2005:207). For the purpose of this thesis, we will rely on a more broadly defined notion of Modern Primitivism as global rather than local phenomena, as my original fieldwork includes interviews with Modern Primitives and tattoo artists living in the Midwestern United States.

The overarching objective of this part of the thesis is to connect and explain how *moko* is important to identity claims among both groups so as to understand the Māori accusations of cultural appropriation on the part of the Modern Primitives, as well as Western Europeans in general. The end goal is to answer whether Modern Primitives, who arrive at their individual identities through the adoption and incorporation of culturally specific practices such as *moko*, are in any way more or less damaging to the indigenous culture than the mainstream Western culture, which may also appropriate these practices for its own use.

Chapter Five begins with a historical discussion of art and art appreciation, maintaining the ethical position that art is best when used and understood in the proper
cultural context. Since attracting international attention, \textit{moko} has become the subject of legal debates regarding its eligibility for protection as intellectual property, but in order to seek those rights accorded by law, it is necessary to ascertain ownership. This leads to debate over establishing the “authenticity” of cultural expressions and traditions, a subject which has frustrated anthropologists and native individuals alike. This chapter explores the need for legal intervention and protection from appropriation by first indicating what measures have already been taken in accordance with WIPA/UNESCO, trade mark bills, and the Treaty of Waitangi, then considering what other strategies can be adopted. The conclusion of this final chapter advocates for increased education among non-Māori artists on the subject of intellectual property rights and \textit{tā moko}, and encourages broader use of a distinctly separate category of body art, known as \textit{kirituhi}, which is equally accessible to both Māori and non-Māori.

\textbf{Basis and Scope of Research Topic}

My understanding of the topic of \textit{moko} and the issues surrounding matters of authenticity, artistic license, and appropriation are rooted in a variety of sources. This work draws upon historical research, as well as private conversations and communications with practitioners of \textit{moko} living abroad and additional fieldwork and interviews with Modern Primitives living and working in the US. Until the present time, bodies of work on cross-cultural artistic exchanges have remained limited in scope, focusing primarily on vilifying Western participants as the controlling party in such exchanges; this research will instead examine how indigenous groups have successfully
dealt with the ramifications of a globalized society and attempt to apply some of those lessons learned to the cross-cultural use of traditional Māori art forms like moko.

Before pursuing my primary objectives, it is first necessary to clarify a few terms. In addition to the word authenticity, words such as tattoo and tribal are also problematic. Despite the name, tribal style tattoos are not directly associated with particular or identifiable tribes. While some tattoo artists may group a wide array designs together under the heading of tribal, informants I spoke with while conducting this research unanimously agreed that the use of the word tribal, in American tattooing parlance, describes only those designs believed, often mistakenly, to be associated with exotic Pacific Islander, Native American, and African “tribal” groups. For the purpose of this research, I will be focusing only on tribal tattooing that is intended to mimic tā moko specifically. In order to make this distinction, I use two criteria. In addition to the visual similarities between moko and tattooed designs, I am also concerned with the placement of the tattoo on certain areas of the body, especially the face, as well as parallels drawn by the wearers between their body art and ideals of Pacific Island cultures. While facial tattoos worn by Westerners are not usually carved, but instead conventionally punctured into the skin, few if any Americans would be able to draw a distinction between the two. Hence, addressing the carving process used in facial moko is not useful for comparison in this case.

Because of the basic aesthetic element, terms such as moko and tattoo are often regarded as interchangeable. Moko is itself a culturally specific form of Pacific Island tattooing and, though the word is used to describe both facial and body markings, only
facial moko is unique to New Zealand. Until the last half century, tattoos and other body modifications in the US and Europe remained the domain of outsider groups: gang members, bikers, prostitutes, sailors, gays, and lesbians were the first Western body modification enthusiasts. According to Maertens, as cited in Gell, marginalized groups, including prisoners, soldiers, and bikers, live an existence which can be termed “rootless”; tattooing reproduces the transient nature of this society (Gell 1993:27). When moko-style design is used and conceived of as a kind of tattoo, it acquires transient properties, achieving distinctiveness from other forms of tattoo only by the daring placement of the design on the face.

Relegating moko to the category of universal tattooing, a concept that is both understood and accessible (at least liminally) by most culture groups, divorces moko from any notions of time, place, and cultural specificity. Doing so places moko in the spectrum of public domain, free to be used without conditions or restriction. Equally problematic is the act of defining moko as property, which subjects the cultural practice of moko to constraints determined by a Eurocentric legal system, ignoring indigenous systems already in place to regulate its use. If moko functions like a signature and is distinct enough to belong (as property) to one person, it is said to be representative of the person (and his/her “Māoriness”) and is intelligible as a separate unit; the chance that it will be appropriated by others increases when this separation is possible (Pritchard 2001:38).

**Challenges to the Research**

The argument over indigenous culture and intellectual property is further complicated by debates over the establishment of authenticity. When it comes to
considering whether or not indigenous people can legally claim the rights to intellectual property, it is inevitable that the “authentic” nature of the art will come into question; this includes whether the art is relevant to a particular tradition or whether it is a part of a more universal category. In the past decade, organizations like WIPO and UNESCO have promoted a *sui generis* approach that encourages the consideration of each form of traditional knowledge as a unique concept and therefore subject only to laws specifically designed for each individual cultural group. This more sensitive and realistic approach still requires a general understanding of traditional forms of intellectual property and knowledge; in order to secure legal protection for intellectual property as a unique part of the culture, the question of authenticity and universal themes must be addressed.

There is a tendency to allow a work of this nature to paint Modern Primitives (and thereby Western society) in a negative light. Often, no distinction is made between Modern Primitivism and appropriation within in mainstream tattoo culture. I am interested in Modern Primitivism in particular as it borrows the aesthetic components of *moko*, if not the *tā moko* process as well. Further, both Māori and Modern Primitive communities utilize *moko* to lay claim to identities which separate them from Others, whether Others are part of the colonialist culture of New Zealand or other individuals sporting tattoos. Modern Primitive identities are a product of hybridization; when formulating identity, the ability to select from as many attributes as possible is ideal, and it is logical that many ways of expressing identity would be borrowed from other places and cultures (Pritchard 2001). In part, this thesis will explore notions of collective memory and authentic identity, including how *moko* is an exemplifies making elements
of a traditional past relevant to the present and how tattooing/moko operates as a means of exerting a shared, imagined kinship with indigenous groups, reinforcing a divide between the subculture and mainstream society.

It is useful to note that individual identity and social identity exist in opposition, while collective identity is comprised of individual identities expressed in solidarity. Individual identity is self-identified and consists mainly of traits that are unique to the individual, including personal experiences, physical appearance, and personality. On the other hand, social identity is understood as an external, recognized conceptualization of the Self, as claimed through social interaction with others through the usage of roles and categories which reflect the ways individuals interact in social settings. Collective identity shares traits in common with both of these forms, communicating a shared group identity that is at once self-determined, deliberate, and political. When speaking of a Modern Primitive identity, I am clearly speaking about a collective identity concept, while Māori identity may be either social or collective depending on where it is being enacted and the reasons for identity claims. Where necessary, distinctions will be made between the two.

Unintentional or not, an imagined division between modern society and a primitive Other perpetuates essentialism, where the indigenous culture is assumed to possess fixed traits which are unchanging and without internal variations among individuals or subgroups. Well-meaning Europeans may adopt “preservationist” attitudes, whereby they feel the art is threatened or nearly extinct within the originating culture whose traits they admire. As any number of both scholarly and layman’s articles
prove, within the past decade *moko* has seen resurgence in popularity within the Māori community itself. The number of Māori getting *moko* has increased as part of this response. Instead of reestablishing something already well documented, this research examines whether or not use of *moko*, or tattooing that is intended to represent or replicate *moko*, outside the context of Māori society has impacted the preservation or perpetuation of *moko* within the Māori community.

Imperial nostalgia, the counterpart to essentialism, blurs history in favor of romanticized or at least inaccurate portrayals of relationships, ritual definitions, and other culturally relevant elements. According to Svetlana Boym (2001:XV): “…nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time…nostalgia is the rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology.”

It can be an “abdication of personal responsibilities” for the events that occurred in the past, or it can be a new way of envisioning the past, in order to provide a new view of the future, one that is more in line with the romantic and hopeful elements of the culture’s past (Boym 2001:XIV; 351). On the surface, Māori who adopt *moko* might be accused of participating in such deception, but given the myriad reasons for obtaining *moko*, it seems more accurate to regard these changes as necessary adaptations which keep *moko* culturally relevant to contemporary Māori society. This thesis will explore both essentialist and nostalgic attitudes as they appear in the tattoo or *moko* narratives of Modern Primitives and Maori alike. As Bissell states:

Analyzing nostalgia in context, locating it richly within the “landscape of the present,” seems a task especially well suited to ethnography. As an
irreducibly plural phenomenon, nostalgia takes on very different forms and dimensions, engaging an array of social agents, interests, forces, and locations. The point of departure for any adequate ethnography of colonial nostalgia is to acknowledge this complicated landscape by carefully mapping a terrain of social difference and distinction. As anthropologists have long recognized, reflections on the past are inflected by multiple and shifting lines of power. [Bissell 2005:239]

Almost limitless narratives exist within tattoo culture, only a few of which are useful to examine here. Historically, sailors or prison inmates have proven interesting subjects, but since tattooing has become more widespread, it seems more useful to restrict my research to outgroups for whom the practice of tattooing is a central component in their identity claims. As sociologist Demello describes, being a part of the tattoo community requires much more than getting a tattoo (Demello 2000:41). In the present day, when tattooed skin is considered a ubiquitous mark of youth culture, only truly exceptional or extraordinary markings require special interpretation by the society. Indigenous persons wearing moko and Western tattoo enthusiasts are typically placed in dynamic opposition to one another, yet some Māori as well as Modern Primitives use the vehicle of tattooing to illustrate a similar disapproval of contemporary Western society. The bicultural system in New Zealand, however, requires social markers such as moko in order to maintain distinctive cultural identities. Choosing to permanently mark the face or other highly conspicuous areas of the anatomy differs, culturally and well as sociologically, from more mainstream tattooing practices in both the US and New Zealand, where other placements are considered almost unremarkable.

As the head is regarded as close to the gods in many Polynesian societies, it is generally considered tapu or taboo. Hence, by extension, any modifications to the face
are highly restricted within Māori society. While Māori generally agree on the meaning and significance of *moko*, they do not always agree on who is entitled to *moko*; rights to *moko* as well as the methods or even the necessity of obtaining permission from any number of tribal authorities varies by region, family (*hapū*), or tribe (*iwi*). Differing interests in globalization, among other factors, influences what roles Māori seek for themselves and how *moko* factors into their modern lifestyle. Māoriness, (*Māoritanga*) is not uniformly conceived within Māori society, and different *iwi* may have differing opinions about what it means to be Māori. The general concept of *Māoritanga*:

…embraces a way of life, a way of acting, thinking and feeling; of attitudes to languages, traditions, and institutions; of shared values and attitudes to people, places, and things, to time, the land and sea, the environment, life and death. It is a total way of life, a lifestyle which continues to survive despite the impact of the global village. [Hohepa 1978]

Facial tattooing does not have uniform meaning within the Modern Primitive subculture either, though it is often spoken of as a method of claiming commitment to body art as well as a personal investment in the lifestyle by inhibiting the wearer’s participation in other social groups.

**The Importance of Self and Identity**

As understood in this thesis, the self is defined as one’s view of oneself, while identity is composed of the various roles adopted by an individual as a participant in a society. All forms of body art, including tattooing and *tā moko*, are influenced by numerous identity spheres incorporating complex issues such as globalization, post colonialism, and intellectual property rights. Social scientists recognize cultural identity as identity that is achieved, rather than ascribed, meaning it is not something we are born
with but something created through the process of social interaction (Leeds-Hurwitz 2005:8). Social reality is not fixed, but incorporates of notions of identity that are consistently recycled. Cross and Gore suggest that, as the self is informed by culture, it may also be impacted by instances of culture change (Cross and Gore 2003:553). Thus, social identity construction requires continual experimentation, repair, and maintenance (Leeds-Hurwitz 2005: 9). If an identity is not salient, it is phased out, altered, or replaced over time. Across generations, this may come to mean that symbols or practices are also rephrased or edited in order to remain salient to the individual. In this respect, not only is adaptation of body art expected, but these changes are part of a necessary response to external or internal societal changes which keeps art valid as a form of intercommunication.

Sociologists like Cross and Gore stress the importance of cross-cultural examinations of identity and the self concept. Cultural models provide an individual with spatiotemporal orientation, or the ability to understand the self in relation to past events (Cross and Gore 2003). Detractors of cross-cultural statistical analysis assert that such studies tend to compare entities that are not comparable; they distort cultural constructs for purposes of trying to measure them. Research of this sort may attempt to establish a society as either egocentric, meaning that the society is focused on the autonomy of the individual, like in the US or other Western nations, or sociocentric, wherein a society is focused primarily on relationships and social roles (Hollan 2002:284). The usefulness of such categorical thinking is debatable; instead, it may be more useful to consider the level to which a society might be either egocentric or sociocentric (Hollan 1992:294). My
approach seeks to understand how these familiar categories resonate in contemporary Māori society and among Modern Primitives, and how, through the use of body modifications like moko and tattooing, alternative formations of the self concept are achieved which may contradict previous categorical assumptions.

Finally, the study of moko illustrates how valuable the practice is to the Māori community, even if only a few choose to engage in the art form. Anthropologists and other researchers have reflected on the difficulties of gathering information on an art which is both sacred and threatened by appropriation. For example, when Hans Neleman travelled to New Zealand in 1998 and attempted to put together a collection of photographs of Māori people wearing moko, he met with considerable resistance from the Māori community. Before granting the artist permission to photograph those who agreed to be photographed, Māori leaders met to address some of the same questions that I now attempt to examine. Specifically, how can Māori ensure that moko is understood as a culturally unique practice, guided by important cultural principles such as a Māori genealogy (whakapapa), and maintain control of the images associated with it? What is it that makes moko a secretive cultural pursuit rather than a public activity that is universally shared and marketed? Further, what general assumptions are made by Westerners that conspire to give those like the Modern Primitives “permission” to utilize moko?

The need to protect intellectual property from wrongful use is a critical concern for indigenous groups. Uncovering what aspects of moko either prevent or provide for the same protection afforded to other art forms is necessary in order to preserve moko as a
culturally relevant practice. Social anthropologists and other academics have tried to answer the challenges of globalization with only limited success. Nevertheless, research such as this is required if we are to understand what is at stake for indigenous communities like the Māori. It encourages an examination of the issues as well as possible responses to the problems that arise from living and actively participating in a global community.
Current literature on Western tattooing is overwhelmingly focused on the symbolic meaning of the tattoo as interpreted by the person wearing it. A more robust understanding of moko’s significance to modern Pacific Island cultures also emphasizes and examines the social and cosmological connections in Pacific Island body modification practices. The reasons for having tattoos as given by Americans are similar to their New Zealand counterparts, but the unique qualities of tā moko elicit a distinctive response which differentiates the experience in the social spectrum and reinforces the cultural significance of the practice. Motivations mentioned by Māori moko recipients include social and cultural connections and responsibilities as well as more universal concepts of spiritual and personal development (which are also of central importance to Modern Primitives who bear facial tattoos). In this chapter, I provide a brief synopsis of the history of moko among the Māori, particularly as it pertains to the renewed or continued cultural relevance of the art form. As previously noted, a complete background in New Zealand tattooing and body modification is not necessary to understand the commoditization and appropriation of moko in the modern day or the necessity of retaining intellectual property rights concerning the practice.
Though the appearance of *moko* remains virtually the same as it was in the past, modern *moko* is not used or interpreted by the Māori as it was in pre-contact times. In order to grasp the significance *moko* has to Māori in the present, it necessary to start at the very root of the practice. Understanding modern *tā moko* requires unpacking surrounding social and structural meanings as they were originally conceived of in pre-colonial New Zealand. By concentrating on the relationship of *moko* to both historical and contemporary conceptions of *mana* and *tapu*, the governing principles of Māori society, we shed light on the social constructions of gender, status, and genealogy. To complicate the matter, the shallow depth of the (written) historical record limits methods of assessing the historical meaning of *moko*. This does not mean that we are completely without sources. However, while most accounts given by early European travelers provide highly descriptive visual details of the finished product, they give little insight into why or how the designs were created, or by whom. It is obvious that such post-colonial treatment of native art is less-than-objective. Until the colonial era, the Māori relied on non-textual forms communication. Ethnographic efforts to record oral traditions which involve *tā moko* are limited by a singular focus on the modern day practice of the art. While plenty of worthwhile information does exist on the history of *moko*, certain facts relevant to this study, such as the training of *tohunga tā moko* and the dissemination of *moko* designs before and during the earlier stages of contact, are hard if not impossible to ascertain.

Though *tā moko* constitutes a distinctive category within body modification, the words *tā* and *moko* themselves appear in many languages in Polynesia. *Tā* prefaces the
word *moko* in many cases, and describes the actual process of creating *moko*. The word *tā* means *to strike or hit*; in this form, the word appears in New Zealand as well as other parts of Polynesia, including the Marquesas, where it specifically indicates an instrument made of human bone used to pierce the skin during *tatau* (Ebin 1979:83). *Moko* means lizard in most Polynesian languages (Gathercole 1988:175). Lizards are long associated with the underworld; their ability to shed their skin is metaphorically associated with the processes of life and death and possibly even with the conception of *moko* as representative of a second skin or spiritual armor. In one instance, Kaeppler (1988) remarks on the connection between the principles of genealogy and the Hawaiian word *mo'o*, which similarly means lizard. Kaeppler associates *mo'o* with the Hawai’ian word for backbone, *iwikuamo'o*, which is also the Māori word for tribe, as the backbone of the curled lizard is featured in some Pacific tattoo designs which incorporate animals (Kaeppler 1988:167-168). While few sources support a direct relation between the art of *moko* and this definition, Māori regard lizards with a healthy level of fear; they are considered *tapu*, much like the art of *moko* (Best 1916: 175).

