

THE EPISTEMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY OF THE CHAMUS IN KENYA: THE HUMAN BODY AS NATURE

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ABSTRACT This paper explores the way the Chamus of northern Kenya, belonging to the Maa group of the Eastern-Nilotic language family, speak extremely physically of the facts pertaining to the bodies and bodily phenomena. The Chamus view the body as a shared anatomical construct and physiological mechanism, and these properties as a mechanism of their culture and society. They treat physical disorders with their ethnomedicine, and have an indigenous reproductive theory. The human cycle of birth, life and death is an attribute of their bodily existence. The biological basis for human life resides in the body. This paper discusses the indispensable bodily interaction with others, and the biological property of the body as the basis for confirming life, citing the Chamus as an example.

Key Words: Physicality; Tangible; Birth and death; Bodily existence; Physical disorders.

INTRODUCTION

The Chamus inhabit northern Kenya, and belong to the Maa group of the Eastern-Nilotic language family. In this paper I explore how the Chamus speak extremely physically of the facts pertaining to the bodies and bodily phenomena. I describe this physicality of the Chamus in detail below. Here, I explain the external world of the Chamus (as opposed to the internal world, namely, the mind). The Chamus simply recognize something that is there, and do not ask why it is so.

Our body is our property. This notion unmistakably marks our recognition or sense. The human cycle of birth, life, and death is an attribute of our bodily existence. If I may speak of “nature lurking inside all our human selves,” based on the premise that our bodies are our biological possessions, then what I discuss here is the epistemological and ontological meaning applied by the Chamus to that “nature” called our bodies, and how such meaning is positioned in the world as they understand it.

The Chamus view of the body, which can be understood through their speech and practices, that is above all, everyone shares an anatomical construct and biological bodily mechanism. Even if such view of the biological commonalities of the body is exactly correct, the Chamus extremely emphasize those properties; in other words, they exalt and prioritize the commonalities as nothing but a mechanism of their culture and society. If I may rephrase these commonalities of the body as universal truths, how did the Chamus come to view the body as a given condition common to all people, or, more positively, view the body as

a universal truth?

What does it mean to say that we have a bodily existence? How does viewing the body as a universal truth position the body in society? It is these issues that I wish to examine in this paper.

THE VISIBLE WORLD

In this section I wish to introduce the methods by which the Chamus construct the commonalities of the body as something that is worth believing. I pursue here the issue of how physical illness is perceived within Chamus ethnomedicine.

I. The Visible Body

Chamus ethnomedicine can be taken as a gestalt medical system that includes anatomical and organ-physiological knowledge, a process of identifying symptoms, the names of illnesses, nosology, pathogenesis, and techniques for disease prevention and treatment. At the basis of this lies a system of realistically viewing the body and a self-completeness that one seeks the understanding of physical abnormalities in the body itself. After having first apprehended the body as an anatomical material that is visible to the naked eye, the Chamus explain the various phenomena that occur by applying their logic of the material world (Kawai, 1998).

Hear is a specific example: Headaches are taken to mean that “blood is bouncing in the narrow blood vessels at the temple.” Headaches occur because more than normal blood flow has entered these vessels. This excessive amount of blood cannot flow freely and so bounces as if it was undulating waves. The standard treatment for a headache is to perform a phlebotomy at the site of the pain around the temple, drain the excess blood, and return the volume of blood within the blood vessels to a suitable amount.

Chamus diagnoses are always made by touch and taking the pulse. Swelling, stiffness, ailments and pain are understood through touch and pulse-taking as abnormalities in the organs and blood vessels within the body. The basis of Chamus ethnomedicine is anatomical knowledge. They have detailed names not only for such bodily constructions as the various organs, but also for the blood vessels, muscles, tendons, spinal cord, lymph nodes, and bones. In addition to their knowledge of anatomy, the Chamus also have explanations for physiology, such as that the spleen and liver are organs pertaining to the blood, that the kidneys relate to waste secretion, and that the spinal cord is connected to the brain and responds to stimuli.

The background to this knowledge may well be the fact that dissecting livestock is a daily experience for the pastoral Chamus. The Chamus, indeed, know the anatomy of livestock thoroughly. The Chamus remove the diseased parts of livestock that have died of sickness and use the rest for food. Livestock gener-

ally show some sort of symptoms of illness before they die. The Chamus are sensitive to the state of their livestock, and can infer various abnormalities from their appearance and behaviors. Having witnessed the livestock's illness from a clinical standpoint, they pursue a deeper understanding of abnormalities through a process of investigating foreign bodies within the corpse, or observing organs misshapen by disease, during post-mortem examination. During an autopsy, the Chamus remove diseased and disfigured organs, or crack open the long bones of the limbs, and discover that "the lungs have turned whitish and soft," or "there are worms in the liver," or "the spine is dripping fluid, like water," thus giving birth to various theories of illness.

