



Whose culture is it anyway? The appropriation of ear stretching in a Western context: A focus on German sub-culture.

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Chapter 1: Background of the study

1.1 Introduction

Cultural Appropriation is a social phenomenon that has raised intense arguments between people and groups of diverse origins. This phenomenon is based on claims of uneven relations between various groups within defined borders with regard to race, gender, class and ethnicity as well as on the basis of consumption without consent or compensation (Penney and Arzuaga, 2017).

Matthes (2016) defined cultural appropriation as a practice whereby an individual or group speaks for, tells, defines, describes, represents, uses or recruits images, stories, experiences and dreams of others as their own. Appropriation also occurs when someone else becomes the expert on the experience of others and is deemed more knowledgeable about the subjects more than they can claim about themselves.

Young (2000) indicated that Cultural Appropriation is not a one-size-fits-all kind of concept; it comes in many forms and occurs for varied reasons. Due to inter and trans-cultural exchanges that frequently take place, many socio-political *faux pas* are bound to happen in this respect. Cultural Appropriation emerges in a variety of forms which include material, non-material, stylistic, motif and subject. Each one of these forms of appropriation are case and context specific and, thus, the situations and degrees in which the argument with regard to Cultural Appropriation can be raised varies greatly.

Also, Lutz (1990) warned that the debate about cultural appropriation should not be associated with the concept of cultural exchange. Cultural exchange happens when two or more cultures rub off each other. Cultural appropriation, on the other hand, is characterised by one group acquiring cultural elements, being ideas or practices, through colonial structures, uneven relations between the cultures in question, whereby one group is economically and politically dominant over the other.

Semali and Asino (2013) noted that studying artefacts and other aspects of material and non-material culture is central to understanding people's daily lives, their sense of place in the world, their food, their art, their spirituality, and their political and social organization, in general understanding people's cultural heritage. Also, studying the practices and the knowledge that comes with cultural elements is central to understanding the history and heritage of people and

the complex contemporary implications as well as the relevance that the said cultural elements have for those people in their daily lives.

Moreover, the meanings attached to culture and all its related effects have changed due to the constantly changing nature of culture. Thus, the possessiveness of cultural elements by groups have come to be questionable over time. Through historical and political backgrounds, cultural forms have been subject to global systems of economic exchange, power relations, and systems of meaning. They are constructed and transformed over time through meaning making activities of individuals as well as through larger social processes such as moments of resistance to conform to gender or class expectations. These transformation processes occur through particular events rather than through gradual social evolution. Thus, culture is continuously produced and reproduced at particular historical times in specific places situated within global movements of people and capital (Merry, 1998).

de Rooij (2015) emphasised the emergence of transnational cultures as a consequence of migration and globalisation. Transnational cultures emerged as result of cultural dissemination and re-production across territories as migrants settled and developed their own sub-cultures in host states. Migration is encouraged by factors such as state corporations, educational and employment opportunities as well as war-induced dispersion in war-torn states. Mavrommatis (2014) also argued that transnational cultures have changed and disrupted the notion of unitary identity as cultures have been translated into new contexts and territories. The processes of globalisation and the power structures between Western and non-Western cultures have been challenged by transnational cultures as the bonds and ties to nations, and organisations are being redefined due to changing allegiances, which have shifted the global realm towards a single entity.

Tsanwani et al. (2017) warned that globalisation has had a negative impact on non-Western cultures. Even though globalisation promotes diversity, it does, however, weaken traditional social identities of non-Western societies and affects the nation's capacity to establish a strong and stable social identity. This is because mediums of communication such as televisions, newspapers, radios, internet have been used to portray Western cultures as desirable, thus compelling non-Westerners to follow suit.

1.2 Problem statement

Several studies have been conducted on Cultural Appropriation as a social phenomenon (Coombe 1998; Tsosie 2002; Heyd 2003; Rogers, 2006 and Young, 2012). However, there is

still controversy about who can claim the rights to certain cultural practices. Furthermore, there is limited literature on ear stretching in the West, how its appropriation is connected to non-Western practices and how this phenomenon is linked to the general cultural appropriation debate.

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to understand the meaning behind German youth stretching their ear lobes and to ascertain if this qualifies as cultural appropriation.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are to:

Analyse the meanings attached to the practise of ear stretching in Western societies.

Determine the extent and circumstances under which cultural appropriation can be argued.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research question will be asked:

What is the significance of ear lobe stretching in the Western context? And

To what extent and under which circumstances can cultural appropriation be argued?

1.6 Significance of the study

This research is of particular importance at a time whereby there are arguments on various social platforms such as media, popular culture as well as day-to-day encounters about who holds the rights to certain cultural elements. This study will therefore analyse the issues that inform the Cultural Appropriation debate by making reference to the ear-stretching practise and the meanings held behind it in the contexts of traditional aspect of the Masaai and other Ethnic groups and the Subculture aspect of the German youth.

Chapter2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks as well as reviewed literature that is relevant to this study. Theories of postmodernism and cultural theories are presented.

Various sources and discussions concerning cultural appropriation and ear lobe stretching are also presented in detail.

2.2 Theoretical Perspective

Theoretical frameworks that relevant to the study.

Postmodernism

Classical theories of sociology have maintained a division between economics, politics and society. However, the postmodernism theory tends to collapse these boundaries and brings culture to the centre of the argument. Gones-Malka (2011) noted that the notion of postmodernism as a culturally dominant concept, which allows for the coexistence of other divergent traits to subsist simultaneously within the domain of postmodernism. Postmodernism supports the idea that social realities are dynamic, forming and reforming in response to environmental stimuli. The importance of culture in society is thus undeniable. Culture shapes peoples' attitudes and actions; and biases their thinking and behaviour towards conventional orders of their particular societies. Culture brings people meaning in their identities and political views. It encompasses peoples' day-to-day activities and practices, ranging from congregating at particular venues to daily domestic activities such as meeting for coffee or going shopping, to the media they consume. Postmodernism in this regard will be used as a base for understanding and reflecting the meanings of individuals stretching their ear lobes to make social meaning and statements.

Cultural Theory

Cultural Theory will be considered as a theoretical framework that will inform this study (as a field of engagement and not a discipline), in order to analyse cultural appropriation as a social phenomenon. Oswel (2010) states that the Cultural Theory is not purely theoretical or purely empirical, but is rather a synthetic mode of writing that pursues ideas in the context of lived cultural experiences. The Cultural Theory is a reflexive engagement with culture, which not

only produces knowledge about culture, but also investigates, experiments and produces theoretical architectures and concepts in it and also with it. This framework thus, is relevant for this study because it is not unitary and is not dictated by the normativity of style, narrative structure and mode of address; it is flexible in basing arguments according to peculiar requirements of the context of cultures, both as objects and resources of empirical phenomena.

Kellner (2009) contends that cultural studies have been used as a mechanism to analyse how sub-cultural groups resist dominant forms of culture and identity and how individuals within these sub-cultures created their own styles and identities. These individuals look and act differently from those in the mainstream and thus, create oppositional identities, defining themselves against standard models.

2.3 Literature review

Cultural appropriation is a concept that has its legitimacy as valid arguments that are frequently contested. Such arguments are usually spearheaded by members of cultures that are each at extreme ends of the spectrum (Western and non-Western cultures), and each does, in their own right, have a valid point (Friedersdorf, 2017).

To set the baseline of these two arguments, a clear distinction between the Western and Non-Western cultures will be made.

Western and Non-Western groups

According to Seyranian et.al (2008) there are number characteristics that set Western and Non-Western cultures apart, these include power, group size, distinctiveness, social category, group context, disposition and being the source or target of certain behaviours. Furthermore, what sets these two groups apart is the positive and negative social conditions and treatment attached to each culture respectively. Cultures springing up from Non-Western places have for long been met with hostility, stigmatisation and oppression of various sorts whereas Western cultures have always been the epitome of high status, class and value, whose representation set the tone for the standards of beauty and what is deemed appropriate and acceptable.

In the context of this study, the terms Western and non-Western are used to refer to cultures and their said practices as well as to differentiate between two groups that exist in two different settings. Additionally, these terms are used to classify the geographical, economic and socio-political circumstances of the two groups. This classification is important as it contextualises the spaces and circumstances in which ear stretching is done by non-Western ethnic groups as

part of a cultural practices and the German Youth as a distinguishing element within sub-cultural practices. This, thus, makes it easier to portray ear stretching as a culture in two different contexts.

