

Pattern of Facial Moko That Related to Whakapapa in Semiotics Context

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Abstract

Māori is native inhabitants in New Zealand that preserves tattoo tradition named tā moko and this research is conducted to know the pattern of facial moko that related to whakapapa in semiotics context. The method of this research is qualitative descriptive and semiotics approach, which is used for digging into the meaning behind facial tattoos of Māori. Based on the analysis result, the writer concludes that facial tattoos of men and women are different specifically in its relation to the genealogy. The several patterns of men and women tattoos are examined using the theory of semiotics by elaborating three parts. The first part is representamen, which outlines the visual forms of tattoos. The second part is object, where elaborates shapes and names of the patterns. And the last is interpretant to explain view of Māori people to the patterns. Further, this research aims to provide information and new insight as well as give new perspective about tattoo itself.

Article information

Received:
10 – 12 2025

Revised:
3 – 2 – 2026

Accepted:
17 – 4 – 2026

Keywords: genealogy; Māori culture; tā moko; semiotics; pattern

Introduction

One heritage named tā moko is tradition where people of Māori marked their skin with various patterns by pigment that known as tattoo. Tattoo in the culture of Māori is not simply a body ornament. They believe that it is an identity, reflection of social status, family history, and whakapapa (genealogy). Traditionally, tattoo or moko is different in placed and name for men and women and receiving this tattoo can be stated that it is accepted in the adolescence, where accompanied by ceremony and ritual. In addition, people who are doing the practice have to be truly chosen and even though the instrument used has experienced changing through the era changing, the traditional one called uhi still exist. The head is the most sacred part according of Māori beliefs, so the patterns painted on it is closely related to status, rank, and lineage. Moko of men covers their entire face, while women only receive on their lip and chin. The tattoos on a male face were divided into eight fields, each of

which head its own name and contained specific information about the wearer. The face was divided into equal halves, and further into four major fields with some additional areas for secondary design (Simmons 1986: 131). Simmons (1986) described several tattoos that were unique to tapu women, or those who were set aside because of their high rank. a woman who was of such high status that no mate would be found to equal her lineage would never marry or have children, and was marked by a partial face tattoo like those found of men.

In this study, the writer uses Semiotics Approach by Charles Sanders Peirce. Sign, in Peirce's view is everything that can be felt by human sense. Chandler (2002)

defines semiotics as the study of signs, which is a reference to a symbol that actually represents something other than itself. The Triadic model of Peirce describes the relationship between the representamen (that which represents something else), the object (that which it stands for or represents) and the interpretant (the possible meaning or the sense made of the representamen) (Chandler, 2002; Johansen & Larsen, 2002). The theory is used by identifying one by one of moko pattern into the triadic model such as analyze what the representamen of the first pattern is, then finding out what the object is, and explain the possible meaning of the pattern according to Māori.

Accordingly, while the Māori practiced ta moko both on body and face, this research aims to know the pattern of facial moko that related to whakapapa in semiotics context, where it is hoped to be additional information about how tattoo has role in cultural.

Method

This research was conducted by applying the qualitative method. Data was collected by reading digital literary works, understanding and arranging facial tattoo of men and women, as well as taking a note for some additional information related to Māori language. Semiotics approach was using to analyze the meaning contained in the tattoo patterns, especially to the patterns that connected to genealogy.

Results and Discussion

In Māori culture, tattoo is one of the most complex cultures that exist because they use many Māori symbols that have secret meanings and only people who belong to that clan know their meanings. In this way, the goal is to maintain the wealth that exists from Māori symbols and their own culture. Each pattern of facial moko also contains different meanings that can be known directly who the wearers are by fellow Māori people.

Apart from the different patterns, there are also certain parts of the facial tattoos which have meanings that indicate the lineage of the Māori people. The men facial tattoos consist of eight parts where they are depicted with a different tattoo symbols. Among them, there are several parts which have relation to lineage where they are able to explain the connection in the different way. In semiotics context which is using triadic model from Peirce theory, facial moko of men and women consists of the same representamen. Representamen is a sign, it is a shape, that can be viewed visually by eyesight, so that it is the tattoo carving on the skin.



Source: Postposmo.

The first part is on men forehead named ngakaipikirau, where this part shows an object consisting of two triangular areas that meet at the center line of the forehead. In the Māori sphere, the interpretation of this position shows how the person's mood is. This is a very special site and can only be done by those who inherit a special status in Māori society (Conoce de Culturas). Then it is also said that the middle part of the forehead shows the general rank of a person (zealandtattoo.co.nz).



Source: Timeshighereducation.com.

Next is the area called ngunga, located below the eyebrows (zealandtatto.co.nz). With the object of two triangular areas also centered on the upper part of the eyebrows, this part is interpreted as a Māori symbol that marks a man's position in the life of the tribe (Conoce de Culturas).

