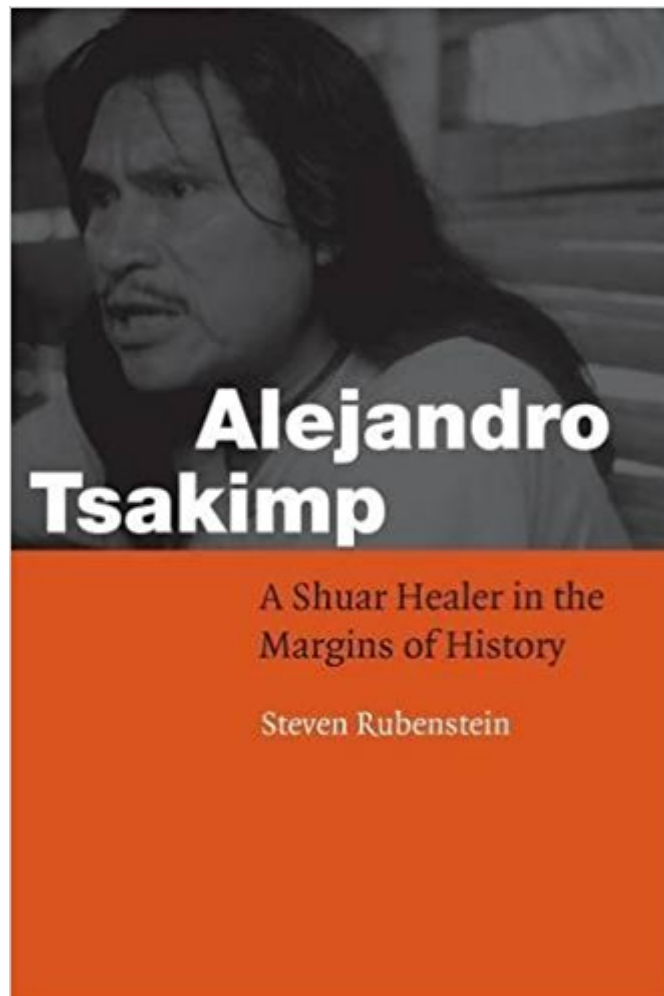




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Alejandro Tsakimp: A Shuar Healer In The Margins Of History (Fourth World Rising)



Synopsis

In the heavily forested foothills of the Andes Mountains in Ecuador, a Shuar healer named Alejandro Tsakimp leads many lives. He is a peasant who sells cattle and lumber, a member of the Shuar Federation, a son and a brother, a husband and a father, a student and a worker, and, finally, a troubled shaman. Being a healer has long been both a burden and a resource, for the power to cure is also the power to kill, and shamans like Tsakimp are frequently in danger from accusations of witchcraft. But the situation of the Shuar today is especially perilous, and Tsakimp must constantly negotiate relations of power not only with rival shamans and his patients, but with the better-educated and richer officials of the Shuar Federation and his own siblings as well. In his own words, Alejandro Tsakimp tells of his lives and relationships, the practice of shamanism, and the many challenges and triumphs he has encountered since childhood. He was born at the time when Shuar were first confronting the impact of Ecuadorian colonialism, which had triggered devastating intertribal conflict over the production and trade of shrunken heads and intratribal feuding fueled by accusations of witchcraft. Tsakimp was first exposed to healing practices when he was cured in the womb by a shaman. Later he actively pursued this knowledge in the hopes of curing his father, another shaman, who was ill from witchcraft. His father's death in 1990 created conflict among his heirs, who were the first generation of Shuar to inherit property. Tsakimp's family fiercely competed for the property and eventually accused one another of witchcraft and parricide. Anthropologist Steven Rubenstein, who began working with Tsakimp in 1989, has skillfully edited Tsakimp's stories and provides essential background information. Rubenstein argues that although these stories reveal tensions between individual and collective autonomy on the colonial frontier, they also resist simplistic dichotomies such as state versus indigene and modern versus traditional. Alejandro Tsakimp provides a revealing look at the relationship between anthropologist and shaman and an insightful glimpse into the complicated lives of South American Indians today.

