

THE COMMODIFICATION OF POLYNESIAN TATTOOING: CHANGE,
PERSISTENCE, AND REINVENTION OF A CULTURAL TRADITION.

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Rachel Robinson

Chairperson _____
Dr. Allan Hanson

Dr. Jane Gibson

Dr. Alan Redd

DATE DEFENDED: 11/29/2010

The thesis committee for Rachel Robinson

certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

THE COMMODIFICATION OF POLYNESIAN TATTOOING: CHANGE,
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Chairperson _____
Dr. Allan Hanson

DATE ACCEPTED: 12/08/2010

ABSTRACT

Micro-Polynesia is the cultural center of the art form of tattooing. Although there was a period of almost complete absence of this art (colonialism until the mid-1900s), this is being revived in the contemporary era. An exception to this decline is found in New Zealand where the practice of tattooing womens' chins maintained itself after the decline of the famous spiral, male *moko* facial tattoo. New features of tattooing, particularly in French Polynesia, incorporate designs and fresh placement upon the body not visible in this geographic area during the years of early contact. Today, one finds a melange of design and the new occurrence of facial tattooing in a region where this was absent in prehistory. Similarly, the revitalization of this dormant art form is linked to other forms of cultural renaissance, reflecting the way Polynesians are fighting to maintain their culture in the face of globalization.

French Polynesia has had a tumultuous political experience beginning in the 18th century when explorers first discovered the shores of Tahiti. While many former colonies of the world have experienced independence in the 20th century, French Polynesia remains an autonomous province of France. The native population resents this close association with France and new political movements have developed to counter French dependency and sovereignty in the region. Tourism has become the most important economic asset in the South Seas and the way to overcome economic dependence from France. Increased tourism has augmented indigenous markets and commodities sold as "authentic" souvenirs to visiting tourists. Tattooing has not only

revived itself to reflect a desire for cultural autonomy and political independence, but also as a way to increase revenue in the island: it has become commodified.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION, THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND RESEARCH FORMAT.	1
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL TATTOOING IN EAST AND OUTER POLYNESIA: SOCIETY ISLANDS, MARQUESAS ISLANDS, NEW ZEALAND, AND RAPANUI; SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND TATTOO TRENDS.	18
CHAPTER THREE: THE SHIFTING ECONOMIC AND ETHNIC LANDSCAPE OF FRENCH POLYNESIA: COLONIALISM, NEOCOLONIALISM AND CULTURAL RENAISSANCE (THE <i>MAOHI</i> MOVEMENT).	52
CHAPTER FOUR: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN FRENCH POLYNESIA: INVENTION OF TRADITION, AUTHENTICITY, TOURISM AND THE CULTURE INDUSTRY.	87
CHAPTER FIVE: MODERN TATTOO TRENDS AND CONCLUSION.	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY:	124
QUESTIONAIRES AND CHARTS:	131
TATTOO EQUIPMENT:	150
MAPS:	153
PHOTOS:	158

Chapter One

Introduction to Polynesia

1.1 Introduction

This thesis concerns the elaborate and ornate tradition of tattooing integral to Polynesian life for over a thousand years. Polynesia is the geographic region in the Pacific Ocean where the points of Hawai'i, Easter Island and New Zealand denote borders of the area. The amount of ocean covered by Polynesia is larger than the size of Europe, indicating the vast terrain of Polynesian research. There are hundreds of islands throughout Polynesia (Greek polys, many + nesos, island) and most groups practiced tattooing, albeit differently, in each separate island community (Oliver 1961:64). These islands became territories during the process of colonization, and are now independent (Western Samoa and New Zealand), autonomous regions (French Polynesia), territories (American Samoa) or states (Hawai'i). The Polynesian islands were one of the last areas to be settled around the world and its original inhabitants came from Asia (66). Given the close proximity and migration patterns of Polynesian populations; it is possible to see similarities and differences between island groups¹. Diffusion and a common cultural heritage are relevant issues for those interested in Polynesian studies and diffusion continues to be a frequent occurrence in Polynesian culture.

Factors for continual inter-island migration involved overpopulation, reduction in resources, defeat in war, and the common human attribute of curiosity. Polynesians were hearty seafarers, prodigious fishermen and successful farmers with neolithic tool technology composed of adzes, spears, and clubs although pottery production (present in

¹ For a more detailed description on settlement patterns relating to archaeology, see Irwin (1981) on the prevalence and distribution of Lapita pottery in Western Polynesia.

some places in the archaeological record) was not common (Oliver 1961:71). On some islands, atolls and/or sub-tropical locations, the environment was unsuitable to nurture plants and alternatives to survival became imperative. Diverse environments in Polynesia promoted the evolution of different political systems found in some parts of Polynesia (Sahlins 1958).

The Polynesian approach to subsistence was a collective endeavor, which required social organization of its people. Groups were predominantly based on consanguineality, and most individuals claimed ancestry from a common individual (Oliver 1961:71). The highest-ranking individual of a group was the chief (*ari'i*, *ariki*) who not only had a direct genealogical connection to its founder, but also to the Polynesian god affiliated with that founder. For this reason, chiefs were sacred and secular leaders over their districts, although there is some variation to this theme throughout the islands. Coupled with the stratification found in Polynesia were concepts of *mana* and *tabu* (also *tapu*, *kapu*), which reinforced cultural mores and fortified political systems. *Mana* was supernatural power endowed in both people and objects, which was highly contagious and could pass between things and individuals. Contagious *mana* was inherently dangerous, which helps explain the many *tapus* (taboos), restrictions, placed on individuals of different social status and occupations (ibid)². Although rank was something ascribed at birth through genealogical connections, there were also ways individuals could elevate their rank, making their social systems a bit more flexible than first appears. Skilled craftsman, warriors, artisans, as well as religious specialists and shamans held elevated status in these cultures (ibid).

² Hanson and Hanson 1983) provide a different analysis of *tapu* for New Zealand.

Because this thesis covers vast terrain, it is easier to designate groups as West Polynesian and East Polynesian. While differences between West and East Polynesia are important in understanding the way tattoos functioned at the social and political level, this thesis rarely addresses West Polynesia. Instead, it concentrates on a comparison of the art form in the Society Islands, French Polynesia from the pre-colonial to the contemporary era. While the central point of this paper is upon the significance of tattoo revival in French Polynesia, it is essential to understand other factors that operated within the social milieu of the islands. Tattooing was not a homogenous, ritualized procedure throughout Polynesia; meanings were different between archipelagos, as well as rituals, procedures and tool technologies harnessed³. To speak comparatively of tattooing, it is first necessary to understand historical island culture, different political systems in operation, and how the tattoo played a role within these communities. While there is discussion on the islands of Marquesas, New Zealand and Rapanui, the concentration of this analysis is on the Society Islands. It is important to discuss islands with little social stratification such as New Zealand, Rapanui and the Marquesas because these cultures were the only islands that practiced facial tattooing historically. This study compares traditional and contemporary tattooing in the Society Island archipelago, as witnessed during fieldwork over the summers of 2003 and 2004.

A caveat is necessary: although Polynesia as a geographic region has several similarities in myth and tradition, the islands are not culturally uniform. Political structure varied between island groups, especially in the outer islands, which were settled last. Rapanui and New Zealand evolved substantially differently from other parts of

³ These issues are addressed in the following chapter on East and Outer Polynesia.

Polynesia due to differing climates and topographies that required adaptable subsistence patterns.

In each settled area, a period of redefinition and reorientation occurred that produced unique linguistic and cultural variations. There are commonalities between languages in Polynesia, but there are also points of variance. Commonly, consonants vary among different languages (e.g., *hare*, *vare*, *fare*, *ware*- “house”). In some instances, a word is the same throughout languages (e.g., *moa*- “chicken”; *iti* “small”; *nui* “large”). Borrowing from outside Polynesian languages and within Polynesian languages is also common; (e.g., in Rapanui, “*ia orana*” is used to greet individuals- a Tahitian word; also in Rapanui, “*ciao*” is used to say goodbye- an Italian word).

Phonetic structure and the similarities found within Polynesian languages make it reasonable to refer to them as dialects, which are relatively comprehensible between different groups. Grace (1970) writes that linguists do not even know the exact number of languages spoken throughout Oceania, but that “...mutual intelligibility is perhaps tacitly thought to guarantee that there is no significant linguistic difference between the units being compared” among Polynesian groups (2, 5). Polynesian languages have a five-vowel system and a ranging, but limited number of consonants (10). While the morphology is uncomplicated, the construction of noun and verb phrases is complex. The stance Grace takes concerning Polynesian languages is that linguistic change is a product of “change responsive to a variety of selective factors stemming from the total environment...the natural, cultural, and social (including the social psychological) aspects” (16). Furthermore, language contact is an inherently important factor in language formation in the Pacific (19). The ability to acquire new dialects with ease aids

ethnically diverse migrants in a more fluid transition into modern, Tahitian life. Modern Tahiti is a potpourri of varying ethnic backgrounds, which include a variety of Polynesian islanders, westerners (predominantly French) and Asian entrepreneurs.

1.2 Modern Polynesian Tattooing

This thesis compares traditional tattooing in Eastern Polynesia with an analysis of contemporary tattooing in the Society Islands, French Polynesia. The intent is to shed light on the tradition in its many contexts through space and time. Tattoos, while pervasive throughout most of Polynesia, historically represent different rituals, political systems, subsistence patterns and in some cases, rites of passage- all of which are consequential to island identity⁴. Designs, placement upon the body and gender highlight differences between the various island groups in traditional tattooing.⁵

The majority of Polynesia converted to Christianity in the 19th century, losing the art of tattooing. East Polynesian islands lost the art more expeditiously than West Polynesia due to missionary-royalty alliances that not only converted, but also unified archipelagos⁶. In contemporary French Polynesia, the shift to modern, electrical equipment has elevated the art to new levels of achievement. Less painful, more precise and efficient technology has led to new types of tattoo recipients throughout the islands: the tourist.

This thesis shows that the art technologically transformed itself as well as the modern, social milieu and global market that packages and sells indigenous art. A

⁴ These issues are highlighted in Chapter two.

⁵ This paper does not address West Polynesia, however it is important to note that origin myths of tattooing in Samoa and Fiji are reciprocal myths, involving Siamese twins, who inverted the message of which gender should be tattooed. This produced male tattooing in Samoa and female tattooing in Fiji. See Gell (1993), Shankman (1972) and Milner (1969) for a detailed analysis of these myths.

⁶Unification occurred in the Society Island Group between British missionaries and the Pomare family and in Hawai'i with the Kamehameha dynasty and American missionaries.

permutation of meaning represents new politics of representation, consequential to modern island identity because traditional tattoos differentiated groups from one another and among socially stratified members of society (Oliver 1974:750). Identity continues to be relevant concerning the Polynesian tattoo. This paper highlights the fact that revalorization, reinvention, and reintroduction of the art form is driven by a strong sentiment of Pan-Polynesian brotherhood- a shared history resulting from years of colonialism and exploitation throughout the Pacific islands. Historically important differences that occurred in pre-modern, Polynesian tattoo iconography are largely absent, making this institution a modern example of cultural loss. This does not mean symbolism has been lost because current tattoo iconography represents revival, with heavy reliance upon the most documented examples of Pre-European tattooing for its reappearance. Cultural diffusion continues to occur resulting in modern, western, tribal features coupled with a Polynesian potpourri of design. The use of color, absent from traditional Polynesian tattooing (with the exception of the implementation of red in Maori female chin tattooing), is now gaining momentum although the innovation is acquired by tourists rather than native Polynesians and the tattoo gun has predominantly replaced traditional tattoo technology.

Presently, Polynesians acquire tattoos that are generally not unique to their island of descent. The overall design on the body is a *melange* between distinct island groups' traditional motifs, as well as new, modern creations. Most Polynesians are aware that designs diffuse between islands and most have a vague recollection of the significance of various traditional designs. A great deal of the early documentation on tattoos, taken by navigators and missionaries in the Pacific, causes some incoherence. Contemporary

tattoo artists realize the poignancy of symbols, but so do most art historians of the Pacific. Marquesan design, by far the most popular with the native informants I interviewed, was the most thoroughly documented design aside from Maori *moko*, making these designs the most prolific in the region⁷. Tourists do not realize, nor do they concern themselves, with the signification of symbols. They mainly covet something “authentic”: to receive a tattoo where the art form was first encountered by the Western world. The Tahitian word *tatau*, literally “to tap”, is the source of the English equivalent, tattoo.

1.3 Theoretical Approaches

Tourism in French Polynesia has been steadily growing over the last 40 years, an accomplishment attributed to the construction of F’a’a’a international airport in 1961. The creation of this airport coincided with French nuclear testing in the Tuamotu archipelago. Innumerable factors transpired to provide the appropriate setting for a successful tourist industry, which I address in Chapter Four. Today, Tahiti is the most frequently visited island in five archipelagos that make up French Polynesia. These groups—Gambiers, Societies, Marquesas, Australs and Tuamotus—consist of high volcanic islands and atolls. Mo’orea, with its close proximity to Tahiti, is the second most visited island among 118 landmasses in French Polynesia. I selected these two islands to discuss how indigenous art frequently becomes a commodity in a tourist setting.

There is unquestionably a market in tourist driven economies for a taste of “authentic” culture. This thesis hopes to resolve the ambiguity surrounding one such

⁷ For a detailed analysis of the Marquesan tattoo, see Von den Steinen (1925), Handy (1922) and Allen (1997).

cultural institution sold in a lucrative tourist setting. When tattooing loses its ritual and the traditional toolkit, incorporating new facets of technology as well as new motifs and recipients, does that make it less “authentic”? Have modern Polynesians invented a tradition? These are important issues raised in Chapter Four through an analysis of tourism, invention of tradition, authenticity and the culture industry. While the issue of authenticity is certainly raised by a number of tourism theorists (MacCannell 1989, Boorstin 1961 and Chambers 2000), another theoretical orientation concerning authenticity is found in literature on the invention of tradition (Handler and Linnekin 1984, Jolly 1992, Keesing 1989, Hanson 1989 and Turner 1997).

Tourism studies are growing in the fields of anthropology, geography and ecology (Chambers 2000:13). The literature offers new theories concerning economics, motivations of tourists and issues of authenticity in the market of indigenous culture, indigenous tourism, adventure tourism and ecotourism (ibid)⁸. French Polynesia avidly promotes these types of tourism, which have become an economic pillar in this part of the world, yet the promise of economic return for the native population is infrequent. While the tourist industry does provide jobs to the Polynesian population, the pay scale is frequently unsuitable to make a living in the expensive region; especially when land speculation has driven property value to astronomical levels. Often, work hours required from tourist positions are disruptive to family life, particularly when families share vehicles⁹.

⁸ For a more in-depth discussion regarding tourism and authenticity, see Chapter 4.

⁹ This information is from fieldnotes gathered in Pape’ete, Tahiti in the summer of 2003 and 2004. I stayed with a Polynesian family, most of who are employees in the tourist industry, who shared vital information with me concerning work hours and pay scales.

Tourism is inextricably linked to revitalization of dormant art forms and revitalization is bound to shifting political climates (Chambers 2000:93-118). French Polynesia has changed its government for the first time in 28 years with the loss of Gaston Flosse as premier in the election held in June, 2004¹⁰. French Polynesians criticized former premier Flosse for maintaining French hegemony in the region by promoting policies and officials who represent the best economic interests of France. The French Polynesian presidential seat has changed numerous times since Flosse lost the 2004 election. Oscar Temaru, a pro-independence candidate took office and was elected three times from 2004-2009. The current president, Gaston Tong Sang, is working closely with French president Nicolas Sarkozy to abolish the territorial assembly altogether claiming the volatile political situation makes it impossible to govern effectively. While the presidential seat in French Polynesia should follow a five year term of election, this has been contested through several no-confidence motions and this is also something Tong Sang is working to eradicate in the region to bring more stability to Tahitian politics.

French nuclear testing and tourism have drawn individuals- frequently families- to migrate to the Society Islands from other islands in French Polynesia for tourist-related, military and wage labor jobs. However, the region has a long history of pre-European inter-island raiding, warfare and migration. Tourism produces an influx of visitors to the region, while transmigration enables individuals to search for alternative work

¹⁰ This election has been tumultuous, at best. There was actually a reversal of this decision during October, 2004 and Flosse was renamed the premier. Since this time, a new vote occurred, which reinstalled Temaru to the presidency in March, 2005. Since 2004, Temaru has been re-elected three times and lost the seat to Gaston Tong Sang in November, 2009.

possibilities. The advantages of tourism have not always had incontestable effects on French Polynesian economics although it created a viable market for indigenous culture.

To discuss tattooing as a commodity in the tourist industry, it is imperative to start the analysis with a discussion on economics. This chapter explores social aspects of both commodities and agents and characteristics of capitalist economy. This section relies on the works of theorists in economic anthropology. Appadurai's work (1986) is invaluable, particularly his analysis on three phases of commodities- their "social lives". Douglas and Isherwood (1979) examine goods as more than material objects that satisfy basic needs; they are symbols that carry meaning and reflect prevailing ideological, economic and political processes. McCracken (1986) highlights how cultural meaning is located, transferred and targeted in aesthetic consumer goods to maintain the system of capitalism.

By first providing a detailed historical background (Chapters 2 and 3), a context builds for the argument that tattoos have *always* been negotiable for exchange; it is the exchange process as well as the recipients that have changed. Tattoos held intrinsic value to Polynesians in prehistory, which in turn required specialists (*tahu'e*) to perform the procedure, as well an intricate barter system of exchange. Historically, celebrated artists traveled to different Polynesian islands performing their craft. In most locations, artisans were paid handsomely for the procedure with pigs (the most desired food), *tapa* mats, and other forms of produce (Gell 1993:48 and Orbell 1963:32). Tattoo artists made a substantial living by performing this *tapu* procedure because spilling the blood or *mana* of a warrior, ultimately thought to be located in the head of individuals, was a precarious job (Barrow 1972:58; Cowan 1921:244 and Hanson & Hanson 1983:53, 60, 73). Ritual

was an important mechanism to maintain the balance between sacred and profane in Polynesian life.¹¹ Without these rituals, without this context, what does the tattoo represent for modern Polynesians? Why did the art form resurface in Polynesian culture after over a hundred years of dormancy?

This thesis asserts that new tribal features in modern, Polynesian tattoo iconography are creations of tourism, globalization, political assertion and diffusion. Innumerable current designs cater to tourists who demand bona fide culture in their explorations. While some tourists study designs and opt for more traditional motifs, the majority acquire symbols that relate to their travel *activities*, not the people and culture they encounter¹². Through interviews, my informants unanimously told me that the turtle and the ray are the most popular designs tourists receive; these are not traditional designs in any Polynesian tattoo book with the exception of Marquesan designs, which used animal iconography.

1.4 Research Format

The research format for this thesis is predominantly literature review. The author compiled books and articles on Polynesian society (both historical and contemporary accounts) and literature guiding studies in economic anthropology, authenticity, tourism, and invention of tradition. The focus is on the revival of tattooing, specifically in the Society Island group and it is therefore important to understand the historical context of tattooing in this region. Because of the dualistic nature of traditional Polynesian societies, a great deal of the literature relies upon the paradigm of structuralism.

¹¹ See section 2.3 for a discussion of the sacred/profane dichotomy in ancient Polynesian culture.

¹² This information was gathered from interviews of tattoo artists on the island of Mo'orea, summer of 2004.

In addition to a comprehensive literature review, I conducted fieldwork for a period of four months in Oahu, Hawai'i, Rapanui (Easter Island), Tahiti and Mo'orea. Two months were spent on Tahiti and Mo'orea, where the majority of this analysis transpired. Prior to fieldwork, I researched all the tattoo parlors I could find on these four islands and while there were too many on Oahu and Tahiti to interview all the artists, I was able to interview all artists on Rapanui and Mo'orea. On Oahu and Tahiti, I interviewed three artists as representative informants and tried to include at least one foreign artist, one native artist and one traditional (via the tapping method) artist. I cumulatively interviewed fifteen tattoo artists. On Mo'orea, I interviewed seven tattoo artists, thirty-five natives who work in the tourist industry and fifty tourists while visually documenting various tattoos individuals obtained. I accomplished this by spending days at tattoo parlors, talking with tourists as they approached and inquired about tattoos and even practiced participant observation conducting two interviews while I got tattooed. I had specific questions I asked each particular group, which are included at the end of the thesis.

All the tattoo artists I interviewed were men between the ages of 24-46. This has some reflection that this is still a primarily male gender role in the islands and it shows a limitation as there were no women available to interview and most of the informants were of a younger generation. Of the fifty tourists I interviewed, there were 33 men and 17 women between the ages of 22-58. Thirty-two individuals were in their 20s, fifteen were in their 30s and three were above the age of 40. Again, this reflects that there is a certain age group interested in tattooing although it does seem to span into older generations as well and that men were more inclined to get tattoos than women. I say this cautiously

though, as of course there were limitations to my research. Not all the tourists I approached engaged in the interview process and I was only able to use information from willing participants solely. The natives who worked in the tourist industry were mostly of the same age group as well and ranged in age from 19-42. Among this group of informants, there were 19 men and 16 women that participated: this was the closest group to a 50/50 ratio and reflects that both men and women actively participated in tourist related work fairly equally.

I had both tourists and tourist workers fill out a short questionnaire to collect data on the range and type of people who came to get tattoos and the tattoos they received. This research format consisted of opportunistic sampling among tourists because not everyone I approached participated. Although I did try to ask open-ended questions, I am afraid that the questionnaire aspect may have hampered my results as they provided multiple choice answers to choose from. However, all questionnaires collected were supplemental to interviews so there was more than one avenue of data collection. Among the 50 tourist questionnaires I did collect, I was able to gain insight into types of tattoos that were popular to tourists and the reasons they acquired them. The questionnaires I collected for the tourist workers were a bit more problematic because they raised some very important questions relative to identity formation, and again they were skewed in that they only offered options to choose from. I had to carefully go back through my interview material and notes to either corroborate or refute that data.

There were, of course, limitations to my research. I spent two summers on Mo'orea; the first summer was guided much more at observation while the second summer was more focused on data collection. During my first summer, I met my most

useful informant, Kae, and he was able to introduce me to other tourist workers in the industry as well as a number of the tattoo artists I came to interview the following year. The nature of my research (ie., the invention of tradition) can and is a hot topic to discuss with the locals and could easily cause offense so I had to tread lightly and be very careful as to the questions I raised. For example, I could not simply come out and say that they are practicing tattooing that was not a part of their traditional past without possibly offending and therefore losing my established rapport with these individuals. On a different note, it is also important to discuss my situated position in the research process. I am a highly tattooed individual and as such there is the possibility that this was an aid to collecting data on this kind of material. It is possible that having some shared interest with these individuals allowed for easier access to informants and more open and frank discussion. On the same note, my knowledge of tattooing could be interpreted by some as having a skewed outlook on the data although I did try very hard to leave my thoughts out of the subject matter.

Pictures provide the reader a visual aid of tattooing and show how the art has transformed and/or remained the same over time (see appendix for visual reference). During fieldwork, I witnessed how the tattooing process functions as a commodity in the tourist setting. Commodification of tattooing is a new phenomenon that operates within a different economic system compared to traditional, immediate, reciprocal exchange. Because tattooing disappeared in the majority of Polynesian islands after colonialism, scholars rely predominantly on the work of early explorers and missionaries to analyze tattoos. Two island groups did retain the practice of tattooing: Samoa and New Zealand, although New Zealand transformed its' process from *moko* to new

innovations involving female chin tattooing. Unfortunately, a large part of this knowledge seems to be written from a rather skewed perspective that requires deconstruction. This paper relies upon the work of Polynesian specialists (Allen, Robley, Shore, Oliver, Hanson, Stevenson, Sahlins, Gell, Danielsson, Newbury, Lockwood, Dodd, Handy, and Kaeppler) for its analysis.

Chapter Two analyzes historical tattooing in East and Outer Polynesia including French Polynesia, New Zealand, and Rapanui (Easter Island). There are tattoo creation myths in most regions, examined as they pertain to their specific cultural manifestations. This chapter looks at the social dynamics and functions of tattoos among these cultures by reviewing procedure and ritual- some did not have accompanying ritual- within their particular cultures. In some islands, creativity occurred from European contact (e.g., the Society Islands and Hawai'i) and designs began to take the form of European introduced items such as clothing and livestock (Gell 1993 and Stevenson: 1988). Islands of Outer Polynesia (New Zealand and Rapanui) were settled later in subtropical environments where traditional Polynesian plant staples were not prolific, making alternatives to survival imperative. Outer Polynesian islands were less unified and more warrior-like due to competition for resources. Interestingly, in these areas, facial tattooing was abundant, whereas the practice was virtually unknown throughout the rest of Polynesia (Gell 1993 and Blackburn 1999).

Chapter Three analyzes the changing ethnic landscape of French Polynesia beginning in 1767 with the first European explorers. Before addressing these transformations, a brief analysis is given on descent patterns and social stratification before the arrival of Europeans. French colonialism was one way the ethnic composition

reshaped itself, yet other factors such as French nuclear testing, modern transportation and increased tourism altered the region dramatically. This section discusses the *Maohi* movement, in response to increased foreigner presence in the islands, and makes reference to other Polynesian revitalization movements occurring simultaneously. These issues relate to island identity, and how many Polynesians increasingly regard themselves as “Polynesian” and not definitively with island of descent. While many migrant workers continue to follow customs of their homeland and retain their traditional languages, others opt for assimilation to lingua francas (French or Tahitian) and share in a Pan-Polynesian concept of self. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the whole of East Polynesia. For the sake of brevity, this chapter discusses solely the islands of the Society Island group, yet addresses the history of migration throughout French Polynesia, specifically as it pertains to French hegemony and neocolonialism.

Chapter Four examines tattooing as marketed in the tourist industry along with other cultural institutions being revived in the contemporary era. This chapter discusses modern tattoo trends as new traditions by analyzing new modes of exchange, identity formation through consumption, and how objects become commodities in developed market economy. There is a profound amount of diffusion occurring not only between Polynesian islands, but also with western culture, as new tribal features are visible in tattoo shops and on individuals. This chapter analyzes issues of authenticity and invention of tradition in relation to indigenous art and the tourist industry. Following this line of thought, a focus on commodity exchange is essential, highlighting the way objects carry social meaning and represent social relationships between individuals.

Chapter Five concludes with the idea that modern French Polynesian tattooing is a noticeable example and vivid display of cultural invention. The summary discusses how the traditional past now represents the present in altered forms of art that adapt to new economic, social, and political circumstances. This chapter analyzes the recent arrival of facial tattooing in a region where this practice did not occur in the pre-colonial period. Facial tattooing is a vehicle for identity formation that coincides with the current revitalization throughout Polynesia, which allows for the construction of a Pan-Polynesian identity. Shared experience in the region produces a shared ethnic identity in contrast to western colonizers and entrepreneurs who have exploited and economically dominated island groups. Furthermore, facial tattooing represents “authentic” culture in a tourist industry that caters to expectations of international tourists.

Chapter Two

Historical Polynesian Tattooing and Tattoo Myths

2.1 Polynesian Tattooing and its Background

Most scholars today believe the origins of traditional tattooing in micro-Polynesia descend from the Lapita culture of Melanesia, famous for its incised pottery (Blackburn 1999). There is a direct correlation between the incised motifs of Lapita pottery and the designs found in West Polynesian tattoo iconography, most notably in Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. The Society group had much less developed visual art than other island groups and relied heavily on performance art to maintain folklore, myths and traditions over time. Song, dance and oration were of infinite importance to traditional Tahitian culture (as they were throughout all of Polynesia), which had important ramifications during the period of missionary contact and Protestant conversion of the archipelago. As these cultures were oral traditions, the written and tangible evidence is scant, which contributes to the way islanders borrow from one another to presently revitalize tattooing.

2.2 French Polynesia: Society Island Tattoos

The earliest accounts of Tahitian society come from travelogues, diaries and memoirs of early European explorers such as Wallis, Cook, and Bougainville. Karen Stevenson (1988) wrote her dissertation from these works, and focused on the role of arts and adornment in traditional Tahitian society. Tahiti was traditionally highly stratified with chiefs, *ari'i*, situated at the apex. Chiefly descent was reckoned cognatically and preference was given to the first born child regardless of gender (Newbury 1988:59).¹³ The firstborn child inherited land titles and the rank associated with land titles upon the passing of its parent. The Society Islands were governed by lineages of chiefs who

¹³ Social stratification and descent patterns in traditional Society Islands are discussed in section 3.1.

occupied different districts. Island unification did not transpire until the reign of Pomare II and conversion to Christianity in 1815 (Stevenson 1988:223). The unification of the Society Islands under the Pomare-missionary alliance lineage shares similarities with the conquest of the Hawaiian Islands by the alliance of Kamehameha's dynasty and the Calvinist movement.

Social stratification was not based solely on a chief-peasant dichotomy for a wide range existed consisting of district confederation chiefs, lesser chiefs, warriors, priests, tattoo artists, entertainers (*arioi*), servants, and slaves. Social stratification was recognizable through an intricate system of adornment that differentiated classes (Stevenson 1988:66). Tattooing was an important mechanism that allowed Tahitians to distinguish who was sexually available (with women), old enough to wage war (with men), who held the elevated *arioi* status (both sexes), and who held elevated rank (both sexes) (Stevenson 1988:66 Blackburn 1999:111-113 Oliver 1974:433-434 and 614 Gell 1993:137-138 and 148-149). The traditional method used black ink prepared from a combination of candlenut smoke and water. Tattoo equipment was made from bone or shell, carved into three to twenty teeth depending on the design. Several different designs in traditional Tahitian tattoos marked an individual's social status and functioned as rites of passage.

Tattoo artists and priests were the only individuals allowed to practice tattooing in pre-modern Tahiti. These people would travel around and trade their valuable craft in exchange for hogs, cloth, and fruit (Stevenson 1988:71). In this way, the economic system involved in the process of tattooing was one in which barter was the norm and reciprocity the key to successful, peaceful exchange. However, because hogs were the

most precious food item and extremely valuable to Tahitians, it can be argued that tattoos were expensive and only the elite had access to the particular goods required for exchange (ibid). Oliver (1974) states that tattoo artists also performed supercision rituals invoking the deity Tohu at the shrines- *marae*- of two spirits who introduced tattooing to the islands- *Matamataarahu* and *Turaipo* (861).¹⁴ Supercision rituals were incisions of the foreskin practiced as an initiation ceremony in parts of Polynesia. Thus, tattooing had a religious as well as a social dimension to it because many reasons for the procedure concerned initiation rites and the public display of social demarcation. Tattoo operators who conducted procedures on individuals of lesser social status were generally apprentices, and this was noticeable by the varying levels of tattoo quality between the elite and commoners. Because tattooing was a very specialized craft, taking a lifetime to learn, the occupation was generally learned then passed between close male relatives (862).

Design and artistic flair were seminal features of social demarcation and restrictions existed between groups in regards to which patterns they could acquire. The *arioi*, or entertainers, distinguished themselves within their own intricate hierarchy by displaying particular motifs (Blackburn 1999:113 Gell 1993:146-150). There were eight different *arioi* groups and tattooing of these individuals was the only example of a ritualized, communal tattoo ceremony in the Society Islands¹⁵. *Arioi*, associated with the religious cult of ‘Oro, held elevated status within Tahitian culture, which included

¹⁴ See Society Islands myth of tattoo origins, 2.3.

¹⁵ There is one resource, Teilhet (1973), that states there were seven *arioi* groups. This is the only example I found with seven as opposed to eight, *arioi* divisions. With this in mind, it must be considered an anomaly.

numerous taboos, such as the prohibition to procreate and consequential widespread occurrence of infanticide.

Chiefly lineage, determined by nascence and the preference for primogeniture, contributed to both women and men having tattoos. Interestingly, among Polynesian cultures where genders were more egalitarian, tattooing occurred on both sexes. The traditional design of women was a complete marking of the hands and feet that gave the appearance of gloves and sandals. Men and women elite wore the traditional *taomaro* tattoo, a design of four to five arched lines, which began at the hip and ended at the small of the back (see page 158 right figure). Elite women were completely blackened under the last arch having their buttocks completely colored (Stevenson 1988:68) (see page 158 right figure). Other designs utilized during this time were stars, chevrons, Z's, and a circular mark on the inside of the each arm (ibid) (see photos, page 158, left figure).

European explorers noted that skin color was an important feature of social status, and that tattoo '...marks were originally intended to make the whiteness appear greater...' (Stevenson 1988:69). It is plausible that these observers placed western ideas concerning the pale appearance of skin unto Polynesian cultural institutions, but one thing is clear; the elite were definitely prone to less exposure to sunlight. The highest ranking individuals in the Society Islands, the *ari'i*, had paler skin because they did not engage in daily subsistence activities under the fiery Tahitian sun. However, social demarcation was not the only important aspect of Tahitian tattoos. Designs were linked to coming of age, associated with sexual maturation, the ability to withstand pain, and to promote sexual attraction (ibid). Beautification of the body was an essential reason Tahitians had tattoos, and scholars have argued that tattoos functioned in the South Seas

much as lingerie does in the western world (Scutt 1974:76). Tattoos were thus multifunctional; they separated classes from one another, were a rite of passage into adulthood, and an aid to beauty and sexual attraction.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the written evidence on Society Island tattoos is minimal, and there is no documentation that male tattooing was a group activity (besides among *arioi*) although it is clear female tattooing was individualized and occurred close to the home.¹⁷ It is imperative to understand the role of tattoos in early Tahitian society because their traditional function is no longer valid in modern Tahiti.

Tahitians became artistically innovative during the period of European contact. Bligh witnessed in 1777 that the horse had become a common tattoo found on the legs of Tahitian men. The horse was introduced to the island by Captain Cook in 1773 (Stevenson 1988:138). There were no animal designs found in pre-European Tahitian tattoos. Also during this time, women began to receive tattoos on their legs in ways that resembled European hosiery (Stevenson 1988:137 and Gell 1993:123) (see photos, page 158, bottom right figure). While the function of traditional designs remained the same (a measure of social status and attainment of adulthood), the new design became a symbolic association with Europeans. The horse tattoo symbolized friendships between Europeans and chiefs, which were economic assets to chiefs who could acquire newly introduced goods from the Europeans, therefore elevating their status. The ability to acquire new goods reinforced the prestige of chiefs. Before contact, Tahitians were mainly concerned with meeting immediate needs and contributing to a system of tribute. The introduction

¹⁶ See the following section for a discussion of *ra'a* and *noa*, relating to the tattoo myth in the Society islands.

¹⁷ Oliver (1974) said there was no evidence of collective tattooing in the Society Islands, which is a sharp contrast with West Polynesian tattooing (Samoa) where the ritual was a communal experience.

of European objects created a new source of tension in Tahitian society as it did in Hawaii (Sahlins 1981).

The most important aspect stemming from European contact is the fact that after the explorers came, so did the missionaries. In 1815, the Society Islands converted to Christianity (Stevenson 1988:223). Tattoos became heathen, associated with paganism and outlawed by the missionaries.¹⁸ The islands were unified by cumulative efforts between missionaries and Pomare II, and with the help of newly acquired muskets (Newbury 1988:65). Tahitian religion, an oral tradition, was lost in the process as Protestant churches replaced *marae*, the traditional ceremonial centers where Tahitian priests conducted rituals and sacrifices. *Marae* lands were infinitely important because they produced the fruits of tribute, which were then given to the god 'Oro. *Marae* lands were also associated with land titles and rank. Once a devout follower of 'Oro, Pomare II converted to Christianity and turned over many land titles to the missionary party. Pomare II's conversion inevitably commenced the breakdown of traditional Tahitian social structure. Missionaries designated converted high chiefs as patrons within churches and governance soon took the form of Christian morality (Newbury 1988:66). Although the Pomare dynasty had won the title of "king" of Tahiti, this became a ceremonial, empty title as real power resided among the missionaries. Tattoos virtually disappeared in the Society Islands until their reintroduction in the 1980s.

2.3 Society Islands: Tattoo Origins

The Society Island's myth of the origin of tattooing is an important feature to address for two reasons: it makes a valid connection with West Polynesian tattooing and

¹⁸ This is interesting because Samoan tattooing was never associated with paganism and therefore maintained the institution much better than other Polynesian cultures following the contact period.

it emphasizes the role of blood-letting rituals in Tahitian culture. Before these issues can be addressed, a brief discussion of this myth is necessary. Ellis (1831) tells us that:

The following is the native account of the origin of tatauing. Hina, the daughter of the god Taaroa, bore to her father a daughter, **Apouvaru**, and who also became the wife of Taaroa. Taaroa and Apouvaru looked steadfastly at each other, and Apouvaru, in consequence, afterwards brought forth her first born who was called **Matamataaru**. Again the husband and the wife looked at each other and she became the mother of a second son who was called **Tiitipo**. After a repetition of this visual intercourse, a daughter was born who was called **Hinaereemonoi**. As she grew up, in order to preserve her chastity, she was made *pahio*, or kept in a kind of enclosure and constantly attended by her mother. Intent on her seduction, the brothers invented tatauing, and marked each other with the figure called *taomaro*. Thus ornamented, they appeared before their sister who admired the figures, and, in order to be tattooed herself, eluding the care of her mother, broke the enclosure which had been erected for her preservation, was tattooed, and became also the victim of the designs of her brothers (262-263).¹⁹

An interesting linguistic feature is the word *taomaro*, the most common tattoo found on Tahitians during the contact period (see pictures, page 158, top right figure). *Tao* translates as ‘spear’ and *maro* as ‘girdle’; thus it appears that the *taomaro* design is actually a ‘girdle of spears’ (ibid). This is fascinating because in the Society Islands, emphasis was never placed on maintaining girls’ chastity, as was the case in Western Polynesia where hypergamous marriage alliances occurred²⁰. In the Society Islands,

¹⁹ The interesting point of this myth is the linking of incest to the institution of tattooing. This is comparable to Tonga and Samoan myths of Siamese twins who imported tattooing from Fiji. Gell (1993) connects these myths by analyzing the name ‘Apouvaru’- *apu* meaning shell and *varu* meaning eight. As Siamese twins are credited with bringing tattooing to West Polynesia, the analysis of Apouvaru, or eight-shell in the Societies, reflects eight appendages found on Siamese twins. This is the only incidence of Siamese twins in Tahitian mythology, yet the archaeological evidence provides several carved artifacts, which display Siamese twins in a back-to-back alignment. Gell suggests these figures represent an encompassing divine authority, which can watch over the people and enforce prohibitions (142-146).

