

Ngōku whakaaro – hei maumaharatanga

Maori women facial adornment: A mark of remembrance

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Abstract

To honour the life and memory of the late Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu, and the elevation of her son King Tuheitia, a group of women from Tainui iwi undertook the process of taking moko kauae - of colouring their chins with traditional patterns. The adornment process took place at Turangawaewae marae with family, friends, elders, and grandchildren. In this presentation we will talk about the journey of these women to prepare themselves for their transformations, the process they went through, and their lives since. We will also consider how their decision also meant exposure to outside opinion, the associated risks of objectification, “image-snatching”, and cultural and intellectual property issues.

Moko Kauae - A brief history

Moko - the practice that involves the chiselling of human skin and the insertion of pigment is related to *tatau*, the Pacific tradition of puncturing and colouring the flesh. From this technique, *tatau*, comes the English word “tattoo” and its Western practice (Gell, 1993).

Traditionally, men were tattooed from the waist to the knees; occasionally on the shoulders, neck and throat, and most emphatically across the entire face (N Te Awekotuku, 2002). For women, their kauae (chin), abdomen, thighs, calves and back were coloured. Unlike other Pacific tattooing cultures, the Maori tradition had one unique feature: the engraved face, in which the skin was cicatrised and coloured, chiselled into a boldly textured relief (Ngahuaia Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, & Karapu, 2007). The early 19th century saw the disruption of the Maori world by christian missionaries, and later, by vast numbers of settlers greedy for their slice of paradise. They perceived the art of moko as ungodly, barbarous, pagan and demonic, and its demise was eagerly encouraged (Nicholas, 1994).

By the 1860's the art itself was in a decline. Few *tohunga ta moko* (highly trained practitioners) remained and tended to work only in regions of active anti-settler resistance (King & Friedlander, 1972). Micheal King's work in the late 1960's records this decline. Interviewing elderly Maori women with moko kauae, thought to be the last from the traditional 'old world', he established that most had acquired their work in the 50 year period between 1890's – 1940's. From King's work, it would appear that the primary reason for the

decline in Maori women taking moko kauae had more to do with the unavailability of moko practitioners, rather than a lack of desire. Indeed, this desire to continue the practice saw a number of Maori women in the 1970's turn to Pakeha mainstream practitioners to adorn their faces (Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, & Karapu, 2007).

Despite christian condemnation, settler distaste, urbanisation and western world influences, the Maori women's practice of taking moko kauae has endured. As we have written elsewhere (Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Nikora, Rua, & Karapu, 2007). Maori conventions of vanity have prevailed. Moko kauae is less a matter of heathen practice, and much more a matter of personal pride, and enhancing one's physical appeal. It was not a "heathenish badge"; it was simply about beauty, a way of exciting admiration, and envy, and attracting favourable attention as marriageable young women. The badge motif is reiterated by Cowan, shifting in symbolic meaning from heathenish to patriotic. He described his encounter with Hiki, a woman in her prime. She responded to his inquiries about her moko,

I like it because it is a tohu (badge) of New Zealand. Besides, friend, did not your European ladies have holes pierced in their ears for ear-rings, and don't they squeeze their waists in small, to try and look pretty. Well, that is a mark of the pakeha. My kauae is the ornament of the Maori (Cowan, 1910, p190).

And of Maori women in this contemporary world? The work of Te Awekotuku et al (2007) records present day sentiments. For contemporary Maori women, taking moko kauae is about paying

homage to the old world by claiming, cherishing and continuing an ancient custom. It is about inscribing memories into the skin of loved ones, of events, of joy and sadness. And it is about celebrating being Maori and thriving in today's world.

Since the 1980's Moko has gone from a place of obscurity to a place of pride and strength amongst Maori across all generations and communities. While the number of Maori men committing to pukanohi is still relatively low, the number of Maori women adopting the female equivalent has exploded.

In this presentation we will consider the journey of a group of Tainui women who recently adorned their faces to mark the passing of Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu and the ascendancy of her son King Tuheitia. In particular, we will consider the making of a book and the compilation of images and stories by these women and the arising intellectual and cultural property concerns.

