

The Himba. Black Africa is here, and marketing hasn't arrived yet.

Opuwo, Namibia. Close to the Angolan border you can find a small town where white people do not appear very often, around that town lives an old population with red-skinned women, red hair and almost no clothes. The red is not their natural color, the women color their skin as well as their hair.



I was the “visitor”: like an alien in a strange world I plodded around the almost abandoned village, led by a native African guide who translated my questions and their answers. Males are used to leading beasts all day around the savana so that the village belongs just to women and children. My camera, an Iphone 6, has got some picts, just led by my curiosity and the interest for details.

Tours take place almost every day. From the resort, by car, the guide brings tourists to the village and leads them in chatting with the old man of the village who reports that he has seen 77 springs, then the guide shows the traditional life-style of the Himbas as well the significance of their clothes especially of the young girls. The village has no bathrooms nor showers...

The guide told me how young girls wear a typical kind of necklace until they get marriage. After the wedding the necklace will be changed with a bigger one and the wedding happens when they are almost 20 years old.

After a while the guide reported some difficulty in the relationship between the official institutions and the Himbas, just imagine they don't even know when they were born. They have no calendar and do not keep track of the days and months, so they do not mark their birthday... they simply remember what was happening in those days... How they know when a girl is 20 years old in order to get marriage or how the old man knows he is 77 years old, they were simply questions with no answers. Something is wrong here.

The visiting has its main attraction: after the demonstration of a woman about the use of okra to color their skin red, we came back to the village open space.

Out of the blue a huge crowd, for this small village, was already sitting just waiting for visitors. In a large area almost 50 women, young girls and children were in a circle.

Did we have a party? Yes, something like, but the purpose was to market

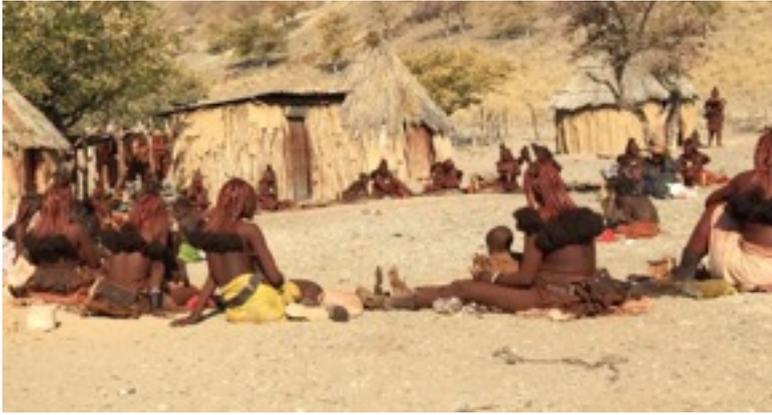
numbers of small objects produced by the Himbas women: wood human figures, bracelets, statues, wood plates... all goods for sale as gifts and reminders of the trip of the rich tourists. The sole purpose of the visit was clear then: the market!



What happens in a market with few rules and no limits to any performance aimed to persuade the visitors to buy?

I witnessed a market with no marketing. A market place governed by the invisible hand of demand/offer with any fair play. A place where the game played is just SELL!

A degree in economics isn't necessary to understand how a place like that can just be a HELL.



The insistence in getting your attention becomes rapidly hysterical, each of them screams loudly to invite you to come closer, to touch the products, to try the goods, to put in your hand something from their own product range, their goal is to make you see and appreciate something they have produced. They scream loudly but only a few English words, and they know they have no way to communicate properly neither the product's features, nor the production complexity. They only tend to get your attention as fast as they can. They force you to try them on: in a while

I've found both my arms covered by bracelets (I don't even wear a watch...), they can't ask you what you are looking for, they only hope you see something you like and, according to that logic, the more objects they show you the better it will be.

They can't approach you, their goods are on the ground upon a canvas, so you have to go closer to them and check their products. To invite you closer they scream more loudly, they move their hands or even throw you the objects! Yes, I was thrown objects by some girls meanwhile I was talking to another one. The throwers were young women who required my attention. If they get it for a while, they know, they need to keep your attention to finalise the sale right now, otherwise you won't come back anymore. You haven't got enough time for all of them, they have no time to waste, they have to rush to persuade you to buy right here, right now! Procrastination is not allowed.

After a tour of three quarter of the circle I found a pretty young girl, about 12, the one who was at the demonstration about young girls' dressing code. I decided to reward her buying something to compensate her for her performance. She offered me some bracelets, some statues, various objects. I wasn't really interested in any of them. I felt to buy something was my duty as a visitor and maybe I could use it as gift. Starting the negotiation about what to buy and how much it cost, she gave me two different prices for the same model of bracelet. One of them had little imperfections so she gave me a higher price for the better one, but first she had given me the cheaper one in order to attract my interest. - I'm quite sure she hasn't read *Robert Cialdini* yet.- I found that young, pretty girl incredibly able in managing negotiation of prices. She cares if you like something or don't. If you put it down and pick it up again, she understand that you want it. She plays the persuasion game very well: taking her position firmly at the right time and giving you leeway over the price when it is needed. And it is not due to the your request of a discount, she knows how the more you ask for a discount the more you are interested to that good, so that the harder she takes the position on the price.

I left the market place a bit pissed off: I left 15 dollar to a nice girl just because I wanted to experience the market place, I brought home a couple of bracelets I'll never use and I have no one to give them to. Ok, ok, 15 Namibian dollars are worth less than 5 pounds, the problem was not the money at all, but the bad experience to fight with a horde of salespeople hungry and motivated to sell, but with no sense of fair play, no marketing rules, nor education.

The next entrepreneur who states how salesman MUST be just hungry and strongly motivated and how training them is only a waste of their precious time, I swear, I'll throw him in that market place!

But, no doubt, he maybe already is in a market place like that one, and my role, as advisor, should be to get him out of there...

