



THE TATTOO AS ANCESTRAL LEGACY AND DICHOTOMIC ELEMENT OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

Nowadays, tattoos are associated mostly with fashion; nevertheless, tattooing can constitute a tool of national identity due to its ancestral relation with the Latin American native culture. With regard to the art of the state, no work can be found that analyzes this specific topic. This paper discusses the determinant footprint of ancient symbols in the culture and its actual use as a national identity element. The study uses a deductive method and qualitative analysis to clear the situated premises and ascertain the problem solution through the use of ancient icons in tattoos as identity symbols, which may be reconstructed from the consideration that supports the national proud and development. Although the results still present a low percentage of users, there are citizens who don tattoos. The concept about its representation is positive, and the use of tattoo as an element of identity was found among 50% of citizens. This leads us to conclude that it is, indeed, used in this sense and that the trend could progressively increase. In order to validate this premise, a quarter of the population was necessary.

Keywords: *Tattoo, identity, ancestral Ecuadorian tattoos, ancestral American tattoos, Semiotics.*

INTRODUCTION

The tattoo corresponds to the traditional practice of tracing systems of signs in the body, modifying the skin with multiple faiths, and considering social and antisocial objectives. This ritual is manifested worldwide, which shows the sequence of its migration as well as its historical and geographical distribution. Tattooing, the process of inserting pigment into the skin to create permanent designs and patterns, appeared on human mummies in 3200 BCE and was practiced by ancient cultures throughout the world. (Krutak & Deter-Wolf,

2017). View of tattoos and tattooed people in the Western world has improved dramatically, as opposed to twenty to thirty years ago, when tattoos were primarily seen as a trademark of the working class (construction workers, sailors, soldiers, and so on) individuals or criminal elements (DeMello, 2000). The aim of this study involves defining its changes until it became an element of national identity.

The objective established the tattoo as a dichotomous element of the national identity. In other words, clearing the hypothesis about the ancestral relationship of the same, as it relates to our aboriginal cultures, through the determination of the art of the state in order to generate a possible mitigation related to the problem, which represents the absence of identity in the development of people.

The general objectives are situated in the determination of the most representative or known tattoo parlors through Google search engines. To ascertain if individuals wearing tattoos existed, which were associated with the rescue of the national culture, surveys of

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representative samples were conducted to obtain more rigorous results that validated the fact that the tattoo is a mechanism to increase the identity. Carrying out qualitative analysis is a common practice in cultural studies, which is supported by Semiotics. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis was carried out in this work to determine if tattoo use is prevalent in the American continent and the kinds of signs used, with the deductive method employed to collect more rigorous data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tattooing, the practice of inscribing the skin with permanent designs and patterns, is a global and indefinably ancient practice. Historical and archeological evidence shows tattooing was practiced throughout the world in the ancient times, and indigenous cultures from every continent except Antarctica included tattooing as an essential element of their cultural fabric. Both the body marks and the tattooing process acted with the aim of negotiating relationships between individuals and their society, nature, and the spiritual realm. Depending on the culture and time period, indigenous tattoo traditions have functioned to signal entry into adulthood, reflect social status, document martial achievement, demonstrate lineage and group affiliation, and channel and direct preternatural forces (Krutak, 2007; 2012; 2014a, 2014b). Tattooing in the West was a common practice among the first sailors of Captain J. Cook, who arrived in the territories of Oceania, popularizing it in the other places visited by these sailors (Ganter, 2005). Although in the West, the tattoo has had other functions apart from the hierarchical and aesthetic. Technically speaking, a tattoo is a lasting pattern, picture, or mark accomplished by making punctures in the skin, into which pigments are inserted. In the past, tattoos were not used to create individual identities. They were a collective cultural project, which constituted particular social markers. Sometimes, they conceived a spectacular appearance when everyone shared the same design in a tribe; in other cases, they were used as initiation rites or symbols, which constitute the fact of having reached the age of majority (Simons, 2015).