Furthermore, an object called uma, the area around the shrine, its interpretant is to detail the marital status (zealandtattoo.co.nz). But more than that, it is also said that uma is the area from the temple to the middle of the ear, when tattooed on this part of the face represents information about the father or mother of the individual (Conoce de Culturas).



Source: Wisemove-co-nz.

Additionally, it can also be noted that a person's lineage is indicated on each side of the face. The left side is generally the father's lineage and the right side is the mother's lineage. Being of noble or distinguished descent is a primary requirement before tā moko is performed.

Furthermore, the facial moko of women that can be seen now is from one of influential Māori woman in New Zealand, Nanaia Mahuta who is the current Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand.



Source: [Jogja.tribunnews.com](https://www.jogja.tribunnews.com)

Facial tattoos on Māori women are known as moko kauae. Moko Kauae is a legacy of ancestors (whakapapa) and cultural identity. Its intricate designs link the wearer to their family tree. For Mahuta, it links the late Māori queen, Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu and the current Māori king, Kingi Tuheitia. Meanwhile, the markings on the left and right sides of the face refer to one's paternal and maternal lineage.



Source: [Newzealand.com](https://www.newzealand.com)



Source: [Liputan6.com](https://www.liputan6.com)

The visual elements of Māori design consist of a series of key motifs that have their own meaning and patterns that indicate a person's lineage, namely the koru, a spiral-shaped object, resembling the growing frond of a native New Zealand fern.



Source: [Creativefabrica.com](https://www.creativefabrica.com)



Source: [Teara.govt.nz](https://www.teara.govt.nz)

The koru represents parenthood, ancestry, and genealogy. Because of these human characteristics, designs with a single koru and multiple koru growing from it are said to represent whakapapa (ancestry), where essentially a family tree is made from the koru design ([mountainjade.co.nz](https://www.mountainjade.co.nz), 2023). The other side, the koru (native fern) symbolized new life and growth and often represented a family member or loved one ([newzealand.com](https://www.newzealand.com)).

Accordingly, if one side of a person's ancestry was not of rank, that side of the face would have no moko design. Likewise if, in the center

forehead area there is no moko design, this means the wearer either has no rank, or has not inherited rank.

Semiotics approach by Peirce indicates the same representamen with different object and interpretant. As said that tattoo of Māori is one of the most complex cultures, there are several meanings of patterns that interpreted by Māori itself. By the founding of different meaning between the pattern and the place of Māori people facial moko, the related to whakapapa is also limited.

Firstly, tattoo of men which located on the center forehead named ngakaipikirau. It is said that the object indicates the rank of men in society. It may be seen to have low percentage in connecting to genealogy, but noticing that if one side of a person's ancestry was not of rank, that side of the face would have no moko design. Likewise if, in the center forehead area there is no moko design, this means the wearer either has no rank, or has not inherited rank. This is able to illustrate that a person's rank is inherited from his ancestors and shows that the inheritance of a person's rank is related to his lineage.

Secondly, the object ngunga which is indicates the position of men in the tribe. This part can be said that someone inherits the position from his ancestors. Not much different from the previous part, a man will know his position just by looking at this ngunga tattoo.

Thirdly, the part called uma is interpreted into two different meanings. The first shows marital status. However, more than that, it turns out that uma also shows the lineage of the father and mother. Specifically, uma is said as the area from the temple to the middle of the ears.

As in the picture shown, the forms of tattoos on the left and right sides of the face are not the same. So that is enough to distinguish between the signs of the father's and mother's lineage. The difference can be clearly seen starting from the tattoo pattern on the forehead which is indeed different between the right and left sides.

Next, the tattoos on the faces of Māori women are limited to the lips and chin. From some of the pictures that have been listed, their tattoo motifs look exactly the same, but if it is viewed again, none of the objects have the same shape. What distinguishes one from another is the spiral object which is interpreted as a symbol of lineage.

Koru is a spiral tattoo object, resembling a fern leaf which shows a person's life journey and is also primarily a symbol of lineage. This pattern is the most easily seen pattern on a Māori face and is sometimes carved more than one on the faces of men and women. In the case of a number of koru more than one, it can be said that they are able to represent other family members both from mother's side or father's side.

Accordingly, tattoo as sacred tradition of Māori has unique meaning. Besides of the genealogy, for men, it is also deeper to the position, status, and their rank. And for women, they have the tattoo as identity and social

status.

Conclusion

The result of this research is that the only one pattern of Māori tattoo on the face has deep meaning to the whakapapa (genealogy) and the wearers' life. It is also differentiated between men tattoo and women tattoo. The facial moko of men consists of three sections which related to genealogy, while facial moko of women consists of only one section. In the aim of elaborating the meaning behind Māori tattoos, this research will be able to give information about the tradition of tattoo where in several cases it is more than an art. Accordingly, this research may become additional information for other research on the same topic.

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