Dis-assembling Partnering: The Kayapo of the Brazilian Amazon and Conservation International

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Social scientists have expressed increasing skepticism concerning the value of partnerships between large international NGOs and local indigenous communities. They have addressed the domination of international meanings over local ones, and noted how local peoples are excluded from decision-making processes that affect their lands and livelihoods. Yet a number of independent phenomena have fueled an increase in collaboration between indigenous peoples and international environmental NGOs. Indigenous peoples find access to international funding sources through alliances with global actors, including conservation societies, who provide valued visibility and leverage in negotiations between indigenous peoples and national governments for rights and autonomy. From the standpoint of environmentalists, indigenous communities are valued for their role in protecting the landscapes in which they live. This presentation considers the case of a partnership between the Kayapo, an Indigenous community of the Brazilian Amazon, with a long record of militant protection of their autonomy, and Conservation International, the world's largest environmental NGO. The presentation examines this unlikely alliance, considering the differing perspectives of the constituents, and the struggle by them to achieve common ground.

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