The sensitivity associated with cultural appropriation is rooted in three main domains, these include history, power relations, and economics. These domains will be highlighted using various examples throughout the literature review. These three domains are interrelated and, usually one domain is a direct consequence or effect of the other. To give a clearer understanding, members originating and affiliated to non-Western cultures, who are the ones crying foul, are coming from a place where they have always been subjects of oppression, dehumanisation and discrimination.

A Historical Background

In order to identify and understand the historical context of this debate, the history of African Americans is considered as an example. African Americans, as victims of the Slave Trade at the beginning of the 15th century, were displaced from their native homes in Africa and taken to America to be used for hard labour, and had their beliefs, identities and cultural practices tarnished. Their ways of being and expressions, be it in the form of art, music and spirituality, wearing their hair in cornrows and dreadlocks, body modification practices and dress sense dominated by animal skin hides with colourful culture specific patterns and beaded jewellery, were considered as uncivilised and unappealing by their colonial and slave masters (Abbattista, 2011).

Roberts (2016) stated that throughout history, slaves have often been described by the master as being somehow physically different, this difference was given a negative connotation and with this physiological features and cultural practices, were the basis of rendering African and Native American slaves as non-human during the Seventh Century slavery era in America.

With being removed from their homelands and living through decades of dehumanising experiences because of the Slave Trade, African Americans were forced to adopt the English culture, which included speaking the English language, adopting names that were not of their original African tribes and a changed sense of dress style. Thus, over time, they became at risk of losing some of their roots, culture and identities, which ultimately led to their history as human beings with a unique identity and origin being wiped from their existence (Nzeabide, 2009). Spiritual, musical and educational interventions were used to retain some of the cultural roots. According to Sullivan (2001), African Americans used music to remain connected to

their African heritage while protesting the bleak conditions they faced throughout history. Musical protest took on assorted forms and functions as African Americans strove to advance their socio-political positions as Americans while simultaneously retaining their cultural heritage.

The African American church formed during slavery has also been central to preserving indigenous African rituals and practises that shape the current African American spiritual experiences. The African American church's history and modern-day commitment to the well-being of the black community in America is key to maintaining a sense of connectedness within the community. The church is not only a place of worship, but also serves as a centre to educate African Americans about their history and heritage, a venue for political organising as well as a resource for economic support (Cook and Wiley, 2000).

Fast forward into the 21st Century, their ways of being, which were previously deemed as uncivilised and dirty, are now a counter culture statement by individuals who stem from of the same racial group that had oppressed African Americans before.

Cultural appropriation and Power Dynamics

A severely controversial and most practical incident that adds on to the Cultural Appropriation debate and single-handedly encompasses the domains of power relations in a racial and economic context is the case of "The Open Casket". In this case, a white artist, Dana Schutz, made an artistic impression portraying the disfigured corpse of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy from Chicago who was tortured, lynched, and murdered on 28 August 1955 for allegedly whistling and making gestures towards a white woman while visiting family in Mississippi. Till's mother insisted on having an Open Casket' funeral so people could see the brutality of the lynching, exposing the horrific extent of American racism. The press images of Till's mutilated body, along with the fact that his murderers were subsequently acquitted, are often credited as having stimulated the Civil Rights movement in America (Muñoz-Alonso, 2017).

This case, thus, becomes a pivotal point in this debate as it illustrates the multiple facets of the Cultural Appropriation debate. In this instance, the aspects of race, privilege, history and economics simultaneously come into play and thus, lay bare the implications associated with this notion and takes coverage of the groups on both ends of the spectrum respectively.

Frank (2017) pointed out that Hannah Black, a social activist concerned with racial issues and the Arts residing in Berlin, was displeased with Schutz's use of Emmett Till's image. Black's

stance on the painting was that it was not appropriate for a white person to engage the suffering of a Black person in such a manner because they stand to economically and politically gain from the art work.

In a letter directed to the museum, which exhibited Dana Schutz's painting, Black requested the removal of the art piece from the exhibition. In her letter, she stated that: "Ongoing debates on the appropriation of Black cultures by non-Black artists have highlighted the relation of these appropriations to the systematic oppression of Black communities in the United States of America and worldwide, and, in a wider historical view, to the capitalist appropriation of the lives and bodies of Black people with which our present era began. Meanwhile, a similarly high-stakes conversation has been going on about the willingness of a largely non-Black media to share images and footage of Black people in torment and distress or even at the moment of death, evoking deeply shameful white American traditions such as public lynching. Although derided by many white and white-affiliated critics as trivial and naive, discussions of appropriation and representation go to the heart of the question of how we might seek to live in a reparative mode, with humility, clarity, humour, and hope, given the barbaric realities of racial and gendered violence on which our lives are founded. I see no more important foundational consideration for art than this question, which otherwise, dissolves into empty formalism or irony, into a pastime or a therapy" (Black, 2017).

Taking cues from Black's letter, it can be said that what makes this case the epitome of Cultural Appropriation, is how Black Americans received the art work in itself. Black people in America have been and still are affected by racially motivated incidents such as these for a long time and this makes their protest against the painting legitimate. To have the death of a black boy interpreted by a white person, who is not prone to suffering from the direct effects of racism, touches a sensitive nerve.

On the other hand, though, there is another question of freedom of expression in the world of art and the artist's own motives. Dana Schutz, in self-defence, indicated that she made the art piece through empathy and a shared pain of being a parent towards Till's mother. She also acknowledged that she had never and could not experience life as a black American, but the art piece came from a place of sincerity. By accepting that she could not own the suffering of a black boy or a black woman as a white woman, but claiming ownership of the suffering of a mother, she accepts that ownership of subject-matter and group membership really are central to the legitimacy of her painting (Miya, 2017).

In trying to figure out who is entitled and has the right to look, speak or interpret on Till's death, Speidel (2017) warned that the idea of ownership of certain topics, experiences or events is problematic. The consequence of this would be representational segregation, where only one group's perspective on a kind of event would be visible and all other perspectives considered insignificant. In such a regime, even sharing one's human concern for the suffering of humans of another group would be considered illegitimate.

Smith (2018) proposed guiding questions related to the controversy of this art piece and the Cultural Appropriation debate in general. Smith asked: Is making any kind of art a form of concern? Does it matter which form the concern takes? Could non-Black artists be painters of occasional black subjects or must their concern take a different form, for instance, in civil rights law or public-school teaching? If they ignore the warnings of the letter and other similar counter-statements and take Black suffering as their subject in a work of art, what should be the consequence? If their painting turns out to be a not especially distinguished expression of or engagement with their supposed concern, must it be removed from wherever it hangs? Must it be destroyed thereafter? And what purpose does its destruction serve?

Subcultures in Western Contemporary Societies

On the opposite end of the debate and in a more contemporary setting, there is a claim to the use of cultural elements associated with non-Western cultures that manifest in sub-cultures that play as a distinguishing factor from the rest of society within Western cultures. Sub-cultures are a distinctive style of life dominated by cultural individuality, self-expression- and a stylistic self-consciousness. Identity and taste for individuals who are part of counter-culture, is formed around cultural artefacts and cultural resources. The lifestyles of these individuals are marked by peculiar leisure activities, cultural consumption patterns and cultural tastes, and these are visible in their sense of clothing, style of music and their choice of literature (Tally, 2004).

Sub-cultures in Western societies, which places them in total opposition to the dominant culture, takes the values of the dominant culture and redefines them negatively. Yinger (1960) as cited by Larkin (2015) describes a sub-culture as a medium to which young people subscribed to, which usually springs from divergent behaviour as a response towards the status quo of a dominant culture. It is also a set of norms and values that sharply contradict the dominant norms and values of the society to which the group belongs.

Social stratification in post-industrial society is assumed to be moving into a culturalist phase based on subscription to distinctive lifestyles and tribe-like configurations built on cultural

consumption. Research has over the last two decades demonstrated the growing importance of cultural competencies for problems of inequality. Familiarity with different lifestyles and the cultural capital that is attached to them affects a variety of life outcomes (Tally, 2004).