Passing of Te Arikinui and the coronation of her son King Tuheitia

Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu succeeded her father, Koroki, on 23 May 1966. She reigned for over 40 years as the leader of the Maori King Movement, Te Kingitanga. She was much loved and touched the hearts of many in her own tribal community, in the Maori world and New Zealand generally. Te Arikinui herself was enthusiastic about moko. In the 1970's, she hosted a reception for kuia mau moko in Mahinaarangi House, Turangawaewae. These venerable

elderly women were revered for their age, experience and more importantly, their connection with a previous time. They had lived with earlier generations and the trials they endured. They were our connection with the past. Three decades later, after these kuia had passed on, Te Arikinui mentioned how an aunt, over 80 years of age, had asked her blessing to take moko kauae. Te Arikinui was thrilled to be asked, yet, at the same time, frustrated because she knew of no practitioners to whom she could refer her aunt to have the work done.

On 15 August 2006 came the sad news that Te Arikinui had passed away. Six days later her eldest son, Te Arikinui Tuheitia Paki, was confirmed as her successor.

It was not uncommon for women to take moko kauae to remember events or to commemorate the lives of others. Ngakahikatea Whirihana was one such person. Author Micheal King met her in 1968. At that time, she was well over 100 years old.

Ngakahikatea received her moko kauae in the 1890's at the request of King Mahuta after Mahuta's daughter had died in her arms. The King wanted Nga to commemorate her passing by taking the moko. ...Nga agreed (King & Friedlander, 1972, unpagged).

These days, people take moko for a wide range of reasons: to mark events in their lives (birthdays, going overseas, leaving home, having children); to celebrate achievements (leaving school, graduating university, winning a place in a sports team); to commit to certain pathways (to being drug free; to upholding Maori life ways); or to

simply celebrate the art form as Maori art on Maori skin. Like Ngakahikatea, for this generation, the passing of a loved one is also reason to take moko.

Ngoku Whakaaro

Our book, “Ngōku whakaaro – hei maumaharatanga” (White & Nikora, 2008 in press) is a personal expression of love and deep affection remembering Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu and honouring Kingi Tuheitia as her successor and the new King. The publication was compiled as a record of twenty Waikato women who decided to take moko kauae to honour and celebrate these two historical events. Their stories are told in their own voices. They are a humble and genuine reflection of their lives and dedication to the Kingitanga, the King Movement. This book also includes the artists whose talent made the journey possible.

The Journey

The book is the end product of a journey. So, let us start at the beginning.

Ngoku whakaaro – my thoughts. ‘Wouldn’t it be nice to do something special and meaningful for Te Ata’, observed one kuia over coffee with

friends one day. Taking kauae. Something personal. Something small. Something remarkable. And so an idea was expressed, circulated and explored in whanau, with groups of kuia ruruhi, (elderly women) and kaumatua (elderly men) then in whispers around the edges of various tribal gatherings and events. The momentum picked up when other kuia rūruhi quietly stated, 'We want to do this too, for the new King, we've been talking about it'.

This was indeed a perfect place to be in, there was a strong desire for having moko kauae, for worthy reasons and it had the sanction of kaumātua, it now required the blessing of the King. This occurred in an informal conversation with King Tuheitia at the time of the historical opening of 'Manunui a Ruakapanga', ta grand carved house at Pukawa, on the shores of Lake Taupo.

Having circulated an idea, having spoken with interested kuia, having received support and blessing from people who mattered, the next step was to call a series of meetings with kuia and other women interested in taking moko to further explore the idea, the issues, the process, the artists, the designs, and the risks. This was a new and unexplored territory.

Nga Miro - the Turangawaewae Maori health centre was the setting for the first hui. About 10 women aged between their late 50's to 70 years old gathered with growing excitement to listen to the experiences of Te Rita Papesch, a woman in her 50's whose body is richly adorned including her chin and forehead. Did it hurt? How long

did it take? How should we prepare? Who should I seek permission from? What was the environment like when you had yours done? Did others watch? Did they take pictures? Did they have karakia? Did they sing? And what happened after? How long did it take to heal? What creams should I use? What did your family think? What about the general public? Do people stare at you? What if they want to take your picture? The questions were endless, yet Te Rita kindly, generously answered in informative and gentle ways reassuring the woman yet emphatically leaving them with the space to explore and choose the pathway that felt right for them. And, there was also the chance to play and explore with makeup paint – just to see and feel what it was like.

