Article

"There Are No True Himbas Anymore": Exploring the Dynamics of the Himba Culture and Land Use in the Face of Change in Kunene Region, Namibia

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Abstract: The Himba people have upheld a unique society for many decades, characterized by their distinctive customs and social structures. Though they have demonstrated great resilience and endured various external forces threatening their cultural identity, the survival of the Himba culture is in jeopardy due to the increasing challenges of modernization and environmental degradation. This study aimed to document and understand the Himba traditional culture, examine how external factors have influenced them, and explore how resilient their culture is in the face of outside pressures. The study reveals that the Himba people are facing significant cultural transformations brought about by many outside factors, such as modernization, globalization, education, religion, and environmental pressures. Most participants concurred that the Himba culture has changed. While some respondents expressed a sense of regret for losing their culture, some felt the cultural changes experienced were warranted. By studying how the Himba people respond to environmental and societal changes, this study showcases the resilience of indigenous communities and provides valuable insights into the intricate relationship between Himba culture, land use, and sustainability. As a tribe in transition, adapting to uncertainty and embracing change may be the only option for them to sustain their culture.

Keywords: culture; cultural change; Himba people; Kunene; cultural resilience

1. Introduction

Indigenous cultures are under many pressures and in different stages of assimilation and change. Some are dying out due to internal and external pressures [1]. Pastoralist nomads and semi-nomads have proven to be exceptionally resilient as cultural groups [2]. Many have survived the encroachment of external pressures such as war, colonialism, the appropriation of land, government policies, Western philosophies, and severe environmental pressures. This resilience is due to the evolution of socio-ecological relations that are receptive to the arid and semi-arid landscapes they tend to occupy [2]. However, continued destruction of the environmental infrastructure may significantly cause a shift in indigenous cultures due to reduced adaptive capacity. This has already happened to many indigenous communities worldwide [3].

For a long time, the concept of nomadic pastoralism has been known to be central to the Himba identity [2]. Though pastoral nomadism has been portrayed as well-adapted to the challenges of an arid environment [4], human–environment relations in Kunene have rapidly changed through the past century, especially due to government (colonial) measures and drought events [4], and serious challenges have impacted Kunene's existing social structures, affecting both age and gender relations [2]. Important resources of the pastoral system have been endangered by outside forces [4]. The Himba people have seen tremendous challenging times, such as the drought of 1981, which was so devastating that it was feared to mark the downfall of Himba society [4]. However, they were still able to rebuild their herds and maintain their deep pastoral identity. Though they have shown

much resilience, the current environmental infrastructure has become so weak that they may no longer be able to sustain their pastoral lifestyle. The prospect for pastoralism is not hopeful due to land degradation and climatic variability, and one may wonder how a pastoral way of life could be maintained in the future. Furthermore, the intrusion of external factors such as education, modernization, and religion continues to threaten their cultural identity more than ever before. The current renewed environmental and social pressures may pave their cultural landscape in a completely different direction.

Some scholars have already observed a change in the Himba fundamental cultural values and beliefs in the rising generation [2,5,6]. For example, the traditional beliefs centred on cattle reverence and ancestral worship are deeply ingrained cultural symbols. While these aspects still exist in Himba society today, there is an observed shift in the observance of these deeply ingrained cultural values and beliefs [5]. The Himba people are on a fringe between cultures, and how they navigate themselves amidst much pressure will determine if Himba society will still exist in the future.

Great debates surround the notion of cultural change/shift, and many scholars agree that human cultures are dynamic, constantly evolving and mutating [3,7–9]. Generally, changes in our social and physical environments can lead to cultural change [7]. So, cultures are inherently fluid and susceptible to change over time, and cultural preservation may not be easy. Instead, cultural resilience is encouraged [8,10]. While resilience is often referred to as the ability of a system to bounce back, this may not always be feasible. A system may be able to absorb changes and transform itself; this is also resilience. According to Holtorf (2018) [10], cultural resilience can be defined as the ability of a cultural system to face adversity, adapt to change, and continue to evolve. This means that cultural resilience involves both embracing change and maintaining continuity. From this perspective, disruptions should not be seen as enemies to be avoided but rather as collaborators in the complex dance of cultural sustainability [10]. So, what is probably important is not necessarily whether the culture is changing but whether there is cultural resilience. Cultural values can evolve and adapt to changing circumstances, but at the same time, they can also demonstrate resilience by persisting under pressure [8]. In conversations regarding contemporary pastoral societies in Africa, the perspective of change is inevitable [11].

Though the Himba culture is well documented, few studies have focused on the cultural transformations within Himba society and examined in depth the threats to the Himba culture as well as the implications of the external factors on the Himba culture, including the narrations from the Himba people themselves. Research like this is crucial for understanding the unique challenges and opportunities indigenous communities face as our world rapidly changes. It helps us grasp how these communities can sustain their cultural identity while adapting to modern circumstances. Therefore, this study aims to explore the changing landscape of the Himba people, particularly in relation to their cultural beliefs and practices. Specifically, the study aimed to document and understand their traditional culture, examine how external factors have influenced them, and explore how resilient their culture is in the face of outside pressures. I explored the following research questions: How has the Himba culture changed, and why? Are the perceived changes negative or positive? How have external factors such as religion, education, and globalization affected the Himba people's cultural practices and beliefs? To what extent have the Himba people maintained their cultural identity and traditions amidst these changes? What does the future of a Himba society look like? By understanding these dynamics, we can work towards sustainable solutions that support and enhance the long-term ecological and cultural sustainability within their communities.

1.1. Background

To contextualize the study, it is essential to examine the historical and socio-cultural context in which these transformations happen in Himba society. The Himba people have historically resided in a semi-arid region of Kunene (formally Kaokoland), where they are known to be pastoralists and possess a deep cultural identity. The Himba people's core

cultural values have withstood many encroachments of foreign influence. Bollig (2020) [6] gives an account of how the Himba social–ecological system has undergone major changes every thirty to forty years since the 1900s, resulting in a grave transformation of their environmental infrastructure. These changes have been material, social, political, and cultural and are due to external factors such as colonialism and the introduction of governmental programmes such as fixed boundaries in the 1920s, the vaccination programmes of the 1930s, and the borehole-drilling programme of the 1960s and 1970s, or the community-based natural resource management programmes of the 1990s and early 2000s [6]. The region has also seen the introduction of different diseases, both for animals and humans, including Sexual Transmitted Diseases, and has suffered several severe drought events. Despite the encroachment of various outside forces, the adaptive capacity that the Himba people portrayed was remarkable [6]. However, the significant change made to the current environmental infrastructure is undeniable. Bollig (2020) [6] warns that we should not be ignorant that humans have shaped the Kunene region and the landscape of the Himba communities in many ways, but it has not been a passive recipient of human action only. Therefore, both nature and humans have created the current arid landscape where today's pastoralists live. Bollig (2020) [6] emphasizes that what provides resilience is the environmental infrastructure, which, in this case, has been dramatically depleted. He postulates that revolutionary changes have occurred in Kunene in the past 25 years. The region, which was once isolated, has now been opened up to national and global flows of ideas, finances, and institutional designs with new infrastructures creating new alternatives for land use and mobility. Furthermore, the population and human settlements have increased, and alternative sources of livelihood, such as tourism and mining, are now available.

