

# **TATTOO AND CHRISTIANITY: TATTOOED CHRISTIANS AS NEGOTIATING WITHIN EVERYDAY MODERN CONTEXT**

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**T**his paper will elaborate about tattoo and Christianity, which is more concern on the way tattooed Christians negotiate their tattoo within the debate on tattooing practice. In some Christian denominations, they have different perspective on tattooing practice. In one hand they interpret that tattoo is prohibited in Christianity and they usually justify the tattoo prohibition through some verses in Holy Bible, which is the most used verse to legitimate the prohibition on tattooing is in Leviticus 19: 28. Moreover, some use 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20 as well. In the other hand, some Christians say that the verses do not have a big deal with term of tattoo; it is because they more take a look in the historical context of the verses' passage. Regarding to some perspectives that tattoo is prohibited in Christianity; it makes tattooed persons become marginalized and less-religious person. In contrary, tattooed Christians have their own perspective about religious matter and see the verses in different way. Based on the concept of everyday religion from Ammerman's writing, she seeks to the counter traditional of religion with 'non-expert' experiences in term of religion. The way tattooed people explain their commitment to get religious tattoo symbol on their body is seen the creed as Christian. Within the emergence of debate on tattooing practice in Christianity, tattooed people have encounter argument that actually they already got their spirituality through their commitment as a tattooed person and they already religious in their own way through 'mundane stuff'.

Keywords: everyday religion, tattooed Christian, Tattooing practice debate.

## **INTRODUICION**

Debating on tattooing practice has emerged in Christianity, which involve the role of religious institution and sometimes give contradiction in society. It is because there are some social phenomena that seem not

proper with the basic teaching of religious institution as standard of social norm. Tattooing practice as social phenomena is seen as prohibition in some Christian denominations, because it is considered as violating of the Christian teaching. Such as what Zelyck argues in his writing that “tattoo desecrate the theological aspect of image of God because they glorify the ungodly and vulgar, as well as convey narcissism, defiance, and arrogance – vices that inappropriate for Christians” (2005: p. 3).

Regarding to the role of religious institution that is seen as standard of social norm, it influence how society see the phenomena of tattooing practice. Therefore, the role of tattoo in society sometimes is more seen as deviant lifestyle from the conventional lifestyle, which is connoted freedom from conventionality. Irwin said that her respondents suggested that people who commit to be tattooed symbolized liberation, independence, and freedom. In the other hand, for some people, they saw as the way to increase their attachment to alternative social groups (Sanders 1989; Vail 1999) (Irwin: 2001, p. 55).

In article that written by Fedorenko, Sherlock and Stuhr, they cite the work of Sander (1989), which is mention that the term of tattoo originally from the Tahitian '*tatau*', means to mark. The French navigator bougenville used the term of tattoo to portray a culture of body decoration of the Tahitian natives in his *Voyage Author Du Monde*, 1766-69, published in Paris in 1771, (1999, p. 105) . Regarding to tattooing practice, it is categorized as part of body modification which is recorded as the ancient and very wide used in the world. Based on Olong's writing, he mentions that the ancient tattooing tradition is dated 2,000 BC which is designated by the finding of evidence of Nubbian mummy site in Egypt (2006: p. 97-99). Meanwhile, in Sander and Vail's book, they mention that tattooing practice emerged carved figures from Europeans sites and recorded date 6,000 B.C. and Egyptian figurines created some 2,000 years later show facial and body markings which is recognized as tattoo (Sander and Vail: 2008, p. 9). Somehow the diffusion of tattooing practice spread by 1,000 B.C and was practiced by the Maoris of New Zealand. Both women and men, they are tattooed, but with different design and for the different degree (Sander and Vail: 2008, p. 10).

Related to tattoo that found as the ancient body art decoration, numbers of countries have tattooing tradition which comes from tribal society. For instance, in Indonesia has tattooing practice in Mentawai which known as archipelago that consist of four major islands – Siberut, Sipora, North Pagai and South Pagai – and administratively part of West Sumatera. In Mentawai, tattoo has social and cultural institution such as,

economy, health, belief, etc. The tattoo's function as tribal identity has the important position on it. It is because with a certain motif of tattoo on the body can be identified and even communicate the tribal broader in society (Olong: 2006, p. 199-200). Besides in Mentawai, tattoo is practiced in Dayak tribes – such as Dayak Iban, Dayak Kayan, which is located in Borneo. For Dayak society, tattoo has important meaning as a bond symbol in their life until the death is coming. It is believed that only the soul of tattooed people, especially in hand, and generous women who can success to cross the wooden bridge. The wooden bridge is believed as the connector to reach their ancestor in heaven, which the bridge is over the death river. The wooden bridge is guarded with a vicious and evil guard named *maligang* (Olong: 2006, p. 212-213)