Larkin (2015) also revealed that contemporary capitalist societies, which are predominantly placed in the western sphere, contain dominant cultures and a variety of subcultures, these include the queer culture and religious subcultures such as Evangelicals and Mormons. The dominant culture is almost always associated with the political and economic elite. These subcultures differ from the dominant culture on the basis of ethnic, social class, racial, age, sexual orientation and other social distinctions. Subcultures exist within a larger multicultural context from the dominant culture, with which they share certain core values, but differ over significantly.

The Evolution of Ear Stretching

Redirecting the focus on the practice of ear stretching as a cultural feature, many ethnic and cultural groups have practised this for many centuries and for various reasons. Breuner and Levine (2017) noted that although interest in body modification has increased recently, history shows that body modifications are not new, research by archaeologists keeps revealing evidence of tattoos, piercings, and scarification as far back as 2000 BCE, when they were largely used as a form of art or to identify group membership, such as a religious group or tribe.

Gilmore (2016) moots that earlobe stretching and septum piercings were popular among the Aztecs, Maya and Incas, who mainly wore gold and jade for religious reasons. The practice has also been around in India, Nepal and Tibet and is visible in the Bundi ethnic group of New Guinea as well as the Amazonian Huaoranis.

In a detailed account, people of southern Asia have used huge and showy ornaments on their stretched earlobes since prehistoric times. Stretched earlobes decorated with earrings were an important and elaborate component of Asian tradition and this continues to be a visible aspect on the figurines of the Indus civilization and the Mauryan period as well as on stone sculptures of the historic period. Stretched earlobes have continuously been spotted on sculptures of the Buddha, they are known to be a symbolic reflection of the nobility of the Buddha before he avowed to find the passageway to enlightenment. Traditional earplugs hung to the earlobe to modify and enlarge the earlobes in order to produce a permanent modification. The earplugs were made of a variety of materials, these came in forms of shell, bone, ivory, baked clay and

semi-precious stones. The designs of the earplugs were usually plain discs or they would be decorated on one or both sides (Smith, 2006).

For African ethnic groups such as the Maasai living in Kenya and Tanzania as well as the Mursi in Ethiopia, stretching ear lobes has been used as a passage rite ritual for transition into adulthood or to enhance beauty or sexuality. Zooming in on communities living in the eastern and southern parts of Africa during the nineteenth century, the development of earplugs was closely related to the custom of ear piercing. Among the Zulu, the ear piercing practise developed into an important ceremony known as Qhumbuza, which was performed on Zulu children reaching puberty to mark the first step from childhood to adulthood. It involved making an incision in each lobe with a sharpened piece of iron and placing a small piece of corn stalk into the newly made hole. As the ear healed, larger and larger pieces were inserted until the hole was big enough for a piece of reed to be used (Krige, 1950).

Jolles (1997) noted that the symbolic nature of Qhumbuza as a rite of passage involved is demonstrated by the fact that it could take place at new moon or full moon. This symbolised making of a new person into the family unit because the children were becoming full members of the family, irrespective of the child's gender. The inherent meaning of the ear-piercing ceremony was the acquisition of a social identity. Qhumbuza conferred a higher status on the child, who was now considered to be able to hear and understand and therefore his ears have been opened in order that he may hear well. The acceptance of the child to be an adult meant that they now have loyalties and obligations to the community that cemented the hierarchical structure of Zulu society.

In the 1920s, Zulu people continued to wear earplugs both as ornamentation and as a distinguishing mark of the Zulu national identity. By the 1950s however, the ear- piercing ceremony started to lose its ritual significance along with traditional attire as colonisation had swept in throughout the Southern African region and the socio-political atmosphere became flavoured with the aesthetics of Euro centrism (Jolles, 1997).

In Contemporary Popular Culture

Ear stretching has been popular for centuries, but this popularity has increased in Western culture in recent years. For some, there is a profound spirituality in the prolonged process of stretching ears, while for others it is fun and more involved than simple ear piercing, and the fact that fewer people do it adds to its appeal. A movement known as Modern Primitivism sees

individuals adorning their bodies with tattoos, piercings, and other objects in the manner similar to tribal and ancient cultures as legitimate. Such social movements have allowed for the increasing popularity of gauge earrings within popular culture today. Gauge earrings, which assist the ear stretching process, come in many different designs and all require an unusually large hole to be made in the earlobe. The earlobes are first pierced with a normal-sized earring and given time to heal. The piercing is then slowly stretched using graded tapers to ultimately achieve the desired size. Plug-type earrings are kept in place while the lobe adjusts to the new size before attempting to further increase the diameter of the hole. Gauge earrings range in size from 20 gauge- measured as 0.8 millimeters, to 00 gauge-which is measured as 9.3 millimetres (Collins et al, 2015). This means that the high the gauge number, the smaller the size of the ear lobe stretch, and the lower the gauge number, the bigger the size of the ear lobe stretch (Association for Professional Piercers, 2017).

Ear stretching has since been adopted by the communities leading alternative lifestyles in the twenty first century before being used by the fashion industry. Seeing that this practice has been a cultural feature for many civilisations, the untaken task of exploring how it got passed around, allows for interpretations that lead to present day debates about cultural appropriation.

Cultural Appropriation, as the literature above dictates, is not a rigid concept which can be uniformly applied, as there are elements and contexts which make it malleable, thus making the debate about who holds the rights to certain cultural practices and material objects a topic of interest. Problematizing how cultural elements are practised are owned, and by whom, constitutes the source of this debate, thus this phenomenon should be studied in a vigilant manner.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study is mainly qualitative and supported by secondary data on the practice of ear stretching as a cultural element within the Masaai and other ethnic groups, and as an element of the German sub-culture. This chapter discusses the methodology utilized, followed by research design, the sample frame and sample procedure, the research instrument that indicate how the unstructured interviews were conducted, as well as the method of data collection and analysis. The ethics considered by this study and the limitations of the study were also outlined hereunder.

3.2 Research design

This qualitative study will explore the meanings attached to ear stretching in a Western context in order to better understand the cultural appropriation debate. This approach will allow for engagement with German youths through in-depth interviews to generate data on the meanings and interpretations of their stretched ear lobes (Mabuda, Potgieter and Alberts, 2008).

This study is mainly-exploratory and seeks to explain an observed phenomenon. Furthermore, exploratory research comes in handy when trying to gain insight into a perceived phenomenon as a researcher may discuss the problem with experienced and knowledgeable individuals in the field and use their insights for better understanding. Exploratory design is thus, applicable to explore the meanings held behind ear stretching in a Western context.

3.3 Sample Frame

Data was collected from 9 young people living in Giessen, Germany, with stretched ear lobes as an individualistic attribute to set them apart from the rest of society.

3.4 Sampling

To find participants for this study, Non-probability sampling technique was used. This method of sampling is a convenient method of selecting a sample for the purpose of this study. Furthermore, this method is appropriate in trying to gain an understanding about ear stretching in a contemporary Western context, with a potential to generate valuable insights from the participants. Non-probability sampling also comes in handy when studying existing theoretical insights or developing new ones. This method of sampling is thus favourable in this respect as it also less expensive, easy to apply and allows for easy access to participants (Showkat and Parveen, 2017).

3.5 Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to find participants for this study. Purposive sampling refers to selection of participants that will be best suited for understanding the research problem and research questions. Participants are usually selected based on their particular knowledge of the phenomenon, for the purpose of sharing their knowledge and experiences with the researcher (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). In this Instance, German Youth will be the best source of rich and valuable information regarding having stretched ear lobes as a unique individual trait, as they are experts regarding their own identities.

Through Purposive Sampling, participants were sourced by contacting an available key informant and finding other relevant subjects through Snowballing. Atkinson and Flint (2001) describe snowballing as a technique for finding research subjects whereby one subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn, provides the name of a third, and the pattern continues until the researcher has reached his or her desired target. Snowball sampling is used most frequently to conduct qualitative research, primarily through interviews.

This technique is relevant in this study as it provides a means of accessing social groupings considered to be vulnerable, impenetrable or isolated within a larger social context. This process is based on the assumption that a link exists between the initial sample and others in the same target population, allowing a series of referrals to be made within a circle of acquaintance (Berg, 1988). Snowball sampling thus, offers practical advantages since this study is primarily explorative and qualitative in nature.