Though the Himba culture is well documented [2,6,12–16], to what extent this culture has changed or shifted has not really been explored in depth. Studies focusing on Himba cultural change in Namibia are very limited. Jacobsohn (1995) [2] was the first to examine in depth the cultural changes experienced by the Himba people, concentrating on the link between social interactions and material culture, with special emphasis on the socio-economic shifts occurring in the region. She wanted to delve into how people invest meaning in built space and material culture and to understand the manner and reasons for the change in this meaning. Jacobsohn gave detailed accounts of changes in the dressing (fashion), diet, cattle, sacred beliefs, and gender roles in the Himba people 28 years ago. There are no details on how religion, education, and modernization have influenced the Himba people in different aspects of their culture. Crandall (2000) [16] documented his one-year stay with the Himba people, including observations of a culture change among the young Himba people. His account was limited to about 20 people he lived with, narrating their own story. Cameron (2013) [5] examined the degree to which cultural differences are emerging due to exposure to various influences, including modern media. He focused his research on investigating the presence of a potential generational gap in Himba cultural values rather than conducting a thorough analysis of its underlying causes.

Jacobsohn (1995) [2] recorded that major changes in the Himba culture had already begun in the 1980s, such as changes in hairstyles, the use of modern clothes and tools, and a loss of interest in the culture among young people. For example, most young men considered Western clothing to indicate wealth, while the older generation thought cattle indicated wealth. Younger men aspired to have modern belongings such as cars. She concluded that several factors, such as droughts, war, colonialism, development, aid, and tourism, may have caused significant social and economic interruptions in Himba communities [2]. Crandall (2000) [16] recorded that young Himba people appeared to be moving away from traditional values of generational respect and community solidarity and were shifting to modern lifestyles. The elderly Himba blamed education and Christianity for these changes in attitudes and values among the Himba youth. The sentiments were that the values, concepts, and ethical principles guiding the older generations are considered old-fashioned and misguided.

Modern science, which is seen as a progressive and advanced way of life that each country and its people should adopt to reach development, invaded and surprised the traditional society and initiated its undoing. It set in motion views and concepts that paved the way for a contemporary alternative to traditional society [17]. At its core, modernization theory originated as an economic framework, suggesting that social progress could only be achieved through economic development. In the early stages, missionaries and colonial administrations saw traditional practices and beliefs as obstacles to progress and enlightenment. This did not end here; even after indigenous communities were granted independence from colonial rule, the new governments inherited the same sentiments and ideas of modernization [17].

According to Jacobsohn (1995) [2], the traditional Himba culture, as denoted by naked, ochred bodies; calfskin attires; shell decorations; dung-mortared houses; and nomadism, is associated with benightedness, technological inadequacy, and primitiveness in some political and development circles. Even after independence, the Namibian government saw the Himba "traditional culture" as a hindrance to development and enlightenment. This is because the Himba resisted major development projects in their region, such as the construction of Hydroelectric dams in 1995 and 2012. The Himba people maintained that these projects could destroy their cultural lands and the graves of their ancestors, which are integral to their culture [6]. They also expressed that they were not properly consulted and informed [6]. Could the construction of the dams have brought some benefits to the country and the Himba people, perhaps? If allowed, could this have brought the death of Himba society? The answers to these questions are debatable. Returning to the concept of cultural resilience, not all disturbances are necessarily bad, but resilience is needed to adapt to and absorb changes.

With increasing globalization and interconnectivity, the pastoralist lifestyle is becoming more challenging to sustain [18]. Kotowicz (2013) [18] studied cultural transformations in the Maasai culture and asked the following fundamental questions: In a culture where cattle and pastoralism are key elements, what will happen to this culture when pastoralism is no longer practical [18]? What happens when the continuity of the past lifestyle and culture is deteriorating? In this case, regarding the Himba pastoralists, what will happen to the Himba identity when pastoralism and livestock (cattle) are no longer a core element of their culture? What will the Himba identity and culture look like in the future? In the face of many pressures, such as climate change, and as pastoralism becomes increasingly challenging to sustain, how will the Himba redefine themselves without pastoralism? Within this background, I investigated the cultural transformations experienced by the Himba people, focusing on the changing landscape in which their traditions and lifestyles unfold. How resilient is the Himba culture amidst shocks? What is a true Himba? Are there still true Himbas?

1.2. The Concept of Culture and Cultural Transformations

As Simonsen (2008) [8] noted, defining culture is challenging due to its inherent complexity. Despite efforts, a precise definition that captures the core essence of culture remains elusive. According to Jahoda (2012) [19], the term "culture" has been polysemantic for a long time. For example, in France and England, it was referred to as the qualities of an educated person. Thiele (2016) [9] defines culture as the world that humans create, enjoy, and enhance through science and knowledge, morals and politics, economy and technology, rituals and food, arts and recreation, faith and spirituality. In other words, culture refers to how we cultivate a unique human environment within the natural world, and it establishes sets of habits and traditions that point us to three fundamental ideals: truth, beauty, and goodness [9]. In this paper, I adopt Brasche's (2003) [17] definition, who defined culture as "the expression of community identity. This expression can take various forms, including art, music, dance, fashion, stories, crafts, language, customs, and practices".

Culture is manifested in different layers, like an onion. Some of these layers could be visible, and others invisible. Invisible layers could include values and beliefs, while

visible layers can be artifacts, assumed behaviours, and practices, as well as systems and institutions [8]. Although human nature is inherited, culture is acquired, not inherited. It emerges from one's environment and surroundings. Because culture is shared, it transcends individual idiosyncrasies and cannot be limited to only one individual. Each of us is affiliated with one or several cultural groups or classifications, whether from national heritage, religious affiliation, or gender-related. As a result, we are all members of several cultural groups on different levels [8]. Today, very few individuals live in traditional cultures that have managed to preserve their belief systems, skills, and rituals from generation to generation without significant changes [9].

So, culture is dynamic and can never really be absolute. Due to the interactions between cultures, the borders between them are not definite, so culture is not homogenous, and it is not restricted to one individual [8]. In fact, new cultures are created or adopted daily, and new elements are constantly added to one's culture. In an age of global interdependence, the communities that sustain us are multiple and expansive, with ecological and atmospheric relationships spanning the globe, including networks of commerce, trade, information, communication, conventions, protocols, agreements, and laws [9]. All these are grounds for cultural transformations beyond our control. Though culture is typically seen as something to be preserved and passed on intact from generation to generation, and while this is often the case, to survive in the long term, a culture must adapt.

Another widely accepted perspective on culture is that it reflects the adaptive responses of human groups to the challenges and opportunities presented by their environment. This means that a group's behaviours are shaped not only by cultural learning but also by the specific characteristics of their physical and social ecology [7]. Kwon et al. (2021) [7] stipulate that environmental stressors may ultimately cause alterations in societal norms and values. This phenomenon can occur as individual reactions accumulate over time or due to cultural transmission mechanisms adapting to these reactions.

As modernization continues to expand, the impact on traditional cultures such as the Himba community cannot be ignored. In the gush of global information, there are concerns that the rich and distinct culture of each social group may be weakened. This dilution has already begun manifesting in real life and can be observed in many societies. With the rise of technology, particularly in communication, where information is readily available, any culture can drastically change, either leading to enhancement or tragedy. A closed living environment with no apparent external influences may be able to keep and maintain the traditional culture of a given ethnic group, but the world is no longer closed [3].

