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## THE CHANGING IDENTITY OF KARO ETHNIC I N SPECIAL REGION OF YOGYAKARTA

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### **Abstract**

This article is research result relate to identity construct of Karo ethnic on multiethnic society in Yogyakarta. The existence of Karo people in Yogyakarta is showed through identity produced, constructed, and negotiated to other ethnic on interethnic communication. Based on theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction, in general it studied concerning identity of Karo ethnic in multiethnic society. The main focuses are (1) how is identity of Karo ethnic constructed in multiethnic society in Special Region of Yogyakarta? (2) how are elements such as culture, language, custom, tradition, role, symbols and history make changing identity of Karo ethnic lived in Special Region of Yogyakarta?. The data analysis of the research is conducted qualitatively based on interview result, participant observation, and documentary study. The finding show that either individual or group identity of Karo ethnic in Yogyakarta is not constant concern, but it rather changed, constructed and reconstructed. Those changing identity is always in interaction or other relation. The identity construction of Karo ethnic in Yogyakarta includes culture, language, custom, tradition, economic and symbols. Its implication is that that negotiation may change the individual or collective identity through behavior and attitude, eating pattern, and type of food, use of native language, or less of understanding of other Karo custom.

**Keywords:** identity, Karo ethnic, symbolic interaction

### **Introduction**

Communication have role on determine and explain the individual or group identity and identity is main core on intercultural communication (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, 2010:17). Study about interethnic relationship is still relevant with various present concerns, which is everyone intentionally or not, like or dislike, will more intensively engaged in social contact to people who vary in ethnic.

The research about interethnic communication had been done by communication experts in Indonesia, such as about Javanese, Batak and Bugis ethnics by Schweizer showed that suggest that Javanese ethnic in Yogyakarta is considered by Batak ethnic and Bugis ethnic in Makasar as ethnic which have characteristics: tender, friendly, polite, diligent, simple, coward and respect the culture, custom, rule and norms in society. It conducted on undergraduate who having study in Yogyakarta at that moment (Mulyana and Rakhmat, 2000:221). The result should be



reinvestigated at present remembering rapid era development, thus people will interact to other ethnic wider.

The study about stereotype of Javanese and Chinese ethnics conducted by Rahardjo (2005:134) showed that Javanese considered by Chinese as tolerance, reluctant, lazy to work, etc. However from Chinese perception, Javanese is perceived lower in work ethos but polite in daily interaction. That perception is reported by Budi Santoso on his research in Indonesia University 2002. According to Chinese undergraduate perception toward Javanese ethnic in Semarang, West Java, that Javanese people have prominent ability in socialization which proposed harmony to around environment. In addition they considered that work ethos of Javanese is less tough and still develop the hostility toward Chinese. Similar research is also conducted by Umi Habibah. She exposed that Javanese people (in this term the undergraduate in private university in Yogyakarta is as sample) considered condescending toward Chinese which appears reluctant (indolent) interact with Chinese which is more advance in economic (Habibah, 2003:99).

Thus study relates to the existence of Karo ethnic in Yogyakarta considered need to be studied in order to its existence have been existed in sixties, either as undergraduate or employee. According to interview result with pioneer of Karo society association "Sinuanbuluh" in Yogyakarta (June 2011), people who came first in Yogyakarta was Perangin-angin clan (died in eighties early 2012). To present, the existence of Karo ethnic in Yogyakarta such as: *Arih Persada* (sixteen families from vary clans), *Dalinta Jumpa* (around seventeen family from vary clans), the association of *Ginting* clan (about thirty families), association of *Perangin-angin* clan, Moslem Karo association in Yogyakarta, Catholic Karo of Yogyakarta and many undergraduate of Karo ethnic in various university (such as *Sialem-alemen* in UPN Veteran of Yogyakarta, *Piso Surit* in Gadjah Mada University, Karo undergraduate in Atmajaya University, Janabrada University etc).

The interethnic relationship is involved two complex concepts are communication and other ethnic having different culture as well. Ethnic group or caste conceptually according to Anthony Smith (in Haryo, 2001) is social group which its members having similarity of origins showed the similar historical background and fate, having one or some cultural types and felt unique solidarity and collectivity. There is opinion that characteristic of ethnic group or caste is conviction of there is connection as decent from same ancestor because similarity of physical characteristic and habit or based on historical experience totally can differentiate themselves with other people. Further, ethnic group is not solely determined by lived region boundary, however the more important things is boundary where that social live taken place as behavior order and complex social relationship. Interethnic boundary is sustained or guarded and preserved through social interaction between people with vary in cultural background. Ethnic group known as specific social unit if it showed behavior or different culture form other social unit.

