

Living with strangers: Huaorani and tourism industry in the 21st century

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Abstract

Indigenous groups that made full contact with Western culture relatively recently (almost sixty years ago in the case of Huaorani) are targeted by Western tourists looking for “exotic” people and places. Huaorani people’s image fits into this category and it can be found in various media. Huaorani have quickly adapted to increasing numbers of tourists and their needs: they sell handicrafts, found their own tourist agencies, build “jungle lodges” in the tropical forest and become licensed tourist guides. This paper focuses on the image of the Huaorani created by various media, on tourists expectations, their fulfillment by the local people as well as tourist services provided by inhabitants of one remote Huaorani settlement.

KEYWORDS: indigenous people of the Amazon, local tourism, image of the indigenous peoples

Introduction

Puerto Francisco de Orellana (Coca), one of the biggest cities of Ecuadorian part of the Amazon region, appears like most cities in this part of the world – concrete buildings, paved streets, small number of trees or other greens, multitude of cars and crowds of people going around their daily business. The city is the Ecuadorian outpost to the Oriente, the part of the country that encompasses the tropical rainforest, some of it still pristine, including the Yasuni National Park, the tourist attraction of the area. People coming to the city from all over the world are very likely to also encounter the information about the local inhabitants of the region, indigenous groups that have been here for millennia – Quichua, Shuar, Shiwiar or, most famous, Huaorani. The life of the latter is connected with the forest more than others due to their relatively late full contact with Western world (as recent as half of the twentieth century) and many local tourist agencies advertise local people as the main attraction of the area. Large-scale images of naked Huaorani hunting with blowguns and spears decorate the walls of agencies and serve as the unequivocal signal of what to expect during the offered trips. There are few big travel agencies in the city and also number of smaller ones and the latter try to overcome this stereotypic image of Huaorani by offering trips showing every day regular life of the people, but it seems that the tourists themselves are prepared to experience the “Indians living the same way as their ancestors”. Many

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more elements in the city depict the Huaorani in the “wild” manner: reliefs and murals on local hotels’ walls, names and pictures in the stores, Internet cafes and other facilities visited by tourists. They strengthen their desire to experience something extraordinary and completely different from their everyday life. They also shape the image that brings false notions about the indigenous people.

Introduction

Majority of tourists coming to the Ecuadorian Amazon are interested in observing nature. The tropical forest is well known as a biodiversity hotspot of the world. Facts such as that there are more tree species in a small fraction of an Amazonian rainforest than in the USA and Canada combined are now widely known because they appear in so many articles, brochures, papers etc. It is true for animal species as well (Bass et al. 2010). The fact that the forest is also home to thousands of indigenous people seems to interest tourists only in the context of “ethnotourism”. However, these groups are promoted by many local tourist agencies under the slogans of “primitive tribes” or “Indians living like they used to for hundreds of years”. This kind of promotion happens even for the indigenous groups that had contact with Western culture more than four hundred years ago and live the same way as most people in Amazonian countries (e.g. Hutchins 2007). It is especially true in Ecuador, where many indigenous peoples struggle with the image popularized by various media. Local people are supposed to act and look certain way that does not undermine the tourists’ expectations – to some extent people living in the forest became, as John Urry stated, the part of the landscape itself (1992). It is a result of the history of Western imaging of the Amazon region as well as the people inhabiting it – the tourists’ expectations create the ‘conveniently anachronistic Indians’ (Hutchins 2007: 91) that are supposed to live the same lives as their ancestors and be the part of the forest. This is what the tourists are looking for: unspoiled nature inhabited by unspoiled people. And, quite surprisingly, in many cases that is what they find during their travels because it is made possible by the agencies organizing their trips.

There is a debate in anthropology regarding the influence of tourism on cultural practices and the livelihood of indigenous people (e.g. Greenwood 2004; Ness 2003; Reid 2003; Wallace 2005). The conclusion is not an easy one to achieve as the matter is complex and as Wallace put it, hard even to describe as well as to define (Wallace 2005). The analysis of certain cases may shed light on the practice of tourism as well as its outcome and influence on indigenous lives. The case of the Quichua people described by Frank Hutchins (2007) serves as a good example of this. Tourism practiced among the Huaorani presents a different approach and is conditioned by different factors than those in the Quichua community, despite the fact that the two groups reside in neighboring lands.