A pivotal point is that not all forms of *moko* are universally practiced among the Māori and that facial *moko* in particular is dependent upon cultural constructions specific to the Māori. Principal to understanding what *moko* was and how it now relates to contemporary life in New Zealand is accepting that facial-style *moko* is exclusive to Māori, but that not all Māori tattooing is *moko*. In practical application, *tā moko* is distinguished from other forms of traditional Polynesian tattooing by the texture of the designs; *moko* is created by cutting the skin with chisels made of bone or nephrite,
resulting in a grooved surface. Traditional Polynesian-style tattooing uses clean punctures, performed by small needles or needle combs which leave the skin smooth (Te Awekotuku 1996:40). Traditional practitioners, like moko artists shown in the film “Skin Stories,” and Gordon Hatfield and George Nuku, who appear in the documentary “Māori Moko,” use traditional handmade chisels made of wood and whale bone. The bone is long and flattened to a chisel shape, and is held against the recipient’s flesh with the left hand, between the forefinger and the thumb, while the wooden handle is tapped into place with a mallet (tā), also made of wood or sometimes a fern stalk, held in the right hand. Because little damage is caused to the flesh, the finished product is a smooth surface design, similar to that of an ordinary tattoo.

On the other hand, tā moko of the face involves cutting or carving grooves into the skin while staining it with pigment, lending the finished design a more chiseled, textured appearance. Two tools are used to complete the design. The first, called an uhi whakatatarāmoa, is used to perforate the skin with a razor-like sharpness; reminiscent of a chisel, only modern practitioners use metal blades. A second, serrated blade is used to introduce pigment to the fresh cut (Te Awekotuku 2007: 20). For more delicate work around the eyelids and on the nostrils, a tiny chisel less than 2mm wide, called an uhi kohiti, is used. This chisel punctures the skin and, on the second application, color is struck into the open flesh.

Pigment is either applied to the chisel after the initial incision and the incision retraced or it is drawn over the open wound on a piece of flax. The process itself takes several hours and more elaborate designs may take multiple sessions, spread out over
days. The account of one colonist, as depicted in the journal Forest and Stream (1874), describes the work of a neighboring *tohunga tā moko*: “Unusually complex designs are said to require weeks, or even months in their execution; seeing that some portion of the skin must be healed before others are proceeded with.”

**The Role of Mana and Tapu in Moko**

Gell (1993:240) suggests that life in pre-colonial New Zealand reflects a frontier society in an ecological sense; the temperate environment stands out among Polynesian islands, as do certain traditions and cultural structures created by the Māori in response to the physical demands of adapting to a new way of life. However, Feinberg (2002) asserts that modern efforts to “recreate” older systems of social order draw upon the same unique set of challenges which are continuously present in the cultural mindset of present-day Pacific Islanders. Furthermore, Feinberg (2002:12) also suggests that Pacific Island chiefdoms permit a level of flexibility in the social order. Historically speaking, the Māori also embodied a level of flexibility within their own social structures; in addition to genealogical seniority and primogeniture, leaders were competitively selected for their skill as warriors and politicians (Gell 1993:240).

Māori social structure is centered on the belief that there were 11 original lines, each line representing one of the canoes that first travelled from Hawaiki and settled in New Zealand in 14th century AD. Māori society was originally ranked into three social strata, determined by the individual’s originating line. Members of the two higher strata were considered free people, while the lowest were slaves (*taurekareka*), usually war captives who existed outside the system. Those descended from the oldest males of each
generation formed the aristocracy (*rangatira*), while those from more junior lines, or whose ancestors had lost status, were considered commoners (*tutua* or *ware*). The divisions between the two upper strata could still be a matter for debate, however. Theoretically at least, subtribes (*hapū*) are similarly ranked within each of the main tribes (*iwi*) by the chiefs’ genealogical rank, meaning that *hapū* have a vested interest in making sure they are represented by the most senior member of the group. Differences in rank directly correlated with the degree of sanctity (*tapu*) and the individual and group luck and strength (*mana*). In early Māori society, Goldman (1970:52) suggests that marriage was generally endogamous within *hapū*, while upper ranking members of Māori society chose marriage partners based on what best provided for their status needs. If there was room within the *hapū* to move up in rank, then marriage outside the group was unnecessary. The need for a visual marker indicative of genealogical order and seniority increased in situations where the relative status of individuals was similar and not all parties were familiar with the genealogies of those present, as with the occurrence of larger social gatherings within the *iwi*.

The Māori descent system is cognatic, as descent is mapped through both sexes, with preference given to the male line. Leadership is based on a type of primogeniture that allows women to inherit if there are no males of equal or greater rank to continue the line. The *ariki* or chiefs illustrated the nuances of social and kinship systems such as sibling seniority through the use of *moko*, among other ways. Among the more junior lines, the need to visibly differentiate status or *mana* or *tapu* of a certain individual was not as pertinent as the differences in status between individuals were not as great. *Moko*
was adopted among warriors for different reasons: to appear fearsome in battle or to establish perseverance.

The social and political importance of undertaking a tedious and painful process like tā moko is best understood by examining the critical role of tā moko as an agent of two forces, mana and tapu. According to Goldman (1970:37), Bowden (1979:52) and others, the interplay between mana and tapu is central to systems of rank and status in Polynesia. Tapu, as conceived of by the Polynesians, is a perceptible manifestation of the sacred or even taboo nature of an individual’s life force, while mana is best characterized as reflective of that person’s overall relationship with the gods, meaning personal strength, good fortune, and success (Goldman 1970:38; Keesing 1984:152). However, in more recent research, anthropologists have come to describe mana as a condition, not a thing; objects are imbued with mana, whereas humans may be mana (Keesing 1984:138).

As Keesing also relates, mana is rooted firmly in the social systems of Oceania rather than in “disembodied philosophies,” as described by early European anthropologists (Keesing 1984:153). He relates that “…in Tahiti, the Marquesas, New Zealand, and Hawai‘i, that Polynesians had further substantivized mana as an invisible medium of power connecting god-like chiefs with the gods seems, translation errors and European-imposed mysticism notwithstanding, beyond question” (Keesing 1984:152). Further, while tapu is the result of genealogical seniority, role, or occupation, mana exists through these as well as through the actions of the individual (Goldman 1970:38). For example, elders holding the same rank may differ in terms of mana, but they will still
uphold similar *tapu* restrictions in accordance with their assumed roles or responsibilities (Goldman 1970:44).

The clearest expression of *mana* and *tapu* working in conjunction is apparent in an individual’s genealogy, which remains the basic foundation for most chiefdoms. The gods communicate blessings through an individual’s *mana*; through genealogical connections, *mana* may be carried over generations, and portions of *moko* designs are thus inherited. A person’s *mana* is illustrated by their skills and successes, which could sometimes correspond with a similar rise and fall in the person’s *tapu* (Bowden 1979:57). *Mana* was at once controlled and communicated through the use of *tā moko*, by presenting *mana* and genealogy in a conspicuous fashion, viewable to all, on the wearer’s body. By improving one’s relationship with the gods and ancestors, an individual might adopt additional *moko*. It is best to think that *moko* itself as creating the conduit which opens up op. Differences in political power were effectively differences in *mana* (Bowden 1979:57). Effective leaders, according to Best (1898), exhibited the following eight qualities or *puu manawa*: ability to provide food; ability in settling disputes; overall bravery; responsible leadership during war; artistic skill in carving, tattooing and ornamental weaving; hospitality; skill at building houses. Protracted emphasis and recognition of these practical leadership qualities were coded into the social structure through publicly visible indicators such as *moko*, which became an integral part of the Māori chief’s appearance, as indistinguishable and indivisible from the individual as one’s signature.
The ability of tā moko to confer additional amounts of mana beyond that already possessed by the individual through personal achievement or genealogical connections is metaphorically reproduced in Māori mythology. As expected, Māori cosmology serves to support the established society. In the best known legend on the origins of moko, the blessings of the gods are transmitted through moko designs, elevating the hero Mataora’s genealogically inherited status above that of a common man and enabling him to maintain his marriage to a god’s daughter by conveying additional mana upon him (Te Awekotuku 1996:35; 2007:12-13). The story of Mataora is an indicator of both the sacred significance of moko and the priestly role of the tohunga as a mediator of divine energies. The story’s hero, Mataora, operates as a go-between, connecting the god of the underworld, Raumoko, to the human world. When Mataora mistreats his wife, she returns to her father’s kingdom in the underworld. Mataora follows her, intent on convincing her to return, but by the time he reaches his father-in-law’s kingdom, the designs painted on his face were smeared and unrecognizable. On seeing his appearance, his wife's people laughed at him as their faces were marked with the permanent application of the art called moko. After Mataora begged his wife's forgiveness, he then asked his father-in-law to teach him tā moko.

The Role of the Tohunga tā Moko

Those who create and design moko are known as tohunga, a general term used by the Māori for artists and specialists with in-depth knowledge of traditional art forms. For the purpose of this work, the mention of tohunga is taken to mean a tohunga tā moko exclusively. The role of the tohunga tā moko in the communication of mana was to make
the moko safe for the wearer, similar to Mataora’s role as the first tohunga. In some cases, a person of particularly high status who was believed to be mana (like a very powerful ariki), could not be tattooed. Whether this was to prevent a violation of tapu restrictions which could put mana at risk or if the mana was thought to be overpowering to the tohunga, or possibly both, is unclear (Gathercole 1988:173).

In terms of the social structure, tohunga typically descended from important families or the ariki themselves. Higher ranked tohunga ta moko were considered aristocratic shamans as well as skilled craftsmen, with their talents and connections being passed on through genealogical succession, most often through the male line. Moko was by no means ubiquitous throughout Māori society; the tohunga himself did not wear moko. Tohunga, marked by a genealogical ties to mana, associated with their occupation and by their skill as craftsmen, prevented moko from becoming noa or common, but as moko decreased in political importance, status normally associated with the tohunga also changed (Goldman 1970:40; Gell 1993:243). The general assumption that tā moko was limited to the aristocracy is countered by pointing out that, until the number of women wearing moko came to outnumber the men (after 1840), moko was regarded as a physical characteristic of Māori men, who, as responsible male adults, were also considered warriors (Gathercole 1988:172). The unique qualities of an individual person’s moko are recorded in early historical accounts of interactions between the Māori and Western culture. Though Thomas and others clearly establish that moko design motifs were historically used as signatures, the designs were not conceived of as such until after the arrival of the Europeans (Thomas 2005: 94). Because the designs were considered unique
markers by their wearers and the practice of tā moko was ubiquitous in Māori society, depictions of one’s moko was often used to sign or mark documents and treaties with European settlers throughout the 1800s (Ebin 1979:89). In one example of this, occurring in November of 1831, thirteen Ngapuhi leaders drew their moko as signatures on a document with the British. The use of moko on historical documents such as the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 prompted a desire to attempt to read the designs as a form of written language.

Even as the demand for moko spread to include men of the junior lines, the tohunga’s elevated status and kinship ties to the ariki, plus the intensely skilled nature of the craft, assured that the price of a tohunga’s services would reflect his or her relative social worth and contribution to the social structure. Thus, talented tohunga tā moko expected to be paid well and might travel over a long distance to perform their art. Furthermore, there was no such thing as a rushed job; larger moko were performed in stages and, on occasion, the pigment of older designs had to be touched up. All of these added to the cost of the service.

In the past, economics played a secondary role in the use of moko. While modern moko practiced by Westerners is performed almost purely for the financial gain of the artist, moko was originally practiced within the community for ritual as well as secular reasons. The high value of the tohunga tā moko’s tools, as suggested by their careful design and conspicuous ornamentation, in the form of elaborate carvings and precious inlays, reemphasizes a ceremonial purpose as opposed to a merely utilitarian function. Specialized feeding funnels, which helped reduce swelling to the face and prevent any
direct contact with food while in a tapu state, were created by a master carver and were also elaborately decorated, honoring the social worth of the moko recipient and ensuring the success of the tohunga’s completed product (Gathercole 1988:171).

Pigment manufacturing also contains ritual and symbolic elements; pigments used for moko were typically supplied by the patron himself and could consist of a variety of natural components, including carui gum, animal fats, and vegetable dyes mixed in preparations with ritually collected and stored soot and oil or water. In one example, Roth describes how one particular tone of dye was obtained by feeding special soot to a ritually starved dog, then harvesting the animal’s excrement (Roth 1901:31).

As moko varied in place and time and diffusion of the designs occurred not only through proximity to other moko wearers, but by the mobility and popularity of the tohunga tā moko himself, Gathercole suggests early tā moko was more highly developed and complicated than a simple status marker (Gathercole 1988:173). Similarly, the decline of moko cannot be linked to a single change in the status system; rather, it is useful to present a series of social and cultural events which contributed in varying degrees to the current practice. As a tradition, moko never ceased entirely. Certainly, moko is no longer the cornerstone of social transaction within the Māori community. Undertaking moko in contemporary New Zealand is primarily governed by individual decision, although considerable deference is given to whanau or extended family. Historically speaking, tā moko was often compulsory insomuch as society places demands on individuals to conform to the standards embraced by the hapū. The modern shift in emphasis on the individual’s ability to decide to adopt moko does not dilute
moko’s relationship to divine authority and genealogical succession (Gell 1993:37). The difference between individual identity and social identity are of critical importance here; as Gell relates, if modifications are viewed as a way of establishing individuality, then what the term individual means must be quantified by the society itself (Gell 1993:37). As the definitions of individual and social identity change, it is logical to assume that moko would also experience a shift in meaning if it is to have a useful role as part of Māori identity claims.

The Decline of Moko

By 1840, Colonialism had taken its toll on Māori tradition. While missionary influences discouraged body modification practices among all Pacific Island peoples (Blackburn 1999), the near-disappearance of moko can also be tied to the reduction of tapu restrictions placed on tā moko in answer to the European demand for mokomokai. The complicated role played by mokomokai, or so-called “shrunken heads” offers another explanation as to why moko lost its function as a status marker among men, but continued to be practiced by women into the present day. Before decorating the mantles of wealthy European curiosity seekers, mokomokai served socially valuable purposes to the Māori. Those charged with performing the ceremony and creating the mokomokai, as well as the individual’s relatives, were considered tapu and were forbidden to touch food until the process was complete (Robley 1998:146). Rather than morbid reminders of mortality, mokomokai conjured memories of the deeds and mana of the individual, reminding families of their affection for the deceased. Mokomokai were taonga or treasures, kept by the family in ornate boxes and brought out for special occasions. The
heads of enemies, however, might be kept on public display, taunted and laughed at until their relatives could make arrangements for their return. In political matters, the heads of captured chiefs occupied an important place in peace negotiations; peace treaties between iwi often involved the return of mokomokai to their rightful places. No iwi would put off negotiations if mana was at stake. On the contrary, to destroy one of the heads would signify that peace between the tribes was impossible.

The importance of a warrior’s moko as a mark of his manhood is well illustrated in an account by the European traveler, Marsden. Upon hearing that a chief’s nephew was to be tattooed, he remarked to the man that the youth was far too handsome to be so disfigured. According to his reports, the chief laughed in his face and commented that the boy would have a noble and masculine face; that without moko he would not be fit to be a successor to the chiefly line and that other Māori would “regard him merely as a woman if his face were not tattooed” (Forest and Stream 1874).

Mokomokai

A central explanation offered for the decline in moko among Māori men specifically is that men bearing moko were targets for European headhunters or enemy iwi, who, social customs aside, saw the trade in mokomokai as a lucrative business which could also permanently harm a rival family’s mana. European traders and less scrupulous Māori would steal, procure, or produce heads in trade for ammunition, which would then be used to wage war on neighboring iwi as well as the European outsiders themselves. In this manner, many mokomokai made their way across the ocean and into the hands of museums and private collectors. While Joseph Banks, the naturalist who
travelled with Cook in 1770, reportedly purchased the first of these heads, the first
mokomokai recorded in Sidney did not appear until 1811. It wasn’t until the 1820s that
the “baked heads” were regularly mentioned in ship manifests (Robley 1998:169-171).

Robley notes that sales of mokomokai dropped off in the 1840s, around the same
time the Māori ceased performing the procedure on late relatives (Robley 1998:170). Of
the hundreds of mokomokai estimated to have left New Zealand between the late 1770s
and the mid 1800s, only about 100 have been returned so far, leaving over two hundred
of these remains in the hands of foreigners. Contrary to the meager defense used to
support the continued possession of such artifacts, trade in mokomokai was never
condoned by the Māori community in general; such activity was regarded as sacrilegious.

In answer to European demand for these gruesome souvenirs, it is possible that
the Māori conceived of the idea to tattoo slaves with moko, either shortly before death or
after, in order to preserve mana. While tattooing slaves is common in parts of the
Pacific, the branding of Māori slaves with moko appears to have developed in response to
the demands of curious Europeans, who bartered with the Māori in exchange for coveted
trade goods such as firearms (Manson 2001:21). These heads are often poorly preserved
and bear designs interpreted as nonsense, containing neither genealogical significance nor
mana (Manson 2001:21). In such a situation, it can be assumed that the tapu restrictions
associated with moko were also relaxed. Out of all the mokomokai bearing moko that
were brought overseas, only one of the heads in known possession is female, likely
because the small size of the moko designs worn by women made it unlikely that they
would be preserved as mokomokai (Blackburn 1999:18). Furthermore, mokomokai with
smaller, less noticeable *moko* were not desired by European traders. This supports the possibility of a link between the trade of *mokomokai* and the perpetuation of the *moko* tradition among women as direct factors in the decline and survival of *moko*, respectively.