²⁰ In Western Polynesia, great emphasis was placed on a woman’s virginity because it was a function of hypergamous marriage alliances and the way in which women enhanced their status by marrying up. As we have seen, this was not the case in the Society Islands, which placed precedence on the primogeniture Gell (1993).

sexual freedom was not only tolerated, but avidly promoted among adolescents, which makes this form of design significant. The emphasis in the Society Islands attributed to female seclusion was not related to a woman's chastity; rather it focused on her sacredness and close association with the gods.

Hanson (1982) discussed the idea of female seclusion as it relates to childbirth and menarche and his conclusion was that women, instead of being a vehicle of contamination, were actually conduits between sacred and profane realms. Women, in other words, were sacred in the natural sense, their birth canals a passageway between the divided worlds of *ra'a* (sacred) and *noa* (profane). The fact that Hinaereeremonoi engaged in an incestuous relationship with her brothers after receiving the *taomaro* tattoo implies that tattooing functioned as a seductive, aesthetic art. The aesthetic aspect of tattoos became something highly coveted and eventually this design came to represent coming of age for women as a vivid display of pubescence. This idea seems supported by memoirs of European explorers, who frequently remarked that Tahitian women lifted their garments to show their tattoos, symbolizing freedom to engage in sexual relations.²¹

2.4 French Polynesia: Marquesan Tattooing

With the exception of Maori *moko*, Marquesan tattooing was the most thoroughly documented form of tattoo throughout the Polynesian islands. There is a substantial reason for this: Marquesan tattooing was the most pervasive, covering the entire body including the face, although full body tattoos were exclusive to men. Complete tattooing (*pahu tiki* 'wrapping in images') was unique to this part of the world and over 174 named motifs, were documented by Von den Steinen in 1925 (Gell 1993:163) (see pictures,

²¹ See Stevenson (1988) for discussions of these early memoirs.

pages 161-164). Another unique attribute to this part of Polynesia was that the political system, which Gell calls a devolved system, was much more reminiscent of Melanesian and the American Northwest Coast cultures where big men held political power (165). It is imperative to discuss some traditional features of Marquesan life to understand the complex nature and function of the tattoo within this geographic region²².

There are six inhabited islands within this archipelago, which are divided into north-western and south-eastern groups as well as four uninhabited islands and numerous islets. While the surrounding ocean is somewhat similar to other South Pacific waters, the Marquesas are located along a cold equatorial front lacking reefs and flat, beach areas. The Marquesas are, topographically speaking, characterized by steep cliffs that descend into the ocean. There is much less cultivable land in this area and fishing is more perilous than on islands with coral reefs and sandy beaches. These islands experienced occasional droughts and famines. Food was harder to acquire in the Marquesas, which resulted in hoarding by chiefs (*haka'iki*) and a system of food bribery to obtain political support.²³ As in the Society Islands, chiefs ruled over certain districts and inheritance passed through the primogeniture as well. However, Gell claims that the Marquesan genealogical system was actually "*ex post facto*", serving as a "...cloak of legitimacy to chiefly power which had to be achieved and maintained by other means" (1993:166). While there was rivalry between chiefs in different districts of the Society Islands, chiefly conflict was more pronounced in the Marquesas where terror and bribery were the means in which chiefs acquired support.

²² Because of the vast amount of Marquesan iconography, I will refrain from addressing all these motifs. For a detailed analysis of Marquesan tattooing, see Von den Steinen (1925) Handy (1922) and Allen (1997).

²³ This took the form of an exclusive feasting club, where chiefs distributed precious food supplies to members, established through the unique, rectangular tattoo design placed upon the chest of members.

An important difference between the Marquesas and the Society Islands resides in the fact that the Society Islands were a mixed political system, which incorporated all classes into districts with access to land and food²⁴. In the Marquesas, the head of a family held land independently from the chief of his district, which is quite different from Society Island organization. Private land ownership made alliance formation more essential to Marquesan life than in other French Polynesian cultures. Alliance building, a common feature among cultures with big men, occurred through marriage, adoption, trade, and the unique phenomenon of “feasting clubs” (Gell 1993:166-167). Marquesan chiefs were denied special religious functions and did not act as intermediaries between men and gods as in other Polynesian cultures²⁵. Instead, Marquesans had religious specialists and shamans (predominantly women) to act as the voice of gods, and who were literally referred to as *etua*, ‘gods’ (168). Influence and power of female shamans sometimes countered the power of chiefs. Although there were certainly religious specialists in other areas of Polynesia, the point is that in the Marquesas the shamans were women whose power rivaled that of Marquesan chiefs²⁶.

Similar to the Society Islands, there existed a division of the world into sacred and profane components. The term for sacred in Marquesan (and Maori) was *tapu*, which meant a person under the influence of the gods (Gell 1993:173 and Hanson: 1982:344). *Tapu* was a condition that could change by outside forces and a great deal of ritual and

²⁴ See section 3.1 for a complete breakdown of traditional Society Islands organization.

²⁵ Throughout western and central Polynesia, the divine authority and right of chiefs came from the idea that there was a direct genealogical connection to the Polynesian pantheon of gods, this being quite similar throughout Polynesia. However, this was not exactly the same in different archipelagos (e.g., in Samoa there was a spiritual as well as a temporal chief; in the Society Islands the highest chiefs were those from the island of Raiatea.)

²⁶ The difference between religious specialists in the Marquesas Islands and other areas of Polynesia was the clear delineation between specialists (women) and chiefs (men) who had distinctly different roles. Chiefs in the Marquesas were much more focused on politics as opposed to religion, whereas in other areas of Polynesia (e.g, New Zealand) chiefs were simultaneously involved in politics and religion.

regulation assured that dangerous aspects of the *tapu* state were made *me'ie*, profane. People of high rank were considered *tapu*, as well as certain artisans that engaged in dangerous, sacred activities. Tattoo artists were thought to be in the *tapu* state throughout the procedure and were required to follow restrictions such as sexual abstinence (Marquesas and New Zealand) and being fed by others via funnels (New Zealand). Here again is the idea that sacredness has the characteristic of being contagious.²⁷ Interestingly, in the Marquesas the tattoo recipient was not considered *tapu* during the procedure, which is a distinct variation from other outer Polynesian islands.²⁸

It should not be surprising that in a culture where women could not only become chiefs (due to preference for the first-born child) but also where women were spiritual intermediaries for the gods, female tattooing was pervasive (see photos, pages 163-164). Marquesans had a series of rites of passage, similar to Tahitian *amo'a* rituals, that freed children from the *tapu* state, allowing them safe integration into society. In particular, the *ko'ina ha'ame'ie i'ima* ritual, or 'feast of making the hand clear' has striking parallels with a Tahitian *amo'a* ritual that enabled children to touch the food supply (Gell 1993:176). In the Marquesan example, the designated child would make *poipoi* for his *pahupahu* kin group (the child's closest and most important relatives, the mother's brother or father's sister), after which all would consume the *poipoi* (Gell 1993:177 and Allen 1992:10). This has implications for one particular form of female tattooing; only girls and women who had their hands tattooed were allowed to make *poipoi* (ibid). Some

²⁷ For an excellent discussion on contagion, especially as it relates to ideas of female pollution, see Hanson (1982).

²⁸ Among the Maori of New Zealand, both practitioner and receiver were perceived as in the *tapu* state until completion of the tattoo, or *moko*.

scholars claim that Marquesans had rituals which sought to contain *tapu* within the body (Gell 1993:190-191,197, 217 and Allen 1992:10-11) (see photos, page 161).

Three striking differences exist between traditional Society Island tattoos and Marquesan tattoos. First, Marquesans tattooed individuals collectively, whereas Tahitians did not have a ritualized, communal tattoo ceremony (except among *arioi* groups). Next, Marquesans practiced extensive facial tattooing, a very interesting phenomenon because of the Polynesian belief in *mana* and the notion that the head was the central location of *mana* within the body. This belief made facial tattooing inherently dangerous. Thomas (1990) believes it was possible to distinguish different social classes in the Marquesas- what he calls “*tapu* grades”- by the various facial patterns among individuals (58) (see photos, page 161). Facial tattooing was exclusive to the Marquesas, New Zealand and Easter Island, and I believe it served a separate function than other forms of the tattoo. Facial tattooing, having appeared only among the warrior societies, was both protective and distracting in battle. Lastly, although a parallel can be drawn with Tahitian *arioi* designs, specific motifs in Marquesan iconography served the purpose of reflecting membership into feasting clubs. I will address each of these differences individually as they relate to tattooing in the Marquesas Islands.

Tattooing in the Marquesas Islands is reminiscent of communal tattooing in West Polynesia and displays a sharp break from Eastern Polynesia, particularly Tahiti, where communal tattooing did not occur.²⁹ While the evidence thus far has suggested that tattooing was a way to measure social status, there is overwhelming documentation from throughout Polynesia, that some of the most prestigious chiefs did not appear tattooed

²⁹ In Samoa, the heir apparent was tattooed along with several supporters in this individual’s age-grade. The procedure was followed by a feast and public display of designs and was “paid for” by the paramount chief, in the form of hand-woven mats (a lucrative item of exchange in West Polynesia).

whatsoever.³⁰ One plausible suggestion is that tattooing was believed to be a phenomenon brought to the mortal world from the gods. A salient function of tattooing was to separate mortal (profane) and immortal (sacred) realms of Polynesian cosmology. This division is clearly articulated when one analyzes communal tattooing in the Marquesas Islands where the *opou* (heir apparent) and his *ka'ioi*, supporters of the same age-grade, were systematically tattooed in a conspicuous manner (Gell 1993).

The *opou* was tattooed initially upon his feet and after completion of these tattoos the process moved upward along his body. The *opou* was not tattooed upon the face, although there were exceptions to this because a particularly prominent *ka'ioi* could become a chief through demonstrations of generosity, prowess, skill and alliance formation. His supporters were tattooed first on the face (initially the mouth), which then traversed downward along the body, specifically leaving the feet the only unmarked area on their bodies. There were very good reasons for this transposed procedure. The *opou* as upcoming chief was considered *tapu*. Marking this individuals' feet first was a way the sacredness of this individual was contained within his body. Tattoos obstructed the flow of *tapu* when walking upon mortal earth. Tattooing the feet sealed off the *tapu* quality of this individual and in this way, tattooing was a form of preventive protection (Gell 1993:199). This is similar to the marking of women's hands, to prevent the flow of *tapu* from their sacred bodies into the food supply while producing *poi* (Allen 1992:10).

Gell (1993) refers to Marquesan tattooing by analyzing two separate ideas: closure and multiplicity (181). Closure refers to the way tattoos protect individuals by

³⁰ In Ua Poa, the **only** politically centralized island in the Marquesas, the paramount chief was devoid of these markings. Also, the Tui Manu'a of Samoa and the Tui Tonga of Tonga, as well as Hawaiian rulers and the sacred chief of Mangaia were completely unmarked (Gell 1993:211). This clearly shows that while tattooing was valued, it contained both positive and negative aspects. These examples exemplify the fact that some chiefs were so powerful, their rank so far above and beyond commoners, their association with gods so superior that they became, in essence, too sacred for this procedure.

serving as a "...barrier, screen, or carapace" (ibid). The examples just discussed would fall under the rubric of closure and protection by containing *tapu* within the body. Multiplicity refers to a different form of protection among the Marquesans, predominantly exclusive to this archipelago (see photos, page 161). In this case, certain symbols recreated that individual; they multiplied him and served as a duplicate form of defense.³¹ Some scholars link *moko* facial tattooing in New Zealand to this idea of multiplication. In particular, Gathercole (1988) believes Maori warriors were literally donning ancestral masks for protection in battle.³² However, the Marquesans did not use the technique of multiplication on the face at all. Facial tattooing in these islands consisted of broad, black bands that ran either horizontally or diagonally, although evidence exists which showed circles around the eyes denoted membership into feasting clubs (Krusenstern 1813:159-161) (see photos, page 162). This is prominent for another reason; only men were members of feasting clubs, only men were communally tattooed in this manner, and only men wore these designs. Women were not dependent upon an *opou* for food during their tattoo operations, nor were they able to brandish these designs, which for the most part were the only distinguishing features (besides hand tattoos) that differentiated design between the sexes.

A few words should suffice concerning Gell's theory of multiplicity as Marquesans used it. These designs, while found all over the body, were mainly imprinted upon the torso and appendages of individuals and the most frequent were *tiki*, *mata hoata* and *etua* (see photos, pages 161-164). These particular symbols were

³¹ While the Marquesans were the only Polynesians that used tattoo imagery to duplicate the subject, recall that the connection has been made to Siamese twins (in Samoa, Fiji, Tonga and the Society Islands) who were omniscient and protective via a multiplied individual.

³² I will discuss this more in a section on Maori *moko*, see Gathercole (1988)

anthropomorphic and represented cosmological forces. In Polynesian mythology, *tiki* is the first man created by gods (*ti'i* in Tahitian). Common secondary faces are *mata hoata*, or shining eyes, while *etua* refers to spirits (Gell 1993:195-197). These were customary designs in Marquesan iconography and according to Gell, served as a defensive integument upon the adorned. There were considerably many more closure motifs than multiplicity designs in Marquesan iconography, most frequently taking an animal form (e.g, the turtle and crab, who wear protective shells). Accordingly, there were generally two ways to protect the body- by multiplying the self (possibly with divine characters) and by mimicking protective aspects found in the natural world. One other symbol that occurs with great frequency and is worth mentioning pertains to Kena and the charter myth of tattooing in the Marquesas Islands. The mythical hero Kena is a universal Marquesan design which falls under the category of multiplicity (see photos, page 160).

2.5 Marquesas Islands Tattoo Myth

The myth of Kena and Tefio is tragic, yet makes a very strong connection with the Society Islands' myth relative to themes of incest and the way tattooing enhances sexual attractiveness. Gell (1993) translates the work of Von den Steinen (1925), and highlights some important features between these myths. He translates:

A mortal hero, the chief of Te Aa from Hivaoa, leads an expedition to the underworld, Hawaiki, where he battles with Tu Tonga, who rules there. At the end of these hostilities, Tu Tonga presents Te Aa with his two sisters, who become the wives of two of Te Aa's companions. Te Aa is trapped in the underworld, but these two men and their supernatural wives manage to escape, and return to Hivaoa, where one gives birth to Kena, a boy, and the other to Tefio, a girl. When they grow up, Kena marries Tefio... The marriage founders. Kena is addicted to surf-board riding...After ten days' continuous surfing Kena's body begins to rot away...Tefio, who had warned him against

surfing, leaves him and marries a different man... Later, Kena hears that the two sons of a neighboring chief are being tattooed. By supernatural means, he hijacks the tattooing ceremonies and ensures that he is tattooed first and has the best designs... Kena attends the feast at which the newly tattooed display themselves, which is also attended by Tefio with her new husband. She falls in love with Kena, and they plan to elope... They start to make love, but are disturbed, and have to move on. This happens several times... Tefio becomes ill and sings a funeral lament. Finally, she dies of 'women's cramps'. Kena mourns her... he returns, like Te Aa, to Hawaiiki, to meet with Tu Tonga, his mother's brother... beguiled by the sight of certain cockroach-women in the underworld, he falls into a deep pit, and dies.(186-187).

This myth shows that tattooing was also an aid to beautification in this culture. Although Kena is able to rejuvenate his rotting flesh through the process of tattooing, and ultimately win back his love, he tragically dies in the end. Tattooing, in this sense, is a mortal thing, which divides the divine/immortal from the imperfect/mortal. This story reflects the predicament this semi-divine couple existed in (and possibly the reason they had such a hard time copulating). As semi-divine beings, they followed neither the divine marriage pattern (brother-sister incest, which was found in Hawai'i) nor the preferred mortal marriage pattern (cross-cousin marriage) (Gell 1993:188).

Kena and Tefio were parallel matrilineal cousins, and in essence, this pattern doomed their marriage. In the Marquesas, parallel cousins were considered siblings, a possible reason their relationship could never be fully consummated. Unlike the Society Islands' myth where tattooing descended from a supernatural source, Kena witnessed this (and interrupted it) during a mortal ceremony. The Marquesan myth represents the mortal aspect of tattooing; while it can be protective and alluring it is also not a means of achieving divine-like status or immortality- it separates men from the gods. Parallels exist

between this fatal and pessimistic worldview and the widespread prevalence of Maori *moko* in New Zealand.

2.6 New Zealand Tattoos

Although tattooing among the Maori of New Zealand was by far the most documented, there is much disagreement among scholars as to what Maori tattooing historically represented. Common threads in the literature suggest that Maoris practiced tattooing as an aid to sexual attractiveness, as a rite of passage, and to appear fierce in battle (Roth 1901, Hanson 1983, and Gell 1993). Other scholars suggest facial tattooing minimized the appearance of aging and served as an individual mark of identity (perhaps as a signature) more than as motifs that symbolized rank or ancestral lineage. Some early explorers equated Maori *moko* to European heraldry saying that distinguishing marks represented different tribes (Gell 1993, Robley 1840, Simmons 1983, D'Urville 1834, Orbell 1962, and Roth 1901) (see photos, page 167). Roth (1901), upon close examination reported that no two *mokos* were identical, although there was widespread development of spiral designs (31). Having said this, rank was apparent by the workmanship of a given tattoo. A shoddy job, contracted by an apprentice or inexperienced artist, was accessible to people with limited economic means or practiced on captured slaves who served as canvases. On the other hand, beautifully done tattoos could only be afforded by those of high rank (e.g., chiefs who had resources to pay renowned artists). In the literature on *moko*, one author equates *moko* solely with rank saying "...distinguished families possessed marks which belonged to themselves alone" and that "slaves, by definition, had no place in society" and that "*moko* was a mark of a man's or woman's position in society" (Orbell 1962:32). However, Robley (1840) refers

to the fact that a European, John Rutherford, having been captive among the Maoris for ten years was tattooed, along with five other prisoners in 1816 (103). Another possibility that social status was conveyed in tattooing resides in the fact that *papatea*, plain face, was an insulting and derogatory term (Simmons 1983:234).

It is important to note that Maori facial tattooing-- *ta moko*-- was by far the most elaborate facial tattooing throughout Polynesia and one in which the procedure was substantially different (see photos, page 167). Maori male facial tattooing was a much deeper tapped in design, appearing as a carved-in design (Roth 1900:117 and Phillipps 1948:113).³³ Gathercole (1988) states that the curvilinear style of *moko* is reminiscent of woodcarving and rafter paintings in Maori meeting houses. Also, there are examples of *moko* on carved wooden figures (see photos, page 169). From this evidence, he suggests Maori *moko* was the donning of an ideal, ancestral mask and a link to the ancestral past, perhaps the assumption of that personage completely (173-176). He argues that the term *moko* also means “lizard”, an animal loathed and feared by the Maoris as a creature that conceivably moves back and forth from death via the shedding of its skin. His suggestion is that *moko* was transformative and existential reflecting their worldview in an omnipresent and permanent sense (177). *Moko* tattooing shares with the Society Islands an individualized process, yet among the Maori this procedure continued to completion of *moko* designs - a lifelong process sometimes (Robley 1840:38 and 54). To explain Maori tattooing more efficiently, a condensed summary of traditional Maori subsistence, political patterns and religious views are compulsory.

³³ The Maoris were the only culture that carved the face. However, this was restricted to male facial tattooing. Women’s chin tattoos (*ta ngutu*) were actually done with the comb and tapping stick, standard tattoo technology throughout Polynesia. Male *puhoro* designs on the upper thighs and buttocks were also done with the comb and tapping stick. There is an early example of *puhoro* designs on the face, which in all probability was also done with a comb as it is a very complicated pattern.

The Maori political system was atypical of Eastern Polynesia, occurring in fragmented political blocks of ramage and tribes in which the unique habitat required a combination of hunting-gathering and horticulture for subsistence. New Zealand is divided between the North and South islands and each has a relatively different climate making subsistence varied between them.³⁴ The topography and weather of New Zealand made it difficult to sustain the tropical Polynesian staple crops and different methods of exploiting the environment were necessary to maintain the population. It is not surprising that limited access to fertile land combined with a dense population gave rise to violent and pervasive warfare among Maori tribes. Fortunately, they had an abundance of marine resources because they also lacked domesticated animals with the exception of dogs (Gell 1993:239).

While the Maoris did have chiefs (*ariki*) and a system of inheritance through the male primogeniture, it is difficult to compare this to chiefdoms found in Western and Eastern Polynesia. Firth (1929) relates the Maori political system to societies found in the northwest coast of America because of developed hypercompetitiveness via elaborate ceremonial exchange know as the “potlatch”. In potlatch societies, there is the assumption of genealogical succession to chiefly positions, but a lack of unilineal descent groups, leading to confusion in succession, which is then determined via competitive exchange and overt generosity. To become a Maori chief required more than blood ties to an ancestral ramage (*hapu*) and qualities such as prowess, generosity and oration were considerable in determining succession.

³⁴ Breadfruit and mulberry did not survive in New Zealand on either island. In the North island, yams and taro could only be grown on the northern most part, whereas in the South island, much more temperate, only sweet potatoes could be harvested.

Maoris share general similarities with other Polynesian cultures concerning the nature of gods and humans, the dichotomy of sacred and profane realms, and the need to ritually coerce gods for success in horticulture and warfare, but Maoris were much more fearful of the Gods intervention into human affairs. Just as rituals exist to bring the gods into human affairs, there are also rituals to send them away once they are no longer needed and/or desired, a process called *whakanoa* (Hanson 1982:345). Similar to other Polynesian groups, the *tapu* quality of someone (recall that meant they were under the influence of a god) was contagious and could be passed along by sharing a cup, touching their food supply, or through blood (ibid). In fact, one of the reasons Hanson (1982) rejected the idea of female contamination in Polynesia was because there were rituals found throughout Polynesia where women removed things from the *tapu* state by attracting the gods, not repelling them (345-352).

The traditional Maori worldview recognized unfortunate events as a characteristic of not only human affairs but also among the gods. The complacent acceptance of malevolent attributes in Maori life highlights a submission to inevitable and constant strife endemic of pre-colonial life in New Zealand (Gell 1993:244 and Douglas 1966:164). Hanson and Hanson (1983) also describe this phenomenon among the Maori by looking at dual antagonism found in their culture through a series of conflicts resolved through reciprocal retaliation. Maoris perceived themselves as victims of cyclical warfare between not only humans, but also with the gods. The situation of conflict/resolution was symmetrical, much like *moko* is bilaterally symmetrical on the face of its bearers (Hanson 1983:214 and Simmons 1983:229).

This pessimistic worldview has led some scholars to argue that *moko* was ritual affirmation and stigmatization of imperfection in the Maori world (Simmons 1983 and Gell 1993). I think political fragmentation and recurring warfare among the Maori did indeed play a role in shaping a worldview that regarded strife as inevitable. Further, *moko* served as a distraction and an impediment to enemies during continual warfare. If we accept that rank was visible in male *moko* tattooing by the workmanship of a given tattoo, then a well-done *moko* assuredly belonged to someone of high social status. High social status came through either genealogical connections or prowess in war (Roth 1900:116). High ranked individuals had a closer affiliation with the gods and this close connection meant a higher concentration of *mana*. Similarly, a warrior's success in battle was supposedly the result of high proportions of *mana*. Surely, this frightening spectacle and its consequential attributes put fear into enemies in a region plagued by frequent battle. Simmons (1983) tells us "It is no accident that warrior people should use a facial tattoo that in repose is dignified but in anger gives the face the appearance of a snarling animal" (228).

New Zealand tattooing is not this simply explained though. There were two styles of *moko* tattooing; an archaic non-curvilinear one and the successive spiral one that dominated toward the end of the nineteenth century (Gell 1993:250). These styles respectively, were *moko kuri* (dog tattooing) scattered in a limited area in the South Island and *moko*, found predominantly in the North Island (Gell 1993:252) (see photos, page 165, bottom right and left, *moko kuri*). More importantly, there exist other forms of tattooing in New Zealand that the "enhanced *mana*" theory does not explain, which we shall now address.

While rank was not a deterrent to an individual having tattoos (most individuals and both genders had tattoos, with the exception of the *tohunga*- priests and *tapairu*- high-ranking women), it was reflective in the quality of work and also in the quantity and patterns that applied only to ranked individuals (Simmons 1983:236 and Gell 1993:263). Some *moko* marks symbolized distinction and genealogy as they passed from father to son (Orbell 1963:31). Yet, this assessment is also problematic. Simmons cites the testimony of a Maori elder who as late as 1949 informed him that a woman who had been set aside for marriage purposes because of her high genealogical rank could cohabit and have children, but would be recognizable by a special mouth-tattoo (see photos, page 170). In earlier times this had been ‘wavy vertical lines’. Once foreign technical innovations in tattooing were incorporated into Maori female tattoo- which survived into this century, unlike male *moko*- the device was changed to ‘red lines outside the normal blue chin tattoo’ (1983:238) (see photos, page 171).

Female tattooing was prevalent in Maori society, and after the decline of male *moko* in 1840, the female lip and chin tattooing became the most notable symbol of Maori identity (Simmons 1983:242 and Cowan 1921:244). Male facial tattooing fell into disuse after a brief revival during the war torn years of the 1860s mainly because the Maori were conquered, making the social system and values in which *moko* articulated itself no longer applicable (ibid). Before the Maori wars, Maori women tattooed their chins to display marriageability; it was an obligation- a rite of passage- as much as an aid to beauty because tattoos obscured unsightly wrinkles (Roth 1900:116, Scutt 1974:76 and 143 and Gell 1993:266). Maori women tattooed their lips in order to find a suitor because “red lips were abhorred and black ones considered the perfection of feminine

beauty” (Roth 1901:33). Maori women became innovative and started using darning needles to produce mouth tattoos and the result was such that the tattoos looked quite shoddy (see photos, page 171).

Female tattoos did not confine themselves to the lips and chins. Roth (1901) tells us that women of rank also bore tattoos on their foreheads, between the eyes, and in a vertical line from ankle to knee on the backside of the leg (33). Women also began to tattoo their Christian names after missionary contact (see photos, page 172). Another occurrence of female tattooing indicated something quite different from marriageability and rank; lamentation gashes. Women would systematically gash their breasts and arms at funerals, *tangi*, of close relatives, and then smear ash into these lacerations (34).

Robley (1840) and Roth (1901) believed that New Zealanders brought tattooing from the Eastern Polynesian islands along with the traditional technology found there. They contemplated that *tangi* (also found in the Society Islands) was the initial phase of tattooing, which then grew into tattooing via tapping implements and later *moko* design (Roth 1901:35). If this view is correct, which it may very well be, then the Maoris must have believed pain was an integral aspect of the tattoo operation, making this an exemplary way to display bravery and strength. It seems there is some validity in this statement, especially given the fact that rank augmented through prowess.

2.7 New Zealand Tattoo Myth

The myth most commonly associated with the classic *moko*, curvilinear style concerns the chief Mataora. I quote Gell (1993), who uses Best (1924) as his main source, at length:

Mataora was a chief who was one day visited by a party of youths and maidens who came from Rarohenga, the

underworld. Their leader was Niwareka, who was the daughter of Uetonga, the ruler of that place. They were extremely beautiful, especially Niwareka herself, and had pale skin, very long hair, and wore skirts made of seaweed. Mataora fell in love with Niwareka and married her. They lived together happily, but one day Mataora became jealous and angry with his wife, and eventually went so far as to strike her. Niwareka immediately fled back home. Mataora was afflicted with grief, and set out to the underworld in search of her. Eventually he arrived at the house of Uetonga, who was engaged in tattooing. Mataora had supposed that the only way to decorate the human face was by means of painted designs, and had no notion that they might be incised permanently. Uetonga demonstrated the difference by rubbing out the designs Mataora had painted on his face...he undertook to be tattooed by Uetonga...as he lay there suffering... Mataora sung of his unavailing search for Niwareka... she was restored to him. He wished to return to the upper world, but initially permission was refused because of the wickedness which prevails there- as witnessed by Mataora's own bad behavior in beating his wife. When at last permission was granted and he was allowed to return to the upper world, his tattooing was there to remind him to avoid such evil actions (254-255).

This myth shows that tattooing functioned as a means of separating gods from man, yet it also brought them together. Here we have a goddess married to a *mortal* man. They separate due to his bad behavior and rejoin only after he receives tattoos. In this myth, tattoos are a form of punishment for bad conduct; it neutralizes status difference by creating balance between humans and gods.

The conclusion I draw from this material is that tattooing in New Zealand did in fact portray a worldview and philosophy of the dualistic nature of life and death. However, it also fulfilled social functions such as rites of passage for both men and women and conveyed rank through the quality of tattoos and accessibility to specific patterns. It is no surprise that once colonization occurred, the practice dwindled among

men and the warrior class. Another culture that practiced facial tattooing for similar reasons is also worthy of examination.

2.8 Rapanui (Easter Island) Tattoos

The most limited available material on Polynesian tattoos comes from Rapanui, otherwise known as “Te Pito te Henua”, the navel of the earth (Taylor 1981:19). There are very good reasons for limited material on Rapanui tattooing; Easter Island is the most isolated land mass on the planet, their society was almost extinct by the late 1700s, and geographic remoteness meant considerably fewer explorers to the island than other Polynesian islands. This island is perhaps the most poorly understood throughout Polynesia and remains somewhat of a mystery to modern scholars, although archaeologists have reconstructed various sites that allow for some interpretation of traditional Rapanui society. The few records we do have predominantly comment on the designs that were visible on islanders, but they do not infer any meaning behind them. Gell (1993) who has had so much to say on Polynesian tattoos relinquishes himself to defeat “...it is not possible, for the lack of data, to take the discussion of Easter Islands tattooing any further than this” (275). Alas, I also find myself in something of a quandary to analyze this form of extensive tattooing.

There is no recorded myth on the origin of tattooing in Easter Island, although there is a well-known myth surrounding Hotu Matua, its founding chief who landed at Anakena beach (Blackburn 1999:157). Scholars dispute where this individual came from, but the consensus seems to be that a wave of Marquesans were the first settlers³⁵

³⁵ Thor Heyerdahl is probably the most famous for his KonTiki expedition. Heyerdahl believed that Polynesia was settled from South America. The evidence he used to hypothesize this was the fact that the sweet potato was cultivated on Easter Island. He took a voyage to prove it was possible to settle this island from a South American point of origin.

(McCall 1980, Taylor 1981, Blackburn 1999 and Gell 1993). In fact, there is no supporting evidence that the island is anything but Polynesian in descent; they spoke a Polynesian dialect, had similar social stratification, practiced extensive tattooing and produced monolith statues called *moia*. In Easter Island, there were phases of evolution broken into three different epochs: the rise of civilization (1200-1500 A.D.), the *moia*-building phase (1500-1722 A.D.), and a period of intensified warfare and rise of the bird-man cult (1722-early 1800s).

Easter Island is commonly used as an example of what can happen when the environment is over-exploited and population expands unchecked. There is veracity to this assumption. Once a thriving civilization of approximately 7000 individuals during the *moia* building phase, the Easter Island population dwindled to 111 by 1877 (Blackburn 1999:159 and Gell 1993:270). Various factors played a role in the decline of this Polynesian community such as the introduction of disease (smallpox and influenza), decline in wood (wood was used to move *moia* throughout the island), Peruvian blackbirding (slave trade), intense warfare, and depletion of resources. Most of these factors stem from political organization on the island.

Easter Island represents a Polynesian culture with very limited social stratification and political cohesiveness, meaning these groups were not chiefdoms in the sense of the more unified Polynesian cultures. Similar to the Marquesas Islands, Easter Island political structure was more along the line of a culture with Big Men, where hypercompetitive exchange (in their case *moia* building and the annual competition for the title of 'bird-man') prevailed. There were chiefs on Easter Island but they did not maintain political control, this being actualized by warrior chiefs (*matatoa*). Warriors

belonged to one of two coalitions, referred to as 'land' and 'sea' people by the territory they occupied (Gell 1993:271). Vying political units on the island competed with one another through dedicatory feasts and the construction of colossal *moia* statues, thought to represent ancestral lineage (there were about ten vying districts on the island).

Hypercompetitiveness led to the ultimate demise of this culture, creating endemic warfare brought about by a massive depletion of resources. Without trees, the islanders could no longer build canoes, limiting the acquisition of marine resources. Deforestation resulted in erosion and uncultivable land, further reducing food on the island. Archaeology on the island validates the fact that warfare was rampant, there was no encompassing hierarchy, just extensive struggle between groups.³⁶

While the recorded evidence of tattooing on Rapanui is minimal, it is possible to draw some conclusions based on what we know of political instability and organization on the island. Easter Island styles consisted of full body tattooing (like the Marquesas) and elaborate facial tattooing (as in New Zealand) (see photos, pages 173-174). The iconography of Rapanui tattoos consisted of linear representations (broad lines usually along the limbs), realistic designs (fishhooks and knives), sexual motifs (the vulva or *komari*), dance paddles, and symbols of myth (e.g, the 'bird-man' design) (Blackburn 1999:161 and Gell 1993:272) (see photos, page 173). Neck tattooing was common, usually taking forms from the natural world such as the frigate bird (see photos, page 174). Dance paddles were prominent and important because these belonged solely to the dominant coalition (the land or sea people, this periodically shifted between both groups

³⁶ I participated in archaeological field school in Rapanui in the Summer of 2004. Multiple weapons are found all over various districts on the island, some of which still lay on the surface. *Mata'a* (obsidian spear points) are very common as well as numerous caves that contain artifacts, showing how at the high point of conflict on the island, groups were hiding from one another to avoid confrontations.

as one usurped power from the other and vice versa), and contained human elements (see photos, page 174, top).

Dance paddle designs, *pare*, were engraved with facial features and interestingly the word “*pare*” means fort, protection, rampart, and obstacle in other Polynesian dialects (Gell 1993:273). Metraux (1940) believed that *pare* meant the location of this particular design around the waists of individuals (244). Similar to Tahitian *taomaro* design, or girdle of spears, is the idea that tattoos are protective and a necessary prelude to sexual relations. The faces found on dance paddles are comparable to Marquesan secondary face designs, which was a means of multiplying the self. By referring to these examples, it is feasible to say that Rapanui tattooing was protective, it marked rank between various tribal groups, and was a rite of passage into adulthood. Having said this, the lack of data makes it impossible to corroborate this statement with fact or evidence. It seems logical to say with some accuracy that widespread, full-body tattooing resided clearly among Polynesian cultures characterized by intense warfare, limited resources, and political decentralization. I will have much more to say on social stratification as it relates to facial tattooing in Chapters four and five, which analyze contemporary tattooing in the Society Islands.

2.9 Tattooing and Political Structure: Open, Traditional and Stratified Societies.

In *Ancient Polynesian Society*, Goldman examines three variations that existed among pre-modern Polynesian status systems (1970). An analysis of these systems, coupled with examples of the cultures shaped by them, helps explain distribution and difference of tattooing among pre-modern Polynesian cultures. However, it is important

to clarify that differences among these systems are differences of degree - not kind, especially concerning traditional and open systems, which are merely a matter of gradation. The most clearly defined system existed among stratified cultures, in particular ancient Hawai'i where a distinct division occurred between the landed aristocracy and the landless commoners. The distinction between these three types of societies is that each culture handled the status/power dichotomy in its own unique way. The difference among these groups is the way in which the status/power relationship was actualized in everyday life. I quote Goldman at length concerning the nature of this dichotomy:

In Polynesian status systems, all three possible relationships exist: power and status are aligned as equal, status is dominant and power is subordinate; and power is dominant and status is subordinate. These Polynesian relationships between status and power are cultural, and they do not in themselves answer the psychological question of which of these, status or power, is more fundamental in human nature. Power is defined as control and is an objective condition, in the main, while status is defined as honor and is a subjective condition, in the main. This distinction... can only be sustained at a cultural level of analysis, not at a psychological level... The value of drawing distinctions between status and power is that the variable relations between these two linked psychological and cultural motives can be used to identify types of status systems and the direction in which they are developing. Along these lines we can say the following: In the Traditional societies, status is dominant and power is subordinate; in the Open societies, power is dominant and status is subordinate; in the Stratified societies, status and power are at an approximately even level but both are more consequential than in the Traditional societies. Taking Polynesian society as a whole, it is evident that the central issue is the steady growth in power. What is of real significance in Polynesian history is that power does not seem to develop either as an adaptation to complexity, nor in direct response to economic necessity. It seems rather to be an outgrowth of the

rules of status...The growth of political power as an aspect of status is...a consequence of status rivalry...status itself is predicated upon mana, upon a concept of supernatural power (21-22).

According to Goldman, in a traditional system seniority is the most central symbol of rank (1970:20). Traditional cultures are also associated with a religious system headed by a sacred chief (ibid). Some cultures Goldman classifies as traditional are: New Zealand, Manihiki-Rakahanga, Tongareva, Uvea, Futuna, Tokelau, Tikopia, Pukapuku and Ontong Java (21). In traditional cultures, the allocation of authority and power occurs in a rather systematic manner because seniority passes along the male line.

Among the Maori, the practice of following strict principles of male seniority in the allocation of power allowed for less ambiguity than in the more stratified societies (e.g., the Society Islands) where primogeniture- preference for the first born child regardless of the sex- was the preference. However, this is too simplistic of a statement because as we have seen, the Maori had other ways of achieving status outside the realm of descent (recall the emphasis on prowess, craftsmanship and political leadership). In other words, while the Maori did give particular prominence to genealogy, they did not neglect other imperative attributes relevant to obtaining high social standing (Goldman 1970:35). For this reason, I have some hesitation referring to the Maori as a “traditional” system as does Goldman. My reservations come from the quote above that clearly states open societies place more emphasis on power than rank, which seems much more typical of Maori culture. Instead of using Goldman’s three-tiered analysis, I opt to discuss the difference between more stratified and less stratified Polynesian cultures with reference to tattooing.