To collect data regarding services provided to tourists by the local people, I conducted research in one of the Huaorani settlements. The work was initiated in 2007 and subsequent visits (2007-2017) to the settlement allowed me to observe the changes in offered services as well as the attitude towards tourists. To achieve the understanding of tourism influence on the local community, I led interviews with people offering tourist services – both in the settlement and in the agency in the nearby city. In total there were

over thirty interviews conducted with mostly young people as well as the older ones that live off tourism in the settlement. All of the people that offer tourist services in the settlement shared their experiences with me. Participant and non-participant observations were also carried out in order to gather first-hand data. These were undertaken during my repeated returns to the settlement between 2007 and 2017. I also talked with tourists during their stay, noted their reflections and overall opinion of the experience.

There are not many written documents that can be studied on site regarding tourist services – the exceptions are the local guides' business cards and "Thank You Guest Book" which allows the tourists to express their gratitude or simply comment on their experience. These documents were also subject to analysis.

Cultural context: the Huaorani

Indigenous people of the Ecuadorian Amazon had full contact with the so-called Western culture at various points in time. In the case of the Huaorani it was relatively recently – in 1958 Summer Institute of Linguistics initiated "peaceful" contact (Davis 1996; Wierucka 2015; Ziegler-Otero 2004; Yost 1981a and others). As a result, Huaorani were subjected to more intense influences of the national Ecuadorian culture as well as globalization processes than ever before.

Currently there are over 2000 Huaorani living in over thirty settlements in the Eastern part of Ecuador, in the Huaorani Territory (in 1990 Ecuadorian government recognized the Huaorani rights to the land in the area of 612,560 hectares) as well as outside of it. The society is divided into *nanicaboiri* – the longhouses consisting of kin groups. Affiliation to a *nanicabo* (the singular form of plural *nanicaboiri*) is one of the most important elements of the Huaorani culture, as it is the basis for establishing further relationships within the society as well as outside of it. From it stems the division for "us", "others" and "strangers": all within the kin group are *huaorani* (*people*); the ones that are more distant relatives are *huarani* (*others*); and everybody else is *cohuori* (*strangers, non-humans*). This order is connected with many conflicts in the past as well as recently (e.g. Cabodevilla 1994; Rival 2015; Wierucka 2015).

One of the most prevalent information about the Huaorani states that they are the fiercest warriors in the world. As I argued elsewhere (Wierucka 2015) war traditions are an important aspect of the culture nevertheless it is impossible to state for sure if they are characteristic for a specific time frame during the Huaorani ethnohistory or they are an immanent part of the cultural practices throughout the centuries. Nonetheless war traditions are most widely known element of Huaorani culture both in Ecuador and outside of it.

The *nanicabo* in which the research was conducted lies relatively far away – it can be reached either by an almost hour long flight or by a two day long travel by hired canoe. *Nanicabo* is inhabited by almost a hundred people living in small clusters of houses. There are also several other buildings: a school with the teacher's house and a wooden building serving as a guest house. All people in the *nanicabo* are interconnected through blood ties or marriage. Few of them are not Huaorani by birth (to be a Huao one needs to have huao parents and speak their language, Huao Terero), nevertheless despite being married to a Huao, they are still considered *cohuori*. Previously the term applied also to children from

mixed marriages (Yost 1981b; Huaorani prefer endogamous marriages between cross cousins – a practice that is recently often undermined by the lack of candidates in this category as well as availability of candidates from other ethnicities).

Years of inducing Christianity caused many conversions, nevertheless Huaorani themselves argue that the conversions were not fully genuine and that most of them still practice shamanism (Huaorani informant, Ecuador, 2012). Practicing shamans are still present in Huaorani communities and local people turn to them for help on various occasions, however it is difficult to define precise number of people of sundry spirituality.

People in the settlement make a livelihood through different means: they work for oil or logging companies, hunt in the forest, gather in the woods, grow crops, sell local produce but also find employment outside of the nanicabo. Some of them also serve as guides for incoming tourists.

Imagining the native

Some of the characteristics of the culture mentioned above e.g. relatively late full contact or warfare practices are important when looked upon from the tourism perspective: they enable advertising Huaorani as one of the “most primitive tribes”. The tourist agencies in the city nearest the Huaorani Territory sell the image that was created by various media over the last decades: Huaorani are presented as naked people holding spears, often depicted running through the forest as during a hunt or war attack.