**Gender and Moko**

A vital part of the structuring of Māoritanga, Māori cosmology depends on dualistic and culturally conceived notions of gender and social responsibility. A woman’s identity was not restricted to her familial role. A Māori woman was an essential part of the community; what social roles she fulfilled might vary from *iwi* to *iwi*, but women were not regarded as mere possessions within traditional, pre-colonial Māori society. Colonial rule undermined the value accorded to Māori women as nurturers and organizers of the extended family (*whanau*) and, in so doing so, also undermined the importance of women’s roles and relationships, which were traditionally significant. As Jenkins relates:

> Western civilization when it arrived on Aotearoa's shore, did not allow its womenfolk any power at all - they were merely chattels in some cases less worthy than the men's horses. What the colonizer found was a land of noble savages narrating . . . stories of the wonder of women. Their myths and beliefs had to be reshaped and retold. The missionaries were hell-bent (heaven-bent) on destroying their pagan ways. Hence, in the re-telling of our myths, by Māori male informants to Pākeha male writers who lacked the understanding and significance of Māori cultural beliefs, Māori women find their *mana wahine* destroyed. [Jenkins 1998:161]

As practiced by women, the use of *moko* as an indicator of social standing was not as widespread; this allowed more flexibility in its use, which in turn enabled *moko* to survive. Before the 1840s, women of chiefly lines symbolically marked their entrance
into womanhood by acquiring moko, whereas male rites might or might not have involved tā moko, since moko was something conveyed on males through achieved as well as ascribed status (Te Awekotuku 1996:40). As decent was and still is cognatic, Māori women also transmit genealogical rank and prestige, though the male line is usually preferred when tracing ancestry. In practice, women of chiefly descent could inherit wealth and land as well as possess mana and tapu, while the junior lines especially would invoke matrilineal ties where it suited their needs, more so in situations where the mother’s line was closely associated with a prestigious lineage. Though it was a rare occurrence, unmarried women of highest rank, symbolically regarded as male, might possess full face moko and enjoy a certain level of sexual freedom. Any arrangements with those of lesser rank were not regarded as marriages, nor were the children of such unions considered to be legitimate offspring of the chiefly line (Gell 1993:264-5). Only the moko of a chief’s eldest daughter warranted feasting; sometimes, ritual sacrifice or symbolic pillaging were enacted in return for the spilling of her blood.

Historically, gender differences in the location of moko on the body or face were evident, though these divisions were not absolute and could vary between īwi. Women customarily received markings on their chin or lips or between the eyebrows, whereas men were likely to have full moko designs on their faces, as well as complementary moko between the waist and the knees. Only rarely, would a woman receive full facial moko, though either gender might possibly have moko on the tongue, genitals, or even the entire body (Gathercole 1988:173).
In addition, women were more likely to practice the *moko kuri* style, characterized by groups of vertical lines reminiscent of traditional weaving and mat work, usually associated with women. The word *kuri* references a specific method for making pigment, where a dog (*kuri*) was sacrificed and the ashes used as the base (Gell 1993:253). The symbolic identification of *moko* with weaving arts is captured in the *moko* origin myth wherein Mataora emerges from the underworld wearing *moko*, as well as a newly woven garment and belt, made by his wife. Beautiful examples of weaving are highly prized and *mana*, much like *moko* (Gathercole 1988:176). *Moko kuri* designs were often the result of a Māori mourning practice associated with *tā moko* where women inflicted gashes on various parts of the body to illustrate their grief, then rubbed pigment into the self-inflicted wounds, resulting in a pattern described as reminiscent of cloth which served as reminder of the event (Gell 1993:247). Though it has fallen into disuse in the modern era, this design is thought to be older in origin than more well-known curvilinear patterns. Furthermore, *moko kuri* was exclusive to women and would sometimes appear on other parts of the face.

In addition to communicating rank and *mana*, the physical components of *moko* are not without their relationship to beauty and sexual appeal, most notably where female *moko* is concerned. Some Māori women wore *moko* to stay young and prevent wrinkles (Ebin 1979:82). Whether *moko* was believed to spiritually maintain one’s youth or was only symbolically associated with a youthful countenance, or if the properties of *moko* were actually thought to inhibit aging directly is unclear. Looking at the designs and attention paid to the shape and contours of the face and considering photographs of
women wearing *moko* at different stages of life, it can be at least gleaned that *moko* ages well in comparison to modern Western tattoos, which rarely take into account the inevitability of the biological process. In metaphorical terms, the name of the hero Mataora, credited with bringing *moko* from the underworld, means “face of vitality” (Te Awekotuku 1996:39). This idea of “timelessness” or “living without death” reinforces the art’s mythological origins as well as the original association of the word *moko* in Pacific Island parlance.

While both genders agreed on the general aesthetic appeal of *moko*, there existed differences in how *tā moko* was practiced by women. According to Awekotuku, rather than using it to mark *mana*, women used *moko* as a living history to indicate important personal and social events such as the birth of a child or grandchild or the death of a chief. Perhaps because fewer women were adept at the art form or possibly because the women who performed *tā moko* did not share the elevated status markers of their male counterparts, *moko* was done in groups, as opposed to the individual ceremonies that were more common among men (Te Awekotuku 2007:250).

When *tapu* restrictions changed and *moko* ceased to be equated with rank and achieved status, the relationship between women and *moko* persisted. Cultural emphasis on women’s *moko* occurred concurrently with decline of male *moko*, the first wave happening in the early 1800s, immediately following the European expansion, and a second and semi-final episode following the cessation of wars between the Māori and Europeans in the 1890s (Gathercole 1988:171). Male *moko* had all but disappeared by 1865; changes to the Māori social structure suggest responsive shifts in the practice of
moko, which agree with the material evidence and accounts (Gathercole 1988:171). In addition to mokomokai, the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907 was aimed at preventing ‘unqualified healers’ from practicing healing arts as well as tā moko, and is considered yet another contributing factor to the decline of moko. Without heavy emphasis on personal successes or ambition, Māori culture maintained recognizable group cohesion from a renewed dependence on derivative status elements such as kinship obligations, mastery of the arts, and those aspects of primary status that are either group or task oriented. During this period, Moko survived only at the fringes of Māori society; we will examine these social spaces and role of moko within them in the next chapter.
Chapter 3

Unconventional Methods of Cultural Preservation

The same adaptive spirit that enabled the Māori to survive during their initial arrival in New Zealand hundreds of years earlier also characterized the culture’s ability to thrive after the arrival of European settlers (Ausubel 1961:220-1). The ability to persevere, in combination with an overall rejection of the European lifestyle and government, enabled a resistive acculturation to take place (Ausubel 1961:218). Inter-tribal disagreement and continued conflict with the British over land rights led many iwi to distance themselves from the Pākeha-organized government. Like their Native American counterparts, Māori removed themselves almost completely from the colonial environment, retreating to the safety of the rural villages, but then resurfaced en masse during the mid-20th century to participate in mainstream European society (Ausubel 1961). After World War II, many Māori departed the marae (sacred meeting spaces around which village life was organized) and sought out work in urban settings, leading to a serious disruption in the continuity and stability of established traditional systems of status and inheritance.

In order to address issues such as intellectual property rights and the use or appropriation of moko in a modern context, it is useful to first examine how tā moko was preserved and transmitted historically within the Māori community itself. The
persistence of *moko* as an acceptable practice in non-traditional subgroups of Māori society, especially after its decline in popularity in mainstream Māori society, provides unique insight into the traditional transmission methods of the *moko* art form. “Tattooing renaissances” have occurred in other parts of Polynesia, including islands like those of Hawai‘i, where traditional practices were forced to extinction by colonial and missionary presences, only to resurface later as part of an attempt to revive the culture’s heritage and traditional forms of expression (Kaeppler 1988). While historians and anthropologists have referred to the resurgence of *moko* as a recent development in the history of *moko*, it is important to note that the practice of *moko* never fully disappeared from New Zealand (Te Awekotuku 2007). For this reason, I prefer to utilize the phrase “*moko* revitalization” to describe attempts made by cultural subgroups to preserve and restore *tā moko* to a position of importance in Māori society.

By more closely examining changes to Māori society, particularly changes to women’s status and gender roles, this chapter revisits how an art that was once a cornerstone of the status system has altered in response to a variety of external and internal pressures. It also includes an abbreviated look at the contribution of non-Māori Pacific Islanders, including Samoans like Sua Sulu´ape Paulo II, and norm-breaking subgroups like Māori gangs and Rasta societies, who contributed to the practice and preservation of *moko*. Though the distinctive appearance and process of *moko* certainly contributed to a decline in its popularity in mainstream Māori society, it may also factor into *moko*’s survival, shielding the art from cultural degradation and annihilation by appealing to subcultural groups as a symbol of pride.
Women and Moko

The notion of women playing a significant role in the continuous practice of ordinarily male dominated forms of body art is not unique to the Māori. Lévi-Strauss (1973:185), for example, made a similar case of women of the Caduveo tribe in South America. Caduveo men abandoned the idea of tattooing the body early on, but the women maintained the practice by engaging in temporary body painting, which they practiced on themselves and on young children of both genders (1973:186). After Māori men ceased practicing moko entirely, women continued utilizing those designs they were already familiar with, including moko kauae (kauae meaning chin); some women also adopted smaller markings on the center of the forehead. Like moko, which imitates woodcarving, weaving, and other forms of Māori art, Caduveo body art mimics patterns apparent in decorative Caduveo art. Unlike moko, however, Lévi-Strauss maintains that Caduveo designs are not influenced by the contours of the face (Lévi-Strauss 1973:185).

Full facial designs and body moko are historically rare among women; overall, larger designs were considered rare on men as well as early as the 1860s, though general knowledge and documentation of these practices, including photographs, persist into the present day.

Unlike the basic designs of moko, which contain similar elements regardless of the wearer’s gender, tā moko instruments did begin to see significant change after falling under the purview of Māori women. Women experimented with different types of material, deviating from original chisels made from albatross bone and incorporating modern materials made of metal; only women experimented with using darning needles
and bound clusters of smaller needles, in an effort to create a smoother, more tattoo-like texture on the skin (Te Awekotuku 2007:71). The making of pigment also became less standardized and adaptations were made that incorporated more readily available substances. Bird and fish oil were common bases, while the dark colors came from India ink, soot from Candlenut tree wood, or even gunpowder (Te Awekotuku 2007:30). Large pieces might require use of pigments derived from the larva of the Pepe Tuna moth (Te Awekotuku 2007:30). These adaptations were likely influenced by necessity; the lower prestige placed on women’s rituals and activities required women to be resourceful when acquiring tools to practice moko. Additionally, innovations spread more readily at the local level as there were fewer formal ritual elements to support widespread standardization.

Moko began to suffer a decline in popularity even among women during the mid 20th century. This decline in interest coincides with a wartime shift toward urbanization and the development of new social pressures, leading younger, unmarried women to seek work outside of the marae, the focal social space of the iwi. As able women left the marae, fewer artists had time for the work and fewer of the younger generation were trained to practice traditional art forms (Te Awekotuku 2007). Further, though familial ties persisted over great distances, city dwellers might have limited interaction with their iwi and their kin who remained on the marae. In the city, even if a woman desired moko, it was unlikely that she knew someone who could perform the task.

Nevertheless, as touched on briefly in the preceding chapter, there are several factors which uniquely impacted women which may have contributed to their role in the
perpetuation of the *moko* art. As stated in the previous discussion, the less conspicuous nature of a woman’s *moko* design did not lend itself to preservation in the form of *mokomokai*. Also, because women were less likely to come into direct contact with European traders or rival *iwi*, the risks were minimal that a woman with *moko* might be singled out or killed for her *moko*. Secondly, while women did leave the *marae* to support the war efforts, they labored in a minimally skilled capacity where their appearance was far less important to European employers. Further, because *moko kauae* is a smaller design, it is likely it did not hinder their eligibility for employment as much as a man’s full face *moko* might have in a similar situation.

The beginnings of the revitalization of *tā moko* also followed a shift in the status and roles of women. Not only were women participating actively in political and national identity formation; in addition, they adopted a significant role in preserving Māori culture and traditions (Mohanram 1996:63). Dame Whina Cooper, the first president of the Māori Women's Welfare League, which formed in 1951, led a national land march in 1975 to draw attention to the plight of her people. The New Zealand women's rights movement, which saw its start in 1970, also coincided with the creation of Nga Tamatoa, a predominantly male action group whose goal it was to preserve the notion of *Māoritanga*, or “the Māori way of living” (Mohanram 1996:62).

Often, Māori women find that Pākeha feminist universals contradict the ideas of *mana wahine* or the Māori woman’s agency. In this situation, *moko* serves as an expression of social cohesion among Māori women while also demonstrating a link to traditional heritage. Te Awekotuku describes how adding *moko kauae*, a traditional
woman’s chin *moko*, to her countenance brought about a sense of sisterhood with other women who bear similar marks (Welham 2007:6). Influenced by the death of the Māori Queen, Dame Te Atairangikaahu in 2007, as well as the impending publication of her new book on *moko*, the 58 year old author, tattoo artist, and feminist explained that *moko kauae* is an expression of femininity, something she felt was otherwise lacking in her chosen lifestyle (Welham 2007:6).

According to Mohanram (1996), the creation of a Māori feminist identity is the product of the nationalistic struggle for sovereignty in New Zealand and not the dualism of man and woman which characterizes Western feminism. Mohanram states the following: “Māori feminism derives from Māori nationalism, a nationalism that allows for the visibility of racial divisions (Māori vs. Pākeha) rather than gender divisions (men vs. women), on which feminism is traditionally based” (Mohanram 1996:58).

**The Role of Gangs in *Moko* Preservation**

The importance of maintaining a distinctively non-Pākeha identity is equally important to out groups such as Māori gangs (called mobs) or subculture-derived religious organizations like the Māori Rasta. Similar to biker gangs and prison inmates in the West, Māori mobs play an important role in the perpetuation of body art, especially *moko*. Mobs such as Mongrel Mob Notorious and Black Power have used *moko* for the purpose of gang initiations, to illustrate devotion to the gang, and to communicate a non-conformist stance to the dominant post colonial society (Te Awekotuku 2007).

In her book, *Mau Moko: the World of Māori Tattoo*, writer and feminist Ngahuia Te Awekotuku examines in detail how Māori mobs assisted in the perpetuation and
survival of *ta moko*. In Western and non-Western cultures alike, gang members commonly mark their skin with gang insignia in order to advertise their commitment to the gang as well as to commemorate events associated with personal and gang history. Common gang *moko* incorporates traditional gang symbols such as fists, skulls, and barbed wire, into the appearance of *moko* patterns. Most so-called *moko* created in prison environments are actually tattooed rather than carved on the skin, since the equipment for creating chiseled designs is prohibited.

To members of gangs, facial *moko* or “masks” are a way of expressing permanency; with a visible marker like *moko*, you can’t run away from the gang any more than you can run away from the gang’s enemies. It is a measure of commitment to the gang lifestyle, as well as to Māori culture. Because historically *moko* was not restricted to just the warriors or to high status men, it is unclear whether *tā moko* was conceived of as a measure of a person’s ability to withstand pain. As *moko* was sometimes mandated by the society, it is unlikely that this perception played a significant role in the past. However, this sentiment is expressed to some degree where *moko* is undertaken as part of a gang initiation, in addition to the social sacrifices an individual makes when adopting *moko* or the gang lifestyle.

Gang members interviewed by Te Awekotuku claim their tattoos demonstrate their link to their chosen family, just as a traditional *moko* celebrates a link to Māori ancestry. But according to Te Awekotuku, many Māori take offense at what they view as a bastardization of Māori tradition. She expresses that modern wearers of *moko* owe a debt of gratitude to those gangs that kept the art alive after it became unpopular with the
increasingly urbanized Māori mainstream (Te Awakotuku 2007). Fortunately (or unfortunately), the stigma associating tattoo culture with gang culture has dissipated somewhat; now moko appeals to middle class professionals and urban youth, as well as passionate political and socially conscious individuals alike.

**Rasta and Moko**

Māori Rastafarians like the Ngati Dread are another excellent example of the fluid meaning of moko and how mercurial it can be while still remaining salient to Māori identity. The Ngati Dread mix Rasta teachings with the teachings of Te Kooti, founder of the Ringatū church, which in turn combines both tribal religion and Christianity. In general, Māori and Pākeha alike regard the Ngati Dread as yet another gang and not a viable religious organization. This sentiment is evidenced by violent disagreements with both Pākeha and other Māori, mostly over land rights and disputes over public and private property in the town of Ruatoria, where the majority of the Ngati Dread reside. In 1990, members of the Rasta were arrested for arson and other crimes. Several of the Rasta, including their leader Chris Campbell, adopted moko after their incarceration in an effort to identify with their ancestors during a time when they feared for their lives (Neleman 1999:132). The heated situation culminated in the death of Campbell at the hands of local authorities. The Rasta’s’ emotionally charged sentiments are reflected best in the words of Te Ahi Te Atua or John Heeney, who writes in a letter to Hans Neleman (1999), author of the pictorial, *Moko: Māori Tattoos*:

> …our moko is our god-given heritage, enabling I and I to enter in and out of the land of our ancestors. Aotearoa is the land of our nativity, and like many others of God’s people have been ripped off by the conglomerates, and by baldheaded
business men who give a damn [sic.] about indigenous peoples. They’ve lied to us, murdered us, imprisoned us, oppressed us, yet we are still here and we are not going anywhere by the force of the crazy Baldheads. [Neleman 1999:133]

Incorporating Christian religious iconography into the designs, moko serves multiple purposes for the Rastafarians, acting as both confirmation of personal faith and an expression of Māoritanga. Heeney’s own full-face moko bears the words Alpha and Omega and a Star of David, traditional symbols of the Rastafarian movement, woven into more Māori designs. Alpha and Omega, or Mother and Father, represents the balancing and complementary aspects of Creation, a Rastafarian equivalent of yin and yang, while the Star recreates the central Rastafarian belief that Rasta are one of the lost tribes of Judah. Māori Rasta feel wearing moko is a godly act that brings them closer to their ancestors and the Creator (Dhushara Productions N.d.). As with gang reinterpretations, many Māori feel uncomfortable with the repurposing of moko in this fashion.