The oldest actual tattoo identified to date appears ca. 8000 BP as a “moustache” on the upper lip of a mummy from the Chinchorro culture of South America (Allison, 1996), which shows that the tattoo is neither a recent element, nor an alien practice. In Ecuador, tattooing dates back to the period of the Coast Development, 500 years before, up to 500 years after Christ, and is evidenced through the Jama Coaque, Bahía, and Guangala cultures and their corresponding vestiges of tattooing tools found. The tattoo had its beginnings in the Amazonian indigenous tribes as healing and religious symbols. Tattoos reflect a journey through the symbology of the human being. They are traces which shape our identities from the resistance of not detaching ourselves from our roots to raising new imaginaries that improve pride and appreciation of our own. America (considered a continent and not a country) is an appropriate example to show the journey of the tattoo from the icon, because the research considers U.S. and reviews Mexico too, as a case study of identity through tattoos to finally reach Ecuador.

Considering what was mentioned above, evidently, the topic is an issue that deserves treatment from the generation of identity and the struggle for sociocultural claims, identifying previous ancestral relationship, as was done in this introduction. Tattoos were found in the studies of Alison in Chinchorro, in the Tarapaca region of Chile, which considered the oldest evidence on mummies in world history. (Arriaza, 2003). The studies in the paper *The World's Oldest Tattoos* confirm that Tyrolean Iceman, which is known as Ötzi, presents the world's oldest preserved tattoos. (Deter-Wolf, Robitaille, Krutak, & Galliot, 2016).

The point is that, according to this study, if the Chinchorro mummy is not the oldest, whose mention has been disputed with Latin America, and constitutes an ancestral legacy and not a mere alienation. Globally, the real intention of the tattoo has been transgressed, which in a way creates stigma and segregation. The evidence of it is on those people who have chosen to wear it, not only for fashion or other aesthetic reasons, but symbolic causes too. One would constitute the national identity and the elements of its respective semiosphere, since the tattoo is

a mechanism of cultural identity, as long as it is testimony that there are users who carry symbols of ancestral character in their skin as a symbol supporting this argument. Semiosphere space is a condition and necessary prerequisite for the implementation of communications and the existence of languages and their work. Language in this context is considered as a function, a clot of semiotic space. It is about the space in which all participants of communication are initially immersed, and which ensures the operation of the device consisting of the addressee, the addressee and the channel connects them.

Only in this space is semiosis possible (Lotman, 2005). In this sense, the tattoo is analog to the language, because it communicates something. It has its own space with a system of signs, which is decoded during this work, constituted in its semiosphere, and is concerned with nationalism. National identity involves one's identity or sense of belonging to one state or to one nation (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It is the sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, represented by distinctive traditions, culture, language and politics. National identity may refer to the subjective feeling that one shares with a group of people about a nation, regardless of one's legal citizenship status (Guibernau & Smith, 2004). National identity is viewed in psychological terms as "an awareness of difference," and a "feeling and recognition of 'we' and 'they'" (Lee, 2012). The expression of one's national identity is viewed in a positive light as patriotism, which is characterized by national pride and the positive emotion of love for one's country (Ashmore, Lee, & Wilder, 2001). The importance of cultural identities in development processes is crucial to encouraging people in building their personal human experiences and values, defining their requirements, and dealing with them to find the opposite satisfactory solutions. But often, the self-determination opportunities depend on the power of identity in the socio-political system (Cucina, 2015).

There exists an engaging discussion involving several authors about the concept of identity. Among the most notable are Enrique Adoum (1998) and Pareja (2004). Another author Ulloa promotes the debate on the

construction of Ecuadorianity, of the Ecuadorian, and of the country in which these people live. One of the phenomena that impedes this construction is the negation of what Ecuadorians are, since people live on appearances by concealing their own roots (Ulloa, 2010). In this sense, we pretend to be others many times, as our own origins are unknown, and when the rejection of others by their surnames and economic position becomes evident, calling them: "longos," "montubios," "cholos," "runas," "blacks," "colorados," "morenos," "indios," and "monos", all the words are denominations, produced by the racial mixture. (Ulloa, 2010). Ecuador's identity problems do not only go through ignorance, but also through the denial of the ancestors, roots, and so on. Equatorianity must be thought of as the possibility of generating meanings of belonging, inclusion of respect, and pride in what the Ecuadorians are, what they have, and how they value it (Ulloa, 2010). According to Enrique Adoum (1998) is the deepest and most vigorous root that the people and the individual have cast in history, which is made up of the following: ethnicity, language, religion, and ethic conscience of nation; that is to say, feeling Ecuadorian. (Adoum, 1998). It establishes the way in which an Ecuadorian sees other Ecuadorians, places a reflection on the anti-Ecuadorian, that is the Ecuadorian, based on historical, social, economic and unfortunately political facts that led to be what these people are nowadays (Adoum, 1998). Although works such as these pretend to help reconstruct this obligatory identity, as people, who have an emergency to have it, generate a real development around it. The book Ecuador particulates signs, deals with the individual identity of the inhabitants, often determined by the geographical zones of Ecuador, as well as the language, because this one communicates something, has its own space within a system of signs, decodes during this work, and constitutes its semiosphere, which concerns nationalism.