The Chamus have developed various methods of home remedies for people, both medicinal and surgical. In many cases, symptoms are treated by stimulating the body in some way, with methods that employ external physical stimulation such as phlebotomy, hot compresses, moxibustion, acupressure, and massage, but also through the use of oral medicine. For example, emetics and laxatives are used to cause physical reactions such as nausea and diarrhoea. Chest and gut pains are often thought to be caused by a build-up of bile and fever. These symptoms can be purged from the body, whether through vomiting or defecation, by taking medicine.

In this way, the targets of the treatment are physicalities such as bile, fevers, and excess blood, which are thought to be direct causes of the symptoms, or else, physical conditions of the organs and tissues that differ from normal, such as "nerves that no longer respond to stimuli," or "a liver in which the blood has clotted." Chamus medical treatment can be defined as symptomatic or palliative treatment. Treatment fixates on recovery and normalization of abnormal internal conditions as determined exclusively by the manifested symptoms, which differs fundamentally from treatments supported by an identified aetiology.

Chamus ethnomedicine is built upon a presumption that biological mechanisms and bodily constructions are common to all people, throughout the course of illness – from awareness of the illness, through diagnosis, to treatment. Physical phenomena, namely illnesses, occur in common to all people, thus treatments and prophylactics are applied based on the physical commonalities. In the Chamus awareness, the logic of the physical world applies to physical ailments because they are suffered similarly by anybody. I submit that this awareness of the Chamus is expressed by tangible actions exchanged between people, and leads to mutual nurturing.

II. The Body as Potential

In a simplistic understanding, the explanation of symptoms based upon the physical commonalities of the body is a method to experience the sensations of others and to enable sympathy by bringing into play the imagination of the listener to ask, "If my own organs and tissues were damaged in the same way, what sort of pain would I experience?" Women who have spoken to me about

various illnesses explain the individual symptoms in this way. Nevertheless, they also confess that they “don’t know that pain” when they themselves have never suffered that particular illness.

The basic Chamus conviction that the anatomical body and its concomitant phenomena are common to all people, however, enables descriptions of the symptoms that have already been described by someone else to be conflated with the specific symptoms that “I, myself, am currently experiencing” – a way of thinking that maintains a subjective sense of oneself. Illness in everyday speech offers a general model of the objective phenomena that can occur anatomically. The intellectual and sensational experiences of specific symptoms are given frame and shape by flowing into the objectifying process of thought.

Thus, the Chamus do not understand or try to understand the sensations of others through analogy, imagination, or empathy. Both the speaker and the listener declare their own subjective experience, and then share the symptoms through the dual process subjective experience and objective physicality. Speaking of bodily phenomena as workings of the physical world is firmly rooted in the Chamus mechanism of cognitive encounters with their bodies and sharing the experience with others.

Another marked characteristic of the Chamus view of the body is the body’s historicity. They firmly believe that bodily experience is an irreversible process. People who see sickness around them always invoke all their own knowledge and memories pertaining to their own bodies. They recall past injuries, medical history, injuries incurred as a newborn or while a fetus, deformities or health at birth, the parents and their physical conditions, as well as touch on recent experiences such as what they ate or drank last night, and recent climate. These are all elements that trigger or become agents that bring about abnormalities in organs and tissues, together with foreign entities that invade the body.

In the Chamus cognitive process, symptoms are linked to various events that occur in the unique location called “my body.” The Chamus speak of the body as “that which I have become.” This body cannot always be healthy and is easily injured or broken. Individual episodes of specific bodily phenomena are viewed as potentials occurring from within and without through the historical processes of the body in question. The knowledge of original commonalities as phenomena that can occur anatomically is at the core of the Chamus logic of the physical world.

BIRTH AND DEATH

As described above, the Chamus treat the body to be absolutely visible and speak of the physical phenomena as visible. But what sort of ontological meaning does this “visibility” have? Here I discuss Chamus customs and knowledge pertaining to birth, the transition into physical being, and death, the transition into an invisible state of being.

I. Birth: From Invisible to Visible

Here I describe the Chamus reification of the indigenous reproductive theory.