Political hegemony among the Maori was a condition of rank; a lack of leadership did not tend to downgrade an individual's inborn rank, yet a person of merit might acquire a position of leadership and thus augment his rank. Similarly, marriage was another way one could elevate or diminish their social standing by either marrying into a higher genealogical line or marrying down. On the same note, the growth of a community was associated with power (*mana*) and seen as honorable, while another groups' decline bore witness to a lack of *mana* and the consequential degradation of this particular leader's status. The Maori had a system of stratification intact that separated individuals from one another but this was tenuous. *Ariki* were paramount chiefs who presided over their lineage. The masses, *rangatira*, were all those individuals who claimed descent from an *ariki* regardless of how distant the genealogical connection. Finally, the *tutua*, commoners, were the lowest ranking individuals although even these low ranking individuals held land rights (Goldman 1970:42-43). Tattooing among less stratified cultures such as the Maori was extensive, elaborate and included the face. The same holds true in the Marquesas Islands and Rapanui, where we have seen that endemic warfare is symptomatic of little social stratification, a high prevalence of facial tattooing and an emphasis on power over rank. Facial tattooing, having only appeared in these less stratified cultures, is symptomatic of political instability and extreme warfare. I think this is the main reason for its' occurrence: it was a form of protection and an aid to distract the enemy during warfare. Facial tattooing in the less stratified societies may be related to the value placed on fierce warriors in these warlike societies. This trend is very different when we analyze much more clearly defined stratified Polynesian cultures.

The stratified cultures Goldman examines are the most clear-cut examples of the differentiation of rank and social standing among Polynesian cultures. Among these cultures, status was both economic and political which may help explain the way the majority of these cultures came to be politically centralized in later periods. The consolidation of chiefly power through alliance formation was common among stratified Polynesian cultures and resulted in these chiefs wielding much more power and influence over larger territories than those in traditional and open systems. The main examples in this discussion are the Society Islands although other stratified cultures existed on Mangareva, the Hawaiian Islands and Tonga (Goldman 1970:21).

The rank system of the Society Islands is thoroughly addressed in Chapter Three so a brief discussion follows. The Society Islands, in particular Tahiti, held the most extreme view of primogeniture and both male and female lines inherited chiefly titles through birth order (Goldman 1970:178). Society Island *ari'i* were bestowed indelible rights and honors that were recognized everywhere and the sanctity of chiefs was indisputable. This fact is corroborated by ritualized human sacrifice that occurred throughout the life of a royal heir to maintain *mana*, which descended from the gods, yet sanctity was not relegated solely to royalty (182). Lesser chiefs received their sanctity from the lesser gods and rights of the *marae* always transmitted to the primogeniture of a given genealogy.

While resources do not agree on an exact number, I adopted Hanson's analysis of six class divisions among the Society Islanders: *ari'i rahi*, *ari'i*, *iatoai*, *ra'atira*, *manahune* and *teuteu*. The most apparent form of social demarcation was that of the *teuteu* who were landless and worked as servants for the classes above them. Bilateral

descent was also recognized in the Society Islands which ultimately meant that high ranking families could acquire land and wield power over very large groups of individuals. As we have discussed with reference to tattooing, it occurred less frequently on the body and did not include facial tattooing among these stratified cultures. Society Island stratification exists on one extreme of the continuum while the social structure of open societies exists as its counterpoint.

Among Goldman's open societies, military and political actions governed status and power much more than religion (Goldman 1970:20). That is not to say religion did not exist among these cultures because it definitely did, yet it did not carry nearly the same kind of magnitude at determining individual rank as in other Polynesian cultures. Another characteristic found in the open cultures are the communities of specialized artisans, which Goldman refers to as "guilds" as these occupations passed from father to son (1970:108). The most pronounced open society, which may have actually devolved from a more traditional-based culture, is found in Easter Island (Rapanui). Status rivalry is at the heart of this culture. According to the founding myth, Hotu-matua was forced to flee his natal land due to defeat in war by his brothers. Upon landing on the island, he allotted six districts to his sons by birth order; the most fertile and northern lands were given to the oldest son, while the youngest son acquired the eastern, less fertile district (Goldman 1970:97).

Easter Island also had chiefs, *ariki*, and the northern district became the leading aristocracy on the island; this tribe was called the Miru. The Miru retained high rank and sanctity but power and authority became associated with the warriors who overthrew the aristocracy (Goldman 1970:99). Commoners were also capable of ascending in rank

through the ritualized bird-man competition/cult associated with the late period on the island. Archaeology on the island can show the rise, decline and almost complete extinction of the culture through the artifacts they left behind. The early archaeological features of stone masonry, some of the best in Polynesia, imply that this culture was at one time a traditional society. The stone masonry work could have only been accomplished via communal labor, which is not feasible among open cultures characterized by constant inter-tribal warfare.

On Easter Island, the apex of status rivalry was manifest in the size and placement of *moia*; huge monolith face carvings that were said to be guardians of the tribe. The different districts continually tried to show one another up by the creation of larger, more complex statues and the addition of red basalt top-knots. It was competitive and a real reflection of the intensity of status rivalry on the island. The placement of the *moia* was not accomplished by communal labor; rather it was forced and used captured slaves from other tribes taken during internecine wars. Furthermore, Easter Island (like New Zealand and the Marquesas) is another example of a Polynesian culture that practiced facial tattooing. These cultures were governed more upon the premise of power than rank.

Chapter Three

Society Island Social Structure: Historical and Contemporary Review

3.1 Tahitian descent and social stratification before the Europeans

There is a great deal of speculation using European notions of social organization in scholarly interpretations of the Society Islands. The majority of explorers likened the social structure of Tahiti to a feudal polity, paying little attention to the wide range of anomalies that occurred outside the basic structure of medieval feudalism. While there are indeed some attributes reminiscent to feudalism, such as tribute and a “class” system, Tahitian social organization was much more complex than this. Politics and land tenure involved a variety of factors ranging from birth order, lineal and collateral descent and even religious affiliation making it entirely too simplistic and inaccurate to call theirs a “feudal” system. I may use the term feudal in reference to other Polynesian cultures (Hawai’i in particular) or to look at traditional economics via a system of barter and immediate exchange, but these will be highlighted as we move through the text. For the moment, a brief discussion of descent patterns and social stratification are imperative to gain insight into the many ways that Tahitian culture changed over time.

Hanson (1963) thoroughly examines social organization in the Society Islands at the time of European contact by analyzing historical records of early explorers. He concludes that large social groups found in the Society Islands were attributes of a political system based on: “... bilateral descent and inheritance by a single heir... incomplete segmentation...and social stratification” (84). Gell (1993) calls this political system a ‘mixed type’ because of variables involved in social stratification, which also share characteristics of feudalism. I have already discussed how primogeniture, preference on the first born child, played a role in the inheritance of titles reckoned

bilaterally- through both parents. What needs further elaboration is the significance of titles not only to land, but also the title's affiliated *marae* and the inherent rank behind a given title.

Titles vested land and authority over individuals residing on such land to heirs of bilateral descent (Hanson 1963:6). Authority, based on the premise of rank, emphasized the high degree of social stratification among Society Islanders, another very complicated issue, as there is wide variation among sources. The division of land at its most basic denominator was the district, but within any given district were sub-districts belonging to individuals of lesser social status/rank. Social stratification was thus pyramidal with an ideal rule of succession, yet the reality was dynamic due to many ways in which Tahitians circumnavigated usual modes of rank procurement and inheritance patterns. For example, if an heir had no children he could name his successor, or sometimes the rule of primogeniture was discarded for a non-first born child. Frequently, lineages expired and succession passed from a lineal to a collateral relative, and perhaps the most interesting phenomenon was the relationship called *taio* (8-11). The *taio* relationship was the practice of a male adopting a male friend, who thereafter had entitlement to all privileges found in brother-brother relationships. The *taio* relationship sometimes occurred between Polynesians and Europeans and was one way in which the system of traditional Tahiti came unglued.³⁷

Although primogeniture was the preference, this did not exclude this individual's siblings from rank or land rights. Conversely, an heir had the burden of taking care of his nuclear family and for this reason many sub-districts of a given district went to his

³⁷ Recall that Pomare gave land to missionaries after he converted to Christianity, but there are also other examples of this. Several mutineers of the "Bounty" had *taio* relationships with Tahitians as well. See Hanson (1963).

parents and siblings. Interestingly, when the principle of primogeniture went into effect upon the birth of this child, all rights of that title (including rank) became the infant's, resulting in that individual attaining a higher social standing than his parents. This frequently led to hostile parent-child relationships (e.g, Pomare I and II). Of course infants cannot care for their districts or maintain sovereignty at such a young age, so required a designated relative to act on his behalf. While rank and title were interdependent they were not however equal. Hanson (1963) states that siblings born of the same parents carried equal rank due to bilateral descent although preference for primogeniture did make a difference in an individual's status. Differences in rank became noticeable at the level of cousins, collateral relatives, so this difference is manifest between lineal/collateral relations (34-35). Titles conferred land, sovereignty over the land and the people residing on it, and a genealogical connection to the god of the *marae* associated with that particular title to the heir.

The exact number of classes found in the Society Islands vary widely among sources but most sources concur at a minimum of three: *ari'i*, *ra'atira*, and *manahune* (Rutter 1935 Henry 1928 Beaglehole 1955 Williamson 1924 Davies 1961 Ellis 1831 Wilson 1799 Hanson 1963). I have adopted Hanson's (1963) analysis that includes six class divisions among the Society Islanders. *Ari'i rahi* were the highest class and most powerfully ranked individuals although there existed variation among them. *Ari'i rahi* were district confederation chiefs, for districts formed alliances linking smaller groups to a loose, extended, larger group (Hanson 1963:25). The highest ranked individuals of *ari'i* status traced their ancestry back to one of the many Polynesian gods (40). *Ari'i* governed districts and everyone who lived within a given district (ibid). Lesser chiefs,

iatoai, had sub-districts (*patu*) within any given district and maintained jurisdiction over the people who fell below their class (27). Below the *iatoai* were the *ra'atira* who held smaller parcels of land (*rahui*) that they themselves farmed, but acreage on these plots varied greatly (28). All social classes above the *ra'atira* lived off tributes made to them by subordinate classes (ibid). *Manahune* may or may not have owned land (there is wide divergence among sources) but they were commoners who comprised households (Wilson 1799 Rutter 1935 Ellis 1831 and Hanson 1963). The lowest class among Society Islanders was the *teuteu*, landless servants who worked for the upper classes (ibid).

Group membership for the *manahune* and the *teuteu* classes was designated by place of residence. Among other class groups, who may have had claims to more than one district through bilateral descent, membership came through the affiliated *marae* these individuals could enter (Hanson 1963:44). Land tenure was not a system of owning property, as we are accustomed to think. The Society Island's organization referred to a system where titles vested individuals and groups into a larger social network based on "...individual responsibility, reciprocity, and authority, but not as having had joint ownership over any form of property" (57). The basis for titles was not so much about land or descent, but the actual *marae* to which that title belonged. *Maraes* had hereditary names and genealogies of their own as well as a system of rank based on the age of a given *marae* (48-50). *Maraes* frequently split into parent-daughter *marae* when siblings produced heirs, a process Hanson refers to as "segmentation", which he believes explains the large social groups of the Society Islands (52). Lastly, authority in the Society Islands descends from class status and rank of individuals. Those of higher social

standing could place prohibitions over the products of their districts and sub-districts, demand tribute, recruit warriors and laborers during times of need (71-72).

So far, this sounds rather easy to follow, but rank was not just a matter of descent. There were four ways individuals could elevate their rank (class status): prowess in war (conquered territories were frequently given to warriors), the accumulation of wealth (mainly European goods), interclass marriages (which was not very common- class endogamy was the general rule), and through the cessation of a lineal line and transfer to a collateral line. The last factor was quite frequent because Society Islanders practiced infanticide, sometimes resulting in the total elimination of a given line of descent (Hanson 1963:30-33). Frequently, individuals belonging to separate classes engaged in a sexual union resulting in pregnancy and the newborn suffered at the hands of its parents upon birth. Infanticide primarily occurred when there was a union with parents of different class systems or in the case of the *arioi* who were forbidden to procreate. Bilateral descent complicated the system further because the primogeniture inherited from both parents, and if the parents were from different classes, it allowed for this individual's title accumulation to be widely variable and he could conceivably own territory in more than one district.

This elaborate system made it possible that high-ranking families could acquire much territory and wield authority over very large groups of individuals. Although the principle of bilateral descent was the norm in the Society Islands, frequently titled individuals did not lay claim to all the districts in which they held title. District alliances generally prevented a complete takeover by a single lineage because when one line became too powerful, it would be stopped by other allying districts. War was in fact

quite pervasive among the Society Islanders. One family did manage to exercise ultimate power though, and under the Pomare line the Society Islands unified due to a number of factors, to which we shall now turn.

3.2 Colonial Encounters in the Society Islands (1767-1900)

The first explorer on the scene in Tahiti was Samuel Wallis, who anchored at Matavai Bay in 1767. Count Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1768) and James Cook (1772-1775) quickly followed Wallis. These three explorers left many documents and memoirs describing the native Tahitians' *joie de vivre*, physical characteristics and what they believed were political systems on the islands. However, there are inaccuracies in these records: many cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the ways in which Tahitian chiefs, *ari'i*, supposedly ruled the island. The chosen port of Matavai Bay by these explorers was one way in which European contact negatively influenced Tahitian social cohesion because it placed a preference (and with it trade and luxury items) on Tahitians living in this particular district. A power struggle emerged between chiefs of different districts, as the *ari'i* of Matavai Bay developed relationships of trade with the Europeans and the Europeans mistakenly assumed there was one paramount chief for the whole island³⁸. This, of course, was not the case in traditional Tahitian culture, where there were four dominant groups in vying district alliances, each with a paramount chief.

Their social arrangement limited the importance of wealth as it emphasized the importance of birth, specifically that of the primogeniture or first-born child which was fundamental to inheritance patterns. Nevertheless, marriage was by far the most

³⁸ This was interesting because the *ari'i* of Matavai Bay were inferior chiefs. Dodd claims the selection of this port laid the groundwork for the eventual overthrow of the traditional Tahitian political system.

important way individuals accrued wealth and power. By no means were Tahitians egalitarians, yet they did have a class system that assured individuals access to land. Traditional life during this period focused on the god 'Oro; food was plentiful but as we have seen, this did not mean warfare was absent. Conversely, warfare was common between districts and between the Leeward and Windward groups of the Society Islands, which had the result of leaving some individuals landless, perhaps the *manahune*.

The nine islands of today's Society group were not unified at this time and inter-island warfare was frequent. Furthermore, a separate class of individuals, the *arioi* or entertainers, lived alongside religious specialists on the island of Raiatea (in the Leeward Societies), making this island the religious center for all of the Society Islands (*arioi* also lived on Tahiti and Mo'orea). The conversion of Raiatea was strategic for the Pomare dynasty and the London Missionary Society in converting Tahitians and unifying the islands for the first time in history. Raiatea remained the last stronghold of traditional religion in the Society Islands and the place that resisted French interference most vehemently. Interestingly, the first Pomare--Tu-- was actually a Tuamotuan by ancestry; exemplifying the fact that Tahiti was (and still is) an island of varying Polynesian ethnicities (Dodd 1983:66).

European notions of how monarchies maintain themselves confused the traditional Tahitian system where four to six equally paramount chiefs governed their districts. Adding to this disruption was the introduction of muskets and a relatively low-ranking line of chiefs who seized the opportunity to become paramount king. Pomare I married the daughter of a chief from the Northern (Matavai Bay) district, and managed to persuade Captain Cook that he was the rightful king of Tahiti by successfully waging war

against the other chiefs. Pomare was succeeded by his son, the power hungry Pomare II, who alongside the missionaries converted the island of Raiatea to Christianity in 1821 (he had already converted Tahiti and Mo'orea in 1815), thus forcing the ancient religion underground (Dodd 1983:68). Pomare II not only converted the religious lives of Tahitians, he also changed the political scene in 1819 by establishing the "Code of Pomare" (ibid). In essence, this was a transformation of the traditional Tahitian moral code into adherence to British law (ibid).

As we have seen, the French and English both appeared on the scene at roughly the same period, although the British were about a year earlier. The important point is that English missionaries arrived in 1797 and managed to effect conversion by 1815. England had sweeping success at not only conversion but also the promotion of English law by Pomare II. French Catholicism followed later after British conversion of the islands.

French interference occurred when the missionary-*ari'i* government failed to settle recurrent disputes stemming from European contact. Theft was rampant after the introduction of European goods, which contributed to violent retaliations. The Tahitian queen, Pomare IV, begged and pleaded with Queen Victoria in 1836 to intervene and settle ongoing disputes with little success. Tahiti would have willingly become a British territory, but Britain, fearing military confrontation with France, refused to engage in a war over a scattering of economically unimportant islands in the South Pacific. The French saw their opportunity and established a "Protectorate" in 1842, in which chiefs remained responsible for their designated districts (Newbury 1988:68). This was a very easy feat to accomplish for Queen Pomare had fled Tahiti for Raiatea during this period

of turmoil. One by one, the French Protectorate began abolishing traditional customs bestowed to the *ari'i*: no longer could land rights pass from *ari'i* parent to child, *ari'i* ceremonies were abolished as well as the annual tribute commoners gave chiefs (70). Land loss had detrimental effects on Tahitians who made a living from copra, coffee and fruit harvests.

Many Tahitian chiefs did not succumb to French authority without a fight. In fact, the final conquest of Tahiti was an ongoing three-year battle between the French military, situated along the coastal regions, and the native rebel population that had sequestered itself inland in the mountainous region along the Fautaua river (Dodd 1983:134). Rebel Tahitians held out in this area for quite some time because it was virtually impenetrable by the Europeans. It took collusion with the “native” traitor Mairoto for the French to finally defeat the rebels on September 17, 1846 (136). Ironically, Mairoto was not a Tahitian but actually from the island of Rapa in the Austral archipelago (134). This bit of evidence sheds light on the fact that interethnic contact was frequent in French Polynesia as well as raids³⁹.

After France won the political battle for the Societies- although it definitely lost the religious one to English Protestants- serious efforts began to take place to gain an economic foothold in the region. Sugar and coffee plantations began to sprout up coupled with the introduction of an even more ethnically diverse population. In 1862, there were only 8000 natives left on Tahiti. The population had been seriously reduced from warfare and introduced disease (Dodd 1983:184). Tahitian volunteers on plantations were minimal making labor the major obstacle for successful plantation life. The

³⁹ There is evidence from throughout Polynesia of the frequent occurrence of raids and inter-island marriage alliances. Fiji, Tonga and Samoa are very good examples of this, especially regarding the way that the Tui Tonga and Kanakapoulous lines have incorporated worthy “outsiders” into their dynasty.

solution was to send a ship, the *Eugenie*, to the Tuamotu and Cook Islands to secure indentured servants (ibid). This was problematic; money did not hold enough allure to maintain a Polynesian workforce. Generally, Polynesians worked long enough to afford a few things then took to wandering away from plantation life in search of a more leisurely, yet productive opportunity.

Because of different cultural values that Europeans and Polynesians attached to money, plantation owners had to recruit a different work force. This came in the form of 1200 Chinese coolies from the islands of Macao and Hong Kong (Dodd 1983:185). The newly introduced Chinese did not mix well with the native population and the Chinese would later become resented by the local population. Eventually, coolie contracts expired and many Chinese left Tahiti to work plantations in the Marquesas Islands, yet many stayed on and became prosperous entrepreneurs alongside the French. As contracts dwindled, a new supply of migrant workers was brought over from far off Easter Island consisting of 67 individuals, who also did not mix with Tahitian population, remaining separate and isolated (ibid).

At this point it should be evident that Tahiti, possibly due to its central location in the Pacific Ocean, became a mixed ethnic population early in its history. The frequent occurrence of raiding throughout Central Polynesia brought several different Polynesian populations to Tahitian shores. Plantation life brought the most diverse and far away ethnic groups. Thus, it is clear that the disparate population of modern Tahiti has roots in the colonial period. French nuclear programs would only further exacerbate the mixed ethnic composition of the islands in the 1960s.

While France now had her protectorate in the South Pacific, there was of course the small problem of the Leeward Islands (Raiatea, Tahaa, Huahine, Maupiti, and Bora Bora). Although technically the Pomare dynasty unified these two groups (the Windward and Leeward), the Treaty of Jarnac (1847) treated the Leeward group as if they were neutral and independent from the Windward group (Dodd 1983:119). Both the British and the French signed the treaty, which stated these islands could not be attacked by either force, and were to be left to administer themselves independently. The French Protectorate was actually just for the Windward group initially. The creation of the Suez Canal in 1876-1878 forced European powers to change their policy regarding the Leeward group, for now this region became an important strategic location (197). France was determined to protect its asset by not only changing the region from a Protectorate to a territory, but also incorporating the Leeward group into this newly begotten territory (ibid).

The Windward group became a territory when Pomare V, Prince Hinoi, signed a proclamation on June 29, 1880 relinquishing his rights as king in exchange for a handsome lifelong pension for himself and his beneficiaries (Dodd 1983:199). The lack of a recognized heir in this document made it inevitable that the Pomare dynasty would disappear forever upon the death of Hinoi. By the 1880's, the *ari'i* were of little significance to the functioning of the Society Islands; the elite Pomare lineage had become more symbolic than political and the dynasty was assured decimation.

Incorporating the Leeward group into the new territory was a difficult and arduous task for the French because these islands had remained relatively neutral during war torn years on Tahiti and Mo'orea. The Leeward group still recognized paramount

chiefs or “kings” on each island and the natives had always considered themselves a separate nation from the Windward group. The French negotiated with the British by creating a joint French-British ruled New Hebrides for French control of the Leeward group. Alas, the treaty of Jarnac (which guaranteed non-intervention by both French and British armies for the previously deemed independent Leeward group) was thrown out in 1888 in the name of imperialism (Dodd 1983:213). Yet, it would take 18 years of struggle and the eventual surrender of the great chief Tapoa of Raiatea in 1898 for the Leeward group to be incorporated into the territory (205).

3.3 Neocolonialism (Nuclear Colonialism) in French Polynesia

France is still thoroughly engaged in economics and politics on the island. Constant contact between Europeans and Tahitians created a race of “demis”, people of mixed European and Polynesian descent. Consequently, demis became the predominate people, besides the French, to hold political office in Tahiti. The demi population was advantaged over Tahitians because most grew up in more educated, French-speaking households. Some scholars argue that the term “demi” has come to mean Polynesians who are literate and educated in French (Shineberg 1988:79). Contemporary Tahitian society is a pyramid of French, demis, Tahitians, Chinese and other Polynesian Islanders, and identity has become an important facet of Tahitian culture. This interethnic culture has experienced dissension on many levels, but today most Polynesians express resentment toward the French most profoundly.

One of the most pertinent and viable criticisms raised by Polynesians against France concerns how French political figures have manipulated the media and indigenous populations to further homeland security. Of particular prominence is the fact that France

moved its nuclear testing projects to French Polynesia in 1962 after Algeria, France's previous nuclear playground, declared independence. Decolonization was not uncommon during this period coupled with the creation of newly independent nations. France lost the Comoro Islands and Algeria during this era, yet its grip on French Polynesia remained strong. The main reason French Polynesia did not become decolonized was because the Tuamotu archipelago became the new site for nuclear testing; specifically the islands Fangatafua and Mururoa.

Repercussions of France's continued political sovereignty in the region are not solely political and economic; they extend to social factors that encompass numerous dimensions, most importantly the health of island populations. It is common knowledge that the arms race has presented dilemmas on a worldwide scale (e.g., Britain in Australia, USA in the Marshall Islands, Russia in Siberia and France in Polynesia), yet France remains the most negligent in its arms policy with respect to indigenous populations⁴⁰. A more promising side to this argument is that French hegemony in Polynesia has caused Polynesian populations to emphatically demand independence, which includes a revitalization of language, art and culture called the *maohi* movement. To better understand the complexity and nature of the *maohi* movement and its revivalist tendencies, further discussion of hardships that arose from French military presence and key leaders in the political scene are essential.

Beginning in 1962, President Charles de Gaulle began concerted efforts to maintain his position in the arms race by moving nuclear research to the Tuamotu

⁴⁰ The USA took precautionary measures in the Marshall Islands by moving populations to other locations to avoid radioactive fallout contamination, as did Britain and Russia. While France did use islands where populations were minimal, they have been negligent and dishonest in their "scientific findings", which continually proclaim that contamination has presented no harm to island populations. See Danielsson (1986).

archipelago in French Polynesia, yet de Gaulle's impact on island economics goes back to as early as 1940 (Danielsson 1986:18). After the crushing defeat of France in WWII, Churchill declared French politician Petain a miscreant and de Gaulle the deserving leader of a "Free France". This statement had far-reaching effects on French Oceania's economic systems because Australia and New Zealand, along with the USA, were the main importers of French Oceania's commodities- copra, vanilla, mother-of-pearl and black pearls (ibid). Foreign businessmen in Pape'ete, Tahiti's main town and the capital of French Polynesia, found it essential to ally with de Gaulle's movement to secure continual trading with Britain and her allies. The Polynesian population was relatively unaware of the extent of political tensions in France at this time, but the threat of losing imports they had become accustomed to (e.g. tobacco, liquor, cloth and food necessities) became the deciding factor for selecting de Gaulle over Petain.

The Free French Committee was formed and included the Tahitian hero from WWI, Pouvanaa a Oopa. Pouvanaa, a staunch advocate for Petain, refused to sign a referendum pledging allegiance to de Gaulle, but this did little to dissuade the popular vote. De Gaulle won the election by a sweeping 99.8 percent of the vote in French Oceania (Danielsson 1986:18). Patriotic fervor sprung into action and hundreds of Polynesian farmers left their homes to support de Gaulle in liberating the mother country from fascists. Nevertheless, Pouvanaa remained critical of de Gaulle, especially concerning economic policies that permitted "a flourishing black market in basic commodities, thus placing them outside the reach of the Polynesians" (20). The French response to Pouvanaa's insolent statements was to put him in jail for an unspecified

timeframe for unspecified violations, yet Pouvanaa would escape this imprisonment and later became a leading figure in Tahitian politics (ibid).

World War II had a different effect on the Polynesian population than the previous war. Polynesian soldiers, having fought and lived in France, came home with the understanding that democracy in France was quite different from democracy in their islands. Thus, the seeds of Tahitian discontent with French rule were sown, followed by protest rallies organized by none other than Pouvanaa. French response to Tahitian protest always took the authoritarian road and martial law was declared. Pouvanaa was again incarcerated along with six other political malcontents. Eventually these individuals were acquitted, but the authoritarian role of French government in Polynesian matters accentuated the prestige and power Pouvanaa held over the local population. He won a seat in the French National Assembly, formed the RDPT (*Rassemblement Democratique des Populations Tahitiennes*) and this newly formed political party procured 18 of the coveted 25 seats in the Territorial Assembly of Tahiti in 1953 (Danielsson 1986:24). Recall that Pouvanaa did not favor de Gaulle, or his role in Polynesian economics; he favored a policy of “Polynesia for Polynesians” (ibid). While Pouvanaa’s party won the majority of seats in the Territorial Assembly, what would seem as a success was ultimately a failure because France still maintained authority over the region, regardless of the fact that the islands were supposedly “autonomous”. In fact, rules drawn up in Paris by the National Assembly limited the scope of power the Territorial Assembly held when it declared that “...the Territorial Assembly was not empowered to discuss and vote on problems of a *political* nature” (26).

De Gaulle ultimately lost all respect with the Tahitian population when he gave a speech in Pape'ete in August 1956 pronouncing three new goals the French government had in relation to French Oceania:

...there is a universal desire among peoples and ethnic groups to preserve their own culture and determine their own destiny. At the same time, they have a basic need of belonging to a larger economic, cultural, and political block, if they wish to escape material and spiritual poverty, avoid becoming prey to ignorance, and having their country transformed into a battleground for all sorts of ideologies fighting for world hegemony... another trend in the postwar world is the constant growth of sea and air communications throughout the world, basic to all human contact, trade, exchanges, to all human activity...the beginning of the era of nuclear energy, opening the way for either advancement and progress or the complete annihilation of mankind (Danielsson 1986:28-29).

The goals put forth by de Gaulle state nothing less than allowing French Oceania some form of internal self-government (ultimately decolonization), increasing tourism (producing a viable economy in the region) and testing nuclear bombs in the islanders homeland. The majority of local Polynesians had no idea what these bold statements would signify over the course of the next twenty years, nor the ways in which these policies would ultimately wreak economic havoc on their islands. Time would soon make these possibilities all too clear.

The purported decolonization that de Gaulle promised began to take place six months after his famous speech; the initiators of these mild reforms were the Minister for Overseas Territories, Gaston Defferre and the Minister of Justice, Francois Mitterand (Danielsson 1986:30). The first reform changed the name of the territory from French Oceania to French Polynesia while others included creating a Government Council of seven ministers (headed by an appointed delegate that took orders directly from Paris), an

increase in seats in the Territorial Assembly from 25 to 30 and broader freedom for the Territorial Assembly in financial affairs (ibid). Pouvanaa's RDPT party won the majority of seats in the assembly and his first initiative was to arrest land sales in the region. Pouvanaa was aware and empathetic with the way increased foreign presence had caused augmented land speculation, making it difficult for the native population to afford their own land.

The year 1958 was precarious for de Gaulle; it tested his patience concerning the civil war in Algeria and the consequential cry for independence in French Polynesia, promoted most avidly by Pouvanaa. De Gaulle sent out a referendum that allowed Polynesians to vote whether they wished to maintain a French territory or withdraw and become independent. Due to lack of air service and limited communications systems, most Polynesians in the outlying 117 islands never received word of this news. The use of radio would have been a viable solution to this communication glitch, until it was discovered that previous decrees "...*forbade* all local politicians..." from using this network, giving sole access of the radio to metropolitan political leaders: the French (Danielsson 1986:37). People throughout the archipelagos of the Marquesas, Gambiers, Australs and Tuamotus voted to remain a part of France due to lack of information; yet the Society group decidedly voted no: they wanted independence. De Gaulle was so enraged by Pouvanaa's outspokenness that he removed him from political office and had him incarcerated (ibid). With Pouvanaa now behind bars--eventually he ended up in Marseille, excommunicated from his family and friends--de Gaulle had no serious political contenders in the region to fight against his next move; nuclear colonialism.

De Gaulle's eloquent speech in 1956 enabled local Polynesians to believe his decision to build an airport in Tahiti was more relevant to creating a viable tourist economy than to nuclear testing. Of course this development would eventually aid the tourist economy, but the essential reason for its creation was not to increase revenue via tourism, rather to increase "job opportunity" through construction projects and a nuclear arms race. By 1963, both Russia and the United States had agreed to stop detonating atmospheric bombs, but France never intended on stepping down from a race in which it already lagged so far behind due to the hiatus caused by the Algerian civil war. Rumors circulated that Polynesia had taken the place of the Sahara as France's new test site for nuclear testing. Experts began to give lectures on inherent dangers of radioactive fallout and anthropologists began protesting after radioactive contamination of fish occurred in Christmas Island, also in the Pacific Ocean (Danielsson 1986:46).

De Gaulle remained steadfast that nuclear tests were of little consequence to the local population due to its small size (around 85,000) spread over vast miles of ocean. His decision prompted many Polynesian politicians to proclaim a need for more representation in the Territorial Assembly in Tahiti. Because Tahiti was the economic and political center of 118 islands in the territory, it not only became a haven for French military but also withstood the great migration that occurred within five archipelagos of French Polynesia. Military bases were built in Tahiti, Hao, Mururoa and Fangatafua within a year of de Gaulle's decision to move nuclear tests to French Polynesia (74). Hao served as the base for assembling and building weapons, which would be detonated on Mururoa and Fangatafua, while Tahiti became recreational base for French servicemen and members of the CEP (Centre d'Experimentation Pacifique) (ibid).

What de Gaulle and his cabinet members failed to realize were the cultural ramifications resulting from these policies at the local level. Pape'ete quickly became overcrowded (45,000); traffic jams developed as well as urban slums; brothels thrived to accommodate servicemen; tensions escalated between locals and foreigners; and violence erupted in the streets to the point where servicemen actually began to dress as civilians to avoid confrontations. The last fact exacerbated problems because tourists were frequently mistaken for disguised servicemen and attacked on the streets of Tahiti, leaving a very negative image in the expanding tourist industry. Part of the charm and lure of the South Pacific is its reputation for friendly, hospitable individuals--a fact swiftly put to rest as innocent tourists were beaten by disgruntled Polynesians.

It is estimated that from 1964-1967, the number of Polynesians who migrated to Pape'ete was 20,000 (Danielsson 1986:84). The economy in Tahiti suffered as subsistence farmers traded garden tools for wage labor opportunities in either military or construction jobs. Decreased production of plant staples (taro, yams, sweet potatoes and bananas) forced the local population to rely on markets for food, run by Chinese merchants that tended to elevate prices (ibid). The result was that slums rapidly developed around the city center of Pape'ete, as well as gangs. The schooling system in Tahiti forced children to remain in school until the age of 14, after which boys tended to join gangs and engage in violent, disruptive, drunken behavior in the streets of downtown Pape'ete. Girls were impacted by slum life as they came to understand that their sexual charms were worth gifts military men offered them in exchange for their services. From a Marxist perspective, the introduction of wage labor into the Tahitian economy also

introduced the proletariat-bourgeoisie dichotomy and consequential exploitation and alienation of workers.

Polynesians were exploited for their labor in comparison to French military men who came there for work. While Polynesians inhabited slums, the French lived in newly built barracks on some of the best land Tahiti offered. The cycle of poverty did not end, but actually escalated after plants closed their doors and development projects (e.g. roads, airstrips and hospitals) finished construction. In spite of continual protests, nuclear testing continued although it was forced underground in 1972 (Danielsson 1986:195).

France was uncooperative concerning demands set forth by the Territorial Assembly about nuclear testing. The assembly wanted international specialists brought into French Polynesia to conduct tests on the flora and fauna to discern how much contamination had occurred. The French solution was to offer the advice that locals should refrain from eating fish, particularly bonita and ahi (tuna) which are migratory, to avoid possible radioactive contamination via food. This was impossible to a population that had always relied on marine resources for nutrition⁴¹. In fact, French Polynesians were left so much in the dark as to when and how frequently tests were conducted that they relied on New Zealand's National Radiation Laboratory to actually know when a seismic blast had occurred (182).

France's unrelenting desire to catch up with the United States and Russia in the arms race increased French expenditures in the region, which in turn resulted in cutting budgets in other areas, most notably the patrolling and assessment of contamination from these tests. In 1969, Minister for Defense Pierre Messmer, announced that he would

⁴¹ This is especially important in the Tuamotu archipelago, made up of atolls which cannot support vegetable and tuber growth, or feed for domestic animals, which leaves them predominately dependent upon marine life and imported food for survival.

down-size military personnel by one-third and cut costs by NOT sending French naval ships to monitor the area surrounding the danger zone of Mururoa (Danielsson 1986:131). These factors continued to fester and the Polynesians began forming their own political parties to counter Gaullist efforts in their islands.

French political life was extremely tumultuous in May 1968 beginning with a series of student protests at the Sorbonne, which de Gaulle tried to silence with police action. The rebellion extended to French workers and an estimated two-thirds of the workforce went on strike. De Gaulle's alleged brutal military action to quash the rebellions resulted in diatribes and non-renewal of his presidential seat and he was replaced by former Prime Minister, Georges Pompidou in the 1969 elections (French presidents are elected for a period of seven years). Unfortunately for the Polynesian population, Pompidou continued de Gaulle's project and announced his goal of "...a serial production of operational H bombs- in five years" (Danielsson 1986:144). To accomplish this ambitious feat, another influx of military personnel infested the region, resulting in the mass migration of 18,000 individuals in 1970 (ibid).

Shifting ethnicity in the region was not altogether a negative factor; an increase in the Polynesian population into Tahiti also meant an increase in potential votes in the next local elections. This was the only possibility Tahitians had in gaining a voice in politics. They had to overthrow Gaullist-influenced Alfred Poroi from the senate (the position is called *deputy* in French Polynesia) and replace him with John Teariki, Francis Ariioehau Sanford, or Pouvanaa⁴², all advocates for autonomy and the abolition of nuclear testing. Pouvanaa won the election and stressed the need to gain control over broadcast media,

⁴² Pouvanaa was released from his 10 year incarceration in 1968 after pressures from the Territorial Assembly mounted. Although a weak, old man he would again become active in politics.

which would help the native population determine its own future. Meanwhile, in 1972, the United Nations Conference on Human Environment concluded that French nuclear tests should be arrested due to the paucity and inaccuracy found in French UN reports and samples taken from the region. France retained only Portugal, China and Albania as its allies (Danielsson 1986:180). Reports offered by the French government to the UN council had little to say regarding islands most exposed to nuclear fallout (Tureia, Marutea, Maturivavao, Mangareva, Vahitahi, Pukarua and Reao), all of which support an indigenous population from 50-500 (181).

Deputy Pouvanaa continued to boycott nuclear testing. In May 1973, he sent copies of a letter he co-authored with Sanford to 200 French magazines and newspapers with hopes it would reach the French people, who would hear his cry for freedom from French tyranny. Only one of these 200 publications ran Pouvanaa's letter. Not only was news being withheld from Polynesian populations but also from French citizens, who may have placed pressure on their government had they been aware of the bad international reputation they acquired. From an economic standpoint, the French must have realized the serious repercussions of their government's inaction; boycotts began to occur with not only goods but also communications, led by the Pacific nations of New Zealand and Australia and followed by countries in Southeast Asia (Danielsson 1986:194). It was logical for other countries in the vicinity to protest pollution of their waters and food supplies, a factor France continually denied.

International pressure did not stop nuclear tests; however, it did force them underground. Underground testing was not the best alternative in a geographic area of islands and atolls, made up of basalt rock that can easily break apart due to constant

explosions. The sudden death of Pompidou in 1974 cut his presidential term short, leaving Giscard d'Estaing his successor. The change in French presidency did not make a difference to Polynesian politicians, who felt all French politicians were at one time a member of de Gaulle's cabinet and therefore in accord with his policies. In essence, this would remain to be true until France switched allegiance to the Socialist party in 1981 with the election of Francois Mitterand.