Mainstreaming Moko

Though moko appears more frequently in urban areas and overseas, and has gained greater popularity among Māori, it is far from being universally accepted. Attitudes within the Māori community itself vary from tribe to tribe and even from family to family. Like other forms of indigenous body art apparent in Polynesia, moko is commonly described by the Māori as “heavy,” meaning that it bears certain weight and responsibilities and should not be taken lightly by the person who receives it. A family might feel that the individual looking to get moko does not deserve it or cannot live up to the new expectations that might be placed upon the recipient after receiving it. In a
sense, the *mana* conferred on the individual is above that person’s capacity to handle. Historically, commoners were less likely to receive *moko* for similar reasons.

Some cultural dissonance among the Māori is needed to encourage and strengthen cultural solidarity and maintain the bicultural system, but if it leads to confusion, such dissonance can have a negative impact on the concept of a collective Māori identity. The cultural gap between urban and rural Māori, or between younger and older generations, is one example of the problematic nature of such dissonance. *Moko* artist Julie Kipa states that the majority of Māori she sees getting *moko* are between the ages of 18-30 (Kipa 2000). This age gap illustrates an increasing desire to connect with the past and a need for youth to distinguish themselves from the Pākeha majority. Dominant Māori culture does not always accurately reflect Māori youth identities, which are increasingly westernized. Children who grow up in the cities may have never visited a *marae*, but the visibility of *moko* and its association with traditional cultural expressions and “Māoriness” makes it an appealing option for young people. Parents may try to dissuade younger adults from acquiring *moko* if they feel it limits their prospects for employment or associates them with an undesirable stereotype (like gang members or prison inmates). Those receiving tattoos in Western Europe and in the US typically fall into the same age category. Though Western youth may also experience discouragement or discrimination as bearers of body art, certain subgroups, like athletes and musicians, seem immune to such limitations. In this case, *moko* is used to express individuality, as well as group identity.
The desire to create a unique identity or to rebel against mainstream society is in many respects shared by all of those who practice body modification, though these reasons only partly explain why Māori choose to get *moko*. One pivotal difference that separates getting a tattoo from receiving *moko* is the sense of continuity and connection to culture and history that many Māori express as their primary reason for adopting *moko*. While a Māori family may disagree with a family member’s choice to wear *moko*, many more feel that *moko* brings them closer to their culture and heritage or *Māoritanga*.

Receiving input, or having the blessings of elders may make it appear as if there is an authentication process at work, but in actuality, permission has no apparent effect on how the *moko* is understood or authenticated by the individual as part of their individual or social identity. Sautet (2008:9) indicates that nearly 25% of urban Māori are not able to link themselves directly to a particular *iwi*; they also represent the majority of those who receive *moko*. A study of 83 *moko* recipients conducted by Nikora (2007) seemingly indicates that, in lieu of permission, some recipients set certain cultural goals for themselves which they use to authenticate their identity claims, assert *Māoritanga*, and further reify their choice to receive *moko*.

The contrast between modern *moko* and *moko* as it existed in past includes a distinction in who was actually tattooed as well as whether or not those persons were willing participants. The dominant perception of *moko* in the present is that *moko* is a personal choice, though its function and legitimacy, as well as its acceptability, varies from *iwi* to *iwi*. I do not believe, however, that choice significantly alters the art’s ability to function as a status or identity marker within modern Māori society. Nevertheless, the
difference between Māori who choose to utilize tā moko and Māori who do not view body art as an appropriate expression of modern identity is an interesting subject which warrants future study. While moko is useful in making identity claims, it is far from being the only tool that an individual uses. Those who have moko employ it in addition to other methods of asserting Māoritanga. Furthermore, identity claims made by those in the mainstream often evoke collective memory by linking generalized notions of a traditional past to the present. This differs from identity claims made by Māori who are active as part of one of the subcultures discussed in this chapter.

Though moko is generally accepted by the Māori as a display of Māoritanga, individuals with moko face discrimination outside the Māori community, despite the apparent popularity of photographed images of moko-wearing men in suits and women in uniform. In 2005, a Māori woman reported being denied employment as a dishwasher at the Brooklyn Tearooms in Sanson, New Zealand on account of her moko kauae. The woman filed a claim in regard to the situation, citing the Human Rights Act of 2003 which prevents discrimination against individuals on account of their race or ethnicity, citing her moko as an integral part of her ethnic identity. According to an article which appeared in the Dominion Post, Christina Bevans wears moko depicting a hammerhead shark on her chin in order to tell a story about her life experiences (Kavanagh 2005). Parliament initially upheld the employer’s right to not associate with people with facial tattoos, but the complaint was later resolved in April of 2005, with both parties agreeing to withhold details from the media (Human Rights Commission 2005).
**Moko as Part of Pacific Islander Identity**

Other Pacific Islander cultures regard cultural expressions like *moko* with a sense of kinship, reflective of a shared desire to reconstruct pre-colonial traditions. It is believable that a regular exchange of designs between Pacific Island groups occurred in some areas, which contributed to the development *moko*, but there is little historic evidence to support that hypothesis (Demello 2000). It is important to again point out that facial *tā moko* is unique to New Zealand. Using chisel-like tools or combs of needles to deeply mark the other parts of the body, particularly the thighs and buttocks, is also known in other areas of the Pacific, including Samoa. This practice, called *tatau*, shares design elements with *moko* as well.

Whatever the art’s historical origins, encounters between artists of different islands does play a fundamental role in the recent development and revitalization of *moko*. Within both island communities, there seems to be little question as to whether or not such interactions have a bearing on the art’s authenticity or viability as a unique cultural tradition. Shared histories and common values help to validate exchange between Pacific Island artists. Multicultural islander identities, which occur through intermarriage or immigration, also impact the artists’ willingness to exchange information. In this regard, the notion of a common past for all Pacific Islanders is instrumental to the creation of a collective identity. By invoking collective memory, founded on the basis of similar colonization experiences and a shared ancestry, islanders define an identity that is at once political and self-determined.
The Samoan *tatau* artist (*tufuga*) known as Sua Sulu´ape Paulo II is one notable figure of prominence who greatly impacted the perpetuation of *moko* and other forms of Pacific Island body art. Although he was tragically killed in 1999, he left behind a legacy of talented students and hundreds of tattooed bodies. Sua Sulu´ape Paulo believed that tattoos should be shared and visible to everyone (Te Awekotuku 2002:245). Sua Sulu´ape subsequent work with Western tattoo artists, including American tattoo artist Leo Zulueta and Pākeha Tony Fomison (discussed at greater length in the next chapter), indicates that Sulu´ape considered Westerners equal shareholders in the traditions of body art. In 1999, he brought together artists from all over the world, including both Westerners and Pacific Islanders, to expose them to the Samoan culture and the art of *tatau* and demonstrate the proper way to use the traditional tools. Rather than evoking only Pacific Island identity through *moko*, Sulu´ape Paulo focused on the universal identity of artist, particularly those involved in modifying the body through some form of tattooing.

The cultural identity of “Pacific Islander” may be real (meaning it is based on the individual having a shared genealogy with other island groups) or assumed and describes social and cultural aspects of a person’s lifestyle including religion, language, and other cultural attributes. Cultural identity is part of a social process in which the person participates (Leeds-Hurwitz 2006). To better illustrate: Māori may ethnically identify as Māori, but culturally they also share many attributes with other Pacific Islanders and even Pākeha. Many elements of cultural identity are passed from generation to generation such that they feel almost indivisible from the individual’s own personal identity.
Nevertheless, cultural identities are constructed by the society in which a person lives. Ethnic identity is separate from one’s personal identity as an individual, although the two may reciprocally influence each other (Phinney 1996). The ethnic group is normally the one in which the individual claims heritage. Genealogy is the pivotal distinction between claiming ethnic or cultural identity. Central to Māori ethnic identity, the concept of Māoritanga informs each aspect of Māori identity in turn, including gender roles, familial relationships, and personal and cultural responsibilities. In Māori society, ethnic identification also places a strong emphasis on cultural activities and community identity performance.

**Moko as a Part of Biculturalism**

Just as body art can mediate between the natural and supernatural worlds, it is also a part of the communication process which transmits Māori identity to insiders and outsiders alike. This can be useful as well as problematic, according to Schildkrout (2001:1). “Because body art is such an obvious way of signaling cultural differences, people often use it to identify, exoticize, and ostracize others.” A unique situation arises in the case of New Zealand, where the principle of a bicultural society is active in place of multiculturalism. Biculturalism, essentially the recognition of two separate cultures within a single nation, permits the Māori to maintain their culture alongside the mainstream Pākeha culture. This is distinct from the concept of multiculturalism, which encourages a blending of cultures and acknowledges “group-based rights for, or recognition of, migrant groups (which) might undermine prior bicultural commitments to Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi” (May 2008). The bicultural nature of New Zealand
and the fact that the Māori are generally homogenous in comparison to other colonized nations embeds a binary component directly into Māori society (Sautet 2008). Art such as moko is used to maintain and distinguish such distinction, although, as Schildkrout (2001) points out, it may also create problems for the individual.

According to Walker (1985:22), biculturalism arose out of necessity, as a technique for cultural survival. It is directly influenced by migration patterns and political events such as the Treaty of Waitangi that are specific to New Zealand, in addition to an overall homogeneity of both indigenous population and colonizing forces (Mohanram 1996:53). The Māori were culturally homogenous, but politically heterogeneous before the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840, when political necessity required that iwi band together to express a unified presence to the colonizing British (Mohanram 1996:57).

When looking at moko from a historical standpoint, effort should be made to differentiate between adaptations which occurred due to internal social processes, such as cultural diffusion between iwi, and changes influenced by colonialization and other external pressures. As related at the outset of this thesis, no community is culturally “pure” or absent of all outside influence. As Underwood relates, the goal is not to strip away all developments that came to exist only after European contact, but to understand how innovations become an accepted part of the culture in the first place (Underwood 2000:134). The reason it is useful to distinguish between pre and post-colonial traits is not to establish authenticity of moko as a cultural expression, but to maximize the art’s potential usefulness as a modern source of cultural strength and pride by understanding
its previous significance to the various subcultures within Māori society. One way to ascertain the differences between internal changes and those that occur due to external influence is to examine how the art was appropriated and changed by Māori subcultures.

In addition to preserving *moko* for the greater benefit of the Māori culture as a whole, the subcultures described here have also experienced a number of benefits on account of adopting the *moko* tradition to make specific identity claims. Each group retains their sense of entitlement to traditional expressions of cultural heritage by maintaining their ethnic identity, while creating a collective identity through the use of *moko*. For instance, *moko* has provided Māori women with a traditional image of femininity that is maintained parallel to a Western feminist identity, while the Rasta have used *moko* to attach cultural meaning to their religious beliefs.

The resurgence in the popularity of *moko* among both cultural out groups and more mainstream Māori culture is sometimes thought of as an attempt to reclaim traditions while maintaining the current bicultural society by preventing full assimilation into Pākeha/Western culture. As an expression of biculturalism, *moko* operates as a powerful tool which communicates the beliefs and ideas of a distinct and separate culture. It functions not only as a remembrance of pre-colonial Māori society, but provides a symbolic and visible link between past and future aspirations of the culture. Nostalgia, as described by Bissell, adjusts both time and space, “conjuring up the plenitude of the past as a means of measuring the present” (Bissell 2005:226). Though sometimes thought of as an “emotional and irrational” longing for the past, it is also a form of collective social memory which helps to reconcile the hopes and dreams of the future (Bissell 2005:224;
Boym 2001:351). As Boym states: “Creative nostalgia reveals the fantasies of the age, and it is in those fantasies and potentialities that the future is born. One is nostalgic not for the past the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been. It is this past perfect that one strives to realize the future” (Boym 2001:351).

For nostalgia to occur there must be historical evidence of a rise and fall of the society, something which both makes a people hopeful and creates a sense of longing. Among the Māori, colonialization represents a logical distinction between the success of the past and current Māori society. Secondly, the culture must also possess an awareness of the “fragmentation and plurality” and the disconnectedness that emerges between old and new (Bissell 2005:223). Finally, there is the perceived experience of losing individual autonomy, combined with a sense of sadness at the disappearance of traditional expressions which once embodied the heart of the culture (Turner 2002). These collective remembrances are necessary for the development of a cohesive group identity. Because of tribal divisions among the Māori, a collective memory is essential to creating a unified presence and supporting the continuation of a bicultural society in New Zealand.

Conclusion

Art historians agree that there is never a single map of artistic transmission; it is unsurprising that both women and outsider groups have played a strong role in the perpetuation of moko. Further, according to Walker, an attempt to “understand” Māori art in a European Art History context divorces it from aspects of the culture that are intrinsic to the meaning’ of the art. Each art, he posits, follows a “continuum of growth”
which reflects changes within the society (Walker 1985:22). It could be argued that the fragmented and variable role of moko in post-colonial New Zealand minimizes its functionality as an identity marker, making appropriation outside the Māori community more permissible. It is my opinion that an examination the roles of such non-traditional social groups as preservationists of moko should not conflict with the role of moko as a critical component of mainstream Māori culture. Unusual patterns of transmission such as those depicted in this chapter support the notion that modern moko remains a vital expression of Māori tradition, illustrating the continued cultural relevance and adaptability of this particular form of body art. Though a quantitative study indicating the number of Māori currently sporting full facial moko is yet to be undertaken, the increased exposure and availability of moko in New Zealand and elsewhere, coupled with greater acceptance of cultural traditions in the workplace, appears to suggest that the trend is increasing.

An overwhelming majority of Māori cite a desire to reconnect with their past as a primary reason for wearing moko (Te Awekotuku 2007). Moko has particular significance as both a process and a completed work. As explained earlier, tā moko is acknowledged as a traditional form of cultural expression, regardless of whether or not individual iwi support the person’s decision to get moko. Furthermore, the finished moko design can represent a particular trait, social role, genealogical lineage, or mana already present before the moko. As a commemorative ritual, moko is an important cultural expression of collective identity of the Māori; it references the past of the collective group and is related to mythological origins, which must then be defended from outsiders
who view these as a part of a universal category of body art (Eder 2002:25). Whether the boundaries of this identity are conscious or not does not matter. Rather, it is how the actor’s actions are interpreted by others and communicated back to the actor that are of value. In effect, this communicates differentiations within the Māori community in terms of social rank and status, and designated social activities; outside, it acts as a sign of belonging to the Māori community in general (Eder 2002:85). However, if outsiders do not respect the boundary, then it is ineffective as a marker (Eder 2002:87). To take this one step further, biculturalism itself cannot function if the boundaries put in place to demarcate the separation are not respected.
Chapter 4

Modern Primitive Identities and Māori Traditions

Tattooing and body modification play an integral role in many Western movements of social consciousness; body art has made an impact on self-help groups, neo-pagan organizations, and cultural and environmentally conscious collectives, just to name a few. As spirituality and self-knowledge are becoming important aspects of Western tattoo, tattooing narratives have also changed, becoming more complicated, imagined, and self-constructed (Demello 2000:165). Self-proclaimed Modern Primitive Fakir Musafar gave ethnographic and historical substance to the ideas of rebellion and post-modernity originally expressed by punks and hippies. The movement he spurred on, which he calls Modern Primitivism, is a self-defined collective of individuals from myriad social backgrounds who seek ritual and decorative experiences, experimenting with their physical appearance as well as pain as a method of spiritual transcendence (Polhemus and Uzi Part B 2004). They incorporate rituals of scarification, branding, tattooing, piercing, and suspension, drawing not from a single source or culture, but any number of indigenous societies which they believe possesses a universal, “primal” wisdom. If, as journalist Marilee Strong (1999:140) relates, moko is a “psychological fingerprint,” it should come as no surprise that many Modern Primitives have incorporated it into their practice as well.
Identification with the words Modern Primitivism is complicated by the diversity of the people who use the term as well as those who do not acknowledge it or feel uncomfortable with the connotations of the words, despite sharing similar practices. Though none of the informants in this thesis identify directly with the term Modern Primitive or describe themselves as such in conversation, they all admit to following some of the principal ideas as well as adopting the body aesthetic characteristic of Modern Primitivism. I used two primary qualifications when choosing informants for my research: those whose modifications demonstrated high commitment to a Modern Primitive type lifestyle, and whose outward appearances restrict social mobility in current mainstream society. Furthermore, I chose to work with informants who not only wore modifications themselves, but also performed them on others in a professional capacity. The individuals I interviewed for this work between 2005 and 2007 all wear facial tattoos, though only Jason’s chin tattoo replicates the appearance of moko. Facial tattooing, while not exclusive to those identifying as Modern Primitives, is an example of a form of modification that can in no way be hidden or dismissed as mainstream in current social contexts. As Jason explains: “mostly you can get away with any other tattoo, but you tattoo your face and it’s like you just stepped off a cliff.” In addition to personal interviews, I also draw on internet sources to provide current information on the widespread Modern Primitive community; many Modern Primitives use the internet as a networking tool and tattoo narratives appear online in public spaces for general view.