In Chamus society, the membership or social belonging of children is in accordance with the principle of legitimacy. The Chamus, however, do not systematically specify the legitimacy of a child, but rather, establish paternity by working backwards to the physical phenomenon of becoming pregnant. Some fortunate children inherited certain physical features from their biological father. People identify the “biological” father from such traits as skin color, shape of the head, shape of the ears, orthodontics, distension of the belly, curvature of the feet, etc. But when such clear clues are not visible to everyone, the indigenous reproductive theory comes into play (Kawai, 1994: 163-165).

The indigenous reproductive theory of the Chamus has it that conception occurs through the binding together of menstrual blood and semen. Such an explanation of reproduction is not uncommon among indigenous populations. The Chamus cannot see ovulation, but can see menstrual blood and semen. The physical body of the baby, which is a visible construct, is a mystery that needs to be explained by the available manifest mechanisms.

I focus here on the point that the Chamus are sensitive and cognisant of concrete images that support the correctness of this reproductive theory. The concrete images are abundant, and the Chamus observe and appreciate the process by which a baby’s body is formed and becomes visible : The fetus is already visible.

According to the theory, the fetus starts to be formed when the menstrual blood and semen are mixed inside the woman’s inner genitals. Conception is also possible between periods of menstruation, and is not governed by sexual behaviour. The Chamus call menstruation “breaking the male body.” Because semen is often discharged with the menstrual blood, sexual intercourse is avoided during menstruation. Consequently, ensuring conception lies mostly with the menstruating woman. The likelihood is thought to greatly increase during the period after menstruation when there is now no great flow to outside the body. Since menstrual blood and semen are fluids, both require three days to firmly bind together. The semen of different men “destroy” each other, so if a woman has sex with multiple partners during this three-day period, the semen of the first male partner, not yet firmly bound to the menstrual blood, is expelled from the woman’s body, together with the semen that came later.

Here I talk about external factors that are thought to affect the formation of the fetus.

Pregnant women avoid eating and acting in a group, which is one way of observing a prohibition called *ndaare*. *Ndaare* is not a religious prohibition, but is believed to affect the embryo in the mother, create physical deformities, and organ and tissue abnormalities. For example, “sleeping on your back” is *ndaare*. It is said that sleeping face-up sometimes causes the umbilical cord to entwine the fetus’s neck, strangling it to death. Even if, by good luck, the cord entangles only the hands and feet, the child will be disabled from birth at the loca-

tion of the entanglement. *Ndaare* pertaining to food include milk from livestock that sneeze (as this is thought to indicate they have worms in their heads), and meat and fats from livestock that died of disease. If *ndaare* foods are eaten by a pregnant woman, the roots of *Euphorbiaceae planta* are infused and drunk, in the hope that this will ameliorate undesirable effects.

However, food eaten during pregnancy is suspected of being the cause of any symptom the newborn infant may display, even if it was not *ndaare*. One woman explained that when a nursing infant tries to vomit during its first two months after birth, or if the newborn actually vomits milk, “the child was trying to expel *ngaya* (the first stomach of ruminants).” This is because the Chamus believe that fetuses eat using their mouths. This woman thought that the fetus had ingested the half-cooked first stomach of ruminants that she herself had eaten during pregnancy. This had remained in the intestines after birth, and the child was trying to vomit it out. In other words, she interpreted the condition by which the “first stomach of ruminants was stuck in the intestines” as a condition of the body.

A newborn infant encounters various dangers immediately after birth. The Chamus believe the newborn’s body is incompletely formed, soft, and easily injured. The gravest risk during labor is placental blood. If the placental blood flows via the umbilical cord back to the newborn’s stomach, the blood will destroy (“*lukoral*”) the newborn’s intestines. Children whose intestines have been “destroyed” suffer regular bouts of diarrhoea. The midwife must draw out the blood from the umbilical cord and tie its end, so that the blood does not flow back into the stomach between the time when the afterbirth has totally emerged and the umbilical cord is cut. Further, livestock milk that is fed to the newborn infant is mixed with boiled plant broth and given to cause mild diarrhoea. This is because umbilical blood that may have seeped into the intestines (*lukoral*) must be purged from the body as soon as possible, along with the feces.

Before the fontanelles of the skull have fully sutured, everyone will warn that the wind might blow in. This is because any wind that might invade in this way can reach the chest and damage its inner wall. Children whose inner chest wall is damaged will be plagued by coughs and chest pains. The mother smears cow dung on the crown of the newborn infant’s head and swaddles the head, to ensure that no winds reach the crown.