Caste or ethnic group is universally cultural social phenomenon. No one exclude into specific ethnic group or sub ethnic. As social creature, human is individually cannot live without help or cooperation with other in term of social group. The grouped live relates to creating process and cultural development that is logical consequence as *economics homo*, *religious homo*, *politics homo* and etc.

Intrinsically human force on survive is not solely depend on their body organ ability and be based on corporate ability with other in addition dynamic and relative in nature. It is appropriate to symbolic interaction thought assumed that social reality is as process and not as

dogmatic-static concern. It means that society considered as symbolic interaction for individual within it. Intrinsically human is not "finished good" but rather "will be goods" because the symbolic interaction theory discuss self concept which develop based on "sense negotiation" with other. There are three premium build in symbolic interaction: (1) human act based on sense; (2) those sense obtained from interaction with other; and (3) those sense develop and completed when it going on (Mulyana, 2007).

Symbolic interaction theory use paradigm that individual is as main object n social interaction, put individual as active and proactive actor. Basically that theory provides the self with all attributes. Colley called it as looking glass self (Mulayan, 2007:11). It means that every human interaction is always filled with symbols, either in social life or the self. Human is social in nature. Other individual is "mirror" to look at the self. However symbolic interaction theory is way of view threat individual as the self and social individual. As well identity of Karo ethnic in Yogyakarta is also can be seen in symbolic interaction context involved various ethnic in Yogyakarta.

The changing identity of Karo ethnic in Yogyakarta is needed identity -image of Karo ethnic in origin region is Karo Regency, North Sumatra Province. According to Junus Melalatoa (Cultural and Education Department, 2012) in Karo ethnic village there is house used to be lived by one clan (traditional house) is stage house consist of pole, oblique wall and having palm fiber roof. The roof is three levels and made triangle shapes. On top level is put buffalo horn and human face statue, but at present those traditional house is more extinct. Many people redesign their house into new design and according to their want. One of Karo Village, Lingga Village remains some traditional house. While house in Lingga Village is Siwaluh Jabu, Kuntur-kuntur, Sapo Ganjang and Grintem. Kuntur is place used for meeting the society leader. Sapu Ganjang is rest place for single young men. While Grintem is place used by youth people to meet each other.

The mean of support of Karo society is partly in field and farm. The agriculture result is rice, secondary crops, various vegetable and fruits. Smallest kinship system is core family result of marriage, is important economic unit. In Karo society the kinship relationship is important things. Ideal marriage is between men with women from her mother brother. While ethnic is divided into five clans. They are Perangin-angin, Karo-karo, Ginting, Sembiring and Tarigan. They are still divided into sub clan.

#### **Identity of Karo Ethnic in General**

Based on human nature analysis based on geographic, ethnic group and ethnic ([http://marlin2403.wordpress.com/2011/03/22/analisis-sifat-manusia-berdasarkan-letak-geografis-suku-dan-etnik/March 22, 2001](http://marlin2403.wordpress.com/2011/03/22/analisis-sifat-manusia-berdasarkan-letak-geografis-suku-dan-etnik/March%2022,%202001)) accessed on September 7<sup>th</sup> 2012 can be explained as follows:

##### **➤ Karo-karo**

Karo-karo people are partly smart in thinking and action. It proved with Karo peoples who achieved scholar degree at first time Dr. B. Sitepu and Mr. Jaga Bukit. First professor from Karo is Prof. A. T. Barus. North Governor from Karo at first time is Ulung Sitepu. Karo-karo is usually had strong will and hard work to achieve their purpose. Because of that they achieved all they will. Beru karo is known as brave in action. When things are not expected they will angry. They are tending to dominate on household but they are smart as household equalizer.

##### **➤ Ginting**

Ginting clan is known as distinct in speaking. If they are right they will tough. Lieutenant-general Jamin Ginting is one of example from Ginting clan. The late Sutrada Ginting,



members of Provisional People's Consultative Assembly who smart in expressing his opinion. They are not afraid to start something new. They have strong leadership soul. They end to obedient to their wives. Beru Ginting is known as brave to step forward. No satisfy in their life before they do something. Their courage is sometimes taking a risk.