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Sites

The study was conducted in three Himba communities in Kunene region, Namibia (Figure 1). Kunene region, located in the northwest corner of Namibia, is the home of the Himba people, a semi-nomadic tribe who are predominantly pastoralists. Kunene is one of the severely degraded and drought-stricken regions in Namibia, where poverty rates are also very high. I covered three villages, namely, Otjamaungu, Orue, and Otjimbundu. Otjiamaungu is about 30 km from Ruacana, Otjimbundu is about 16 km from Kunene River Lodge, and Orue, the most remote, is about 50 km from Kunene River Lodge. The communities were conveniently selected because the researcher has formed good relationships with these communities and has partnered with these communities in various projects such as community gardens and experimental stations involving students and has been working with some of the communities since 2017.
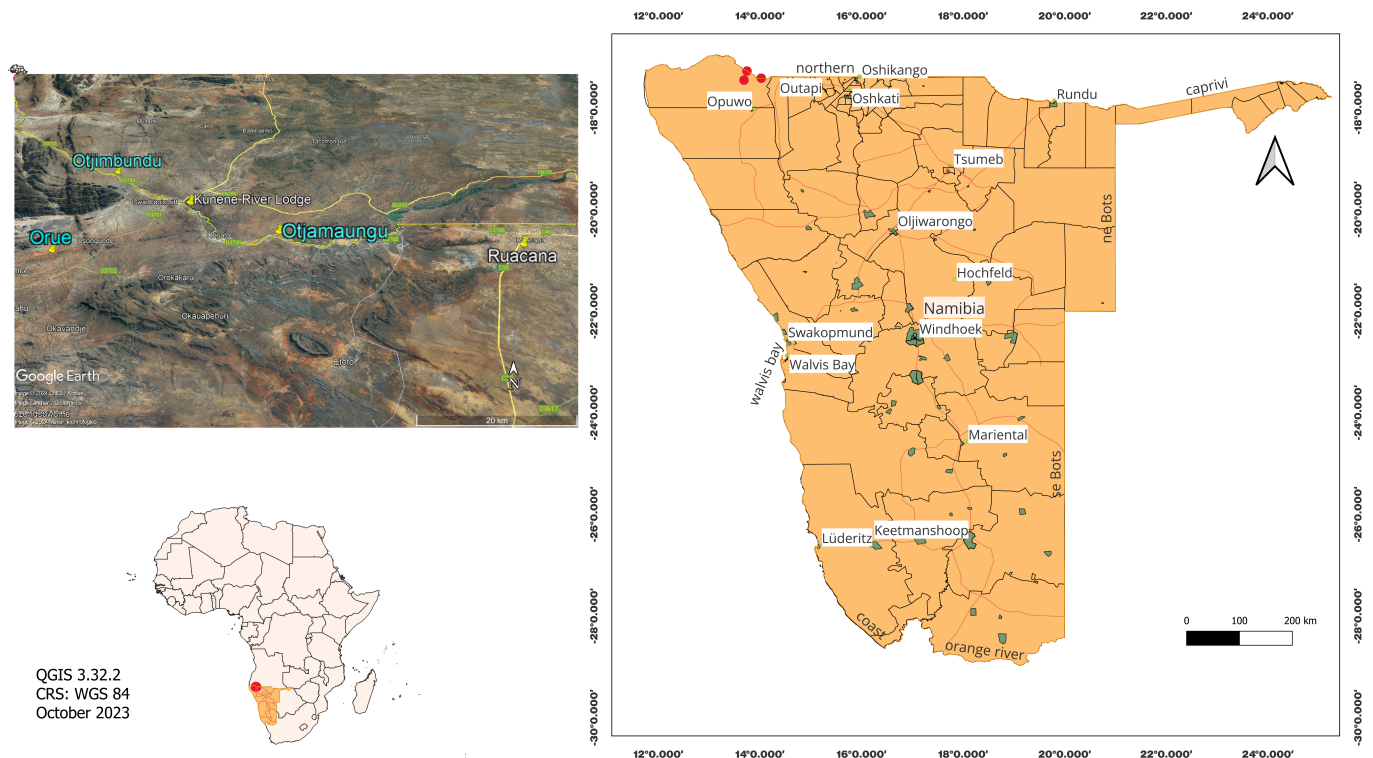
Figure 1. Location of the study sites: villages (**top left**), map of Africa (**bottom left**), and map of Namibia showing different constituencies and towns (**right**). The locations of the villages are indicated in red. Map created in QGIS by Emilia N Inman.

2.2. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a hermeneutical phenomenology approach focusing on the exploration of lived experiences (phenomenology) and the interpretation of the "texts" of life (hermeneutics) [20]. The idea was to capture the lived experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of the Himba community regarding their changing cultural landscape, land use, and the impacts of external forces on their cultural identity. Qualitative approaches yielded exhaustive and detailed data ideal for a thorough analysis of the cultural transformations occurring among the Himba. It also allowed the researcher to adopt an etic perspective, investigating dispassionately without participating. It promotes an outsider's perspective, which can help avoid biases that might come with insider knowledge or previous community experience. Furthermore, this study builds upon previous research conducted by the same researcher, who has built good relationships with the Himba communities and has already conducted an etic analysis in the Himba community. This established trust with the community aids in eliciting richer, more authentic responses from the participants. At this point, it is important to assert my position and reflexivity: Being a young Oshiwambo woman who is highly educated and a practicing Christian with a Christian background, my perspective significantly influences my study of cultural changes within the Himba community. In my own endeavours, balancing tradition and modernity in my own upbringing gives me insight into the complex interaction between heritage and change. My Christian beliefs generally enlighten me about the potential influence of spirituality on cultural changes. I approach this study with a deep appreciation for the Himba communities and their cultural heritage. Recognizing my subjectivity, I committed to maintaining reflection throughout the research process and valuing the participants' perspectives to enhance the genuineness and comprehensiveness of this study while upholding ethical responsibilities.

2.3. Participant Selection

The study used purposive and convenience sampling to select participants from the two Himba communities. Participants included community leaders, elders, youth representatives, and individuals with diverse experiences and perspectives on land use change and cultural transformation. Purposeful sampling is broadly used in qualitative research to classify and select information-rich cases linked to the phenomenon of interest [21]. Creswell (2007) [20] emphasized that qualitative research involves purposefully selecting participants who can offer valuable insights and information regarding the research problem and central phenomenon being studied. This includes identifying and choosing individuals who possess substantial knowledge or direct experience related to the phenomenon of interest. I focused on people who were available and willing to participate in the study. Among all those interviewed, 62% were males between 18 and 75, while 38% were females between ages 20 and 70. I selected all willing and available participants to contribute data on cultural shifts. All attendees were qualified to provide insights. However, there was a higher turnout of men compared to women, potentially influenced by traditional gender roles within Himba households, where women primarily take care of the children. In many indigenous cultures, these gender norms may affect the accessibility and willingness of individuals to participate in interviews or research activities.