The continuity of the fetus to the newborn can clearly be seen here. The body of the fetus, which is not directly visible while in the mother’s body, completes the transformation into becoming visible by manifesting externally through birth. The body of the fetus and the body of the newborn after birth are one and the same, and the fetus exists as a real body. From the ontological point of view, the fetus qualifies as visible, and its existence can be adduced through observation.

II. Death: The World of the Invisible

The Chamus are fully aware of the decomposition that human flesh undergoes after death. They are, however, almost entirely unconcerned. For them, the dead are released from their physical image.

Currently, the Chamus bury their dead in the ground, but in the past, they used a method of processing dead bodies that could even be called “burial by hyena.” The body was left under a tree outside the encirclement of houses (*aulo*), to be eaten by hyenas during the night. The hyenas sometimes dragged the body into the bushes, out of sight from the still living.

The Chamus now prepare a body for burial immediately after death. The body is never left lying in state, nor is there a word for mourning. Three hours after the discovery of death, the body is buried. There is no specific cemetery, and the place of burial is simply the *aulo* of the houses in which the deceased had been living at the time. Small stones are placed on a mound of earth, and covered with branches from big trees and acacia cuttings, not particularly to mark the site of the grave, but as a practical measure to prevent hyenas and other wild animals from digging up the corpse. The cairn, branches and cuttings subsequently erode away. People do not visit the grave after burial, and the actual gravesite is eventually forgotten. The Chamus do not pay their respects at the graveside.

They call the dead *lemenan'gani* (pl. *lemenan'ga*). People who are now dead are all *lemenan'ga*, and have no other existence. The dead do not become ancestral spirits or poltergeists over the passage of time, or through the observance of ceremonies.

People may meet the *lemenan'ga* in their dreams. The *lemenan'ga* become manifest in their healthy selves. They are exactly who they were when they were alive, and in most cases, live in the same house. No one ever meets a *lemenan'ga* that they do not know. Talking in one's sleep is thought to be conversations with the *lemenan'ga*, and is considered strong evidence for the reality of such encounters. Encounters with the *lemenan'ga* can be verified by a third party, by listening to a dreamer talking in his or her sleep. This can be called a sharing of the encounter with the dead with other people. If the *lemenan'ga* appear in dreams for several days in a row, a dreamer may become physically exhausted for not having slept well every night and may gradually become ill. At such times, a simple ceremony is performed in which milk and chewing tobacco are offered to the *lemenan'ga*. Nevertheless, the *lemenan'ga* are never evil. The still living simply do not have or believe in a close relationship with *lemenan'ga*. They are neither welcomed nor feared. I have not heard the Chamus speak of the encounters with the *lemenan'ga* as events to be feared, nor are the *lemenan'ga* objects of fear.

I stress here that meeting the dead in dreams is completely different from remembering a dead person. Some people say that the *lemenan'ga* come only at night and can be seen as faint flickers of light. People who have seen television in the city describe the manifestation as “like the TV.” One woman explained to

me the existence of the *lemenan'ga* as follows: "A person dies. In death, their body and bones crumble to nothing. But the *lemenan'ga* appears. Therefore, the *lemenan'ga* exist. I do not know where they are, nor where they live. But they come. Therefore, they definitely exist." The existence of the *lemenan'ga* can be confirmed by encounters, never out of the ordinary, through dreams. Motomitsu Uchibori (Uchibori & Yamashita, 1986: 91), who studied death in the Iban society of Borneo, pointed out that dreaming is considered a firm basis for the existence of the dead and spirits. In much the same way, the empiricism of the Chamus leaves them no room to doubt the existence of these encounters.

The Chamus do not speak much of an afterlife, and not much can be said on the subject. The absence of a clear and positive view of the netherworld, and of a theory of the afterlife, has been variously cited in studies on the ethnology of East African pastoral societies (Evans-Pritchard, 1975; Nagashima, 1986). The lack of concern for the world after death can also be identified among the Chamus. The dead manifest themselves unexpectedly in dreams, with an external existence unconnected to the concerns of the living. There is neither opportunity nor method for the living to approach the dead. In response to my question of what sort of world is the afterlife, the answer is that, at the very least, it is different from the world of the living, and all contact between the two should be severed. For the living, the dead are not beings to whom one may pray or ask for something; moreover the dead on their part do not inflict punishment in response to the living who, for example, fail to observe such obligations as graveside visits. There is no relationship, rights nor obligations, between the living and the dead.

