

EXAMINING TATTOOING AS A FORM OF IDENTITY EXPRESSION AND INTERACTION PROCESS: ATATÜRK TATTOOING CASE

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ABSTRACT

Today, tattoos are used as a medium for reflecting individual opinions and ideas. Tattooing is perceived as a practice that differentiates individuals and demonstrates an identity or group affiliation. The main aim of this study is to understand the practice of tattooing Atatürk symbolisms in modern Turkey. The practice demonstrates and communicates the important ideology of Kemalism. Atatürk tattoos (signatures, portraits etc.) are a legitimate way of social and political identity expression. In other words, a symbolic reflection of the Kemalist or secular identity.

To better understand the relationship between meaning and interaction as it relates to Atatürk tattoos, twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with people in Istanbul. The focus of the study is to examine what impact having an Atatürk tattoo has on the individuals' experiences. Therefore, the main questions are focused on the process of acquiring, owning, and exhibiting of an Atatürk tattoo in a social milieu. The majority of interviewees were influenced about getting an Atatürk tattoo until it was brought to their attention by people close to them, or societies they are part of. Even though interviewees have stated that they do not care about other people's opinions, they especially have a tendency to conceal their tattoo in their business life and this practice indicates that the Atatürk tattoo bearer may be considered to possess a potentially discrediting or stigmatizing attribute.

Keywords: tattoo, Atatürk, identity expression, body politics, interaction process

INTRODUCTION

The practice of tattooing has undergone an impressive transformation in recent years. Once considered a practice associated with lower classes of society, it is now practiced throughout a broad variety of social class. Independent from classes in societies or centuries, tattoos are a form of communication. Benson referred to tattoos as “scars that speak” (Benson 2000, 237). Tattoos are signs that give clues about one’s self to others. Further, when people notice a tattoo, they also respond to it, try to classify, interpret, and give a meaning to it. However, tattoos are also ambiguous. Hancocks identifies the ambiguity about the appearance and meaning of tattoos as “[u]nless the bearer actually speaks Ming Dynasty Cantonese, how can they be sure that the beautiful symbols actually convey greetings of harmony?” (Hancocks 2005, 357).

The aim of this paper is to understand the decisions revolving around why to get a tattoo, as well as where to get a tattoo on the body. Furthermore, the issues of becoming tattooed and how this decision impacts relationships with other people will be addressed. Since obtaining an Atatürk tattoo (portraits, his signature etc.) is new and popular in Turkey, Atatürk tattoos were selected as a specific case to be analysed. More importantly, and what this study desires to reveal, are the standpoints, the action, and reaction of people using Atatürk tattoos to communicate. This study will examine how people with tattoos communicate their self-expressions using the lens of symbolic interaction theory. In even simpler terms, what meaning could an Atatürk tattoo convey to its bearer and for the rest of the community?

This paper concentrates on the relationship between meaning and interaction as it relates to tattoos. Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with people in İstanbul that have Atatürk tattoos and are of different ages and occupations. The main aim of the study is to examine what impact having an Atatürk tattoo made on the individuals’ experiences. Therefore, the main questions are focused on the process of acquiring, owning, and exhibiting an Atatürk tattoo as it relates to interaction with others.

This paper will begin with a brief historical view associated with tattooing and an explanation of the body as an instrument. It will be shown that tattooing is thoroughly accepted nowadays within Turkish culture. The next section will try to analyse the relationship

between one's tattoo and how people view their "self" and how others view them. Then the theoretical background of research findings will be presented. Finally, the paper will end with a discussion of where the questions of the study match with the general literature.

HISTORY OF TATTOOS

It has been discussed that tattooing has existed in many cultures for thousands of years (Koch et al. 2005) and that tattooing is the most ancient and broadly adapted form of long-lasting body alteration (Sanders 1988). Tattooed mummies such as the Pazyryk mummies (sixth to second century B.C.) and the recently discovered 5000-year-old ice man found near the Alps (Armstrong 1991; Schildkrout 2004) are evidences that tattooing existed in ancient cultures.

Looking at the history of tattooing, in various communities tattooing has had different usages and meanings. For instance, the Greeks marked slaves and criminals with an explanation of their crimes tattooed on their foreheads (Gay and Whittington 2002). The Chinese used tattooing as a punishment and marked the outcasts of society (Gilbert 2000). The Japanese used tattooing for decorative purposes on the body (Brain 1979). In New Zealand, Maori tribes used tattoos to signify braveries and to disclose social status within tribal groups. The Maori also used tattoos to depict their ancestral lineage and rank in society (Doss and Ebesu 2009). In Paraguay, tattoos are used as a tribal distinction (Doss and Ebesu 2009). Based upon these usages and meanings, it is clear that tattooing was used as a communication practice in different contexts and periods in human history. In parallel with these usages, although a scant attention has been paid to tattooing practices in Anatolia in terms of historical perspective, some studies clearly show that tattooing was also used with traditional purposes and practices. To give an example, there were some evidences that henna was used for good luck, to protect against bad spirits in Çatal Höyük during the seventeenth century BC (Scheinfeld 2007). Furthermore, some studies indicate that the migratory cultures in Anatolia such as the Turkmens, Arabs, Kurds, Karaçis, and Sazmantus, applied tattoos for communicative purposes in both personal and communal levels (Serdaroğlu 2013). For instance, to indicate the position of a person in a community, preserving health and curing diseases, symbols of belonging, aristocracy and tribes and sexuality, fertility and beauty are some of the purposes tattooing was used for (Erim 2011).