It was no surprise that autonomist groups in Tahiti again protested against French hegemony in 1976 by seizing the Territorial Assembly. Polynesian politicians believed the assembly was no longer representative of French Polynesia and wanted the French government to dissolve it altogether (Danielsson 1986:226). This protest was peaceful, consisting of unarmed volunteers who sought to secure the building from French gendarmes and soldiers, but stopped abruptly with the death of Pouvanaa on January 10, 1977. Michel Poniatowski, the advisor to President d'Estaing and Minister for the Interior, promised to revise colonial-age statutes still in use in French Polynesia. Polynesian politicians steadily distrusted this claim, as so many times in the past promises had been made and broken. In essence, these revisions (the 1977 statute) did little to reform colonial programs and were just flowery terminology that did not alter the state of affairs.

Over the next few years, protests continued to occur in Tahiti over issues of independence and nuclear testing, and French officials always countered these admonishments with the response that independence would ultimately lead to economic ruin in the islands. Reference was always made to Fiji as an example of how independence can lead to "...abject poverty and racial strife...", although these things

had been occurring in the region since the pull of promising wage labor in the early 1960s (Danielsson 1986:253). Poverty was evident in the developed slums of downtown Pape'ete as well as recurrent racial strife among Polynesians, demis, French and Chinese. Social structure in Tahiti became a pyramidal class system, with the French maintaining the upper echelon, followed by Chinese entrepreneurs, the mixed demi population and native Polynesians at the bottom of the social ladder. The tumultuous nature of social life in the region reached its apex with the assassination of former French naval officer turned entrepreneur, Pierre d'Anglejean by the Te Toto Tupuna gang. The murder bore witness to increased racial hostility by the message left at the scene: "We do not want any more Frenchmen in our country" signed "Te Toto Tupuna", which translates as "The Blood of our Ancestors" (235).

The trial of the Tupuna gang began in 1979, and the defendants blamed the French colonial system as instigators of this racially induced murder. France responded by conducting the trial unfairly. They reduced the jury from nine individuals to four; used the French language throughout the proceedings; inevitably, important documents disappeared; and most importantly, the defense lawyers had not even bothered to correspond with their clients. Simultaneously, proceedings were occurring for a prison riot initiated by incarcerated Tupuna members. The native crowd that swarmed outside the court proceeding used symbols to assert their Polynesian identity and loyalty- the traditional *pareu* loincloth and tattoo marks, one of the first signs this art form revived itself with political motivations at the core.

Sanford, Pouvanaa's successor, decided to take matters into his own hands by traveling to New York to put French Polynesia on the agenda before the Committee of

Decolonization (Danielsson 1986:230). The potential threat of Sanford succeeding with the committee led Poniatoski to make new concessions to the Polynesian population. He allowed the display of the Tahitian flag for the first time since its controversial display by Queen Pomare in the 1840s; promised to dissolve the Territorial Assembly and hold new elections; and endowed the Government Council with two figure-heads: governor and vice-president⁴³ (ibid). The dissolution of the Territorial Assembly was problematic for more than one reason; mainly, by dissolving the assembly the formerly Gaullist politician, Gaston Flosse, was sure to lose his political seat during re-elections. France needed to retain an ally in Polynesian politics and therefore proposed that French Polynesia should now have two deputies in French parliament, one of which became Gaston Flosse (232).

Flosse was an often misunderstood and underrated politician by the Polynesian population. While he began his political career a staunch, conservative, Gaullist, he also promoted many changes that broke economic ties with the metropolitan center, resulting in a complete transformation of his political stance throughout his career. In reality, Flosse approached the French government and asked for a revision of the 1977 statute that would make French Polynesia a genuinely self-governing territory (Danielsson 1986: 270). Flosse wrote the revisions and secretly flew to Paris to present the new statute before Parliament. Some of the provisions weakened economic ties with France by calling for complete freedom to trade with any country Polynesia would like to collaborate with, handling international air traffic internally, and opening the islands up for foreign investment (ibid). In this way, he actually contributed to some form of

⁴³ Queen Pomare raised this flag in a solemn attempt to maintain her territory in the face of French military presence. She failed at this endeavor, and was consequently attacked by five hundred French troops under the authority of Commandant Bruat.

economic independence for the islands although he was quick to admit that economic independence might escalate to a cry for political independence.

While Flosse tried to aid the situation at the economic level, he still wished to maintain political ties with France making independence the point of dissension between his party and the Autonomists. Locals, however, largely misinterpreted his Gaullist reputation, and some individuals remained steadfast in their notions that he represented the interest of Gaullist France solely. Meanwhile, the French presidential elections of 1981 bore witness to the rise of Socialism when Mitterand defeated d'Estaing in the elections. The repercussions of the political shift in France would also reverberate in island politics (Danielsson 1986:280).

French Polynesians were temporarily relieved when Mitterand declared that he would postpone further nuclear testing in the region while he reviewed the programs and policies that had been in effect since the 1960s. One of the key socialist programs Mitterand promoted in response to France's overseas territories was the emancipation policy, which allowed for the eventual independence of its colonies. However, Mitterand decided to maintain Mururoa as a nuclear test site which ultimately resulted in noncompliance of this policy. The international response to this crisis reached its peak with the 1985 bombing of the Rainbow Warrior, a Greenpeace ship sent to protest these tests, in a harbor in New Zealand by French secret service.

By now it should be clear that regardless of the political situation in France, the stronghold over French Polynesia remained intact because of the way islanders and their land were manipulated for French homeland security. What is not sufficiently clear is the effect this has had on native politics and culture in the islands. Resentment has steadily

accrued, new political parties continually form, and now instead of rallying against one another over minute details, these parties have actually formed a coalition with an elected representative figurehead to fight more effectively against France.

3.4 Economic Change: Mo'orea

Extensive research conducted in Mo'orea by Claude Robineau highlights the effect of these changes at the sociocultural level and the economic transformation that rapidly transpired bringing French Polynesia into global economics. As I discussed, these islands were self-sufficient in the precolonial period and a system of tribute and redistribution, as well as access to land, made subsistence a matter of daily survival, with little focus on the accumulation of wealth. Citing Maurice Godelier's view, Robineau believes proper economic examination in this region should ultimately take into account multiple factors such as geography, sociology, economy and history (1984:23). He believes it is imperative to analyze surplus; its capture, utilization and by whom and the manner in which products circulate throughout the entire economy. In Robineau's view, surplus is always a product of exploitation of one group by another being the conjunction between political economy and history (29). In French Polynesia, French entrepreneurs generated surplus by creating plantation life, which was fully focused on the capture of surplus for not only personal consumption, but as an economic asset which would diffuse back into the French economy. The "trilogy of exports" that came from these plantations were copra, vanilla and coffee, although cotton was also harvested for a brief period (Robineau 1984:379).

Robineau analyzes three periods of economic change on Mo'orea, which he refers to as: periodization, colonial domination, and contemporary mutation (379).

Periodization occurred in the first half of the 19th century when traditional subsistence began to shift toward a capitalist market system of exchange. Aiding this transition was evangelism, the breakdown of traditional roles and religion coupled with the introduction of European goods, and the implementation of civil code (ibid). Colonial domination in the second half of the 19th century, characterized by the acquisition of land by foreigners, the rise of a pyramidal, multi-ethnic social composition and consequential social ascension through economic innovation dramatically altered the French Polynesian working world.

Colonial domination typifies plantation life on the islands. With the transition to plantation life and introduced wage labor, an economic disparity arose among islanders based on access to goods, technological innovations, religious affiliation and social networks. This period marked the rise of the demi population, who because of their mixed ancestry held elevated social and economic status over full-blooded Polynesians. Plantation life significantly altered the ethnic composition on the islands with the importation of Chinese coolies and outlying islanders (Cook Islanders, Rapanui, Marquesan, etc.) which continues into the present.

The period that Robineau calls “contemporary mutation”, the one with which this thesis is mainly concerned, began in the 1960s. Contemporary mutation, per Robineau, involved the complete absorption of Tahitian culture, complete economic transformation to salary/wage labor and the end of traditional agriculture in 1967 with the introduction of the CEP (Centre d’Experimentation Pacifique, which is the organization developed for nuclear testing in the region) and DCAN (Direction of Construction of Naval Arms), increased outmigration throughout Polynesia into Tahiti, gave rise to developed racism

and the development of tourism (45 and 379-381). Robineau speaks of the multi-faceted crises the region experienced during this period in several different areas: tourism and development, politics, economics, and urbanization (33). Other scholars such as Paul Ottino write that increased mobility was the most critical and visible part of social transformation in this period (1972:322). This period experienced rapid decline of plantation life in exchange for wage-labor jobs in tourism or development/government positions that France brought to the region by initiating the CEP.

New migration patterns had serious repercussions for the traditional Polynesian structure of family. Many adolescents left their natal islands, where they had lived several generations deep in a cooperative household, for Pape'ete either living alone or alongside other migrants from their homeland who became "surrogate" families. Inevitably, relocation aided in the decline of plantation life, especially in the production of vanilla because a great deal of the workforce left Mo'orea in search of better opportunities on Tahiti. Between 1964-1966, 27% of the population of Mo'orea left the island and moved to neighboring Tahiti in search of work with the CEP (Robineau 1984:101). New jobs created economic competition among migrant workers who occupied "quartiers" in urban Pape'ete (and they still occupy them) and the demi population. The clash between these groups resulted in intensified racism mainly due to language use because knowledge of the French language allowed educated individuals more access to these positions. At the same time, Pouvanaa a Oopa initiated radical nationalist political stirrings among the disenchanting native Polynesian population by voicing opposition to French hegemony in economic and political realms (34).

Although better working conditions and opportunities were an indisputable pull factor to Tahiti, this was not the only reason individuals migrated. There were opportunities to receive a formal education in Tahiti, as well as a hospital. There is not a hospital on Mo'orea-- even today-- and while it is just a short boat trip to Tahiti, the two pharmacies the island boasts have minimal hours of operation and are not effective means at handling emergencies. Robineau calls the new economy that developed during this period an "artificial economy" designed predominantly around the mobility of the younger generations of Mo'orea (105). This migration wave was much different from the earlier wave that occurred in 1960-1962, which consisted mostly of Chinese immigrants. Between 1963-1967, in just three districts of Tahiti (Fa'a'a, Pirae and Arue), the population was 7-8 times higher than the population of the whole island of Mo'orea (106). Yet French Polynesians were not just moving to Tahiti. They also left for Hawaii, France, New Zealand and the mainland United States to attend college (many went to Hawaii to attend Brigham Young University as Mormons proselytize heavily in the region) (ibid).

Robineau highlights this period as important evidence of the dialectic between modernity and tradition and the disparity between tradition and myth by what is readopted as a symbol of development or as a means of liberation (1984:21). Increased urbanization during this period sparked the beginning of what Robineau refers to as "neo-Polynesian" (1984:385). He predominantly focused on Mo'orea for his research because he believed it was representative of functionalism through social evolution seen in three main movements that altered the Tahitian worldview. This was accomplished through: 1) salary/ economic transformation from a traditional, cumulative household effort to more

individual oriented wage labor; 2) increased urbanization; and 3) consumption at the village level (ibid). Indeed the new Tahitian concept of work became “*ohipa moni*”, or work for money (386). As tourism began to increase in the region allowing more work opportunities for Polynesians, cultural institutions began to resurface. This period witnessed and continues to witness reclamation of numerous traditional Tahitian cultural institutions.

3.5 Cultural Renaissance in French Polynesia: The Maohi Movement

Modern Tahiti is experiencing a remarkable cultural renaissance, which has historical roots in French oppression, exploitation and inequality. Raapoto (1988) writes profound statements concerning his Tahitian identity:

They call me Tahitian, but I refuse this. I am not Tahitian. This denomination has an essentially demagogic, touristic, snobbish, and rubbish vocation. ‘Tahitian’ is the *pareu* skirt whose material is printed in Lyon or in Japan; it is the Marquesan *tiki* called Tahitian as well as the *tapa* of Tonga, Uvea, or Samoa sold in Pape’ete under the Tahitian label... Tahiti is an exotic product made by the Western World for the consumption of their fellow-countrymen... The product ‘Tahiti’, which the Bureau of Tourism sells to the world, isn’t it a place of prostitution where the women are easy and cost nothing?... We have ceased being since we’ve been the object of others... An entire people is dying comfortably... because others make the effort of speaking for them, on their behalf... I am *maohi* (3-4).

Today, most Tahitians distinguish themselves from foreigners with the term *maohi*.

Maohi refers to the Polynesian community of all those who can claim to be of the same ancestral past. To be *maohi* is to be the opposite of *hutu painu*, a foreigner with no right to Polynesian land. Because Tahitian is a dialect of other Polynesian languages, the term can be compared to *maori*, the indigenous population of New Zealand. “Ma” translates as

being free from *tapu*, while “ori” means reconstitution or restoration. *Maori* is “tension towards unity, truth, in a process of perpetual renewal” (Raapoto 1988:5). This term is a wonderful example of the way modern Polynesians are asserting their identity and reinventing their culture in the face of globalization.

Karen Stevenson (1990) discusses how Pacific Islanders are using traditions, heightening awareness of their cultural heritage, creating unified ethnic identities for political clout, and marketing this culture for economic gain (255). She argues that the nature of conquest among the Pacific Islands resulted in islanders having to rely on missionary, academic, or colonial accounts for information on their traditions, then reinterpreting these through a process of contemporary revival. Scholars have debated the issue of cultural reinvention, and many agree that the invention of tradition is linked to political redefinition and nationalistic tendencies (Hanson 1989, Hobsbawm 1983, Handler and Linnekin 1984, Jolly 1992, Keesing 1989 and Turner 1997). Culture is constantly recreated, especially in areas of high contact where selective borrowing occurs, and in the case of modern French Polynesia, this is a brazen condition of its revitalization efforts.

In Tahitian history, a great deal of traditional culture transformed during the period of first contact and colonialism. Inevitably, traditions changed or ceased with conversion to Christianity and French colonization. Ironically, colonialism aided modern reinterpretations and reinvention of some Tahitian traditions; this is particularly poignant concerning the *heiva*. In her article, “Heiva: Continuity and Change of a Tahitian Celebration”, Stevenson examines the transformation of the *heiva*, or festival, in Pape’ete, Tahiti over the course of the last 120 years. Historically, the *heiva* was a

redistribution feast given by chiefs to establish allies with other lineages. The function was to excessively display harvests to elevate the prestige of chiefs. The *heiva* has transformed itself several times throughout its commencement in French colonial Tahiti. No longer is this associated with elite Tahitians, rather it became affiliated with the French by the particular date chosen for the celebration. The *heiva* coincides with French Independence, or Bastille day.

The fete, or celebration, honored the remaining Tahitian elite as well as French governors and European missionaries (Stevenson 1990:259). In the early years of the *heiva*, a synthesis between the two cultures allowed each population to gain something from the event. Arts, crafts, and sporting events were integral to the festival. However, early years focused more on French activities such as parades, games, banquets, and ceremonies. Stevenson writes that the French “used the festival to legitimate their colonial position” (258). While the French were using the *heiva* to assert colonial dominance, the Tahitians saw it as a time to congregate and honor traditional dance and song. After World War II, the emphasis shifted to Tahitian activities and arts, and this change has remained a constant attribute of the annual event.

The *heiva* attained international fame and became one of the primary reasons for increased tourism in Tahiti. Tourism in Tahiti increased from 4,000 to 50,000 a year from 1960-1970 (Stevenson 1990:263). Increased migration and tourism play a substantial role in the shift towards predominantly Tahitian activities; it was a way for Tahitians to counter an increase of foreigners in the region by reasserting their identity and traditions. This period also began the concerted effort at institutionalizing Tahitian culture beginning with the establishment of Le Maohi Club in 1965 (263).

Le Maohi Club was an organization fabricated for the sake of creating and reinterpreting traditional Tahitian values such as “strength, agility, ability in subsistence activities (fishing, paddling, copra preparation), and proficiency of the Tahitian language” (Stevenson 1990:263). Tahitian culture was not only celebrated during this time, but also revived and institutionalized. During this period, L’Academie Tahitienne was established with the goal of standardizing the Tahitian language, recording genealogies and myths, and studying the ancient art of lore (ibid). The first museums were opened in Tahiti, including the Gauguin museum and Le Musee de Tahiti et ses iles, another important tourist attraction and source of revenue for the islands. The Tahitian government, in particular the influence of Marco Tevane, minister of Culture and Education funds these organizations. Tevane promotes a return to Tahitian values and identity and believes that institutionalization is indispensable for Tahitians to rediscover their past.

Two significant features occurred that furthered the *maohi* movement: Tahitian became recognized as the official language, and the *heiva* was renamed Tiurai, the Tahitian word for July (Stevenson 1990:264). The date of Tiurai changed to June 29, the day Tahiti was ceded to France in 1881, and this transformation was “hoped to emphasize the beneficial relationship between Tahiti and France” (ibid). The *heiva* was lengthened, and set to conclude on July 14, French Bastille Day, thus representing a French-Tahitian symbiotic relationship. While this symbiosis would seem to undermine the *maohi* movement, the fact is its activities have become Tahitian rather than the French. Dates and names of Tiurai continually change, but the festival always includes at least one day of Bastille recognition and it always commences in July. The important thing to

recognize is that the *heiva* became the main platform for Tahitians to reassert their identity and increase tourist revenue in the islands. More importantly, the local population is displaying cultural revival to a diverse, international audience. As the tradition reinvented itself from a once elite Tahitian feast to a symbol of French-Tahitian symbiosis, it now represents a fusion of the traditional past and the transformed present and emphasizes Tahitian culture much more vividly than in the past.

The Tahitian identity, *maohi*, is meaningful because it synthesizes past traditions with reinterpreted cultural institutions. The *heiva* brought about a revival of many “forgotten” aspects of Polynesian culture such as tattooing, fire walking, music, dance, and rituals associated with *marae*⁴⁴. Presently, the *heiva* incorporates inter-island competition of events such as dance and outrigger canoeing and is an excellent portrayal of an obvious truism: cultural revival, which frequently occurs within nationalistic movements, has the effect of altering traditions they aim to revive (Handler and Linnekin 1984:276 and Shils 1981:246)

⁴⁴ In West Polynesia, this term is *malae*. Both uses of the word refer to the sacred spaces where rituals traditionally occurred.

Chapter Four

Cultural Theory in Modern Polynesia

4.1 Invention of Tradition

The problem of defining what is “traditional” goes back to the early work of A.L. Kroeber (1948) and more modern interpretations put forth by scholars in the invention of tradition literature. There are several ways to consider traditions: as inherited, bounded cultural traits passed from generation to generation; as interpretive, symbolic constructions which embody “continuity and discontinuity”; and as inventions by elites in modern nation states to uphold their dominant positions (Kroeber 1948 Handler and Linnekin 1984 Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Hobsbawm coined the phrase “invention of tradition” and emphasized intentional manipulation, cultural invention, hegemony and rapid social transformation as he examined the industrial revolution in Europe and the way tradition reinvents itself. Hobsbawm used a Marxist perspective for analysis, which is both helpful and a hindrance when one looks at revivals in modern Pacific countries. Instead of regarding tradition as the opposite of modernity, it would be more appropriate to look at Tahitian cultural revival within the context of cultural survival.

According to Maybury-Lewis, cultural survival assumes that a given culture has enough confidence in itself to maintain, adapt and revive traditions in the modern era, taking into account the inevitability of change due to global processes. Cultural survival highlights the fact that culture is not a static entity- a pre-colonial slice of pie brought into the present unchanged- but that all cultures change over time. This approach is more in line with the work of Hanson (1989) where the distinction between authentic and inauthentic traditions dissolves. To Hanson, all traditions are fluid inventions of an interpreted past in the present and it is not a tradition that is necessarily the important

object of analysis. Instead, the important measure is the process and manner in which traditions come to be accepted by a given culture through social reproduction (898). According to Hanson, this process involves sign substitutions that are noticeably different from the sign on which they are reproduced and as such indicate political agendas (899). Sign substitutions in modern tattoo iconography reflects cultural survival because tattoos have been revived as an attempt to validate Polynesian identity, with the goal of nationalism, by adapting to new economic and political circumstances.

There was a native backlash from the Maori community in relation to Hanson's article "The Making of Maori: Culture Invention and its Logic". One of the main complaints lodged against Hanson's analysis concerned the idea that a detached outsider took the prerogative of speaking for the native community. In fact, a great deal of the controversy stems from semantics; the obvious oxymoron that comes from a phrase such as "invention of tradition" runs contrary to what most people think when they approach an issue as complex as tradition. Many fall into the dichotomous trap that there is a static cultural core to traditions, which can be found only by peeling away layers of meaning, but that was not the idea Hanson promoted. In fact, he wanted to do away with the authentic/inauthentic aspect of tradition and look more at the process, not the product, in which traditions resurface. I agree, as do most scholars on invention of tradition, that the adaptation of past traditions in the present reflects a particular, political agenda and that the reproduction of traditions is how they gain validation by the local community.

Because cultures continually change, symbols and customs that represent a given culture are in constant need of reinterpretation in the present. Shils (1981) considered something a tradition if it lasted over three generations (15). This criterion wrongfully

discredits Polynesian tattooing as traditional because as we have seen, the art disappeared then resurfaced after a hundred years of dormancy. Nor should we consider Kroeber's definition suitable- the "internal handing through time" of certain traits- because of the apparent cessation of transmission after colonialism, although historical particularism does offer insight into reasons traditions are prone to change such as addition, amalgamation, diffusion, absorption and fusion (1948:411). With reference to tattooing, all these shifts occurred either pre or post colonialism⁴⁵. Hobsbawm's Marxist analysis is also troublesome because modern Tahitian revival occurs among Polynesians, not the French elite, although undoubtedly many non-Polynesian entrepreneurs make a profit on successfully marketed indigenous culture in the tourist industry. It is seemingly difficult to say that the invention of tradition in French Polynesia is a way that the elite population maintains its dominance, except perhaps in the instance of economics.

The invention of tradition literature is pertinent to an analysis of modern French Polynesia because the current political situation is definitively correlative to a revival of Tahitian culture. Contrary to Hanson's dissolution of an objective authentic/inauthentic past is Keesing's view where neocolonial domination and hegemony set up an objective plane (and Manichean reality) wherein reinvented traditions resurface. This view assumes the existence of a pristine, recoverable past, but a disparity surfaces between "...culture as a way of life and culture, *kastom*, or tradition as a substantivized representation of that way of life" (Turner 1997:4). The problem for Keesing is that living culture and portraying culture (tradition) through symbols of identity do not coalesce. He presents

⁴⁵ Addition took the form of European introduced items in tattoo iconography; amalgamation represents the current trend of mixed Polynesian tattoo symbols; diffusion has been a constant occurrence; absorption is a current trend in both Western and Polynesian tattoo parlors and fusion represents the process of fetishized symbols as commodities in the industry.

such traditions as symbols of “false consciousness” sharing Marxist undertones with Hobsbawm. When indigenous cultures revive certain traditions, they do so selectively and in juxtaposition to an outside element by reinforcing unique attributes that separate them from the Western world. Keesing (1989) tells us that:

In the process of objectification, a culture is (at the level of ideology) imagined to consist of “traditional” music, dances, costumes, or artifacts. Periodically performing or exhibiting these **fetishized** representations of their cultures, the elites of the new Pacific ritually affirm (to themselves, the tourists, the village voters) that the ancestral cultural heritage lives on (23)

The predicament here stems from the use of the term “elite”- who exactly are the elite of the new Pacific? In French Polynesia, the apex of society rests among French and Asian entrepreneurs on the islands. Situated below this layer one finds the *demi* (French-Polynesian) population where in fact many individuals, frequently politicians, aid and fund cultural revival efforts. Native Polynesians in the Society Islands represent the lowest economic bracket, those who seem to cling most vehemently to traditions of their home islands with wide ethnic diversity among them. While it would be nice to get rid of Manichean dichotomies that set up a social reality based on concepts of good/bad, authentic/ inauthentic, and traditional/modern, the fact is that Polynesians and Europeans alike are guilty of considering each other the “other” and there is in fact a decisive rift in Tahitian culture. Yet, the eloquently spoken need of analyzing circumstances which give rise to revival cannot be disregarded either. Tattoos disappeared under the colonial system and religious conversion of the 19th century and they reappeared as nations all

over the world became independent from their colonial powers--this is no mere coincidence.

Revivals of all kinds--particularly cultural and linguistic--operate as symbols for the whole of a given culture reflecting their current political conditions (Keesing 1989:24). To refer to an authentic past is to create a romanticized version of traditional Polynesian culture, which was never a reality. In pre-colonial Polynesia, as we have seen, stability and unification were uncommon traits endemic to the region and some forms of tattooing (predominantly facial tattoos) reflected this fragmentation. A modern trend towards a pan-Polynesian culture, shows how the fragmented region is being transformed by shared experience from vying political districts and distinct island identities to that of Polynesian vis à vis Western identity⁴⁶. Keesing points out that “political myths of the contemporary Pacific that refashion the past to advance the interests of the present are not so different from the political myths of the past” (ibid). A case in point is the mythical blood relation of the Tui Tonga to gods of the Polynesian pantheon to legitimize the inherited position of the king. Although current tattooing may bear little resemblance to historical renditions of the art form, the symbols are a powerful assertion of identity as well as an incontestable political tool used for cultural recognition to legitimate political demands.

Turner (1997) examines the acceleration of political movements throughout the Pacific and argues that tradition can no longer be viewed solely within the context of identity rather, recent movements in Fiji, Bougainville and Hawaii are all “...rooted in contested views of the past...” and that “...each of these events or movements has been

⁴⁶ The University of South Pacific and scholars of Pacific Studies assert a regional identity based on a pan-Polynesian culture they supposedly convey. Some important elements of this culture represent particular regional elaborations within Polynesia (e.g., tattooing). See Keesing (1989).

about political and economic power...” (1). In his view, interpretation of the past is constrained in two ways: the fact that no society freely selects its historical course and that prior interpretation always builds off the *raison d'être* that informs that culture (Turner 1997:10-12). In other words, changes that arise in discourse also account for differences of interpretation due to a shifting focus of representation. In the Pacific, the present shift highlights the native voice which “attempts to reclaim the power of self-definition” (ibid). Authenticity is an important tool of analysis related to modern tourism and economic opportunity for Pacific Islanders.

4.2 *Authenticity, Tourism and the Industry of Culture*

Daniel Boorstin (1964) discusses how travelers have become tourists due to heightened ease of travel (77). He reviews the manner in which travel was accomplished prior to the availability of modern conveniences such as airplanes and trains. Travel before the 19th century was very sumptuous, time-consuming, and laborious; it was work. In fact, the word travel comes from the French word *travail*, which translates as “work”. The traveler was a dynamic person looking for adventure and exoticism; he worked before and during travels, making arrangements and navigating foreign lands unassisted. Tourists, on the other hand, are recreation seekers who strive to experience exotic lands while maintaining all the comforts of home. Boorstin calls this travel experience “pseudo-events”; the expectation of peculiarity and familiarity at the same time (79). The modern travel experience has been transformed and commodified (91). The risk is taken out of the experience, thus making it no longer an adventure but a commodity to be bought and sold.

Pseudo-events are commodities sold in the tourist industry. Tourism caters to the demands of the tourist, and he "...seldom likes the authentic product of culture; he prefers his own provincial expectations" (Boorstin 1964:106). Throughout Polynesia, pseudo-events abound: Hawaiian print shirts, flower *leis*, exotic tattooed dancers, *pareu* skirts, *tapa* cloth, *tikis* and *luaus* are glorified images produced to accommodate expectations of tourists. Tahitians seldom wear Hawaiian print shirts or *leis* (unless they work in the tourist industry, although they still wear traditional *pareu*) and the tattoo completely disappeared until its reintroduction in 1982 (Stevenson 1992:129). The point is that while some of these things were indeed traditional, like the tattoo, they have been reinvented for political and economic gain.

Amanda Stronza (2001) tells us that tourism affects the local population by placing expectations on the host community that shape touristic encounters (271). In other words, tourists' preferences are placed upon people that behave and resemble a certain way they deem "authentic", but what tourists are choosing to see is influenced by external agents such as the media, tourist agencies and the state. She cites Erik Cohen's 1979 work, which explores the idea that while tourism can be an empowering avenue for self-representation by allowing locals to reinvent themselves, it can also lead to role playing; e.g., "playing the native" (18). Howell (1994) considers locals active agents who preserve and invent traditions they choose, all the while being cognizant of what is staged and what is real. From my fieldwork and research, I found the alternative to be the case: there were many misconceptions about tattoo iconography and placement on the body among the local population. In some instances local residents showed me

traditional tattoos that never existed in that geographic area in prehistory. A case in point is facial tattooing in French Polynesia.

One way to view this phenomenon is through the lens of the culture industry. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944) tell us that “under monopoly all mass culture is identical” (3). This view is hegemonic and refers to the way popular culture has been manipulated to profit those in control of certain arenas (film, television and media to name a few). Culture is mass produced by monopolies that seek to maintain power in industry. While consumers are offered choices (or what seem to be choices), they are actually reifications of old themes in recurrent, cyclical themes. They argue that even examples that fall outside the pattern of norms in the culture industry (anathema) are as much a part of it because they protest against the mainstream. In this way, choice is an illusion and consumers are robbed of their imagination by having to choose only between limited things offered to them. Genre shifts to new, aesthetic mediums reflect shifts within the structures of power because while people falsely believe they are making choices, they are really just choosing within limited options offered by the industry.

This view is a bit extreme as it relates to tattooing, but there are some salient features that should be addressed. First, without proper historical documents from each of these island communities, these cultures have had to rely on early documented work by explorers, academics, missionaries and military. As they revive “lost” aspects of their culture, they also reinvent it by borrowing symbols (thus making “choices”) of limited iconography recorded by westerners. In this case, tourism is the industry that promotes culture and as such the business of the culture industry is reproduction of that industry-- in other words continual and expansive tourism to continually profit those in power. This

is widespread and noticeable in French Polynesia and can be seen in the post card images put forth by the media, entrepreneurs, tourist agencies and hotel chains, all of which depict the tattooed savage. These images reflect the structure of power of those in the tourist industry but also contribute to the ambiguity surrounding ethnic identity in the region. Tattooing IS a part of Polynesian cultural heritage but it is also a commodified aspect of that culture in the tourism industry. However, I think it is much too simplistic to say that this kind of commodification infers a loss of meaning to these Polynesians. On the contrary, tourism became the platform for asserting that identity to the western world, albeit somewhat “staged”.

Dean MacCannell (1973) discusses the search for authentic experience in “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings”. He borrows two concepts of space from Erving Goffman (the front and back regions), and explains the difference between the two and their relation to tourism. The front space is where customers, in this case tourists and service people are located; while the back remains the area of the performers (590). MacCannell likens the back region to the art of cunning; the area is a way to separate the social realities of what is being shown to tourists and what really occurs. The front-back dichotomy is an interesting way to consider tourism in the Society Islands. Mo’orea has a flourishing tourist industry at the Tiki Village, which incorporates “traditional” Tahitian dance, fire walking, *luaus*, the music of *ukuleles*, a traditional *marae*, and a black pearl farm exhibit. All dancers brandish at least one black “Tahitian” tattoo on their slim, tan, agile bodies. Several of these dancers became informants over the course of two summers I spent conducting fieldwork on

Mo'orea. Through these individuals, I was introduced to a number of tattoo artists on the island of varying ethnic backgrounds (e.g., French, Tahitian, Marquesan and Tuamotuan).

I spent four months in 2003-2004 traveling and working in the Pacific, and became quite familiar with tourist industries in Hawai'i, Tahiti, Mo'orea, and Easter Island (Rapanui). I witnessed the front-back division during two months on Mo'orea. During my first visit, I made a good friend who worked as a dancer at the Tiki Village. Kae* became my most important informant, introducing me to the small, local community engaged in tourist work, which included a cousin of his who was a tattoo artist⁴⁷. When I returned to Mo'orea after archaeological field school in Rapanui, I called upon Kae in hopes we could visit before I departed. Unfortunately, he had shows every night that week, so he invited me to meet up with him at the Tiki Village.

The Tiki Village is owned and operated by a French proprietor, and is an exorbitantly expensive pseudo-event for tourists. An admission ticket, which includes *luau* dinner and performance, costs about \$75.00, and thankfully my friend waived my admission. The village has thatched roof bamboo bungalows throughout, which are actual homes to several performers. The main event takes place in an outdoor arena, complete with stars overhead and sand floors located in front of a pink sand beach with a miniature pearl farm in the shallow depths of the ocean. Dancing occurs in the outdoor arena that is situated, conveniently, next to the remains of an archaeological feature, the traditional *marae*. There are approximately 75 dancers and musicians employed at the Tiki Village, as well as many in the service industry (cooks, servers, bartenders, bus-drivers). The arena and restaurant are the front spaces, while residential bungalows comprise back spaces.

⁴⁷ This is a pseudonym

An interesting thing occurred during the show as I reminisced about a dance troupe I had seen in Rapanui. I thought to myself how strikingly familiar the two dances and songs seemed. I would later find out why there was such a similarity between these two interpretations from very distant, yet related islands. Dance had been standardized in the 1950s by Madeleine Moua, who later formed the first semi-professional dance troupe in the Society Islands (Stevenson 1992:121). Standardization provided the base from which dance could be creatively modified or reinvented. There was little surprise as to the noticeable connection; the dance troupe I saw in Rapanui was organized by a Tahitian man out of Pape'ete. The base for both dances was the same, yet innovatively modified on each island to depict certain cultural traits.

After the show, I went back to the bungalows with my informants. To my astonishment, we watched DVDs, listened to music on expensive stereo equipment, made snacks in a modern kitchen, and talked long into the night. These individuals were truly modern, truly influenced by a market economy and western culture and it seemed blood was their only tie to a traditional Polynesian worldview. The dance show, which appeared so authentic and real, was "...a show based on the structure of reality" (MacCannell 1973:593). Interviews with dancers made me aware that the tattoos covering their bodies were acquired via modern tattoo technology and designs were not only a melange of Pacific art, but a few individuals sported modern, American tribal imagery. As a student of Pacific studies, I recognized the selective borrowing of design, which manifest as modern, mixed patterns on these individuals. However, the average tourist, with the exception of tattoo zealots, would not have been able to distinguish particular Pacific regions associated with certain motifs. It is plausible that the imagery of

the tattooed dancer is indeed a created reality based upon tourist expectations of what they hope to find in Polynesia, which brings me to my final point.

4.4 Commodification of Polynesian Tattooing

Marx (1887) is the most well known economic theorist who attributed the “fetish” to developed, capitalist market economy. In Capital, Marx put forth the notion that commodity fetishism is an inevitable result of historical, economic development where individual labor is lost to that of pooled community labor. Accordingly, it follows that the mysterious nature of commodities rests in the fact that the exchange of finalized, consumable products obscures the amount and kind of labor involved in production. Indeed, Marx considered labor a commodity itself, but this does not show itself in the goods and services produced by laborers. Furthermore, the introduction of a monetary system of exchange sets up value assignments for products, which fluctuate according to demand. People pay for ready-to-consume products without witnessing or realizing the amount of time and skill involved in their production.

It is apparent that utility functions of objects speak for themselves while exchange value and meaning are constructed for commercial purposes. This is fetishism; how value attaches itself to objects and how labor is a social thing, a common endeavor among free- thinking individuals who work (labor) to provide for themselves. Marx (1887) stated that in pre-capitalist societies (e.g., feudal societies) immediate social forms of labor existed unmasked as services were paid in kind (78). In this way, products of labor were not “commodities” per se, because of clear expectations between an individual producer and an individual consumer in relation to one another. This is commodity fetishism in the modern era; “...the labour power of all the different individuals is

consciously applied as the combined labour-power of the community...they are social, instead of individual” (83). This is a very interesting phenomenon and one worth exploration in the future as it relates to Polynesian tattooing. According to this definition, Polynesian tattooing has not been fetishized; the procedure is still very much an individual endeavor by the artist, his labor unmasked to the actively present recipient.

Traditionally, tattoo artists received payment (in pigs, produce or cloth) for their skill and service, which was predetermined by not only the product but also the process this entailed. Individuals recognized the qualifications of an artist (and frequently their accompanying and prerequisite ritual knowledge), which determined the quantity and form of payment. This is radically different from contemporary tattooing in French Polynesia where payment fluctuates among the native population and visitors to the islands and it is a vivid example of how the tattoo became a commodity. It is helpful to look at this commodity through two related, yet separate lenses: as a social object that carries meaning above and beyond utilitarian functions, and as a tool for identity formation reflecting the politics of representation via consumption (Appadurai 1986 Douglas and Isherwood 1979 and McCracken 1986).

In The World of Goods (1979), Douglas and Isherwood examine the role of consumption in everyday life to determine why economists subjectively reduce consumption practices to largely utilitarian and psychological needs (physical and mental well-being). The consumption of anything outside these two domains usually falls into an all-encompassing third category that includes leisure goods. Quite simply, demand theory and utilitarian need do not answer imperative questions on why people consume things that are not a necessity. Douglas and Isherwood’s answer is that commodities send

visible social messages to the external world that communicate cultural meaning.

Cultural meaning represents morals that organize how cultural phenomena are arranged, evaluated and interpreted. Through goods, norms and values articulate everyday social life yet meaning is never static and there is constant movement and reinterpretation of a given commodity.

Appadurai (1986) also breaks from Marxian labor-dominated discourse on commodities by looking at the “social lives” of objects as they pass from production, into exchange, to consumption (13). He defines three categories of any given commodity that reflect how exchange is always a social factor:

The commodity situation in the social life of any thing... can be disaggregated into: 1) the commodity phase... 2) the commodity candidacy of any thing; and 3) the commodity context in which any thing may be placed... The commodity phase is where certain things are seen as moving in and out of the commodity state... The commodity candidacy of things... refers to the standards and criteria (symbolic, classificatory, and moral) that define the exchangeability of things... Finally, the commodity context refers to the variety of social arenas, within or between cultural units, that help link the commodity candidacy of a thing to the commodity phase of its career... dealings with strangers might provide contexts for the commoditization of things that are otherwise protected from commoditization.

(1986:13-15).

These categories are an important tool of analysis for modern French Polynesian tattooing because the subdivisions help explain modern tattoo trends among native culture as well as in the tourist industry.