Even if the departed appear in dreams, all connection with the dead basically cease to exist. To the living, the dead are beings with whom they no longer have a relationship. In this sense, death is the ultimate loss.

BODILY EXISTENCE

The ontology of the dead highlights the strong specificity of the Chamus vis-à-vis the universality of humans bodily existence. Below, I try to clarify further the strong Chamus sense of the body, and their meaning of universality.

I. Existence and the Body

The Chamus do not possess a dualistic theory of spirit and body, nor do they recognise the antagonism of flesh versus soul or spirit. The Maasai dictionary (Mol, 1972) translates *ol-menan'gani* (pl. *il-menan'ga*) as ghost, spirit, dead person, corpse, which is equivalent to the Chamus *lenen'ga*. I hesitate to translate *lemenan'ga* as "ghost" for all the reasons described above.

To my abrupt question, "What happens when you die?", nearly all Chamus responded, "It's the end." A similar view of life and death can be seen among the Iteso, who live in Uganda, also in East Africa (Nagashima, 1972: 76-88).

They, too, do not have an afterlife, or spirits after death. To reiterate, the basic Chamus view of life and death is that when people die, they cease to exist, never return, and become nothing. Nevertheless, the dead exist. The dead are clearly separate from the living. Because the living occasionally meet the dead in dreams, the existence of the dead is confirmed by Chamus empiricism.

As I have shown, the Chamus have thoroughly internalized the issue of bodily existence through the process of identifying the visible and biological. On the other hand, although death is a biological process that occurs to the body, the Chamus do not talk of the phenomenon of death, nor of its occurrence, as a physical outcome. The rapid burial upon death and the historic lack of funeral traditions seem to indicate that the method of processing the dead reflects the Chamus view of the corpse as both dead and non-existent.

If we assume that death severs the body from existence, then conversely, it is the body itself that provides the basis for living. Death is separated from life by the body.

II. Relationships with Others

Previously, I described the dead as beings with whom all contact had been severed. Given that the basis of life is the body, the meaning of severance of all contact sets apart the dead and the living, or beings in a community. Here, I return to the topic of the customs concerning death.

For a community, death is a complete separation of one member from others, and is a crisis not only psychologically, but also for maintaining the community. Uchibori (Uchibori & Yamashita, 1986: 120-121) theorized how the very construction of the Iban society, in which the possession of wealth and power are lineally inherited, ensures the continuity of the family, and ultimately of the community. The Chamus solution, however, is completely different, and enacted through the specific actions by the dying persons themselves.

A Chamus person has many things to do before he dies, with *lomon le nkitugun'go*, translated as "words concerning (my) inheritance." With these words, first of all, all the sons are gathered and their financial rights and obligations are explained; such as the division and parcelling out of livestock, loans and repayments. The words encompass the lives of those who will be left behind, such as who is entrusted with looking after the wife, who is about to be a widow, and the affairs of children. Moreover, people whom the dying person had previously cursed are summoned, an accord is reached, and the curse is lifted as the dying person blesses them. Conversely, people who are thought of as likely to curse the widow and the children after one's death are cursed. Next, the relatives are assembled, and *maiyan* performed, in which the dying sprays a mouthful of milk on to them. *Maiyan* can be translated as blessing, but is also an action to indicate that the dying person has no dissatisfaction or anger towards their relatives. After these rites have been performed, bead necklaces and earrings, and brass wristlets and anklets are removed from the dying person, and the head is shaved. This is called *sorata*, and means to

remove all adornments from the body. Financial issues, past antagonism towards others, and concern for the future of the survivors are all cast off in the same way as the adornments, which had been worn to commemorate various rites of passage.

This series of actions are performed according to the will of the dying person. People who become aware of their own imminent death go through these actions, even as they wonder, "Am I really dying?" The approach of death is visible to prophets called *loiboni*. *Loiboni* divine the causes of illness and misfortune as witchdoctors, and perform shamanistic medical treatments. The Chamus ask the *loiboni* when they will die and firmly believe in the answer divined. Thus, the *loiboni* constitutes the transition from possessing a body to non-existence.

The various Chamus actions and ceremonies after death are extremely simple. Although a funeral is held, there are no clothes or makeup to render the person's death conspicuous, and the ceremonial activities that can be called funeral rites and their corollary activities are also sparse. Nor is there any theory of cause and effect concerning a person's death. The Chamus do not ask, "Why has this person died?" but ask, "How did they die?" They ask how they proceeded to their death. More accurately, they do not question about death, but about life. For the Chamus, death is not presented as a problem for the people left living, but for the deceased.