Although the practice of tattooing has become a modernized phenomenon in today's world, in the beginning, it was considered as something adopted by lower class of society, for instance, sailors, prisoners, gang members and outlaws (Atkinson and Young 2001). In the 1800s tattooing became popular among the aristocratic community (Irwin 2001) and in the early 1900s tattooing continued to be considered as something adopted by lower-class community (Govenar 2000). By the middle of the twentieth century, people who had tattoo(s) were viewed as marginal, unreliable, and dangerous (Sanders 1985). While tattooing has been linked with a certain group of people, it has also been linked with a certain type of person. These people, by tattooing themselves willingly, presented a "mark of otherness" which was associated with criminality, mental illness, and abnormality (Kosut 2000). However, as a consequence of modernization, the practice of tattooing and its usage also transformed significantly in the twentieth century. For instance, over the years as more and more people from the middle-class community were tattooed and various artists who had formal art training became interested in this craft or profession, tattoos received new consideration and admiration (Schildkrout 2004). Thus, it is natural to see tattooing as a modernized phenomenon, dramatically ruptured from its historical context, which also incorporates a traditional perspective into a modernist one. Accordingly, tattooing is not linked with lower class society anymore in today's world, on the contrary, it is directly associated with the middle class and is evaluated as a modernized "traditional" phenomenon.

Even the academic interest about tattooing in Turkey is still at an embryonic level. Recent studies have shown that the tattooing practices in Turkey became an important phenomenon within the Turkish public sphere especially after the 1980s, which can be considered as the years when modernized and westernized life practices began to be deeply embedded in Turkish society due to the neo-liberal policies that were widely in use. In other words, westernized or globalizing cultural practices like tattooing or other performative practices that are based on consuming habits and personal interests had limited influence on the public and private spheres of Turkey until the 1980s. This is definitely related to the economic structure and politics of Turkey until the 1980s. After the military coup in 1980, the economical politics and approach of Turkey dramatically changed and neo-liberal policies began to appear in every aspect of Turkish society. In this era, westernized and global consumption patterns, which are directly based on capitalist and economic globalization, began to appear in the public and private spheres of Turkish

society. Admittedly, this can be evaluated as the second radical rupture from “tradition” in terms of a modernist perspective for the Turkish Republic after the reforms of Mustafa Kemal during the founding years of the Turkish Republic to create a holistic and national identity as a consequence of western oriented policies, in which he underlines these efforts as “attaining the levels of modern civilization” (Tanil 2003). In parallel with the effects of the neo-liberal politics of Turkey, which have been occurring since the 1980s, the practice of tattooing in the context of western practices has begun to become more prevalent in the everyday life practices of Turkish citizens since the end of the 1990s. During this period, tattooing is generally associated with western tattoo practices like music band tattoos, political images, and personal interests. In this sense, Mustafa Kemal tattoos began to appear in large numbers on the bodies of some Turkish citizens during this time. According to Turkoz (2014), the underlining reason why some sections of Turkish citizens used their bodies as a way to disclose a political message is directly related to the results of the 1990 and 1994 political elections, in which Islamic political parties won in landslide fashion. Hence, for Yegenoglu (2007), this political support for Islamic parties in Turkey’s nonreligious public spheres, which were shaped through Kemalist reforms, also increased the concerns of Kemalists and nationalists about Islamists becoming the vital power in the social, cultural, and political life of Turkey.

Consequently, tattoos have represented personal histories, thoughts, feelings, and memories of people for many centuries. It is a timeless and constant way of communicating to the outside world. But the message of a tattoo may not be perceived by others as the bearer intended. As aforementioned, there is scant literature about tattoo usage in Anatolia during ancient times. Also, there are very limited academic studies about recent tattoo images in Turkey. Especially, there is no data about the number of tattooed people in Turkey or no studies have been done to analyse the sociological and psychological aspects of Turkish tattoo bearers. Nevertheless, the observations indicate that tattooing has become popular among Turkish citizens in recent years. The proliferation of tattoo studios can be verification of this claim. The aim of this paper is to understand the decisions revolving around why to get tattoos, as well as where on the body to get the tattoo. The study especially focuses on Atatürk tattoos (portraits, his signature etc.). In addition, becoming tattooed and how this body art impacts interaction and relationship with other people will be analysed. This research question will be examined with the help of the symbolic interactionism theory perspective.

ATATÜRK TATTOOS

The omnipresence of Atatürk in Turkey is a well-known but may not be such a noticed fact among Turkish citizens. Everyday spaces in Turkey contain various forms of Atatürk symbolism – statues, busts, pictures, and paintings are everywhere, as well as bridges, roads, avenues, cultural centres, streets, etc. are named after him. These structures and names greet the citizens every day. People are so used to living with a background image of Atatürk that these images go unnoticed most of the time. However, the tattooing of Atatürk images (portraits, his signature etc.) on Turkish people is a relatively new practice that has gained popularity in recent years. It is believed that the political power and public visibility of Islam in Turkey at the end of the 1980s and successes in the 1994 local elections, and the 1999, 2002, 2007, 2011, 2015 general elections are the significant points which should be highlighted in the current study. Accomplishments of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) in Turkey have caused some people to develop a more obsessive attachment to symbols of modern, secularist Turkey.

What makes Atatürk a common centre of interest as far as the mass mania of conspicuity is concerned? Why do people obsessively identify themselves with the “Father of the Turkish Republic”? Why do they somehow feel engrossed and trapped in the majestic image of a great figure? It would not be erroneous to claim that Atatürk has been meticulously conserved in the collective memory of the Turkish citizens since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The creation of the Atatürk myth was not an unfounded fallacy as it has been generated through generations, in an ascending parabola, since the early 1920s. Atatürk pioneered a rarely-witnessed social, political, cultural, military and administrative changes within the newly founded Republic which was the fruit of an almost 150-years of a reformation period. His merits are concentrated in his extraordinary ability to transform a highly conservative, oriental, closed, extremely patriarchal, religious, xenophobic society into a secular, occidental, egalitarian, free, and open society. He drew a portrait of himself through his extraordinary intellectual, military and personal merits which gradually turned to be a perfect example for the whole society: an intelligent polyglot, an astonishing bookworm, a realist strategist, an admirable dancer, an exemplary statesman, a patient reformer...

