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# The Skin as a Surface of Composition: The Use of Animal Body Parts and Plants among the Panamanian Emberá

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the use of animal body parts, and plants, in various practices of the Panama Emberá. An examination of different bodily practices, including the use of body paint, canvasses the human skin as an important site for the alchemic incorporation of other's abilities and effects. In the context of sickness and shamanic curing, the human skin appears as the ground or screen for projecting oneself into the other's sight; at the same time it provides a clue for human intervention (via diagnosis). In other practices for transmitting the qualities and capacities of non-human bodies, the Emberá do not use the entire body of a particular non-human species but bodily parts, which are not representations of species but rather offer certain kinds of embodied capacities or qualities which reside in the non-human body. In these types of practices, the skin appears as a surface for the re-composition of the body as an assemblage. The skin then is an opening for containing different bodily partialities, and is the place to which they attach. It characterizes the human body form and is the locus of bodily plasticity.

## Introduction

In this paper, I discuss the use of animal body parts and plants in various practices of the Panamanian Emberá. The Emberá have developed numerous uses of body paint with genipap (*Genipa Americana*, Ulloa 1992; Le Clezio 1971; Theodossopoulos 2012)<sup>1</sup>. They use extract taken from the juice of this fruit to draw body decorations with fine sticks. Many of these are used for attracting other people's attention in particular situations, such as during parties or national ceremonies; some also are used for shamanic curing. In addition to genipap fruit, the Emberá use various plants for caring or reshaping their bodies. Each plant use has its own particular effect on the human body. In this respect, the use of plants resonates with other practices which use animal body parts to enhance the human capacity to act and it is this which I examine in this paper.

The Emberá, previously known in the anthropological literature as the Chocó, and belonging linguistically to the Chocó language family, live in the pacific forests of northern Ecuador, Colombia (Chocó) and in eastern Panamá. The Panamanian Emberá live in three different provinces, Panamá and Darién and Comarca Emberá =Wounaan.<sup>2</sup> The ethnographic data in this paper is based on my field research conducted in a riverside community of the Sambú River area during 2009-2014.

Among the societies of lowland South America, the body is the site of irreducible differences between beings (Viveiros de Castro 2005; Descola 2013). Thus, we can assume that when the Emberá use animal body parts and plants, they are relating different bodies to the human body itself. Such kinds of practices, transmitting particular affects, qualities or capacities of non-nonhuman bodies to human bodies, is widely seen in lowland South American societies (see Santos-Granero 2012; also Brend Brabec de Mori, Carneiro de Carvalho and Rahman, this issue). For example, among the Peruvian Urarina, rattles attached to baby hammocks include diverse animal body parts such as bones, teeth, beaks and tails, the rattling sound of which transmits animal qualities onto growing babies (Walker 2013:46-50). Transferring properties in this way must be carefully managed. Among Muinane - the people

of Centre - various consumed substances such as tobacco, coca, chili peppers, manioc and so on, constitute one's "emotions/thoughts". Of these substances, there are "protocols" that define the set of appropriate preparations as well as how such admixtures are to be consumed in order to enhance one's morality (Londoño Sulkin 2012:95). On the other hand, misappropriation of these "could always turn those substances into poison". Negatively taken, these affects cause "madness, anger, a range of disease, and even death, much like the effects of the substances of animals" (Londoño Sulkin 2012:95). Inappropriately prepared or consumed animal substances can cause the transmission of animalistic agencies to the human body (Londoño Sulkin 2005; 2012:95-117). Among the Witoto, another self-denominated "people of the Centre," ash-salt obtained by burning plants are not only substances that contain capacities or affects in themselves, they also contain the affects of other beings including insects and animals which somehow relate to the plant. Certain types of ritualized discourse (*rafue*) have the ability to enhance the qualities of the ash-salt or to connect "the salt species with other plant and animal species" (Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño 2013). In the case of the Emberá, the human skin, which marks the particularity of the human body, plays a significant role. The skin is the channel of this corporal transmission of qualities or capacities, in the same way in which the oral consumption of substances is among people of the Centre, or as are rattle sounds amongst the Urarina. In what follows, I consider three kinds of practices and discourses: first, body decoration in shamanic "curing" ceremonies; second, practices called *obligada* which use animal body parts; and finally, practices that use plants to improve the quality of the human body. By looking at these practices in different contexts, I will describe the various aspects of the human skin as they manifest through these practices. On the use of the genipap fruit for body decoration in the Emberá's life, Ulloa (1992) has conducted an exhaustive study of the collection of plant dyes and the motifs of body decoration. With respect to body painting, there are many motifs and various styles of design: abstract geometrical patterns without any reference to natural entities, motifs of natural entities (including animal, plants, and insects) modified in geometrical patterns, and some that represent natural entities in naturalistic form.