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Customer Reviews

"Alejandro Tsakimp, a powerful and committed shaman, and the equally determined anthropologist, Steven Rubenstein, co-operate, through Alejandro's memories of his own life, to unfold a poignant and compelling deconstruction of the exploitations created by the discourse and pursuits of the colonialism through which native peoples of ia today are struggling. . . . Rubenstein's discussions are a rich brew, strong, and sometimes deliberately provocative. . . . The volume is highly relevant to classroom use. This is also a book that will give great enjoyment to the general anthropological audience. It is deeply relevant to ongoing heated disputes among ianists."-Joanna Overing, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* * *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* * "[A] beautiful biography. . . . Rubenstein tells readers far more than is normally learned about anthropological fieldwork practice and the effects it has, in a mutual sense, on the roles of both investigator and informant."-Choice * CHOICE *

Steven Rubenstein (1962–2012) was a Reader in Latin American Anthropology at the University of Liverpool.

This is a serious anthropological book. I was extremely impressed by Dr. Rubenstein's intellectual discussions, his research methods, and his careful approach to his informants as well as his sensitivities to and sincerity for his informants during research and writing. He is honest with his readers. In ethnographic works like this, especially ones involving different cultures, I have observed that authors tend to paint the stories heard in their own cultural colors and speak for their informants instead of allowing the informants to speak their own voices. However, in this book, the author makes sure that the readers clearly hear Alejandro's and other informants' voices and their telling their own stories. This is a must book for students majoring in anthropology, especially graduate students. Dr. Rubenstein reviews and includes the work by anthropologists in the past such as Malinowski and Radcliff-Brown and engages his reader in great discussions about various issues in

anthropology. Because the author explains each issue clearly and systematically, even a person like me, a professor of communication, who has no formal anthropological background and whose mother tongue is not English, could understand the major discussions in anthropology identified in this book. In addition, because the author deals with various issues in academia and in life, readers can apply the knowledge they gain from this book into various fields. For instance, in terms of the issue about colonizer and colonialism, this book made me think about what happened to the farmers in my own neighborhood in Japan after WWII and during 1970 when new land policies were enforced. This book will make a useful textbook in ethnography, anthropology, or methodology. This book also will aid anyone who is interested in life history, cultural and cross-cultural studies, spirituality, politics and colonialism, social change, history, South American culture, and cross-cultural and intercultural communication. I think more communication scholars, especially the ones who conduct qualitative researches or who teach intercultural communication, should read this book.

This book is a serious anthropological work about an indigenous Ecuadorian Shaman. I had no difficulty reading the book as a layperson. Dr. Rubenstein puts a lot of himself into the book and is upfront about his friendship with Alejandro. I liked how he confronted the ethical and objectivity issues inherent in a study involving people. He lets Alejandro Tsakimp tell the story of his life. Much of the book is dialogue from interviews of Alejandro which allowed me to draw my own conclusions about what it might be like to be Shuar and a shaman in modern Ecuador. I enjoyed the book. I thought it was clear, expressive and well-paced. I recommend it to anyone who is interested in South American culture. It would also be an excellent resource for anyone considering working with Shuar people as a Peace Corps volunteer or with an aid organization.

Rubenstein's book does two things at once: It provides an insightful look into the life of the Shuar healer Alejandro Tsakimp, in which many of the complexities of this person (and the Shuar people) are presented to the reader. At the same time, Rubenstein confronts the issues of representation -- he introduces himself and explains his relationship to his subject and the representation he is making -- then steps away and allows Alejandro to tell his story. I found this book both interesting and useful for those two reasons -- as a fascinating glimpse into the lives of the Shuar people and as a model of dealing with the critical issues of representation confronting authors (and readers) across a wide range of studies.

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