According to Yeğenoğlu, from the Kemalist perspective, modernization is understood as the secularization and westernization in Turkey. Since secularization and westernization are associated with

modernization, modernization is considered as a final end (Yeğenoğlu 2007). Yeğenoğlu claims that supporters of Kemalist ideology evaluated the level of civilization according to the accomplishment level of modernization and westernization in different part of life.

Navaro-Yashin (2002) examined the image of Atatürk in her study and she referred to Atatürk as a sign of separation from religion in Turkey.

Özyürek (2004) argues that when Islam was promoted, Atatürk symbolism became privatized. However, Özyürek explains the increasing visibility of Atatürk symbolism as a commercial activity.

Nilüfer Göle (1997) referred to the continuous conflict between Secularism and Islamism in Turkey and she states that this conflict is not solely contained to the political arenas; it is also an important issue in the community. For this reason, people use their bodies in a political way to disclose their tendencies, such as through a veil or tattoo. She also says that modernizing and westernizing reforms have had a significant effect on public and private spheres and this influence has allowed Turkish citizens to self-(re)define themselves.

In light of these explanations, Atatürk tattoos are an interactive performance that are displayed on the body and create a sense of belonging and emphasize group identity. The public displaying of a tattoo is used to differentiate oneself from others (Simmel 1950). These tattoos differentiate people politically from each other and create various social dynamics that impact Turkish society.

It is important to briefly emphasize how the authors explain secularism and Islam in the Turkish community and this can highlight why people prefer to have an Atatürk tattoo. There are many studies that try to explain the national, ethnic, and religious identity connection in the current context of Turkey, it is decided to refer some of the evaluations of various authors about what an Atatürk image is and what secularism means in Turkey.

BODY AND SELF-EXPRESSION

Along with the social, cultural, political, and technological changes, the body and its embodiment experiences have become more considerable and apparent than ever before in academia. The spread of plastic surgery or tattooing has created new sociological research areas about the body and its embodiment. In this sense, recent studies clearly show the body and embodiment relationship from different sociological perspectives, including gender, race, and death. For instance, Turner (1984) and Synnot (1993) show that bodies are

gendered. Calefato (2004) highlights the body as a fashioned “thing”. In a more complex way, Demello (2000) examines that body is a customized phenomenon by tattoos or increasingly appearing other body customization practices in contemporary societies. Accordingly, these studies consider the body as a social subject and clearly indicate the role of the body as a way of communication in various contemporary sociological contexts and interests. In parallel with the current interest in academia, this study also considers the body as a socially constructed rather than a static object and as a vehicle of communication in social interactions and tries to examine how the body is constructed through tattoos as a way of personal expression.

Although the body is considered as a given and a passive object in natural sciences, it can be evaluated as a socially constructed phenomena and a determinative factor in everyday life practices. For instance, as Baudrillard (Waskul 2006) states, the body is the site where social relations directly occur. For Baudrillard, it is not an authentic and passive “object” anymore in contemporary consumer culture. Consistent with Baudrillard, Giddens (Waskul 2006) states that the body is the way of personal expression in man’s ongoing “identity project”. According to him, the body is the reflection of our individuality as well as our group affiliations. He thinks that the human body is a part of the sphere of modern culture, not a part of nature anymore. For Foucault, the body is a social phenomenon that is ideologically and culturally constructed by historical power relations on an ongoing basis. He claims that the body is constituted through the regimes of discourse and power. Thus, the body is repressed and transmuted and cannot be separated from the regimes of discourse and power. Furthermore, Goffman (1959) also considers the body as a place for exposing the self in modern communities. According to him, the body is not an organic phenomenon; on the contrary, it is a performed character – which is continuously constituted in different contexts of everyday life – that is metaphorically presented to different audiences. Based on these theoretical frameworks, just as it is clear to see the body as a socially constructed phenomenon and a determinative factor in social relations, it is clear that the idea about the body as an objectified, customized phenomenon or a source of communication and signification, is based on different practices like fashion, tattoos, or hair styles. Therefore, tattoos or other body customization tools are important practices for analysing how the body is constructed and used for different aims such as a method of personal expression.

In this sense, the recent studies by symbolic interaction theorists argue that the body is one of the most important signification or communication sources, which occurs through social interactions (Vanini 2004). The studies are theoretically based on socio-semiotic interactionism, an approach that depends on an assumption that the body and its meanings are constructed through human interactions; the issue of how the mutual communication takes place through various interactions with different bodies on both contextual and theoretical levels is also handled (Vanini 2004). For instance, Zilman (1991) mentions that the body takes, metaphorically or not, its physical and existential forms through other bodies. He identifies this as mediated body – a body is shaped and constituted with the intentions or personality traits of other bodies. Sanders (1985) also analyses the tattoos on the human body by using symbolic interactionism theory. In light of his observations, he accepts the body as a vehicle of communication and puts forward the idea that the body has got not only physical aspects, but it also has different characteristics, which are based on human interactions, like being an aesthetic object, a canvas for resistance against social control, or a vehicle of communication. More recently, Benthall and Polhemus (1975) state that bodies are a sort of personal expression device, more specifically a medium, for expressing mental or emotional states. These studies certainly accept the body as socially constructed and as a subject occurring through social and human interactions in terms of communicative circumstances.