The contexts in which the Emberá use body painting are wide-ranging: puberty initiations (hardly seen in contemporary life), the inauguration of a new house, communal parties (*fiesta*), shamanic curing, and for daily use such as for protection from the sun. "Fiesta" or inaugurations are opportunities for inspiring love and new relationships and body decoration is an important tool for attracting other people's attention, including for the purpose of sexual seduction (Ulloa 1992:134). Today, body decoration is also attractive to tourists (Theodosopoulos 2012) and during national celebrations. Yet, what the Emberá do with plant and animals bodies is not reducible to attracting other people's attention, nor is it limited to self-representation.

The focus of this paper is not body decoration itself, rather, as I mentioned before, "body" changing practices which include particular kinds of body painting. The question is not "what is body decoration in Emberá society?", but rather "what role does the skin play in the Emberá's life?"

### Changing body-images in protection and cure

Firstly, I would like to pay attention to one aspect of the efficacy of body decoration in shamanic curing. In order to explain this, I must introduce briefly ideas of shamanism and disease among the Emberá. Shamans amongst the Emberá are called *jaibana*, and according to Losonczy (1997), the word *jaibana* consists of a word and a morpheme: *jai* and *banaa*. The morpheme of *banna* means to be in possession of and "full of", or a "group" or "plethora of", and *jai* is a word for the particular kinds of spiritual beings that are regarded as causes of illness or illness itself (Losonczy *ibid.*:314).<sup>3</sup> *Jai* owned by *jaibanas* are used for both curing and making somebody sick.

These entities are usually invisible, but the mode of existence of *jai* resembles that of natural species in the forest. There are many kinds of *jais* as species and every *jai*-species is composed of numerous individuals. Species of *jais* are very wide ranging and each of them is a particular class. Some are modeled on natural species, such as the howler monkey, harpy

eagle, frogs, bees, river fish, and particular plants; and others are modeled on artifacts, such as guns, planes and so on (see also Vasco 1985:101).<sup>4</sup>

In curing illnesses caused by *jais*, sometimes the skin or feathers of certain animals are used. For example, for curing illness caused by *bombora-jai* (the harpy eagle *jai*), harpy eagle features are used. When this *jai* is attached to the patient's body, it first affects their eye sight; he/she can't open one's eyes during the day time. Then it affects the motion range of the neck. He/ she can't face the front. Finally, it kills the person by turning their head back to front. The patient's body becomes partially like that of the harpy eagle, and in that way, *bombora-jai* affects the human to whose skin this *jai* attaches.<sup>5</sup> By rubbing the patient's skin with harpy eagle feathers, the *jaibana* can rid the patient of this *jai* entity. As one *jaibana* explained, by rubbing the skin with particular animal skins/feathers, the *jai* attaches to this skin/feathers and is thus removed from the patient. In this type of procedure, direct contact—through rubbing—with skin has an inversed efficacy: not in-corporation but through the de-corporation of affective entities. Skin itself is a surface on which the effects of body are arranged though line drawing and direct contact.<sup>6</sup>

The word of *jaibana* literally means the person who owns many entities of illness. Each *jaibana* can be the master of a whole *jai*-species, and own individual *jais*, in the same way in which a human owns their pigs. By feeding them on *chicha* during rituals, *jaibana* can maintain his/her relationship to his/her *jais*, whom he keeps somewhere in forest. When he/she stops caring for these, *jais* may leave their lazy owner (see also Kane 2004:131; Vasco 1985:45).<sup>7</sup> The abilities of any one *jaibana* are directly proportional to the diversity of *jai* species that one owns.

A patient who needs shamanic curing is affected by these entities. In some cases, particular *jais* have already attached themselves to a patient's body; in other cases *jais* are ordered to attack a particular person by a *jaibana* and are looking for him/her in order to do so. In both cases, patients need to find a *jaibana* who can protect their health, and their human life, from the *jais*.

It is in this context that when a patient is seeking a cure, body painting takes place. Figure 1 is a photo taken during the preparatory phase of a curing ceremony. Two men with body decorations were patients at that time. According to the *jaibana* who was trying to protect the men on the picture, they were under the attack of a *jai* which their neighbor sent them. Even if the *jai* was not yet attached to the bodies of patients, making them sick and leading to their eventual death, their approach also causes people discomfort and intervention is necessary.



Figure 1. Body paint applied to *jaibana* (Kondo 2009)

It is not a *jaibana* himself but “a guardian” *jai* who decides the motifs for curing.<sup>8</sup> Although Ulloa collected various motifs used by the *jaibana* and his/her assistants (Ulloa 1992:205-231), bodily decoration is sometimes used for patients. The guardian *jai* appears in his dream,<sup>9</sup> bringing instructions to decorate the body of the *jaibana*, or his/her assistants, and sometimes that of the patients, with geometrical designs using the genipap fruit. In the case of Fig.1, the decoration on the patient has the effect of preventing a serious invisible attack. On the other hand, according to Ulloa, various motifs that assistants of *jaibana* and the *jaibana* use are efficacious in attracting *jai* that the *jaibana* requires when curing and which are normally resident somewhere in forest. In curing snake bite, *jaibana* uses the motif of the snake on himself in order to “attract the snake which bit the patient”, and the motif of a medicinal plant which the *jaibana* uses for curing “invoke(s) the mother” of this plant (Ulloa 1992:228).

