

I Foresee My Life



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I Foresee My Life is a study of the ritual performances of the Kayabi, a Brazilian indigenous people, during the 1990s. Kayabi rituals are distinct in that they center on the autobiographical narratives of living people. Suzanne Oakdale discusses these autobiographical performances in the context of shamanic cures, mortuary rites, and political oratory. In each ritual, leaders describe how some of the dramatic environmental, economic, and political changes taking place in the Amazon have affected them. For example, the Kayabi have moved from a heavily colonized area to a reservation and as a result have had to address different facets of Indian identity, new forms of commodity consumption, residence patterns, and leadership. As they narrate their lives in these rituals, leaders also give other participants ways to address some of the pressing issues in their own lives. Special emphasis is given to the emotional effects of narrative performances and how these accounts move people to identify with others, compel them to act in appropriate ways, or assuage their grief over a lost loved one. Oakdale analyzes autobiographical performances using insights from studies on ritual, life history, and linguistic anthropology to better understand Kayabi notions of self and person and the role these narrative expressions play in their social life. Richly textured with eyewitness accounts and indigenous voices, I Foresee My Life demonstrates the enduring power of indigenous performances today. Suzanne

Oakdale is an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of New Mexico-Albuquerque.

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