The commodity phase reflects the way the process of tattooing shifted into modern, commodity exchange out of traditional political systems where service and payment in kind were the prevalent mode of barter exchange. The new market economy

of French Polynesia integrated into the tourist industry introduces modern, monetary exchange between private individuals who know little about one another or their respective cultures. This phase is evident today when one examines various modes of exchange, which fluctuate between monetary exchange (among tourists) to a barter system (among Polynesians), depending on the parties involved in the transaction.⁴⁸

Appadurai, building off the work of William Chapman (1980), claims that both monetary, commodity exchange and barter- although quite distinctive processes- frequently coexist in some societies (1986:10 and 1980:67-68). Fieldwork and interviews in Mo'orea showed this as an appropriate synthesis of economic models in this particular society, by the apparent and dramatic shift among individuals. Tourists of non-Polynesian descent paid high premiums for tattoos while tourists from other Polynesian islands paid a discounted price for their tattoos and native individuals paid the lowest fees (if they paid at all) as they generally tended to barter with one another. In other words, there was not a strict price enforced across the board, but it changed depending upon the clientele and there were two forms of exchange in process simultaneously, also dependent upon the recipient.

Commodity candidacy examines cultural frameworks for the classification of goods and services, yet this categorization is problematic for two reasons. Some exchange situations suspend general notions that there are basic, common rules governing exchange. Two factors in particular seem to lack the complexity involved in determining a homogenous framework of not only utilitarian needs but also leisure goods. These situations are: cross-cultural exchange where price is the sole characteristic agreed upon by both buyer and seller; and “intracultural exchange where, despite a vast universe of

⁴⁸ Different modes of exchange are analyzed in the conclusion, Chapter Five.

shared understandings, a specific exchange is based on deeply divergent perceptions of the value of the objects being exchanged” (Appadurai 1986:14). Appadurai calls these situations “regimes of value”, where value is inconsistent among different settings, distinct commodities, and various agents (ibid).

Disparate regimes of value emphasize the fluid nature of tattooing as a commodity, as well as the commodity context. Commodity context refers to different social environments where commodities find themselves linked on their trajectory toward a social life. Frequently, this “...may bring together actors from quite different cultural systems who share only the most minimal understandings...about the objects in question” (Appadurai 1986:15). The tourist industry in Polynesia is the commodity context where tattooing finds itself ready to embark on a social life, but this social life is cut short and ceases to be once that tattoo is actualized. Commodification is the ability to exchange something, to reflect value (however divergent that may be depending on the recipient) and that ability to sell/resell which ends once the process is completed. As a rudimentary institution of Polynesian culture, the art symbolically carries meaning imbued with traditional heritage, identity and cultural representation. On the contrary, tattoos for many foreign recipients are more likely a mark of conspicuous consumption (a visible display of leisurely world travel) and an attempt to find the “authentic” within an exoticized culture.⁴⁹ These cases exemplify the fact that the significance of tattoos is not a stable, common denominator, but a variable expression of identity embedded in contrasting politics of representation. Tattooing to Polynesians carried meaning associated with traditional heritage, while tattooing to tourists reflected memories of the

⁴⁹ This information was collected through field interviews and is a general, common thread I found among non-Polynesian respondents, many of whom claim they would never have gotten a tattoo, except in this environment.

tourist experience. Tourists told me that the tattoo represented this particular time and activity; it was a way to mark the experience (quite literally) and remind them of this particular time/space.

Luxury goods are enigmatic commodities because they do not fulfill basic, utilitarian needs. Appadurai (1986), like his predecessor Douglas (1979), finds that luxury goods fulfill the role of visible signs that send messages whose

“...principal use is *rhetorical* and *social*, goods that are simply *incarnated signs*. The necessity to which *they* respond is fundamentally political...it might make more sense to regard luxury as a special ‘register’ of consumption...The signs of this register... are some or all of the following attributes...1) restriction ...to elites... 2) complexity of acquisition...3) the capacity to signal fairly complex social messages... 4) regulation by fashion and 5) a high degree of linkage of their consumption to body, person and personality. (38).

Tattoos are clearly luxury items, like any other form of art, but that does not negate the fact they that can and do have a particular function. Cultural traditions such as Polynesian tattooing commonly provide the appropriate medium that set certain cultures apart from others. As I have tried to show, the tendency to revive “lost” cultural traits is symptomatic of cultures that have a legitimate stake in recognition and an aim at becoming economically and politically viable. The end result of culture revival in the region has been a push toward marketing of indigenous culture for economic gain. What this means is that change takes place on two related levels: a shifting economic landscape characterized by the selling of authentic art and the legitimization of identity formation that counters foreign presence in the region.

It is only due to immense change that one finds sacred art and ritual fall prey to commodification. Because of the transient, flexible nature of commodities "...it is typical that objects which represent aesthetic elaboration and objects that serve as sacra are, in many societies, not permitted to occupy the commodity state...for very long" (Appadurai 1986:22-23). In other words, the current marketing strategy (at the level of tourism) merely reflects a current, economic situation and need to regain economic power by the native community, which under different conditions could alternatively curtail this practice. Having said this, there are always foreign entrepreneurs using indigenous traditions to further their own agenda, which is one way that the commodification of culture is a dangerous and ambiguous enterprise.

Diversion, literally an object thrust onto a divergent path than its original intention, turns sacred items into commodities. Accordingly, diversion often reflects "a sign of creativity or crisis, whether aesthetic or economic" most commonly detected in the realm of fashion (Appadurai 1986:26-28). Polynesian tattooing reflects Appadurai's notion of diversion because it has definitely been derailed from its original intention where tattooing once was a right of passage, a sign that showed marriageability, or reflected status. The new meaning (among Polynesians) reflects both creativity and crisis due to borrowing from within and outside of Polynesian culture for iconography as well as adapting to new modern tattoo trends that appeal to western culture also. Tattooing, as both tourist and indigenous art, is one example of how folk art attains new meaning in different social contexts. It exemplifies how western concepts of fashion alter traditional art by placing an expectancy on what is authentic, what is true to that culture – to both producer and consumer.

The use of the term “commodity” in reference to Polynesian tattoos is problematic for one apparent reason: once embedded, once actualized on human form, there is not a possibility of resale on this item. The tattoo upon completion becomes inalienable art, therefore it is important to note that it is the process of tattooing that has become commodified in the region and not the actual tattoo. It is the process that has shifted technologically, among a divergent clientele, with new symbols that carry disparate regimes of value and varying forms of exchange. Furthermore, that commodity candidacy ends once the procedure is completed. According to Appudurai’s theory, the tattoo itself cannot be a commodity, but rather moves directly from commodity candidacy-- as the object of commodified skills and labor-- to political art, a non-commodity regime of value.

There is an antagonistic relationship in indigenous art concerning issues of authenticity, ideas of taste and various socioeconomic positions of individual consumers and producers. Graburn (1976) addresses how small-scale cultures frequently find themselves in the midst of cultural transformation because of the influence of larger social and political economies. Pop culture and fashion have the tendency of forcing themselves from the global market into even the most isolated places through manufacturing, advertising and mass communications. The spread of western, tribal iconography into Polynesian tattooing reflects the pressure of smaller, less economically viable cultures to acquiesce to more economically powerful outside forces.

McCracken (1986) writes of the fashion system that “...takes new styles...and associates them with established cultural categories and principles” resulting in the invention of “...new cultural meaning” (76). There are two ways to consider the context

of new meaning; among Polynesians and among tourists. Now that tattooing has revived itself in Polynesia, several artists engage in international conferences devoted to the art. Meaning, to these individuals, seems to be coerced by the need to keep up with the pace of western technology and style to be considered serious participants and competitors in the industry. By incorporating new designs, artists display that they are up-to-date with modern tattooing, which allows formal recognition, perhaps advertising opportunities and inclusion in tattoo magazines, which in turn brings more business to these artists. Just as tourists return from their vacations with Polynesian tattoos as a marker of leisurely activity- a status symbol-, so to do Polynesians incorporate western design to show they are adept in their art and capable of adapting to new global markets and demands. From my research, I found that 44% of the tattoo artists I interviewed participate in international conferences on the art form.

Commodification of tattooing in French Polynesia represents tension between identity formation (cultural appropriation) and economic appropriation and hegemony. By borrowing from western iconography and western technology, tattooing has been capitalized on and forced into a competitive arena. I agree with Adorno and Horkheimer's view to some extent in that consumers are offered limited choices when selecting tattoos as it pertains to "flash" tattooing. However, tattooing in general is a creative enterprise, one that builds off the ideas of the consumer. There need not be a limitation in the selection process as quite frequently people bring in their own ideas and/or patterns of the tattoo they wish to receive. In this way, the "flash" offered off the walls of tattoo parlors can and does offer minimal choices, but consumers can also be active agents in the creative process. They can choose to select premade, fabricated

“flash” iconography or they can bring in their own ideas, meet with tattoo artists and creatively modify patterns. This holds true for tourists and locals alike.

4.5 Theoretical Tension

There are several flaws in the study of tourism as it relates to Anthropology. The most common criticism that has been raised is that the focus has been aimed mainly on tourists (guests) rather than on locals (hosts); in fact, some studies are devoid of the local voice altogether. Another frequently cited issue is that there exists an asymmetry of power between hosts/guests. Hosts are generally perceived as passive agents in the tourist industry, while guests are active agents who shape their experiences by giving preference to natives who they perceive as more indigenous (Stronza 2001:271). Yet, other scholars believe that locals can be active agents by preserving what they want, inventing traditions, all the while remaining cognizant of what is real and what is staged (Howell 1994).

My research falls somewhere between these theoretical camps. While tourism was initiated by French neocolonialism in conjunction with the nuclear movement, the political situation has constantly changed. Native politicians now hold office, they hope to break economic and political ties with France and they aim for tourism to be the predominant catalyst for such changes. While there are examples that the native population is active in shaping tourism (ie., the *heiva* and tattoo revival); there are also examples that they may not necessarily be cognizant of what are real and what are spurious traditions (ie., tattooed “crests” and traditional dance). The question that is important to ask is whether commodification of the tattoo promotes a loss of meaning to the local population. Cohen (1988) tells us that local populations frequently lose culture

as they adopt new things they are exposed to by tourists. Yet, I would argue over the term **adopt**; I would rather say French Polynesians have **adapted** by incorporating new recipients, new tattoo technology, the use of color and new forms of exchange.

Tattoo revival in French Polynesia exists in theoretical tension. First, there is the desire to break economically from France and use tourism as the vehicle for that break, which includes the revival of indigenous culture. On the other hand, reviving “lost” aspects of Tahitian culture involves reinvention of cultural attributes; namely borrowing widely from throughout Polynesia in tattoo iconography and body placement. In other words, there is tension between the goal of independence and the loss of specific island identity and move toward pan-Polynesian identity.

Stronza (2001) speaks of the urgency in future anthropological research to “fill in the gaps” that seem to be missing in the research (278). I tried to fill in this gap by spending as much time interviewing tourists as I did the local population; in fact, I probably spent more time with the locals. I lived with a native family the duration of my stay on Tahiti who were employed in the tourist industry and I spent the majority of my time on Mo’orea with Kae and his friends from the Tiki Village. I wanted to learn not only what tattoos meant for tourists but also for the local community. Time and time again, I found that answers from tourists always involved documenting specific memories; they received tattoos to represent some experience they had during their travels (whether that was a sting ray to depict swimming with sting rays, or a native flower to remind them of the islands’ beauty, or even Marquesan design to remind them of Tahiti!) The locals, on the other hand, always spoke to me about the importance of

being proud of traditional heritage, even if that meant they had tattoos from different island groups.

Tattooing represented a cultural practice and history of Polynesian people and its' revival reflects evidence that the culture lives on. There were individuals that told me tattoos were an expectation in the tourist arena, especially where dancers and musicians were concerned. These individuals continually spoke of recreating their heritage and educating tourists on their culture. They tended to not differentiate between traditional patterns and the modern *mélange* of design. The one thing that has remained constant is that Polynesians adhere to strictly traditional black ink tattooing without the use of color, while color is only used among tourists. My research validated this: 64% of the tattoo artists I interviewed told me they produce more black ink tattoos than color.

Chapter Five

Modern Polynesian Tattooing and Interpretation

5.1 *Modern Tattoo Trends*

While tattoos were introduced to the Western world via the Pacific islands, the art declined after religious conversion on the islands. Presently, tattoos are experiencing a resurgence, but they represent something entirely different. No longer are tattoos a mechanism to distinguish between island groups and a class system; most Polynesians (particularly the younger generations) flaunt at least one tattoo and there is wide borrowing from among different island iconography (see appendix, pages 17-18, 20-21, 23 and 28-32). Tattooing is no longer a ritualized affair for a select group of elite (with or without their entourage) who can afford to pay *tohunga* specialists⁵⁰. Instead, the process has become commodified and individualized involving different, situated forms of payment. If the notion of *tapu* is alive today, it has transformed from ancient times when tattooing was perceived a “precarious” procedure. Factors such as sterilization, modern convenience of the tattoo gun, and accessibility to the masses have altered the traditional playground for tattooing. Today, tattooing is commonplace and commodified—a distinct variance from its traditional barter system, although all practices of exchange assign value to this art and establish social relationships between individuals. New modes of exchange represent a shifting economic landscape where payment is negotiable depending upon individuals. There exists a wide range of not only ethnically diverse

⁵⁰ There are some instances where tattooing was NOT a ritualized procedure and did not symbolize rank. This exception is found largely in New Zealand where tattooing had a distinct and very different function. Also there are several cases where tattooing was NOT performed on high-ranking chiefs as they were considered too sacred to risk the loss of mana via blood. The Tui Tonga of Tonga is a very good example of this exception.

artists on the islands, but also the form of payment varies between individuals (e.g., natives, tourists and tattoo connoisseurs).

There are two main modes of exchange in the tattoo industry, as witnessed during fieldwork. Naïve tourists can expect to pay high premiums for acquiring what they perceive as the authentic Polynesian souvenir. My fieldwork validated this fact: one of the questions I asked informants was how much they paid for their tattoos, which was always quite expensive. I am familiar with the tattoo industry and I know that here in the United States a good artist will easily charge \$100/an hour at a minimum. In French Polynesia, the price was higher than this. On numerous occasions, tourists were charged between \$75-\$125 for simple, “flash” style tattooing that took less than a full hour to complete.⁵¹ On the other hand, Polynesians, who sometimes cannot afford their overhead, let alone tattoos, do not deny one another a shared tradition based on monetary compensation. In these instances, barter continues to be a mode of exchange; where a service (tattooing) is generally exchanged for some commodity (e.g., food, liquor, clothing and western goods). However, my research corroborated the fact that cash payment was the preferred mode of exchange among tattoo artists (82%) and that monetary exchange occurred with more frequency (64%), which portrays a shift in the economy. Another unique agent thrown into the mixture is what I refer to as the “tattoo connoisseur”. Generally speaking, there exists an understanding among tattooed

⁵¹ Flash tattoos are designs that are readily made and on display for people to choose. These are quite simple for the tattoo artist to produce as no drawing and/or sketching is involved in producing the tattoo; it is simply copied onto transparent paper, placed on the area of the body and then inked in. This form of tattooing is a very simple and fast procedure to accomplish for tattoo artists.

individuals that love of the art is valid enough reason to receive a reduced rate, and this seems to hold true internationally.⁵²

Artists are more willing to negotiate price with someone who is a serious collector rather than someone who is getting their one and only token tattoo. Sometimes a delayed form of reciprocal exchange occurs, which represents not only a form of implicit trust established between individuals, but also newly formed friendships.⁵³ This is reminiscent of the way Tahitians incorporated European goods into their tattoo iconography to exemplify established relationships with Europeans and the consequential ability to acquire western goods. Presently, it can be more efficient for artists to establish relationships and contacts with individuals who can then send things over cheaper than having to order in advance and pay exorbitant import fees⁵⁴.

Equally important, designs that were once exclusive to particular islands are now borrowed throughout Polynesia, as well as introduced into Western tattoo parlors. Modern tattoos displayed on Polynesians represent a pan-Polynesian marker of identity and someone from Tahiti might very well wear the marking of Maori, Tongan, Samoan, Marquesan or Hawaiian, and vice versa (see appendix, pages 18-26). From my research, the most popular designs among local Polynesians were Marquesan (46%) and Maori (18%), while 18% opted for other Polynesian designs and 18% chose animal or western iconography. Tattooing has lost traditional significance and ritual; in its place is a

⁵² I am obliged by this statement to include my own reflective and situated context into the analysis. I am a “tattoo connoisseur” who acquires tattoos that mark certain temporal and spatial experiences of my life. There has never been an artist that has charged me a full fee for a tattoo. I attribute this to being a “collector”, and this is true for my travels throughout Europe and the Pacific as well as here in the United States.

⁵³ I interviewed two tattoo artists -one in Easter Island and one in Mo’orea- who frequently and willingly gave tattoos to individuals with an oral agreement that their recipients would send things back in exchange. Some of these items included tattoo needles, tattoo books, and red feathers.

⁵⁴ Here the reference is to Easter Island, where even the simplest purchases are made in advance from either Chile or Tahiti, and require enormous import tariffs.

melange of design incorporating patterns from a wide array of islands⁵⁵. As for tattoo technology, the traditional method of tattooing has diminished throughout Polynesia although there are several places that still use the traditional toolkit, even marketing this tradition in a thriving tourist industry.

Individuals can receive the traditional tapping method of the tattoo, as long as they have economic means to secure it. While traditional tattoos are still executed, health sanctions have come upon the region and tools are only good for a single procedure due to the risk of HIV exposure via blood. Tools must be made in advance, a lengthily and arduous process, and purchased by the tattoo recipient. The whole process demands planning, communication with the artist, high tolerance for pain, and a large sum of money for not only labor but also tool production. When I interviewed one well-known traditional artist, I asked him if he felt it sacrilege to give these tattoos to individuals of non-Polynesian descent. The response I received was that “if they are man enough to get it, they are man enough to have it”⁵⁶. He also told me this is a very rare event; usually people who receive traditional tattoos of non-Polynesian descent are either tattoo artists themselves or people who are serious tattoo collectors. In this example, the artist told me he has only tattooed three non –Polynesian individuals in this manner and they were all tattoo artists from different parts of the world (France, United State and Australia). Evidently, the ability to withstand pain is still an important element not only of one’s character but one’s ability to brandish these uniquely Polynesian creations.

⁵⁵ I say this very cautiously because there is still the very important element of bravery (e.g., prowess) and the ability to withstand pain as an important attribute to receiving tattoos.

⁵⁶ This quote is taken from fieldnotes during an interview with a Marquesan artist on the island of Mo’orea, June 2004.

With an increase in sanitation and health mandates throughout the region, more and more tourists return from their travels with this authentic mark as a souvenir. From my interviews, 45% of tourists said they would get a tattoo; of this percentage, 43% claimed this to be a spontaneous decision and 57% stated this was pre planned. Of the tourists who chose to get tattoos, 14% said they would not have gotten tattooed outside this vacation experience, 53% would have gotten tattooed outside the experience and 33% claimed uncertainty. Tattoos are a hot new commodity in the islands, and even an island as remote as Easter Island has at its minimum three tattoo artists to accommodate the growing demand. Tattoo artists in the region make their money more from tourists than the indigenous population and my research validated this. Informants told me that the majority of the tattoos they give (64%) are to visitors, not the native population (36%). The majority of tattoo artists interviewed (82%) said that tourism has helped augment their customer base. Moreover, the native population seldom pays for tattooing with monetary compensation and bartering is generally the norm between locals. An interesting occurrence is the fact that prices tended to be discounted for other visiting Polynesians as opposed to the *hutu painu* (white foreigners). The modern version of the tattoo is a pseudo-event; it glorifies the final product and not the traditional process and ritual from which the art descends. On the surface, authenticity seems compromised due to ease and accessibility; underneath the surface lies the fact that reinvention of the tattoo has occurred to accommodate new economic and political functions in a more developed modern Polynesia.

A helpful quote from Linnekin (1983) sheds light on the peculiar situation of the Polynesian tattoo:

In nationalistic movements, tradition becomes a rallying cry and a political symbol. Cultural revivalists search for an authentic heritage as the basis for ethnic distinctions; as they rediscover a culture they also create it (241).

Throughout Polynesia, revitalization movements are occurring. In Hawai'i the emphasis is on bilingual education, national recognition of the Hawaiian language, more equal distribution of Hawaiian Homes Act land allotments and revival of the *hula*. Maoris hope for more equitable distribution of land, promote an ideology of self-determination and avidly participate in the creation of bilingual schools. French Polynesians also desire self-determination, which will culminate in political and economic independence. Tattoo revival signifies this pan-Polynesian effort to revivify traditional culture and livelihood as political statements that reflect the current situation of these island groups.

Diffusion and borrowing between the islands is not a new phenomenon, but the mixture of designs is a new experience, which cohesively unites Polynesians in efforts and aspirations to identify with the pre-colonial past. In the case of French Polynesia, revivalist tendencies not only differentiate Polynesians from other ethnic groups that coexist in the region, they are also a chance to reclaim their culture in the face of globalization. Paradoxically, a large part of reclamation is reinvention, which is not necessarily a negative factor. Because a large part of Polynesian prehistory was lost during colonialism, island groups have looked to one another to reclaim their past. Simultaneous revitalization movements throughout Polynesia are politically oriented against overwhelming outsider presence on native land.

From my interviews with tourist workers, I found that 86% had at least one tattoo. One pertinent question I asked was if they felt having tattoos affected their employment:

46% said they thought tattoos were a positive attribute, 7% felt this had a negative impact on employment opportunities, 27% were uncertain and 20% said tattoos had no affect on employment. While these numbers are quite high in relation to tourism, 80% of informants said they would have gotten their tattoos irregardless of where they found employment. Of these 30 people or 86%, a vast majority (94%) have some kind of Polynesian design while only 6% claim to have Western tribal designs or animal iconography. In reference to facial tattooing, 35% of respondents claimed they have or would get facial tattoos, while 45% said they would not and 20% claimed uncertainty. The most popular design among the locals was by far Marquesan (57%) with Maori coming in second (20%), while 17% chose other Polynesian designs and 6% opted for Western tribal or animal designs.

I think it is more important to focus on the shift in meaning rather than the authentic/inauthentic debate. From my interviews, respondents told me they acquired these tattoos “because they were a part of their history”, they “represented a shared past with other Polynesians”, they “were a part of traditional Polynesian culture” and that “institutionalization of the Tahitian language was just one part of cultural reclamation” and that “tattooing was as much a part of Tahitian culture as the language and just as important to revive”. One of the most interesting occurrences I came across was the fact that although they did not feel it was sacrilege to give these tattoos to people of non-Polynesian descent, they did feel that the new technology harnessed was less authentic. Yet, the majority of these individuals received their tattoos with the modern tattoo gun. With this in mind, it is apparent that they are cognizant of changes in the process which are occurring although it does not seem to change meaning to these people on a personal

level. Time and time again, I was told that tattoos “represent identity”, “reflect shared culture with other Polynesians”, show that “their culture lives on today”, document their “cultures’ past in the present” and “symbolize pride for their ethnic heritage”.

How did the facial tattoo spread to Eastern Polynesia, in particular the Society group? Clearly, there was contact between various Polynesian archipelagos and exposure to this cultural institution, but facial tattooing in the Society Islands did not appear until recently (see photos, pages 186-190). I asked my informants, some who had facial tattoos and others who had only body tattoos, what they thought this represented. The common response I received was that “... facial tattooing was more authentic”⁵⁷. When I asked them if facial tattoos carried any negative connotations or possibly infringed on employment possibilities, I was told it *enhanced* the job market for them. In other words, there is secure employment--in tourism--for individuals that exude a pristine, authentic Polynesian culture. While facial tattooing is rare compared to body tattooing, it surfaced in an area previously unknown which poses certain questions worth exploring.

I propose three hypotheses as to why these islanders might claim the facial tattoo as authentic to this region. First, there is a desire to associate with the revival of Maori *moko* in the last 20 years, coupled with the thriving *Maoritanga* movement. *Moko* is assuredly the most familiar Polynesian tattoo to the western world, and as such it renders a more authentic appearance in exotic-oriented tourism on the islands. Poignantly, the success of the Maori population in overcoming hardships and reestablishing itself as a

⁵⁷ This quote is taken from fieldnotes, an interview with Kae (a pseudonym) my main informant on the island of Mo’orea, June 2004. Kae is from the island of Rangiroa in the Tuamotu archipelago and has lived in Mo’orea since he turned 18 years old. He confided to me that facial tattoos were the next area he planned to have tattooed. Interestingly, the Tuamotu region also never had facial tattooing in prehistory.

viable ethnicity in the 21st century promotes a shared Polynesian identity. It is profitable and lucrative to identify with a distant, yet related, group of Polynesians who have successfully reintroduced themselves and their culture into the global landscape. Secondly, Maori *moko* and Marquesan tattooing were the most thoroughly and proficiently documented examples of tattooing in Polynesia. Historical records and visual documentation play an enormous role in the resilience of symbols and iconography that now finds itself throughout Polynesia. There is a direct correlation between facial tattooing in Eastern Polynesia and accommodating tourist expectations of what they will witness in Polynesia. A final proposition suggests that pre-colonial Polynesian cultures that practiced facial tattooing had the least amount of social stratification in their political organization while cultures with the most apparent social stratification were the least tattooed of the Polynesian cultures. This point is poignant when our discussion returns to modern tattoo trends in the region and its cultural significance for current social stratification in the islands, as the pan-Polynesian movement currently stresses egalitarianism over stratification.

5.3 Conclusion

A modern interpretation of French Polynesian facial tattooing is that it represents nationalism and their desire to break away from French dependence. By reclaiming their cultural tradition, they reflect this desire for political and economic independence. It is literally a defiant vehicle and medium for expressing dissatisfaction with the way the French government has politically, economically and culturally dominated island life. In this way, facial tattooing still represents low social stratification, but now it refers to a desire to secede from neocolonial powers that continually monopolize the islands. A

possible connection between contemporary and pre-European facial tattooing is that individuals involved in the pan-Polynesian movement are expressing themselves as militant, which perpetuates the notion of the fierce warrior into the present. From my questionnaires, 19% of locals claimed nationalism as the meaning of their tattoos. Other meanings informants discussed with me were: tattoos helped with their own concept of self-identity (19%), tattoos helped them identify with other Polynesians (31%), and tattoos displayed pride for their ethnic heritage (25%). All of these meanings seem to solidify the fact that tattooing does support the goal of independence and a Pan-Polynesian concept of self. Analyzing this questionnaire data with interview material, I was told continually that tattoos reflected “pride”, “cultural traditions”, “links to an ancestral past”, and “shared culture with other Polynesian groups”. When I asked what their tattoos represented, the majority (51%) claimed tradition; while 26% believed kinship was emphasized and 13% said it represented their ethnicity. As symbols carry intrinsic meanings, modern tattoos force a more cohesive ethnic identity (that of Polynesian) but also public and apparent disdain for hegemony in the Pacific region. These ideas help us understand why facial tattooing is now present in places like the Societies islands, which never practiced it before. The Societies remain the political and economic center of 118 islands in French Polynesia and this is where we find the predominant militant, independence-minded people today.

Cultural survival is not about freezing a culture in time, rather the theory evokes the idea that change is always an inevitable outcome due to globalization. According to this view, it depends on indigenous communities to decide for themselves what traditions should be maintained, revived, even reinvented, to suit their current needs. No culture is

exempt from change, yet ethnicity is a powerful social category that carries meaningful political weight. A pan-Polynesian identity, created via shared cultural attributes, is meaningful in the contemporary period when several Pacific nations have already achieved sovereignty. It behooves French Polynesians to identify with other Polynesian groups and this is accomplished several ways. I have tried to show that shared symbolic tattooing is just one avenue that promotes a politicized, Polynesian identity.

While some people may sneer and say Tahitians exploit their culture for economic gain, I think that general and subjective assumption undermines the premise that self-determination requires not only political freedom, but also economic independence. If tourism is a viable means to gain economic control of the region, why should one condemn Tahitians for selling their culture in an industry that begs for and values authenticity? From my interviews with tourists, 84% had attended or planned to attend a Polynesian luau and/or show. Among these tourists, 48% responded that the experience met their expectations while 34% believed their expectations had been exceeded; only 18% viewed the experienced lacked in their expectations. How can Polynesians be judged for reviving traditions any way they regard as beneficial, when we ourselves are guilty of selling and exporting American pop culture on a worldwide scale?

Factors that operate within modern tattoo revival include ethnic identity, nationalism, economic viability (via tourism), authenticity and global market processes such as commodities and consumption patterns. It is impossible to say that reviving a cultural practice is simply an attempt at international cultural recognition or a means to economic liberation or a way to symbolically protest neocolonial policies because all of these factors are intertwined with one another and cannot be separated. There is no

simple way to peel away the layers of repression to get at the heart of cultural revival tendencies, yet there seems to exist a playing field for socially constructed realities in the Pacific, and that field is tourism.

Tattooing is a commodity, and as such the inalienable art has transient qualities that hold individual meaning best interpreted as postmodern constructions, outward manifestations, of identity. They are postmodern, while claiming a traditional base, in the sense that there is a wide range of diversity among buyers and sellers alike. The tradition no longer belongs to one particular culture because identity (as well as ethnicity) is malleable and continually shifts. Tattooing is now a global phenomenon and as such even Western cultures have borrowed from Polynesian iconography. While tattoos in Polynesia certainly assert a mark of identity and a desire to associate with a distant past, what can these motifs depict for people of non-Polynesian descent? It is my belief that the playing field has been altered, but so too has the clientele (see appendix, pages 22 and 24-26). A western tourist returning from her vacation with a Polynesian motif might want to visibly associate herself with status; a status that is marked by the apparent ability to tour these places and show that visibility via tattoos. The most common tattoo designs among tourists were animals (44%), flowers/landscape (27%) and Polynesian symbols (18%); only 11% chose Western designs. These numbers seem to be more reflective of travel experiences rather than the native culture.

Among Polynesians, tattoo revival symbolizes many facets relative to postmodern construction of identity, globalization, political and economic trends. For Westerners, these may also represent status or more specifically a desire to outwardly exhibit status via visual reproduction that represents witnessing and participating in an “authentic”

culture. We now see that this really is not so much about authenticity because that has become subordinate to economic gain, at least in the sense that it is not generally perceived as *tapu* to engage in tattooing of people of non-Polynesian descent; 27% thought this was *tapu*, 64% believed this was not *tapu* and 9% were undecided. In reference to tattoo technology, 47% felt the use of tattoo guns was less authentic, 30% believed this was not less authentic and 23% were undecided. Among the tourist workers, 31% believed it was inappropriate to give non-Polynesians their unique designs, 25% thought it was alright for non-Polynesians to brandish their designs, while 44% remained undecided. That being said, I did meet one artist on Mo'orea that would not even let me see a tattoo of his family crest as it was too *tapu*. However, throughout my research I never found "crests" in Polynesian iconography, so one can surely understand my confusion that this could be perceived as *tapu*. It seemed to me to be a reinvention of culture.

Tattooing non-Polynesian people has absolutely nothing to do with any traditional basis of the practice and as such it can and should be seen as an attempt to refashion a particular aspect of those cultures in a global economy. The fact that facial tattooing is now viewed as the epitome of authenticity in French Polynesia, where it was previously nonexistent, is proof enough that sometimes the revitalization of a culture comes from the modification of it at the same time but not without good cause. The desire to borrow from the Maori, to adapt their cultural relic is twofold: it is an attempt to associate with a powerful Polynesian group that has asserted itself and become successful and viable in the 21st century, while at the same time it allows the tourist industry to successfully and willfully promote "authentic" Polynesian culture. These grimacing faces give tourists a

taste of the authenticity they hope to find in these places although experts would agree this is to some degree an aberration of tradition. But cultures, as we have seen, are not static and frozen in time; they change to represent modern politics, economies and identities. And in this way, modern Polynesians reclaim their culture by reinventing it at the same time.

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QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TOURISTS

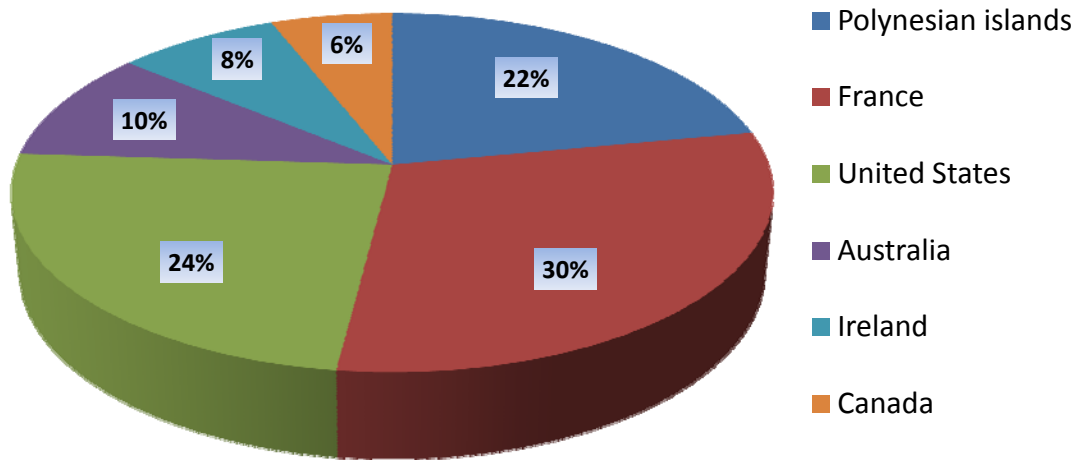
- 1) Where are you from?
- 2) Why did you choose the Society Islands for your vacation?
- 3) What have you been doing with your time here?
- 4) How long are you staying in the islands?
- 5) Are you traveling outside of Tahiti/Mo'orea?
- 6) Where are you staying? For how long are you staying?
- 7) Has this experience lacked, met or exceeded your expectations?
- 8) What has been your favorite activity, tour or experience?
- 9) Have you been to any luaus and/or shows?
- 10) What do you think of the local environment?
- 11) What has your experience been with the local residents? Choose from the following options: a) Hospitable but fake b) Hospitable and genuine c) Forced d) Avoided.
- 12) What do you think about tattoos?
- 13) Would you ever get a tattoo?

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO QUESTION 13, SKIP TO THE NEXT SET OF QUESTIONS. IF YOU ANSWERED NO, THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

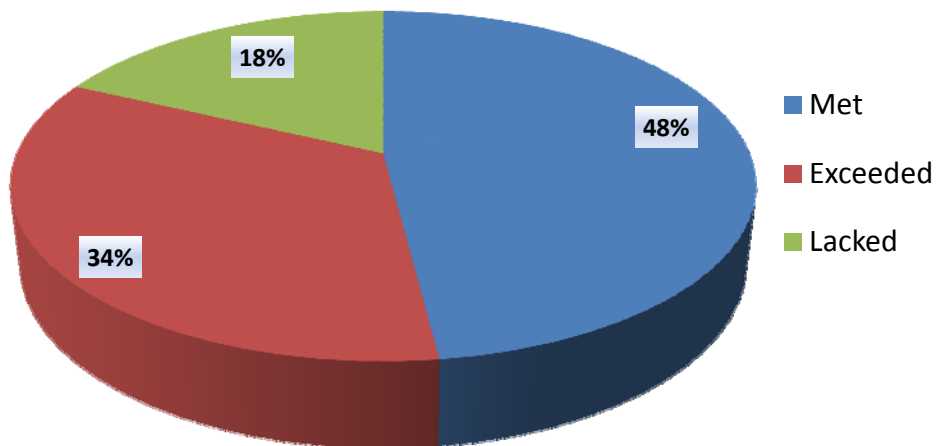
- 14) How much would you be willing to pay for a tattoo?
- 15) Would you get a "traditional" tapped in tattoo or would you choose to use modern tattoo equipment? Why or why not?
- 17) Would you choose a local Polynesian to do your tattoo, someone of non-Polynesian descent or do you have no preference?
- 18) What would you choose as your design?
- 19) Would you rather choose "flash" tattoos from wall designs, give the artist license to be creative, or bring in your own design?
- 20) Would you say that getting a tattoo was something you thought about long and hard in advance or was it a spontaneous thing?
- 21) Would you have gotten a tattoo outside of this vacation experience?

This questionnaire was given to 50 tourists. The highlighted questions have appropriate corresponding charts on the following pages (126-130).

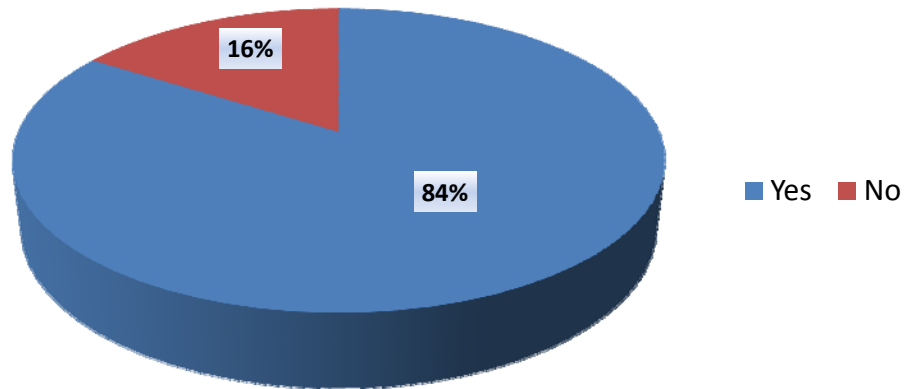
Where are you from?