Three artists were chosen. Remarkably one of the artists, Haki Williams is from Tūwharetoa and contributed to the house, Manunui a Ruakapanga where the earlier conversation with King Tuheitia took place. Manunui a Ruakapanga also connects to Te Aitanga a Hauiti of Uawa whose tupuna is also Ruakapanga, and whose principal whare whakairo carries the same name. Mark Kōpua is from there, and Rikirangi Manuel, the third practitioner also hails from Te Tairāwhiti. For these artists and their communities, being able to work with these kuia ruruhi was one way that they too could connect with the kaupapa of the Kingitanga and with the new King Tuheitia.

To open the way for the project, one woman volunteered to be the “manu taiko”, the first recipient. Already a serious wearer of ink, she wanted to demonstrate the process for the group, some of whom

attended. Her experience was long, painful, and hard to watch because she had difficult (as in ageing, fragile) skin. Viewed by some as a worst case scenario, this still did not put anyone off; they remained determined!

On the 9th and 10th June 2007, at Turangawaewae Marae, in the house 'Pare Waikato', 16 women took their moko kauae. This was a moving event which was supported, shared and celebrated in song by whānau, other wahine mau kauae, and a strong contingent from Te Aitanga a Hauiti and Tuwharetoa. And through the weekend between songs, jokes, tears, food and memories, the women were asked to write their own stories in their own words, about themselves, their families, and their thoughts about moko.

Following this memorable event, the women would come together to compare their experiences with their 'new' faces. They swapped stories about how their lips and chins had healed, how their swelling had abated, how their families had reacted and adjusted, and later, how their local communities and the public generally had responded to them. Few had any negative experiences, and if they did, these women were not about to let these incidents over shadow what for them had been, and continues to be an overwhelmingly positive experience. One of the artists played an important role following the initial procedure. He contacted each woman he had worked with, and others too, to consider her healing process and whether any further work needed to be done to improve her kauae.

Since their initial procedure a number of women have had 'touch-ups' with Haki, to improve colour, or to straighten or strengthen lines.

And they also came together to work on the book Ngoku Whakaaro. Each woman had her portrait taken to illustrate the stories that would appear in the book. They also organised a group photo with King Tuheitia. A Pakeha photographer, Becky Nunes was engaged to work with the women in this regard. When we return to Aotearoa/New Zealand, the book 'Ngoku Whakaaro' will have been printed ready for distribution. The process of pulling this book together has been remarkably smooth reflecting the enthusiasm that everyone has had for this project and to overcome challenges along the way. We turn now to look at some of these, specifically those to do with the ownership of intellectual and cultural property.

Issues to consider

Ownership of the idea

After the passing of Te Arikinui, many people were thinking about how to commemorate her life. Since 2006, there have been many commemorative initiatives. They include a rose garden, and education scholarships. Marking her passing and connecting with her son Tuheitia through moko was being discussed by a number of groups that just so happened to converge their interests in the Turangawaewae event. Who then owns the idea?

The designs

Some women designed their own kauae, some took that of their ancestors, and others left that decision over to the artist. There are a number of issues here.

The first is taking the design from an ancestor. What rights do descendents have over the design work of their ancestors? Do they have the right to take? Who do they ask for permission? Who has the right to give or refuse consent? How is this source of inspiration acknowledged and should it be?

The second issue concerns the designs created by and technical roles played by the artists. Does the artist have a right to say 'that's my design'? Does that artist have a right to set limitations on photography, and whether or not the wearer can appear in books or on film? To what extent should the artist be acknowledged, particularly if he or she has already been paid a considerable fee or commission? What are the expectations of what wearers do or don't do?

Photography

The media recording and publicity surrounding the passing of Te Arikinui and the coronation of King Tuheitia was massive. It was an event of interest to the Maori world, and to national and international viewers. There were television crews and reporters present from all over the world. While attempts were made to restrict filming and

photography, a search on 'youtube' and 'google images' will reveal that these efforts were somewhat futile. In these times of digital cameras and mobile telephone photography, an image taken in New Zealand can be sent around the world in seconds.