According to Pareja (2004), the schizophrenic national identity can lead a country to its dissolution, to crumble, and fall apart. "Ecuador is a schizophrenic country, mentally and emotionally split. This psychiatric concept refers to a fragmented personality of

the individual that, due to this dysfunction, can reach absolute madness” (Pareja, 2004). Both Adoum (1998) and Pareja (2004) focus on identity as an engine for development or for the failure of a country. However, there are authors who pose a different position. Ivan Carvajal mentions that the basic problem of Adoum (1998) and Pareja (2004) essays is that they presuppose the existence of an “Ecuadorian being,” a “national subject” already given and established, when in fact what exists is a sociological fictionalization of a conceptual character on an imaginary: “the Ecuadorian,” “the Ecuador,” and “the Ecuadorianism.” The images that are chosen to be tattooed in some way leave an undiscovered identity with a view to help the identity emerge through its affirmation of the image.

These signs acquire several characteristics depending on the use and subjectivities of each one of the modified bodies coexisting as identity symbols (Santillán & Javier, 2011). In Costa Rica, there are 400,000 people with at least one permanent tattoo on their body, that is 12.5% of the total population; also, 20% of the young people between 18 and 29 have at least one tattoo. Nevertheless, that percentage drops to 3% among those who are 50 years old or older (Universidad de Costa Rica, 2016). The Strategic Communications Office of Mexico (GCE) conducted a survey, which indicates that 74.2% of people tattooed or pierced think that it was an obstacle for them to get work. This data contrasts with what the companies said: 55.3% said that would hire someone with piercings or tattoos, while 36.6% answered in favor of not doing it for any reason (“Al 74% de las personas tatuadas o con piercing se les dificulta encontrar empleo”, 2013).

In the U.S., 36% of military veterans and those that currently serve the army have tattoos and 30% of all college graduates in the U.S. have tattoos, 36% of the population between 18 and 25 years have at least one tattoo, the percentage increases to 40% among the population of 25 and 40 years, and decreases to 10% among Americans aged between 41 and 64 years. The U.S. has more than 20,000 tattoo parlors. This number increases by one every day, and its citizens spend 1.65 billion dollars a year on tattoos. (History of Tattoos, 2018)

According to data from the Canadian Medical Association (CMAJ) and the community executive, 12% of Europeans are tattooed. Spain is among the countries of the European Union (EU) with stricter legislation when it comes to regulating tattoos. (The National, 2017). Currently, like in Mexico, in Ecuador, religious subjects are chosen by the clients of tattoo parlors. People who opt for this decision affirm that religious images provide a spiritual and protective value. Each country has its religious icons: Mexico has the Virgin of Guadalupe, Ecuador has la Virgen Dolorosa (Sorrowful Virgin) or el Sagrado Corazón de Jesús (The Sacred Heart of Jesus). The national identity is not so marked, as in some neighboring countries, but there are different representative designs such as Aya Huma (from kichwa: energetical origin guide) or those cited in the results, as the most symbolic of the moment of embodying the love of the homeland (Santiago & Loco, 2017). Nicholas Thomas, director of the Museum of Archeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, says “People are not just British or Australian or Californian, our identities are much more particular, are linked to our interests, related to cultural or spiritual traditions, tastes in music and subcultural loyalties.” The tattoo has become a vehicle for that particular type of identification (Simons, 2015).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The proposed methodology is supported across 50 search engines to determine the most popular tattoo parlor. Surveys would be conducted to obtain information of one representative sample relative to 3,400 individuals of both genres, between students and professionals of the different Ecuadorian careers and universities, and between an age range of 17 to 61 years of several professions. The paper is organized as follows: Section II situates the study context in which the phenomenon was observed. Section III carries the description of the methodology used, Section IV presents the results obtained from this study. A discussion of the results is presented in Section V. Finally, the literary support is presented in the bibliography.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