3.5 Research Instruments

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with research subjects of German descent. The aim of the interviews was to explore the thinking, assumptions, attitudes as well as perceptions of participants which may be influencing the observed phenomena of those involved in ear stretching.

Unstructured interviews were used in this instance as the study is aimed at attempting to find patterns and understanding the social phenomena at hand. Thus, unstructured interviews were appropriate in this regard as they can generate detailed data and enable in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within a particular cultural context. In addition, they are most appropriate when working within an interpretive research paradigm, in which it is assumed that reality is socially constructed by the participants in the setting of interest.

Based on this underlying assumption, it is important to understand the phenomenon of interest from the individual perspectives of those who are involved with it. Allowing for the interview to freely flow and not imposing too much structure on the interview would have inhibited the interviewee's responses and would have posed the risk of an inadequate understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009).

Skype was used to conduct the interviews. Iacono et al. (2016) noted that using Skype as a qualitative research tool allows researchers to transcend geographical boundaries, by nullifying distances and eliminating the need to visit an agreed location for interview. This meant that the researcher had direct access to their participants, by connecting with participants from a specific part of the world on a wide range of topics involving different cultures, thus breaking down the barrier of time and space.

Additionally, Sullivan (2012) emphasises that Internet based methods are currently being used by social scientists, with special emphasis on Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) programmes such as Skype. This approach gives the researcher an opportunity to interview research participants employing voice and videos using across the Internet. Skype has thus, enhanced the capacity to connect the participants and researcher as well as to record and store video calls.

Furthermore, secondary data was collected from related research studies and relevant media outputs that are relevant to ear stretching and cultural appropriation. The specific types of data sources to be used in this research include the following:

Formal studies and reports, journal articles, case studies and academic research papers. Mass media outputs such as newspaper and magazine articles as well culture-based blogging sites.

These sources were useful in magnifying the different contexts in which ear stretching occurs, with regard to the Masaai, other ethnic cultures and German youth. An exploration of the two contexts will inform the theoretical and empirical basis of the study. In addition, these methods are most appropriate when a researcher is working within an interpretive research paradigm, in which it is assumed that reality is socially constructed by participants in the setting of interest.

Based on this underlying assumption, the perspectives of the subjects of the study involved in the practice of ear stretching are necessary to understand and make a link to the bigger debate on cultural appropriation. It will thus, be useful to allow the interview to be shaped by the researcher and the subject. Imposing too much structure on the interview will inhibit the

interviewees' responses and put the research at risk of gaining an incomplete understanding of the phenomenon (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2005).

3.6 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed for the purpose of analysing data collect for this study. The goal of a thematic analysis was to identify themes and patterns in the data that are important and interesting, and to use them to address the research or produce an idea about the issue at hand. Thematic analysis was also useful in interpreting and making sense of collected data. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) indicated that there are various ways to approach thematic analysis. For the purpose of this study, the Latent Approach was chosen as instrumental device to explore beyond what has been said by the participants in order to identify and examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations as well as ideologies that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data (Braun and Clark, 2006).

There are steps that were followed as a process of deep analysis or meaning interpretation to go beyond obviously said ideas by the participants in the transcripts. To this end, the identified themes were analysed in relation to each other, the overall research questions and relevant academic knowledge. Streubert and Carpenter (1999) asserted that the actual analysis of data begins with listening to participants' verbal descriptions, followed by reading the verbatim transcriptions. Data analysis will thus be conducted using Tesch's method of analysis of qualitative data in the following manner:

Recorded interviews were listened to and transcribed. The transcriptions were read thoroughly to get a sense of the whole data and ideas will be noted down as they emerged through the collected data. During this process, certain categories or themes emerged, some more essential than others and will become central once the process of analysing begins. This lead to the identification and formation of categories. Underlying meanings of the data were extracted and recorded for further analysis. Notes on recurring themes from the data were made to cluster similar topics together.

Thereafter, data was categorised to form major ideas, unique topics and additional ideas on the margins. Topics related to each other were grouped together, in order to form unitary categories respectively. The compiled information was then analysed to systematically explore and generate meanings. In reporting the findings, examples from the participants' verbatim statements were included, in order to have additional dimensions to the subject matter at hand.

This approach has been the most influential in cultural studies because it offers a clear and usable framework for doing thematic analysis.

3.7 Limitations of the Study

The study focuses on one particular case related to the issue of cultural appropriation while many other relevant cases may be disregarded. This runs the risk of the argument becoming biased and one-dimensional.

Snowballing participants for the study may come off as a selection bias because the quality of the data is limited by the validity of the sample.

Secondary data sources pertaining to this issue might be outdate and the appropriateness of the data available is an issue due to it having been collected to answer a different research question or objectives.

3.8 Managing research limitations

This study cannot be generalizable because it treats data qualitatively. The sample is usually relatively small because the researcher needs detailed information about a number of individuals or a specific group to study the sample's peculiar cultural background. To avoid generalizability, the same research should be undertaken several times and in different contexts and the analysis should be treated by different researchers before claiming its generalizability.

Snowballing is useful in gaining access to subcultures, which are usually isolated within a larger social context. Therefore, in circumstances like these, the researcher has no control over the apparent selection bias because subject referral is at the discretion of the key informant.

Minimising all limitations is unviable due to impeding research obstacles such as financial constraints.

3.9 Ethical considerations

The researcher presented the proposal of the study to the Higher Degrees Committee in the Faculty, where the research proposal was accepted, and an acceptance letter with the ethical clearance certificate was obtained. There was informed consent from the participants to participate in the study, with a clear explanation to them of the conditions under which they would partake in the study, and they were told about the aim of the study, and that participation was voluntary. The participants were also guaranteed anonymity and were not pressurised to partake in the research. The researcher did not reveal the names of the participants in the reporting and findings of this study.

Ethical considerations with regard to research processes have been observed, and all information was collected with strict confidentiality. This enabled the informants to freely express their true feelings and opinions without fear of victimisation. Confidentiality of participants was assured in this study, although only respondent's age, location, their highest level of education and their gender was required. The safety of the participants was guaranteed, and they were also allowed to withdraw from the study at any time, even if they did not wish to provide the researcher with reasons for their withdrawal. 15 participants were initially contacted to partake in the study, however, only 9 participants agreed to be part of the study and 6 participants who were referred to by other participants declined to partake in the study for their own private reasons. The researcher did not probe the reasons for their withdrawal out of respect for the individual's decision and the study only featured respondents who were willing to partake in the study.

Furthermore, the ownership of the original data will at all times be acknowledged. Should the contents of a particular research be part of another research project and the data is not freely available, except to the original research team, explicit, written permission for the use of the data will be obtained from the research producer and included in the application for ethical clearance (Tripathy, 2013).

Chapter 4: Research report, Findings, Themes and Codes.

4.1 Introduction

The chapter to follow is a presentation of collect data in its raw state. The chapter in outlines the research report, research findings as well as the themes and codes formed from the collected data in great detail.

4.2 Research Report

Initially, 15 participants were meant to be recruited only from the town Giessen, Hessen, but because the method of recruiting students was random sampling and snowballing, meaning that participants were referring each other, data was thus gathered from only 9 participants located in different cities of Germany while still using skype. Skype interviews were conducted with young people from Giessen, Hamburg, Frankfurt am Main, Cologne, Butzbach, Stuttgart and Turningham. The remaining 6 participants decided not to be a part of the study anymore and the skype interviews were thus cancelled.

Most participants consented to their names and details being used for the purpose of writing up the research. The names of the participants were omitted in line with research ethics, and consent would need to be sought after if the videos are to be published. Gender representation was not a distinguishing and contributing factor in this study. This is because the participants referred each other it was out of the researcher's control. As such, two males and seven females were interviewed.

Key informants were contacted a few days before the Skype interview through text messages to request for their participation in the study and explain to them the purpose and objectives of the study. Once the participants gave consent to partake in the study, interview dates and times were discussed and set up by the researcher and participant. The said interviews took place online using Skype as connecting medium, with the researcher being in a closed private office and the participant in the location of their own choice, which was usually in the place of residence.

