

Phenomenological Study of Tattoo as the Symbol of the Owners' Self Identity in Jember

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ABSTRACT--- *In modern time, Tattoo is a meaningful art form. Meanwhile, it is considered as an expression which is identical with crime and other negative acts. This research is a qualitative research by applying depth interview technique. The result of the research shows that tattoo function as the self expression, actualization and part of group identity. This research concludes that the tattoo for the tattooers in Jember has various functions, it can be shown from a various designs of the tattoo which has a various meaning for them which are as a form of personal expression, self identity and the symbol of group identity.*

Keywords--- Tattoo, self identity, phenomenology

1. INTRODUCTION

Tato has a long history not only in indonesia but also in most of the world. People has considered that it has evolved from primitive society which has become a popular form of culture in modern society. Someone who wants to draw his body with tato is unnecessary to be a member of one of the ancient tribes such as Dayak in Kalimantan or Mentawai in Nias who considered it as the their religious binding to the communal faith. It is because it has been trend and symbol of personal identity. Meawhile, tato is still labeled negatively as identical with crime and criminal acts. However, in the past it reflects the communal identity and as a mean of camouflage in the process of hunting. Furthermore it manifests the level of achievement in hunting even for human hunting such as in Dayak Iban and Kayan which use the tato as a signified achievement for cutting the enemy's head (Olong, 2006 p. 95).

Tattoo has specific meaning for the owners. It has become more interested by the youth. For them, it symbolizes their existence, protest and styles in their course into maturity.

It is derived from english word 'tattoo'. Some communities calls it as *tatoage, tatouage, tätowier, tatuaggio, tatuar, tatuaje, tatoos, tattueringer, tatuagens, tatoveringer, tattos and tatu*. It is done identically by using bone, needle, thorn. The design then is made colorful by colour pigments (Olong, 2006 p. 83).

For the owners, tattoo can not be separated by their life experiences. It can function both as the self reflection and self representation. Its development is influenced by cultural, historical, sociological factors. It is also affected by art, communicative science, style and religious idea. Most of indonesian is muslims. Thus it becomes a forbidden act. It is in line with a hadits recited by Muslim which states that the prophet has curse the tattoists and the owners of tattoo. It is applicable for the arabian who like to decorate their physical appearance with their Gods. But for Nanda, it does not means that his tattoo does not become the obstacle for him to pray. For the case of the prohibition for the woman to have tattoo in the past, it was mainly caused by the fact that most of them like to draw tattoo on their faces.

Tattoo is assumed as identical with crime. It can be rational since the society often witnesses the criminal, gangster, thieves, robbers who have tattoo. It is also supported by the criminal news broadcasted in television. This assumption is influenced and caused by the case of "Penembakan Misterius" (PETRUS) in 1982-1985.

Symbol is an informative sign or characteristic. Since the beginning, it is the symbol of communal identity as represented by the tribes of Dayak and Mentawai. Those tribes express their socio cultural ideas including economy, health, technology and skill. The researcher found that the owners state their intention through their tattoos. The meaning is individual. This makes the researcher conducting this research. It aims to describe tattoo as the symbol of self identity and its meaning for the owners. This research is located in Jember since the informers in Jember have the answer of the research problem.

2. THE METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

This research is a descriptive qualitative research applying transcendental phenomenological approach. According to Abercrombie, Hill, Turner (1984), a qualitative research is a research characterized by its distinctive purpose which intends to understand phenomenon impossibly measured quantitatively. This research used interpretative paradigm which focuses on the meaning of personal action social daily experience (W. Lawrence, 2000 p. 71). This research is included as naturalistic inquiry which use people as its observable instrument. Phenomenology is a conscious science and a method to understand the object and events consciously experience. (Littlejohn, 2001 p. 306-308)

Phenomenon is a conscious fact understood by the subject. Etymologically it is derived from the Greek word “phainomai” which means being seen. Thus, phenomenology means a method to get a new knowledge or develop the existing one systemically, critically without any presumptions.