In short, although the recent studies focus on the mutual relation between the body and human interactions within the symbolic interactionism framework, the ontological relation of the body in a political (Atatürk) context has remained underexplored. Hence, this study develops an understanding about the body in the context of meaning production by focusing not only on the body as a fieldwork, but also concentrating on the body as a socially constructed phenomenon. Furthermore, this article will not only analyse the Atatürk tattoos, but also evaluate how the Atatürk tattoos have become a message on the human body as a consequence of social interaction. In this regard, this study offers a conceptual approach to analyse Atatürk tattoos by utilizing symbolic interactionism, which basically begins with the argument that human beings and communities are co-dependent and connected, and both are established through shared meanings. Symbolic interaction come out as an effort to comprehend social life through stimulus response. Therefore, the goal of the research is to understand the symbolic practices that make a shared reality possible (Pascale 2011).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND TATTOO

As in many other communication mediums, tattoos have also developed a new kind of language that necessitates attention, especially in the Turkish community. To initiate and maintain communication in a community, the tattoo bearer has to have an idea of what kind of message can a tattoo carry and disclose, and at the same time, understand the possible implications a tattoo can create on other people. A significant point to keep in mind is that this message may vary from person to person, as each tattoo may expand, constrict or rediscover language. Then it is possible to talk about the language of tattoos as well as certain messages that tattoos are used in. From this, the explanation of symbolic interaction of tattoos is seemingly in need.

The term “symbolic interactionism” was coined by Blumer (1969), to explain and develop the ideas of George Herbert Mead. Symbolic interaction theory perceived self as a social entity instead of as a psychological entity. Human behaviour is considered a social behaviour that comprises social acts. The individual is considered as active and creative in symbolic interactionism. This perspective concentrates on interaction and meaning. This theoretical approach lays special emphasis on how individuals interpret others, themselves, and their situations. Proceeding from this explanation, people act toward things based on meanings that they have developed for those things through interaction (Burke 1999; Charon 1992). In light of this explanation, people who have a cross or Virgin Mary tattoo are defined as religious, and the tattoo bearer also wants to emphasize the importance of religion for herself/himself.

Mead (1934) gives high importance to the self as a fluid and dynamic process that changes over time. Self is a significant entity in the theory. Mead considered self as a flexible, dynamic and reflexive entity that alters over time. Mead denoted “self” as both a subject and an object. In other words, self can observe and communicate with oneself and respond to oneself as others would. Consequently, self is a social origin entity and is directly affected by communication (Stryker and Serpe 1994). What this may mean for tattoo communication is that the relation between the tattoo itself and the message associated with that tattoo could transform feedback between the tattoo and the tattoo bearer. In other words, people learn more about others by watching them. People also learn more about themselves in the same way as well. Tattoo bearers, like Atatürk tattoo bearers,

distinguish their body and themselves from others (such as, Islamic people), and having such a tattoo has a deep and important impact on her/his interactions. People constantly engage in an interpretation and evaluation process from one situation to another; the meaning of these situations depends on people's interpretations and evaluation of them. An Atatürk tattoo has become a key component of the bearer's identity and their behaviour will change in accordance to who they come into contact with, another Atatürk tattoo bearer or people who do not have Atatürk tattoos.

During the internalization process, the explanations of third parties and our reactions are internalized, likewise we talk and listen to ourselves in the same way that we talk and listen to third parties. Mead refers to us as "I" and "Me", to form the basis of our self. This is a way to know ourselves and how we interact with ourselves. Although the primary interaction process of symbolic interactionism is based on face to face communication, this is named as the internalization process, sociology scholars of the body have claimed that nonverbal communication also fits in with the explanation of process of internalization (Schilling 2002). People can learn a lot from the response they received from others. In fact, when people discuss and evaluate responses and reactions, they go through an internalization process.

To have a tattoo is a conscious and deliberate decision (Bell 1999; Sweetman 1999). People either prefer to tattoo themselves or not. There is a plethora of evidence that some group of people get inked just to display their identity. For instance, prisoners, gang members (Bell 1999; Cronin 200), religious groups, etc. (Stevens 1992). Atkinson and Young asserted that the body is an "evocative social text" (Atkinson and Young 2001, 119) or "a bill board to be displayed socially" (Atkinson and Young 2001, 128). Clearly, tattoos have been used in an informative way. Further, tattoos may be located on relatively hidden parts of one's body or they may be located on more visible parts of one's body. Thus, it is important to emphasize that tattoos have the potential to be seen as a communicative tool and used for communicative intentions. People who prefer to have their tattoos on a visible part of their body are aware that others might notice their tattoos easily and form decisions about them. Roughly speaking, visible tattoos have more communicative value. This does not mean that, when a tattoo is in a concealed part of the body, it does not have communicative value. Actually, concealed tattoos also have communicative value. However, limited people are aware of them and may form a decision or a judgment about it.

It seems possible to approach symbolic interactionism theory in terms of tattoo visibility. To do that one needs to analyse the theory from the perspectives of meaning and symbolism. Blumer (1969) explained symbolic interaction theory based on three main propositions (Poloma 1993):

1. People act toward things with regards to the meaning that those things represent to them.
2. As a result of interaction people infer meaning.
3. Interpretation changes the meaning.