2.4. Data Collection

I conducted in-depth interviews with 33 individuals from Otjamaungu village to explore their perceptions, experiences, and knowledge of land use change and cultural transformation. These interviews allowed the respondents to share detailed accounts of and individual perspectives about their cultural transformations. Furthermore, I conducted a focus group with 20 respondents in Otjamaungu on issues of land use change and the environment, the causes of these changes, and their implications for their culture. They also gave their perception of nature, the environment, and what it means to them. Another focus group discussion with 10 people was conducted in Orue village. I also had various discussions with a few families in Otjimbundu village. Focus group discussions complemented the interviews by providing a social context in which people's individual views could be expressed, challenged, and negotiated. The dynamic and interactive nature of focus groups can lead to a greater understanding of cultural changes as experiences can be debated in a group setting, creating a wider range of perspectives. Apart from in-depth interviews and focus groups, I also included participant observation. I have been conducting research with the Himba communities since 2017 in Otjimbundu village, initially with a PhD project and later with other projects and community outreaches that expanded to Orue and, later, Otjamaungu village. I have formed very close relationships with these communities, and together with the communities, we have established community gardens and experimental stations. I have, in some ways, become a part of these communities. I have actively observed their daily activities and cultural practices during my stays. Direct observations provide first-hand experience of the community's lifestyle, traditions, and interactions. The interviews were conducted at the community gardens under a tree, and they lasted for about 30 to 45 min. The interviews were conducted in February 2023, and participant observation has been ongoing since 2020 when the project began.

The research was conducted with the University of Namibia Decentralized Research Ethic Committee (UNAM-DEC-MRS-008—27 July 2022). It was clear to the respondents that participation in this study was voluntary, and they had every right to discontinue their participation at any time during the interviews. All the participants signed an individual informed consent form to participate in the interviews. Interviews were conducted with the assistance of a translator, a young Himba matriculant man who was born and raised in the area. With the permission of the participants, all the interviews were recorded, and written notes were also recorded during the interviews.

2.5. Instruments

I used an interview guide as the research instrument for each interview. The research guide is a casual, flexible approach encompassing topics and questions. These can be asked in different ways to different individuals during interviews [22]. Interview guides serve as valuable tools that outline the objectives of an interview, including the specific topics to be explored and the criteria for determining a relevant and insightful response. They are also flexible in that one does not need to keep any specific order in asking the questions, and the guide does not dictate exactly how the questions should be asked. The interview guide included the following questions:

a. Is the Himba culture changing, and is this change good or bad?
b. What aspects of culture have changed, and what has contributed to this cultural shift?
c. What is threatening the Himba cultural identity?
d. Did environmental issues such as drought affect your cultural practices?
e. What is a true Himba?
f. Is there a change in land use?
g. What is your perception of nature, and has the natural environment changed?
h. What is the state of the natural environment?

2.6. Data Analysis

The focus group sessions and the in-depth interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic content analysis using ATLAS ti software version 23. Canva was also used for data visualization of the qualitative data. Transcripts and field notes were systematically coded to identify emerging themes, patterns, and connections related to land use change and cultural transformation among the Himba community. The first step was to read through the transcripts as many times as possible in order to familiarise myself with the data as a whole.

During this first step, I searched for frequency of words or phrases that appeared to capture key thoughts and, thus, enable grouping of experiences. I followed the steps underlined by Partridge et al. (2010) [23] for the tasks undertaken during a phenomeno-graphic data analysis, which included getting to know the data as a whole by reading and re-reading the data, finding important sections of the data (to the research questions), comparing parts of the data to find sources of differences or similarities, creating initial categories or codes, labelling those codes, and determining the relationship between the codes to identify the main themes in the data. Re-reading the transcripts and trying to find meanings in the opinions shared, as well as going back and forth to the different codes, also helped in identifying subthemes. Sometimes, combining various codes resulted in one theme. Through a process of iterative coding, themes were refined and organized into meaningful groupings to answer the research questions and provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

3. Results

3.1. Perceived Changes in the Himba Culture: Has the Himba Culture Changed, and Is This Change Good or Bad?

The respondents were asked whether they think their culture (Himba) has changed. All the respondents agreed that their culture has indeed changed. The respondents were also asked if the perceived changes were good or bad. There were mixed opinions regarding whether the perceived changes were good or bad. While most young men expressed that the changes were good, the older men and women believed the changes were detrimental to the Himba culture. Most young Himba women also perceived the changes as bad for their culture. Some negative changes expressed included changes in marital practices leading to more divorces and modern food consumption leading to sicknesses. Some benefits of the cultural change included using modern goods and tools such as strong shoes and cars that have made life easier. Table 1 depicts some views on the negative and positive aspects of the changes in the Himba culture as expressed by the respondents.

Table 1. Perceived changes in the Himba culture as expressed by the respondents.

Perceived Changes in the Himba Culture	
Negative	**Positive**
"We never used to add salt to our meat. When the people who went to school returned, they introduced us to salt, bringing us different diseases. We are getting sick because of the new food we are introduced to." M5	*"Things are better now. I have good modern shoes that enable me to walk long distances, even to Opuwo. It was even a bit hard to make fire traditionally, but now we are using a matchstick. It made life easier, but some of the young ones have lost out on important skills."* M18
"For me, the old practice was perfectly fine. It does not look good now. It was very different in the past; if a lady gets a baby while unmarried, that child will automatically belong to her father. If a man gets children with someone who is not their wife, then the children will not be regarded as his. They will belong to the woman's father. That was much better compared to now. The burden is too much as young men are just dumping their many children to their mothers." F3	*"The culture has changed from negative to positive because in the past we used stones as pillows, but now we are using modern soft pillows. Now it is good because the pillow is very soft. Even the cattle herders back then would use animal leather as blankets which got them sores, but at least now they are using modern matrasses."* M11
"The change is a problem because only the people who went to school live better, but the uneducated suffer. This is because the jobs are only offered to those that are educated." M5	*"Back then, we wore open leather shoes, which were very hard and did not protect the skin; now, we can wear boots and not get hard skin."* M12
"Nowadays, young people choose their own spouses, and things have become chaotic now with so many divorces compared to how things were in the past." M6	*"New developments are good because we used to walk very long distances, carrying all our belongings, but now there are cars. So, cars have made life easier."* M16
	"It is a good change because the way the new modern houses are built is very comfortable." M8

3.2. What Aspects of the Himba Culture Have Changed?

The respondents were asked to express what aspects of their culture have changed. Figure 2 depicts various themes associated with changes in the Himba culture. Various factors such as dressing/fashion, hairstyles, marriage practices, traditional rituals, diet, gender roles, and the use of modern goods and facilities were categorised into codes that described how the culture has changed. Codes such as discrimination, social pressures, stereotyping, as well as education, religion, modernization, and government regulations were categorised as contributing to the cultural change (Figure 2).
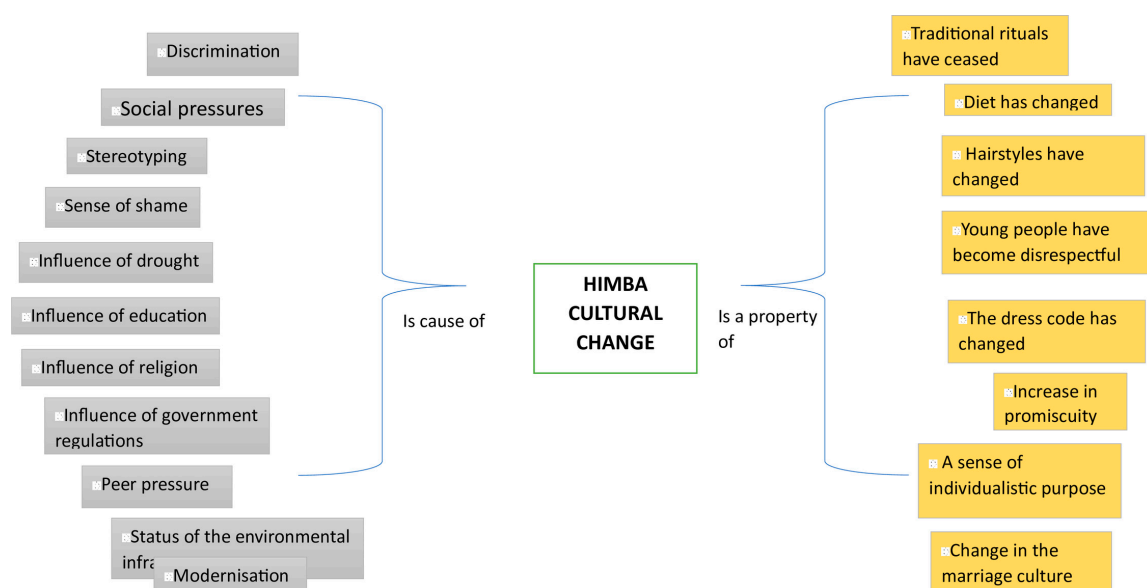
Figure 2. Various codes associated with the changes in the Himba culture generated in ATLAS.ti desktop.