In preparation and undertaking of the for the data collection process, an upgraded version of Skype was used. This meant that the Pamela software for recording video calls was no longer needed and was thus never used. Skype had new features which enabled the caller to record videos calls and download them afterwards for storage. The software also kept the video call

recordings for 30 days after the recording and automatically erased them from the platform. Video call recordings were thus downloaded as soon as the interviews ended to ensure that data was not lost, and the interviews could be transcribed. The interviews were also recorded using a cell phone as recording device as a precautionary measure should there be problems with the recording and storing the online interviews. The audio recording from the cell phone was then transferred to a file on the computer that included the downloaded Skype video interviews. Both the skype interview recordings and cell phone recording audios were stored in a password protected computer and have only been accessed by the researcher.

Recorded interviews were listened to and transcribed. The transcriptions were read to find certain categories or themes, some of the emergent themes are more essential than others and will become central to the analysis and argument of the paper. Notes on recurring themes from the data have been made to cluster similar topics together, which reveal important major codes and themes.

There were a few problems associated with the data collection process. But these were mitigated by a carefully planned interview schedules and setting a conducive environment that is private and free of distractions such as noise, and most importantly, which had a good internet connection. Even though the interviews were fully conducted in English, there were usually small language barriers between the interviewer and the participants, but because the whole process depended on being connected to the internet, both participants used a google translate to whenever the need to describe a word or phenomenon between German to English. Downloading the recorded interview videos to be stored on the computer also took a few hours, this is because the size of the videos was quite large as interviews ranged between 30 to 60 minutes depending on the intensity of the interview. One of the interviews did not properly record by Skype and some data was lost from the interview video, but because a cell phone was used as another recording device, data was easily recovered and stored.

4.3 Research Findings

The findings from the interviews show that despite their different locations, research participants all have a common identity and background, these are their similar characteristics:

- They are all natural citizens of Germany.
- They were all young people between the ages 20 and 30.
- All participants have post school and university education respectively according the German schooling system. At the time of the interview, three participants were busy with masters degrees and three participants have their bachelor degree university education, three participants were already working within their fields of study.
- The participants described their economic background either as middle-income class or upper middle class. Two participants identified themselves as coming from the upper middle class of the German society while seven participants indicated their economic background as middle class.

Similarity in characteristics of the participants was therefore helpful in eliminating information, cultural any other form of inconsistency and bias.

- Seven participants got introduced to the ear lobes stretching culture from being involved in what they called the punk rock scene in their early teenage years, while two participants got to know about stretched ear lobes by seeing it all over the internet and social media as it was starting to be cool thing to have.
- The seven aforementioned participants recall getting drawn into the scene through music, rock and hard metal early in their teenage years (between 13 and 17), which exposed them to the practise of earlobe stretching. Being involved in the punk rock scene was their very first encountered with stretched ear lobes which they saw this from their fellow punk community mates who already had what they refer to as ear tunnels. They don't recall knowing about the practise of ear stretching from any other group/source, because they had not been exposed to any other culture/community besides their own that have stretched earlobes as a trademark, thus they were doing it as being in a larger group of ear stretchers.

- All of the participants noted that they did receive some form of resistance from their parents initially, but the older generation got accustomed to the ear tunnels and did not have a problem with it over time. In comparison to the older generation, the age mates of the participants (friends, classmates) were not all opposed to it, they thought it was a “cool thing” to do and have.
- Three participants decided to close their ear plugs. Two participants closed them for hygienic as well professional as they were entering into the job market to appear more professional in the work environment, hygienic reasons also serve part of the closure. One participant decided they did not like the ear plugs anymore and went back to have normal earrings.
- The remaining six participants still had their ear plugs at the time of the interview. They mentioned that they still held strong beliefs about freedom of expression and individuality. They attested that this gives them the privilege of appearing different from the normal German stereotype of being blond and blue eyed.
- Two participants indicated that their stretched earlobes did not hold any significant meaning as it was merely for beauty enhancement and to feel like a part of the punk community. The remaining six participants indicated that their stretched earlobes held a significant meaning as it was a symbol of their own individuality, creativity, rebellion against the German norm of appearances, freedom and the right to self-expression.
- When asked about knowledge of other cultures having stretched earlobes, seven participants were not aware of any when they initially started, but got to know of the cultures as they grew older. They mentioned that they saw stretched ear lobes and lip discs mainly in African and Indian tribes through the formal education. The other two participants were not aware of cultures outside their punk community that stretched their earlobes, it they indicated that they only got exposed through social media, the internet and other sources of informal education.

- The 7 participants who became aware of other cultures having stretched earlobes were not sure if ear stretching had significant meaning for the groups/tribes they mentioned, but they thought it might be a symbol of spiritual enlightenment or a feature that distinguished the group. Being aware of this at a later stage left the said participants remorse because they realised their positions as Europeans taking significant cultural features from other communities.
- The other 2 participants who knew at a later stage about communities outside their own that had stretched earlobes indicated that they had bad feelings about being in the practise without prior historical knowledge.

4.4 Themes

From the above data collection report, 5 central themes have emerged and they are listed as follows in no order of importance:

- *Introduction to ear lobe stretching culture.
- *Maintaining the practise of ear lobe stretching.
- *Significance of stretched earlobe.
- *Knowledge of other groups who practise ear stretching.
- *Forms of resistance.

4.5 Codes

Following from the themes extracted from the data collected, the following major codes arise as follows:

- Introduction to ear stretching through either the punk rock scene or the Internet/social media respectively.
- The decision to either closed the earplugs and maintaining them.
- Ear plugs as form of either self-expression or beauty enhancement.
- Were aware of other cultures and initial unawareness.
- Perceptions after exposure to other cultures.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The codes and themes noted in chapter four were the most apparent and predominant ones to come out of the interviews with the research participants. Online interviews were held with nine participants and who at the time of the interview or prior to the interview had stretched earlobes. Drawing from the dominant themes and codes as presented in the previous chapter, meaning making was drawn from themes and codes that stood out predominantly from the participants of the study. This chapter thus analysed the formed codes by using verbatim statements from the participants to understand the meanings held behind German Youth stretching their lobes. This chapter also drew on existing literature and theoretical frameworks on how German youths “appropriated” ear stretching to form their own unique identities and if this constitutes cultural appropriation.

5.2 Data Analysis

This section narrowed down the most dominant codes and based the argument in the results findings of the study. Drawing from the said predominate codes, seven participants out of nine were introduced to the culture of earlobe stretching through what they called the punk rock scene with the influence of close friends, music and bike riding. At the time of interview, the said participants still had their earplugs because it was a symbol of individuality, self-expression, creativity and rebellion against the stereotypical German norm.

The same participants were not initially aware of other groups that stretched their earlobes because they had not been in anyway exposed to the culture in a different context, but as they grew older, they became aware and their perceptions about their own involvement with practise change.

The analysis to follow will therefore be based on the predominant themes taken from the aforementioned seven participants as there are similarities in their stories that indicate a particular narrative about ear stretching in the German Context. What was also delved into was the symbolic meaning held behind their involvement in the ear stretching practise, this was aided by clues embedded in the verbatim which was used to build an argument about how cultural phenomena relates to cultural appropriation.

5.2.1 Introduction to ear stretching through the punk rock scene.

“INTERVIEWER: Okay. How did you come to know about ear tunnels or ear stretching?

PARTICIPANT 1: I think about music and my favourite musicians and yeah...they had tattoos and beanies on their heads and tunnels in their ears, so I think ja, that was the first time I saw it...

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, when was this?

PARTICIPANT 1: When I was 13 / 14 maybe, so 2007/8.

INTERVIEWER: So it was around 2007, okay. Through music and what kind of music were you listening to?”

“INTERVIEWER: Oh wow, okay, right, so how did you come to know about the ear stretching?

PARTICIPANT 2: I think it was...my peer groups, so I had friends with stretching ears and we heard a special kind of music, it was something like heavy metal and other stuff and then we went to many concerts and saw like many people with those stretched ears and we thought that it's like super-cool to be a part of this group and yeah, like in my peer groups in those days, I had like many friends with big tunnels yeah, and blocks, and I've never stretched it that wide, it was always under 1cm.”

“INTERVIEWER: Very nice, and how did you come to know about this practice, how did you find out about it and how old were you?

PARTICIPANT 3: Okay, so for me it was like, I was around, I think 17 or 18 and then I had a boyfriend and yeah, my boyfriend actually had two, so my ex-boyfriend, its a long time ago.

INTERVIEWER 3: Okay, so its not the boyfriend anymore, okay.

