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## Club-Fighters of the Amazon: Warfare among the Kayapó Indians of Central Brazil by Gustaaf Verswijver

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*The Club-Fighters of the Amazon: Warfare among the Kayapó Indians of Central Brazil* by Gustaaf Verswijver. Almeria: Turuti Books, 2018. 376 pp., maps, plates, tables, appendices

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In a 2018 article, Potawatomi scholar Kyle P. Whyte argues that viewing the Anthropocene as the launch of a new apocalyptic epoch in human history is misplaced (Whyte 2018). He instead contends that many Indigenous peoples see the current era as already dystopian, coming after centuries of displacement, demoralization, and death. Whyte's perspective provides an important entry point when considering Gustaaf Verswijver's *The Club-Fighters of the Amazon: Warfare among the Kayapó Indians of Central Brazil* in light of today's precarious political-economic and socio-environmental moment. Verswijver's monograph (based on thirty months of fieldwork from 1974 to 1981), provides an ethnographically grounded and ethnohistorically-focused description of the disruptive transformations that occurred among Mebêngôkre-Kayapó peoples (henceforth Kayapó) over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Importantly, Verswijver swiftly moves away from the environmentally and biologically deterministic descriptions of Indigenous peoples that shaped earlier representations of Amazonian life, incisively demonstrating that Kayapó peoples' complex warfare practices are relatively recent phenomena cultivated during one of the most devastating ethnocidal periods in their remembered history. Beginning with the obligatory chapters on the conditions and rationale for research, subsequent chapters outline life in Kayapó communities, the political strategies used during settler colonial expansion, how warfare was integrated with highly valued ceremonial and ritual activities, and the consequential shifting of social life post-"pacification." Formerly a hard-to-find book, those interested in ethnographies of Gê peoples will find this new edition a welcome part of their collections.

*Club-Fighters of the Amazon* has something for a variety of audiences. For first-time ethnographers, oral historians, and Kayapó allies, the book is instructive as it incorporates meticulous appendices of chronological events, changing geopolitical configurations represented in maps, a photo essay, a newly written forward, and a preface by Carlos Fausto. The presence of various charts, tables, and other qualitative forms of data visualization show the innovativeness of Verswijver's detailed ethnohistorical work. Similarly, the photo essay, despite some descriptions leaving one wanting, also provides a critical visual archive on Kayapó peoples' livelihoods during a time period for which photographs are still difficult to obtain; as such, it is a valuable resource for those Kayapó communities represented in the photos and their living family members.

If I were to integrate this book within current conversations in interdisciplinary and anthropological forums, I would be eager to engage with three specific subfields, although many more could be considered: new materiality studies, feminist Indigenous studies, and public engagement and praxis. First, despite the title suggesting a focus on the material culture (club) and warfare (fighters) of Kayapó peoples, Verswijver highlights the complex resource sourcing, embodied knowledge, and extensive landscape expertise Kayapó peoples value in the production of different types of material objects (such as clubs) and their associated immaterial lives. For example, Verswijver dedicates an entire chapter to the ritual of returning warriors; he explains how sequences of ritual activities and accompanying body-painting practices serve multiple representational functions simultaneously: individual transformation, social cohesion, and reification of visual semiotic codes. Verswijver also details how Kayapó express elaborated systems of leadership, kin and nonkin ties, and individual variability in ritual and secular practices. In this way, Verswijver draws attention to how expressions of masculinity are tied to multifaceted notions of personhood, thereby clearly cri-

tiquing past anthropological practices of using material culture as a proxy for cultural complexity.

Second, Indigenous feminist scholars would be attentive to strained engagement with gender in this work. Verswijver includes himself relatively little in his writing. It would be helpful to know the “behind the scenes” (Lea 2017) aspects of his interactions (as a male anthropologist) with women. If restricted, is this the reason why readers rarely get a sense of expressions of both women’s and men’s worlds? With that said, female livelihoods pop up in unexpected moments, and at certain points Verswijver gestures toward Vanessa Lea’s important work on this subject. For example, hand-drawn sketch maps of the village space (see chapter 1, figure 2) show designated women’s body-painting areas in the same image identifying men’s seating places, which hints at the differentiated but complementary nature of female and male leadership—although the author does not elaborate. In later chapters, Verswijver considers (e.g., pp. 162–63) the “political economy of control” thesis best known from Terence Turner’s work, examining what role women play in disputes, fissioning, and warfare (Heckenberger 2005:312). On the other hand, Verswijver rarely details women’s ceremonial roles. For example, Verswijver only lists what takes place among the men in the community when he charts the well-organized four phases (p. 260) of naming ceremonies. Nor does he highlight the key role women leaders have had in village governance, as elder women in A’ukre have explained to me, or the central role women like Tuire played in the democratic turn in Brazil (p. 279).

Finally, current calls for public engagement, renewed consideration of ethics, and demands for activist-oriented anthropology would couple well with some of the struggles Verswijver illuminates. In one instance, Verswijver includes how he administered medical care to different community members (e.g., p. 205), which would align with classroom discussions on doing ethnography. Attention to struggles in land demarcation, national politics, and extractivist economies in chapter 5 also are well-placed to engage with critical discussions about the role of collaborative or advocacy-oriented anthropology. Verswijver’s caution at the beginning of appendix A, which I reproduce here, also provides important counterpoints to ongoing scholarly and popular science debates on sociobiology. For this reason, *Club-Fighters of the Amazon* would be a wonderful choice for undergraduate classrooms as students struggle through ethical and human rights questions that anthropologists have faced over time: “Yet, it is important to warn the reader to regard the following parts with a certain amount of caution. Indeed, upon reading the following account, the reader may get the strong impression that Kayapo (Mekranoti) history, is made up of a long series of raids, attacks and internal strife, and that their history is dominated by such events. *My selection of events puts a strong over-emphasis on this facet in view of the topic of this book!*” (p. 282, emphasis in original). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the detailed notes about places and people throughout the book and in the appendix would be an appreciated contribution to any Kayapó community school or library, where elders and youth can engage with a textual version of their hard-fought history and incorporate those stories as they deem appropriate.

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