How does a drawing on the skin work to protect against the attacks of invisible beings? The answer is very straightforward. According to the *jaibana* and other informants with whom I raised questions concerning this practice, the decoration is “to change the image of oneself.” Geometrical patterns drawn on one's skin hides his/her appearance. It changes their image, the appearance of the patient, and people do this so as to cheat the eyes of the spiritual beings which are looking for them.<sup>10</sup> In this way, it disguises and helps to protect him or her from attacks of spiritual beings that have been sent by a *jaibana* somewhere. Such is the efficacy of decorating the body in the ritual.

On the efficacy of body decoration, Gell discusses the apotropaic pattern of decorative arts including tattoos. Referring to various examples of using “maze” designs, such as those that involve “repetition and symmetrical arrangements of motifs” (Gell 1998:76), he characterizes this kind of decoration as a cognitive obstacle that prevents spiritual beings from reaching their malicious ends. “Apotropaic patterns are demon-traps, in effect, demonic fly-paper, in which demons become hopelessly stuck, and are thus rendered harmless” (Gell 1998:84).

This explanation of the efficacy of decoration is not applicable for the Emberá. One of the reasons for this is that the decoration in the photo is not something like a “maze”.<sup>11</sup> In addition, when we consider how the *jai* affects the human body. In this case, the “maze” style skin decoration is not adequate for protection from *jais*, for this would assume that the destination of the demonic agents is beyond the surface on which decorations are drawn: the human skin.<sup>12</sup> However here, the surface of body is precisely the destination of *jai*. Especially in the case of *jais* modeled on animal beings, such as *cotutu-jai* (howler monkey *jai*), or *sorré-jai* (woodpecker *jai*), and that take the form of these animals (Figure 2);<sup>13</sup> these invisible entities are on the body's surface when one falls sick. The vision of *tongelo*, who is another kind of specialist on *jai* matters, also displays these characteristics. The *tongelo* is especially good at diagnosing diseases caused by invisible entities, and he can see each *jai* as it appears with its particular image in his hallucinatory vision. *Tongelos* see patients' sick selves as bodies attached to a particular *jai* species when they ingest hallucinogenic plants and they recognize them as the cause of disease.<sup>14</sup> Then, when people are sick, the invisible entities are already on patients' body. This could be the reason why the “maze” like pattern, which is said to trap demonic beings inside of itself before passing the skin, is not used for preventing demonic attacks amongst the Emberá.



Figure 2. Statue representing the bodily condition of a patient (Kondo 2009)

Additionally, the Emberá state that a person's appearance can cause such illnesses. When an individual *jai* causes a disease in a particular person without the malicious instruction of a *jaibana* sorcerer, the patient may have unintentionally attracted the *jai* because of their good-looks. *Jais* follow such people and attach themselves to the people they desire.<sup>15</sup> When the *jai* finds his victim in the forest, it is often because it is sexually attracted to this person.

One day, a married woman with children, whom I shall call Tenisa, was walking alone in the forest when she was suddenly confronted with a shadowlike figure, who stood looking at her. Being frightened by the presence of such an unusual figure, she immediately returned home. However, she gradually started to feel strange and finally fell sick, suffering symptoms of a loss of strength and having difficulty breathing. It took almost a year to recover because doctors in the hospital could not identify the disease that harmed her. During that time, she occasionally dreamed of this strange figure and started to realize that a *jai* was following her. According to the *jaibana*, who finally cured her, it was indeed this male shadowlike figure who had been attracted to her which had caused her illness. As this entity of illness decidedly selects those who he/she will follow based on their appearance, decorations that obscure one's appearance are adequate for preventing demonic attack.

In fact, visual appearance play significant role with regards to the realm of the invisible or spiritual entities. The word *jaure* means soul or vital principle that resides in something that moves. Even plants may have *jaure* since they move when the wind blows. Additionally, *jaure* means shadows caused in the day and as well as those from the light of the moon, images of oneself that appear in rivers, in mirrors and in the other people's eyes. These entities share one characteristic: they are optical bodily images that appear outside of and effluent from one's own physical body.<sup>16</sup> As Le Clezio wrote, inspired by the Emberá's discourses and practices, "the skin is a spectacle of one's life, offered to the other's eye" (Le Clezio 1971:122, translated by Kondo).

As the appearance of the human is an important matter in respect to the realm of the invisible or spiritual entities, a realm perhaps beyond material reality, the human skin is also a surface for redrawing relationships with these entities. Body decoration during ritual rearranges one's appearance so as not make a spectacle of oneself for other invisible agents. Here, the human skin appears as the ground or screen for projecting oneself in the other's sight, at the same time it provides a clue for human intervention in these aspects of reality via material procedures. It allows one to make one's appearance invisible to invisible beings. Skin is located at an intersection of different realms: visible and invisible, tangible material and optical images.

