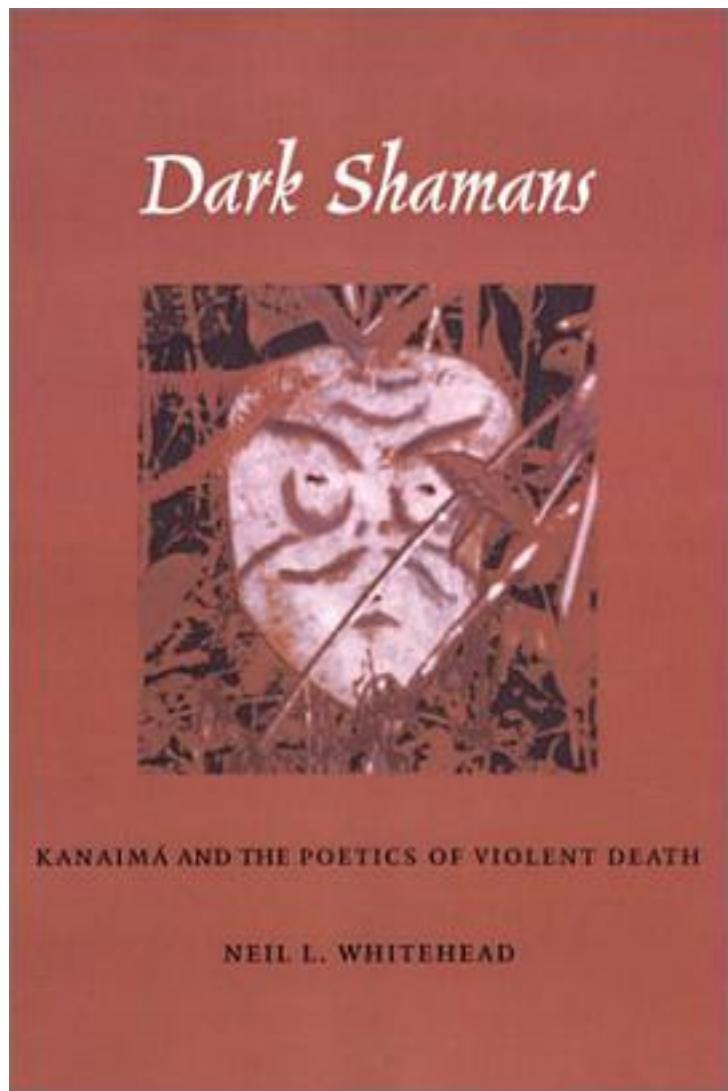


Dark Shamans



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On the little-known and darker side of shamanism there exists an ancient form of sorcery called kanaima, a practice still observed among the Amerindians of the highlands of Guyana, Venezuela, and Brazil, which involves the ritual stalking, mutilation, lingering death, and consumption of human victims. At once a memoir of cultural encounter and an ethnographic and historical investigation, this book offers a sustained, intimate look at kanaima, its practitioners, their victims, and the reasons they give for their actions. Neil L. Whitehead tells of his own introduction to kanaima—which involved an attempt to kill him with poison—and he relates the personal testimonies of kanaima shamans, their potential victims, and the victims' families. He then goes on to discuss the historical emergence of kanaima describing how, in the face of successive colonizing modernities—missionaries, rubber gatherers, miners, and development agencies—the practice has become an assertion of native autonomy. His analysis explores the ways in which kanaima mediates both national and international impacts on native peoples in the region, and considers the significance of kanaima for current accounts of shamanism and religious belief as well as theories of war and violence. Kanaima appears here as part of that wider lexicon of rebellious terror and exotic horror—alongside the cannibal, vampire, and zombie—that haunts the western imagination. Dark Shamans broadens discussions of violence and of the representation of primitive savagery by recasting both in the light of current debates on modernity and globalization.

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