In light of the above items, we realize that meaning is the centre of human behaviour according to symbolic interactionism. Symbols alter the social relations of people and people give meaning to symbols and try to explain these meanings with the help of language (Tye and Tye 1992). Consequently, symbols are the main point of communication. Symbolic interactionism includes the understanding and explaining of actions because symbolic meanings might have different denotations for everyone. This explanation can be evaluated from the tattoo perspective. Tattoos also lead to the comprehension of what other people find important or meaningful. As mentioned earlier, tattoos are also a way to create meaning and a way to understand what is meaningful to others. Tattoos can have various meanings among different groups. A person with a visible Atatürk tattoo may believe that the tattoo is an expression of belief in Atatürk's principles and reforms or is a sign of a loyal supporter of Atatürk, but the same Atatürk tattoo might be accepted as a sign of rebellion or perceived as unreligious when praying in the mosque with others. Therefore, concealing a tattoo may be explained with the symbolic interactionist approach by aiming to reduce a role conflict. Having a concealable tattoo provides an opportunity to move in and out of different roles easily. People who have concealed tattoos may abstain from exposing their tattoos in some groups, in order not to hear something like "I didn't see you like that" or some similar phrases, which affect their relationship with others in a negative way.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims at understanding the social construction of the human body through tattoos as a way of personal expression. For that purpose, the study focuses on the critical relationship between the human body and its embodiment. As Goffman (1959) points out, the human body is central to interaction with its various discourses and shared meanings. The body not only enables people to engage

in social encounters, but also connects with and differentiates from the flow of habitual activities and relationships with one's social identity. More specifically, Shilling (2002) also highlights that postures, gestures or other personal expressions are bodily activities that are imposed by society. Thus, the human body is the main fieldwork and site of this study and Atatürk tattoos will be analysed in terms of their communicative purpose. For these reasons, the data is analysed in two steps. Firstly, this study tries to reveal the emic meanings of the participants about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and lastly focuses on the human body and embodiment relations with regards to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk references which have been examined in the first step of the analysis.

The bodily human practices in contemporary societies generally occur through symbols, words, or other personal activities. All these practices are important in making the connection between one's self-identity and one's social identity (Goffman, 1959). For that reason, it is important to analyse the human body in terms of its bodily appearance. Thus, the main research method used in the first phase, which was also the "physical" fieldwork of the study, is the semi-structured in-depth interviews with the participants who have Atatürk tattoos. This research also gives an opportunity to grasp how the emic meanings of the participants occurred and were shaped through the symbols of Kemalist ideology. In this regard, having an Atatürk tattoo and the visibility of these tattoos on the human body were the two main criteria in selecting participants for this study. These criteria are expected to reveal the emic meaning of participants about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the usage of tattoos as a way of human embodiment. In addition to this, the literature also supports the fact that face-to-face interviews are still a better way to understand "the other" (Davis 1982). In this context, the study is conducted via open-ended questions asked face-to-face in interviews with twenty persons that have tattoos on their bodies. The interview questions guided participants to talk about their Atatürk tattoo experiences, details about their tattoos, and how they view Atatürk. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

In-depth interviews, visual analysis, and participatory observations with people who have tattoos on their body demonstrate to what extent they can directly be associated with the embodied ethnography of human bodies. In order to analyse the Atatürk tattoos, we also need an understanding of the participants' cultural and ideological habitus that their environment is surrounded by. In this sense, given the exploratory nature of the study, qualitative research methods were also employed to analyse how tattoos are reproduced on the

human body as a way of expression. As Blumer (1969) explained, symbolic interactionism is determined by analytic induction techniques, which both depend on inductive logic and empirical proof in localized frameworks. Mostly, symbolic interactionists use textual and visual analysis and ethnography participant observation, life history, unstructured interviews and focus groups as well. Therefore, this study is methodologically based on in-depth interviews and visual analysis adopted to analyse the human body as fieldwork or as a participant of the research. Therefore, embodied ethnography provides us a more holistic understanding not only about tattoos on the human body, but also about a social construct that appears through social interactions. Following this line of argumentation, visual analysis is another major method for data collection in this research. It is employed to examine the symbolic meanings of tattoos and the social context that surrounds and shapes them. With reference to this examination, the symbols, images, or words of the tattoos are analysed to illuminate the use of one's body as a way of making the connection between one's self-identity and social identity.

During the interviews, in order to relax the participants and conduct the interviews in a chat-like atmosphere, warm and amiable interview questions, i.e. the order of questions were not rigorously followed, were asked to the participants. When interviewees went off topic, the interviewer interrupted them to manage and maintain a continuous interview.

Most of the people who were asked to meet for an interview first asked whether this was a political study or not, and which side I was on. Since most of the participants do not want to join a political study, a detailed explanation about the aim of the study was given to them. Moreover, it was highlighted that the participant's personal information will not be published anywhere. It was believed that this is a very interesting finding.

Participants were allowed to choose the location in which the interviews would take place, as well as the time and date. All participants chose public spaces such as local cafes or coffee houses like Starbucks. Participants were not given any prize or fee for participating in the study, in most cases only a drink was payed for their participation. In some cases, participants themselves offered drinks to the interviewer. All the interviews were begun at the beginning of 2018 and completed until the end of the year.

Mostly, the selection of the participants was based on the Atatürk groups on Facebook such as, Atatürk dövmesi.com, Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK Dövmesi Olanlar!, Atatürk Dövmesi Yaptırmak

İsteyen Kaç Kişiyiz?, Atam dövmesi olanlar. An email was sent to every Atatürk group member on Facebook. The study was explained by email, and they were given a phone number to contact the author. Most of the people first wanted to see the questionnaire and then either accepted to be a part of the study or asked not to be contacted again. When the interviewer tried to contact them again, they did not respond to the emails. 75 emails were sent and only 16 people accepted to be a part of the study. The remaining four participants were reached through acquaintances. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 42. Four of participants are females and sixteen are males. In the analysis section, real names and ages of the participants are given in parentheses.

ANALYSIS

ATATÜRK MEANS ...