PARTICIPANT 3: Yeah and we had this kind of lifestyle that we both drove motor cross and I don't know...it's a kind of...for me it was like, okay, I want to do it as well because I like it and he has this as well, and all my friends we hung around with had also this stuff and it was like the people just listened to rock music and then it started with tattoos and everything, so yeah, it was more like a lifestyle.”

“INTERVIEWER: Okay, alright, so how did you come to know about ear stretching?

PARTICIPANT 4: When I was like 14 or 15'ish I guess, I had a boyfriend and he was kind of into...I don't know, like alternative culture and like he had a piercing on his lip and I thought that was so cool when I was 14 and he had stretched ears, so that was like the first time...”

“INTERVIEWER: Yeah I see, I see. So how did you come to know about it, the ear stretching?

PARTICIPANT 5: Yeah, that's funny because when I was 14 I was in a group of people, like skaters and reggae and lovers and yeah, it comes with it I think, that some people had tattoos and piercings and none of this was...I was interested in none of this but stretching the ear and all the stuff with ears...more earrings, than just one, yeah, so I started together with a friend, we did it together and yeah...we had all the time the same size you know, we started together and after this...after 2...1 or 2 years we had 10mm, so yeah.”

“Interviewer: Okay, okay. That’s perfectly fine, that’s perfectly normal. Alright so yeah, I’m like really interested in why...if I can refer you as such, German youth, is that okay, can I use that word, what did you come to know about ear stretching, like your ear plugs?

PARTICIPANT 6: Yeah, back in Cologne, when I was, I don’t know, maybe 12 or something, I started riding BMX you know, okay and...

INTERVIEWER: The bike.

PARTICIPANT6 : Yeah exactly, and because of that I came to the music and to guitar playing and this sub community there were a lot of people wearing ear plugs, but like really big ones often, mostly in the ears, and for me it was just, I think it was, at first place, a fashion thing, and the second thing was like okay nearly everybody was like having ear plugs around there at this time, so I think I got the connection with the BMX riding and the punk scene a little bit.”

“INTERVIEWER: Okay, alright. So why did you decide to start, was it because like you were...you and your friends were doing it, it was a trend or you decided on your own that this is cool, it kind of like reflects the person that I am or what was the reason behind it?

Participant 7: You know, I think at 16 or so I started to have this...I was listening to a lot of rock ‘n roll music, to a lot of hard rock or metal or punk rock or grunge...Nirvana and this kind of stuff, and yeah, and I mean those people never had tunnels themselves but I also identified with Motocross, I was also riding Motocross for like half a year or so and it was this kind of rough image, this rough, rock image that...or not an image, more of an identity, but also an identity that I wanted to show, I wanted to express, because I think I’m pretty expressive person in my...at least in the way that I look or something like that.

Interviewer: Yes you are.

Participant 7: And that’s why I did it I guess, to show my identity, but then also of course to follow a trend but at the time I would have never said that.”

The examples of verbatim above show how majority of participants were exposed to the culture of ear stretching. It has been mainly through what they term as the “punk rock scene”. The data in this regard thus reveals that participants’ decision to have stretched ear lobes comes from association with and being socialised into the punk rock scene. Their decisions were therefore informed by being members of a group that practises body modification by having multiple tattoos and body piercing, including stretched earlobes. The punk rock scene can be tied back to a type of music and lifestyle to which individuals subscribe to a larger group big enough to form a sub-culture. Individuals within this sub-culture are expressive in their fashion sense, have a peculiar taste in art and music and hold conflicting attitudes to societal standards (Jian, 2015).

In the German context, Hayton (2013) indicated that the punk rock scene came about in the 1970s and 1980s in East and West Germany by younger German population at the time as

means for young individuals to explore marginal identities and create the types of meaningful communities they felt were lacking in their existing German society.

The said youth used popular music to build alternative communities and unconventional identities that sought to form a different ideology from the mainstream political and cultural ideology and also engaged in activities which worked to build together both German societies despite the differing political, socio-economic and cultural compositions of East and West Germany. Punk in this regard then became a vehicle for individual and societal democratization and this the sub-culture genre came to be of political and cultural significance.

5.2.2 Ear stretching as a symbol of self- expression and creativity.

Research participants were motivated to set themselves apart from what their society deemed as norm. Their aim was to use their bodies to express creativity and free will, raise their own levels of self-esteem and confidence and to also be associated with a group that is known to be cool and set themselves apart, constantly referred to as punk rock or punk metal scene. The following extracts from the participant's interviews serve as evidence.

“INTERVIEWER: I understand. So when you did stretch your earlobes, did it have any meaning for you, or was it like something that you did with your peers and you know, something that you saw from, you know, all the concerts you were attending, and you know kind of like the culture you were in into, is it the punk culture, can I call it the punk culture?
PARTICIPANT 1: Yeah, punk metal, something like this. I think it was more like a symbol of freedom for me, because then I could show everyone I'm self confident enough to do it and I'm able to be different to other people, I think this was kind of the reason why I did it.”

“INTERVIEWER: I see, so it was total turnover if I can call it that. Let me just go back to while you still had the earlobe, when you had it, did it have any significant meaning for you?

PARTICIPANT 2: Yes, I...I felt...I don't know how to say... ..

INTERVIEWER: Auf Deutsch

PARTICIPANT 2: Zusammenkeitzgefulen

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, part of a community.

PARTICIPANT 2: Yeah, I knew okay with this I'm cool and I'm part of a special community, but yeah, on the other side it was for me kind of creativity and hobby because there were so many opportunities, what you use to stretch it, you know, there were tunnels and these long, I don't know how the name is...these long things, yeah, there was a shop, an on-line shop and they had so many things for tunnels and it was fun to...to...

INTERVIEWER: So like accessories, the actual tunnels, the actual earrings for the ear plugs right?”

“INTERVIEWER: I understand. So when you did stretch your earlobes, did it have any meaning for you, or was it like something that you did with your peers and you know, something that you saw from, you know, all the concerts you were attending, and you know kind of like the culture you were in into, is it the punk culture, can I call it the punk culture?

PARTICIPANT 3: Yeah, punk metal, something like this. I think it was more like a symbol of freedom for me, because then I could show everyone I’m self confident enough to do it and I’m able to be different to other people, I think this was kind of the reason why I did it.”

“INTERVIEWER: Okay good, good, and you decided to start stretching because of your relationship back then or was it also something that you would have loved to do for yourself, what was the reason behind it?

PARTICIPANT 4: Well I just saw it and thought it was kind of cool, and like I said I could just convince my parents that it wasn’t as bad as piercings, because they were like oh that’s so permanent, which is kind of funny, and retrospective, but yeah, I just could take them into it, more than into piercings and it was kind of a way for me, I wanted to have piercings but they weren’t okay with it, so I started stretching and a lot of like the friends of my ex-boyfriend, they were like doing it as well, so it was kind of like all of them were listening like hard-core and it was part of that culture I guess, so then I kinda wanted to be part of that because I wasn’t allowed to have piercings or dye my hair, so yeah.”

“INTERVIEWER: The meaning or the significance of you stretching your earlobe, there isn’t really much of a solid meaning held behind it, is that a good generalisation of what you just said?

PARTICIPANT5: I don’t know if we are just now talking a little bit apart, because what I was explaining was just getting the earring, so not the stretching earplug, I had it when I was 18, okay, so or maybe I just misunderstood it right now, but the stretching of my ear was like more, okay, I’ve been in the scene, the fashion thing, the against society thing, I think all in all together yeah, but I guess most of the people are doing it for fashion I would say.”

Gay and Whittington(2002) indicated that while a number people modify their bodies for a number of reasons, most people who do so are motivated by the desire to be in control of their own bodies and exercise the right to decorate their bodies without having to explain or justify their choices. Klesse (1999) contended that the decision to engaging in body modification also extends to spirituality, aesthetics, group affiliation and rites of passage. This is based on the belief that their modified bodies represent their individuality and creativity. Individuals who go through the process of body modification in academic terms are referred to as Morden Primitives (Winge,2004). Modern primitives modify their bodies to establish a unique identity by borrowing cultural practises and artefacts from ancient tribal cultures and peoples to develop unique identities as response to what they perceive as the superficiality of western society.