Regarding tattooing practice that exists in Indonesian culture, yet, from time to time the existence of tattoo itself gets complicated shifting. Some people in society consider that tattoo is related to the criminal, rebellion, and sometimes as sociopaths (Firmin, Tse, Foster, and Angelini: 2008, p. 195). In Indonesia the stereotype of tattooed person as a negative thing was constructed based on the history from the past especially in new order. It is caused when mysterious sniper also known as Petrus (Penembak Misterius) who shot criminal person in mysterious way, in 1983-1984. Operation target is always identified by their tattoo in their body as a criminal who must be casted off. Tattoo which is stick on the skin of victim's corpse caused traumatic effect for the society at that time (Olong: 2006, p. 256). The national stigma about tattoo that created by the political history in the past still embodied in some Indonesian's head even nowadays, so that is why the controversial tattooed person still happen until now in society.

Nowadays, tattooing practice is not recognized as negative stigma, even though several people still consider tattoo as a negative thing. Nevertheless, current society more accepts tattooing practice as a fashion and even lifestyle (Firmin, Tse, Foster, and Angelini: 2008, p. 195). In modern time, some people consider that tattoo is not only about traditional matters, criminal, or negative things again. Sometimes we find model, artist, rock singer, athletes, scholar, and even the Indonesian Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Minister have tattoo on their body. Beside that today people can access to improve the insight about tattoo in Indonesia through official website of tattoo parlor, article or even magazine which is there is the only one tattoo magazine in Indonesia – Magic Ink Magazine, first established in Bali and now already spread in many areas in Indonesia.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there are many forum of discussion that conducted in various kinds of events. Therewith, some communities

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.magicinkmagz.com/>

routinely conduct tattoo war in every year, which many tattoo artist and tattoo parlor participate at that event. Regarding to the widespread of access to reach information about tattoo, it means that many people have a big deal with tattoo and it is already accepted for many people as well.

In Christianity, many people who against with the tattooing practice will legitimize their argument based on the verses in the bible. I already searched some website which talk about Christian and tattoo, besides that I asked several Christian friend about verses that related to the prohibition of practicing tattoo. I found verses that most frequently used by Christian to against tattoo: Firstly from Leviticus 19: 28 that written, “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I [am] the LORD (NKJV).” Second the verse written at 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [who is] in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s (NKJV).” This research not try to interpret those verses, however, through these three verses we will know what people response to these verses based on individual point of view.

Talking about debating tattoo prohibition seems like we see the blurry boundaries of it. Some people say ‘yes’ for tattoo and other say ‘no’ with their own defense and legitimation, it is very common in the society. What makes it blur is the influence of some religious institutions interpret on tattooing practice based on the biblical view – even in religious institution itself have various different interpretations on tattooing practice. It is because Christianity has various different denominations as well. And if we take a look on writing above there is gap between pro and contra. In Shuma Iwai’s writing, he mentions about different perspectives on tattooing within Christian in diverse cultures. Moreover, in his writing Iwai mention some verses about the verses that tend to be utilized as the legitimating of tattooing prohibition. Iwai mention that only in Leviticus 19: 28 that God has used the particular term, tattoo, which is located in Old Testament (2010: 148). If we are talking about tattoo, it is related to the term of body. Iwai quote what George A. F. Knight addressed in term of flesh, which is in Hebrew shows the whole being of human. It is included personality, soul, and physically body (2010: 149). It is mentioned as well that the body of human beings is created in image of the almighty God. It is written in Genesis 1: 27, ‘God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them’. So that is why many Christian argue and use those verses to against tattoo.

Based on the existence of tattooing practice in Christianity, there are some questions emerge in this research. Firstly, what does the biblical view on tattooing practice? This question tries to see the normative value based on what bible say about tattooing practice. Secondly, how is the tattoo linked to Christianity? This question tries to see tattooing practice from the individual view of tattooed person and try to see how they negotiate their practice to Christianity. Then the last question, how do they interpret religious tattoo symbol which are made on their skin? The question tries to know more about the meaning and purpose inside their religious symbol of tattoo for the tattooed Christian. Besides that it will see how they express their religiosity into the materiality – visual form.

