

Wierucka, Aleksandra, University of Gdansk, Poland

New Ways of Maintaining Power as a Result of the Contact with Other Cultures – the Huaorani Case

Social order of any group is usually an effect of long-lasting changes and needs of the people who constitute the group. The status of chief or shaman is crucial in indigenous cultures and is the base for anybody's place in the group. Sometimes indigenous groups encounter a different way of managing life and other people and stay under its influence but this does not necessary mean that they would simply copy the social power structure of other groups. The Huaorani from Ecuador prove that social change of maintaining the power may come from their own traditions yet at the same time is new and meets the contemporary needs of the tribe.

My research done for the last three years in the Ecuadorian group of Huaorani gave the basic insight into the complex way of maintaining power between the people of the tribe. The data collection is based on fieldwork done among the Huaorani people, mostly observation but also interviews done with the group leader and main source of local knowledge. The interviews let the insight into the ways of change and enabled the comparison of past and present ways of maintaining power in the group.