For this work, the words Modern Primitive appear capitalized, without italics or quotation marks, and refer only to the proper name of the subculture. Discourse relating
to the intent and underlying meaning of the words as they are employed by the subculture is a valuable avenue of study, but the limitations of this investigation preclude any more than a brief mention of its historical connotations and modern usage. The name Musafar adopted to describe his new movement conveys a heavy dose of ethnocentric bias; the very notion of a “primitive” culture gives rise to issues of exoticism as well as ruminations on what are categorically considered civilized (Western) or uncivilized (non-Western) behaviors. Today, the word “primitive” conjures images of African and Pacific Island peoples, romantically envisioned without the tools of modern technology and often sans clothing. Decolonization and the rise of cultural relativism lead to the reassessment of the term and it’s placement in italics or quotation marks in modern anthropological literature (Torgovnick 1990:19-20). In an interview with Mavericks of the Mind and Voices from the Edge in 1992, Musafar claims that the phrase “Modern Primitive” is a trademark of a particular community; as a spiritual teacher, he is concerned with the appropriation and commercial use of his philosophy as well as the terms used to describe it (McClen Novick 2006). As Musafar’s own ideas are “borrowed” or appropriated from indigenous cultures around the world, it may be hard to imagine how this could be the case.

To comprehend where the ideas developed by Musafar’s movement originated and determine what problems this particular type of appropriation might pose to the Māori and the future of traditional body art like moko, it is necessary to first consider a short history of the Modern Primitive movement itself. Afterwards, I will address how issues of essentialism, idealism, and nostalgia function in the Modern Primitive
community, themes that we have already seen as part of a necessary framework for developing or redeveloping group self-esteem within native cultures. To conclude this chapter, I will investigate how these themes also operate as functions of colonialism, unintentionally employed by the subculture to the detriment of the indigenous people.

**Modern Primitive History**

Popular media such as *National Geographic* and, to a lesser extent, modern ethnographies and other anthropological treatments of non-Western cultures, like Mead’s famous *Coming of Age in Samoa*, initially made indigenous practices more accessible to subcultural movements such as the Modern Primitives (Winge 2003:125). By imitating rites of passage traditionally used by non-Western civilizations, Musafar attempts to emulate what he terms *authentic* practitioners of body modification (Vale and Juno 1989). For those like Musafar, body modifications like *moko* are not only a means of expressing attitudes about the self; they also represent a way to reject Western society and culture and common middle-class values. According to Musafar, the body is the primary conduit of authentic experience; the body-first movement relies on using physical stimulation to achieve spiritual enlightenment (Eubanks 1996; McClen Novick 2006). Modern Primitives, like many indigenous peoples, regard the unmarked body as an inarticulate or incomplete body. The body, while symbolically public, is literally a private sphere, which, as Musafar states, the Judeo-Christian world regards as the “last taboo” (McClen Novick 2006).

Much of Modern Primitivism is rooted in the punk subculture movement of the 1970s, the “folk devils” that threatened social mores and flaunted unconventional, even
anarchistic political viewpoints (Hebdige 1979:157-158); it also builds on the foundations of queer subcultures, which first appeared publically in the 1960s (McClen Novick 2006). Despite the familiarity of these subculture movements, punk culture was never entirely co-opted by the mainstream in the way of many other trends. The more readily accessible and socially acceptable offspring movements of punk, such as grunge and riot grrrl, rely heavily on music and fashion rather than the political or personal aspirations of the original movement. The punk body aesthetic, while aspiring to a “neo-tribal” style of adornment, lacks emphasis on the aesthetics of body modification, and expresses contradictory, negative commentary on the state of society in the modern world. As a post-punk development springing from a small subset of the 1970s S and M culture, Modern Primitivism offers a solution to the social discontent confronted by punk subculture. Modern Primitive identities stress transformation over destructiveness and opposition for its own sake. Individuals are empowered by exercising control over their bodies instead of being controlled by society.

Multiculturalism and the drive toward globalization do not adequately explain the creation of the Modern Primitive movement. According to Eubanks, there are greater issues at stake: “profound power struggles within interlocking webs of issues such as multiculturalism, issues of sex and gender and, perhaps most importantly, the construction of the bodies of the “Self” and the Other” (Eubanks 1996:74). To Modern Primitives, Western culture is spiritually stale; they feel that so-called modern society could learn a few things from (purportedly) less technologically enhanced peoples. Though Modern Primitives may derive their tattoos from indigenous sources like the
Māori and other Polynesian peoples, the spiritual and social ideals believed to be represented by the tattoos and other modifications are largely imagined (Demello 2000:185). Musafar remarks that this does not diminish their usefulness; though viewed through the lens of Western culture, Musafar explains: “Fire is fire, no matter where it burns” (McClen Novick 2006). According to Vale and Juno, “Modern Primitive activities facilitate stratification in society” (Vale and Juno 1989:94).

Examining the collection of identities around a subculture marker such as body modification may seem at first an arbitrary distinction. Although there is no centralized philosophy surrounding body modification alone, enthusiasts claim it evokes feelings of kinship with other practitioners of body art, including indigenous peoples; as Vale and Juno relate, it is “…a reaction to overpopulation, fueled by so many uninteresting looking, conforming clones and drones” (Vale and Juno 1989:95). Further, the decentered nature of Modern Primitive practice implies that the authenticity of Modern Primitive behavior cannot be measured by the level of adherence to non-Western indigenous sources of tradition. Although claims to genealogical relationships with non-Western cultures or a history of personal experiences or tutelage may boost one’s status within the group, attempts to validate Modern Primitive culture by the person’s proximity to actual indigenous groups are not useful. Personal commitment to the group lifestyle is more useful in making identity claims as part of the Modern Primitive subculture (Siorat 2005:213).

**Structure in the Modern Primitive Subculture**
Modern Primitive identity is informed by communication with other Modern Primitive practitioners; though they claim inspiration from traditional tribal societies, such communication is itself dependent upon modern Western technology. Radical piercings, tattooing, and enactments of culture-specific rituals like the Kavadi and the Sun Dance are made easily accessible by the internet. Ethnographic and biographical descriptions of various modification experiences are also available to the viewing public via websites and forums such as BMEzine and social networking sites like Facebook. As well as increasing recognition and improving communications between those already engaged in the Modern Primitive lifestyle, international online forums help assist in creating links between Western practitioners of traditional body modification practices such as moko and the indigenous communities like Māori tā moko practitioners living in New Zealand. Demello describes these sorts of communities as “non-bounded and non-face-to-face,” meaning that often these identities are created and maintained through the use of non-physical space (Demello 2000:40). These individuals determine for themselves their level of commitment to the lifestyle; concealable modifications and rituals can be undertaken entirely in private, so that some Modern Primitive identities remain completely virtual. Facial tattooing like moko is unique in that it “outs” individuals as Modern Primitives, forcing them into an active role as representatives of the subculture in the mainstream environment, even if their role in the Modern Primitive community is passive.

In addition to the internet, conventions and magazines also serve to strengthen and maintain connections between Modern Primitives located over large geographical
areas, although these mediums also draw significant attention from the curious mainstream and are by no means exclusive to the Modern Primitive community. The Body Art Expo, a touring convention that covers several stops each year, and Las Vegas’ World’s Largest Tattooing Convention draw thousands of attendees each year, among them many people who identify with the Modern Primitive lifestyle. Magazines like Inked and Skin Art are easily found at conventional magazine stands and are available to the general public. Although Modern Primitives may use these outlets, the conspicuous commoditization of the modification experience at these events leads Modern Primitives to seek more private outlets and gatherings to experiment and share their beliefs and lifestyle.

**Modification as Ritual and Rite of Passage**

The ritual component of the body modification process is routinely denied in mainstream body modification practices, but receives considerable attention within Modern Primitive subculture. The impulsive and temporary nature of more common modification practices such as simple piercings presents an opposition to the permanency embraced by traditional cultures that perform similar modifications. In the Modern Primitive subculture, the process of receiving the modification is typically perceived as a rite of passage that can imbue the person with certain personality traits including wisdom, strength, or personal insight. This is indicated by the number of narratives that reflect on the process itself. Because the meanings of modifications are not fixed in the Modern Primitive subculture, there is next to no emphasis on what the individual modification signifies to the community after it is achieved. Ritual may be defined as a momentary
resolution of paradox, i.e. bridging the gap between sacred and profane or a transition from one state to its opposite. In Modern Primitive practices, the ritual of body modification resolves the contradiction of the individual separated from natural, spiritual fulfillment by Western society. Modern Primitives view traditional societies as encouraging of interactions with the spiritual world, a world considered less supernatural and more a part of the natural order. For Western practitioners, to bring about pain without fear through self-control while also controlling the ordeal or process is a uniquely Western experience. This resonates with an individual’s right to refuse or adopt select body modifications, a privileged choice which was not always a part of the moko experience. According to Gans (2000:175): “the sacrifices individuals impose on themselves are not the same as those imposed on them by the social order.” But as Musafar relates, the mandatory nature of ritual does not preclude the individual from learning something from the experience (Vale and Juno 1989:15).

In indigenous communities, the act of ritual reinforces shared values and beliefs. Modern Primitive rituals also evoke a sense of community and shared experience, but, characteristically, Western rituals place emphasis on individual growth and development as opposed to contributions the individual makes to the society. In both communities, body modifications, whether the focal point of the ritual or merely a byproduct of the event, are permanent and visible markers indicative of a transformation of the self or an elevation of status within the community or possibly both. The concept of tribal identity or belonging to a group remains intact, while the notion of the group superseding the will of the individual is eliminated. In the Modern Primitive view, rituals need not occur in a
group setting as it is the marker or completed modification which functions as a symbol of group identity.

**Individual Versus Group Identification**

While the use of *moko* among the Māori remains socially inclusive of the Māori culture as a whole, Modern Primitives use *moko* to make identity claims which reflect only a specific subculture within the mainstream society, in addition to each person’s individuality. Further, Modern Primitives may utilize tattooing to define a new self, one which is seemingly unconnected to previous attitudes and ideas (Pritchard 2001:29); for famous tattoo artist Ed Hardy, tattooing is mainly about the process of transitioning from one state of being to another, mimicking the unavoidable and universal processes of life and death. The reason most people get a tattoo, he believes, is “to prove or clarify something to themselves” (Vale and Juno 1989:51). Modern Primitives may also use *moko* style tattoos to invoke the past through a communal history of humanity, reflecting back on “pre-technological” tribal societies to express the values they find absent from their lives and in Western culture.

Modern Primitives are not linked by shared genealogy, ethnic heritage, or formal political or social organization; instead, they are united solely through a common performance of identity. Self identity is not so much unconscious for Modern Primitives as it is deliberate and constructed (Kleese 1999:19). Collective identities are socially defined; categories are either accepted or rejected by the actor and the Other. Modern Primitive identities are liminal personas, which become actualized and reinforced through
repeated interactions with others involved in the subculture. Similarly, repeated interactions with other Māori help to actualize and develop Māori cultural identities.

**Aesthetic Elements**

Self proclaimed neotribalists engage in body modifications for many of the same reasons as other Westerners do, but draw upon the traditions and practices of indigenous people, who they believe are more representative of the natural world (Miller 2004:30). Within the Modern Primitive subculture, the aesthetic appeal of a modification may be less important than the personal significance placed on it (Jetten and Branscombe 2001:1208). Those who highly value their group identity may downplay the modification’s aesthetic appeal in an effort to dissuade the mainstream from adopting a similar modification (Jetten and Branscombe 2001:1205). Many Modern Primitives have both common and more extreme modifications; when encountering a commonplace modification, the tendency is to dismiss the “mainstream” individual’s narrative as lacking significance rather than rejecting the modification itself. “It has to be personal,” one artist explained. “I think if more people felt there had to be some kind of meaning behind their tattoo then not that many people would have tattoos.” As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *moko* aesthetic has at many times served as a standard of beauty for Māori of both genders. Do Modern Primitives perceive the strong aesthetic element of body art, particularly facial *moko*, as reducing the art’s significance to the Self? Probably not, but both Modern Primitives and Māori frown on those who adopt *moko* or any other modification simply for the sake of its appearance.
There is an underlying difference between modifications accepted by the mainstream and those modifications undertaken by individuals as part of a subculture. As a modification becomes more popular, its ability to serve as a boundary between the mainstream and subculture is disrupted. Diffusion takes place more readily in certain areas, most notably urban centers such as San Francisco, where modifications are historically numerous. Furthermore, the social performance of body modification serves different purposes in mainstream and subculture contexts. Mainstreamed modifications like ear piercing, circumcision, and plastic surgery are culturally “invisible” when compared to the less-common alterations of the body undertaken by Modern Primitives. Tattooing or modifying the face, more than any other part of the body, raises strong opinions both inside the subculture and without.

While certain piercings are generally regarded as fashion by Western society, tattooing is considered an art form, by at least some. More extreme modifications, however, engender questions about the safety of the modification and the mental well being of the individual.

The term self-mutilation is itself a culture-bound category, as some modifications are intended to signify protest against mainstream cultural norms. The question of whether or not “body alteration” is a medical or moral disease is linked to social beliefs which hold that the distinction between self-mutilation and modification lies in the intent of the individual; that is, the society’s perception of the modification as extreme or acceptable, as well as the modifier’s own self concept, influence and inform each other. Further, tattooing and other modifications have been described as having “addictive”
qualities, both by their wearers and by psychologists. Some posit that this is derived from the increase in endorphins experienced as a result of the pain (Winchel and Stanley 1991); still others have asserted that this addiction comes from a desire to preserve memories and communicate personal values and beliefs (Vail 1999). Pathologizing body modification has gained what little traction it has simply because those espousing these viewpoints are in professional fields which are considered well-respected by the mainstream. While modifications like moko are less likely to be impulsive decisions, there is accompanying assumption that body modification is indicative of recklessness and impulsiveness, both qualities which are associated with youth culture in general.

Health, Safety, and Training

Another major factor in distinguishing Modern Primitive culture from mainstream body modification practices lies in who is allowed to perform a body modification. Rules governing who is permitted to undertake modifications of another’s body in the Modern Primitive community are nearly non-existent, unlike with mainstream modifications. Very rarely do Modern Primitive modifiers conform to neat, established categories that can be regulated by law. While some gain notoriety on the basis of their experience within the practice, others may choose to modify themselves (or their friends!) after reading about or witnessing a particular modification. Historically speaking, ritual knowledge was transmitted from Master to apprentice and the establishment of a practice occurred through reputation, sans licensing, certifications, or medical training. Modern Western artists may spend years shadowing a more accomplished artist, working for little or no pay. Although there are no hard and fast rules about who may learn to perform
modifications, there is some tendency to belittle the artistically trained artist; informants relate this to the experience that every “art school kid thinks they can tattoo.”

A majority of US states restrict who is allowed to tattoo or pierce as well as who is allowed to receive modification, requiring licensing and strict adherence to health and safety regulations in order to protect the (relatively uneducated) public. Page after page of medical journals have been devoted to the dangers of unsafe piercing and tattooing. While many of the laws protect the mainstream public against unsafe practices, others go beyond common sense precautions and sanitation. Some states outright ban tattooing except on persons with some medically definable need for such procedures, such as those with serious ailments who require a permanent alternative to medical alert bracelets. Modern Primitives explain attempts to ‘clinify’ the practice of body modification as the desire to control, eliminate, or even mainstream the practice, though extreme forms of modification are likely to remain permanently on the societal fringe regardless of whether or not they are expressly condoned or covered under law. Modifications performed in the mainstream carry minimal risk, and this is what the average consumer of tattoos and piercings desires; the risk of injury or infection does not appear positively in mainstream modification narratives. Western culture is obsessed with the personal safety of others, relying solely on members of the medical profession to establish what is sanitary or proper procedurally for the average person. Modern Primitives reject this on the grounds that the human body should not be controlled by its imperfections, weaknesses, or the superficial rules of the culture. Risk taking and conquering fear, physical pain, and/or emotional trauma occur regularly as part of the Modern Primitive narrative.
As Gans (2000) describes, distancing the art of tattooing from its historical past is part of an effort to create a marketable commodity out of personal significance and values and increase business opportunities by promoting mainstream acceptability. Disagreements about maintaining a professional attitude not only reflect diversity in the tattooing community, but also illustrate the strong divide between a commercial tattoo artist and a Modern Primitive artist who practices non-traditional forms of tattoo. Even if a commercialized artist has a strong artistic background, many are less equipped to perform the more complicated aspects of tattooing than those who have spent time experimenting on their own (Demello 2000:94). It is easy to situate the blame on the popularity and prevalence of tattoo “flash” art, which allows the artist to trace a premade design rather than create a new design from scratch, as well as the overall inexperience of the artist who creates more art on paper than on the skin.

In addition to obeying laws set forth by state and local authorities, mainstream tattoo artists are pressured by the tattoo industry to maintain a certain appearance. The National Tattooing Association, which dictates standards in commercialized tattooing in the west, expressly forbids its members to wear facial piercings or tattoos. Their aim, they say, is to move away from the “freak show” stereotype that has historically characterized the art form (Demello 2000:127). They also insist that artists avoid tattooing certain parts of the client’s body, including the hands, neck, and face. Jason applied to be a member, but was denied because his facial tattoos were “unprofessional.” “I’ve read all sorts of articles where tattoo artists talk about people getting facial tattoos: they’re suicidal, they’re fucking crazy, they’re attention starved.” He likens it to the
assumption that people with facial tattoos are spoiled because they are able to make a living while maintaining such an extreme physical appearance. “In reality, it’s just saying I don’t have the balls to get my face tattooed.”

**A Matter of Choice**

Identifying the key components of a Modern Primitive identity is crucial to examining what, if anything, Modern Primitive identity claims share in common with Māori and other indigenous identities. Communicating a tribal identity means something very different to Modern Primitives than to the indigenous persons they emulate. Most Modern Primitives acknowledge that their concept of tribe and society involves like-minded individuals who have *elected* to adopt the Modern Primitive lifestyle. Although Musafar sees this as a critical difference, he feels that what one is able to achieve as a willing participant versus a compulsory participant are still the same; he believes that even those who are forced, either by social or physical pressure, to undertake modifications or extreme physical stress can benefit from the practice, and achieve the ability to transcend the physical body and attain spiritual enlightenment (McClen Novick 2006).