### **Literature Review**

Due to its interesting and unique topic from tattoo, the topic has been studied by many scholars from many different disciplines, such as Anthropology, Sociology, art as well as religious studies. In journal article titled “A Case Study of Tattoo Culture” which is written by Janet S. Fedorenko, Susan C. Sherlock and Patricia L. Stuhr deal with tattoo culture and they conduct interview and observation of tattooed persons and tattoo artists from Columbus, Ohio. In term of aesthetic context is provided to understand of the present tattoo culture. “The writers’ presentation of tattooing as an art form is an attempt to broaden the definition of what is considered art and what is acceptable for curricular inclusion in art education.” (1999: p. 105)

In other writing I found article titled Christian Student Perceptions of Body tattoos: A Qualitative Analysis, written by Michael W. Firmin, Luke M. TSe, Janna Foster, Tammy Angelini. It studies about how Christian student participants object see tattooed person. In summary, the student do not have any negative image for tattooed person, there is no rebellion or deviance in the choice to tattoo. They rather see for the decision which is a form of spiritual expression.

In the other article titled Legitimizing the First tattoo: Moral Passage through Informal interaction which is written by Katherine Irwin, It has shown that in the middle class tattooees identified as once deviant behavior. Then through the interaction to others, potentially tattooed person can learn different ways to negotiate their tattoo status. The research is beyond to argue that cultural norms eventually follow behavior and suggest a particular process from interaction in personally. The process includes such a thing that as a deviant attraction, deviant aversion, and reconciliation.

Tattoo usually identified as a deviant thing is not something new, in the other book titled Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of

tattooing written by Clinton R. Sanders with D. Angus Vail mentioned that “[It is] deviation from and conformity to the societal norm surrounding attractiveness are, ...” (2008: p. 2). In this book the writers examine how becoming and being a tattooed person, which they try to connect the design and symbol to psychiatrically. Then in the other part they try to see the occupation for tattoo artist as a career, and then they examine what goal of them which choose tattoo artist as an occupation. In the one of chapters the writers write about the tattoo relationship which is focus on the risk and social control in the studio.

In Indonesia, there are scholars that have written about the same topic of it, yet, they see in different perspective with various approach of discipline. A book titled TATO which is published by LKiS and written by Hatib Abdul Kadir Olong is the most used book reference in term of tattoo in Indonesian references. In his book he does not talk about specific issue on it, but he gives such much information about tattoo culture in anthropology perspective. He writes tattoo as a phenomenon of counter culture and pop culture, tattoo as a deviance and different culture, the role tattoo for the youth. Then in another chapter he examines the history of tattoo and its development either in overseas or in Indonesia. Furthermore he also discuss about Tribal tattoo within Mentawai and dayak tradition. Then in the end of chapter he examines the culture of tattoo and piercing in Yogyakarta.

In the other hand, M. Dwi Marianto and Samsul Barry write a book as well in the same title with Olong’s book, that is TATO which is published by Lembaga penelitian Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta. This book content about the informative writing, which tells about what is tattoo in glance explanation, they also write in brief explanation about tattoo in Mentawai and Dayak tribes, in brief history, symbols, function of it and meaning. Moreover, they explain about process of tattooing then in the end of book they display some tattoo work from several tattoo artists in Yogyakarta. Indeed, this book just wants to give information for layman who wants to know about tattoo. It is not try to give any specific detail for certain issue.

### **Theoretical framework**

In the everyday modern live, the existence of religion just become a worldly-minded narrative. In the introduction of her book, Ammerman also said that in the modern world, religion have been told by the sociologist that it is just such a mundane story (2007: p. 3). The attendance of church member, time to time seems to decrease numbers. For instance from the informants, several of them confess that they do not attend to church regularly. Moreover, their decision to be tattooed

Christian tend to be seen the part of secular and there is no relation with religion. It can be the evidence that the world is very secular, yet, if the measuring tool that used tend to measure the strength of religion by orthodoxy of belief, attendance regularity in church, and the ability of traditional religious institutions to enforce their norms (Ammerman: 2007, p. 4).

