

THE INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC SYSTEM IN NORTHWEST NAMIBIA: MAINTAINING THE HIMBA TRADITION THROUGH THE EXCHANGE WITH OTHERS

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This study examines how the indigenous economy is interwoven with the modern global economy in contemporary Southern Africa by focusing on modes of exchange in Kaokoland, northwest Namibia. Himba pastoralists are the main residents of Kaokoland. Although they are recognized as the most traditional and marginalized people in Namibia, in reality, most have active relationships with neighboring peoples such as the Herero (traditionally pastoralists), the Owambo (traditionally agro-pastoralists, although many are now urban dwellers), and the Damara (agriculturalists). The Himba people keep their traditional way of life in terms of their traditional costumes and heavy dependence on livestock. At the same time, they are becoming involved in modern issues such as the development of a hydroelectric dam, the exchange of their livestock in modern livestock markets that were once forbidden, and participation in a flourishing tourism industry with many foreign tourists visiting their homesteads. A supermarket owned by white people also recently opened in Kaokoland, at which some of the Himba shop. However, most of the Himba have no source of cash income except for the occasional sales of their cattle. The area has a few informal markets or open marketplaces, where the Himba generally barter their goats for commodities and foods brought by the Owambo merchants and Damara agriculturalists. In many ways, goats serve as a sort of regional currency.

In this paper, I describe some specific cases of economic exchanges in this area and propose the concept of an “indigenous economic system,” which defines how the traditional economy in remote Namibia is entangled with the modern global economy through people’s actual daily lives.

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