### Transmitting the Capacities of Different Bodies

The use of genipap fruit does not always involve specified motifs. The "*ombligada*" is a practice that uses a particular part or parts of an animal's body mixed with the juice of genipap fruit. These materials are effective for acquiring the capacity to act, a capacity that resides in specific parts of animal bodies. Even though the variety of animals body parts used in this practice is wide ranging, the preparatory procedures are very similar. First they crush bones, nails, eyes, or brains, of desired animal bodily parts, then mix them with the juice. This admixture is then applied to the skin, especially on particular parts of the human body, but without any motifs modelled on natural species.

During my research period, I did not have the chance to observe this practice. However, many know how to do this and they sometimes would volunteer an explanation when I enquired after different animals we saw in the forest. As this practice does not involve matters of *jais*, the *jaibana* do not play role.<sup>17</sup> In principle, a person can conduct this procedure whenever he/she wants and it is not regarded as something like a rite of passage. The bodily effects transmitted on each use usually remain permanently in one's body even after the drawings or marks made by genipap mixture disappeared. Drawing evokes the efficacy of transmitting the desired capacity, but it is not the capacity itself.

Frequently we can find ringed kingfishers (*Megaceryle torquata*) near the rivers around this area. When these birds, perched on branches by the river side, find a fish in the river, they make a beeline towards the fish under the water and catch it. Members of the Ringed Kingfisher species are known for their ability to find their "prey". If a person puts a mixture of

the mashed eye of ringed kingfishers together with genipap juice and applies this to his face, especially on his eyelid, that person will acquire the capacity for finding prey similar to that of Ringed Kingfishers, not only in fishing but also in hunting. The eyes of the Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maxceimus*), a sea bird, also produces the same effects. As the Emberá do not practice trap hunting, the ability to find prey in the forest with one's own clear eyesight is important for successful hunting.

Since Emberá do not practice ambush hunting either, walking in the forest is also an essential hunting skill. There are animal body parts that are used for enhancing one's capacity to walk in the forest. One of these are deer bones, especially, the metatarsal bone. Deer run fast in the forest when they are chased by predators, dogs, and hunters and sometimes succeed in outrunning their predator. Putting the mixture of the genipap juice and the crushed bones on one's body, by drawing a straight line from the shin to the thigh, has the effect of enabling the person to walk as well as this animal does. The leg of the Grey-necked Wood Rail (*Aramides cajaneus*), a bird known to always be walking around in the forest, were in the past also effective for enhancing the ability of ancestral warriors since they also had to run very rapidly to attack and have the stamina to escape.

For hunting skills, people regard one's attractiveness-luck (*kaña*)<sup>18</sup> as crucial for success. If one has *kaña*, prey in the forest don't run away from the hunter or sometimes they may come close to the hunter all by themselves. There are various ways to gain *kaña* and this quality is also transmittable from particular animals.<sup>19</sup> According to the Emberá, a particular parasitic fly (species unknown) feeding on the hoof of a Red Brocket Deer (*Mazama termaná*) can have this effect. Taken just after the deer's slaughter, the parasite is crushed and mixed with the juice of genipap, with the whole concoction applied to the whole hand and foot without making any design. The person will then acquire the same attractiveness that the parasite has. Here, parasitic habitus are translated into the capacities of seduction and attraction.

The nails of jaguars are good for increasing the ability to use bows for hunting and war (albeit today, bows are seldom used for hunting). By putting a mixture of these nails and the juice of genipap on his arm and on the back of his shoulder, a person will be as a good hunter as this dangerous animal is. Different dangerous animals are used for enhancing the ability for wrestling. One style of wrestling involves grabbing the other man's hair as starting position. The nails of the anteater and the arm bones of the sloth, as well as jaguar's nails, are effective for increasing one's capacity for this style of fighting. Neither the anteater nor the sloth is a predator, but the anteater is regarded as just as dangerous as the jaguar, since it can sometimes kill a jaguar with its sharp nails when defending itself. Additionally, sometimes anteaters kill a hunter's dogs when they encounter them in the forest. Once an anteater strangles a dog, the dog can't escape from his enemy by himself. One Emberá man told me about his encounter with this uncanny animal. When he found an anteater in the forest he shot the anteater with a hunting gun. Since this animal doesn't move it was easy to shoot. However, even though the bullet surely hit its body, the anteater kept moving as if nothing happened for him. The experience terrified this hunter so much and he thinks this anteater to be a very uncanny being. The anteater is not predator, but might be an anti-predatory being.<sup>20</sup>

The Emberá know that the sloth moves very slowly and sometimes people refer to a person or kid as a sloth to mock them. It is positively evaluated for its ability to grab things since it always hangs its body from branches using its arms. Its unwavering body under the branch shows its handling abilities.<sup>21</sup>

Thus we can basically understand what the *ombligada* is. It is the practice of enhancing the human capacity to do a particular action by taking it from the bodies of distinctive animals. This must be one type of the practices which Frazer's famously described as "contagious magic" and that can be seen in other Amerindian societies in variety of different modes (see also Santos-Granero 2012; Walker 2013).