Thus, phenomenology is not only a direct reflection of human experience but also philosophical approach to investigate human experience as long as it is intensively connected to an object (Kuswarno, 2009 p. 1). In phenomenological research involves a careful testing on human experience. The main concept in phenomenology concerns with meaning. It is significant content emerging in human experience. To identify it, those experiences are tested carefully (Smith, etc., 2009 p. 11). Even though meaning can be traced through the action, creation and activities, it cannot be separated from the role of others.(Kuswarno, 2009 p. 1)

This research applies phenomenological data analysis which is *Horizontalizing the data and statement*; it focuses on collecting and classifying data resulted from the observation on the object of the research in the form of the transcript of interview. The data then are checked to avoid the similarities among them. The second analysis is thematic portrayal. It is the efforts to classify of the transcript based on their themes. The third is individual textual description which is the effort to transcribe the individual opinion and statements. The next step is individual structural description which is the structural modification of the data taken individually done by the researcher. Next is composite structural description which is the effort to combine all data taken from the whole subject of the research. The last step is composite structural description which is the combined structural modification of all statements made by the subjects done by the researcher(Moustakas, 1994 p. 122)

Qualitative data are data in the forms of texts, documents, drawing, picture, artifact or other form of object found during the research done qualitatively.

2.1 Observation

It covers systematic note taking on events, behavior and observable object needed to support the research. Initially it is done to collect general data and information as much as possible. Then it is limited to the needed data to find the pattern of behavior and its inter connection in order to determine the theme to study. This observation aims to find a complex interaction in its specific original social background.

In depth interview

It is done to understand the subject and phenomenon of the research

Referential study

It supports the researcher effort in collecting the data and information by reading letters, announcement, policy statement and other without disturbing the atmosphere of the research and the subject. It is important since it can give the data about the cultural values governed by the subject (Sugiyono, 2007 h. 64-82)

The subject of this research is the people who have tattoo in their body living in jember. The subjects are selected based on the quality of their responds to statement that tattoo represents self identity. The subjects are selected randomly. They are :

1. The first informer (Yoga) : a tattooist who also has tattoo in his body.
2. The second is Lucky : a member of Islamic religious community called Majelis Ta’lim Al Alawiyah.
3. The third is Wawan and the fourth is Nanda. The researcher met them in tattoo studio and they are willing to be the subject of the research.
4. The fifth is Nila. She is chosen as the representative of the female informer.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tattoo is a visual object representing some symbolic meaning of various physical behaviours. It can represent the self, style, trend or communal and group identity. The choice of tattoo design is not only directed/based on the internal meaning of its visual design but also the aesthetic of the design. It is the manifestation of the owner’s creation which sometime is motivated by the visual attractiveness. They can also be motivated by their milieu. The researcher also found that it is made as symbolic identity of the group belonging to owner. Lucky, an informer, stated that her tattoo represents her as the third generation of Al Alawiyah. It is quite different from the design the previous generation. The design of Garuda in the third generation is smaller than the previous generation.

Since it has specific symbolic meaning, it can be the object of the research which functions as a mean of communication. It has a intricate symbolic system. Nanda stated that his tattoo is consciously designed which has a permanent meaning for him. For him, a specific visual design of the tattoo has a specific meaning for the owner. It is made to communicate a message in a specific time and place intended by the owner.

The expression are not only represented through the action, words or character of a person but also through tattoo. However it is considered as something outside the normative values governed by the society. For Olong, the other informer, tattoo and piercing in the perspective of Van Gennep represent social symbol. Furthermore he stated that it is done in line with his development into his maturity. The maturity here in the frame of hierarchical biological structure. Meanwhile, in Turner's perspective, it is cognitive liminality or a choosen method of expression in the development into the maturity (Olong, 2006 p. 58).

The intention represented in tattoo is the basic reason for someone who intend to make tattooe in his body eventhough in doing this he should torture himself. Further he should dealt with his family and neighborhood's negative responds. However the internal meaning of the design is actually the intended message which is communicated about his self identity. In primitive tribe, tattoo symbolizes bravity, skill and social status. According to Mulyana, sign or symbol is used to state something else in words or non verbal actions (Mulyana, 2013 p. 92)

The symbol represented in tattoo visual design cannot be separated with the meaning intended by the owner in accordance with his experience. It represents the owner's discourse which motivates him in selecting the appropriate visual design of his tattoo to express his self identity. It is possible that different owners have similar or identital visual design, but their reason and motivation and the affecting factors are always individual.

Any visual design of tattoo has a personal aesthetic value. Nowadays it has been considered as the symbol of self identity, art and a way of thinking. The owners want to express himself, trend and to maintain his culture which are presented through visual sign. This is in line with Fiske (2012) who states that social interaction and communication can be done through the use of signs. However, there must be inherent distortion in the process of understanding the message which makes it important to consider its context.

Tattoo as a meaningful symbol and sign is an significant object to study which has communal function in traditional society. It does not only functions as the symbol of collective identity but also it is the symbol of communal loyalty, solidarity, status, code, a mean of acces for the community.

