

NEGOTIATING REPRODUCTION

Family Size and Fertility Regulation among
Shuar People of the Ecuadorian Amazon

av

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ABSTRACT

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The focus of this dissertation is situated in the realm of the global reproductive health discourse and its interplay with national politics in Ecuador. It addresses how high fertility rates are perceived as an issue that hinders development and modernisation. Population policies and reproductive health and family planning programmes have been developed in order to help people control their fertility, based on the assumption that reducing the number of offspring will enhance the well-being and prosperity of family, community, and nation. The ethnography presented in this thesis is based on anthropological fieldwork among Shuar people of the Ecuadorian Amazon. Being numerous and having large families are important to the majority of Shuar people. The study aims to explain how Shuar individuals make sense of human reproduction and how the choices they make about family size and fertility regulations relate to both their own reproductive norms and practices and to national and international ideals.

Shuar people's notions of reproduction and well-being differ significantly from the assumptions embedded in global and Ecuadorian discourses. Reproduction, and having a large family, is an intrinsic part of Shuar people's notions of conviviality, or well-being, and of how to achieve this way of living. Having large families are linked to their ontologies, social dynamics and perceptions on power, knowledge, and the growth of children. The ways various agents of change in Ecuador interpret, communicate, and implement reproductive health policies and programmes certainly influence the experiences and decisions of Shuar people but not always as anticipated. Shuar people do not simply internalise international or religious norms and ideas. Instead, they assert their own dynamic patterns of reproductive practices according to their own perceptions, norms, experiences and systems of knowledge.

This study offers critical insights into, and analyses of, the various ways in which the state may intervene in people's reproductive life. It explores how Shuar people's encounters with state health professionals are experienced and embodied through practices of the everyday. What we see in these encounters is that the state does not simply represent a set of rational and bureaucratic practices, strictly implementing policy discourses and development objectives, but is suffused with subjectivity. The power to define reproduction and reproductive practices and relations does not operate in one direction only. This study demonstrates how the global and national discourse on population and reproductive health is being interpreted, recreated and transformed through multifaceted negotiations at various levels. In this process, Shuar people are conscious participators in the dialogue that takes place in the encounter with state health professionals, and are never involuntarily ruled by the dominant discourse they meet.

Key words: *Ecuador, Amazonia, Shuar people, reproduction, conviviality, well-being, state, population policy, family planning, subjectivity, power*