Interestingly, the term *ombligada* reminds us of a Spanish word for the navel: "ombligo." African descendants who live in the coastal area of Darién and Chocó in Colombia are neighboring groups of the Emberá and they have also developed practices called *ombligada* which aim at providing, in principle, the same effect: transferring particular qualities of animals or even minerals into the human body. However, in these societies, this is done when a

baby is born, where a mixture of bodily parts and medicinal stuffs is applied directly to umbilicus (Arocha 1998; Losonczy 1997:201-209).

The Emberá also mentioned such procedures, but they never deny the effects of *ombligada* through the skin. Besides, according to the Emberá, this *ombligada* through the skin is effective whenever it is done in one's life time and is not something restricted on the moment of birth (see also Kane 1986:228). Not only the navel but also the skin is a channel of this type of transmission of different capacities or qualities.

The Emberá draw simple lines on the arms, legs or eyelid with the mixture containing materials of body parts of different species and as such, the motif of real animals is *not* pertinent in this context. The *ombligada* practice is not that of representation, but rather, is to do with simple markings on skin that signal potent capacities that enable the Emberá to incorporate particular qualities into their bodies.

### Transmitting Qualities of Different Bodies

I would like to go on to a different set of practices, that of using various plants that focus on changing the human body's form for the purpose of curing. Even though these are not called *ombligada*, they have a similar effect in that they transmit bodily qualities of different species to the human body. However, genipap fruit is not used in this context.

Various other plants are also effective for changing the human bodily form in different ways. In most of cases, the quality required for changing the body appears in the physical form of the plants. By putting the prepared plant stuffs on particular body parts, that part will become similar to the plant itself. A direct contact between a given substance and the human skin allows for this type of incorporation. Direct contact with the skin in certain medical procedures, including bathing in plant infusions and orally taking tea, is also widely used for curing and especially for diseases without *jaiz*. The skin is also a channel of ingesting these medical effects.<sup>22</sup> Pouring a hot herbal infusion, containing a range of medical plants, straight onto the skin is effective even for a knife wound. Direct physical contact with the skin is a necessary procedure for the transmission of a given quality, but no lines are drawn, either with the genipap fruit or without it. These practices then highlight the capacity of the skin itself rather than effects of line drawing in acquiring new bodily differences or for transmitting bodily qualities that people are trying to acquire. Here we can see "the permeability of the skin to outside influences" (Lagrou 2009:199).

There is also a plant (species unknown) used for enlarging male genitalia. The underground thick root of that plant is used and the form and size of this root is similar to that of the penis. After smashing its roots, one applies it on the body part covering it with a leaf from the same plant and leaving it there throughout the night. If one does this various times, then he is to acquire a penis as big and thick as this root.

Another plant, with big tubers, are applied to the female genitalia of young girls to reduce sexual desire. The edible part of this plant is covered by dry skin, but the reverse underside is wet. After drying the underside over the fire, the genitalia of a young girl is wiped with this plant which is said to be effective for regulating the sexual desire of the growing girl: the inner-side is no longer the part to be wet. By converting the natural character of the skin of this plant, a growing girl is able to acquire the modified quality that this artificially-converted skin expresses. Here, the combination of two oppositions, "cover side - inner side" and "dry - wet", recalls the similarity between body parts, the skin of plant and the human girl's genitalia, of different species.

There is a fruit (locally called *sawn*) that is spherical enough to be used for making a bowl; this fruit is also good for shaping women's hips. The fruit begins as the size of the thumb but grows to that of soccer ball in two or three days. Crushing the fruit when small and applying it to the hip of a girl when she is around three year old with help to cause a desirable curve. One day a woman, whom I shall call Elena, explained to me the procedure for obtaining this body shape with gestures: first, touching the outside of a bowl made from this fruit, she gestures the form of an ideal hip by moving arms roundly on her own hips and swaying them. Then her grand-daughter, perhaps eight or nine years old, took the bowl and put it on her hip and stepped with it swaying her hip as her grandmother did. These impro-

vised gestures demonstrate the effect quite well: one's hip will become as round as the fruit bowls, and hopefully the woman will also acquire the same swagger.

All of the examples mentioned above show how to incorporate the quality embodied in the form of plants into the human body. In such a way, the human body will partially become just like the particular plants they apply.

### Form as a Materialized Capacity

We are now able to understand that the form, in the morphological sense, of the plant is the quality which people want to acquire. In this respect the use of plants is similar to that of animal body parts during *ombligada*. Both kinds of practices aim to incorporate particular qualities or to activate, on the human body, capacities which reside in the bodies of different species. This constitutes an alchemical exchange: the forms of different bodies are the embodied qualities or capacities that people would like to incorporate. But it should be noted that what is used is only particular parts of beings: not a whole body but only a part of the body which is then related to the particular parts of the human body on which the effect will take place. To consider this aspect further, I would like to refer to discussions on the body's form in Amerindian societies more widely.