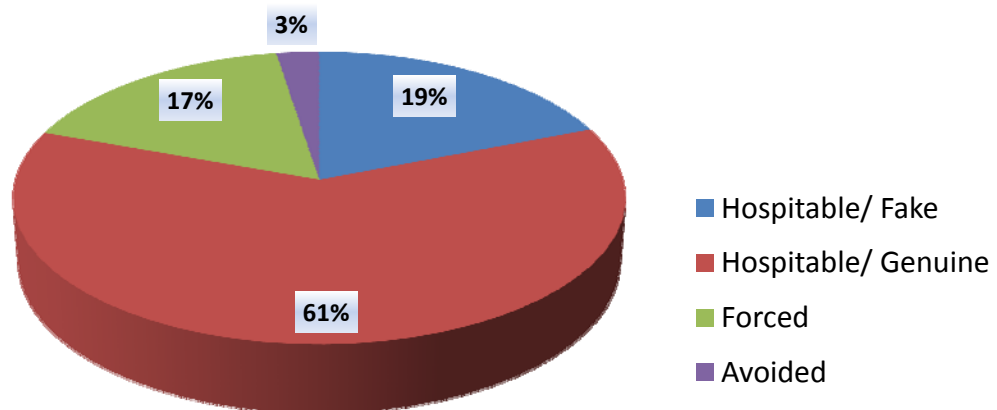
Has this vacation lacked, met or exceeded your expectations?



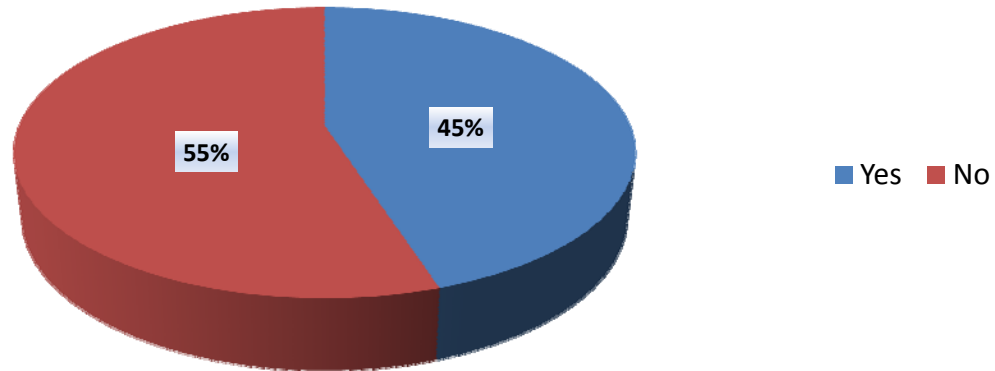
Have you been or are you planning to attend any luaus or Polynesian shows during your vacation?



What has been your experience with the local residents and/or workers in the tourist industry?

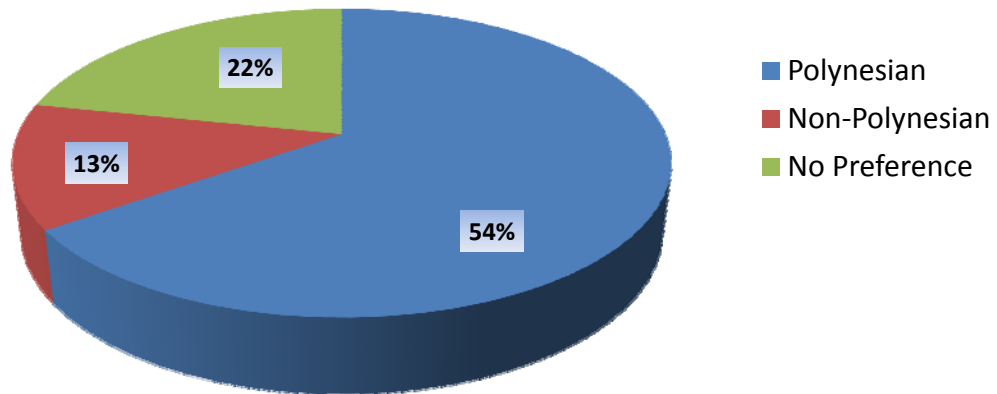


Would you ever get a tattoo?

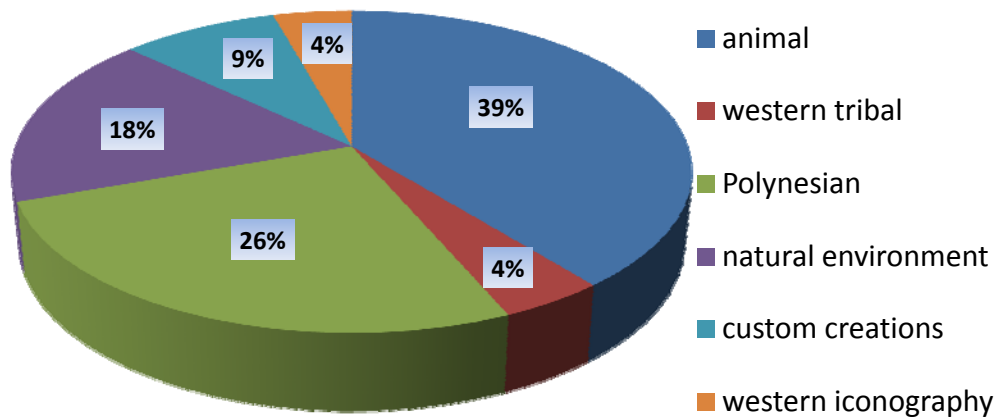


The following charts reflect only the people (22 or 45%) who answered “yes” to getting a tattoo.

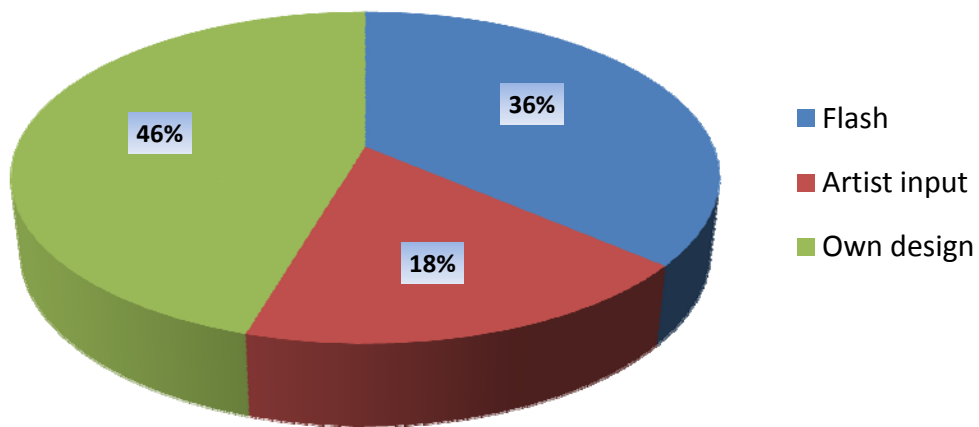
Would you choose a local Polynesian to do your tattoo, someone of non-Polynesian descent or do you have no preference?



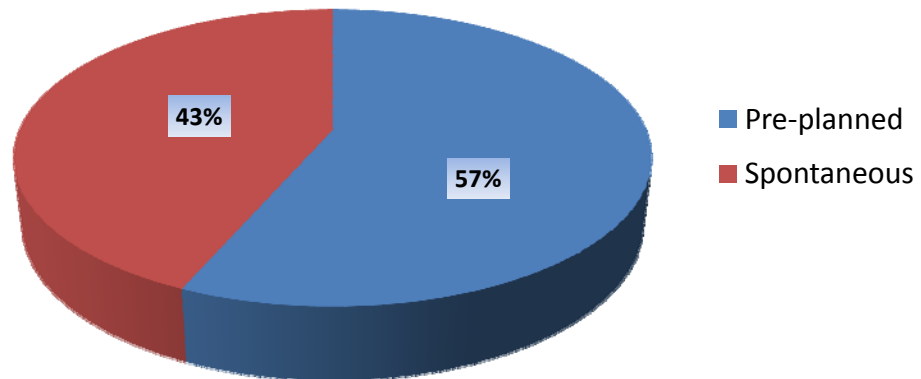
What would you choose as your design?



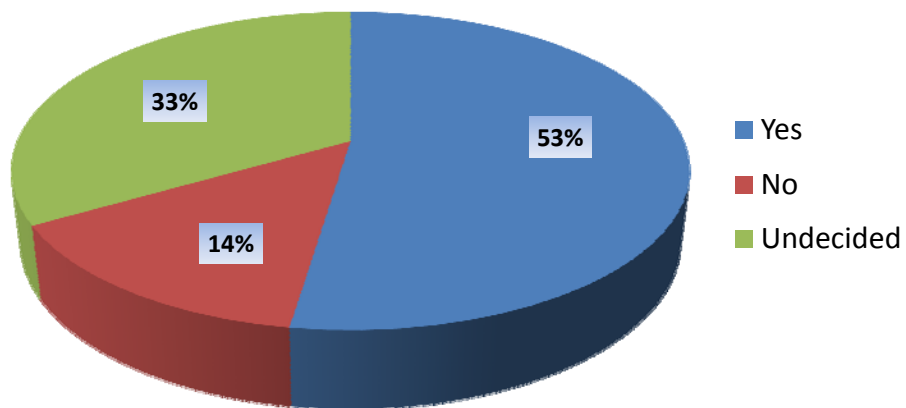
Would you rather choose “flash” tattoos from wall designs, give the artist license to be creative, or bring in your own design?



Would you say that getting a tattoo was something you thought about long and hard in advance or was it a spontaneous thing?



Would you have gotten a tattoo outside of this vacation experience?

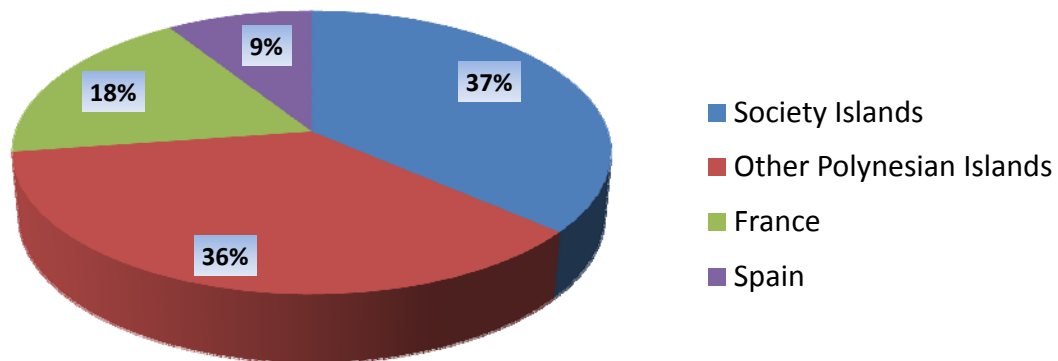


QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TATTOO ARTISTS

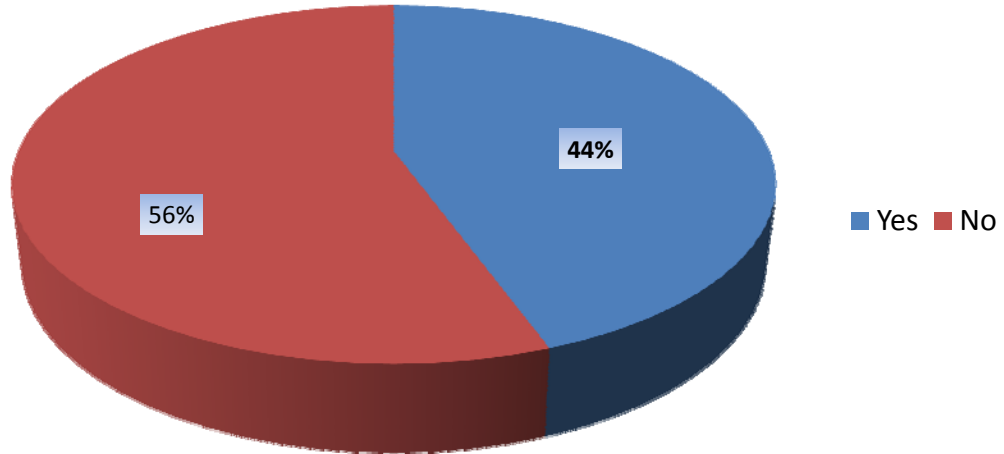
- 1) Where are you from originally?
- 2) Where did you learn the art of tattooing?
- 3) How long have you been practicing tattooing?
- 4) Do you attend international tattoo seminars?
- 5) Do you do more tattoos on locals or tourists?
- 6) Do you do any traditional tattoos?
- 7) What is the most common design selected among locals?
- 8) What is the most common design selected among tourists?
- 9) In relation to tourist customers, do you produce more “flash” designs, custom creations or do they bring in their own designs?
- 10) In relation to local customers, do you produce more “flash” designs, custom creations or do they bring in their own designs?
- 11) How are you paid for your work?
- 12) Which method of payment do you prefer?
- 13) Would you say tourism has helped you acquire a wider customer base?
- 14) Do you feel it is tapu to give non-Polynesians tattoos?
- 15) Have you done any facial tattoos?
- 16) Do you do more black or color ink tattoos?

The following charts (131-137) correspond to highlighted questions on the above questionnaire, which was taken from interviews with 11 tattoo artists on the islands of Mo’orea, Tahiti and Easter Island.

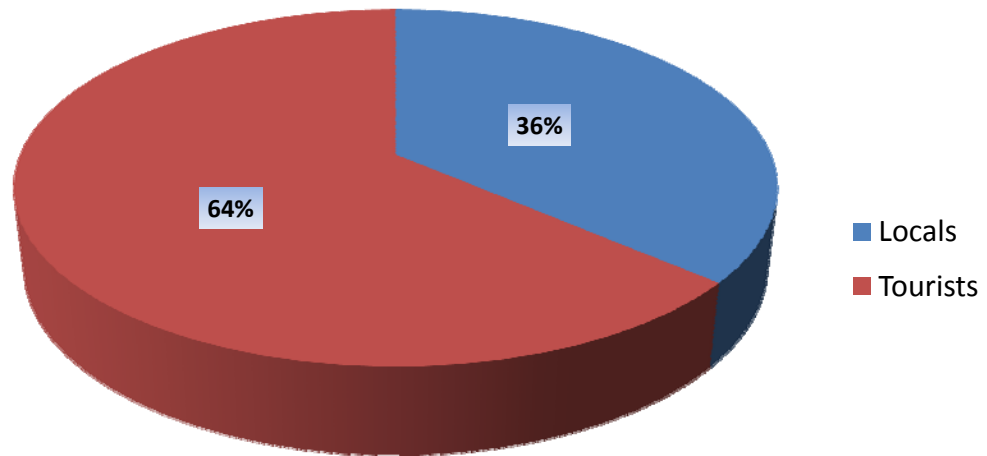
Where are you from originally?



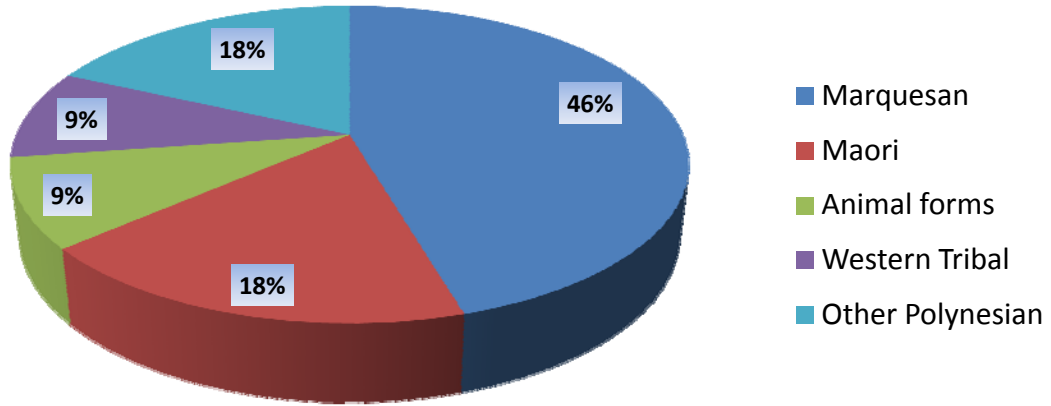
Do you attend international tattoo seminars?



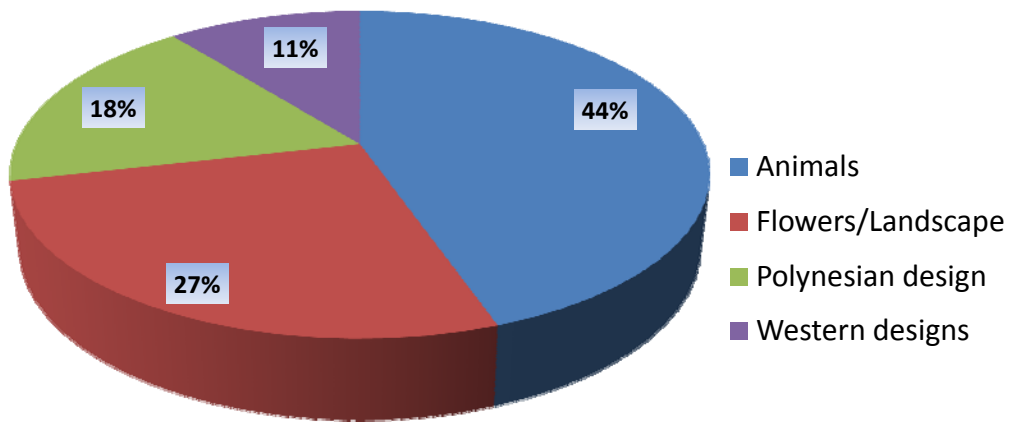
Do you do more tattoos on locals or tourists?



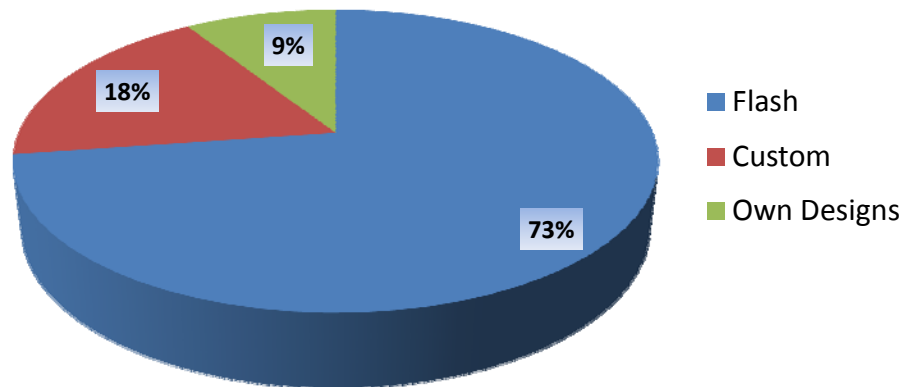
What is the most common design selected among locals?



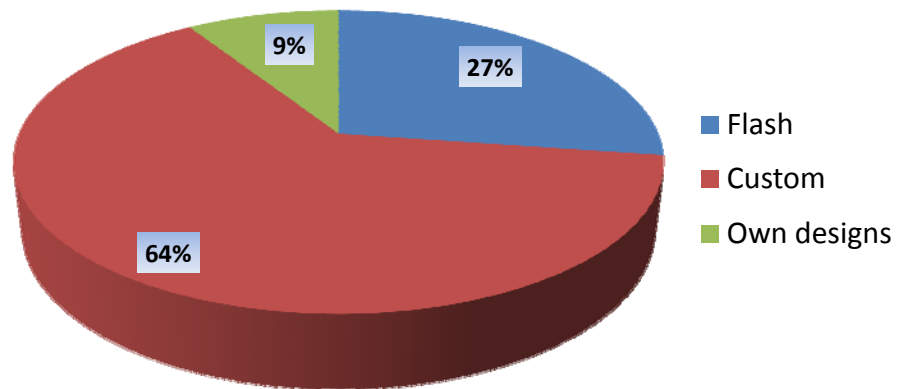
What is the most common design selected among tourists?



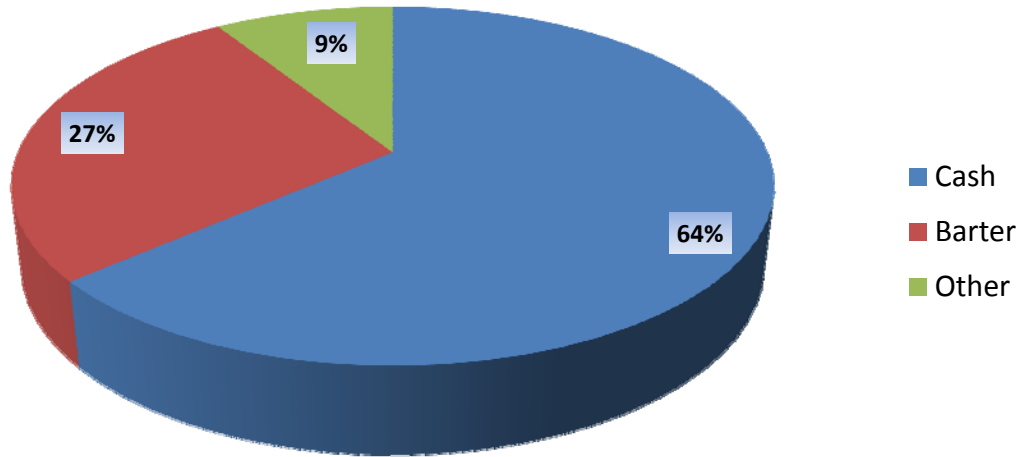
In relation to tourists, do you produce more “flash” designs, custom creations or do they bring in their own designs?



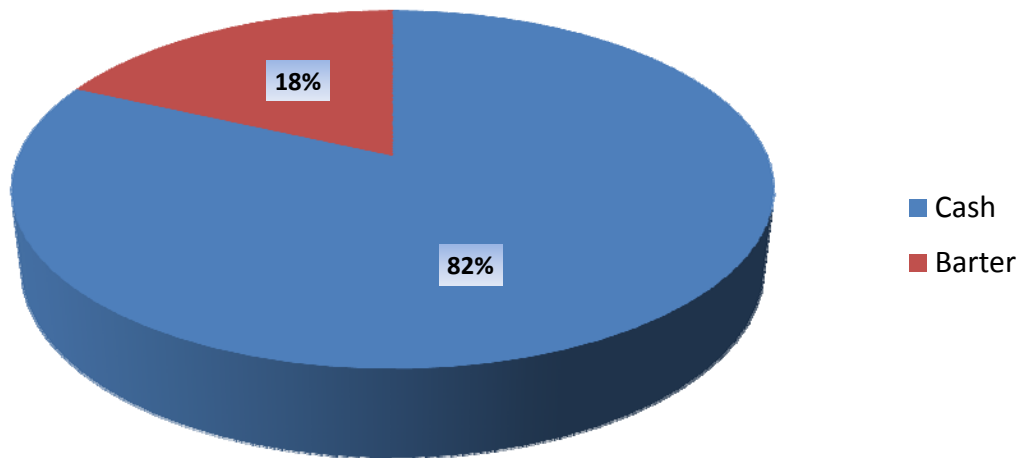
In relation to locals, do you produce more “flash” designs, custom creations or do they bring in their own designs?



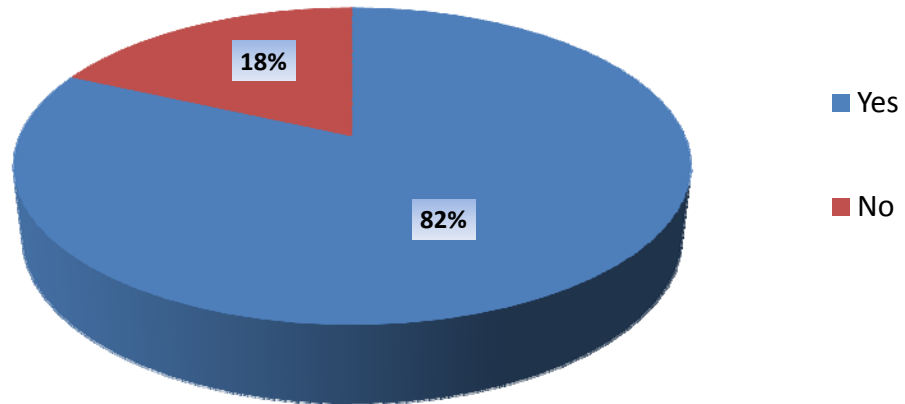
How are you paid for your work?



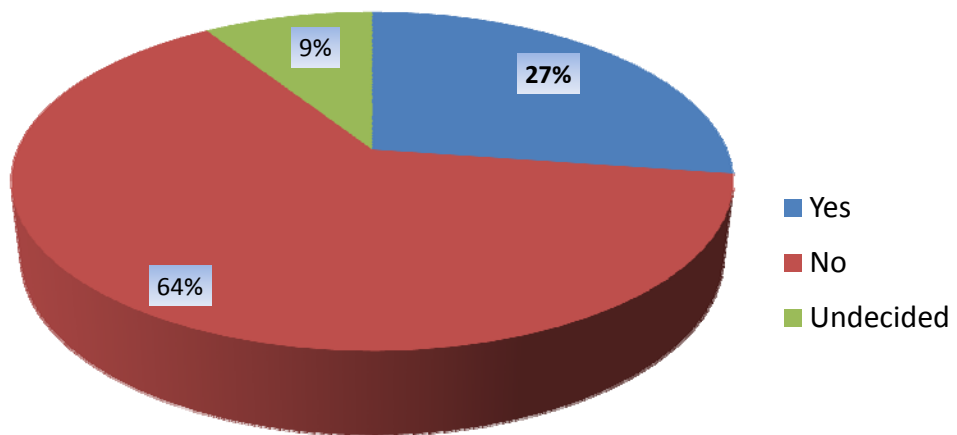
Which method of payment do you prefer?



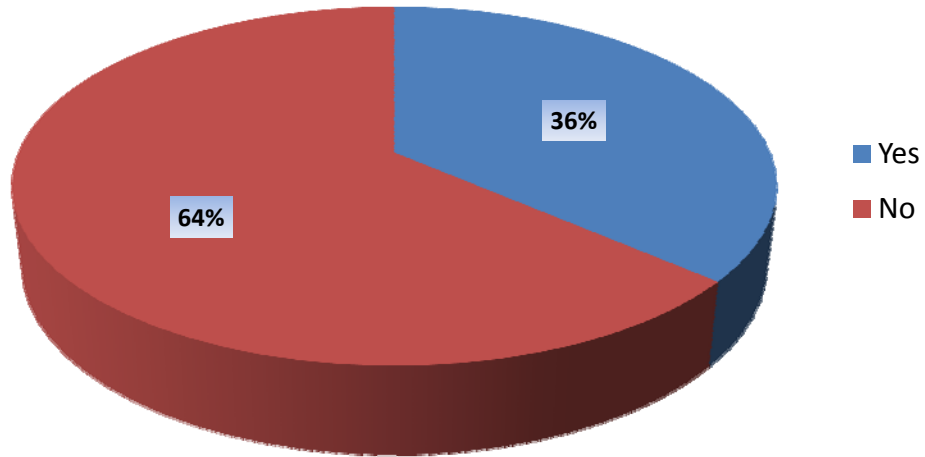
Would you say tourism has helped you acquire a wider customer base?



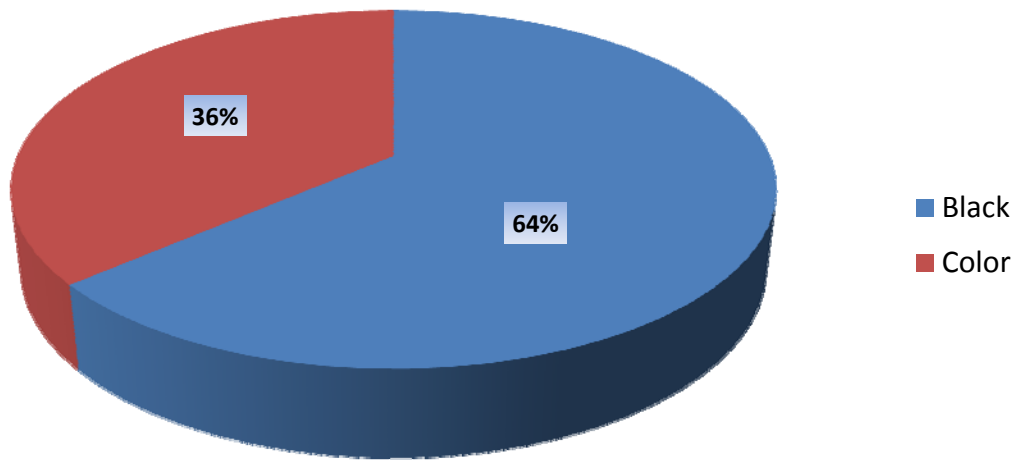
Do you feel it is *tapu* to give non-Polynesians tattoos?



Have you done any facial tattoos?



Do you do more black or color ink tattoos?



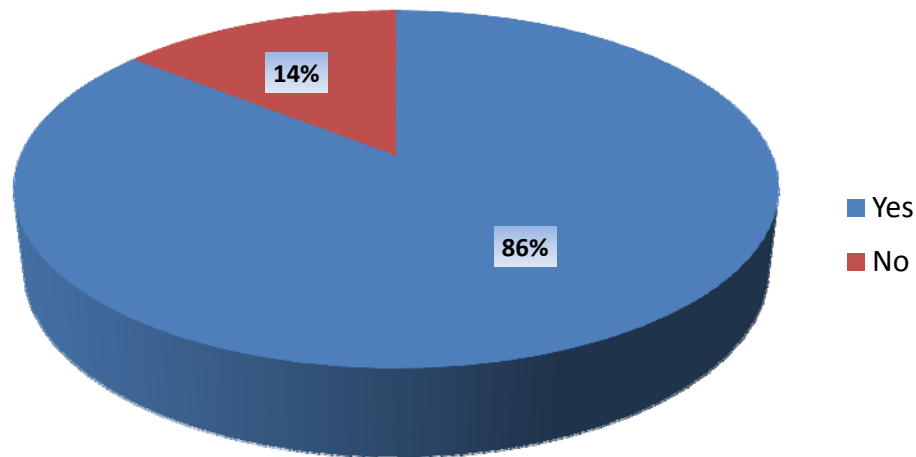
QUESTIONS FOR LOCALS IN THE TOURIST INDUSTRY

The following questions were given to 35 people who work in the tourist industry on Mo'orea and Tahiti. Of the 35 people, 30 answered yes to question number one.

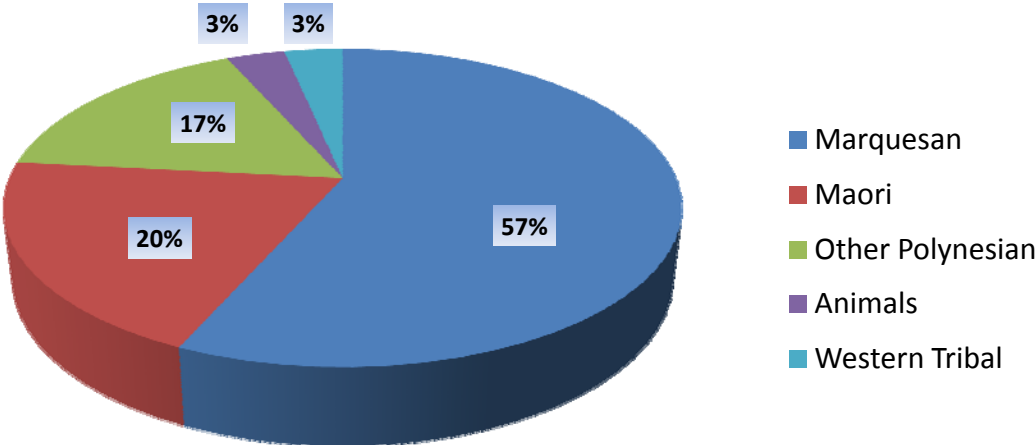
- 1) Do you have any tattoos? If you answered yes, please go on to question 2.
- 2) What designs do you have?
- 3) Are your tattoos in black or color ink?
- 4) Do you plan to get more?
- 5) Do you have or would you ever get a facial tattoo?
- 6) How does having tattoos affect your employment opportunities?
- 7) What do you think about non Polynesians acquiring Polynesian tattoos?
- 8) Would you ever get a western style tattoo (tribal or otherwise)?
- 9) Is there a prominent gender in the islands that get tattooed?
- 10) Is body placement an important feature for the meaning of your tattoos?
- 11) Are tattoos done with tattoo guns less authentic than those done by traditional means?
- 12) If you did not work in tourism, would you still have gotten any tattoos?
- 13) Do you feel the meaning of Polynesian tattoos has been compromised?
- 14) What meaning do your tattoos hold to you?
- 15) What do your parents and older generations in your family think about your tattoos?
- 16) What do your tattoos represent?

The following charts (138-143) are representative of the highlighted questions given to 35 informants employed in the tourist industry.

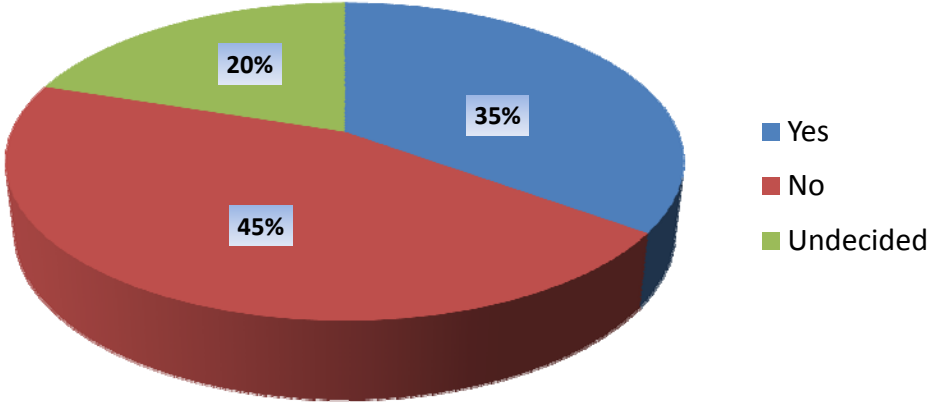
Do you have any tattoos?



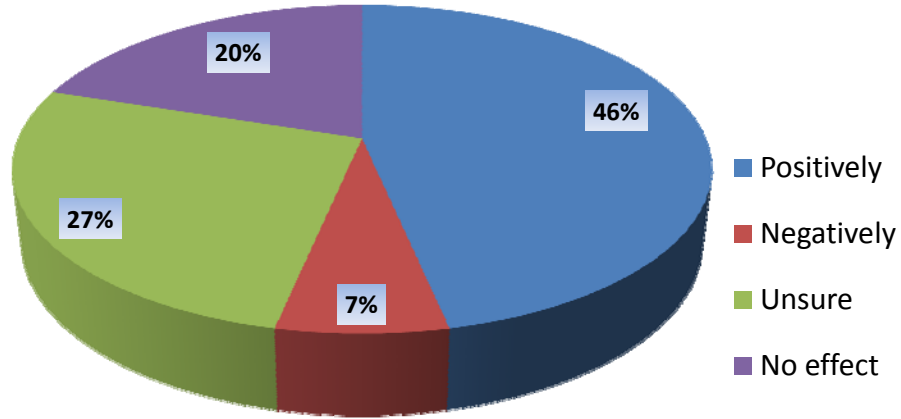
What designs do you have?



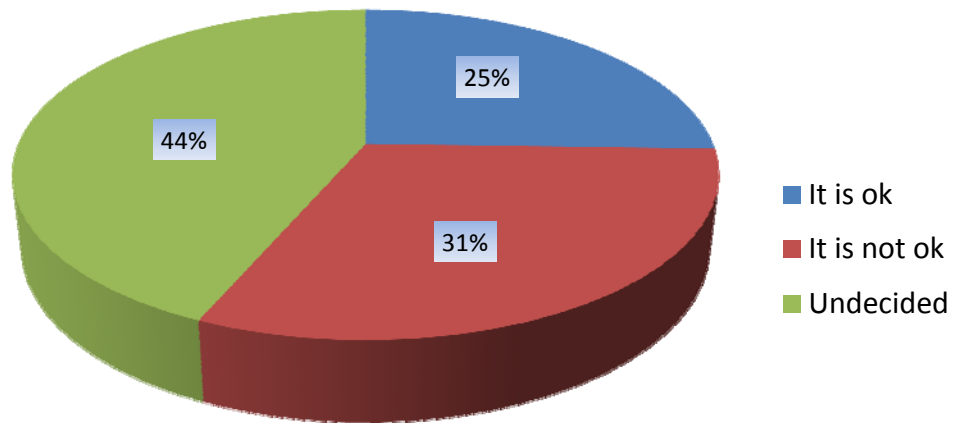
Do you have or would you ever get a facial tattoo?



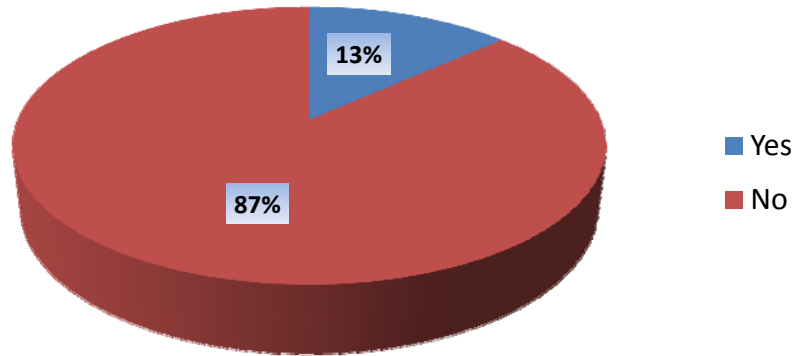
How does having tattoos affect your employment opportunities?



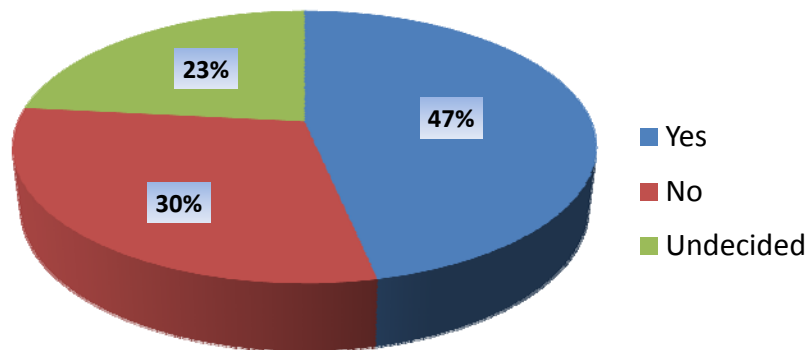
What do you think about non Polynesians acquiring Polynesian tattoos?