The image of Huaorani has been present in the Internet for many years and it has stemmed from it and is being created by it constantly. A simple exercise repeated every couple of years proves that tourists planning to visit the Ecuadorian part of the Amazon are being deceived by thousands of images posted by fellow tourists that fulfilled their dream of “meeting the most genuine indigenous community” that is “well preserved” and “live in a very primitive way”¹: the google search for the word *Huaorani* yields 205,000 images of almost completely naked, face-painted and spear-handling people (the same search done in 2011, 2013 and 2014 yielded 14,200, 313,000 and 84,500 images respectively²). Huaorani Indians are also called *Auca* in Ecuador: the pejorative name originating from the Quichua language meaning *savages*. Its usage is quite common and people in Ecuador often do not realize its offensive meaning. The search done under this name yields 158000 results but mostly refers to Operation Auca, the missionaries’ failed attempt to contact the group of Huaorani in 1956³ (the same search done over the years brought the following results: 46,900 in 2011, 84,500 in 2013 and 22,900 in 2014⁴).

The overall characteristics of the portrayed people are the same: the Indians are depicted living the same lives as their ancestors – and this image obviously is not true.

¹ The quoted phrases come from different web pages advertising trips to Huaorani communities (e.g. <http://crookedtrails.org/trips/ecuador-the-huaorani-community-of-the-amazon-rainforest/>, <http://elevateddestinations.com/itineraries/amazon-huaorani-excursion/> accessed 26.08.2016)

² Searches done on March 24, 2011; January 23, 2013; July 23, 2014 and August 20, 2016.

³ For the more detailed description of these events see e.g. Davis 1996: 256–67, Robarchek & Robarchek 1998: 151–158, Wierucka 2015: 56–62 and others).

⁴ Searches done on March 24, 2011; January 23, 2013; July 23, 2014 and August 20, 2016.

Nevertheless the false image is being created by both parties – tourists and local people. The tourists put an effort into experiencing something extraordinary (it might be what Urry (1990) has in mind writing about central activity in tourism) while at the same time local people want to earn money giving the tourists what they expect: eco-friendly, forest-living, half-naked Indians. To some extent it goes along the lines of “imaginative tourism geographies” described by Gregory (1994) only in this case it could be renamed “imaginative native”: the tourists are being presented with the ‘timeless’ Indians that live ‘authentic’ lives. This is what they expect so the local people adjust their presentations accordingly. This also draws tourists to the settlements, so the complex web of demand and supply is being created and everybody in the tourism industry gets caught in it.

Before traveling, visitors search the Internet and read that they will be able to meet the “real Indians” in Ecuador and then they come to the local city and their expectations are confirmed by the images present on reliefs on hotel walls or pictures in the various offices and stores.

Local tourism

The Huaorani Territory occupies a relatively large area between the Napo River in the north, Curaray on the south and along Yasuni, Shiripuno, Cononaco and Villano Rivers with their tributaries. The settlements are dispersed in this area and in some cases it takes days of travel to get from one to another. Some of the villages possess a landing strip so it is possible to fly to them by a small plane hired in the city. Many tourists employ this opportunity as it significantly saves time.

There are three “jungle-lodges” maintained jointly by the tour agencies and local Huaorani people. The lodges are a popular choice for tourists who want some luxury and good service while being in the forest – there usually are comfortable cabins, electricity, food service and a bar. Attractions include kayaking, bird watching, fishing, cultural activities etc. A majority of tourists looking for an adventure among the Huaorani choose to stay in these facilities. This is quite luxurious experience of the tropical forest, as lodges bear the character of more or less regular hotels. The idea of lodges started some time ago and Huaorani, as well as other indigenous groups of the Amazon, started to explore this possibility.

The community that I conducted research in does not run jungle lodges. It may be because when tourists started to visit there already was a building that was used as a guest house (it was built as a church but never served as one). The people decided to undertake a different kind of tourism – the one that let the hosts be a part of the community and at the same time not to interfere with the families too much as tourists stay in a separate building (over time the old church building was replaced with the specially built big house with porch and thatched roof in the front of the river; interviewed Huaorani stressed that the reason for building a new house was that tourists ‘staying longer than three or four days start to annoy local inhabitants’ so nobody in the settlement was ready to invite strangers under family roof when the older building for tourists deteriorated). The main idea is to draw the tourist directly to the community – a practice that has been applied by Amazonian Indians for some time now (e.g. Stocker 2007; Hutchins 2007).