Through human interaction, meanings of things are created over time (Blumer 1969). For symbolic interaction, the origin of meaning is collective. It is not something that can be detected and determined individually. This is the most significant point for symbolic interaction and this point differentiates symbolic interaction from analytic realism in which a table is seen as a table in and of itself. In symbolic interaction, objects and events are never solely a backdrop for interaction. According to Mead (1934) people do not just imagine the probable positions of others. People also imagine the objects and places with which they have an interaction. Therefore, inanimate objects can be considered to have a type of agency or they have a duty on effects of human responses and interactions (Pascale 2011).

According to the interview results, Atatürk tattoo bearers evaluated Atatürk as follows:

"[...] I am a big fan of Atatürk, I have an emotional attachment to him. Atatürk is a patriotic and foresighted leader. If I were under the same conditions as him, I would behave in the same way. Atatürk has left us a beautiful future [...]." (Emre, 41)

"[...] Over the years I realized that Atatürk is a führer and the Turkish community caused it to be so. My sign sensitivity changes but I am still concerned with giving a message with my tattoo. However, Mustafa Kemal is still a real leader for me [...]." (Can, 28)

"[...] I believe Atatürk is a hero and idol and that's why I want to have an Atatürk tattoo. I am supporting republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism and reformism and Atatürk is the best way to express support for these principles [...]." (Özkan, 28)

"[...] Atatürk is a timeless and endearing leader. I believe Atatürk is the only sufficient answer to the AKP and AKP's potency. I believe Atatürk is a symbol of equality, unity and progress [...]." (Sevginar, 42)

"[...] Atatürk means freedom, leadership, being the face against injustice, respect for people, modesty [...]." (İsmail, 38)

"[...] Atatürk means love, great people, a great leader, everything to me [...]." (Afra, 45)

Generally, participants assessed Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a great leader and they consider him to be one of the most important figures in the history of the Turkish Republic. Based on this argument, it was observed that the participants' relationship with Atatürk is established based on emotional metaphors.

A collective identity may have been first assembled by different people, for example, as in the case of the Atatürk tattoo bearer group in the Facebook communities. Collective identity relies on certain agreements and approvals by those to whom it is applied. Collective identities are declared in cultural materials-names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, etc. Different from ideology, collective identity bears positive feelings for other members of the group. It means to be a group, and the meaning of a community consists of symbols, icons, etc. Besides, these icons or symbols of the community are one of the key elements that make it one.

From the above quotations we realize that the participants define Atatürk through common words such as "great leader", "justice", "secularism", "republic", etc. Although these words do not provide conformity among the participants, they can be evaluated as the symbolic domain of Atatürk in Turkish society.

As a result of interviews with Atatürk tattoo bearers, Atatürk is considered as a public figure that has had a significant impact on communal and social life. In this context, participants defined Atatürk through common expression. Participants have established their relationships with Atatürk over emotional messages. Therefore, in terms of the internal and social relations of the participants, Atatürk has become the main determinant in the relationship between their body and their Atatürk tattoos.

IMPACT OF OTHERS

Whether formally structured or not, social institutions can also form and develop one's identity (Gubrium and Holstien 2003) such as a group of friends who have Atatürk tattoos and gather frequently to chat. Even if someone refers to oneself in an individualized sense

with terms such as “I” or “me,” these labels are passively taken into consideration in a social context (Gergen 2007). In other words, we cannot distinguish ourselves from our related and close environment in which they (Atatürkist, Kemalist, secular etc.) are developed:

“[...] I am a member of Kuvayi Milliye society and people in that community have had a serious impact on me to understand and love Atatürk. For us, Atatürk is a sign of nationalism. And most of the people in my society have an Atatürk tattoo. When I saw these people’s tattoos I decided to get one [...]” (Tolga, 42)

“[...] I graduated from Gazi University. During my university life my patriotism was further increased by the effect of my friends in university. My friends had a serious influence on me to get an Atatürk tattoo because 7 out of 10 of my friends have an Atatürk tattoo or an Atatürk and Turkish flag tattoo [...]” (Ercan, 28)

“[...] I learned the values and thoughts of Atatürk from my parents. All my family members are active participants in the Kemalist Thought Association and most of the people around me have an Atatürk tattoo. Even my father has an Atatürk portrait on his left bicep. I have an Atatürk signature tattoo on my left arm [...]” (Hasan, 25)

“[...] like Pınar I decided to get an Atatürk tattoo after Gezi. Actually, I did not have an idea to get an Atatürk tattoo. However, I went to the tattoo studio with Pınar and I said to myself why don’t I get one? I can say that she is the one who inspired me to get an Atatürk tattoo [...]” (Beyza, 31)

The common basic message is as follows: the interaction process both shapes and constructs what we think of as the self. Sanders (1988) argues that tattoos are symbols of being a member of an unconventional social group and these groups apply their own practices and beliefs to its members to follow. The above quotations also support the explanation about the impact of other people in getting an Atatürk tattoo.

ATATÜRK AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL

Individual identity is inevitably associated with physical appearance. People alter or decorate their bodies and form behaviours in order to disclose information about themselves as efficiently and quickly as possible. Physical modifications (clothing or any type of physical alteration) allow people to alter their roles according to the expectations of the surrounding environment (Goffman 1959, 78). Decisions or judgments made by others according to this appearance provide a basis for social interaction (Kruglanski et al. 1993). The

concept of “embodied sociology” is analysing identity development as a physical manifestation from an outcome-based standpoint. Further, the main focus point of analysis is to reveal how individuals express themselves nonverbally instead of through verbal cues (Goffman 1959). The Atatürk tattoo design choice particularly reflects both individuality and an identity with a particular group. It serves as a means of personally connecting with others who recognize Atatürk and share the values that Atatürk’s principles and reforms embody. Some participants want to declare with their Atatürk tattoos that they are the protectors of the Republic of Turkey:

“[...] No one can disturb this republic easily when we are here is the message that I want to give with my tattoo [...].” (Ismail, 28)