It is unfair if we are measuring the strength of religiosity by separating 'sacred' and 'secular' without understand the experience from non-expert to religion within everyday routine. In spite of the secularism, they have their own argument that what they have committed as tattooed Christian is not just term of mundane stuff. It is like what Davie said in Ammerman, it such more suave and creative ways by measuring the strength of religion beyond just the church pews (2007: p. 27). Furthermore, McGuire in Ammerman argues in his chapter, that if we want to understand the full range of religion as practiced and experienced by ordinary people in the context of their everyday lives, we need to be aware of how people's religious and spiritual expressions engage their material bodies and address their material concerns (McGuire 1990, 2003c) (McGuire: 2007, p. 187). Based on the story of informants, the Society or even the church member often sell tattooed Christian short because the stigma of tattoo itself without try to understand what their argument and their commitment of tattooing practice. Some of them have religious tattoo on their body, then others already have a plan to choose religious symbol for the next tattoo until they decided when it happens. Choosing the religious symbol does not mean they have no reason on it, some of them explain that they consider choosing religious symbol for their tattoo is kind of the creed as Christian. Regarding to their reason on it, they already religious in their own ways then it cannot be separated each other what is sacred and what is secular.

Regarding to focus of this research on everyday practice of tattooed Christians within the relationship to the Divine, it is important to highlight the ability of various forms of secularity to shape everyday interaction by using the view of everyday religion concept (Ammerman: 2007, p. 9). Ammerman said that, "everyday religion may happen in both private and public life among both privileged and non-privileged people" (2007: p. 5). So that is why it can appear in whenever we are, unpredictably. For the tattooed Christians, they can feel God embodied in their body and even as a reminder of doing goodwill for their life through their religious symbol on tattoo. From the concept of everyday religion from Ammerman's writing, she seeks to the counter traditional of religion with 'non-expert' experiences in term of religion. If I conclude,

Ammerman tries to see the individual experience to religion, how the secular thing can be embodied and linked to the Divine.

Begin from the reasons of tattooed Christian and their argument to encounter the legitimating of people who against tattooing practice through the biblical verses, it can be seen that they try to create their own religiosity as minority through the negotiation of the debate of tattooing practice in Christianity. Furthermore, Ammerman said on her writing that “in each case we find people engaged in a vigorous negotiation between old and new, using traditional symbols and inventing their own” (Ammerman: 2007, p.10). She said that the important task is either engages that definitional negotiation or see what lesson that we can get (2007: p. 9). Understanding about the concept of everyday religion we should see deeper on the tattooed Christians’ negotiation on their commitment of tattooing practice. For instance, we can understand the tattooed Christians when they confront the tattooing practice debate in Christianity. When people said about the verses to legitimate the prohibition of tattooing practice that written in I Corinthians 6: 19-20, some of them just try to negotiate by saying; if your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, why not to decorate it. It maybe sounds ridiculous, if we do not try to understand it as everyday religion concept. Hence, the way tattooed Christians negotiate to the debate on tattooing practice in Christianity will be the concern of this research.

The way tattooed Christians express the creed by tattooing the religious symbol on their body means the religiosity and spiritual expressions engage their material bodies. The materiality and spirituality cannot be separated in term of religious experience. They try to express their religiosity through the visualization of Divine that consider embodied in their body. In Ammerman, McGuire said that “we need to take seriously not merely the packages of religious narratives supplied by institutions but – more important – the myriad individual ways by which ordinary people remember, share, enact, adapt, create and combine the “stories” out of which they live” (McGuire: 2007, p. 187). People’s material bodies can be linked with their lived religion through either regarding to Divinity or the mundane routine.

In Ammerman, McGuire use the concept of “embodied practices” to emphasize those ritual and expressive activities in which spiritual meanings and understandings are embedded in and accomplished through the body (e.g., bodily, senses, postures, gestures, and movements) (2007: p. 187-188). Lived religion is based by the people who share, enact, adapt, and create “stories out of which they live”. Ordinary material existence – especially the human body – is the very stuff of these



meaningful practices (McGuire: 2007, p. 197). Each embodied practice indicates recreate distinct kinds of spiritual experience.

An individual's everyday religion is expressed through just such embodied practices. Understanding religious-as-lived needs, after that we should take seriously the human religious practice completely. It is not only what we found in religious institutions but also such as when we found it in everyday embodied practices. In the chapter of analysis will elaborate about the way tattooed Christians' positioning themselves within the tattooing practice debate and the signification regarding their decision to choose religious symbol.

## **Methodology**

Regarding to the data collection in this research, the scope of field site of research that chosen to conduct the research is Yogyakarta area; it is because the development of tattooing practice in Yogyakarta is seen grew rapidly from time to time. Based on the discussion which was conducted by Ketjil Bergerak community at 1st April 2015, – theme: *Kelas Melamun: Edisi Tattoo* (Daydream Class: Tattoo Edition) – the speakers said that the growing of the tattoo parlors more and more increase in large numbers. They recorded through establish *Gerombolan Tukang Tato (GENTO)* – Tattoo Artist Community – in Yogyakarta. The speakers; Huhum Hambily who concern as the redactor of Magic Ink Magazine and Anneke Fitrianti who is tattoo artist and the owner of Petrichor Tattoo Studio, they are part of *Gento* as well. Establishing *Gento* is purposed to embrace, measure the growth of tattoo artist and giving the information about standard of sterilization of tattoo parlors' gears. Through the numbers of *Gento*'s member that increase every year it can be seen that the tattooing practice in Yogyakarta have certain attraction in many background of society.