➤ **Sembiring**

Sembiring clan is partly diplomatic. Talk less but have deep meaning. Sometime soft in expressing their opinion thus their heart will accepted by everyone. For the example is Major General Raja Kmai Sembiring with his vocal to be controversial MPR building years ago. Criminologist Adrianus Meliala is an example. They tend to be shame and afraid to express their felling to girl they loved. Beru Sembiring is having patient soul. Even though many people who don't like them they will accept it patiently. They tend to be household ruler.

➤ **Tarigan**

Tarigan clan is smart in speaking. They will dominate the conversation. Because they smart in speaking they are partly have trade soul. Mulia Tarigan and The psychologist Mestika br Tarigan are the example. Beru Tarigan is tend submit toward what they get. Sometimes what they said is different from what is in their heart.

➤ **Perangin-angin**

It is known as Tambar Malem (except Sebayang). Tambar Malem is smart in speaking to cheer people up. If any had problem, they will make a joke and find the solution. They are moderator and mediator in nature. They tend must be persuaded and jealousy. They are courage in action and express their opinion. The actor Advent Bangun and Kiras Bangun or Pa Garamata are example. Beru Perangin-angin wants to exist. There is pride within their self if people look at them. They tend to rule their family. Sometime it make dispute to their family.

Karo ethnic characteristic based on clan above is small conclusion from a research, which is can be opposed and debated anytime. That conclusion should not to be reference to consider clan characteristic and one's characteristic, even though if exposed deeper, every Karo people have similar characteristic. It is because natural, cultural and art factors refer to Karo social identity.

The clan characteristic above cannot be reference to conclude one's characteristic from clan. The era advance, social interaction to other ethnic, and marriage from various ethnic groups lately will reduce the clan characteristic itself. As if the existence of identity of Karo ethnic in Yogyakarta had occurred changing from symbols, language, custom, tradition, role and live history side.

### **Changing identity of Karo ethnic in Yogyakarta**

Based on cultural, language, custom, role, symbols and history values many karo ethnic lived in Yogyakarta occurred changing identity than they lived in Tanah Karo. Karo people are not diligent but not lazy. They have tender heart and strong tolerance. Mutual assistance in nature and cooperating something as "sangkep nggeluh" be value proposed in their social structure. Their life principle is "Ertuah bayak sangap encari" means that proliferating livelihood and work ethos used, "Mangkuk reh mangkuk mulih, Ola lolo cametendu". Karo's philosophy is "Pebelang juma maka mbelang man peranin, Jemur pagenda sangana las" means that get various mean of support in order to vary in result, use opportunity existed. There is philosophy said "Keri gia pola

isina, geah mehuli penangketkan kitangna" means that even though we drink liquid sap until empty, so long as people who drink hang on the place (kitang) well.

The weakness of Karo ethnic is in general get upset and heartache. If the heartache and get upset is deeper it will serve reaction. Generally they have revenge in nature. Karo people are sensitive but have ideal characteristic as single fighter. They are brave to start something even they don't the risk. They have wander about in nature and adapted quickly with new environment. There is term "if you enter the goat gate, you will blare but not be goat, if you enter the tiger gate, you will boom but not be tiger".

Karo ethnic is known as Medan people, especially Batak, as temperamental individual. They are easy to get upset and voice tune and volume is high and outspoken. High tune of voice is not criterion that Medan people or Batak is temperamental said sociologist and anthropologist of Medan State, Prof. DR. Bungaran Antonius Simanjuntak. High tune of voice can we seen on Batak from mountain range, as Samosir range. "Because in there the village area is distant so they have to shout to call". Their heart is not definitely tough, thus not easy to get angry, especially they have educated well. Therefore hypothesis said that Medan or Batak people is temperamental is not definitely correct. It is similar to Dra. Mustika Tarigan's opinion, lecturer of Development Psychology of Area Medan University and some informant in Yogyakarta and author's observation result who member of Karo group in Yogyakarta, said that high tune of voice is characteristic of Medan people but it is not indicated temperamental. "Their character is expressive. The way to express itself is extreme, and then looked emotional. Not all Karo temperamental. For people from other ethnic, it looked excessive. High tune of voice identically the way of Medan people speak is not same with angry. In other side, expressive tune of voice can make one spacious, felling good, and satisfy because they express the felling. It is admitted by Dra Mustika that the effect can make other offended and cannot accept the expression of anger. What the effect? "He will get fire. Therefore, people who angry will get fire because the energy is empty. That why need drink to calm it down". In other society, anger can be expressed with soft tune of voice or left. According to her, "Silent or escape for awhile from angry is way to control anger".