These show that the tattoo maintains a close ancestral relationship, as was validated in the art of the state. Utilizing the advantage of the search engines by the social networking site, it was possible to know about the work of tattooists from five countries: Ecuador, Mexico, the U.S., Jamaica, and Venezuela. It was possible to situate the tattoo semiosphere, which is decoded by the system of signs and manifested in different semiotician proposes: the ritual where the master tattoo translates with great care the sign selected for the client. In practice, is possible to distinguish “sender-receiver,” signified-signifier, if it is thought like dyad, or if is the triad case: referent, representamen, an interpretamen, an anchorage (tattoo-by tattooist) (the client original idea: signifier) and relay (tattoo-symbol-client: signified) (personal sign, the tattooist is an actant, and the client is the actor).

The basic semiosphere is manifested in the system of signs present to represent the tattoo as a nationalist way, in icons and symbols like: religious images, ancestral images (aborigine symbols), and the representative images, which provide a proud character to the citizen (personages, soccer teams, known objects between these landscapes, plants, animals, paintings like Guayasamín motives, among those found at work.

Venezuelan Tattoos



Figure 1. Flag of Venezuela.
Source: Madrid art tattoo



Figure 2. A watercolor macaw
Source: Shaman body modifications

Mexican Tattoos



Figure 3. Virgin of Guadalupe
Source: +deMX, 2016



Figure 4. Catrina
Source: fraktalstudio, 2017

USA Tattoos

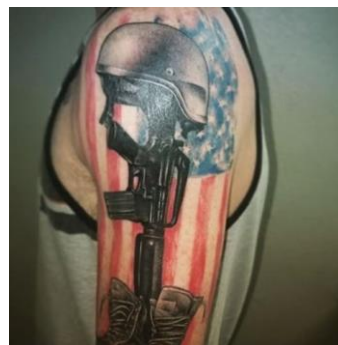


Figure 5. Army
Source: Patrotic, 2017



Figure 6. Army 2

Source: world_tattos_magazine, 2018



Figure 7. Liberty statue

Source: Patrotic, 2017



Figure 8. Uncle Sam gas mask

Jamaican Tattoos



Figure 9. Jamaican flag and island



Figure 10. Bob Marley

Ecuadorian Tattoos



Figure 11. Dolorosa virgin



Figure 12. Soccer teams supporters (Coast & Highland)

Regionals



Figure 13. Highland: Ava Huma

Source: El Ajicero



Figure 14. Galapagos islands
Source: The Galapagos



Figure 18.
Source: misshask1



Figure 15. Andean snowy
Source: moisesart1707



Figure 16. Galapagos Turtle, Lonely George
Source: Amazon

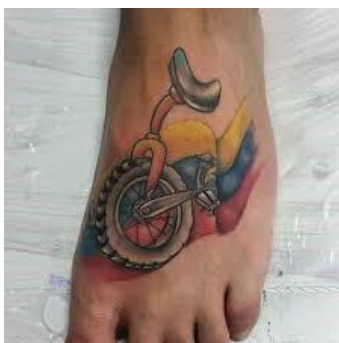


Figure 17. Ecuadorian flag
Source: Tony Art

The results obtained in the tabulation of surveys in relation to the first question defines the tattoo in a word: Art with 27%, expression, drawing and mark with 5%, and 55% use different words according to their concept (Figure 19).

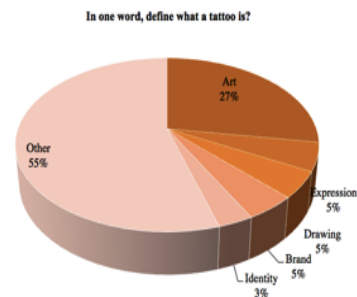


Figure 19.

For the question number two, 80% of the population considers that having a tattoo is acceptable, which demonstrates a tolerant society, open to the ancestral exposed in the last question. The 20% who gave a negative response stick to social stereotypes like if having a tattoo generates problems getting a job, as a symbol of crime and generates rejection societally (Figure 20).