The word cloud below shows the main words and concepts that were used by the respondents to describe how the culture has changed. The main words used to describe how the culture has changed include clothes, food, marriage, aspects of males and females, family structure, and the introduction of schools (Figure 3). More descriptions of these changes are discussed below.
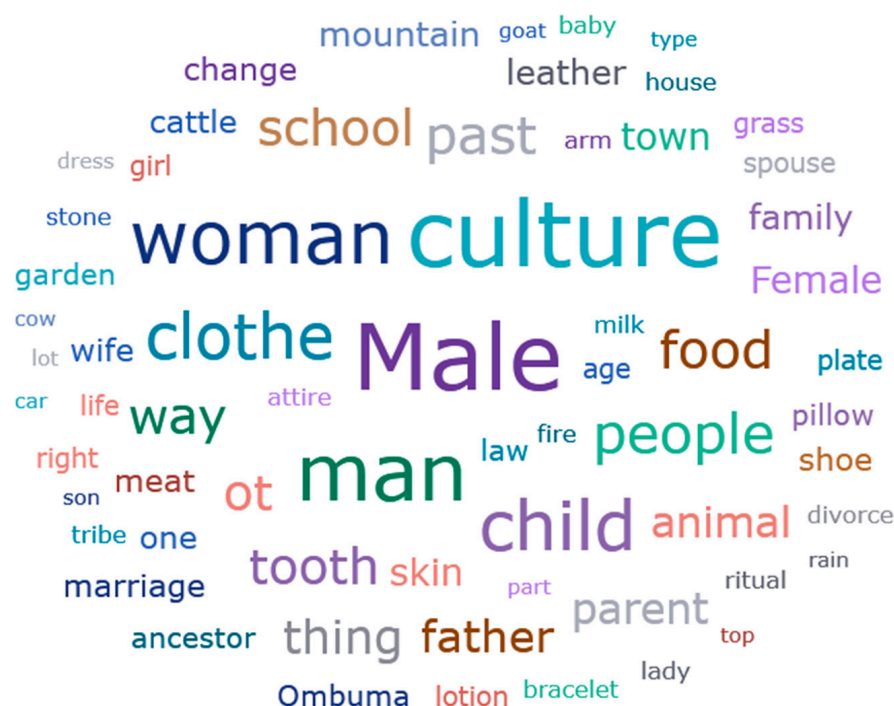

Figure 3. Word cloud depicting the keywords used by the respondents to describe how their culture has changed, generated from ATLAS.ti desktop.

3.2.1. The Dress Code Has Changed

Most respondents commented that there are major changes in the Himba dress code (Figure 4), with many, especially young men, shifting to modern clothes. They also had different dress codes for different developmental stages to show at which stage a girl child was, but that is no longer a practice they observe. The respondents shared their views as follows:

> "Everything has changed now; for example, anklets and bracelets for women are now made from rubber because they can stretch well and easily be removed. Moreover, many Himba women are now braiding their hair artificially, wearing modern dresses and covering up. It seems there is a feeling of nakedness that comes with development; we start feeling that it is not normal, and the new life is very necessary." F7

> "We used to dress up beautifully in full tradition. There were different dress codes for different stages and genders." M17

> "The culture has changed. We used to wear traditional clothes that we no longer wear. For example, we only used to put on a small leather to cover our lower bodies, but now that has changed, even the design of our skirt has changed. Our dress code was different according to different age groups. For example, a girl who has started her period should wear a different attire from those who have not yet menstruated." F1

Figure 4. A group of Himba people in the community garden, Otjamaungu village 2023, most of them wearing modern clothes (photo by Emilia Inman).

A young woman expressed that some Himba women have modified their traditional attires to cover up more, making their skirts slightly longer, and some now add decorations to their traditional outfits:

"Even women who wears traditional Himba attires have modified them to cover themselves slightly more. Now we have modified our traditional clothes by making the skirts longer and adding extra decorations. Our women never had bare arms or legs; they were covered with bracelets, and only orphans had bare arms to show that they had lost their fathers. The older women wore bracelets covering their whole arms. Our women looked beautiful then, but now they have started wearing modern clothes." F3.

3.2.2. The Use of Modern Tools

The respondents also shared that they have adopted modern ways of doing things, such as using modern cutlery and pillows:

"We used to eat on traditional wooden plates and used our hands to eat. Now we are just using modern bowls and plates to eat in. Eating with hands is now considered dirty and unhealthy. So it is no longer okay." F2

"In the past, we used stones as pillows, but now we are using modern soft pillows. Even the cattle herders back then would use animal leather as blankets, which gave them sores, but at least now they are using modern matrasses." M11

3.2.3. The New Generation Now Goes to School

The study reveals that quite a number of Himba people are now pro-education, and they support the idea of children going to school:

"In our time, we did not even see papers as we were growing up. Education is very important, and I tell all the young ones to go to school so they can learn." H49

However, there are still some who believe that the introduction of education is a problem:

"The young generation is now also just going to school instead of going to look after cattle. When they return from school, they call us stupid and uneducated." M5

3.2.4. The Diet Has Changed

Many respondents are contented that they now eat modern food and their diet has changed, as expressed by the respondents below:

"We only used to eat meat and sour milk, and now we eat porridge. In this way, the culture has changed." M5

"A long time ago, we collected and ate wild honey and ground tubers and collected them in the wild easily. However, now we cannot eat some of these wild foods because people will laugh at us and ask, why not eat apples instead?" M7

"The culture has changed because, in the past, we ate a type of grass called Ombuma (grass), but now we are eating rice and other modern food. This way, the culture has changed because we no longer consume Ombuma." M13

"Things have changed because wild foods have become scarce (like Omambibo), and even if you see them, you will start thinking about carrots and potatoes." M14

3.2.5. Their Hairstyles Have Changed

Some respondents also expressed that there is a change in their hairstyles. Hairstyles were very important to distinguish the different stages of development and changes in marital status. Different hairstyles signified different age groups for both men and women and show when one is married, single, or divorced, as expressed by the respondents below:

"Small girls used to have a different hairstyle from elders; their hair used to be plaited with two cornrows facing in front called 'ondato,' and they change this hairstyle as they reach puberty. Men also had different looks at different stages, for instance, when transitioning from small boys to young men and getting married. This depended on their totems too, especially with the hairstyle, but it typically has one cornrow facing at the back, at the middle of the head, and cutting all side hair off." F7

"Back then, married men had a hairstyle that looked like a helmet (See Figure 5). However, most married men no longer carry that hairstyle, and they look funny now. There is no distinction between those who are married." F3

One respondent described the actions of especially young men who have deviated from their cultural practices, such as hairstyles, as those of ignorance:

"Young people do not care anymore; a young man can get married yet no sign, they are cutting their hair with no limits, they do not respect their culture anymore. As much as things seem to be made easier, the change has consequences." M18

a)   b)

Figure 5. (**a**) A Himba man wearing "ondato" for unmarried men. (**b**) A married Himba man wearing "Okandumbo" style (photos by Emilia Inman).