A majority of tourists visiting nearby city look for trips to the Yasuni National Park and as Ecuadorian law prohibits visitors to wander into the Park without a licensed guide (Reglamento Especial de Turismo en Áreas Naturales Protegidas – The Special Regulation of Tourism in Natural Protected Areas, 2002), all of them need to hire somebody with an appropriate permit. The local tourist agencies offer various packages of attractions, including visits to Huao settlements, however – as interviewed people claimed – visitors are not very interested in local culture. Interestingly, local agencies do not get any requests to visit Quichua settlements that are in the vicinity of the city – they would be relatively easy to reach and it would be possible to observe (and probably also take part in –) everyday life over there. The mere few percent of tourists that come with the mind set on experiencing indigenous culture of the region ask about Huaorani thus the agencies provide such services. Around 60 tourists per year come to the settlement with the tour companies. Huaorani themselves also decided to become a part of the bargain – not only be the ones that the tourists come to visit, but also the ones to organize these visits and gain profits off it. For more than ten years around 40 tourists per year find their way to the settlement with local guides. Tourists are usually recruited by the guides themselves at the port in the city and are offered the experience of living with indigenous people of the region. The initiative also reaches potential guests by Internet: a specially created web page informs about the attractions during trips, encourages to contact the organizers and promises to tailor the trip to the needs of the visitors. The web page does not promote the previously discussed image of the local people – the text gives a description of the Huaorani history and culture in an interesting manner and does not emphasize the elements that might give tourists an erroneous impression.

During tourists' visits Huaorani hosts usually dress in their regular clothes – jeans and t-shirts, although in some cases older people remove their clothes and stay only in *come*, a string around the hips, and this happens at the tourists' request to see *real* Indians. Younger people are not expected to be “naked” – in my opinion tourists understand that the elders are more connected to the traditional way of living thus they are the ones to present the *true* look of Amazonian inhabitants.

The Huaorani who work with tourists in the settlement organize everything during the trips, including lodging, cooking and transport. They do not employ any help of NGO's or other local organizations in the process. An important part of almost every tour is hunting. The tourists come to Ecuador to experience the unspoiled rainforest and they soon find out that the most remote settlements offer the most spectacular wildlife experience. This is the most common reason for choosing Huaorani small-scale tourism over regular tour operator trips. And this is also the reason why the Huaorani have an advantage: their knowledge of the forest has been handed down through countless generations and is still practiced. The equipment might have changed (e.g. blowpipes and spears were supplemented by guns) nevertheless the understanding of the forest and all of its intricacies is prevalent.

Huaorani during last decades became known as forest trekkers, who not only move between their settlements but also walk in the forest on an everyday basis – they do that to gather edible fruit and shrubs but also to check the progress of the fruit maturation and vegetation growth as well as for simple pleasure (Rival 2002). In effect, they possess

vast knowledge about the forest and all that takes place in it. The ecology of the local areas is a significant part of this knowledge: knowing how and where specific plants grow and fruit brings knowledge of the occurrence of animals that feed on these plants (Rival 2014). Hunting is never a chance trip – it is always rooted in experience and understanding of the forest. That is why Huaorani are very successful hunters – they usually return from the hunt with plenty of game (usually the collared peccary *Pecari tajacu*, agouti *Agouti paca* or capybara *Hydrochaeris hydrochaeris* as well as different monkeys, e.g. spider monkey *Ateles sp.*, woolly monkey *Lagothrix lagothricha*, etc.).

Their knowledge about plants is quite far from what the Western scientists would expect. In a way it is more detailed and complex, as every part of the plant is named differently and the names depend on the state of its maturity. Furthermore, the plant never exists in this system on its own, it is interwoven into the ecological web of all other organisms linked to it – insects, birds and other animals (Davis 1996). It is not considered a representation of a species, rather, as Rival argues, ‘it is treated as an individual member of a class belonging to a specific environment and as a specific living organism undergoing a continuous process of change’ (2016: 86).