“[...] I believe Atatürk is the only sufficient answer to the AKP and AKP’s potency [...].” (Sevginar, 42)

And some of them considered their tattoo as an indication of their life style:

“[...] People mostly view my tattoo as Atatürk’s signature but I believe it is an indication of my lifestyle like Kung Fu. Kung Fu is a kind of a lifestyle for the Chinese and Atatürk is a life style for me [...].” (Samet, 23)

Some of the participants mentioned that they do not care what other people think about their tattoos and some of them said that they are ready to handle any problems their tattoos may cause:

“[...] this tattoo expresses who I am and if I face any problem or trouble just because of my tattoo I am ready to handle it [...].” (Samet, 23)

“[...] I always waited for someone to say something negative about my tattoo, so I can beat them up. However, such a thing has never happened yet [...].” (Ismail, 28)

“[...] I do not care what other people say or think. Besides, I am ready to handle every type of problem and trouble [...].” (Tolga, 42)

“[...] I believe to have an Atatürk tattoo is something personal and this is nobody’s business [...].” (Afra, 45)

As a result of being in contact with others (assumedly non-tattooed or religious people), people were faced with both positive and negative reactions. According to Sanders people who have received negative reactions frequently are more careful about “whom they reveal their tattoos to” (Sanders 1988, 419). Most of the answers of the interviewees do not directly match with the explanation of Sanders. Because, most of the interviewees mentioned that they are ready to face and handle any negative response about their tattoo from other people. They just prefer to conceal their tattoos in a

business environment. However, according to the answers, interviewees are more afraid of being perceived as a rebel, rather than receiving a negative reaction. Although, interviewees gave very different responses, generally, it was understood that they prefer to expose their tattoos rather than hide them.

The quotations below try to analyse why interviewees deem Atatürk as a communication tool:

"[...] I decided to get an Atatürk tattoo after Gezi. I wanted to say or show that this country is not without a protector. I went to Taksim from the first day to the last day during Gezi and I helped people, people helped me, we shared so many emotional and unforgettable moments together. I learned to share so many things during those days. I guess during that time I understood the importance of Turkey and what Atatürk tried to do. Furthermore, I realized that I really hate the AKP government and I decided to get an Atatürk tattoo as a sign of rebellion against their dictatorship [...]" (Pınar, 31)

"[...] Atatürk is a sign of rebellion and modesty for me. I am proud to carry his signature on me because he was an educated, foreseeing leader. He challenged Islamic people and changed the destiny of the Turkish people. We can do the same thing again. We can break the light bulbs¹ [...]" (Hasan, 25)

"[...] Atatürk gave us this beautiful country as a gift. I believe as a Turkish young person I should also fight to protect this country. Therefore, Atatürk means to fight for the sake of my homeland for me. I believe I can express my thoughts with my tattoo [...]" (Ercan, 28)

The explanations above indicate that interviewees consider Atatürk as a valid sign to express their reactions against the government. Atatürk was also evaluated as evidence of the strength of Kemalism and of a certain life style.

VISIBILITY OF TATTOOS

Individuals who have concealable tattoos have the strength to decide who gets to see their tattoos. Namely, when someone has a concealable tattoo that person has the ability to control and empower her/his body and also control the audience. However, it is not possible to say the same thing for the people who have a visible tattoo (Doss and Ebesu 2009). Having a visible or concealable tattoo has an important effect on the experience of having a tattoo. Tattoo bearers may face negative or positive responses with respect to the visibility of their tattoos (Kosut 2000).

¹ Light Bulb is the symbol of Justice and Development Party.

Generally, the majority of interviewees are comfortable about revealing their Atatürk tattoos to other individuals. They even prefer to get their tattoos on a visible spot on their bodies. Mostly, they prefer to get tattoos on their arms or biceps. Some interviewees try to show that they support Atatürk's principles and reforms with all their heart and that they prefer to get their tattoos on a visible spot on their bodies:

"[...] Since the visibility is important, I believe arms are the most appropriate places for an Atatürk tattoo. Also, I never feel the need to cover my tattoos [...]." (Murat, 32)

"[...] I prefer my arm because it will be easy to show it. I always wanted to have my tattoo over my heart but no one will see it if I have it there. That's why I decided to get it on my arm. I believe my tattoo clearly expresses what I want to say and gives my message [...]." (İsmail, 28)

"[...] My first inclination was to get it on the outer part of my right palm. Metaphorically, when I hit something with my fist it will be perceived as a seal. But the tattoo artist said he could not make it the way I wanted so I got the tattoo on the outer side of my wrist. So I believe when I hold my hand out it can be easily seen [...]." (Sevginar, 42)

Having a tattoo can also cause doubt, it could be perceived by some as a possible discredit to the bearer. Hence, tattooed people may want to manage who gets to see their tattoos. The majority of the interviewees though are not worried whether they will face any problem or trouble with regards to their tattoos. However, in a business environment, as some of the interviewees noted, they felt that they had to conceal their tattoos. Although, none of the participants mentioned directly why they felt that way, it is believed that the choice to expose or hide their Atatürk tattoo is dependent upon their environment and its anticipated reaction. Predicting how a business environment may react allowed for these interviewees to control the interaction process as much as possible.