3.2.6. Some Traditional Rituals Have Ceased

So many factors influencing the Himba culture have led to a cessation of some of the traditional rituals that were a huge part of the Himba culture. Some respondents asserted this, as follows:

"We used to practice a certain ritual for girls entering puberty, where younger girls used to go behind the house with their mates, break all the neckwear they had on, and bring the remains back home. We would then slaughter a cow and have a celebration to signify their next stage when they start their period, but now it does not happen anymore." F3

"Many changes come with marriage. In the past, married men used to cut their beards for the first time, and one was regarded as ready to get married depending on the length of their beard. This is no longer observed. It was also during this stage that the married man changes his hairstyle into 'okandumbo' style and remove their cornrows by cutting off half of the cornrow from the back, opening the hair and putting tree bark chips with red ochre to strengthen it, close it and tie it tightly pointing upward. This is only to be removed when one is widowed or divorced." M17

The following is a profile of a traditional healer whose power and influence is seen to be diminishing because of outside influences such as religion and access to modern services:

Profile 1: A Himba traditional healer was revered among the whole community as he was selected by his late father, who held the same position, to represent the community and speak to their ancestors on their behalf. He was also tasked to permit them to enter sacred places such as mountains, heal the sick, and be consulted for all sorts of problems in the community. One respondent described him as follows:

"This is a special man amongst us all. He is the only one who can permit anyone to enter the Ehomba mountain by making a fire and making you stand on a stone. He will then summon the ancestors that you want to go to the mountain. Even when one is not feeling okay, like having Malaria, he can inform the ancestors to heal you. The man usually has a woven basket with some leaves in it. However, now it only happens once or twice a year. The man has authority because it was passed on to him by his father." M7

He complains that he no longer has the same power due to modernization and religion because people no longer consult him as it was in the past, and so his relevance and influence as a traditional healer have decreased:

"My powers are no longer strong because only a few people now come to me for healing. They are now going to hospitals and churches, etc." M15

Furthermore, there are no longer enough livestock to offer sacrifices to their ancestors, and without sacrifices, these special men cannot perform their duties very well as their sight into the sacred world is limited:

"It negatively affected us because our big men (witch doctors) need animals to sacrifice for clarity. Now, we no longer have livestock to sacrifice to our ancestors." M4

3.2.7. There Is a Sense of Increased Promiscuity

Some respondents also expressed increased promiscuity, especially among young people, leading to social problems such as teenage pregnancy and many illegitimate children.

"When I was young, I used to look after goats, and I would strictly sleep at home because I was still too young to start sleeping around. Now young girls already have more than two kids at a very young age, when they are not married." F2

"For now, in boarding schools, children are just falling pregnant and sleeping with each other in the hostels; the family structure is now broken. The hostel situation is worse there, the young men bringing their girlfriends into the hostel." M17

"In the past, though children were given into marriage at a young age, the men were not allowed to be seen with their chosen wives anytime, or a woman visiting the man's

house; otherwise, the man would pay. They only took their wives when they had reached reproduction age. Moreover, if your chosen bride gets pregnant by someone else, before or after marriage, the child is considered yours because she is your wife, so children were still raised by both parents even if they are not biologically yours." M19

3.2.8. Changes in Marriage Practices: Choice of a Partner

The results suggest that there is also a change in the marital practices of the Himba people, as narrated by one respondent below:

"Previously, men had no say in choosing a wife at any stage of their lives. Similarly, women could not say no or yes when their parents gave them into marriage. Parents chose their preferred wife for their son. This only happens when a man is really grown, approximately above 30 years. Usually, the length of the beard determines if one was old enough to get a wife because a man was not allowed to cut his beard until he gets married. This system was biased because some men genetically develop beards very late or with slow growth in length. Now, young men and women can make their own decisions about marital partners on their own timing. People are walking freely with their fiancées in the village now with no penalties, visiting each other before marriage, and if any of them bears a child outside, the child can come home or to the grandparents' house. After parents notice that your beard is long enough, it remains their secret that you are ready for marriage. So they find for their son a young bride, from 5 years old, and a ritual is performed as an engagement. From there, you start raising your wife, taking care of her, and gifting her until she reaches the teenage stage to take her home. The reason for a young wife is to take care of the husband and give birth until the man is old. In the process of the engagement, if this young man happens to impregnate another lady, it is regarded as an abomination, and he cannot tell his parents. This was unacceptable, and this child will not be regarded as his own." M7

Most respondents expressed the negative impacts of the change in their marital practices, which, because of modernity and outside influences, have made young people abandon these practices to their detriment. As a result, there are many illegitimate children and increased divorces and promiscuity. Below are some thoughts on the changes in the marriage practices of the Himba people:

"In the past, our parents advised us to marry into families that are maybe friends with our fathers. This was good because the two families could work well together compared to marrying someone from a family you do not know. This was good because divorce rates were very much lower. The old marriages were good because people were forced to remain married by their parents, and they had to make it work. Now, there is no order or customary law to override the government laws on marriage, so anyone can divorce as they like." M5

"It was very different in the past; if a lady gets a baby while unmarried, that child will automatically belong to her father. If a man gets children with someone who is not their wife, then the children will not be regarded as his. They will belong to the woman's father. That was much better compared to now. The burden is too much as young men are just dumping their many children to their mothers. Nevertheless, now it is allowed. For me, the old practice was perfectly fine. It does not look good now. I have sons who live far away from home; some are now educated. They simply dump their children here and leave. I have to look after their children, my grandchildren. Now I am suffering here alone because my children go to town and only return to bring me more babies." F1

"Nowadays, marriages are not okay because women may leave their husbands lying that they are just going somewhere to visit, and they take forever. In fact, when they return, some even come back re-married by someone else because now they are not afraid of their fathers. The new marriage arrangements are not good because people are no longer afraid to marry and divorce each other out there on the streets." M9

"In my culture, in the past, as a man, I could not choose who should be my wife. It was the responsibility of the parents to choose spouses for their children. Parents decide whom their children should marry. But now, some women, if you force them to marry a man they do not want to marry, they will tell you they will report it to the police. Nowadays, young people choose their own spouses, and things have become chaotic now, and so many divorces compared to how things were in the past." M6

"The reason why parents chose spouses for their children was because they knew better. Now that young people are choosing for themselves, there are more divorces. Long time, our parents would advise us to marry a lady related to us. However, in the present, men and women have the right to choose who to marry. It is not good because sometimes the ladies we want to marry may be crazy." F6