Besides that Yogyakarta as a city that upholds the culture and art is appropriate for this research. Moreover the designation of Yogyakarta as Student City (*Kota Pelajar*) and as urban city, it attracts people to have desire to live in Yogyakarta. Thus, it could be found very diverse background of people. Nevertheless, although the arrival of many people in Yogyakarta, people will always respect on the culture of Yogyakarta. They still maintain their culture and not to be disappearing because of the influence of migrants or even immigrants that indirectly can influence culture in Yogyakarta. Regarding to the miscellaneous ethnics background in Yogyakarta, it will raise various perspective as well related to the tattooing practice that happens nowadays.

It is not specific in which part of Yogyakarta, yet I would like to conduct the research in several tattoo parlors in south part of Yogyakarta

and place that have very strong sense with tattoo. I found many tattooed people and already found several participant objects at many institutions as well. Then some tattooed people that will be participant object I found in another place randomly. I just try to combine all of them not from same background, which is social class considered in this research as well.

In this writing uses the references regarding to the study of tattooing practice. Beside that I conduct interview to know more the informants' life story. I started to interview during 25<sup>th</sup> March until 15<sup>th</sup> April; I interview either the object of research or supporting information to complete the data. Furthermore, I attended some discussion forums which give more information about both tattooing practice insight and meet some new people who can share about tattooing practice.

Visiting and observing in tattoo parlors is part of this method in the research as well. Observation is needed in this research as well because it is important to know the culture context in modernity, practice, and interaction of the participant in their religious everyday life. Regarding to support the data collection I already observed four tattoo parlors and conduct the discussion informally, and even one of them is part of my participant object. I used several occasions to chat with the tattoo artists informally, talking about tattoo and even some stories about their customers which could be part of my observation.

In this research finally I select seven tattooed Christians from various backgrounds. I choose the sample based on their religious background, which is what this research needs is tattooed Christians. Besides that, I choose related their tradition background which is more selected they who do not have kind of tattooing practice tradition. Based on those considerations of selecting the samples, I select these tattooed people; Karmila who work as blues singer; Elisabeth is tattoo artist, journalist; Abenego who works as barista in a coffee shop; Petrus who works as barista as well; Mike is graduate student; Alex who has clothing store and café; and Kenny, drummer in a independent group band in Yogyakarta and elementary school teacher. Based on the various backgrounds of the informants, it will collect very diverse or even similar but not the same data from them.

### **Biblical View on Tattooing Practice**

Related to the prohibition on tattooing practice, some Christian denominations use verses to legitimate their argument against tattooing practice. The most used verse to legitimate the prohibition on tattooing is in Leviticus 19: 28. Based on Iwai's writing, only in that verse which use the particular term 'tattoo' (2010: 149). Regarding to the use of Leviticus

19: 28, Hartley write about biblical commentary, which comments the use of verse of Leviticus 19: 28.

Verses Translation:

<sup>28</sup> *You shall not make gashes on your bodies for the dead. You shall not tattoo yourselves. I am Yahweh.*

Comment:

**28** The body is a marvelous creation of God. Its wholeness represents the beauty and perfection of holiness. Thus the body is to be kept whole. It is not to be intentionally harmed or marred in any way. Specifically prohibited is the pagan custom of lacerating the body as a means of mourning (cf. Deut 14:1; Jer 16:6; 41:5; 47:5; 48:37, which speak of Israelites gashing their bodies as part of their mourning rites). This practice was to increase one's sorrow. In Snaith's view (94), however, it was primarily done to offer blood to the departed spirit. A couple of texts from Ras Shamra speak about mourners lacerating themselves (UT 67 VI: 5-26; 62:1-29). In mourning for Baal, El the kind "cuts his skin with a razor; he cuts his cheeks and chin, he raked his arms with reed, he plowed his chest like a garden, he raked his back like a valley " (tr. M. Coogan, stories from Ancient Canaan [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966] 240-42). Laceration may have been included in the rites of Baalistic fertility worship, especially when Baal appeared to be deaf to the pleas of his followers (cf. 1 Kgs 18: 28).