As the symbol of communal solidarity, it does not intend to control. Furthermore it reflects their respect to the community which makes it functions as communal binding. this is supported by Nanda who states that the membership of punk community is represented by their tattoo. However, it does not mean that it is not an obligation for the members to have tattoo in their body. The meaning of the symbol is not always derrived from the design as a whole. It is shown by the usage of *circle A* in the community of punk. People assume that most of punk community members has tattoo in their body.

The complexity of meaning represented in tatoo can not separated from the owners' understanding and way of thinking. It is a result of the owners' reflection toward their own life and their interaction in social interaction.(Sobur, 2004 h. 197)

Body is a medium for self actualization since it can represent identity, desire and idealism. Tattoo is cultural, social, individual, economic, political and even controversial symbol through body. This is in line with Blumer statement that all human actions is intrepretative. The similar idea can also be applied in the case of the usage of tattoo as the personal symbol which can not be separated from the owners' way of thinking.(Mun, Janigo, Johnson, 2012 p. 139). Wawan and Nanda's anarchy symbol consistently affects their attitude and perpective. Their tattoo is their self reflection which is the result of concious construction (Sobur, 2004 h. 197-198).

The researcher also found the owners' various reasons for their tattoo including self actualization, the result of social interaction, trend, religious motive, lifestyle, status and also symbol of loyalty. However, most of them agree that tattoo is not only art but also it has specific symbolic meaning. It reflects their creativity, innovation and freedom of expression (Rahayu, 2010 h. 100). It is applicable even for the design selected based on merely its visual attractiveness.

Based on the interview to five informers, it is shown that tattoo is considered as an inappropriate manner since it is suitable with the existing norm in the society. It is forbidden in religious perspecticve and it is assumed identical with crime. This is stated by Yoga who has been judged as criminal since he has tattoo in most of his body. However, tattoo for the informers such as Nanda, Wawan, and Lucky represent their membership to the specific group or community. Thus, in the perspective of symbolic interaction, this is a form of symbolic communication.

There must be a specific reason in creating and selecting the design of the tattoo as stated by Nila. She uses the number 03 – 05 – 1988 and rose as the elements for design to symbolize herself as a girl. These elements are hoped to reflect her date of birth. According to Deddy Mulyana, symbol is a category of sign. The correlation between them can be represented by an icon or index which do not need an agreement. It is because both of them represent the identical object .(Mulyana, 2013 p. 92)

The informers state that they interpret and judge the design of the tattoo based on their perspective. This supports Pierce's statement that sign in general represents a specific object and it is an independent entity which has icon, index and symbol as its elements. Icon is a sign which has connection between the identical signifier and the signified. Meawhile index indicates an arbitrary cause effect correlation between the signifier and the signified object which depends on the concensus of the society (Sobur, 2004 h. 41-42).

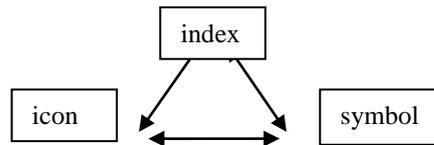


Fig.1: Fiske's category of sign

Pierce also states that the sign is determined by its object. The informers' design is identical with the specific icon to the object. Meanwhile the index is a causal relationship of the visual elements of the design. The object is the symbolized object. The meaning of the symbol is individually different. It is quite clear in the case of Wawan and Nanda tattoo. Eventhough their tattoos are identical which is the visual symbol of anarchy, but they perceive its meaning differently. Umberto Eco in Sobur states that concluding the meaning of a symbol is not a fixed process without bargaining. However, it has independent elements which have different levels of statement and meaning united by the process of coding (Sobur, 2004 h. 35).

The function of tattoo in the traditional era is connected to the religious idea which can not be found in modern time. In modern time, it functions more as an art and self expression. It reflects the human potential to create meaning and symbol as a mean of sublimation that can avoid them to be an animal. Individu is able to create new meaning based on their interpretation toward their actual situation. (Ritzman and Godman, 2009 h. 396)

Instead of the society misconception, tattoo is a form of art which has a significant meaning for the owners. Its function as the self identity, a code representing the owners' definition about themselves which is symbolized through various visual design and colour.

4. CONCLUSION

This research found that tattoo is used to represent the owners' self identity, self actualization, and group identity. As the symbol of self identity, it is represented in symbols reflecting the owners' life experiences. As the group membership identity, it is not attached strictly to the group but it still has personal meaning and some of their designs has been modified.

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