The Huaorani knowledge of the forest is based on understanding it as a heritage left for the living people by previous generations – thus trekking is not only important for livelihood but also for linking the society to the past, to the great unspoken history of their ancestors (Rival 2009). The living generations take an active part in creating the environment for their descendants through mobility, gathering food and seeding useful plants. As a result, as Rival puts it, trekking constitutes the Huaorani way of reproducing society across generations (ibid.).

Tourists that arrive to the settlement have no way of learning all of this. Their knowledge of the forest is usually condensed to the slogan ‘most biodiverse place on Earth’ and although this is true, the forest is so much more. Western understanding of the forest divides it into species and – what is even more important in this case – separates it from culture. The Huaorani notions of the forest as a whole is not applicable here as it is culturally remote (similarly in the case of tourism in Quichua settlements – see Hutchins 2007). In order to be a successful tour guides in the Yasuni National Park that neighbors the Huaorani Territory almost twenty young Huaorani men from the settlement acquired official guide patents. Nevertheless the service they provide cannot include the depth Huaorani take on the environment and is based mostly on Western descriptions of the forest. At the same time the vast knowledge of the forest makes the Huaorani guides ones of the best in the local tourist industry – tourists are usually fascinated by the guides' skills presented in the forest and their familiarity with it. Interestingly, on most tours Huaorani do not use guns – they act as exclusively blowgun hunters in order to fulfill the image that tourists learned from media or from advertisements. Men often dress in come, and with blowguns and spears walk through the forest and engage in a successful hunt. They can still do it mostly because they hunt for their own needs on every day basis and often they use blowpipe instead of shotgun. The traditional forest knowledge of the Huaorani people on one hand helps them to become successful tourist guides, and on the other – they do not fully share it with the guests as the latter usually spend only few days in the village

and experience merely the surface of the cultural practices. What is interesting, the image of the indigenous inhabitants of the forest that tourists obtained in the media and in the city, is being fulfilled by the villagers themselves: in order to get positive comments and strengthen their chance for future interest on incoming guests, the people in the settlement organize the tours in the way expected by the strangers.

Gendered tourist services

A majority of activities connected with tourism services are performed by men of the *nanikabo*. The women in the settlement can join men, but their involvement is indirect. Egalitarianism is one of the characteristics of Huaorani culture. Men and women have their social roles however they can share the work or interchange it. As in many indigenous groups, men usually hunted and prepared hunting gear and women took care of the children, house and the garden. Social obligations shifted a little after 1958, after the full contact with the Ecuadorian nation, but the core roles remained the same: men hunt, but also work for various companies, women mostly take care of the household, but also started to earn money on their own mostly by selling handicrafts (all of the interviewed women can make various handicrafts). Huaorani people are highly independent regardless of gender. Taking this into account, it is understandable that it is mostly men that serve as forest guides and hunters for tourists. Women sometimes join them (it is not uncommon for a Huaorani woman to join the hunt) but the tourist business is lead mostly by men. There is one girl in the studied settlement that is directly involved in tourism – she works alongside her brothers.

Huaorani women take part in a bigger economic initiative that explores the new possibilities in tourist industry. Babb suggested that ‘women’s position may undergo the greatest change in area where they participate in local women’s movements’ (2012: 47) yet this applies to the Huaorani situation only partially. Women founded their own movement, nevertheless their position was never challenged to the extent that they would need to fight for it. To the tourists it may seem that the Huaorani men are dominant in the group as they organize tours and are present in all activities during the trips. Power held by the women in this ethnic group is less visible to the visitor: based on family ties they control who is accepted into the longhouse and becomes the part of the sharing community (Rival 2016). Similarly to the knowledge of the forest, tourists are in no position to learn this during their short visit, so they are often left with the impression they brought with them – spearholding, “anachronic” men living in the Amazon.