Most Modern Primitives understand the social repercussions of choosing to modify their bodies before they even begin. Self-selected body markings, as opposed to those received in accordance with cultural traditions, reveal more about external societal forces than intergroup dynamics. In one respect, for example, it is a sign of privilege that Modern Primitives are able to determine for themselves their level of commitment to the lifestyle (Vale and Juno 1989:95). Musafar unintentionally acknowledges the extent of
this privilege, as related here: “Whether or not you have tattoos or piercings, the bottom line is that purposeful self-evolved intelligence…whether or not you have done the most you can with what you have” (Vale and Juno 1989:15). What is being said here is that one has ownership over one’s own body and the ability to choose modifications if they are available.

**Narrative Construction**

Considerable research and writing is devoted to understanding what modifications mean in the mainstream in comparison to how they impact an individual who is part of a culture which embraces similar modifications. These works appear to evaluate the use of the modification as a reflection of the person’s mental and social wellbeing. Cross-cultural discussions which look at the narratives of indigenous people in comparison to Western subcultures, however, are not as common, possibly because the scientific community fears that using the same method to evaluate minorities as they use to study Western subcultures would encourage unscientific value judgments.

In the Modern Primitive subculture, each narrative is considered unique to the owner, even if the modification is the same. What individuals choose as the focus of the story is variable; some talk about the pain they encounter, or the gratification or enlightenment they receive for their troubles, while others detail the agony that comes from having to find or choose someone to perform the modification and the pride they experience in associating with other Modern Primitives. The stories encountered in both the mainstream and in Modern Primitive subculture contain many of the same elements: stories of rebellion, testaments of personal freedom or the need to distinguish oneself
from others, and occasionally talk of self-gratification or self-injury. Gans (2000:162) feels that there is very little difference between those whose fashion sense includes piercings and tattoos and those who define themselves based on what brand of khakis they wear. Speaking in terms of individual identity processes, this may hold true. However, it is hard to contend that fashionistas are building a cohesive collective identity by wearing brand name clothing!

In the course of my research, I spoke with three individuals who engage in the Modern Primitive lifestyle to one degree or another. All three were in their mid to late 20s, Caucasian, and are employed full time as professional tattoo artists. In addition, all three also have facial tattoos. Sean and Stephanie both tattoo at a traditional walk-in style studio called Eyes of the Dragon Tattoo located in Racine, Wisconsin. Meanwhile, Jason owns his own private tattoo shop in Kent, Ohio, where he is the sole artist and proprietor, serving most patrons by appointment only. At one time Jason was also a piercer. Several of his designs have appeared in prominent tattooing magazines and he has tattooed in several states, including California.

To Stephanie, tattooing has always been a stable fixture in her life. She designed her father’s tattoos when she was in high school and began to seek an apprenticeship before she turned 18. For her, the decision to get a facial tattoo was about commitment to her craft; as she says: “it was a matter of knowing that I planned to be a tattoo artist for the rest of my life.” On the other hand, her partner Sean reflects that his facial tattoo was a product of a rebellious phase in his life. “I was an angry youth,” he explains.
Jason’s chin tattoo attracts the greatest amount of attention, although he also has a large design on his neck and another on top of his head. He is hesitant to talk about his older tattoos, as their personal significance has faded over time. Jason had his chin tattooed in 2000, by one of his teachers in California; “People just drop their jaws, even in big cities. It’s just like 100 people staring at you wherever you go.” Most of the attention, he says, is negative. “I’ve gone through a lot of crap (because of the facial tattoo)”. It was a spontaneous decision which led to him getting the tattoo; “I wanted to be dedicated. I wanted to show my commitment. When I was 17, I began thinking: I want to be the best. I want to be in magazines. I want to own a shop. I did this as a polite way of saying FU to the rest of the world.”

On the plus side, he says, it has made him think more seriously about social relationships. Jason insists that the inspiration for the tattoo came from within; though now he knows that it looks like moko kauae, he was not aware of the cultural connotations when he created the design. In this case, Jason’s use of facial tattooing to build individual identity differs from Modern Primitives who undertake modifications in order to build a collective identity which creates a link between the individual and an imagined and universal “tribal” past. Jason understands that the tattoo “…is about the place where your status comes from. It’s a woman’s design and I’m a white American guy, so I probably don’t deserve this.” Only once has he been confronted by someone who found Jason’ use of the design to be culturally offensive, but this is likely because of Jason’s location, living in the eastern United States, where few people know about moko or the Māori. Though he would caution his own clients against getting a facial tattoo,
Jason says he doesn’t usually refuse to do a design unless it violates someone’s copyright.

Jason has read extensively about Modern Primitivism and was directly influenced by the movement while living in San Francisco. In this case, Jason uses his interaction with the community as an artist as well as his own modifications to make identity claims. Further, the self-determined nature of a collective identity enables him to pick and choose which aspects he identifies with. For example, he takes issue with using the word “primitive,” but agrees that pain can be a transformative experience:

Most people getting tattoos find that it can be addictive. Sure, it’s also cool, but the experience is totally gratifying. You know, you have a hard day, your life sucks, your wife hates you and your crappy four-year old kid hates you, and then you come and get a tattoo and you’re not thinking about that. Your brain is cleared by the pain. You’re just sitting there, dealing with what is going on. It puts you back in your place. That’s why people get piercings. That’s why people cut themselves. You’re just trying to put yourself back into yourself.

One anonymous writer on BMEzine.com adopted a similar outlook:

We all test ourselves one way or another, whether we think about it deeply or just go with it, or both. I'm not sure why originally I was drawn to it. I think, for example, I liked the rewarding pain after doing something, the human experiment when it comes to pain, and pushing your body, and in a sense better understanding yourself. But hey, whether it's just for fun, spur of the moment, a spiritual ritual, or out of pure experimentation, do what you want for you. [posted on BMEzine forum, April 12, 2010]

**Group Identity, Self Esteem, and Discrimination**

Differences arise between the meanings of modifications that have always been an elective part of the subculture and those, like *moko*, which were at least historically mandated by the culture. Because tattooing and other forms of body modifications were adopted by fringe cultures of bikers, prisoners, and gay and lesbian enclaves, there is a
lingering association between tattoos and the rebellion and rejection of mainstream or middle-class, Western values. On the other hand, as indicated in the previous chapters, modern *moko* used by the Māori is concerned with reclaiming traditional heritage as well as subverting the dominant (white) culture. Which reason is of primary concern is dependent upon the individual as well as which subculture(s) or groups the person belongs to. For example, Māori gang members who use *moko* are likely focused on communicating dominance, whereas women who adopt *moko* are more likely to be concerned with creating a feminine-but-traditional tribal identity.

Both Modern Primitives bearing facial tattoos and their Māori counterparts are frequently targets of discrimination based upon their appearances and the decision to modify their bodies in an overt fashion. Rather than attempt to conceal modifications, which are thought to be the focal point of situations involving discrimination, the Modern Primitive community projects solidarity through the adoption of alternate coping mechanisms (Jetten and Branscombe 2001:1205). Those who engage in a Modern Primitive lifestyle cope with actual or perceived discrimination in ways similar to other marginalized or indigenous groups: by increasing intra-group identification. A study conducted by the University of Amsterdam concluded that perceived discrimination stemming from electing to receive certain body modifications like conspicuous piercings and tattoos, leads to strong identification with others who share similar markings (Jetten and Branscombe 2001). Group identification serves as a means of insulating one’s self-identity against mainstream society. Furthermore, value is given to those characteristics which produce differentiation since Modern Primitives define themselves by who they
are not as well as who they are, building similarities through a shared difference from the mainstream.

One significant difference exists between circumstances involving Māori bearing moko and situations concerning discrimination against (predominantly white) Modern Primitives with modifications. Unlike studies conducted in the minority communities where discrimination is present, the self-esteem of Modern Primitives with self-determined modifications appears unaffected by negative interactions with the mainstream. Further, perceived discrimination against higher status/more active group members better galvanizes the group than discrimination which targets lesser known group members (Jetten and Branscombe 2001:1206). Māori, however, perceive the discrimination as an objection to Māoritanga and not an issue with the physical qualities of the modification itself. An individual’s ability to control the “source” of the discrimination, in this case the modification, and choose whether or not to modify their own body, is what dictates this final differential variable (Jetten and Branscombe 2001:1211). Because Māori perceive moko not as an active “choice” but as an extension of Māoritanga, discrimination against Māori who wear moko can reinforce perceived hostility between the Māori and mainstream white culture in New Zealand.

When it appears in the narratives of Modern Primitives, tattooing can act as a great equalizer, crossing boundaries of gender and racial stratification (Demello 2000:42). However, I agree with Eubanks (1996) that Modern Primitivism lacks the critical assessment of issues of race and misogyny while purporting to be a subculture that defines itself as anti-establishment. Musafar himself finds this to be problematic,
though he feels that minorities already have enough issues to confront without taking on
the additional societal burdens of a marked subculture. Kleese (1999) offers that race,
etnicity, and class still limit how the body is perceived even within the subculture,
restricting the person to certain unchangeable roles. In this way, the supposedly
unmarked body that characterizes the middle-class is also an element of fantasy; in
addition to the marks of race and ethnicity are marks of gender, and even abuse or
neglect. But many Modern Primitives still insist and act upon their ability to change even
these distinctions.

**Modern Primitivism as Part of Colonialization**

The Modern Primitive concept of primitivism is part of an imagined past, with the
idealization of the actual, historical past acting as the most noteworthy characteristic.
Musafar’s take on non-Western cultures such as the Māori establishes a sense of societies
“frozen in time” that is, not having an active, living and changing modern society (Winge
2003:126). Alternately, some Modern Primitives view the indigenous people themselves
as having lost touch with their own cultures. In some cases, this is not wholly untrue.
Leo Zulueta, a Western tattoo artist trained in ō moko, relates the story of three
Micronesians who visited his shop, who appeared more interested in the American flash
art than in Zulueta’s own traditional style tattoos (Vale and Juno 1989:99). Zulueta goes
on to report: “Those traditions are dying out where they originated; the original people
have no interest in preserving them. They’d rather have a ghetto blaster and a jeep and a
pack of Marlboros.” Another unnamed artist contends that if “ancient symbols” are not
put to use outside the indigenous community, they risk vanishing forever. Regardless of
their accuracy, these two observations both reflect an essentialist attitude toward the current situation of the indigenous peoples Modern Primitives purportedly respect, and are also an example of “white man’s burden,” whereby it becomes the noble duty of the white man to preserve the culture of the colonized. While culture change is a natural process, deliberate appropriation by Westerners discredits what few claims indigenous peoples still maintain as to the meanings of these symbols (Eubanks 1996:76).

This leads me to conclude that while moko may serve as a marker of individuality in both cultures, the identity claims made by each group are differ in their proximity to the historic past. This is not to say that either identity is more or less authentic, so far as identities go. Stephanie says that tattooing “connects people with humanity”; even though the body modifications used by Modern Primitives may not be linked to personal genealogy, they do transport the person “way out there” as well as “way back” (Polhemus and Uzi Part B 2004). Though Musafar and some Modern Primitives do sometimes take it upon themselves to gain first-hand knowledge of the peoples they emulate, this cannot be said for the Modern Primitive movement as a whole. Sean and Stephanie find that research and reading compliment their knowledge, while attending seminars and conventions give them insight into the tattoo industry. “I love things like National Geographic. I love learning how people in all parts of the world express themselves,” Stephanie says, although both she and Sean limit their own body art to basic piercings and more Western designs. While inspiration can come from any source, Stephanie refuses to copy designs. “That’s copyright infringement,” she explains. She takes issue with Modern Primitives who adapt their designs from indigenous sources, especially
markings that represent important life achievements. When a client requests a tribal

design, Sean responds with the quip: “What tribe are you from?”

Modern primitivism may be a new strategy in the struggle for identity, but it is not

a strategy without cost. Despite any similarities between the use of *moko* by Modern

Primitives and within the context of modern Māori culture, the impact of adopting non-

Western cultural traditions to formulate Western subculture is problematic where it

intersects with identity claims used by the Māori to enforce a sense of solidarity and

opposition with Western culture as a whole. Modern Primitives are desirous of the

socially stabilizing and spiritually satisfying life as they idyllically associate with

Polynesians (Polhemus and Uzi Part B 2004:123). Meanwhile, the strength and longevity

of the Māori community is dependent upon cultural practices which do not incorporate

the Pākeha worldview (Oppenheim 1973:25). This means that they do not exist solely in

opposition or defiance of Western culture, but in a position of bicultural or parallel

equality that is maintained through projecting visible cultural distinctions. Though it is a

viable strategy for identity formation and a way to reject mainstream society, Modern

Primitivism also reproduces stereotypes of the primitivist discourse, which remains at the

center of colonialist and post-colonial ideologies. The biggest challenge Modern

Primitives face is how to avoid denying another’s cultural agency when exercising their

own.

**Essentialism and Nostalgia**

At its worst, Modern Primitivism is essentialist in its application of indigenous

traditions. It constructs a one-way link by which white Westerners benefit from unique
cultural attributes of indigenous societies while ignoring the dynamic and more recent application of these same art forms by other parts of the originating indigenous society. The goal, according to Eubanks, is to look for alliances and not affinities between the two groups, because affinities make concrete and unchangeable connections which deny the parent culture the right to shift meanings and adapt traditions to their own changing needs (Eubanks 1996:84).

Consumerism continues to present a serious challenge to both Modern Primitive and Māori, who use of moko and other forms of modification as a way of presenting an identity that separates them from the mainstream. Jason relates: “With rock stars, TV, and the media, I think we’re losing our identity and tattoos are a way to reidentify yourself. But, once again, it’s going to become something that becomes unidentifiable eventually, when everybody has one.” Kleese (1999:21) contends that while Modern Primitivism may be a rejection of current society, Modern Primitives still consume modifications and commodify ethnicity in a way that makes it similar to fashion trends. Gans (2000:171) also believes that there is “hidden complicity” between the market system and its detractors; any attempt to impart an effort toward self-knowledge is merely whitewashing the attempt to commodify body modification. He also feels that time “wasted on body art is time less spent on the politics of resistance” (Gans 2000:171).

The decorated foreigner may be the new vision of the imperialist presence (Polhemus and Uzi Part B 2004:124), but I reject the notion that Eubanks, Gans, and others perpetuate, that all Modern Primitives are unwittingly complicit as a part of a colonialist revision of history (Eubanks 1996; Gans 2000). There is, however, serious
danger in embracing the postmodern as devoid of all of the trappings of colonization, without understanding the “rules, implications, origins, or consequences” of such acceptance (Torgovnick 1990:41).
The reproduction of art on a massive commercial scale is a phenomenon unique to the modern era. Distinct from the tchokes and poster reprints of Monet that pervade Western culture, uninhibited reproduction and display of culturally relevant art outside the appropriate cultural context has had unforeseen as well as arguably negative effects on the parent culture. Through print media and the internet, as well as public museums, cultural displays and tourism, non-Western art is more readily accessible than ever before, reaching a broader audience than previously thought possible. In such universal spaces, artifacts and expressions of tradition from one culture may be exhibited in a common forum alongside other artifacts, without regard to the art’s unique qualities and significance. Indigenous art exists in a unique place and time, and commands an originating presence. When indigenous art is displayed without reference to its cultural significance, the cultural distinctiveness of the art is exchanged for plurality and universal recognition. What a culture has to say about itself through a traditional art form risks being overlooked, misinterpreted, or, at the very least, judged by the mainstream majority. The final question addressed in this thesis will answer how such attention disempowers the indigenous community and how such situations can be remedied or prevented.
The fact that Māori continue to practice *moko* as a vibrant part of modern Māori culture is testament to the longevity and cultural continuity of the art; Māori do not need the help of Modern Primitives or other Westerners, however well meaning, to preserve the tradition. If anything, *moko* is threatened more by the sudden surge in popularity than it is by disuse or lack of interest on the part of the Māori. An earlier chapter of this thesis addressed what issues arise when there is a perceived departure from tradition within the Māori community itself; the debate over what is “traditional” and what is not takes on even more critical implications when considered in a global context. The popularity and availability of traditional art raises the question of authenticity, which is in and of itself problematic.

As a post-modern twist on colonialism, the question of authenticity complicates an already muddled discussion. At the risk of alienating their informants, some anthropologists have tackled this topic successfully. Anthropologists Van Meijl (1993), Linnekin (1983), and Handler (Linnekin and Handler 1984) perceive history as perhaps rooted in the past, but invented (or reinvented) in the present to serve the needs of a collective identity. In an effort to elucidate the effects of using *moko* in mainstream Western culture, a portion of this chapter will be devoted to understanding how the concept of authenticity or “tradition” is a legal fiction, required to establish legal protection for intellectual property and, if possible, how such protection can be provided with minimal negative impact on the culture. It will also evaluate some of the measures that have already been taken to protect indigenous knowledge and tradition and how they balance in accordance with the needs and desires of the Māori community. Another way
to approach working with intellectual property is to look at current legislation dealing with physical representations of the concept of *moko*. The pressing issue of repatriating *mokomokai* may shed some light on how cultural expressions are regarded internationally. Further examination of possible solutions to the problem of repatriation might help us understand the issues surrounding the protection of *moko* as it is practiced today.

**Authenticity**

While anthropology has long related “authenticity” with unselfconsciousness, anthropologists like Linnekin and Handler as well as Jolly and Van Meijl, challenge the notion that tradition can be treated as a natural object, dependent on spatial, temporal, or other “natural seeming” boundaries, contrasting with modernity (Handler and Linnekin 1984:273; Jolly 1992:49). As Handler and Linnekin (1984: 278) relate, a “natural” model for tradition is possible where the nation is assumed to have the qualities of a living being, including a “personality” made up of traits that are commonly shared by the individuals that comprise the nation. On the other hand, a cultural renaissance like that which occurred in Hawai‘i and on other Polynesian islands, is based on a definition of tradition set by native Hawaiians who live in rural island villages, the closest example modern urban Hawaiians have to the ways of the past (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 283). In either case, authenticity is itself a category designated by the indigenous society and moderated by law when required.