In Descola's discussions on animism, bodies (especially animal bodies) are understood as what differentiates beings from each other and "form is the crucial criterion of differentiation" (Descola 2013:131). Form "includes the entire package of equipment that makes it possible for a species to occupy a particular habitat and there develop the distinctive mode of life by which we immediately identify it" (Descola 2013:134). Each form corresponds to "equipment" for living and for being distinctive.

In the perspectivism of Viveiros de Castro, as it is in Animism more widely, the body is a differentiator and the "origin of perspectives." Viveiros de Castro descriptively defines the body for Amerindians in this way: "What I call body is not a synonym for distinctive substance or characteristic anatomy; it is an assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a habitus." Shortly, the body is "a bundle of affects and capacities" (Viveiros de Castro 2005:54).<sup>23</sup>

Equipment, bundle, assemblage, all these terms indicate one collective made of plural parts. Body is not only a uniform entity but also consists of various components: affects, capacities, qualities and so on. Non-human body forms express these capacities and qualities, each of which also can reside in different collectives to some degrees, since they are transmittable.<sup>24</sup> The form of non-human bodies are so attractive for humans that they wish to incorporate them.

Based on the idea of the body as an assemblage of capacities and affects, we can understand practices of *ombligada* and plant use much better. Body parts in use (bones, nails, leaves, fruit) are not representations of a species itself or a whole assemblage but a specific materialized capacity or quality, that is one component of the body as an assemblage. These are then practices that reconfigure human bodies by taking one particular capacity (or quality) that was in a different assemblage.

Such transmission of qualities and capacities between different bodies is also reported in Kane's ethnographic writing on canoe making practice, which necessarily requires the skill of using the axe (Kane 1986:214-256). She detects a resonance between a particular kind of *ombligada*, which is a reconfiguration of the human bodily assemblage, and a motif of myth, both of which tell the genesis of certain animal bodies, including the proto-woodpecker and proto-horned – which had human bodies at the time. This is also the myth of the origin of water. During these mythic times, all the water was inside of a giant wild cashew tree and the creator, *Ankoré*, found proto-*jesura* ant (*Campenotus*) dominating the water and decided to let the water out. The creator changes the proto-*jesura* ant into the current body of this ant. Proto-woodpecker and proto-horned lizard were stealing water from this giant tree. *Ankoré* got angry and made this tree fall down somehow. "When the world changed, *sorré* (woodpecker) and *ochorró* (horned lizard) stayed with their axes on their heads" (Kane 1986:249-250). In the version which I heard, Proto-woodpecker appears as a person who was invited

by *Ankoré* to cut down a giant tree with his axe. What the myth tells us is that the woodpecker is a being which embodied the axe. The axe is part of his bodily “equipment”.

According to Kane, the beak of this woodpecker is effective for “acquiring force as an axeman.” Putting a mixture of genipap and the woodpecker’s beak on one’s hands and lower arms is the required procedure (Kane 1986:227-228). Thus the beak is the materialized ability of using the axe and the axe resembles the capacity of the woodpecker for felling trees. The form of a being which has an embodied axe is effective for enhancing one’s ability for using the axe. This shows how the *ombligada* is a reconfiguration of the “assemblage” of the human body by taking one particular capacity or quality which resides in the non-human body, and also partially resonates with what Santos-Granero calls the “artefactual anatomy.”

According to him, the artefactual anatomy “conceives of all living beings as composite entities, made up of the bodies and parts of bodies of a diversity of life forms, among which artifacts occupy a prominent place...It can thus be said that Amerindians are not only intellectual “bricoleurs”...but, above all, that they conceive of all creative acts as taking place in the key of “bricolage”. All visible and invisible occurrences in the world have originated through processes entailing the deconstitution and reconstitution of the bodies of ancient demiurge and primordial humans.... it is always about composite, namely artefactual anatomy” (Santos-Granero 2009:21-22).<sup>25</sup>

Among the Emberá, not all of bodies of non-human being are derived from artifacts. It was not a particular artifact but only a mysterious agency of the creator that generated the body of *jesura* ant, for example. However, inspired by this discussion, we can understand that what the Emberá do with animal body parts and plants is corporal “bricolage”, the process of re-composition or re-configuration of human bodies. Body form as a tangible entity is key component of this process. In this sense, the Emberá’s body fabrication is a kind of alchemy that operates processes of composition-decomposition within a logic of the concrete (see Lévi-Strauss 1966:42). The “contagious magic” here is more about operation rather than language-like representation.

In the discussion of metaphor and metonymy, derived from a linguistic-modeled consideration of the symbolic activities of Roman Jakobson, “contagious magic” is regarded as a metonymic phenomenon (Jakobson 1956). However, “contagious magic” in the Emberá practice is not reducible to a metonymical phenomenon that is modeled on language. It is rather an operational activity that presupposes not representational relationship but transformative effects between related entities.