One of the outcomes of women cooperation in many Huaorani settlements were two stores in nearby cities that sell local, hand-made handicrafts. Each object is made by a woman from a huao settlement and is signed by her. The profits from sales go directly to the creators of the handicrafts. One of the stores was closed recently, but the second one, located across a big tourist hotel is prospering well and tourists can choose from wide variety of produce. There are bags, baskets and hammocks, but also some innovative objects, such as earrings resembling traditional *dikkagon*, the balsa roller put in the stretched earlobes by Huaorani or bracelets with charms made out of forest seeds. The tourists welcome this opportunity not only to buy traditionally made handicrafts but also

to directly help local people. Simultaneously, Huaorani women can earn their own money and can freely spend them so they are not dependent on their earning spouses – and they are doing this using knowledge that was taught to them by their parents and grandparents. Traditionally it were mostly women who were creating handicrafts (mostly baskets, bags, hammocks, pottery etc.) so this modern form of this activity – weaving and carving done for tourists – on one hand makes the continuity of tradition possible, on the other it enables women to pursue their independence. Nonsymmetrical income possibilities were thus balanced again – for last decades mostly men were earning money because outside companies would hire mostly for physical work like logging or digging. So apart from hunting men also supplied their families with money that could be spend in the city for various products. Tourist industry enables women to have their own income as well and in turn brings them back their self-reliance.

The eye of the tourist

The impression that tourists leave with is a very important part of tour planning. I think that the eye of the tourist – what he or she sees and how perceives it – is to some extent the main target of all activities. There are some facts that do not reach the consciousness of the visitors although they are immanent to modern Huaorani lives.

The Amazonian part of Ecuador became famous for the struggle between oil companies and indigenous people living in the area. The Chevron case lost in Ecuadorian court in 2011 made media headlines and brought the issue to public attention,⁵ but the problem started much earlier, in the 60s of the twentieth century (Kimerling 1991, 2001) and has not yet been resolved. The history of oil extraction as well as its influence on the lives of local people has been described elsewhere⁶ but neither the events of last decades nor the current problems that the Huaorani people are facing find their way to the tourism discourse. The issues include mentioned oil extraction and threats connected to it, lack of full access to education as well as occupational perspectives, environmental pollution etc. In the tourist's eye Huaorani lead a carefree life in the forest. This is reflected in the inscriptions written by the tourists in the "Thank You Guest Book" in the settlement as well as in the comment section of the web page. Some of the visitors describe their experience as extraordinary and in line with what they expected to find in the rainforest ('True Amazonian experience,' '...if you want to be a part of the jungle you have to choose this tour,' '...a trip into the heart of Huaorani territory is like traveling back in time a few thousand years'⁷) and some seem to be touched in some way by the personality of the hosts ('...with many thanks ... for making our visit extraordinary, inspirational and the most hospitable

⁵ See, for example <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/16/world/americas/16ecuador.html>.

⁶ The detailed description of the oil companies' operations in Ecuador can be found in: Gerlach Allen. 2003. *Indians, Oil and Politics. A Recent History of Ecuador*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources; Kimerling Judith. 1991. *Amazon Crude*. Washington: Natural Resources Defence Council; Kimerling Judith. 2006. "Indigenous Peoples and the Oil Frontier in Amazonia: The Case of Ecuador, ChevronTexaco and Aguinda vs. Texaco," *The Journal of International Law and Politics* 38, no. 3, p. 457; Reid Jan. 1995. "Crude Awakening," *Texas Monthly*, November, p. 201 and others.

⁷ These and following citations come from "Guest Book" in the settlement.

imaginable,’ ‘This was a trip that exceeded my expectations and was without a doubt more than I could have possibly imagined’). And then from time to time there are visitors that do reflect on the life of the indigenous people, nevertheless they still are under the influence of the image created by media as well as (probably) literature (‘...if you are only a guest like us then leave is what you need to do. This place is not for us... Westerners. So go on, jog off. It’s too nice’). Tourists do not realize the hardship of everyday lives of indigenous people – they come to relax, to experience something special that is far from their everyday lives and as a consequence they do not perceive indigenous people as struggling the same way as tourists do when they come back to their homes. The causes or the forms of the struggle may be different but the idea is the same: all of us face problems in our lives and try to overcome them. Visiting the indigenous villages makes tourists put on “tourist glasses” through which most on them can only cast a “tourist gaze” and to some extent their hosts are enabling this by showing expected cultural activities – hunting, preparing gear, kayaking, nature walks etc. Interestingly, the kayaking trips are tailored specifically to meet tourists’ expectations as Huaorani people most probably did not swim in rivers nor use canoes before 1958 and do not use kayaks to this day. Their settlements were built on the hilltops, next to small creeks and only after full contact with Western culture they learned new ways of using water such as swimming or fishing (to this day many of the elders cannot swim even if they have lived next to a river for many years) (Wierucka 2015). Thus, offering kayaking or fishing tours (mostly for piranhas because this is the most exciting for visitors) proves that tour organizers realize what is expected and plan the trips accordingly.