Van Meijl, in his article on the Māori king movement, examines how the pan-tribal movement coincides with the coming of the Europeans (Van Meijl 1993). Jolly
notes that cultures are not only brought into awareness when opposed by outside groups, as the Māori were with the arrival of Europeans in the 18th and 19th centuries. Once European settlers arrived in the 1830s, it became necessary for the Māori to collectively identify themselves as the “true” people of Aotearoa, but recognition of cultural differences among the varying iwi existed long before. It is, illogical to suppose that ‘authentic’ representations of the body exist only in situations where the need for differentiation is well established. European contact made it more politically and socially necessary for the various iwi to embrace their similarities; however, the Māori were certainly cognizant of intertribal differences and similarities previous to the arrival of white settlers. Human beings by nature strive to make distinctions between themselves and others, even within a culture group. Another clear example of this is demonstrated by the social distinctions created by Modern Primitivism in Western society.

Van Meijl, in his 1991 PhD. dissertation, states: “tradition is not only reified, but, paradoxically, its objectification and reinterpretation takes place principally in opposition to a stereotypical representation of European values, largely because a major goal of the discourse of tradition is to counter European domination” (Van Meijl 1992:9).

According to Handler and Linnekin (1984:273), tradition best describes customs and beliefs which can be passed from generation to generation, but which are not wholly unchangeable or static. The concept of “unified through time” is hard to dispense with because it is related to how we view society as a continuous process, communicating the past within the present. Handler and Linnekin explain that there is “no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past and is inseparable from interpretation of
tradition in the present” (1984:276). Handler and Linnekin also argue that there is no such thing as “authentic” tradition; tradition is “never wholly unselfconscious nor is it every wholly unrelated to the past” (Handler and Linnekin 1984:285). Moreover, there is no such thing as inauthentic tradition either. *Moko* is a visual language used to communicate place and belonging in Māori society. It is used to convey social concepts that can be either abstract or concrete, but there is no formal translation for the specific designs and patterns that are part of *moko*.

The statements made by Linnekin and Handler as well as Van Meijl affirm that any “reinvention” of history is part of a normal process of creating a cultural record of history which is instrumental in forming a resistance to European domination (Van Meijl 1993:636). Authenticity becomes a matter of concern only when *moko* is included as a part of a universal category where no distinctions are made. By removing the indigenous culture from the picture and denying *moko* distinctive qualities apart from other forms of body art, indigenous cultural and ritual elements are ignored or removed from the art, and *moko* thereby becomes more susceptible to exploitation (cf. Benjamin 1935: 23).

**The Role of Authenticity in Art History**

Without an apparent original cultural association, cultural expressions decrease in overall usefulness to the community. According to Thomas, dynamism in Māori culture does not emerge from continual stresses, but from “radical changes, impositions and innovations” within the society (Thomas 2005: 25). Detaching art from traditional settings in space and time disrupts valid and culturally sanctioned alterations to the art form (Benjamin 1968). When duplicated without restriction, art is allowed to acquire
cult or popular culture status outside of the parent culture. It is possible that the negative social repercussions that stem from modern popularity can outweigh any economic or social advantages gained by marketing the culture to a wider audience. Walter Benjamin (1968) establishes that authenticity from an art historian’s standpoint has a basis in ritual and is culturally bound to the originating location. This characterization does not, however, take into account the use of traditional expressions in the Diaspora or by those claiming spiritual as opposed to genealogical connections with the indigenous culture.

Having examined the circumstances that accompany the transmission of moko within the Māori community itself, it is safe to conclude that the reproduction is a natural process of information dissemination which may ignore geographical and sometimes even ethnographic boundaries. Furthermore, the community may itself introduce the question of authenticity in order to reestablish boundaries of cultural association.

There are examples where authenticity as perceived and determined by the indigenous party functions to protect traditional expressions of culture. For example, in 2010, the WIPO set forth a list of new provisions which are designed to provide protection to traditional knowledge and heritage on a worldwide scale. Among these provisions is the requirement that all protected forms of cultural expression be “indicative of authenticity/being genuine of a community’s cultural and social identity and cultural heritage” (WIPO 2010:8). The WIPO requires that the indigenous party be in control of determining the authentic nature of traditions by defining the intent of the stipulation as follows:

“The term “characteristic” is intended to convey notions of “authenticity” or that the protected expressions are “genuine”, “pertain to” or are an “attribute of” a
particular people or community. Both “community consensus” and “authenticity” are implicit in the requirement that the expressions, or elements of them, must be “characteristic”: expressions which become generally recognized as characteristic are, as a rule, authentic expressions, recognized as such by the tacit consensus of the community concerned. [WIPO 2010:11]

According to Jolly, the first persons to “objectify” indigenous customs were Western missionaries; by detaching traditions from the indigenous culture, missionaries hoped they would be abandoned as no longer relevant to the current society (Jolly 1992:61). Another method of rejecting the cultural associations of an art is to label it too tainted by Western culture to be considered culturally valid, thereby one may use without regard to its historical or cultural heritage. This is clearly untrue of moko, as it is of many other so-called “dead” practices, as indicated by the history recounted earlier in this thesis. For example: Moko has been used on New Zealand banknotes, implying that it is a universal part of New Zealand heritage. This leads to questions about how such use of moko works to undermine or perhaps promote the bicultural society of New Zealand. Babadzan (cited in Jolly 1992:52) finds that celebrating tradition in such a way co-opts the native and makes it into an element of the nation state.

The Māori goal of a creating a unified culture is to secure a separate but equal position alongside the European mainstream of New Zealand. The most significant goal of biculturalism is the acknowledgement and respect for those things that are distinctly Māori owned and operated, like Māori language, customs, and lands. For the Māori, nationalism and bicultural identity are linked directly to maintaining cultural traditions and heritage; as a collection of individuals sharing a common space with Pākeha, it is doubly important to establish boundaries for membership in the Māori community and create both a
collective as well as social identity. By assigning *moko* to act as a boundary between Māori society and the Pākeha majority, the Māori have maintained *moko* as a meaningful social practice by imbuing it with renewed significance. However, *moko* is by no means ubiquitous in the modern Māori community; the Māori have many additional strategies for marking and maintaining a Māori identity in the bicultural society of New Zealand.

**Other Art Forms as Models**

While there have yet to be any direct claims of authenticity or attempts to secure intellectual property rights to moko, the New Zealand government has taken steps in determining what constitutes authenticity in the field of Māori arts. In 2002, the Arts Council of New Zealand (Creative New Zealand) began use of *toi iho* or “The Māori Made Mark” to promote “quality and authenticity” in the area of Māori arts and crafts. Created were four rough categories which were used as indicators to inform consumers and retailers of the degree to which the item had been manufactured or created by Māori craftsmen. While some artists welcomed the reassurance and protection of their artwork, others felt that the mark intruded upon the more inventive and dynamic aspects of the creative process, including their ability to employ non-traditional media or to involve non-Māori in projects that were essentially Māori in nature. In October of 2009, the marketing campaign was abruptly discontinued. The committee revealed that it felt the mark was unfairly being used to “leverage” works by certain artists, while others seemed to perform just as well without the mark. Unable to come up with a business plan that satisfied all parties, *toi iho* was abandoned. If *toi iho* is any indication of the staying
power of establishing a legal basis for the authenticity of Māori art, it may be best if such issues are informally addressed.

The Māori have experienced limited success with pursuing trademark lawsuits against those who utilize moko-related images in commercial enterprises. This is not to suggest that Modern Primitives and others who privately or personally use moko or moko style imagery should be subjected to the same laws governing larger enterprise, but it is worth considering how such legal battles might impact their use of the art in the future. The WIPO and UNESCO are working toward solutions for situations that they view as the most threatening to traditional knowledge and cultural integrity, but globalism presents a case for the blending and mingling of traditions, with more discrete elements becoming interrelated as time passes (Hatch 1973:57-58). Boas (1940) described culture as consisting of countless loose threads, most of foreign origin, which were woven together to fit into their new context.

As an outgrowth of globalism, Modern Primitives may simply be developing their own universalistic world view (Polhemus and Uzi Part B 2004:127). If Western culture adopts ta moko under the disguise of a culturally universal motif, the Māori risk losing an important and culturally viable, traditionally distinctive tool with which to resist acculturation and oppose post-colonialist hegemony. Modern Primitivism can either be viewed as exploitative and exoticizing, or liberating and a tribute to cultures that exist outside the normal purview of Western culture. Therefore, it is more revealing to examine how it is regarded in the Māori community.
As a response to discussions about words such as tradition and authenticity, the WIPO settled on using the word heritage instead to imply a historical basis for traditional expressions of culture (WIPO 2010:15). New documents suggest that international laws use the word, patrimonio, which means heritage in Spanish, (the word shares a common root with the English word “patrimony,” that carries a different meaning) but allows for the “dynamic and interactive nature” of tradition (WIPO 2010:16).

The increased visibility of “authentic” indigenous practices in the popular media has reduced the blame placed on anthropology as “middle man” between non-Western cultures and American and European Modern Primitives and others who duplicate or use moko for their own purposes. The now-widespread nature of the phenomenon requires the Māori community to find ways to control the use of moko outside of their own society, leading to legal questions which must be answered. The problem is further complicated by vastly differing opinions on the use and purpose of moko among Māori artists, as well as among iwi. In the recent past, the legal system has attempted to set forth ways of dealing with issues of intellectual property and copyright, with varying degrees of success. It comes down to the question of what, if any, rules should govern the use of moko by non-Māori, and how and by whom these rules should be established and enforced.

With increased frequency, Māori moko artists are engaged in communications with non-Māori artists. The homogenization of symbols practiced by Modern Primitives is often used as evidence of the colonizing force of the Modern Primitive culture (Kleese 1999). At best, the selective appropriation of tribal symbols and practices by White
Westerners decenters the associated concepts, forcing them into a universal category that is neither Western nor indigenous (Winge 2003: 126). Improving communication and deepening already existing cross-cultural relationships between indigenous and Pākeha artists and participants limits the possibly damaging ramifications to the native tradition. It also allows Modern Primitives to avoid assuming an unwitting role in perpetuating colonialist attitudes, if the ultimate goal is to establish and maintain clear boundaries between traditional arts and otherwise similar body art practices performed outside the Māori community. Increased contact and communication can also increase diffusion, but since moko has already spread through these networks, increasing the flow of communication should have minimal negative effect.

The Role of Language

Are Modern Primitives incorrectly depicting unrelated practices as moko, or is the issue truly that of Westerners “stealing” and using the art form for their own purposes? Regardless of what is established by law in terms of rights to practice and perform moko, the sharing of indigenous knowledge and practices should incorporate accurate usage of the terms traditionally associated with the art. One suggestion is to allow only the Māori to designate use of the term and indicate which practices are actually moko and which merely use similar designs or techniques. While such an approach would be easier to enforce legally, it would still remain hard to control internationally. While tattoo shops might not advertise moko publicly, there is nothing to prevent them from labeling tattoos as moko in private communications; it would also be a challenge to reach groups like Modern Primitives, who do not always advertise the practice to those outside of their
social group. Furthermore, if the word *moko* is protected, what about other indigenous terms that have entered into the mainstream, including the word tattoo (from *tatau*) or, for that matter, the word Māori itself? Still, providing education about the technical Māori usage of the word *moko* seems a far easier task than gaining the international cooperation of individuals to cease the practice entirely.

The word *kirituhi*, used by culturally conscious Māori and *Pākeha* tattoo artists, is used to describe “skin art” or tattooing, though it originates from the Māori practice of body painting with charcoal (Kopua 2006). In legend, *kirituhi* was the body art worn by Mataora when he descended into the underworld to search for his wife, which wore off with his sweat; both historically and in the present day, *kirituhi* is used as part of traditional Māori performances and formal ceremonies, having taken on a more significant role since the decline of *moko* (Kopua 2006). According to tattoo artist and *moko* practitioner Mark Kopua, *kirituhi* does not have the same restrictions as *moko* because it is not *mana*. Kopua feels there is “a need to appease a fiercely growing market, yet to protect and maintain the integrity and inherent exclusivity of *moko*” (Kopua 2006). Instead of looking for answers outside the culture, Māori artists revived the concept of *kirituhi*. While the modern version is more permanent than the original charcoal effects, the name still carries with it a level of impermanence that Westerners would not normally associate with modern tattooing, but it is perhaps a more accurate term to use for the kind of “*moko*” designs used by *Pākeha* and other non-Māori. It is not the “authenticity” of the methods used in creating the design for a *Pākeha* that is in question; because *Pākeha* do not have the prerequisites to establish a spiritual link to
moko, the tattoo or kirituhi is with them only until death and is hence, by Māori definition, only “temporary.” As my discussions with American informants reveal, modern Western tattooing is a personal experience, driven by the desires of the individual; tattoos are generally thought to belong only to the person who wears them and have their beginning and their end with that person. By contrast, Māori are said to wear their moko always; moko is with them in the afterlife, as it connects them to their ancestors and a time before (Gillies 2006).

Defining Intellectual Property

The term moko and images associated with it receive some small amount of legal protection under New Zealand’s Trade Mark Bill of 1953, although there are not currently any laws on the book that specifically restrict the use of moko as a copyrighted concept owned by the Māori people. In the international spectrum, large commercial ventures, like a moko-themed restaurant owned by a Danish restaurateur who used moko imagery in the décor and website of his restaurant in the Netherlands, as well as borrowing the term for the name for his establishment, have been successfully sued. Copyright legislation like New Zealand’s Trade Mark Bill allows for the protection of the term moko, but the ‘ownership’ of moko as intellectual property is harder to establish. Distinguishing indigenous intellectual property from universal concepts is the first step in providing evidence of ownership and a verifiable framework for rights which can be internationally enforced. A definition of ownership is critical for any discussion about property, intellectual or otherwise. What can or cannot be owned and what is affected by said ownership must be included in the definition.
Sociologist Clark Hare asserts that ownership can be declared if three conditions are met: control, time, and intent (Hare 1999: 292). Control is understood best as the power exerted over the property in question, while time indicates exactly how long jurisdiction has been established over the object or creative concept. Finally, intent reflects propriety and the creators’ intent for the idea, including whether it was created for a limited or particular group of people or if it was intended for open distribution. This last requirement is one which has caused considerable contention in the Māori community itself, as pointed out in the third chapter of this thesis where Samoan and other Pacific island influences on the perpetuation of moko is discussed. Like Sulu’ape, there are Māori who feel that sharing traditional knowledge reflects the universal importance of Māori culture. Others feel that stronger, firmer boundaries should be set for working with Pākeha.

A common misconception about intellectual property, Hare points out, is that an a priori right to ownership, meaning that those who first acquired the knowledge maintain legal rights to it, does not apply to intellectual property in the same way it applies to objects of traditional or cultural value. According to Hare, “ideas or easily duplicated items do not owe their continued existence to the culture, only individuals” who perpetuate them (Hare 1999:293). As I have demonstrated, moko came about through the interaction of Māori art and values; the continuation of the moko tradition is dependent on the memories of the artists and recipients of moko, who continue to imbue it with significance. In this case, a priori rights would not be an option in dealing with moko, but sui generis mechanisms may complement existing intellectual property rights and
might afford additional protection against appropriation. *Sui generis* refers to an idea that is unique, implying that traditional knowledge and cultural expressions are culturally specific and do not easily fall into categories ordinarily administered by law. An informal *sui generis* clause stating that the law should allow for a broader definition of traditional knowledge would help to avoid problems stemming from an inability to meet more formal requirements to establish and maintain rights, and the difficulties inherent in determining ownership by a culture group as opposed to dealing with individual rights.

**Traditional Knowledge and WIPO/UNESCO**

According to Posey (1990), WIPO and UNESCO are vested in creating frameworks for protecting both folkloric and artistic elements contained within indigenous knowledge. New Zealand has been active in the WIPO since the group’s inception. It is not my intent to delve into what should be covered under the heading of ‘traditional knowledge’, only that *moko* should be considered a part of this. In article one of the WIPO’s newest proposal, the category of “traditional cultural expressions” is expanded to include both tangible and intangible forms of art. Though no mention is made of tattoo or *moko* specifically, the addition does include “body painting” as a protected form of expression (WIPO 2010). It is stipulated that these expressions are:

- the products of creative intellectual activity, including individual and communal creativity; are indicative of authenticity/being genuine of a community’s cultural and social identity and cultural heritage (see previous chapter); and maintained, used or developed by such community, or by individuals having the right or responsibility to do so in accordance with the customary normative systems or traditional/ancestral practices of that community. [WIPO 2010:14]
An initial concern was that it might be hard to distinguish one “expression” from another and that to do so denies the “holistic nature of many indigenous cultures” (WIPO 2002:1). The extreme diversity among various systems of traditional knowledge leads to the conclusion that it will be hard to come up with a global set of laws that protects every aspect of indigenous heritage and culture. As Hodder suggests: “In the end it seems more likely to me that rather than defining universal rights to heritage, it would be better to embed rights to cultural heritage within wider considerations of human rights” (Hodder 2008:199). Is it necessary to go so far as to say that intellectual property and copyright are by extension a part of a body of universally held human rights? Anthropologist Manuela Carneiro da Cunha’s call for cultural specificity indicates they are not (Carneiro da Cunha 2001:3). She cites failures of previous attempts, such as the Tunis Model Law issued jointly by UNESCO and WIPO in 1976, a system by which a user of materials in the public domain was required to pay a fee to the indigenous people for a compulsory license. The system was designed to protect folklore and other intangible cultural knowledge, but ultimately the system failed to gain supporters; organizers failed to determine how the funds from licensing should be collected, or how they would be distributed back to the rightful owners (Carneiro da Cunha 2001:4). The wisdom here is that, while attempts to insure intellectual property rights are not always successful, they are a necessary part of maintaining a fair and equal global society.