Marking the body is also prohibited. While the exact meaning of (Hebrew letter) is unknown, it could refer either to making tattoos on the body or to painting the body. Painting the body was a pagan practice. Those preparing to attend a ritual painted their bodies (C. Gordon, the Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilization [New York: W. W. Norton, 1965] 136, 168). Elliger (263) thinks this was done to ward off spirits of the dead. Bodily markings also served as a sign of belonging to a certain cult (Noorrdtzi, 205).

Based on the interview with religious leader from Gereja Kristen Jawa Brayat Kinasih, Sundoyo interpret that if he see the passage of that verse is the prohibition of mourning and there is no have a big deal in term of tattoo. It is related to the culture of that time, which is the point in this verse is do not feel sadness in deeply. It identified that there is no hopeful life. That is what people do not allow.

For the second verse that utilized to legitimate prohibition on tattooing practice is in 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20. Barrett write about a

commentary on the first epistle to the Corinthians to comment what the bible say regarding to the verse 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20;

<sup>19</sup> or do you not know (for this ‘Paulinism’ cf. verse 16) that your body is the temple (or, shrine; cf. iii. 16) of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? Though the language at iii. 16 f. (see the notes) is similar the thought is different; there Paul thought of the community as the dwelling-place of the Spirit, whereas here, in closer agreement with the hellenistic parallels (for many examples see Weeiss), he thinks of the individual. There is no inconsistency between the two ways of using the metaphor; both are correct, and each is used in an appropriate context. When the unity and purity of the church are at stake Paul recalls that the church is the shrine in which the spirit dwells; when the unity and purity of the moral life of the individual are threatened, he recalls that the Spirit dwells in each Christian, who ought not therefore to defile the Spirit’s shrine. Stoic moralists argued very similarly (e.g. Epictetus, quoted on iii. 16); when the divine Spirit is understood to dwell in man not by nature but by grace, and is conceived in terms of the moral holiness of Christ, the argument gains reality and force.

### **An Aesthetic of Life**

Talking about the way of tattooed people show the meaning of tattoo as aesthetic matter is sounds like common opinion. Yet, indeed, it is kind of the way people express an art through perpetuate their idea on the body. It is like what Abednego sees about tattoo for him; he sees tattoo as an art. The first word that emerged when I asked what is tattoo for him; “art” is the answer. Why he consider tattoo as an art because he said that he cannot create any kinds of art work, though just a simple drawing. Thus, his love of art is expressed on his body to create the art in his own way. He makes himself become aesthetics. Even though he respond in a simple word, but it is the fact that tattoo cannot be far away from term of aesthetics, because it is part of art.

Regarding to what Abednego answer, it is little bit different answer when I asked to Mike ‘what is tattoo’ he answer tattoo is kind of self expression – including art – and identity. He told me about his father who is the professor in Indonesian Institute of Art; he published a book around 2001 – which I use it for my literature review – then Mike get influence on it through his father background. Based on his background which is constructed by his family who give him artistic atmosphere,

tattoo for Mike is kind of the media to express the best moment and story which it will be everlasting art work through tattooing his body.

As musician, Kenny has same idea as well to describe what is tattoo. Based on his story, actually he really loves art but his family does not allow him to take a part in term of art. Even though he is drummer in famous independent group band in Yogyakarta, but his family does not allow him to perform. His family just encourages him into academic matter; he follows what his family choice to teach as teacher in school, not to follow his passion as musician. Thus, for him art is very expensive matter; even though he has to pay expensive cost for his tattoo, he would pay it without complain. He believe in tattoo is everlasting stuff, so that, he would pay it, because it is worth it. One more answer about tattoo, based on his opinion, tattoo is not for showing in public space, it is kind of self satisfaction which is not an exhibition.

Different with Kenny, Petrus gets his parent's permission easily. His father said that if you want to get a tattoo, you have to responsible for what have you done. It is because related to stigma of tattooed person in social. Petrus examines the meaning of tattoo for himself; it is the expression of aesthetic. Tattoo is art. For him, tattoo is like an art of painting, but what make different is the material of canvas – it is common to use term of body canvas. The idea of tattooing his body to express aesthetic and art is because Petrus loves to paint. He usually paints on the wall – it is usually called mural. So that, he want his body is like canvas that can be painted aesthetically.