This practise plays itself out in the punk rock sub-culture of the German youth and ear lobe stretching is a distinctive feature of modern primitivism within the punk rock scene the research participants of this study subscribe to. Central to body modification, being earlobe stretching in the context of this study, is the need for self-expression and creativity on the part of the modern primitive. What drives this desire is long standing political and cultural rigidity that the subjects are tied to due to the status of their national and racial background. Pitts (2003) indicated that body modification is a deliberate act of rejection of the ethnocentric tradition of the Western culture and represents a nostalgic view of indigenous cultures as more natural and authentic. The punk rock scene thus incorporates tribal body modification practises as a way of allowing the western individual to invent a version of the themselves that is politically, spiritually and artistically expressive, which is a luxury that Western culture does not afford them. This then shifts representation of primitivism, creativity and artistry away from indigenous cultures and onto White western bodies and results in newfound identities for western subjects.

5.2.3. Awareness of ear lobe stretching outside the punk rock scene.

Six research participants were initially aware of traditional cultures that practised ear lobe stretching when they started practising ear lobbing practice. They indicated that they came to be aware of the practise through traditional and social media as well as school curriculum. Even though they were aware of practise existing outside of their own communities, they did not know and understand the reasons and rational behind the earlobe stretching practise in the indigenous tribes.

“INTERVIEWER: Alright. I get it. This is like the second last question I’m going to ask you. Are you aware or exposed to other cultures, besides your close circle of friends, where people stretch their ears?

PARTICIPANT1: So I know that there are cultures who are doing this, but I can’t say which one, yeah, but I know that they are doing this because of a special reason, but I can’t say which reason.

INTERVIEWER: That’s perfectly fine and were you aware before or after you decided to get your tunnel?

PARTICIPANT 1: I think before, I think I knew it before as well.

INTERVIEWER: Okay so you kind of like knew it before you could do it.

PARTICIPANT1: Yeah, but I didn’t think about it that I’m doing this because of this culture, you know, it was more like this circle of friends.

INTERVIEWER: Friends and the lifestyle then.

PARTICIPANT1: yeah.”

“INTERVIEWER: Okay, so originally he did not like it at all but he just warmed up to the idea. Okay, that’s interesting, so apart from the internet and obviously friends, were you aware of other cultures that did this?

PARTICIPANT2: Yes I know it I think, there are African cultures or communities who wear it. But I don't know which one or who.

INTERVIEWER: Okay was this before you decided to get your own ears stretched or not?

PARTICIPANT2: Yeah I knew it.

INTERVIEWER: You knew previously okay, from African tribes.

PARTICIPANT2: I think I talk in middle class about it, in a history class we talk about these plugs from other countries yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Well this is really interesting, so these are some of the things that you learned in school.

PARTICIPANT2: Yeah.”

“INTERVIEWER: No, you're actually on a good track, I'm asking if you knew other cultures outside of Germany who did it, because you know for me, when I came, I'm South African, and Zulu people do it and when I started reading more about it I found that Indians do it as well, I think it's Indians, and then I went to Germany and I'm like really, you guys do it too, so I didn't know as well, so yeah this is also me just finding out, that's why I'm doing this, so were you exposed to other cultures who did it?

PARTICIPANT3: I knew...we saw this documentations about cultures who stretch their lips or their ears, rings around the neck and I saw all these pictures, now that you talk about the Indians, it came into my head too, but I just think at this age I didn't really think about it, I just thought it was a nice feature for me, but the topic of cultural appropriation didn't come around, it was just like some years ago that I got attached and got more awareness of this, so as I started stretching my ear, other cultures were just really in my mind.”

“INTERVIEWER : Wow, so were you aware of other cultures besides the German punk rock community that also stretched their earlobes, that also had tunnels

PARTICIPANT4 : If I been there or if I heard about it?

INTERVIEWER : If you heard about it.

PARTICIPANT4 : There are different cultures on the African continent whom are stretching that's it. Like there's punk people all around the world for sure who are doing it as a fashion symbol, almost like I did, and there's people who are...I'm not really sure if it's religion or just tradition in their culture, but there, ja...I think you...I think they're in the middle part of the African continent, who are stretching, like their ears...super much, and also lips.”

“INTERVIEWER: Alright, we're getting finished actually, I just want to ask you 2 or 3 more questions. When you started doing this, either when you were 15/16 or even now, were you aware of other cultures that practice this stretching as well? Maybe like outside Germany and stuff?

PARTICIPANT5: The first time I wasn't, well I knew about it but it wasn't in my mind when I did this, when I was a bit older, the 2nd period of time, I knew it, I always had like the women with the stretched lip in my mind, and I think it looked pretty cool and I don't know, it's like I was a bit, yeah, unsure maybe, whilst doing that, because I don't know, it felt like you were doing something that is not your culture, but it looked nice, so I decided to do it, yeah. But they came up to my mind, yeah, it was there.”

“INTERVIEWER: Okay and after, were you exposed to other groups or cultures? Outside of your friends or maybe outside of Germany, who stretched their earlobes?

PARTICIPANT6: I knew that in Africa, I don’t know in which part of Africa, in which countries or so, that people are having this stretching culture but that it’s somewhat different, I know those plates that are inserted....

INTERVIEWER: The lip disks.

PARTICIPANT6: Yeah and I also saw some ear stretching that was quite similar but way extreme, like bigger, I don’t know and [indistinct] there’s also people that have like 30mm or something but yeah I think when I saw this in some African cultures it was more of the big holes, and actually you know I never looked into it deeper, I know that probably, originally this whole thing comes from African cultures maybe, but I never looked deeper into it, I don’t know what’s the background of people doing that.”

“INTERVIEWER: Okay, when you got your ear tunnels, your ear plugs, were you aware of other communities or cultures or groups outside of Germany, that did the same thing?

PARTICIPANT7: No, when I started...oh...wait a minute, the door was ringing, just wait.

INTERVIEWER: No problem.

PARTICIPANT7: So sorry, to answer your question, when I started with the tunnels, I was not aware of any other cultures and who did it yeah, but after sometime and yeah...after all the time, I yeah...I saw that people in Africa or in South America, they do it, but I never thought about the reasons to be honest. Yeah.”

From the above extracts, it can be deduced that young Germans who are part of the punk rock scene were initially exposed to groups outside of their punk rock community that had stretched ear lobes as a feature as a cultural feature located in various parts of the African continent, South America as well as India. Despite their awareness, they did not understand the rational and meanings attached to earlobe stretching of the said groups.

The remain two research participants indicated a sense of not being aware of other groups that practised ear lobe stretching outside of their punk rock community when they started their ear lobe stretching and only came to know of other cultures and communities who did the same thing after they had their ear lobes stretched . That is because primary exposure came from their modern primitive peers who were leading a lifestyle that they aspire to be a part of. The verbatim to follow illustrates the lack of foreknowledge the research participants exhibited:

“INTERVIEWER: I said I was about to ask you if you were aware of other groups, anywhere in the world, who too stretch their earlobes or who have earplugs here? But then you said you weren’t aware of it and then you realised that there’s something...it’s actually bigger than you and the other people.

PARTICIPANT1: Yeah exactly so when I did it I’m 100% sure that I didn’t know that it

was coming from other cultures or it was practised in other cultures, now I'm aware of it, but I'm totally not in a position to give you names of any cultures who did it in like...precisely you know. But I get to know a little bit more about it because when I was in South Africa, I was 19, it was a whole other thing for me, totally different, my parents didn't have a lot of money when I was raised, because of that, there was not a lot of opportunities to get to know other cultures, especially not from Europe, because I never [indistinct] until I was 19 and went to South Africa for this month, yeah and I think that started a little bit, the awareness of other cultures and being really not just the stereo types but to get to into the cultural things [indistinct] actually in South Africa, it's like very, very diverse, and you can't catch it in one month I guess."

"INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So you only recently became aware that other cultures are doing it, through the internet? Wow.

PARTICIPANT2: It never was a thing that was brought to my attention, like in German schools you learn a lot about France and like World War 1 and 2 and other than that, I've never really learned much about other cultures, like the last two years I've been interested myself, like with everything that goes on in the world right now, and I just didn't do that until I was like 17/18, I just didn't inform myself that much because I thought it just didn't matter, and now I have like a lot of friends that know so much...so, so much about things that just never have been brought to my attention and so that was when I first got in contact with like cultural appropriation and I always knew that was a thing but just like how much it is, wasn't...yeah.."