The Chamus say, "People die without any encumbrance." The chain of actions performed immediately prior to death clearly describes this disencumbrance as the result of specific, visible behaviors and actions. The disencumbrance is also a process that leads people to accept death. Given that the shape of experience depends on one's culture, the culture also defines the specific shape of death for individuals. To discuss the cultural climate of death, much further study is required. I would just say here that, death among the Chamus, far from being experienced through the notions of an afterlife and ceremonies to be performed upon death, is rather experienced communally with an actual process of specific, individual actions by both the dying person and would-be survivors. This communal process constitutes the last bodily association between the dying person and the would-be survivors.

I have stated that bodily existence is the basis of living. The dead person has left his body and become certain being that one cannot contact. The bodily existence is the condition for mutual communication among communal partners. "People live in a society" is an ordinary proposition, but for the Chamus, community is akin to interaction among others with a bodily existence, namely, partners of the community.

III. The Body as a Tool of Awareness

I would now like to investigate the epistemological basis for the belief in body existence by the Chamus, which I have so far described.

The Chamus have developed ethnomedical concepts to treat physical and

biological abnormalities within and without the body. For example, when a Japanese has a bad headache, he or she may say, "My head is splitting." The Chamus will say, "Blood is undulating violently in my head", which clearly describes the internal physical condition as visible. Such an expression is a graphic visual description as well as metaphorical description. The importance is that the condition is described as if it "can be known by sight."

It is important to remember that Chamus medical treatment is symptomatic treatment based upon a presumption of the body as a physical object. This has a quite different character from the treatments found in some other societies that employ metaphorical ceremonies to combat curses and sorcery. Chamus treatment works directly on the body with the aim of evoking a specific reaction.

I argue that for the Chamus, the body is the object of their awareness as something visible. Chamus epistemology superficially presents an extremely modern empiricist perspective, which is also the basis of modern Western medicine. However, it clearly differs from an epistemology based on modern empiricism, which depends on language and concepts through logical inference. For the Chamus, the physical world, starting with the body, is not so much the object of awareness but, rather, a locus to be contacted directly using one's own body.

Given this epistemology, if other people of the community are loci in the same way as one's own body, much explanation is not required concerning the bodily existence of living humans. The dead exist and, although some Chamus encounter them visibly in dreams, they are uncontactable beings for whom there is no means for the living to deliberately contact. In other words, the dead are beings who cannot be touched using the body. Death to the Chamus can be understood as events experienced by both the dying and the would-be survivors as an actual process that consist of specific behaviors and actions.

I argue that awareness of others among the Chamus is close to the awareness of the body. The Chamus apprehend various events that occur in the living world as tangible processes consisting of physical phenomena and human actions, and they experience the external world in the form of specific interactions with this world using their own bodies.

Abstraction of the world of awareness without language and shared knowledge are undoubtedly limited by human evolution. The physical world of the Chamus exemplifies their universality by their belief in the tangibility of bodily interactions as the means to define how one can associate with the object of one's interactions.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction of a book titled *The Human Universe of Things*, Uchibori (1997) stated that the human body itself is just a "thing" in the simplest meaning of the word, that it is also a "thing" in the sense of a symbol, and human

interaction in the world, in the final analysis, is nothing but the manipulation of the world – including, naturally, people as “things” themselves – that creates “things” using that very physicality. I agree wholeheartedly with this analysis. However, when facing up to physicality, I can’t subscribe to a standpoint that unilaterally takes the body as a “constructed thing” which is common in criticisms of conceptual essentialism.

Matsui (1997) focused on the attributes of the body as natural and cultural nodes of human existence, and he developed a theory that positions nature as a receptacle for culture, or as a deep layer of culture. Matsui mostly cited gestures and bodily techniques, but even in the areas of linguistic and conceptual awareness and knowledge, I cannot admit any basis for cultures or societies to flatly deny biological properties unconditionally.

The biological basis for human life resides in the body. In this paper, my intention has been to discuss the unavoidability of interactions using bodies, and assert that the biological properties of the body can be the basis for confirming life, through my description of the Chamus. That is to say, biological attributes (in other words Nature as a body), could in all probability form a firm basis to create the shape of life for one’s self in a social setting. For the Chamus, this is the only way that it can be, and as such I came to understand Chamus culture and society, and their belief in the universality of the body. I must hastily add that the universality mentioned here is decisively different from modern universalism, which is a concept of a people who claim to transcend the natural world. The universe of the Chamus is educed from the body and tangible actions using that body.

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