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Preface

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Amazonian shamanism has attracted young urbanites from the most 'developed' parts of the world generation after generation for the best part of the last two hundred years. Michael Brown once cautioned New Age enthusiasts about admiring the shamanic tradition one-sidedly. There is nothing wrong with embarking on visionary quests as an alternative to modern healing practices, he remarked, so long as shamanism's stark truths are not brushed aside. 'Shamanism,' he continued, 'affirms life but also spawns violence and death. The beauty of shamanism is matched by its power – and like all forms of power found in society, it inspires its share of discontent' (Brown 1989, 10). Forty years on, Michael Brown's caution remains very actual. David Dupuis's recent exhibition at the Musée du Quai Branly is a testimony to changing New Age psychedelic sensibilities. Visitors are invited to explore misunderstandings that arise when native Amazonians fulfil non-Amazonians' psychedelic needs. By the end of the visit, they may have learnt much about intercultural encounters, but they will have remained blind to dark shamanic practice (Dupuis 2023). The need to counterbalance the large academic production on global shamanism and *ayahuasca* tourism with proper documentation of the dark side of shamanism has no doubt prompted the authors of this fine book to assemble a wealth of new ethnographic evidence on the social contexts of sorcery practice (*brujeria* in Spanish) in Amazonia.

Kanaima, one of the better-documented forms of sorcery in lowland South America, figures prominently in the book. In homage to pioneer figures such as Audrey Butt-Colson and Neil Whitehead, contributors provide detailed ethnographic descriptions of *kanaima* discourse in daily life and of harmful ritual practice in specific, localised settings. While building on Neil Whitehead's approach to violence as cultural performance, contributors are less interested in abstracting the 'poetics of violence' from *kanaima* pragmatics than they are in providing detailed, contextualised descriptions of the ways in which (potential) victims perceive or experience *kanaima* harmfulness.

'*Kanaima* may be so many things' remarks Dan Cooper in his study of Akawaio representations of the links between violence and territory. Shamanic knowledge circulates unendingly among the people of the circum-Mount Roraima region of Brazil, Guyana, and Venezuela. Rather than looking for anthropological generalizations regarding cannibalism and predation, violence and war, or history as sorcery, we should follow in the footsteps of Audrey Butt-Colson and pay more attention to the native point of view and its focus on the way in which ambivalence is constructed. If all beings present in the multisensory, sacred landscape can be either helpful, harmful, or both, what matters, then, are the moral stances that get privileged. According to the author's research collaborators, *kanaima* sorcery does not perpetrate violence; rather, it works speculatively at ensuring that reciprocity, balance, and continuity prevail. Among the

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Pemon of Venezuela's Gran Sabana studied by Matthias Lewy, by contrast, malevolence acquires meaning not through convergence, but through bifurcation. *Kanaima* killers behave differently depending on whether they possess shamanic powers or not, even if both types of killers equally strike their victims through sound attacks associated with bird whistling. Potential victims must thus pay attention to the quality of the whistling they hear. Hearing a whistling composed of the overlaying of bird vocalization with the sound of a human voice signals the *kanaima* killer's intention to frighten his victim to death. Matthias Lewy invites the reader to dwell on the immorality of intentional twistedness. Why would the imperfect imitation of a bird's song provoke such fear? Evgenia Fotiou's fascinating case-study leads us deeper into the fear-producing machinations of sorcery. How does *ayahuasca* tourism in the Peruvian Amazon intensify shamanic warfare she wonders. Her ethnography, which vividly captures the ways in which power inequalities exacerbate sorcery accusations, provides some answers. She emphasises the central role played by the intense desires, affects, and sensibilities of native Amazonian, mestizo, and EuroAmerican protagonists who get entangled within ever expanding webs.

To summarise, in the Guianas, *kanaima* sorcery practices aiming to poison, mutilate, or kill work by instilling fear. In Peru, globalizing psychedelic experiences drive Amazonians to induce debilitating fear into non-Amazonians, who idealize shamanic practices as potent channels for emotional healing. By juxtaposing these two forms of manipulation of violence, the book seeks to elucidate the historical dynamics at work in both. In so doing, the book invites us to look past fear-inducing techniques, which may be occulting what really matters. A central aspect of shamanic power that too great a concern with the prey/predator relation has masked comes to the fore: strength derives jousting with an equal. For too long, Amazonian shamanism has been thought about as inherently ambivalent because its power can be deployed for beneficial or for harmful ends. However, native Amazonian power is best understood in the context of two predators of equal force locked in combat, neither willing to let the other go (Rival 2015, 290-291). By forcing the souled body not to forget to fear weakness, sorcery techniques shield the strength that one needs to remain human. This might be the book's most powerful ethical insight, one born out of intercultural dialogue, and, it goes without saying, open to further debate.

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