5.3 Punk rock, modern primitivism and cultural appropriation.

Appropriation is a complex political and ethical discussion with many layers that require careful and critical unpacking. Literature associated with the cultural appropriation debate is two ways, other see it as a form of cultural exchange while others see it as yet as another case of skewed power balances between cultural groups or races (Singh, 2003).

Pitts (2003) noted that even though the use of tribal cultural affects such as tattoos and stretched earlobes taken from indigenous non-western cultures is instrumental to affording the modern primitive an opportunity to forge a new identity and an alternative narrative about their personhood, this practise is deeply problematic as historical issues such as racism, colonialism and ethnocentrism will always come into play. The western society will always be associated with and the use or borrowing of the cultural practises does more harm than damage in the sense that indigenous tribes are not afforded the platform to express and communicate their traditions from their own perspective. Skewed racial and historical power will always come in play in this regard.

On the other hand, Young (2018) indicated that cultural appropriation has been understood loosely as the adoption of specific elements of one culture by a different cultural group, which simply implies the transferral of ideas, activities or objects from one culture to another. This can also be translated as one group or individual exerting power over an 'other', through the act of taking something and using it for one's own purposes. This understanding of cultural appropriation is becoming widely criticised as the assumption of defined boundaries between static cultural groups is founded on ideas of cultural essentialism, because it ignores the long history of cross-cultural interaction and influence which has taken place across the world. Thus, attention must be given to the interconnectedness between cultural groups to avoid notions of cultural essentialism. Furthermore, cultural appropriation cannot be understood through analysis of culture alone.

The power imbalance between the appropriator and appropriated and the motivations to take elements of one culture for another's gain are critical in understanding and assessing acts of cultural appropriation, thus revealing the complex and interwoven relationship between culture and power.

In the context of this study, young modern primitives in the punk rock scene based in Germany had no previous exposure to indigenous tribes and were only following in the examples of their peers. Therefore, labelling the practise as appropriation becomes problematic as well. In an instance such as this, what happens when the two parties do not have a direct relationship?

Brook (2007) indicated the transdisciplinary nature of cultural studies as a useful feature in sociology which helps in transgressing established boundaries in academic terrain. This discourse is thus helpful as they allow for a renewed understanding of identity, subjectivity and representation. Seeing that context is a significant element when it comes to the cultural appropriation debate, this study is an example of the many ways in which culture is defused from one group to other or from one generation to the other. A sub-theme of cultural studies that allows for the understanding of cultural diffusion is the process of Transculturation. This involves cultural elements created through appropriations from and by multiple cultures such that identification of a single originating culture is problematic. Transculturation involves ongoing circular appropriations of cultural elements between multiple groups (Codell, 2017).

Lull (2000) described transculturation as a process whereby forms and elements of culture move through time and space and go on to interact with other cultural forms and settings, influence each other, produce new forms, and change the cultural settings. This process thus produces cultural hybrids. Hybridization in this instance occur is a result of imported cultural elements taking on local features, thus causing a new hybrid of culture to develop. Transculturation can also occur as a result of conditions such as globalization, neo-colonialism, and the increasing dominance of transnational capitalism in many countries.

Transculturation offers a new paradigm for thinking about cultural appropriation, one that challenges the notions of heavily reliance on dominance and exploitations well as the subordination of certain ethnic groups as a popular discourse. Rogers (2006) noted that culture has proved to be not static, but to rather be ever evolving and in constant motion, and mapping cultural forms and elements directly onto a specific nation or territory has been regarded as highly problematic as complex and centuries long historical process act as a barrier to pin point the origination of certain cultural elements. The discourse of cultural purity thus becomes complicit in essentializing culture and Western discourses of the primitive and inhibits the prospect of engaging on the topic of culture in a more contemporary context.

Cultural appropriation is not a debate that can easily be ignored because not all acts of appropriation are equal or identical. Acts and conditions of appropriation vary in terms of the

degree and relevance of involuntariness, inequality, imbalance and impurity. There are therefore instances whereby cultures and their elements freely move and evolve and without power implications, resulting in various ethnic groups sharing the same cultural elements (Rogers, 2006).

New conceptions of culture affect cultural politics and ethical evaluations of processes such as cultural appropriation. Transculturation in the context of this study thus fits the model of rethinking the process of how culture moves around and shapes different groups at different time intervals. As the data dictates above, participants of this study were subscribing to an already formed subculture within their dominant culture and they adopted cultural features that they found being practised by members of the sub-culture they were aspiring to be a part of.

Cultural appropriation as a rigid concept instance does not apply in this instance as there are no immediate linkage to between the participants of this study and any other ethnic group. The participants of this study participated in an already existing cultural movement known as modern primitivism which had been long in existence before they could join. Theirs was therefore a choice to participate in a cultural movement that spoke to their individual norms and values, which were outside of their national identity.

Hart (2019) indicated that the modern primitive identity is crucial to examining cultural traits common with ethnic and indigenous identities. Deliberately choosing a tribal identity means that Modern Primitives acknowledge that their concept of ethnicity and society is away from their national identity and they do so by being associated with likeminded individuals who have also elected to adopt the Modern Primitive lifestyle.

Most modern primitives who are part of the punk rock scene understand the social repercussions of choosing to modify their bodies. The act of marking their own bodies, as opposed to those received in accordance with cultural traditions of place of origin, reveals that they are more in tune with more external and universal societal attributes other than intergroup dynamics, this symbolises that they are able to determine for themselves their own identities and commit to a lifestyle that affords them a strong sense of ownership over their own bodies.

Pro-active decision making based on a pre-existing cultural movement in this case thus draws away from the common understandings of appropriation stemming from coloniality and violence, but leans towards an more open understanding of the malleable nature of culture and

it's elements thereof as well as a deeper and through scrutiny of the recipients and practitioners of the cultural practise in question.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations.

6.1 Summary of the findings and Conclusion.

Based on the data gathered and reviewed literature, it can be argued that cultural appropriation is not a one size fits all concept, but it is rather context specific. Some cultural practices have remained intact in the manner in which they are observed or carried out, like stretched earlobes in the context of this study, but have been present in many different ethnic and indigenous groups globally. Stretched earlobes have survived as a cultural element and are visible in precolonial ethnic and indigenous ethnic groups in Africa and India as well as contemporary social movement groups such as modern primitives.

This study has thus fulfilled its primary objectives of analysing the meanings attached to the practice of ear stretching in Western societies as an act of expression and individualisation. This study was also successful in determining the circumstances under which cultural appropriation can be argued by making reference to transculturation as a means of rethinking the process of how culture moves between social groups and shapes the said groups differently. The reviewed literature supported the argument laid out in the research and was paramount to gaining a deeper understanding of the fluidity of culture and the context in which appropriation can be debated.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the literature review, findings and the conclusions discussed above, the following recommendations for research and development of this area of study are as follows:

- The findings of this research have shown that there are varying conditions in which cultural appropriation can be raised. More context specific case studies should therefore be conducted that scrutinise the phenomenon of cultural appropriation so as to move away from the essentialisation of cultural practices and elements. This will greatly develop an area of research in which honest engagement with human relations and social connectedness is at the core of scholarly enquiry.
- Power dynamics, colonisation and exploitation aspects of the cultural appropriation debate are still valid, however, these aspects should be treated separately from contemporary understandings of nature of culture as fluid and adaptive.

- The use of technology and the internet should be used more widely endorsed and used as it provides an opportunity for researchers facing geographical, linguistic and cultural barriers to have easy access to research participants in their areas of interest. This will also be beneficial for individuals and groups of interest who have an interest in sharing their stories and histories.

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Research Questions for the Interviews

What is your name, or would you like to remain anonymous?

How old are you?

What is your place of origin?

What is your level of education?

What is your economic background?

How did you come to know about ear stretching?

How long have you been stretching your ear lobes?

Why did you decide to start stretching your ear lobes?

What significant meaning does stretching your ear lobes hold for you?

What kinds of reactions do you get from your community members for your stretched ear lobes?

Are you aware or exposed to other cultures (besides your own) whereby ear stretching is practised?

If yes, which ones are they and what does it mean for them?