In contrast, the Turangawaewae weekend was a relatively small and private affair. There was one television film crew who asked to film and interview participants, and the local Maori radio station reporters also visited. And participants graciously obliged. Outside of these expressions of interest, the event was relatively free of pressure from the media. However, the same could not be said of 'insider' interest, from whanau, practitioner interest groups, and from iwi that came to support.

Through out the Turangawaewae weekend, hundreds of photographs were taken. One person was designated the official photographer, and people were asked not to take photographs without the permission of the Turangawaewae Marae Trustees, the legal entity responsible for the marae and its facilities. However, if you give one person with a camera unlimited access, inevitably, others will quickly find reason with good justification to take photos: 'oh, this is my grandmother and I'm taking photos for the family', or 'mum's sister is in Australia and she wants to see what's going on'. My estimate is that thousands of photographs were taken over the course of the weekend.

One of the reasons why the Turangawaewae Marae Trustees restrict the taking of photographs is to protect images of the marae environment being used for commercial purposes. Copyright of images taken by the official photographer belong to the

Turangawaewae Marae Trustees. So too are those images taken by Becky Nunes. The copyright of the Ngoku Whakaro book belongs to the Turangawaewae Marae Trustees and they themselves are the publishers. Although these measures are in place, it does not mean that copyright breaches will not happen in the future. The questions that remain to be answered are:

What level of breach should be prosecuted?

Can the Trustees afford to prosecute?

What role can the World Intellectual Property Organisation play to support entities and concerns like this?

Community and cultural capital

Because the copyright of images and of the book are vested in the Turangawaewae Marae Trustees, and because these women support and participate in the activities of the marae, to a certain extent, they can be conceived of as part of the community's *cultural capital* – the cultural resources and experience available to a community to capitalise on opportunities and to deliver on responsibilities. This might include the number of fluent Maori speakers in a community, the presence of carvers, weavers, ritualists, orators, bards, as well as cultural symbols such as carved houses and canoes. These comprise an important part of a cultural community. The community belongs to these women as much as they belong to the community. They were already active in marae rituals and played important roles. Becoming

wahine mau moko enhanced their existing roles adding colour and depth and encouraged their continued contribution and their personal pursuit of wisdom and experience.

Turangawaewae is a national marae. It is the official residence of King Tuheitia. It is the 'foot stool' of the Kingitanga movement. It is frequently visited by people from all over the world and often in the media. It now has a growing reputation for wahine mau moko. It's what people anticipate seeing when they are welcomed on to the marae. It elevates the status of the marae, of the occasion and of the community, and it begs further questions. What right does the community have to protect, regulate or control its cultural property? And what exactly is being owned?

Whanau property

When considered in the context of whanau, the notion of moko kauae as property that can be controlled and regulated is clear in the experience of some ruruhi involved in the 'Ngoku Whakaaro' journey. Here are two examples: very early in discussions, one ruruhi expressed a very keen interest to take moko. However, her son would not allow it. He, rightly or wrongly, felt that taking a moko would not enhance her present ritualistic role, one that required, in his mind, pure humility. Strong community responses indicated otherwise, however, the kuia conceded to her son. Another example is of two ruruhi whose daughters also believed the act of taking moko to be whakahihi – conceited or arrogant, or trying to reach beyond one's position. In

contrast with the first example, these ruruhi went on with the process, their respective daughters eventually acceding after witnessing their mothers' transformation in appearance and the community responses to them.

Families, partners, children – those close to us do have an impact on the decisions we make and how we conduct ourselves. They are a strong influence in the decisions we make. What we do as individuals reflect directly on our families and those other groups we are a part of. It is through our daily social negotiations and interactions with others that our behaviour is interpreted, moderated and controlled.

Here concludes our telling of the journey of Ngoku Whakaaro and the challenges faced by this group of women and the intellectual and cultural property they and their families and communities have given birth to. Ma te wahi ngaro e manaaki e arataki.

Pai marire.

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