The services offered in the settlement changed over time. In 2007 the sheet of paper with prices listed was hammered to the wall of an old guesthouse where the visitors stayed. A few years later, the tours are organized beforehand and planned, tourists stay in the guesthouse, the guides possess nature guides patents and the whole operation is advertised to tourists personally or through the dedicated web page. And some people in the nanicabo actually sustain themselves exclusively on tourist services.

Huaorani themselves are stressing that practicing tourism in the settlement is a sign of the modernity but also is a part of their own vision of the world. As they put it: ‘tourists are also part of the world so they can come and see the village’ (Huaor informant, 2017). Almost all of the people in the settlement are profiting from tourists’ visits, and nobody opposes them. The interviewed Huaorani were telling about their life between oil and tourism industries and their conclusion was that tourism is better for the settlement, for family life (men can stay in the settlement instead of working for the companies) and for environment (more people understand the value of the forest and the need to protect it). During the forest treks with visitors guides are explaining the Huaorani way of life, their use of medicinal plants, local techniques of handicrafts and also the importance of the local environment.

There are some indirect benefits of tourists’ visits: some are practical, e.g. more canoes are in the settlement, so it is easier to travel or to transport or to react during the emergency, and some of them are long-term ones, e.g. tourism prevent migration (there is no need to travel to earn money).

The modern agents of change

Among different agents of change that are active in the indigenous lives, tourism in all its forms as a Western practice definitely influenced the everyday lives of indigenous people, even if tourists themselves would rather see ‘untouched’ Indians. Nonetheless, tourism in the Ecuadorian Amazon also faces issues that have their source in external as well as internal events. In Huaorani case the former group include deforestation, oil companies activity, lack of mechanisms to enforce the law while remnants of internal war or changes in the settlement appearance can be counted in the latter.

The issues rooted in external activities of the industry or the state are shared by all indigenous populations of Ecuador. Events mentioned above such as oil companies’ operations in the region, logging as well as governmental regulations executed by local municipal offices influence the lives of local communities to a much bigger extent than tourism. For example in 2014 a generator was installed in the discussed Huaorani settlement. It is understandable that people need power to use everyday appliances although one of the local guides suggested that it might have been done only to show that the local governmental offices are serving the communities. Surely the effort is visible, nevertheless I am not sure that it was the best decision. Maybe the resources could have been allocated differently to better benefit members of the nanikabo.

Local authorities also have control over the flow of tourists because due to local events they can close the road that reaches the Huaorani Territory. This is connected to Huaorani internal affairs: one of the Huaorani kin groups have been staying in voluntarily isolation since the half of the twentieth century and its members still maintain some of the practices that were abandoned by other nanicaboiri. Tageiri (or Taromenane – the names are often given together⁸), the members of the isolating group did not resign from killing vendettas that were part of the Huaorani culture in its history recorded by missionaries and travelers. Their vendettas are organized mainly to avenge the death of a member of the group and their core element is the attack on other nanikabo or on cohuori – the same way as it was before 1958. Other Huaorani communities have been refraining from vendettas for many years now, nevertheless they are still affected by the activities of the Tageiri/Taromenane. Events in the last few years (killing the Huaorani between 2013 and 2017) were widely publicized in media and the image of the “fierce warrior” was recalled. Apart from the impression that it had on Ecuadorian society, the road to the Huaorani Territory was closed as it became dangerous to travel close to the Tageiri territory (called “Zona Intangible”). This affected the local tourist industry however the Huaorani living in close proximity to Zona Intangible speak in favor of Tageiri/Taromenane and pressure the Ecuadorian government to respect the rights of people living in voluntarily isolation.

Despite various sources introducing changes in Huaorani lives, tourism in the settlement should not be considered as one of the main agents of change. The total number of people that base their subsistence exclusively on providing service for tourist is about

⁸ For more detailed description of the Tageiri/Taromenane see for example Cabodevilla Miguel A. 2003. “Reflexiones sobre un ataque huao,” *Íconos*, no. 17 (September 2003); Cabodevilla Miguel A. 2008. *Zona Intangible. Peligro de Muerte!* Quito: Cicame; Cabodevilla, Miguel A. 2013. *Una tragedia ocultada*. Quito: Cicame; Wierucka Aleksandra. 2015. *Huaorani of the Western Snippet*. New York: Palgrave and others.

