



**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
STANDARD LEVEL  
PAPER 1**

Thursday 13 November 2003 (afternoon)

1 hour

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**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES**

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage carefully and then answer all the questions.

*Texts in this examination paper have been edited: word additions or explanations are shown in square brackets [ ]; substantive deletions of text are indicated by ellipses in square brackets [...]; minor changes are not indicated.*

*Extract from Beth A Conklin, “Body Paint, Feathers, and VCRs: Aesthetics and Authenticity in Amazonian Activism,” **American Ethnologist** 24:711-37 (1997).*

In the past decade, public concern about threats to the tropical rain forest has thrown Brazilian Indians into the limelight of global media attention. Certain individuals from remote Amazonian communities have found themselves flooded with invitations to travel abroad, speak at ecology conferences, meet world leaders, accompany rock stars on concert tours, and testify before policy makers at the World Bank, the United Nations, the United States Congress, and the European Union headquarters. As Indian activists journeyed into these arenas of intercultural dialogue, they encountered Western value systems and technologies of representation that offered new perspectives on their own culture and new channels for communicating their concerns to influential outsiders. Responding to these possibilities, Indian activists transfigured the ways in which they presented themselves and their cultures to the world.

[One significant way in which they do so is through body presentation.] Native Amazonians who once took pains to hide their external signs of indigenous identity behind mass-produced Western clothing now proclaim their cultural distinctiveness with headdresses, body paint, beads, and feathers. Many anthropologists have interpreted this revival of native costume as an expression of political assertiveness and renewed pride in being Indian. It certainly is. It is equally clear that this shift responds not only to indigenous values and internal societal dynamics, but also to foreign ideas, aesthetics, and expectations about Indians.

[...] Of all Brazilian Indians, the Kayapó most fully realized the political possibilities of using indigenous dress and undress to play off Western symbolic constructs and gain media attention. In 1988, two Kayapó leaders faced legal prosecution [for protesting against] a hydroelectric dam project that would have flooded Kayapó villages. When one of them arrived at the courthouse to give his deposition, he appeared shirtless, wearing body paint and feathers – for which he was promptly charged with contempt of court and refused admittance to the public building. In response to the judge’s order to show respect by “dressing appropriately” in suit and tie, he replied, “Your Honor, this *is* how we Kayapó show respect. This *is* the Indian’s suit and tie. Besides,” he pointed out, “when we invite you to our villages, we don’t ask you to take off your clothes and paint up like a Kayapó.”

Events surrounding this trial gave a vivid demonstration of Kayapó skill at the [strategic use] of native body images and symbols. Media attention was captivated by the stunning spectacle of more than 400 Kayapó – dramatically costumed warriors and nearly nude women – who staged brilliantly theatrical “war dances” to confront riot-control police armed with automatic weapons in front of the television crews clustered outside the courthouse. [...] Kayapó successes inspired other Indian groups to engage in new forms of activism to defend their lands.

[...] The ideological basis for the Indian-environmental alliance was, of course, the growth of Western views of rain forest natives as “natural conservationists” whose traditional resource management practices embody Western environmentalist values of ecosystem preservation, sustainability, and appropriate technology. [...] This “greening”<sup>1</sup> of native struggles vastly expanded the audience receptive to indigenous messages, so that local conflicts over land and legal rights increasingly have been played out on an international stage where “the whole world is watching”.

[...] The body images that Indian activists have constructed fit the ideology and aesthetic sensibilities of their environmentalist allies. The rejection of Western costume obviously marks Indians’ difference, separation, and opposition to Western traditions that, in environmentalist ideologies, are seen as destructive and corrupt. Feathers are used as a visual confirmation of the often repeated idea of Indians as “close to nature”. Monkey and jaguar teeth might also evoke the idea of closeness to nature; however, they are not used as they appear to be unacceptable, perhaps because they too graphically indicate acts of killing that offend Western sensibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> greening: making matters conform to the values of environmentalists

1. Explain how Kayapó self-presentation has been transformed through their encounter with other cultures. *[5 marks]*
  
  2. Explain the ways in which environmentalists are selective in their understanding of tropical rain forest Indians and their plight. *[6 marks]*
  
  3. Compare the way in which Amazonian Indians use signs of difference for political ends with another subgroup or group. In your answer refer to how the chosen subgroup or group constructs difference or uniqueness to achieve certain political, economic or social goals. *[9 marks]*
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