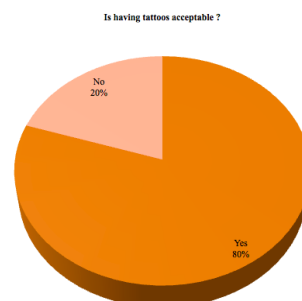


Figure 20.

Next, the population was asked what they would tattoo on their body, which gave the following results: 13% have not defined the

tattoo on their skin, while 9% would tattoo letters, words or phrases, 4% animal population, and 3% an element of nature such as flowers, sun or moon, and finally 55% of the population opt for personalized designs that represent experiences, memories or personal tastes (Figure 21).

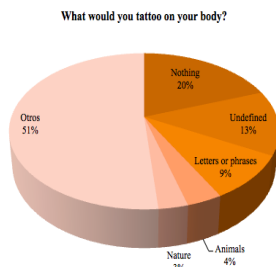


Figure 21

In the question five, do you will wearing a tattoo with an ancestral design like a “diablo huma, o Inty,” evil 28.2% would choose an ancestral motive for a feeling of identity and patriotism, while 72.8% would not consider this option because they did not like this kind of elements (Figure 22).

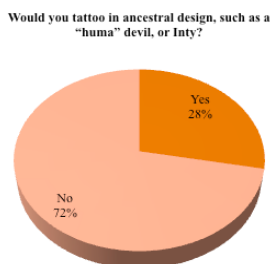


Figure 22.

In the last question: Do you consider that spreading the ancestral motives in the art of tattooing could support to generate national identity? 50% of the population provided an affirmative answer. Since it considers that it could be a way to promote culture in addition to rescuing an ancestral art, the repowering would be given through diffusion: when the meaning of the chosen design is asked, or when is just appreciated like a tendency. Negative responses are supported by religious beliefs, tastes, and other alternatives to promote national identity. (Figure 23).

Do you consider that spreading the ancestral motives in the art of tattooing would support to generate national identity?

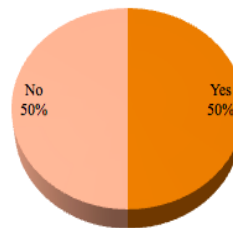


Figure 23.

CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that, in fact, the tattoo constitutes an ancestral legacy in Latin America. Although the group of researchers, who are cited in the first part of this work, affirm that Otzi is the oldest mummy, this is not the case, having not been mummified as such, but frozen. For this reason, it is not constituted as mummy, so there is a difference between mummy and vestige. Then, the mustache mummy of the Chinchorro should be still considered as the oldest mummy, surpassing those of Egypt. Finally, as it was mentioned before, in fact, the tattoo would be considered an ancestral element.

Regarding whether it constitutes a dichotomous element that contributes to national identity, this premise has also been validated, as shown in the results, in the American continent. In Mexico and the U.S., there are samples about traditional icons and symbols considered as tattoo election. In the case of the U.S., as was shown, the rates are quite high. Ecuador is a country that is not an exception, although the percentage is still low; therefore, it constitutes a dichotomous element for its national identity.

The religious themes as symbols of protection are the most chosen and the images vary according to the country. For example in Mexico, people wear Guadalupe Virgin tattoos and in Ecuador, the Dolorosa virgin, but they have the same meaning: protection, gratitude, blessing and success. Hence, the diffusion is born when the tattoo acquires a strong meaning for people and expresses it freely without realizing that they are part of a culture that has years of history and meaning, according the

tattooists' point of view. More than a national identity, is possible to say that exists a "regional identity," as is evident that each individual loves and goes out of his way for his cradle. This is the case of the Ecuadorian people, and this criteria is also evident, for example, with soccer teams tattoos.

Specifically, the symbols that represent the national identity in the country are specific: Highlander (Diablo Huma), Amazon (Jaguar), Coast (Dios Sol, Ecuadorian beaches) and Insular Region—Galapagos (turtles, the islands, Charles Darwin), as these constitute motives of nationalism that are expressed through an image that the client proudly carries all through his or her life. Many people, who choose traditional national symbols, get in the skin of the Ecuadorian culture, of the national identity, sometimes without full awareness of this, except those who directly choose national symbols. Therefore, a mitigation plan to solve the problem can be encouraged considering this basis.

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