12 (for over 80 people living in the longhouse). Most of the visitors stay just few days and their influence on the settlement is minimal (actually, judging from the “thank you notes” the members of the nanikabo might have more influence on the tourists in this case as visitors are stressing their admiration towards local people and gratitude for organizing the tour). Even some less visible influence such as changing of forest perception or realizing the need for the environmental activities is less the effect of the presence of tourists than it is the outcome of the overall Huaorani situation (similarly to other indigenous groups of the region Huaorani people are fighting the oil and logging companies. It is especially important for Huaorani because few nanikaboiri live in the Yasuni National Park or in close proximity to it. Huaorani are also members of the CONFENIAE, Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana, the political body that defends local people rights). In this light the relatively small number of tourists visiting the settlement does not leave much imprint on the group.

More changes were a result of constant contact with all of the other people outside of the settlements since 1958 (oil workers, missionaries, governmental officers, military people, loggers, settlers etc.). The number of tourists in this context is not significant, nevertheless lately it has been the biggest group of outsiders that come to the longhouse and to some extent join the everyday lives of the Huaorani. For a fraction of time tourists are welcomed and become a part of the nanikabo while at the same time they never stop being cohuori. This fact might be proof for the deep changes that the Huaorani culture underwent during the last decades. Accepting strangers for even a short period of time in order to gain economic profits is not in line with the huaorani-cohuori division as practiced in this group. And while it is a valid point in the process of Huaorani becoming full members of the Ecuadorian nation over the last fifty years, it can also be perceived in the frames of changing cultural practices.

Modern Huaorani way of life lately received the chance of getting more recognition that can reach wider audience. In 2016 the BBC documentary crew came to the settlement with the plans of recording not only traditional practices but also the contemporary subsistence patterns. Local guides stressed economical, educational, social and cultural issues that Huaorani are struggling with as well as the need to respect the changes that the community is undergoing. As a result, the documentary⁹ is not feeding off the existing Huaorani image but tries to present the Huaorani people as they really are. Although the description on the BBC web page informs that Huaorani can reveal ‘secrets for surviving ... using blow pipes and sharpened sticks [sic!] to hunt monkeys and wild pigs,’¹⁰ but the actual footage presents the people in a kind manner that is uncommon in this type of production. It is true that the program stresses Huaorani hunting skills however it also introduces much information about their everyday lives. Whether this documentary will influence the image of the Huaorani in popular opinion depends mostly on how many people it will reach and what they will focus on: the exotic Indians hunting the anaconda or the people living their lives in a given environment and making the best out of it in their

⁹ Tribes, Predators and Me: Anaconda People of the Amazon, BBC 2016, 59 minutes.

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03123sv> (Accessed on 25 August 2016).

own way. The image of the Huaorani people as warriors and hunters might be dominant in the media and in this particular case the description follows this manner to catch the attention of the potential viewer. Nevertheless, as the local guides assisting the production stressed, the image presented may change the perception of the Huaorani people and give the insight into their modern lives.

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Povzetek

Zahodni turisti, ki iščejo “eksotične” ljudi in kraje, ciljajo na avtohtone skupine, ki so z zahodno kulturo vzpostavile stik relativno pozno (pred skoraj šestdesetimi leti v primeru Huaorani). Tovrstne podobe Huaoranjev se uvrščajo v to kategorijo in jih je mogoče najti v različnih medijih. Huaoraniji so se hitro prilagodili vedno večjemu številu turistov in njihovim potrebam: prodajajo ročna dela, ustanavljajo svoje turistične agencije, gradijo “džungelske kočice” v tropskem gozdu in postajajo licencirani turistični vodniki. Prispevek se osredotoča na podobe Huaoranijev, ki so jih ustvarili različni mediji, pričakovanja turistov, njihovo izpolnjevanje s strani lokalnih prebivalcev in turistične storitve, ki jih nudijo prebivalci enega od oddaljenih naselij Huaorani.

Ključne besede: avtohtoni prebivalci Amazonke, lokalni turizem, podoba avtohtonih ljudstev

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