Practical Examples of Traditional Knowledge in Legislation

In 2002, during the fourth session of the WIPO’s Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge, and Folklore, the
committee for New Zealand concluded that there was a need to develop a *sui generis* or
another similar approach in addition to currently existing intellectual property (referred to as IP) laws, to protect cultural resources such as *moko*. Proposals were generated by a focus group sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce, which consulted directly with Māori representatives. Because the Trade Marks Act of 1953 covered only Māori text and imagery (WIPO 2002:2), a revised bill was introduced in 2002, followed by the New Zealand Trade Marks Bill, enacted in 2009, to address these new concerns. The WIPO called for the appointment of an advisory committee to advise on matters concerning inappropriate or offensive uses of Māori texts and imagery (WIPO 2002:3). The document presented to WIPO introduced practical examples of inappropriate use of Māori traditional knowledge that would be covered under the future legislation, using as examples the Danish restaurant mentioned earlier in this discussion, as well as designer Paco Rabbane’s 1998 fashion collection, which featured models wearing metal masks styled after *moko* (WIPO 2010:7). In this portion of the bill, *moko* is referenced directly and described as follows:

*Tā Moko*, the art of Māori tattoo, is a process of carving deep grooves and colouring into the skin for family and personal identification. Certain people were entitled to wear *moko* for particular reasons such as rank, status, achievements, membership and also life history. As tattooing involved marking the face and the shedding of blood, it was highly tapu or sacred and the process was associated with extensive ritual and regulations. While in contemporary society, the practice of *ta moko* is not as prevalent as in traditional times, the norms governing this art form still exist. Given these restrictions, it causes offence when it takes place outside of these parameters, particularly when sacred images are using in an inappropriate context. [WIPO 2010:6]

The proposed rewrite of the bill establishes that the use of Māori images and text by persons and groups other than the Māori does not itself constitute offensive use; the
bill proposes that an advisory committee be established to determine what amounts to offensive use. Some consider creating an advisory committee (composed mostly of Pākeha) to determine what is or is not offensive to the Māori is itself offensive, as is the fact that the person who determines the appointments to the committee is also Pākeha. This means that the ways which the committee goes about proving or disproving a potential offense must be transparent or else risk accusations of unfairness and racism. The advisory committee’s principal duty is to act defensively against attempts to establish trademarks which violate the terms of the bill. New applications for trademarks containing Māori text or imagery would be forwarded from the Intellectual Property Office of New Zealand to the committee for review, looking specifically for offensive implications (WIPO 2010:12). The 2010 WIPO document establishes that the agency should also be proactive in educational and awareness campaigns and assume responsibility for pursuing legal action wherever necessary, as well as seeing to reparations, should certain circumstances apply (WIPO 2010:26).

What criteria should be used to establish the offensiveness of appropriation? Furthermore, what checks and balances should be in place to ensure that those who make the laws maintain a strong connection to the indigenous people they represent? Consciously or not, all artists are influenced by their surroundings. If New Zealand proudly acknowledges its Māori heritage, what is to keep Māori design and art from influencing how New Zealanders, Pākeha and Māori alike, conceive of their own designs? How do we establish intent or offensiveness? The answers Māori are likely to give to these questions would differ, perhaps dramatically, from the responses of others.
An ideal advisory committee for the sort of task proposed by the WIPO would consist not only of Pākeha “experts” on law and culture, but of Māori cultural representatives as well. It would also be beneficial to include artists or art historians who understand the traditions from an artistic viewpoint and can clearly distinguish between artistic license, interpretations, and negative misinterpretations.

The WIPO Annex also maintains that the Treaty of Waitangi should remain foremost in consideration when adopting new policies regarding IP and traditional knowledge in New Zealand. Signed in 1840, the Treaty is a broad statement of principles on which the British and Māori agreed in order to form a nation state and build a government in New Zealand. The Waitangi Tribunal of 1975 was created to allow for public address of the possible breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. Intellectual property issues raised by a claim, called the Wai 262 claim of 1991, relate to what is generally conceived of as "Māori cultural and intellectual property right." Of particular concern were possible effects intellectual property rights laws might have on cultural property and what rights were maintained in cases involving third parties who used traditional knowledge and practices for commercial purposes when originality was not legally defined. Furthermore, the Wai 262 claim revealed that the Māori were troubled by the already established IP laws, fearing that extreme restrictions and the interference of Pākeha lawmakers would lead to an inability to obtain trademarks to their own traditional knowledge and cultural practices (Ministry of Economic Development, New Zealand 2007).

Art in the Public Domain
If New Zealand takes on responsibility for preventing any new infringements on Māori IP rights, what does this mean to the representations of Maori art that already exist in the public eye? Carneiro da Cunha, in her article on UNESCO and the defense of traditional knowledge, feels that indigenous knowledge should only enter into public domain under two circumstances: if there exists protection of the public domain from misappropriation (wrongful or damaging misuse) and if there exists proper compensation whenever usage leads to commercial enterprises (Carneiro da Cunha 2001:1). By its very definition, public domain (at least in the US) means that something can be used freely and without permission, except for commercial purposes (for example, to sell something already provided free of charge). I find two problems with Carneiro da Cunha’s approach: first, it does not consider how to address offensive misuse, and, secondly, it fails to consider the amount of effort required to monitor abuses that occur on a smaller scale, like that which goes on among Modern Primitives or in tattoo shops. Carneiro da Cunha’s suggestion does encourage IP rights be upheld internationally and by an international presence like UNESCO or WIPO, thereby helping to guarantee that a foreign indigenous group can expect equal rights to those of a native indigenous group. For example, if a particular use of moko in the US was considered offensive, the Māori could maintain that they have the same rights as Native Americans and use those rights to object to the use of their traditional knowledge. While Carneiro da Cunha’s suggestions are based on granting rights to particular forms of indigenous IP for medical or other worthwhile humanitarian reasons, it is noteworthy to reflect that the reasoning behind
retaining the rights to indigenous IP are nevertheless similar: “to pursue both equity and preservation” (Carneiro da Cunha 2001).

**Moko in the Māori Community**

In an effort to recognize the dynamic nature of even traditional cultural expressions, the attempt is being made to include and protect expressions as they are made by individuals as part of the community (WIPO 2010:15). By establishing that the “use” of moko outside “traditional” Māori communities does not automatically constitute a violation of the terms of the sui generis policy, the rights of Māori who live predominantly urban lifestyles outside of the marae, as well as Māori living in the Diaspora would also be protected. Additionally, there is some question as to the development of formal or informal systems for monitoring traditional knowledge. While a more formal system of recording intellectual property might make it easier to establish rights in situations like that concerning the mokomokai, it is not a practical approach to protecting art forms. A formal system would require discussions on the notion of authenticity in terms of those practicing moko and their rights as Māori. Specific to the moko art, questions arise that include whether Māori not living or trained on a marae would be entitled to the same recognition and protection; it would also have to take into account Māori communities in the Diaspora. These situations make an excellent case for further study as to the effectiveness and application of future claims and legislation. The WIPO determines the limits to traditional knowledge and the rights established under that category as follows: “…the duration of protection against misappropriation should last as long as the distinctive association remains intact and the knowledge therefore constitutes
traditional knowledge [referred to in abbreviated form as TK in the document]” (WIPO 2010:40). A distinctive association exists as long as the knowledge is maintained by traditional knowledge holders (those who are members of the indigenous community according to the community’s own standards), and, most importantly, remains associated with them as an integral part of their collective identity (WIPO 2010). So long as these criteria of eligibility are fulfilled, the protection of traditional knowledge under these Principles is unlimited. However, because of the increase in popularity and the attention now being given in tattoo circles, it is uncertain if it is possible for moko to maintain such separateness.

**Moko Outside the Māori Community**

There is the general acknowledgement that the increased visibility of Māori culture and a reaffirmation of the bicultural principles of New Zealand are positive steps toward international recognition, but some may find fault in the committee’s clear refusal to name every use of the expression or art outside of the community as appropriation. The only requirement is that usage should remain respectful and acknowledge the indigenous source. The document annex (WIPO 2010:32) states: “Those using traditional knowledge beyond its traditional context should mention its source, acknowledge its holders, and use it in a manner that respects the cultural values of its holders.” Many Māori believe it is not possible for a non-Māori or Pākeha person to give proper respect to a Māori tradition. In such cases, it is hard to say that anything can be done to improve or alter this opinion. Two interesting points should be made here, though. As mentioned in the last chapter, the very definition of moko involves the basic
principles of *whakapapa* (genealogical connections), *mana*, and *tapu*; yet, for some Māori, just giving the outward appearance of a *moko* design is enough to constitute appropriation. However, it should be pointed out that, in practical application, many Māori apply the rules of *mana* and *tapu* to Pākeha as well. This comes into play particularly when the status of a Pākeha individual requires an amount of respect, such as situations involving dignitaries and heads of state. It is not wholly satisfying to use the division between practical and theoretical applications of the three principles to explain how *moko* should be handled in cases like the Modern Primitives, but it is a necessary consideration. Perhaps the most that can be asked is for Modern Primitives to step up and ask questions to ensure that traditional forms of knowledge are handled with care, and with deference to the rights and wishes of the indigenous groups.

The most recent draft for establishing intellectual property rights appears to close in on a solid basis for protecting cultural traditions such as *moko*. The WIPO document on traditional knowledge and cultural expression raises the following considerations in declaring certain behaviors to be out of bounds:

In respect of words, signs, names and symbols which are such traditional cultural expressions/expressions of folklore (as considered by the above categories established), any use of the traditional cultural expressions/expressions of folklore or derivatives thereof, or the acquisition or exercise of IP rights over the traditional cultural expressions/expressions of folklore or derivatives thereof, which disparages, offends or falsely suggests a connection with the community concerned, or brings the community into contempt or disrepute. [WIPO 2010: 21]

Moreover, the WIPO discourages formal registrations and other infringements on traditional systems of managing knowledge within the indigenous community (WIPO
2010:33). Any registration would be optional, with goal of providing the strongest protection possible to the community (WIPO 2010:34).

**National and International Law Enforcement**

Just who is responsible for administering and securing rights to tribal knowledge is a fundamental question. Article 13 (WIPO 2010:47) clearly calls for “a competent authority,” and conveys that this authority would be ideally operated by the national government of New Zealand. The administrative committee should be diverse and include both Maori and Pākeha members. The diverse ways in which potential laws could be managed necessitate input from the Māori as to what they want to accomplish. With respect to *moko*, my research suggests the majority of Māori would be satisfied with a two-fold solution: repatriation of the remaining *mokomokai* and a government-funded educational campaign, used to distinguish the use of *moko* from broad concepts of tattooing and body art. Article 14 (WIPO 2010:51) addresses these concerns and their enforceability on the international front, which is of serious concern, especially where the *mokomokai* are concerned. At present, the WIPO requires that a country extend foreign indigenous groups the same rights and protections it accords the tribal knowledge of indigenous groups in its own jurisdiction. Carneiro da Cunha (2001:3) notes that this respect only extends to those kinds of IP that are considered traditional knowledge and not part of the public domain. Another, stricter, option in the article stipulates that “a foreign court in the country of protection would have recourse to its own laws, including its own customary laws, to determine whether a foreign community qualifies as a beneficiary.” Under mutual recognition and assimilation principles, a foreign court in the
country of protection accepts that the originating community has legal standing to take action in the foreign country as the beneficiary of protection because it has such legal standing in its country of origin.

**Conclusion**

Culture is a social construct; its symbols, handed down through time, gain a different context and meaning in the present. If globalization requires that we move toward adopting *sui generis* policies for intellectual property, meaning that it would consider each situation individually as unique to the culture, some criteria for authenticity should still be identified and agreed upon which satisfy both law makers and indigenous groups and ensure that these policies are applied fairly. In situations of dispute, these criteria would be helpful in establishing a basis for legal intervention. To this end, direct demonstration of ownership should not be required except in such situations and as defined by the indigenous group itself. Ideally, any final definition of intellectual or traditional property must allow for alterations which empower and work for the culture in the present while protecting and continuing the tradition in question in order to come close to satisfying all of the parties involved. If it is necessary to determine “authenticity” then such determinations should avoid assumptions about stagnation and allow for adaptation and change as the indigenous culture participates in global as well as traditional/local pursuits.

Though this work has focused on *moko*, the problems I have described are not unique to it. The study of *moko* reveals that globalization is a force which cannot be stopped, but can be managed responsibly. Indigenous people in other places are dealing
with problems comparable to the challenges faced by the Māori. In the Amazon, for example, native people fight to maintain their rights over indigenous medical knowledge, even as pharmaceutical companies from all over the world attempt to gain access to the information, as well as the raw materials. In the US, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), passed in 1990, requires federal agencies and institutions who receive government funds to return Native American bones and cultural items, especially funerary objects, to the descendants. A successful legal argument was established on the basis of First Amendment rights, which requires the respect of religious (funerary) beliefs and practices, as well as adherence to rights accorded by sovereignty, equal protection for human rights, and existing treaties.

According to the WIPO, indigenous groups from other countries should be able to make a case for repatriation based on similar claims. NAGPRA is not without limitations; the act does not afford protection to items or human remains recovered on private lands or housed in private collections prior to 1990. Even in situations where repatriation is a given, actual repossession of artifacts can take years; the process is even longer when ownership or origins are disputed. As evidenced by the treatment and handling of the repatriation of *mokomokai*, rights to *moko* as indigenous intellectual property have yet to achieve universal recognition. However, by involving agencies like UNESCO and the WIPO, the Māori have made progress toward obtaining these rights.

Starting in 1992, the Te Papa Tongarewa, New Zealand's National Museum in Wellington, began requesting that all Māori remains be returned to the country for proper burial. While the contemporary museum community generally frowns upon the
possession of human remains, some groups have argued that the inability to identify
mokomokai as belonging to a particular iwi is reason enough to block repatriation.
Others, like the French Cultural Ministry, contend that allowing repatriation and reburial
of the heads is tantamount to eliminating records of historical importance to those who
now possess them (New Zealand Herald 2007). Over two dozen institutions have
complied with the request, although several American museums still have Māori bones
and heads in their collections, including the American Museum of Natural History, which
has more than thirty mokomokai. The Smithsonian in Washington and the Field Museum
of Chicago were among the many US institutions which willingly returned the heads at
the request of the Te Papa Tongarewa.

In situations like these, it is important that evaluations are in line with current
scientific values as opposed to antiquated world views of previous generations. They
also should reflect modern interpretations of laws as applicable to human remains as
opposed to those concerning cultural artifacts, intellectual property, or works of art. If
there is something to be gleaned from mokomokai as preserved and historical artifacts,
this should not overshadow objections from modern decent groups regarding how, or
even if, the heads are displayed. From an anthropological perspective, perhaps an
intermediary approach is to preserve heads that were lawfully obtained, treating them
with respect and dignity as dictated by the descendants to avoid consigning them to the
confines of morbid curiosity. Similar to the current approach embraced by New Zealand
through Te Papa Tongarewa, a more sensitive alternative would ensure that the heads are
entrusted to an association of cultural groups to oversee their care; the heads would be
properly documented, but appeasing curiosity seekers with casual museum displays would be prohibited.

In this thesis I have argued that *moko* has a significant place in Māori society, not only as part of a continuing tradition, but as a vibrant method for navigating the unique social and political environment of New Zealand and maintaining and asserting social, individual, and collective identity. I have also argued that the appeal and use of *moko* by non-Māori such as the Modern Primitives is part of a developing trend toward globalism; and it is because of globalism that the topic of authenticity is unavoidable. Only an acknowledgment of the historical specificity and unique positioning of *moko* will allow for nuanced understanding of this traditional form of expression. Suggesting possible solutions that guard the traditional uses of *moko* while allowing for non-commercialized and non-traditional explorations of both its artistic and social potential will hopefully resonate with other situations elsewhere.

Traditional cultural expressions like *moko* have experienced changes due to both internal and external fluctuations in the Māori society. Simultaneous shifts in the practice of *moko* coinciding with changes to the Māori social structure suggest a crucial link between the art and identity formation. If traditional cultural practices are strengthened by their ability to change with the society, then the resurgence of *moko* is not in fact a reinterpretation of status or gender hierarchies within Māori society itself, but a reflection of modern collective identity. Further, this identity is dependent on the continuing notion of a bicultural system for New Zealand which governs the sometimes-tense coexistence of Māori and non-Māori/Pākeha identities. Modern *moko* is informed by the opposition:
of the Māori, who act as receptacles of *mana* and *tapu* through the transmission of culturally significant practices such as *moko*, and the Other (e.g., Pākeha) who, lacking the appropriate genealogical connections, are limited in the ways that *mana* and *tapu* apply to them. Focusing on the resurgence of *moko* within distinctive subcultures and the underlying changes undergone by the Māori social structure during the past half century helps elucidate this connection.

Beyond the scope of this research, examining the feelings and motivations behind Māori attitudes regarding the appropriation of *moko* by non-Māori may also help clarify some of the nuances of *mana* as it is applied to those outside the Māori community. Modern Primitives and Māori utilize moko to make identity claims which support the creation of distinctive and separate collective identities. Māori, however, do not depend on *moko* to “authenticate” their claims; instead, it is one of a number of tools they use to project solidarity and difference. Modern Primitives, on the other hand, depend on traditional modifications like *moko* to forge a link between themselves and an imagined historic past. Alliances achieved through activism and education may eventually replace the need to make specific claims to *moko*; however, it is unclear if these changes will impact the appropriation taking place at a mainstream level. In these cases, legal intervention may still prove to be the most effective response.
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