If this corporal “bricolage” is not reducible to language, how is their “set of the bricoleur’s means ... defined only by its potential use” (Levi-Strauss 1966:17-18)? It could be the diversity of forms as a bundle of affections and capacities, including those of animals, plants and even artifacts. Amidst this diversity, the Emberá detect affects and capacities that can be incorporated into their own bodies.

In practices of this bodily bricolage, the skin appears as the surface for re-composing the body as an assemblage; more figuratively, skin is a surface on which different threads of capacities or qualities are interwoven. Given that the transmission of qualities or capacities doesn’t always involve body decoration, the human skin itself is opened “to constitute the surface that contains bodies” (Lagrou 2011:76).

## Conclusion

On the theme of human skin among the societies of lowland South America, Turner described one aspect of the skin as a surface for inscribing social relationships. By focusing on various modes of fabricating skin that is nearly equally to dressing the self, he showed how social categories or relationships to other social persons are expressed and impressed on the skin (Turner 2012). The practices of the Emberá show a different aspect of the human skin: a complex surface on which different kinds of effects are generated. It is not only a surface that represents social relationships developed outside of one’s body; the human skin is also a surface that relates and composes the body itself. Karadimas said, “the human being is not devoid of the skin in the sense that they are flayed, but it seems that the skin singularly is exempt from any motif.” (Karadimas 2011:205 translation by author).<sup>26</sup> The skin is not just an absence of salient capacities, rather, as the practices of the Emberá show, an opening for

containing different bodily partialities. The human skin demonstrates its capacity or quality of attachment/detachment of different bodily forms. In short, the human skin characterizes the human body form and is the locus of bodily plasticity.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The book of Le Clezio, entitled *Hai* is not ethnography in the ordinary sense. He doesn't even mention the name of the group, the Emberá. However, there are various easily identifiable photos of artifacts that belong to the Emberá, and it is clear that many passages are a description of this group. The title of his book, *Hai*, surely derived from the native term for invisible entities also discussed in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup>Comarca is a special administrative area for the indigenous people in Panamá. In this Comarca, the Emberá and the Wounann, previously called Chocó, live. There are also many communities of the Emberá located outside of this Comarca.

<sup>3</sup>Other scholars also noted that the word of *jai* can be translated as “illness” (Anonymous 1929:1; Isaccson 1993:76). Some regard this concept to signify “essence” (Vasco 1985:103; Losonczy 1997:314). On the signification of *jaibana*, Vasco suggests a different interpretation. According to him, “*baná*” may correspond to “*banía*”, a word for “water.” Then *jaibana* can be *jai banía*, the essence of water (Vasco 1985:144).

<sup>4</sup>There are even *jais* modeled on animals, but we cannot definitely conclude that an animal *jai* is the representative of that animal. It seems that the relationship between a *jai* modeled on animals and real animals in the forest is obscure. Some of the Emberá, including a *jaibana*, denied the transformation of animal souls into *jais*. Rather, the *jaibana* told me that the *jais* proliferate thanks to sexual reproduction. However, Losonczy defined *jais* as ex-souls of animals and some of humans who died in forest (Losonczy 1997:322, 341). I don't yet have any data that would allow me to explain how to consider this difference.

<sup>5</sup>On other examples see Hernández (1995:89).

<sup>6</sup>Other scholars also recorded characteristics of shamanic curing as extractive acts (Losonczy 1997:337; Vasco 1985:82). Additionally, in a myth of origin of the common potoo (*Nycibius greseus*), a motif of illness as cloth, or something to be detached, appears. In this story, the creator at first was affected by a kind of skin disease, then, his wife become tired of caring for such an ugly man. One day, she went to a communal party to look for another man. The creator decides to follow her and takes off his diseased skin. Then he appears as a really attractive man. Somehow he detects her cheating heart, and changes her into common potoo.

<sup>7</sup>On the importance of feeding or caring in order to be a “master” in Lowland South American societies, see Fausto (2008). Losonczy described with detail the importance of increasing the power to control the *jai* for apprentices to be good *jaibana* (Losonczy 1997:314-317). Vasco also reported that *jaibana* can appropriate *jais* which were attached to his patients, when *jaibana* have cured diseases (Vasco 1985:82)

<sup>8</sup>According to Ulloa, on some occasions, assistants or *jaibanas* themselves decides on the motives (Ulloa 1992:123-124, 206)

<sup>9</sup>Vasco recorded that through dream, the guardian *jai* informs the *jaibana* how to prepare a curing ceremony (see Vasco 1985:16).

<sup>10</sup>Theodossopoulos also refers to the same effect of body decoration in shamanic curing without specifying motives in use (Theodossopoulos 2012:602). On the motives for body painting, Vasco mentioned the face paintings of *jaibanas* in Colombia. These are called “like jaguar (como tigre)” and “like cat (como gatico).” This enables *jaibana* to identify these felines (Vasco 1985:94). In the catalogue of body painting collected by Ulloa, we can find vari-

ous motives for paintings applied exclusively on the face, which are seldom used in the case of the Emberá in Panamá, as far as I know (see also Issacson 1993:32-34).