Karmila is as blues singer, said that she see tattoo as art, which art is associated as aesthetic. So that she wants to make her body gorgeous. Besides that, I found interesting statement from her; she said that she loves being hurt. Karmila told me, if you feel in difficult situation or you are depressed and give up on your life, you will look for your God, right? It means that she always thirst of His attendance. You get the lessons from your life, when you found problems, difficulties, you feel down, which are no friends want help you. So that if you want to success you have to be hurt firstly. It is like tattoo; you feel hurt when the process of tattooing until the healing, yet in the end you will find a beautiful art work on your skin. She said, "Beauty is pain."

Like what others' statement about what is tattoo, Alex said same thing to describe tattoo. Nevertheless, what makes his answer interesting is when he said that tattoo is an art, but not only art as usual. Tattoo for him is kind of media, which is a tool to communicate something; a tool that can actualize something, same like when people wear drawn t-shirt or written t-shirt. Tattoo for Alex is an art that can be media to share a goodsake. For instance, he told about his story when his non-Christian-friend asked

him about his tattoo which almost his entire tattoo is religious symbols, he start to explain the meaning of his tattoos one by one. It is kind of share Christian teaching to another religious affiliation which have no intention to convert, but just want to share about Christianity. For Alex tattoo is more than common art.

Sometimes, people say that tattoo is an art is too common thing which it associated with aesthetic matter. It seems that everybody know that tattoo is about artistic matter. Nevertheless, for some respondents explain – indeed – it is still related to art, not as simple as artistic matter, for them tattoo is beyond the art itself. It represents how life works for them through art.

### **Encounter Tattooing Practice Debate; Negotiating Tattoo prohibition**

Talking about tattoo that still become never ending debate, in this paper, tattooed people tries to encounter the prohibition on tattooing practice. They negotiate through the reason why they want get tattoos. Respondents want to encounter the prohibition through negotiating their religious symbol of their tattoo. Tattooed people already thought about the stigma that will be given to them. They have commitment as tattooed people as well.

Regarding to tattooing debate in Christianity that such blur and never ending debate, Mike responds about 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20 that used by people who against tattooing practice. He said that, “If your body is the temple of God, why not to decorate it.” Then when people ask, why do you destroy your body? He answer, tattoo is not kind of torture, indeed, it is hurt but it is not destroying practice. It will heal off the scar and the end will give beautiful result. It is not different when people wear saint t-shirt, what makes it different is tattoo will you bring until the end your life.

Regarding to the meaning of tattoo itself, Elisabeth has different answer from other respondents; she stated that tattoo is a commitment for her. Whatever the reason, tattoo is eternal. She get tattoo is kind of tool to remember meaningful moment in her life. Related to the prohibition on tattooing practice, Elisabeth’s response to Leviticus 19: 28 that used by people to legitimate the prohibition on tattooing practice; she had conducted a discussion through reading the Holy Bible and specific to the verses that used to legitimate the prohibition on tattooing practice. People who attended the discussion discuss about Leviticus 19: verse 28, they try to take a look through historical timeline. In that discussion explained that what kind of picture and symbol that categorized as idol worshiper, so that, if you make tattoo like that you are not Jesus followers. It is in

the context of that time, not for everlasting era actually, Elisabeth explain about what she already read and discuss in some discussions. Then about verse 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20, she said that if our body is the temple of Holy Spirit, why not to decorate it.

Regarding to respond about verses that used to legitimate tattooing practice prohibition, Alex as affiliation in one of Charismatic churches in Yogyakarta, he has interesting perspective which is rare among other Charismatic church people. People who follow Charismatic church teaching are more against tattooing practice, yet, different for Alex. For instance, his view about Leviticus 19: 28, he sees that verse not only talking about tattoo. Indeed, in English translation it is written 'tattoo' which in Hebrew written 'qaqqa'. Alex grasp that Leviticus in general is talking about idol worshipping in Israel. Israel was surrounded by nations deal with Occultism, which one of the rituals is incise on the flesh. That ritual indicates mourning practice of the death. Alex said that, based on his interpretation tattoo in Leviticus passage there is not related to tattooing practice itself, because in that context is talking about mourning practice at that time. Alex said that, if we read verse, we should read it the passage fully and try to see the context of the passage. Secondly, in verse 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20, Alex highlights 'your body is Holy Spirit'; he grasps in the verse's passage is not talking in term of tattooing matter. It does not talking about physical body, which actually that passage is talking about adultery matter.