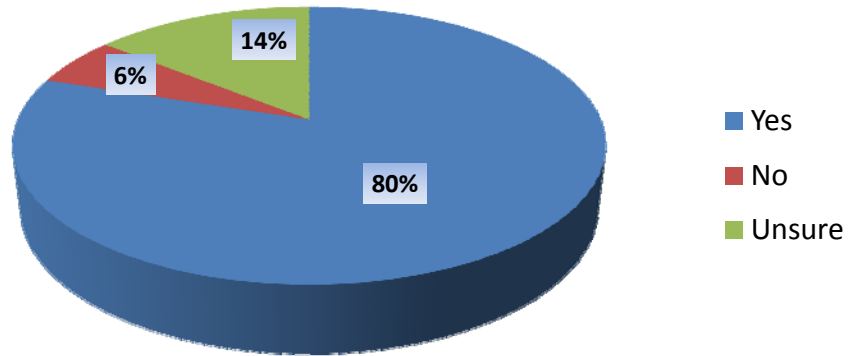
Would you ever get a western style tattoo (tribal or otherwise)?



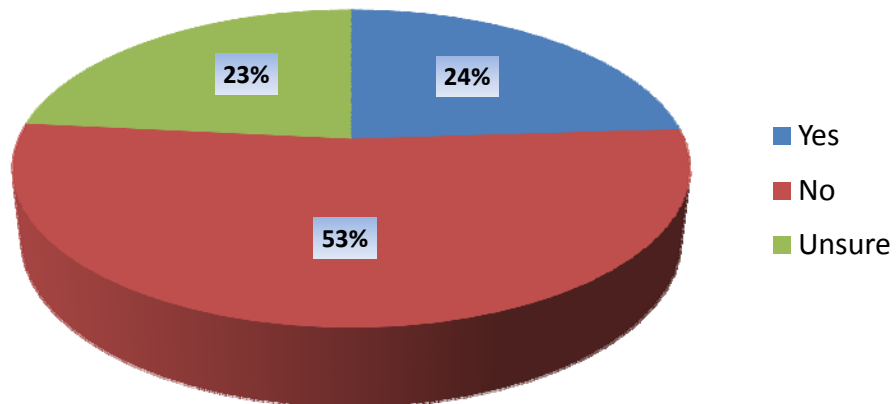
Are tattoos done with tattoo guns less authentic than those done by traditional means?



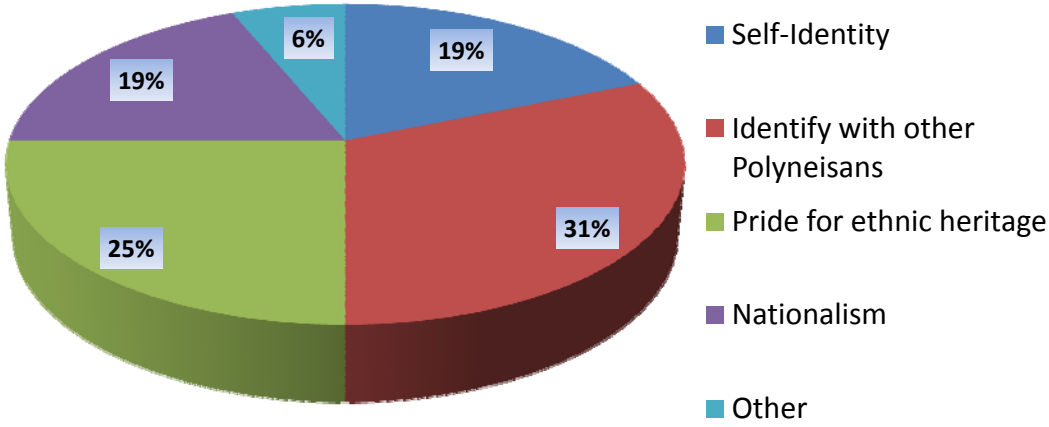
If you did not work in tourism, would you still have gotten tattoos?



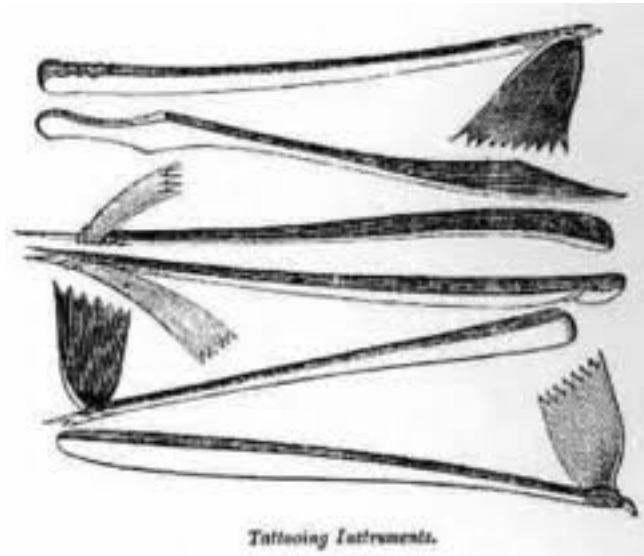
Do you feel the meaning of Polynesian tattoos has been compromised?



What meaning do your tattoos hold to you?

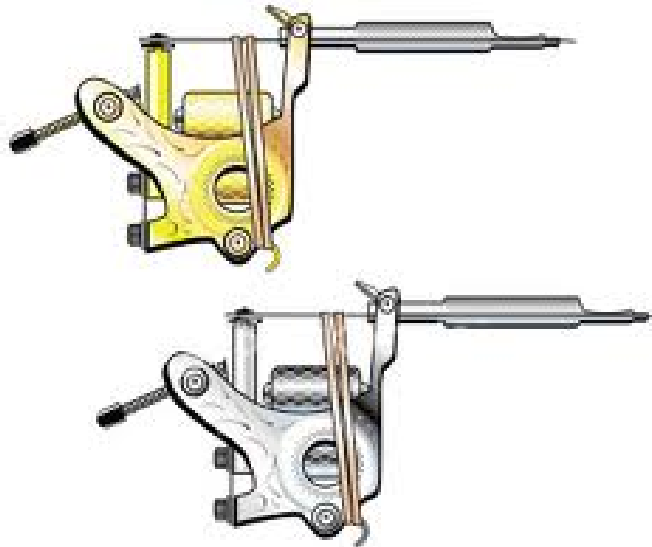


ANCIENT TATTOO TOOLS

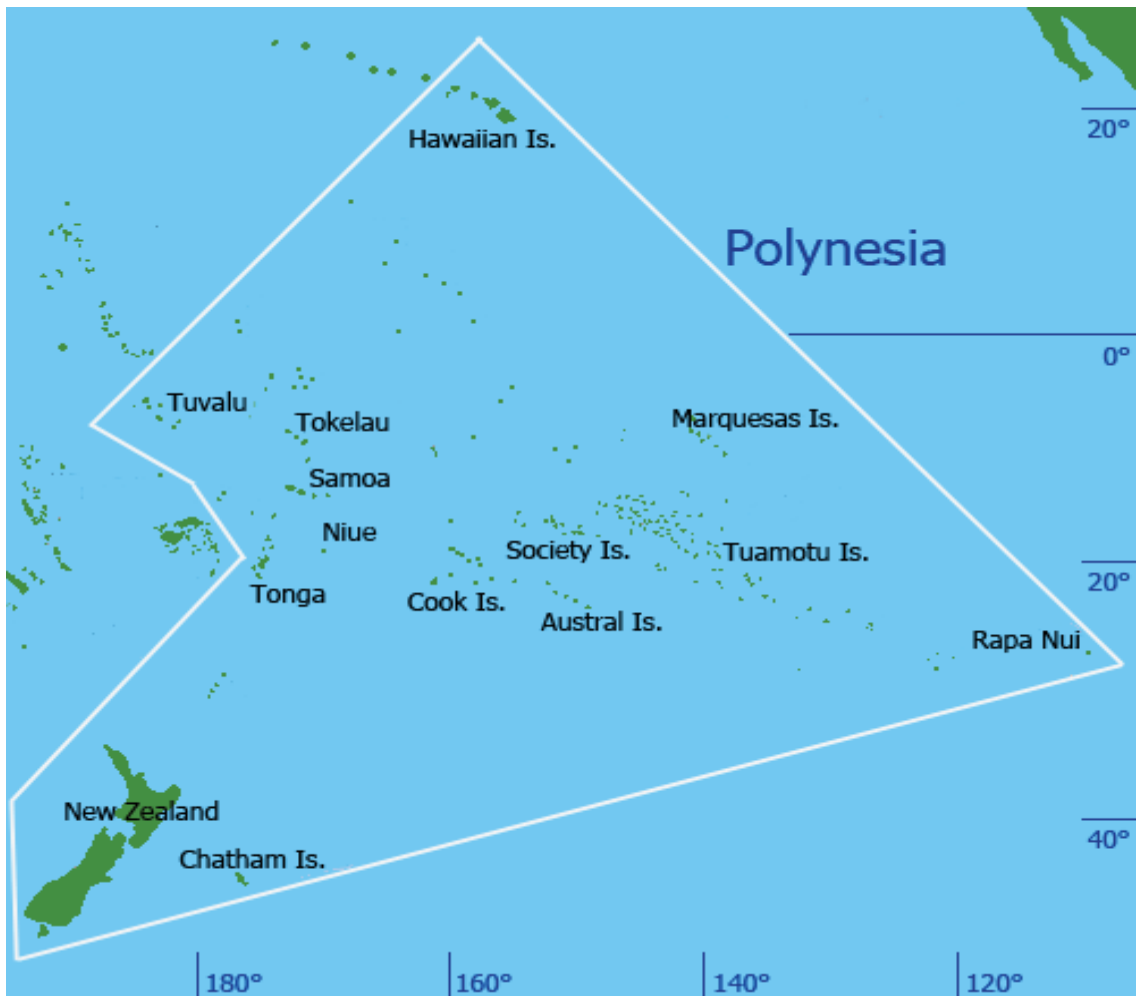




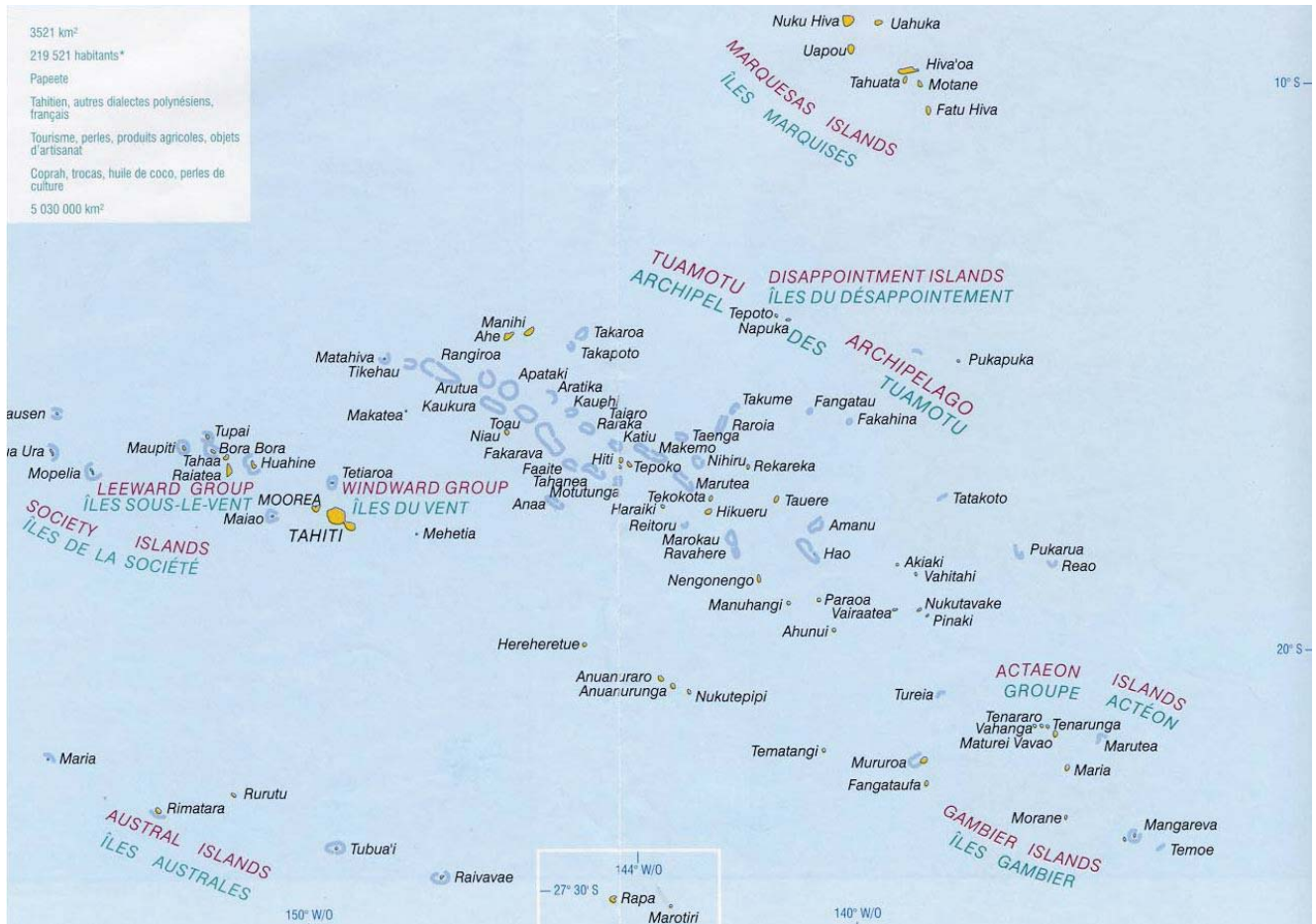
MODERN TATTOO GUNS



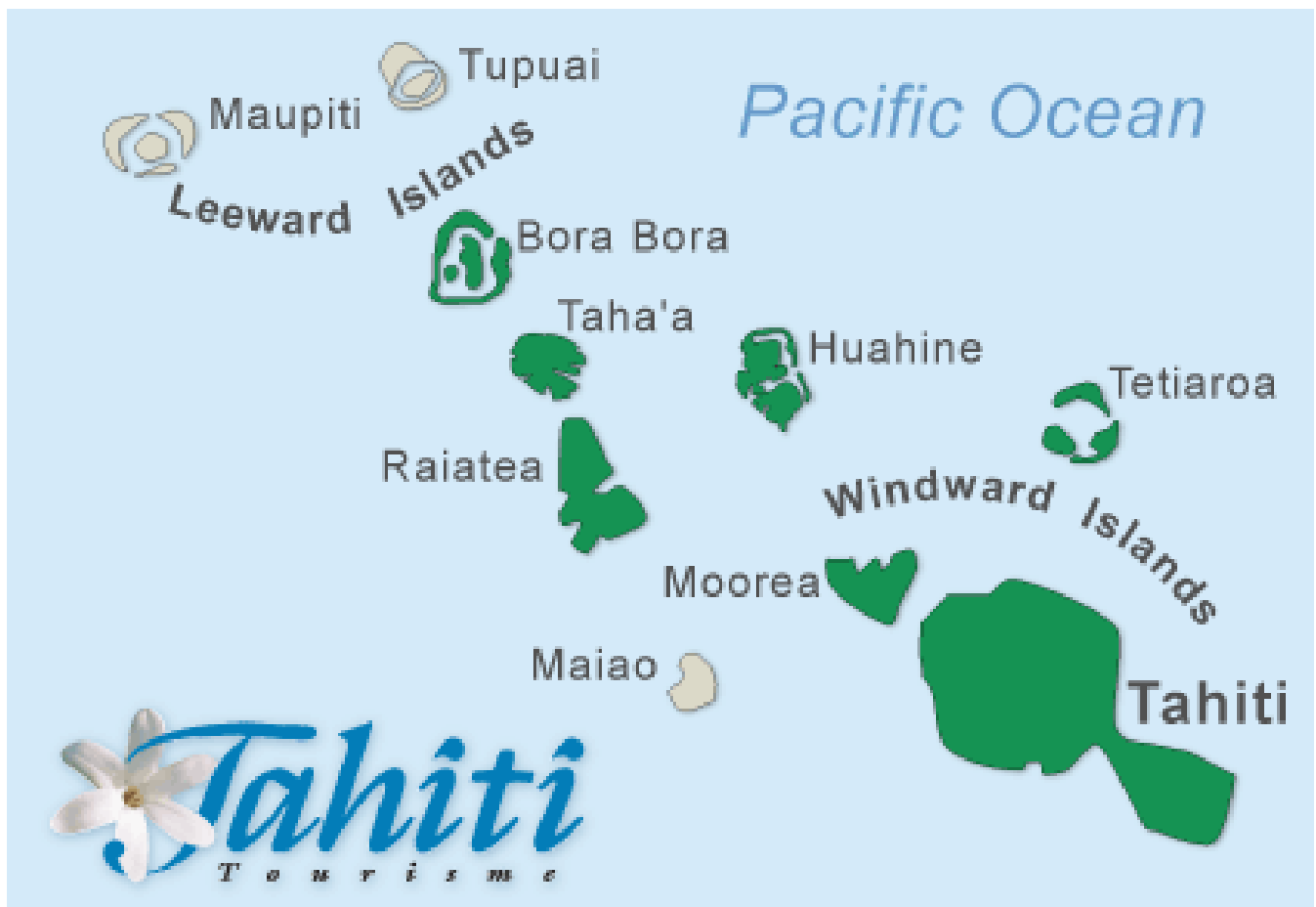
Map of Polynesia



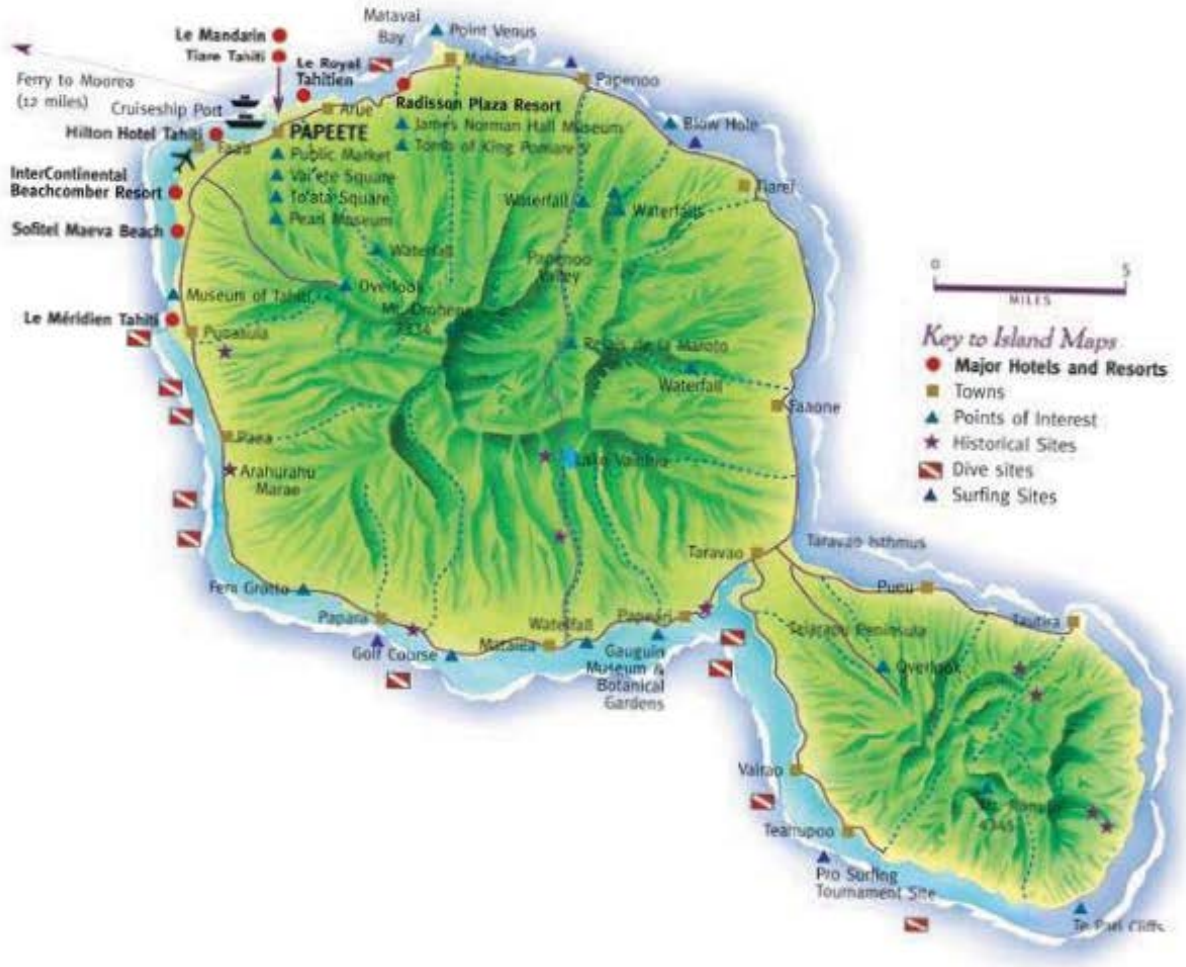
Map of French Polynesia



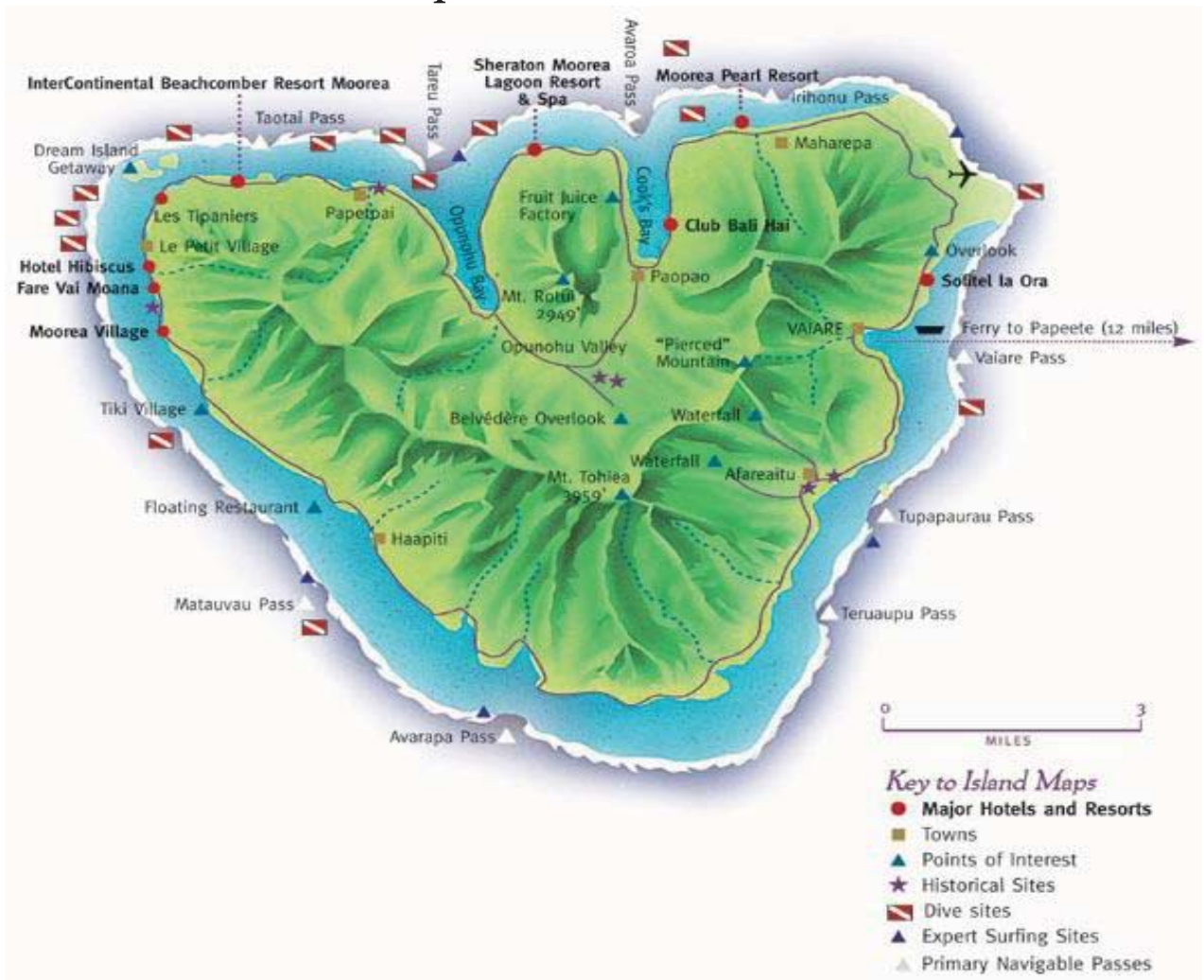
Map of Society Islands



Map of Tahiti

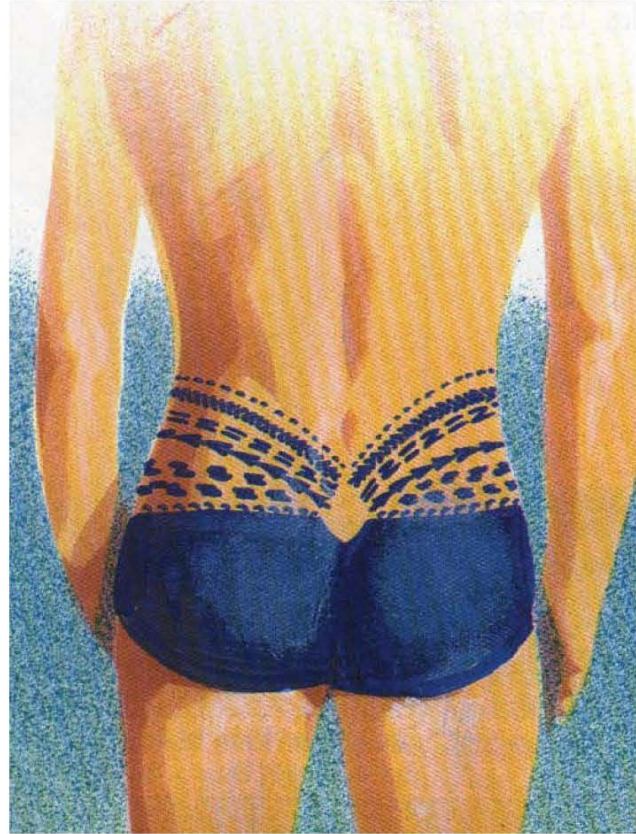
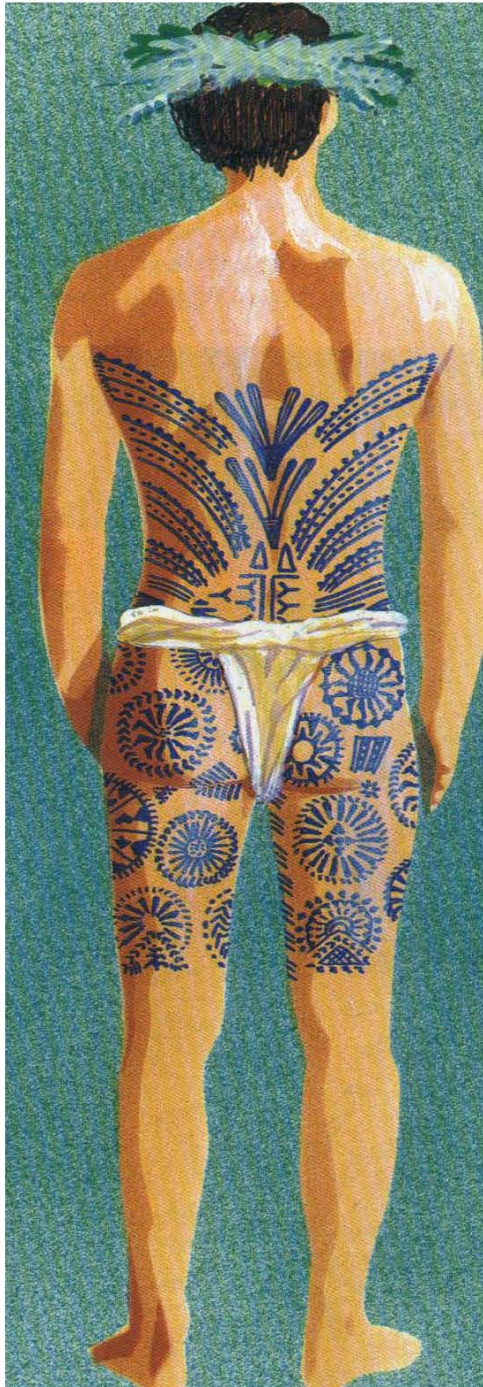


Map of Mo'orea



Society Island Tattoos.

Left : W. Smyth, 1826. Male tattoos consisting of chevrons, arches, Z's and stars. Top right: S. Parkinson, 1769. Elite *taomaro* design with blackened buttocks (occurring on both men and women). Bottom right: W. Smyth, 1826. Female leg and foot tattoos (example on the far left gives the appearance of sandals).



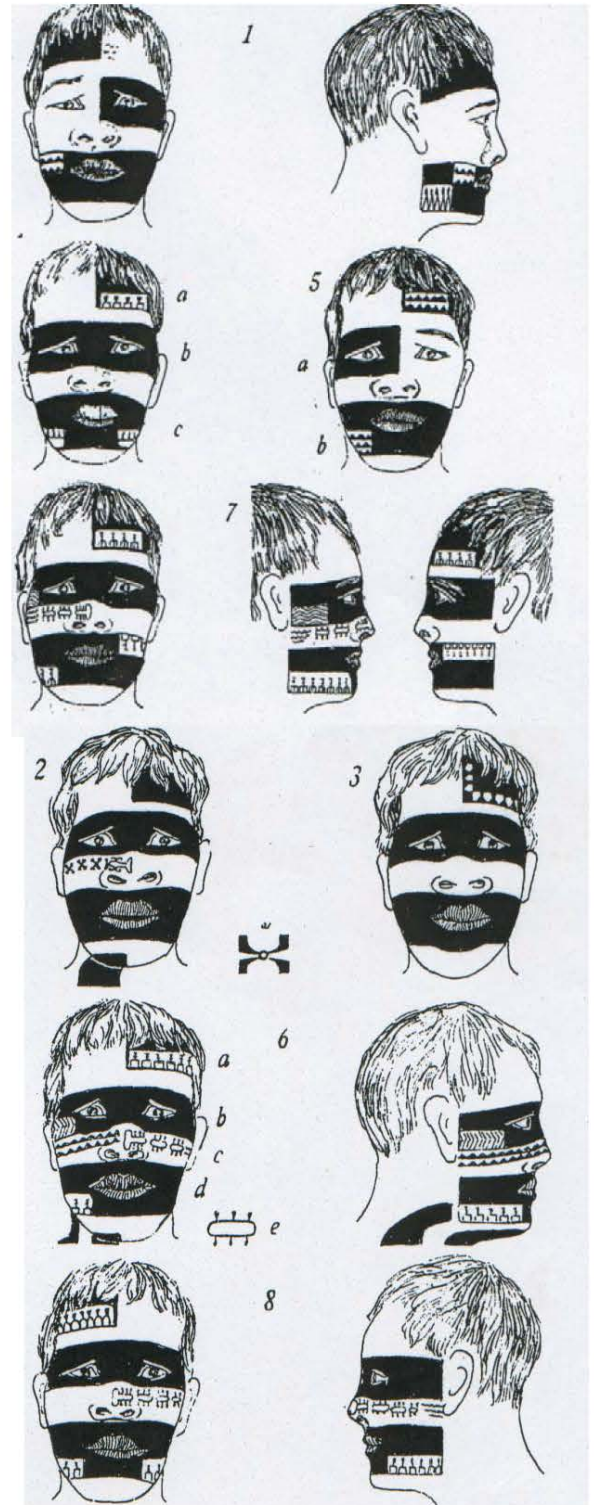
Sandwich Island (Hawaiian) Tattoos: Left: Jacques Arago 1819. Both Hawaii and the Society Islands introduced European animals into their tattoo iconography. If you look closely you can see that he has four animals (goats?) on his chest and armpit area. A very extensive review, however, did not allow me to find an example of the horse tattoo in Tahitian iconography. Top right: Hawaiian female foot tattoos. The picture on the left was thought to emulate hosiery. Bottom right: Hawaiian female hand designs. Some designs appear to mimic European jewelry (e.g., rings and bracelets). Both Hawaii and Tahiti replicated European garments in their tattoo designs once European contact was made.



Marquesas Islands: Kena, mythical importer of Marquesan tattooing.

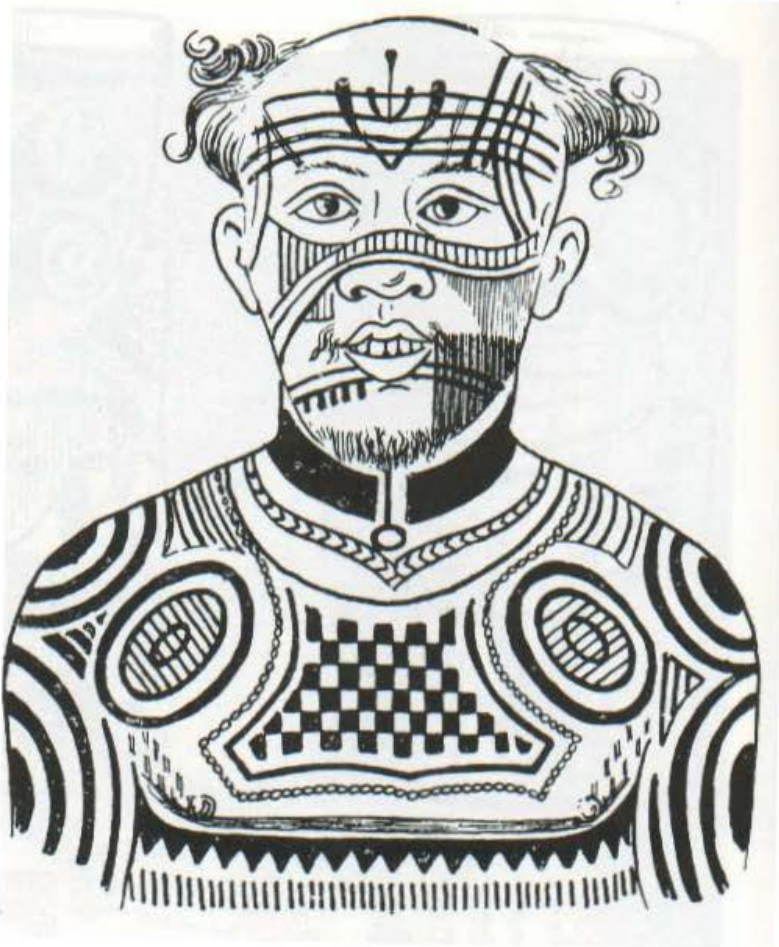


Marquesan male tattooing: Left: Von de Steinen, 1925. Notice the secondary faces that are inlaid; these would be referred to as *multiplicity*- duplicating the self. Right: W.C. Handy, 1921. Male, facial tattooing (this varied between the different Marquesan islands). Numbered examples below are from 1 and 5) Hiva Oa, 2 and 3) Ua Pou, 4 and 6-8) Ua Huka



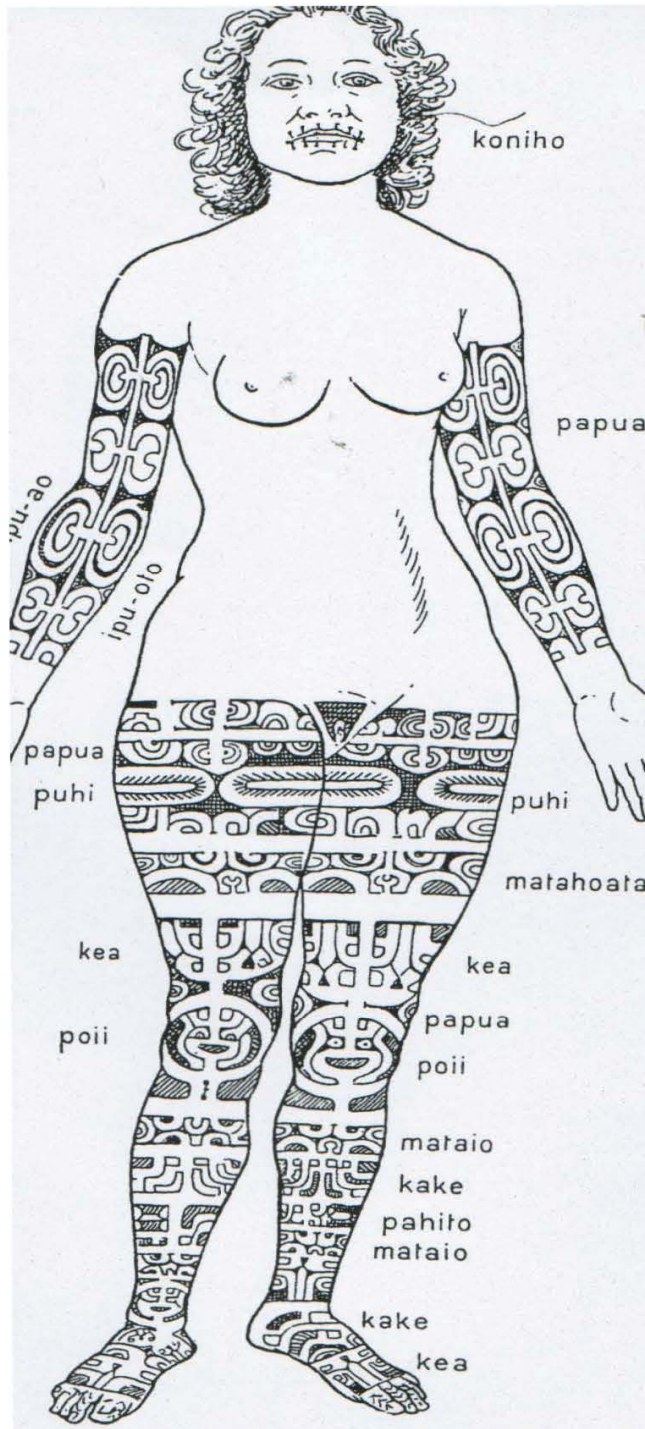
Marquesan tattoos

Left: Von den Steinen, 1925. Marquesan chest tattoos exclusive to Keatonui's feasting society. Top right: depiction of a Marquesan tiki. Bottom right: W.C. Handy, 1921. Marquesan tiki tattoo designs.