Identity is tied to appearance and it is directly affected by interactions with others. When people first meet or contact one another, they may not fully perceive each other. They need to believe in internal or inherent evidence during the communication or interaction process to make meaning of their identity in relation to others (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The idea is, each interacting individual tries to understand or become aware of the identity of another and her/his own identity in the eyes of the other. Can is one of the interviewees of the project and his answer defines the relationship between a tattoo, its perception, and the interaction process very well:

"[...] when minibus drivers see each other, they honk their horns at each other. To have an Atatürk tattoo is something like that. When I see someone, who has an Atatürk tattoo, I realize that he is someone like me. People can know you or have an idea about you thanks to your signs and a tattoo is a good sign to express yourself. Hence, some people prefer to have it just to be perceived as modern or some people prefer to have an Atatürk tattoo just because it is a fad. Society takes what you give to them [...]" (Can, 28)

"[...] I believe to have an Atatürk tattoo is a kind of secret sign. When I see someone with an Atatürk tattoo, I know that we are on the same side and we can trust each other [...]" (Pinar, 31)

Awareness is very obvious in a relationship between two individuals in which certain aspects of one's identity can be manipulated based on interactional cues. When individuals first come into contact with one another, one or both of the persons who have an Atatürk tattoo may not be readily apparent or the tattoo could be concealed under clothes. Through changing their appearance, i.e. hiding their tattoos, people may also be altering their interaction with others. People spend a lot of time interpreting their own behaviour and those of others in an attempt to make sense of the situation in which they find themselves so that they can act accordingly (Hewitt 1997). As a result, since people lack the ability to know how others truly feel about their Atatürk tattoos, they need to obtain hints during the interaction experience to decide what appropriate action to take.

In light of these explanations and quotations, it is understood that the interviewees deem an Atatürk tattoo as a sign between people who have common sense and perspective. Generally, most of the interviewees consider their Atatürk tattoo to give a political message.

In societies, individuals have various roles, and according to these roles people are shaped by the responsibilities and beliefs these roles imply and as a result they revise their sense of self. Thus, these people do not have a united "personal self," but rather a variety of identities, which they utilize and alter according to the situation in which they find themselves (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Actually, the term "generalized other" used by Mead (1934) is the reference point of this explanation by which we make behavioural decisions and interpret others' actions. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes that identities have explanatory, authoritarian, and evaluative significance and are constructed by subjective belief designs. People feel under pressure to implement these categorizations for the benefit of improving common bonds and motivating self-enhancement.

The term “social scaffold” coined by Goffman (1959) emphasizes the significance of context when defining and evaluating social interaction. The term “scaffold” signifies both the delicacy and fluctuation of the metaphorical structure. Actions that fall outside of the social scaffold can break the balance. However, if those actions come to be embraced by a broad number of people, they have the potential to alter its main construction. When we evaluate this explanation with respect to the research question of this study, the social scaffold of Turkish society has traditionally banned permanent tattooing, but the adoption of this practice by those who harbour the greatest power over its structure is gradually changing this perception. The popularity of the Atatürk tattoo in recent years displays that those who have Atatürk tattoos, especially visible ones, are gradually changing society’s restrictions against them, and by doing so are using social leverage to reconstruct the scaffold in a way that ensures a more favourable perception of Atatürk tattooed persons.

CONCLUSION

The practice of tattooing as well as the views associated with those who get tattoos has significantly changed over time in Turkish society. Whereas tattooing was associated with individuals from the lower class of society and often rejected because of religion, now there is not a definite pattern or type of person who gets tattooed as it varies by the demographic categories of age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion and economic status (Kosut 2000; Atkinson and Young 2001).

This research provides support to the present tattoo literature and limited Turkish tattoo literature in that it emphasizes and supports many findings that have previously been discussed in relation to tattooing. Through focusing on the relationship between interaction and one’s Atatürk tattoo, this research encompasses the tattooed people’s relation to other people’s expectations, input, and the interaction process with others.

This study tries to examine and explain the role of Atatürk tattoos in three different ways. The meaning of Atatürk for the Atatürk tattoo bearers and why interviewees consider Atatürk as a communication tool were discussed in this study. Further, the issues of how their environment evaluated the interviewees’ tattoos and how they decided on where to get their tattoos were explored. These questions were examined based on symbolic interactionism.

Although views toward tattooing have become much more acceptable over the years, there are still some arguments that tattoo bearers still possess a probable discrediting characteristic (Sanders 1988). Therefore, the tattoo experience, in the study of Atatürk tattoos, has an important impact on the interaction process with others and has significant potential for changing social interaction (Sanders 1988). The research findings of the study also indicate that the design and place of the Atatürk tattoo on the interviewees' body match the tattoo bearer's self-expression. Interviewees chose the image that they did because the preferred tattoo reflected their personal and social values and identities.

The findings of this study are parallel to Sanders' research on tattooed individuals. Sanders' research on tattooing showed that individuals become involved in tattooing because others close to them have tattoos which impacted their decision to get one (Sanders 1988). The majority of interviewees were influenced about getting an Atatürk tattoo until it was brought to their attention by people close to them, or by the societies they are part of. Even though interviewees have stated that they do not care about other people's opinions, they especially have a tendency to conceal their tattoo in their business life and this practice indicates that the Atatürk tattoo bearer may be considered to possess a potentially discrediting or stigmatizing attribute. The visibility of their tattoos, and avoiding individuals and situations which would bring any negative feedback are verification of this statement. This research also emphasizes the fact that interaction is an essential and important component of an individual's self-expression, namely an Atatürk tattooed expression. As aforementioned, a tattooed identity (Atatürk tattoo identity) alters and changes over time, and it is managed through interaction with other people. Through having a stake into the consideration of other people's reactions, actually tattoo bearers have a tendency to control the interaction process and frame it positively. The research results indicate that identity and altering the visibility of a tattoo have an important engagement.

As a final word, it should be noted that the number of people with Atatürk tattoos is increasing every day. This requires the study of what people are trying to say or why they deem an Atatürk tattoo to be a communication tool, and how the interaction process is managed between people with an Atatürk tattoo and the other people in the community. This study has just begun to shed some light on the topic and further research needs to be done in the area.

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