Karo people in Yogyakarta had occurred various changing identity of ethnic. Many people are not as emotional as Medan people, because environment factor which influence the emotion. "Community or environment will influence toward oneself". For example quote of interview result with scholar from Karo who have been living two years in Yogyakarta initial "AL" that:

"Since lived in Yogyakarta, I have already experienced changing, such as in way of speak. I don't need to speak with high tune of voice, because I adapted with Javanese people in Yogyakarta who have soft, polite and friendly characteristic. I rarely communicate with tough Javanese people. My environment is majority occupied with Javanese ethnic, so gradually I influenced with Javanese habits and way of speak. I feel comfortable live with culture like this (interview on June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012)".

The changing identity of Karo ethnic lived in Yogyakarta is admitted by Al's parent when they visited to Yogyakarta. The author asked how is theirs son ethnic identity, then they answered that at present he is different than he was in village (Tanah Karo). Things have changed are way of speak, way of behave and act.

The changing identity of Karo ethnic is also experienced by Karo people who lived in Yogyakarta and married with Javanese peoples, Kalimantan, Sunda, etc. the marriage relationship is cause many changing identity, not only language, but followed cultural values.

There are who follow both parties, one party and there are who follow each cultural values. Through adaptation process, make identity of Karo ethnic had changed appropriate to different level. There is who changed to similar with Javanese ethnic because he capable to speak Java and adapt Javanese custom. There is still act rigid and high tune of voice, even his spouse from other ethnic many influenced by Karo culture. Partly Karo ethnics live in Yogyakarta have adapted values, custom existed in Yogyakarta.

According to symbolic interaction analysis that interethnic relationship between Karo and non Karo in Yogyakarta, that cultural values followed by Karo ethnic considered positive by other ethnic, especially Javanese ethnic, even married with Karo people. The following opinion from informant of Javanese ethnic (interview result with X who has been marriage for 30 years with Karo ethnics):

"Initially I hard to accept the Karo values which different from Javanese. They tend to tough and egoist. Moreover at the hardest time as scholar, he came to my house with his friend in order to eat together in my house. By associate with karo people, gradually I felt that values are helping each other, it more positive (interview on March 2 2012)."

The existence of Karo ethnic in Yogyakarta is relatively "unproblematic" with around society. Precisely the openness is positive according to Javanese people.

The changing ethnic identity is not apart from interaction with other ethnic, either use verbal or non verbal symbols. In addition adaptation with other ethnic, there are some problems in interethnic interaction between Karo and Javanese lived in Yogyakarta. Such as language, customs, stereotype, behavior and attitude, etc. there are some Karo people who unable to speak Javanese especially new comer. It is usually food adaptation, attitude in socialization with Javanese people who tend to be shame, make interaction is little awkward.

Through adaptation process those problems can be handled and changed by interethnic interaction or symbolic interaction thought based on awareness each party to adapt. It is line with symbolic interaction thought which assumes that social reality as process not as something static-dogmatic. It means that society seen as symbolic interaction for individual within it. Every human interaction is filled with symbols, either in social life or self life. Other individual is "mirror" to look at. Therefore symbolic interaction theory is way of view considered individual as self and social. The changing identity of Karo ethnic occurred in interethnic interaction existed in Yogyakarta, especially Javanese.

### **Conclusion**

The changing identity of Karo ethnic in Yogyakarta occurred because of interethnic interaction between Karo with other ethnic. It is from cultural values internalized with Javanese values, language used is Indonesia, and even have mixed with Javanese language, daily polite and soft behavior and attitude, etc. it can be analyzed based on Symbolic Interaction Theory that have certain characteristic and concept concerning communication and society that: (1) changing identity occurred based on decision and subjective action and it depend on situation they found. (2) in multiethnic society life occurred interaction process between structures and therefore it is always occurred changing social structures. (3) Changing ethnic identity understood based on experience through sense found within their primary group symbols and language are essential part from social life. (4) Changing ethnic identity arranged over social objects which its meaning determined by social according to people around. (5) Interethnic relation is based on

interpretation about object and communication situation. (6) Changing ethnic bring consequence concerning changing self concept and defined through social interaction to other ethnic.

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