

## Reply to Gewalt: Isolated Himba settlements still exist in Kaokoland

We agree with Gewalt (1) that historical and anthropological accounts are essential tools for understanding the Himba culture, and these accounts are valuable to both us and him. However, we contest his claim that the Himba individuals in our study were not culturally isolated. Gewalt (1) claims that it would be “unlikely” that the Himba people with whom we worked had “not been exposed to the affective signals of individuals from cultural groups other than their own” as stated in our paper (2). Gewalt (1) seems to argue that, because outside groups have had contact with some Himba, this means that these events affected all Himba. Yet, the Himba constitute a group of 20,000–50,000 people (3) living in small settlements scattered across the vast Kaokoland region, an area of 49,000 km<sup>2</sup> (4).

Gewald (1) further asserts that our ignorance of the history and anthropology of the Himba undermines the validity of our research. In fact, because we were aware of the historical events that he describes in his letter, we employed rigorous procedures to ensure that the Himba individuals that we included in our study had not been in contact with individuals from other cultural groups. Our descriptions of the Himba sample in our study reflected our honest evaluation of their living situation, to which we had paid considerable attention. However, we would like to use this opportunity to outline in more detail the ways in which we ensured that the Himba individuals included in our study had not had contact with other cultural groups.

First, we sought out only the most remote settlements, which were many hours drive away from Opuwo and other bigger settlements in Kaokoland. Gewalt (1) is correct in stating that the South African Defense Force (SADF) laid down a network

of roads and tracks in some parts of this region. However, the settlements that we visited were not reachable by roads or tracks; we literally drove through rivers and across vast regions of empty land to reach the extremely isolated communities that were included in our sample. Second, we conducted extensive interviews with individuals in each settlement that we visited to establish if they had been visited by mobile schools, traders, researchers, missionaries, or tourists, and if they had visited larger regional towns. Only where this was not the case did we proceed to conduct our study with individuals from the settlement.

Finally, Gewalt (1) questions our claim that the “Himba do not have a system for measuring age” (2). He points out that the Himba use a system of ascribing names to years. We are happy to qualify our claim. The Himba participants in our study were generally not able to report the name of the year that they were born, and there was no reliable way to find out this information from an alternative source.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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