Marquesan Tattoos

Von den Steinen, 1925. Female Marquesan tattooing from the island of Hiva Oa.



Marquesan tattoos

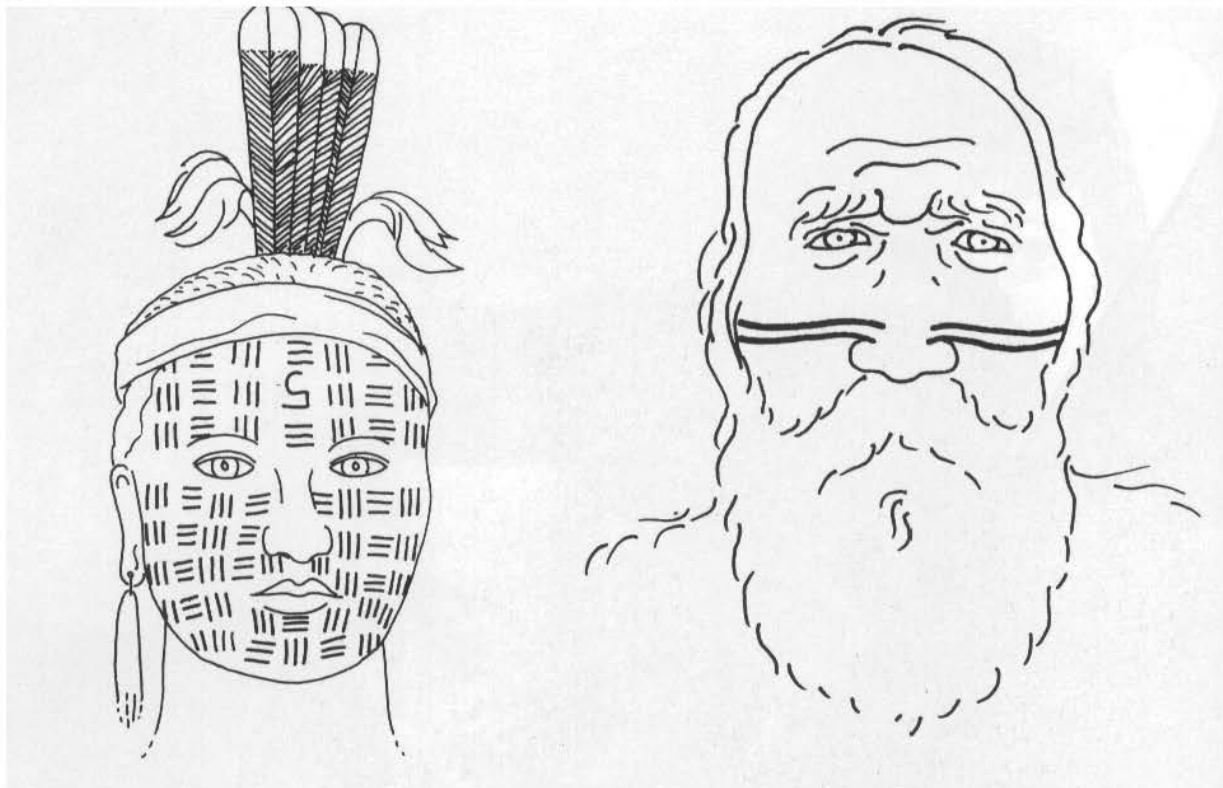
W.C. Handy, 1921. A: Female hand tattoos from the island of Fatu Hiva.

B. Female hand tattoos from the island of Tahu Ata.



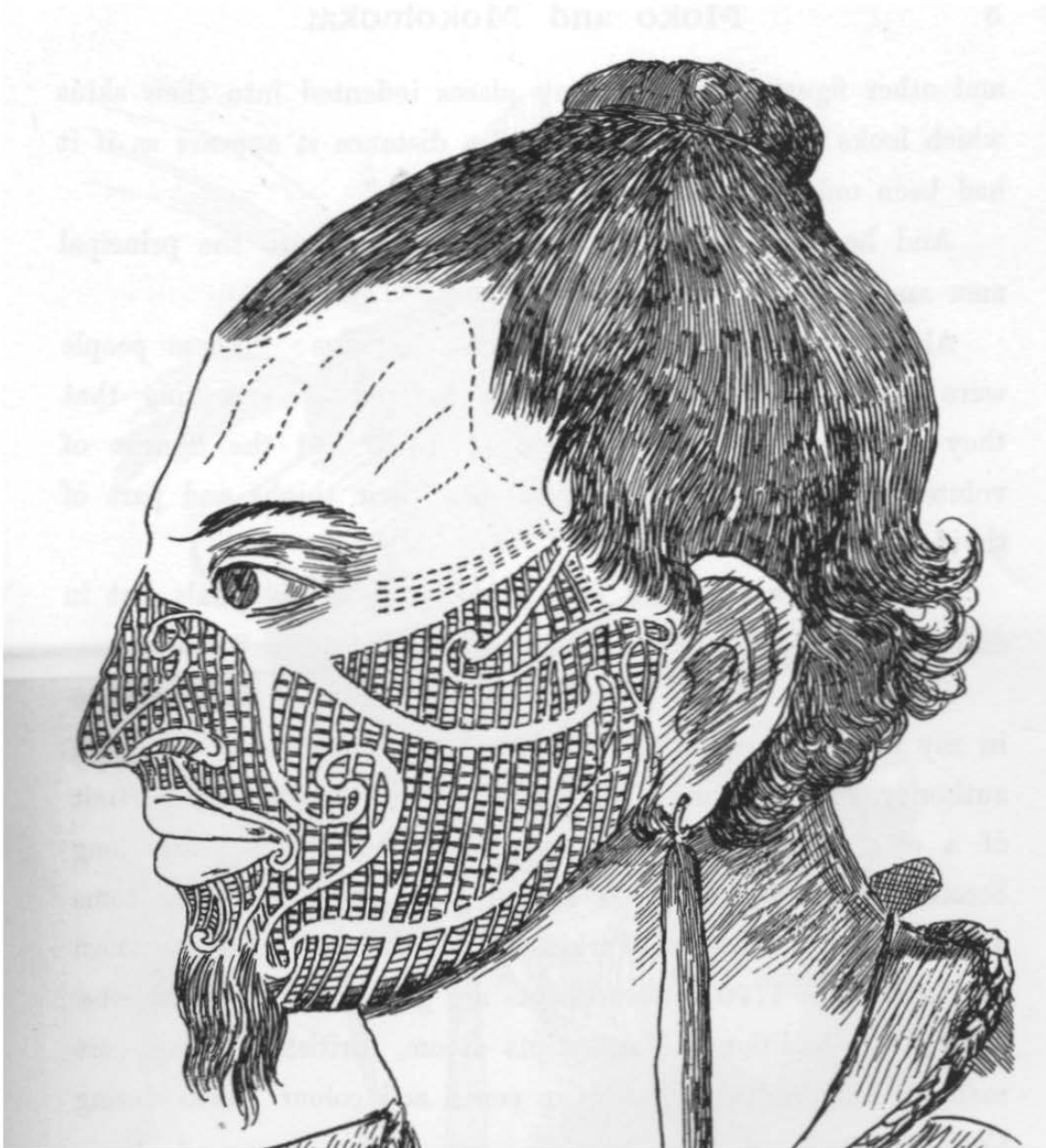
New Zealand Tattoos

Top: D'urville, 1841-6. New Zealand, Maori *puhoro* thigh tattoo.
Bottom left: White, 1889. Moko kuri. Bottom right: Cowan, 1910. Moko kuri.
Moko kuri is the linear design that prevailed in the south island of New Zealand.



New Zealand Tattoos

Sydney Parkinson, c. 1784. Parkinson was the artist who sailed with Captain Cook from 1769-1770. Maori puhoro facial tattoos. The date indicates that the puhoro design is very old, even before moko kuri. Puhoro thigh tattooing came much later after this, as well as the fully evolved spiral mokos.



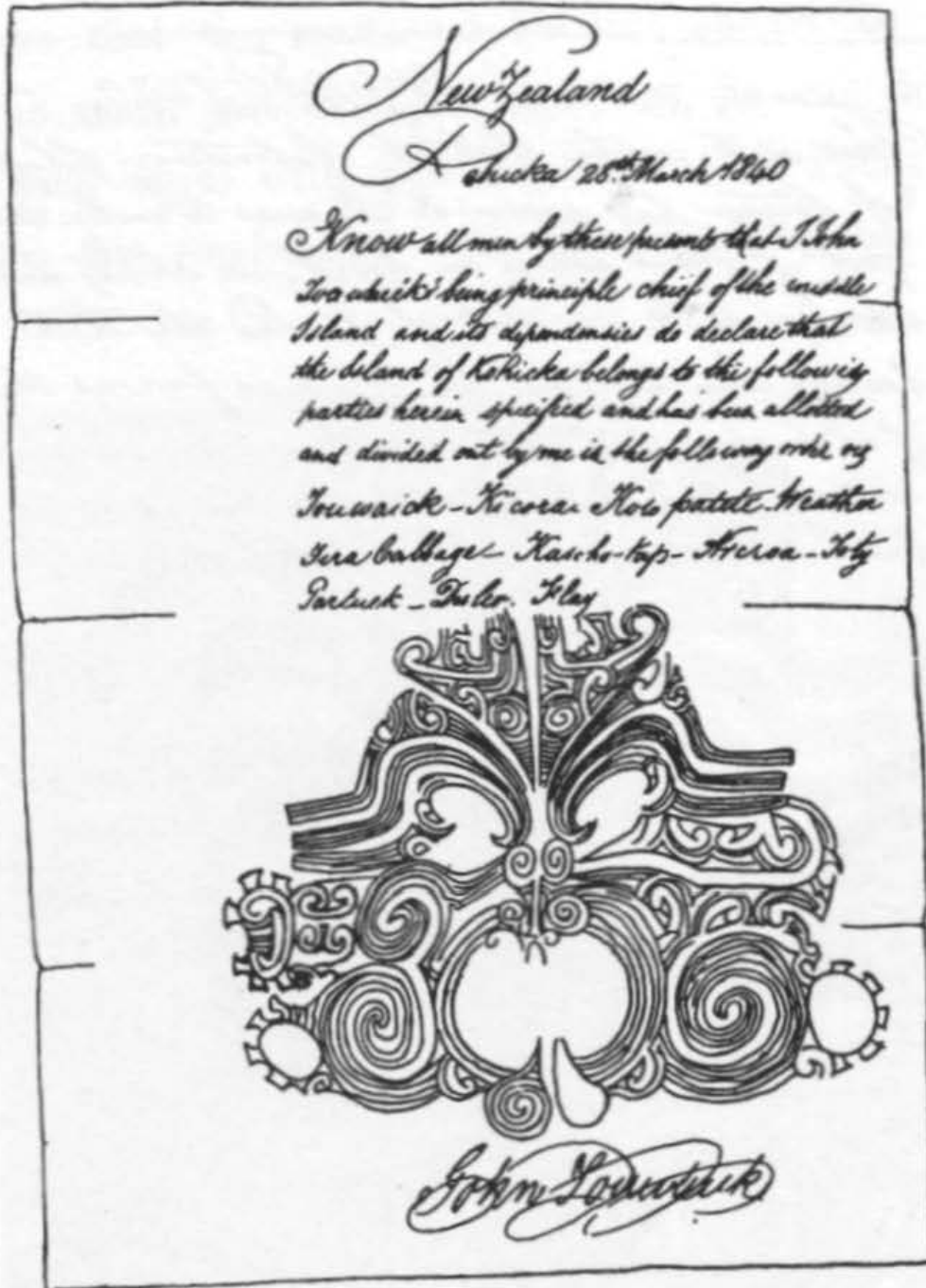
New Zealand Tattoos

Robley, 1840. Moko tattoos.



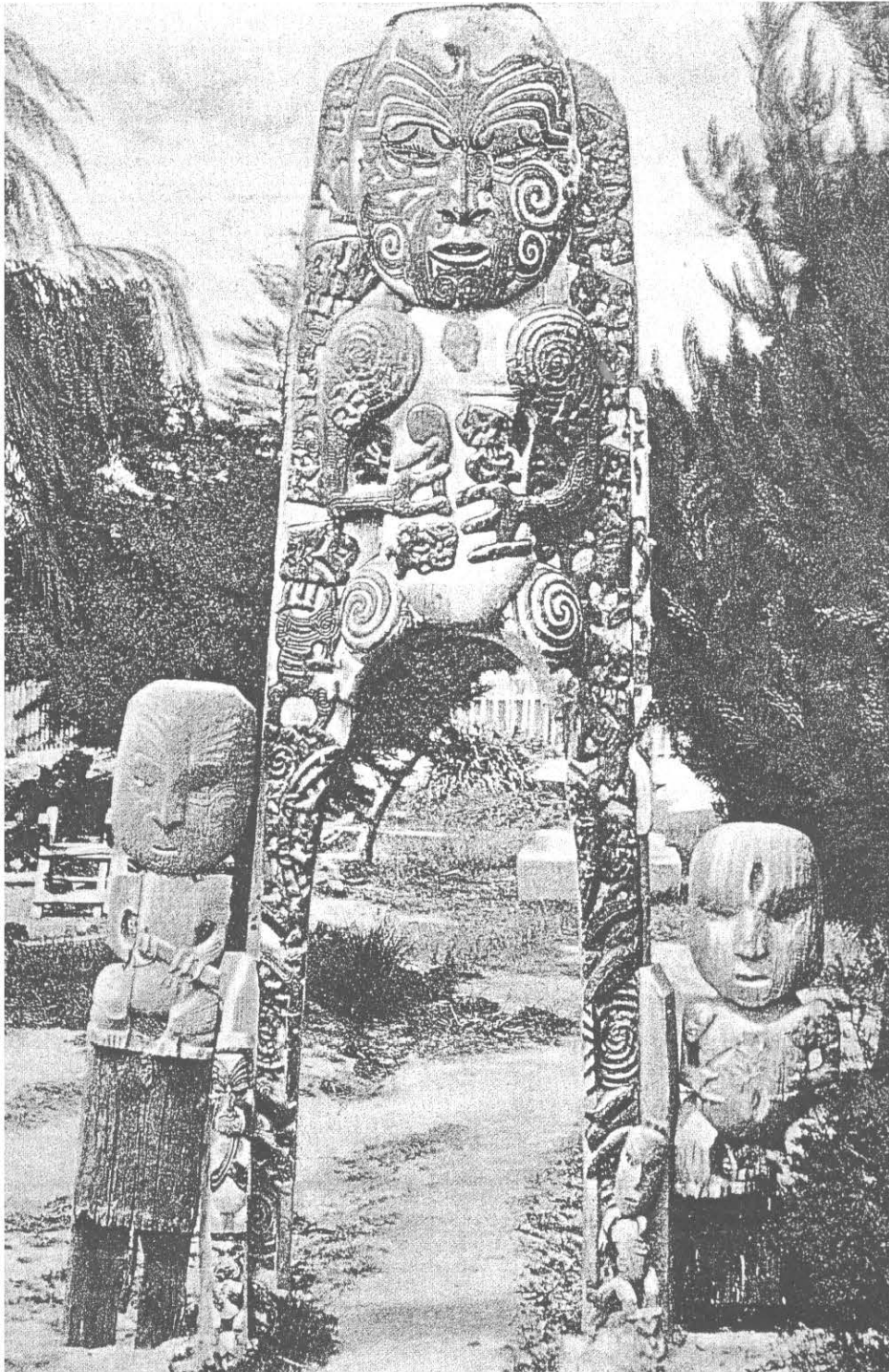
New Zealand

Robley, 1840. This is a land grant signed by Tuawhaiki, chief of the Ngaitahu tribe. Examples such as this enabled Europeans to compare moko to individual Maori identity formed through moko tattoos.



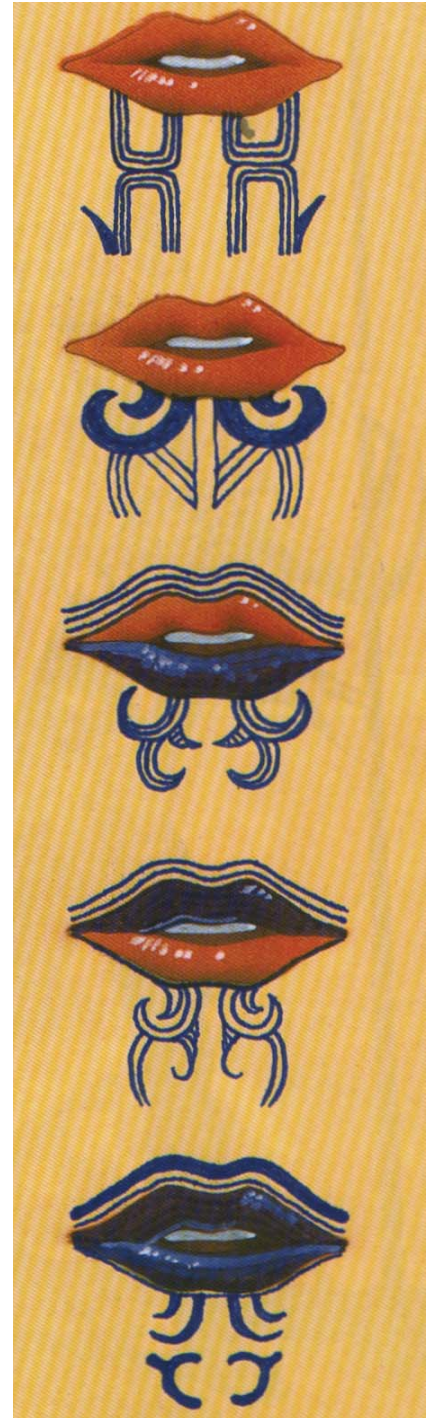
New Zealand

Muir and Moodie, 1910. Gateway of Pukeroa village, which remained standing until 1845. Notice the moko on this sculpture. Gathercole believed that moko was the donning of an ancestral mask, perhaps taking examples such as this to make his argument.



New Zealand Female Tattooing/Mokomokai

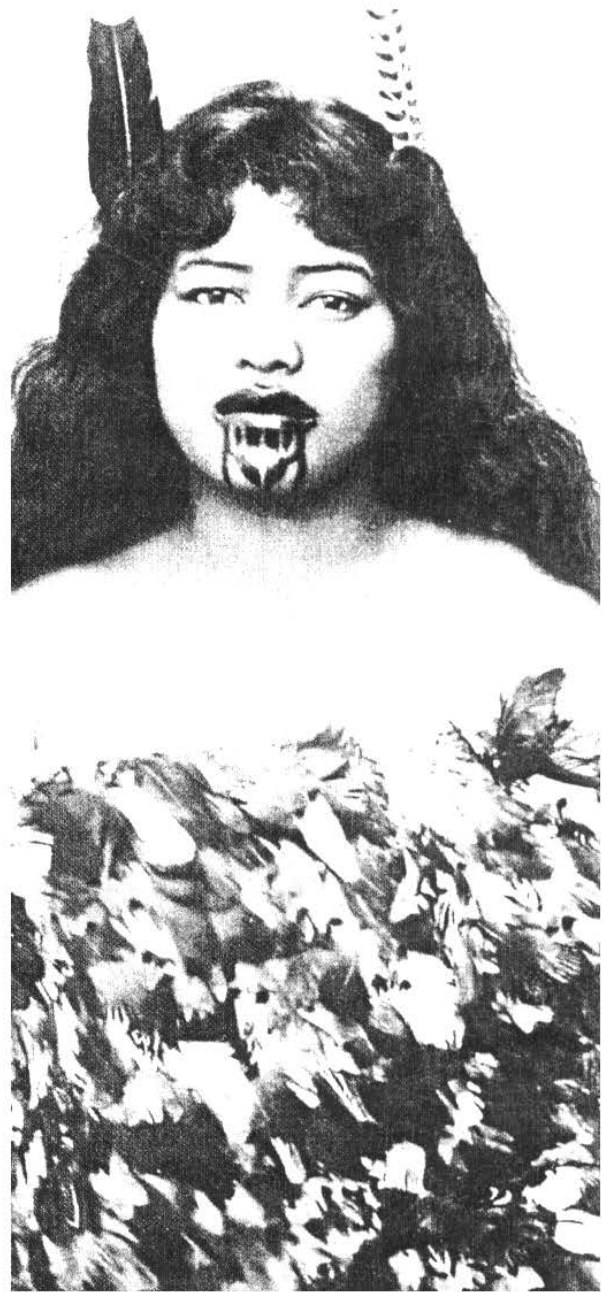
Blue, full lips were the ideal for Maori women. Female chin tattooing (mokomokai) maintained itself throughout the Maori wars and decline of moko. However, this practice did change over time. Left: Robley, 1840, female tattooing using the uhi (chisel). Right: Different female chin designs. Although I could not find an illustration, elite, unmarried women bore the mokomokai marks in red pigment.



New Zealand Persistence and Innovation

Left: Photo postcard F.G.R. #2508 c. 1915. Both of these postcards portray the “revival” of mokomokai around 1910. The use of clustered darning needles replaced the uhi for these tattoos, as can be seen by the distinct, broad lines in juxtaposition to the earlier, fine lines.

Right: Photo postcard F & T series # 8011. C. 1910.



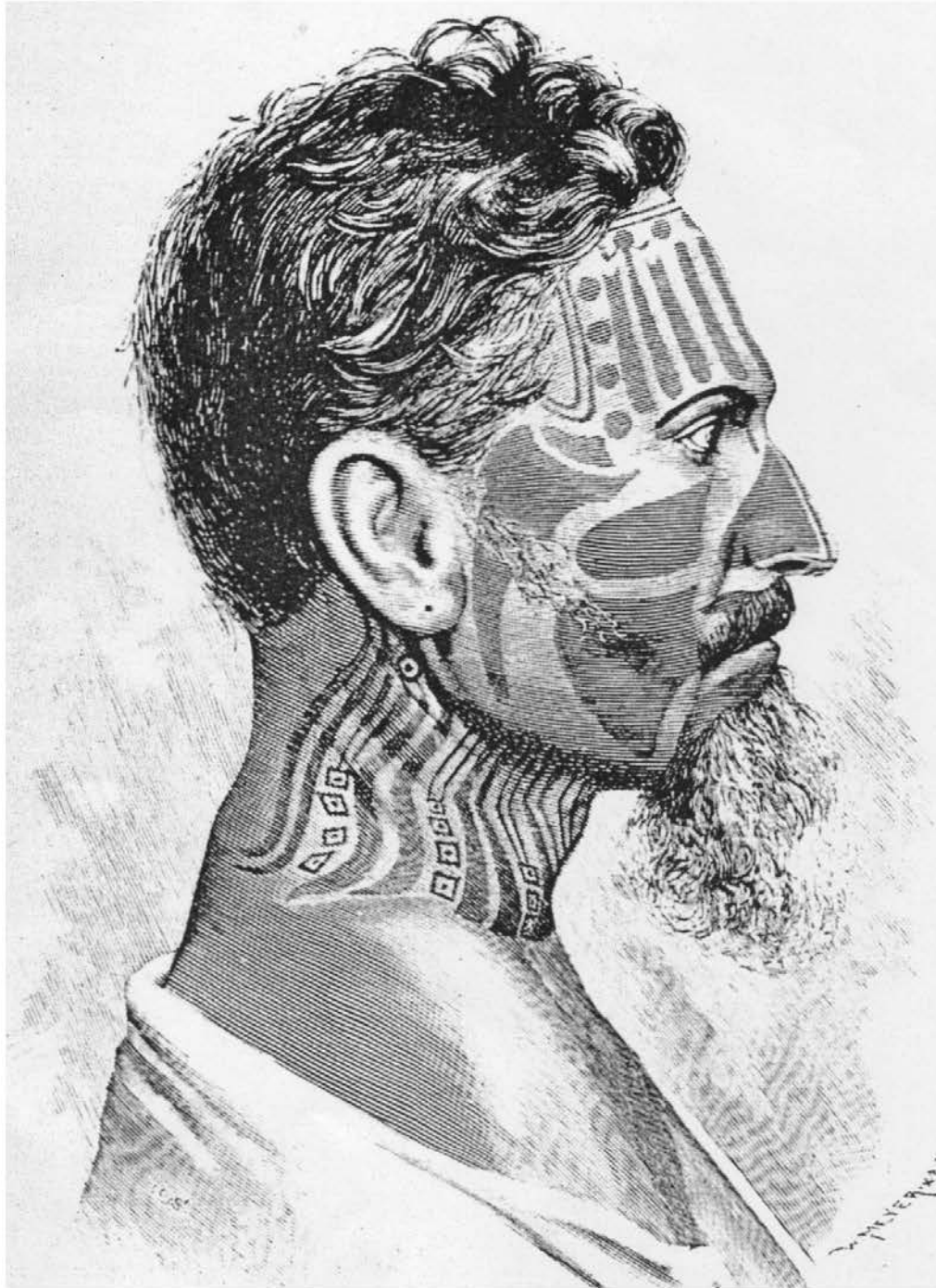
New Zealand

Pulman photo # 185, 1880. Although this is a common Maori greeting and gesture of affection, the words on these womens' arms are true anomalies compared to traditional Maori tattoos. These words are said to be their baptismal names, making this style an innovation that began with missionaries.



Easter Island Tattoos

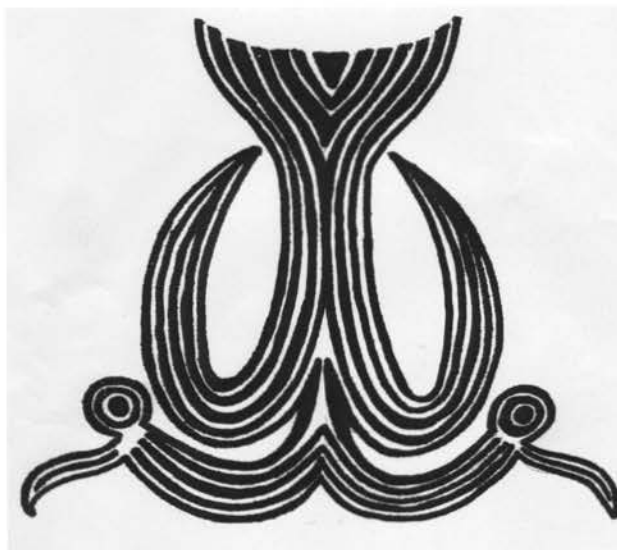
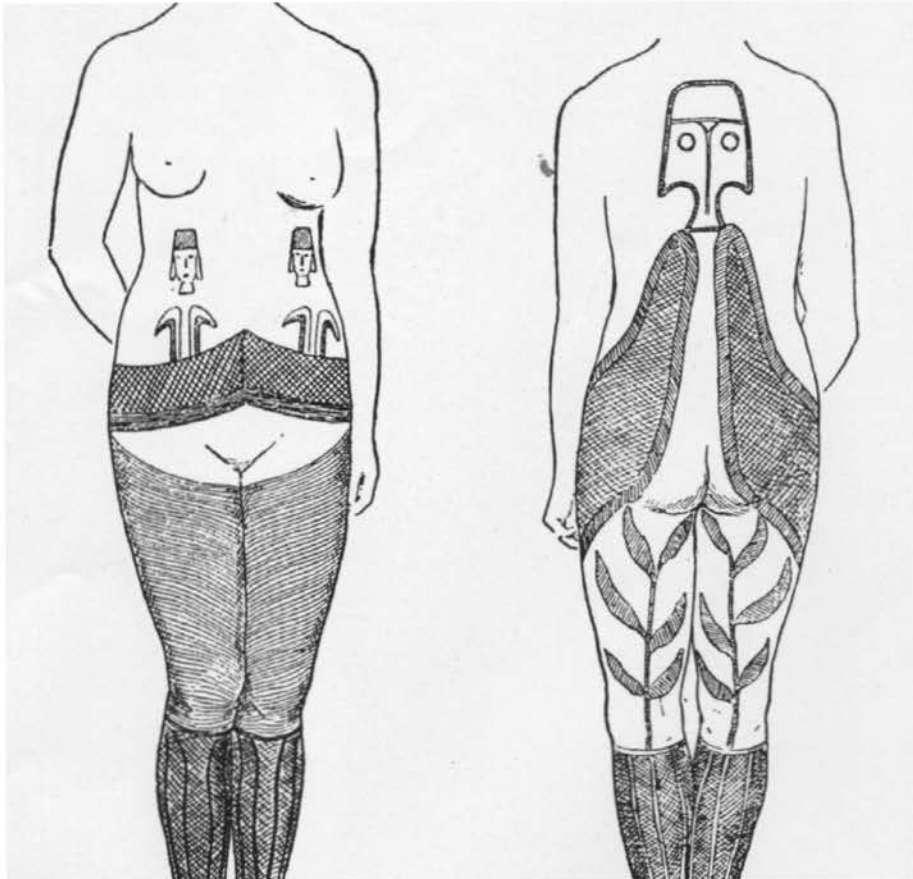
Stolpe, 1899. Easter Island not only tattooed the faces of its men, they also placed great emphasis on the neck. At this point, it should be apparent that the Marquesans, Maoris and Rapanui each had their own unique way of tattooing the face, which is important concerning revivalist efforts in the present. Facial tattoos are making a revival on Rapanui today.



Easter Island

Top: Thomson, 1889. Female tattooing. The back design is said to represent *pare*, dance paddles. Notice the secondary faces that appear in this iconography, reminiscent to Marquesan examples we have also seen.

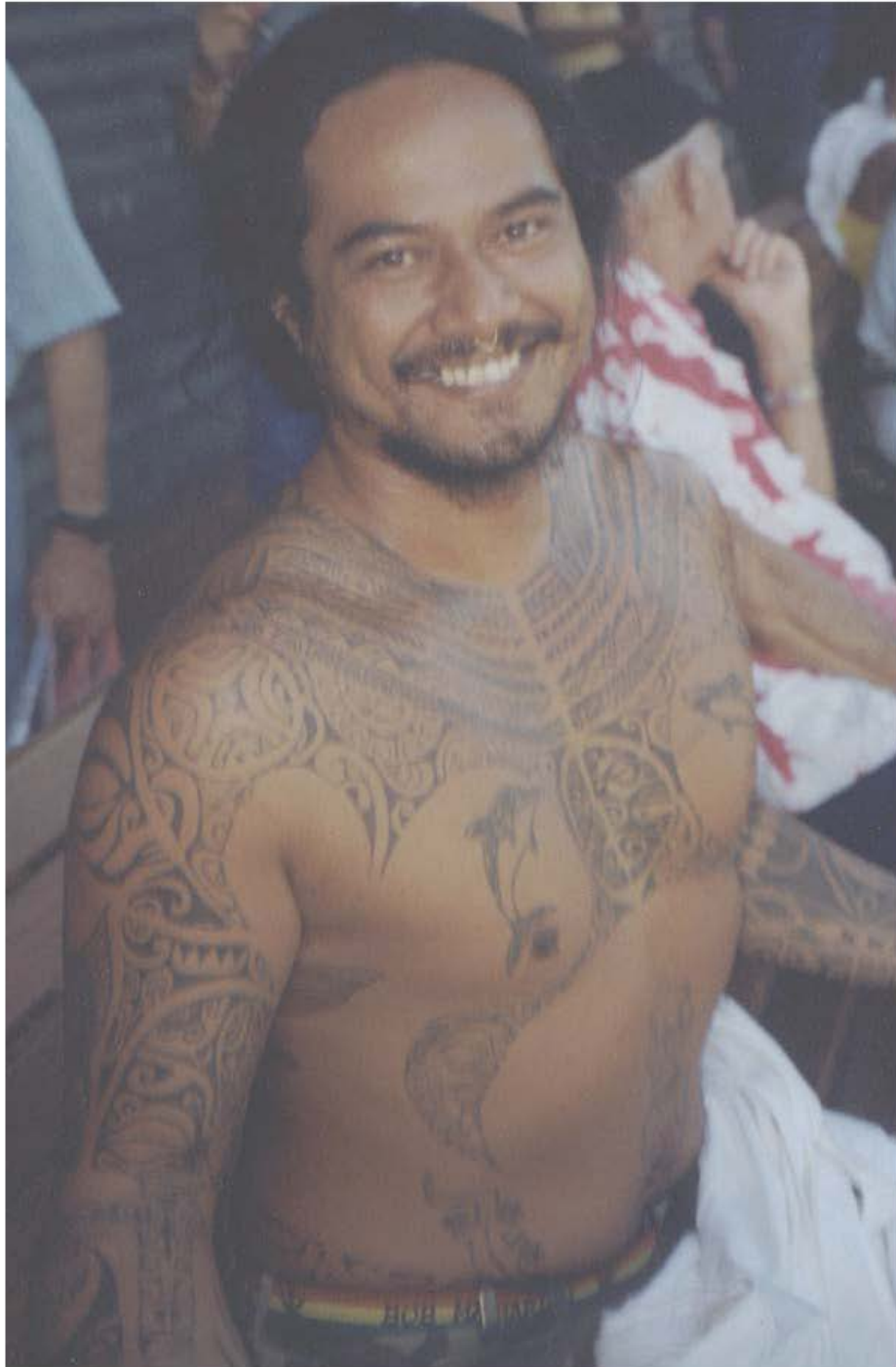
Bottom: The frigate bird was an important motif that symbolized the birdman. This design was found on both men and women.



Contemporary Tattooing in French Polynesia

Papeete, Tahiti 2004. This picture was taken by the author.

Notice the mixture of design: it is a mosaic of Samoan (around his neck and shoulders; this design would have been around the middle of Samoan men), lots of Marquesan design on his arms and new designs (the dolphins on both sides of his chest).



Contemporary Polynesian Tattoos

Papeete, Tahiti 2004. This individual is a native Hawaiian I interviewed over the summer. Notice that he opted for Marquesan design instead of the traditional, geometric assymetrical Hawaiian designs. The picture to the right has petroglyphs from Hawaii in between the Marquesan designs (look closely, they kind of look like stick men).



Tattoo Apprentice

Moorea, Society Islands 2004. Picture taken by the author.

This Frenchman makes a living apprenticing in one of the more affluent tattoo shops in Haapiti, Moorea. All the designs on his legs and arms borrow significantly from Marquesan iconography, although there is creative and different placement (especially on the leg) than those found in pre-European Marquesas.



Tourism and Tattoos

Moorea, Society Islands 2004. Picture taken by the author and reproduced with permission.

Kae is from the Tuamotu islands and has lived on Moorea for several years working as a dancer. He enjoys his job- it frequently enables him to travel with his dance troupe out of the islands and into other countries. Kae believes his tattoos are an asset to his career- they exude authenticity to the diverse audiences he performs for. Interestingly, here again we have overwhelmingly Marquesan designs mixed with Society Islands zig-zags, Samoan back poitrine patterns and (right leg) a pattern he claims comes from his native island in the Tuamotus, Rangiroa. A true bricolage, in the Straussian sense.



Contemporary Tattoos

Moorea, Society Islands 2004. Pictures taken by the author.

This man is from Tonga, but only the left arm would suggest that.

Left: Society Island concentric style (inside circle) with Marquesan design on the outside circle.

Right: Tui Tonga, a Tongan club, and the enata (eye) Marquesan design, with basic tribal around the body of the high chief.



Contemporary Tattoos

Moorea, Society Islands 2004. Picture taken by the author. This Irish man loved Moorea so much that he not only stayed for a month, but also acquired this tattoo to commemorate his experiences there. Again, this is a mixture of design, the fish hook (front chest) is actually a replica of one he purchased in New Zealand. The black filler is pretty modern tribal work, he said he wanted “lots of black” and the swirl design on the arm is a mixture of Marquesan and Hawaiian designs (the triangles and geometric lines are Hawaiian). The tattoo is incomplete in this picture, he had already sat for four hours and had to reschedule for the last bit of work.



More Marquesan Designs

Moorea, Society Islands 2004. Picture taken by the author.

Left: A much more modern appearing secondary face. The circle design is the “enata,” it means “eye.” The Marquesans were cannibals, who frequently ate the eyes of their enemies because they believed the eyes held vast power. This man is a Tahitian.

Right: This is a mixture of mainly Marquesan design, but there is also some Hawaiian (geometrics) and Society Islands (z’s) mixed in. This man is also a Tahitian.



Marquesan Designs and Cover-ups

Moorea, Society Islands 2004. Pictures taken by the author.

Left: This is interesting placement. I wonder if this gentleman realizes that this tattoo was traditionally brandished by Marquesan women? This individual is a French man who lives in Moorea.

Right: French man who decided to cover up an old tattoo, (the black inside middle is a cover up) and the outside is a new Marquesan addition of secondary faces. He spends each summer on Moorea, living in France the other months.



Artists at Work

Top: This artist moved to Moorea from France to learn the art of tattooing. He makes a very good living working out of his “hut” shop located in a prime location- beachfront at the Sofitel.

Bottom: This man is from the Tuamotu Islands and works as a tattoo artist out of his home. He too makes a very good living off the backpackers who stay at hostels nearby.



The finished product

Moorea, Society Islands 2004. Picture taken by the author.

This is the finalized tattoo that was being completed on the top of the last page. It is a tiki, secondary face with the enata design surrounding the head. This American girl also has tattoos from Easter Island, Hawaii and a traditional, tapped in design from Moorea, Society Islands.



Artist and Connoisseur

Moorea, Society Islands 2004. Picture taken by the author.

This is the artist pictured earlier hailing from France. His artwork is a work in a progress. The dark, black rectangles along both of his sides are being tapped in with traditional tattoo equipment while the remaining designs (again a mixture of Hawaiian, Marquesan and Society Islands) have all been done with the tattoo gun. Notice his crown circling the head in modern tribal design. The remaining pictures that follow are works by this artist that have been reproduced with permission of the artist. Unfortunately, they are the only examples I have of modern facial tattoos in the region. (I felt really awkward asking people I did not know to photograph their tattooed faces).