<sup>11</sup> Even in the catalogue made by Ulloa, there are no motifs that correspond what Gell called “maze” (see Ulloa 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Inspired by the discussion of Gell, Ingold further developed an interpretation of the efficacy of the “maze” like decoration with regard to the notions of “surface”, “trace” and “threads”. Then, he summarized its efficacy as follows: “For at the very moment when the demon alights on the surface, it ceases to be a surface at all, and the line apparently drawn on it become threads that trap the demon as if in a spider’s web” (Ingold 2007:57).

<sup>13</sup> This artifact, modeled on the baton of *jaibana* which I bought from a husband of a female *jaibana* as a souvenir, represents the body of patients. A howler monkey attaches on the head, and according to the manufacturer, this is the state of being sick with *cotutu-jai*.

<sup>14</sup> He/she cannot own *jais* as *jaibanas* can, therefore, *tongelos* can neither cure nor cause any illness with *jais*. However, unlike *jaibana*, who requires the help of his guardian spirits for diagnosis (that is, in identifying the *jai* on the body) through hallucinatory dreams, the *tongelo* can directly see the appearance of *jais* with his naked eye. During diagnosis by *jaibana*, who sees the affecting *jai* is not the *jaibana* himself but his guardian *jai*. Sometimes, a *jaibana* can interfere with other *jaibana*’s by making their guardian *jai* blind, which then deprives the *jaibana*’s of their ability for diagnosis.

<sup>15</sup> Among the Mehinaku, the invisible entity called *apapanye* causes disease because they love the patient. (Stang 2009:83).

<sup>16</sup> To indicate this variety of connotation, some say that there are three or four types of *jaures*. As far as I understood, there is not a systematical explanation on relationship between the different aspects of this entity (or these entities). Vasco also shows varieties of the explanations of *jaure*, which are somehow un-systematized (Vasco 1985:99-100).

<sup>17</sup> See Vasco (1985:89), on the ambiguous role of *jaibana*. At least, this procedure doesn’t require specialist knowledge or skills of *jaibana*.

<sup>18</sup> One Emberá man stated that a body with *kaña* is similar to the body of juveniles, who are regarded as much more attractive than elders.

<sup>19</sup> Hernández recorded other types of acquiring of quality for seduction, or being attractive (Hernández 1995:139-140).

<sup>20</sup> The anteater is also regarded as being able to cause bad fortune in hunting. If a hunter encounters an anteater at first on his hunting trip and fails to kill it, then he would not kill any animal on that day. On the danger of the anteater among the Runa, see Kohn (2013:120-121).

<sup>21</sup> Lévi-Strauss mentioned that the sloth has strong links with the hammock in various Amazonian myths. In the Mundurucu myth, “the sloth result(s) from the gradual transformation of a man wrapped in his hammock.” He also noted that “in his common position, hanging head down from a branch, the sloth resembles a hammock” (Levi-Strauss 1996:125,133-34).

<sup>22</sup> According to the work about ideas of “skin” in Europe by Benthien, the idea of skin as corporal boundary of the individual emerged in 18 century, and before that, skin was an important surface for medical diagnosis and treatment, including bloodletting or bathing and so on. The skin was the “organ of treatment” (Benthien 2002).

<sup>23</sup> This connotation of bodily form as an affect can be applied to the appearance of *jai*-species or invisible body of *jai*. The appearance as an animal species expresses how it affects human body as illness. Form-appearance- of *jai* is exactly affection.

<sup>24</sup> In various societies of Lowland South America, directions of such transmissions are not restricted from animal to human. Dogs also can gain particular qualities from different animals or perspective of the prey animal. Many of such transmissions occurs mainly through mouth (see Descola 1996: 128; Kohn 2013:107; Walker 2013:47). According to Walker, in the Urarina, dogs’ “tongues rubbed repeatedly with those (nests) of songbirds to make them bark louder and more often” (Walker 2013:47).

<sup>25</sup> Santos-Granero proposed a framework of “incorporation” to interpret “contagious magic” in body construction. According to him, there are two types of incorporative procedures: embodiment, “which entails the incorporation through objectivation of external substances and subjectivities” and ensoulment, “which involves the incorporation through subjectivation of external artifacts and bodily substances” (Santos-Granero 2012:198). I don’t think

the practices of corporal transmissions concerned here always involve processes of “subjectivation” or “objectivation.”

<sup>26</sup>In the preceding sentences of this quotation, Karadimas refers to the identification of the animal body as a cloth, expanding the theme of “envelope” that Viveiros de Castro detected, and which Fausto develops with the discussion of mask (Viveiros de Castro: 2005; Fausto 2011 also Gonçalves Martín this issue).

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