### **The Creed Under the Skin**

When some denomination disagree related tattooing practice in Christianity, some tattooed people have they own reason to explain their commitment to get tatto and encourage them. Like what Mike said to me, to be tattooed person is kind of the creed as Christian. Committed becomes tattooed person through religious symbol is the way he commit the creed as Christian. Even though he is rare to come to Church, his tattoo becomes his reminder that he is a Christian who have to doing a goodness sake. Mike said that his religious symbol tattoo is the most pride tattoo for him; such kind of the pride becomes Christian. Based on Ammerman's writing, she argues that Everyday religion may happen in unpredictable places (2007: p. 9). Through tattoo that represents the creed as Christian for some tattooed people, it means that based on respondents story tell that they are religious in their own way.

Moreover, Kenny told his story about the first time he got an idea to get a tattoo. In the beginning he is kind of following their friends who has tattoo. Besides that at that time, he likes to listen to Christian metal core bands which the lyric very powerful for youth and their purpose to

moss for Christ. Then he has an idea to have a religious symbol of tattoo, he has lettering tattoo “Ave Maria” and three roses under the letters. Three roses mean three Holy Spirit. His tattoo placed in his chest, whenever it is Kenny stand for the creed as Christian.

Similar with Kenny, Petrus has religious symbol concept of his tattoo, almost entire of his tattoo has religious theme. In his back, he has Jesus Christ picture and lettering tattoo that say “Only God Guidance Conselor”. There are two picture of Holy Spirit that is pictured as two flying dove in his chest, then under the picture of Holy Spirits he has his Baptist name “Gregorius”. Those tattoos symbolize the identity as Christian and a form of the creed as Christian. And in the middle of interview, he said to me that he proud to be Catholic, and tattooed his body become the way to actualize the creed.

Different with others, Abednego is one of respondents who have no Christian symbol on his tattoo. He has religious symbol of Sidharta picture, – he is inspired of his peaceful teaching – but he has not had Jesus picture on his tattoo. Nevertheless, he feels guilty because he has many tattoos on his body, but he does not have any religious symbol on his body that identified a Christian. Then He said to me that for his next tattoo he wants to tattoo his body by Jesus picture or cross. I asked him why he wants kind of that picture and he answered: “I have many tattoos that are random picture when I want to make it, just make it and it happens. But, I am yearning of the existence of God in my life and I want that God can be embodied in my body.” It is the way he show his love to be Christian and as reminder or self-control to do goodness in his life.

For Elisabeth, tattoo is kind of commitment itself, she has religious concept on his right hand. It represents her life story; begin when she met her husband. It becomes the beginning of her life. She was Muslim, but after she met her husband and accompanies him in the church, Elisabeth feels comfortable and enjoy when she came inside the church. She refuses that she becomes Christian because of her husband already Christian, she claim that she truly find God in her way. So that is why she wants to record her story in tattoo. She has initial her name and his husband, then there are wings and phoenix which is represent second-birth. She also make his way of life in her arm, then the upper arm she has Jesus picture and lettering tattoo “prove of heaven”.

Similar with Elisabeth, Karmila has full-right-sleeve-tattoo which is associated as goodness. She intends to choose religious symbol for her right sleeve because she believes that she have to do goodness during her life. It becomes reminder, besides that she has full-left-sleeve-tattoo that represents the death. It is because her sleeve full of skull picture and she said that it is kind of reminder as well. I have been born and human



definitely will meet death. So that is why both sleeves are reminder for her life to do better, better and better life to face heaven. She chooses Virgin Mary in the top of sleeve; it represents her role as mother. Under Virgin Mary she has roses; it is dedicated to her mother. Rose is like her mother's name. Beside that on her wrist she has – both left and right – alfa omega symbol, which represent there is beginning and there is ending. Another tattoo is *ambigram* design which it can be read in two sides that are angel and devil. She said that, there is angel and devil in my hand. It represents that in human there is good and bad inside the body.

The last respondent, Alex has entire religious symbol of his tattoo. He uses his tattoo to actualize and use it as media to share with people. He is very excited if there are people that ask him why he has tattoo. He will happily tell them about Christianity, which is according to him Christian is not limited as religion, but Christianity is talking about decision to live like lived Christ.

According to Ammerman, everyday religion may be shaped as much by the everyday negotiations of living as a minority as by the institutions that seek to carry it forward (2007: 11). The respondents' story about the meaning of their religious symbol of tattoo is kind of everyday religion that wants to negotiate what Christian denominations which represent church as institution. Sometimes it makes tattooed people afraid to reach their religiosity through come to the church because of the judgmental matter. So that is why Ammerman concept used in this research to shape and encourages people to encounter religious non-expert within the tattooing debate.

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