

## Moko – A Research Project

**Ngahua Te Awekotuku, Mohi Rua, & Linda Waimarie Nikora**

*Centre for Maori and Pacific Development Research &  
Maori and Psychology Research Unit  
University of Waikato*

*During the symposium there were opportunities for participants to contribute where other scheduled contributors were unable. At the time of the symposium, the authors of this paper were about to launch their book "Mau Moko". They took the opportunity to talk to symposium participants about their experiences working on the project. This is a short summary of their paper.*

Moko colours the lives, and the skins, of all the people involved in the making of this book "Mau Moko", which began as the Marsden project, "Ta Moko – Culture, Body Modification, and the Psychology of Identity", 2001-2005. We proposed to study the origins, significance, technology and practice of Ta Moko from the pre-contact period to contemporary times, and to explore how this important art form has become a dynamic and positive assertion of being Maori in our changing world.

The research team included Professor Ngāhua Te Awekōtuku, Dr Linda Waimārie Nikora, Mohi Rua and Rolinda Karapu, and a significant number of community members, active practitioners, and emerging scholars. We were based in the Maori and Psychology Research Unit, at the University of Waikato, over a four year period. Once Penguin agreed to publish our work as a book, Becky Nunes brought in her formidable skills as a portrait photographer.

Community participation was an essential element in bringing it all together, and taking the stories, the tāonga, and the moteatea, library, and museum research back to the people. We presented on many different marae, attending and coordinating various wananga. Our research administrator emerged from one event with his own major work in progress!

One community offered unconditional support; the Aitanga ā Hauiti people of Ūawa, the guardians of the majestic house Ruakapanga, and heirs of the Te

Rāwheoro School of Learning. They nurtured us with their generosity and their wisdom.

We also did several sessions for tertiary and training providers, as we were committed to sharing the information, particularly the archival material, as we were compiling it. Team members spoke on moko at many conferences and symposia locally and overseas, at academic venues as diverse as Philadelphia, London, Rome, Harvard, Banff, Oxford, Sydney, Honolulu, Sintra, Cambridge and Puerto Rico.

The research project was in two sections. One section looked at the history and technology of moko, examining early historical records and some manuscript materials, particularly Te Rangikāheke, Mākereti, and the closed notebooks of the late Dr Michael King. Michael was an enthusiastic supporter of the study, and gave Te Awekōtuku access to his private moko files. We will always be grateful for that privilege; e te tungāne, moe mai.

Mōteatea, waiata and haka either published or currently performed were also closely examined for ta moko references. We found over fifty examples; some revealed salient information.

We visited many institutions in Aotearoa and overseas, strengthening established connections, reviewing material already investigated, and looking closely at their collections.

The second section of the project, face to face, in the community, was also underway. Initially, there was a mixed reaction, but most of the people we

*Extracted From:*

Levy, M., Nikora, L.W., Masters-Awatere, B., Rua, M.R., Waitoki, W. (2008). *Claiming Spaces: Proceedings of the 2007 National Maori and Pacific Psychologies Symposium, 23-24 November, Hamilton*. Hamilton: Maori and Psychology Research Unit.

approached were genuinely interested, even excited. We designed an interview schedule, underwent university ethical review, and trained interviewers on campus, and on the marae. We cast a wide net, through personal contacts, marae, family and iwi networks, media soundings, and the internet. We expected to interview about forty wearers, and eight artists. By the end of the project, thirteen artists, and ninety wearers had participated, with volunteers coming forward even when the book was in press. This was very humbling.

What amazes us is that in the project's beginning, we could name every living Maori with an adorned face;

or we could connect to them. Now, that is impossible, there are so many.

For the team, this book, *Mau Moko : the World of Maori Tattoo* reflects the pepeha,  
*E hara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari taku toa, takitini e.*

It is a triumph for all of us, a collective success; and one for which we acknowledge the assistance and generosity of the Marsden Fund.

Kia ora koutou katoa.

### Further reading

- Nikora, L. W. (2006). Maori and psychology: Indigenous psychology in New Zealand. In A. Weatherall, M. Wilson, D. Harper & J. McDowall (Eds.), *Psychology in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Auckland: Pearson.
- Nikora, L. W., & Te Awekotuku, N. (2003). Cultural tattoos: meanings, descriptor and attributions. In L. W. Nikora, M. Levy, B. Masters, M. Waitoki, N. Te Awekotuku & R. J. M. Etheredge (Eds.), *Proceedings of the National Maori Psychology Graduates' Symposium Making a Difference* (pp. 129-132). University of Waikato, Hamilton 29th & 30th November 2002.
- Nikora, L. W., Rua, M. R., & Te Awekotuku, N. (2007). Renewal and resistance: Moko in contemporary New Zealand. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, (17) 6, 477-489.
- Nikora, L. W., Te Awekotuku, N., & Rua, M. (2004). Wearing Moko - Maori facial marking in today's world. In N. Thomas, A. Cole & B. Douglas (Eds.), *Tatau/Tattoo - Bodies, art and exchange in the Pacific and Europe*. London, England: Reaktion.
- Rua, M. R. (2003). *Moko : Maori facial tattoos : the experiences of contemporary wearers*. Unpublished Thesis (M Soc Sci), University of Waikato.
- Te Awekotuku, N. (2002). More than skin deep: Ta Moko Today. In E. Barkan & R. Bush (Eds.), *Claiming the Stones/Naming the Bones: Cultural Property and the Negotiation of National and Ethnic Identity in the American and British Experience*. Los Angeles: Getty Press.
- Te Awekotuku, N. (2004). He Maimai Aroha: A Disgusting Traffic for Collectors: The Colonial Trade in Preserved Human Heads in Aotearoa, New Zealand. In A. Kiendl (Ed.), *Obsession, Compulsion, Collection: On Objects, Display Culture and Interpretation* (pp. 77-91). Banff, Alberta: The Banff Centre Press.
- Te Awekotuku, N., & Nikora, L. W. (2003). Ta Moko: Culture, Body Modification and the Psychology of Identity. In L. W. Nikora, M. Levy, B. Masters, M. Waitoki, N. Te Awekotuku & R. J. M. Etheredge (Eds.), *Proceedings of the National Maori Psychology Graduates' Symposium Making a Difference* (pp. 123-127). University of Waikato, Hamilton 29th & 30th November 2002.
- Te Awekotuku, N., Nikora, L. W., Rua, M. R., & Karapu, R. (2007). *Mau Moko : The World of Maori Tattoo*. Auckland / Honolulu: Penguin / Hawai'i University Press.

Extracted From:

Levy, M., Nikora, L.W., Masters-Awatere, B., Rua, M.R., Waitoki, W. (2008). *Claiming Spaces: Proceedings of the 2007 National Maori and Pacific Psychologies Symposium, 23-24 November, Hamilton*. Hamilton: Maori and Psychology Research Unit.