"Long time ago, even if you beat your wife, and she goes to report to her parents, she will just be told to return to her husband even if her eye was beaten out." F9

"Previously, men did not have a say in choosing a wife at any stage of their lives. Similarly, women cannot say yes or no when they are chosen. Marriage was all arranged by the parents. They choose a preferred wife for their sons. This only happens when the man is really grown, approximately about 30 years old." M16

3.2.9. Gender Roles Have Changed

The respondents noted that gender roles have also changed. Certain activities that were only specific to a certain gender are no longer observed, such as cooking and gardening, which was regarded as solely a woman's role:

"In the past, men were not allowed to cook food, even meat; only women could cook. However, men can now cook and do all kinds of household chores." M6

"In our culture, cooking was a curse if you had a wife." M16

Some respondents also narrated that women have more rights now compared to before when they had no say in anything and were often expected not to be around men:

"Back then, women had no right to say or do anything, even to discipline or "beat" their own child. However, now they have all rights just like men." M5

"Back in the day, men were not allowed to sit with women; even though she was your wife, you could not sit with her in public. In the past, men were also not allowed to make gardens, only women, though the first harvest from the garden was only eaten by men before the women. However, now all that has changed, men can sit together with women and men can now make gardens and cook." M20

3.2.10. Some Cultural Aspects Are Now Seen as Depicting a Sense of Shame

Some felt that some aspects of their culture are now regarded as shameful, and practicing them brings them some sort of shame, and people are no longer practicing them. They are, therefore, losing these practices. Several respondents expressed some practices that are now subjecting them to shame as follows:

"Yes, the culture has changed in some ways, for example, now we wear modern expensive clothes from the shops. When we go to bigger towns like Ongwediva wearing traditional clothes, people laugh at us, saying we are crazy. If one visits a big town wearing traditional clothes, one will be shamed and laughed at." M16

"In the past, we had a ritual to remove the four bottom incisor teeth for fashion. Nowadays, children do not want their front teeth removed. The removal of teeth in both genders was to make them look beautiful at the age of 16 and above. We do not use it anymore because it is no longer a sign of beauty but shame. It can affect speech, and young people shy away from it. If you have your teeth removed, you will be laughed at and shamed. For some of us, who had our teeth removed, we now have to buy new teeth because we feel we do not qualify to be in a city like Windhoek without proper teeth. In the past, one cannot

even be given Omaere if you didn't have the teeth removed. But now the new generations are refusing to have them removed because they feel they will not be able to speak English. In fact, some are trying to get them replaced. They fear they will not get partners that are not coming from their tribe. Back then, we were lied to that if we do not remove our front teeth, the teeth would eat our droppings when we went to the toilet. However, young people are now refusing to remove their teeth. All the young ones now have all their teeth intact. When we go to some towns, they will make fun of us, like telling us to eat apples with our front jaws while there are no teeth. It negatively affects our lives because we now need a lot of money to replace them." M17

"Long time ago, we used to collect and eat wild honey and ground tubers and collected them in the wild easily. However, now we cannot eat some of these wild foods because people will laugh at us and ask, why not eat apples instead?" M13

"A long time ago, the only woman who could dress the way I am dressing right now was one who had lost their father. If you still have your father, you are supposed to dress well. My father is not even proud of the way I am currently dressed. However, when I wear my bracelets and anklets and go to a town like Ongwediva, people there will laugh at me." F5

It seems that there also is pressure coming from schools and discrimination against those wearing traditional attires, especially in schools:

"Yes, our children are not wearing traditional clothes when going to school. This is because others will laugh at them and bully them. When they return home, they force their parents to buy them modern clothes so they look like others." M3

"A certain teacher at Ehomba school asked about the Zemba tribe scholars whether they are "human" or "Zemba" or are they even humans. So things like discrimination because of our culture are also affecting us." F1

3.2.11. A Sense of Individualism and Self-Determination

Some respondents expressed that they have lost the community and collective spirit, and many have become individualistic, pursuing their own good only:

"In the past, one could choose from the relative's cattle herd, whichever calf they wanted to make their leather from, and it would be done for you. Families were stronger back then. Now, if you do not have your own resources, you will suffer alone. Everyone is concentrating on their own children. Cattle is now expensive, but you can buy cheaper clothing to cover up. And as years goes by, the spirit of change gets stronger on every tribe worldwide, hence the shift." M17

3.2.12. Cultural Change Has Brought a Sense of Loss

Some Himba people have expressed a sense of loss and regret due to the changes in certain cultural practices, as mentioned by some respondents below:

"Things have changed because wild foods have become scarce (like Omambibo), and even if you see them, you will start thinking about carrots and potatoes. They are very healthy, but we seem to be losing them. We have lost out on some really healthy food options because of the introduction of modern food." M13

"Even for me as a man, I was not supposed to be wearing these clothes but rather leather. I am now wearing a cap. We are lost." M2

"A long time ago, women had nice scents because of certain herbs they used, and they do not use those perfumes anymore. Now, they do not smell as nice. The nice scent was a nice treat for men visiting their women." M16

3.3. Factors Threatening and Influencing the Himba Culture

The results indicate that there are several outside factors influencing the Himba culture. Education, modernity, religion, drought, and government policies were the main threats

indicated by the respondents as infringing the Himba culture. One respondent narrated their fear of the end of the Himba culture as follows:

"The culture is changing. The culture is threatened by things such as education. In the coming years, the Himba culture will die, and we will only see it in museums that this is how the Himba people used to wear and live. I think when our current old people die, that will be the end of the Himba culture." M6

3.3.1. The Influence of Education on the Himba Culture

Many respondents addressed the issue of education as the main threat to their culture because it targets their young people, eventually changing them, from their dressing to their mindset. These are some of the narrations from the respondents:

"When development reached us, we have sent some of our children to schools, and they came back with fashion, and influenced us to wear more like town people, use perfumes, braid our hair etc. For instance, when parents have to go for meetings or graduations, they will suggest or even impose some special attire for their parents to wear on these occasions." M19

"If people become educated, they will no longer return to their traditional way of life. Education will keep changing them and kill all the traditions in them. For example, when children attend school in their traditional attire, others will laugh at them, so they are forced to wear modern clothes." M6

"My child came from school and asked me, as his father, to get him modern clothes." M2

"Certain families of Himbas do not eat certain food or animals or parts of an animal as part of the family tradition and ritual. For example, some families do not consume meat from cows without horns. This is because it will bring bad luck to the family. However, once the children go to school in towns, they eat everything, even cows without horns. Then culture is lost in the process." M4

3.3.2. The Influence of Religion on the Himba Culture

Religion was also cited as one of the factors influencing the Himba culture. Many especially quoted that religion required them to change to modern clothing:

"People who attend church are not allowed to wear their traditional clothes." M6

"Evangelism has an impact on our tradition. After many sermons we realized that we need to leave behind some practices, you need to go to church, wear church clothing etc." M19

Religion has changed not just the way they dress but the way they also think, opening them up to new perceptions about life and changing their whole worldview. Below is an account of a Himba who converted to Christianity:

"We lived in our own little world. Our faith was merely in our ancestors. We believed they protect us, they bring rain, they heal us, they feed us, they multiply our livestock, they bless us and everything. As long as we had our livestock, life was sorted. We also used traditional remedies to heal the sick, using spells and plant-based materials from spiritual trees such as Mopane, Grewia species and Terminalia to call on the spirits for healing. We have been hearing the name of God for a long time. We knew there was 'Mukuru' controlling the universe, but we lacked the truth, direction, and we were even reluctant to change for anything. Our tradition was so strong back then that we couldn't be really moved by other beliefs, but now we all know that God has just been the one protecting us all along. We are now stuck with a mixed culture, the new realistic faith with understanding, and the old belief of ancestors." M19

Some expressed that the right to choose what to believe is important and has opened up their minds to create their own destinies, as narrated by a young Himba man below:

"We did not believe we could be more than just farmers or have other significance in the society apart from being a family head as men. The fact that people didn't even have a voice in making future plans, it was all arranged by your parents wasn't fair. Currently, there are more rights, choices to make, and it is up to you what you would like to believe in. This might not be the best solution for our traditional implications, but it is advantageous because at times it feels you are not bound to tight laws and beliefs you are not comfortable with." M16

3.3.3. The Impacts of Drought on Himba Culture

Drought was the main factor cited by the respondents as having caused a big turnaround in the Himba culture. Drought made it impossible to maintain some of the cultural practices, particularly in the preservation of pastoralism, a core cultural aspect of the Himba culture. One respondent expressed that drought has made them change their lifestyles:

"We had many cattle and lots of meat and milk. We lost the cattle and started making gardens. Livestock was the main livelihood, but now we had to learn to do other things for survival. We had so much milk when I was young that even our chicken drank milk instead of water. Then we had a drought and lost the cattle, and we had to grow more Mahangu and buy maize meal. Now we cannot eat just meat without porridge." M7

Many expressed that they are now forced to migrate to urban areas, abandon some traditional rituals, and consume modern food, among other changes. Figure 6 below illustrates how drought has affected the Himba culture, as expressed by the respondents.
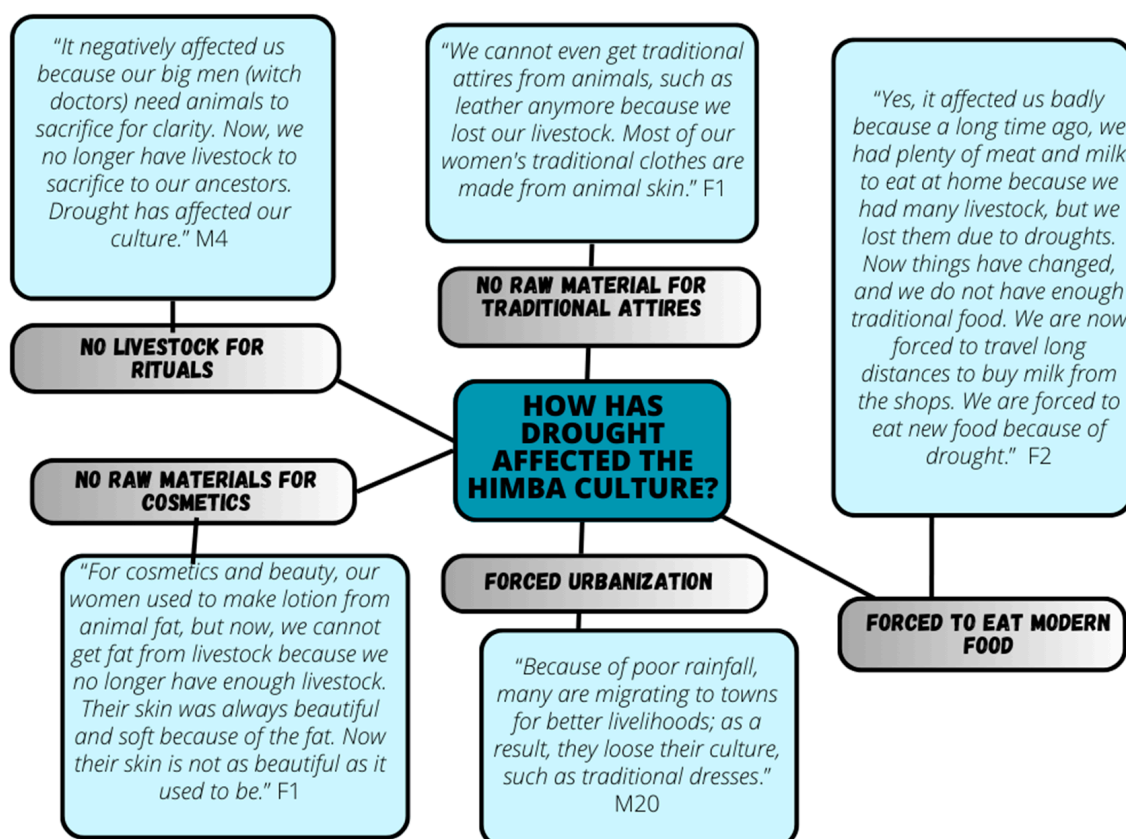

Figure 6. Opinions of how the drought has affected the Himba culture.

3.3.4. The Influence of Modernization on the Himba Culture

Though some respondents, especially the elderly, are not happy with the changes in their culture, which are mostly the results of outside forces, many, including the elderly

Himba, have acknowledged the benefits that have come with modernization. Table 2 shows extracts that illustrate their suggested needs in their communities, all pointing to an acceptance of modern goods and facilities.

Table 2. Expressed needs by the communities indicating an acceptance of modernization.

Suggested Needs	Comments
Running water, toilets, and sewage	*"We don't have running or tap water, or toilets and sewage. We access the water from the river. We need these things." M6*
Hospitals and clinics	*"We have no clinic, not here in our village, no access to hospitals. All the nearby villages go to the available clinic in a village far from here. If you are pregnant, you have no access to services and people sometimes just die." F3*
Better roads	*"Many children are going to school, but the gravel roads are very bad, with no road grading and no network reception." M21*
Cellphone coverage; electricity	*"We do not have clean water and no cell phone coverage." M13*
Job opportunities	*"There are many problems here; we do not have jobs, and there is no capital to start a business." M22*

3.3.5. The Influence of Government Laws on Himba Cultural Practices

Government laws were also cited by the respondents as a threat to their cultural identity, affecting traditional practices of marriage, raising children, and gender roles.

Regarding the influence of government on their marital practices, some respondents shared their opinions as below:

"Some of our cultural practices are threatened or abandoned because they do not agree with the laws of our government. For example, getting married to minors was part of our culture. Child marriages were common, but now that is illegal. The girls were given into marriage when they are very young, and their husbands start sleeping with them at around 12 to 14 years, taking up the roles of motherhood at a young age." M19

"Back then, if a man grew older without a woman, the father would look for him, a wife, even a baby, but now, according to the government law, we are not allowed to do so, which is affecting us. Because one is given a young child as a wife, they can just wait for the young girls to grow up to marry them while concentrating on looking after their cattle; now we struggle to find the right partners." M18

Regarding the influence of government laws on raising their children, some respondents expressed their opinions as follows:

"In our culture, a child has no rights; only the parents can decide for them. Now the government says 18 years is an adult, and they can make their own decisions." F7

"When, for example, one gets five daughters or sons, according to the law, all these children must go to school. Moreover, when sent to school, they are forced to wear modern clothing and no longer want to return to poorly built houses. Instead, they prefer to move to town for a holiday until we eventually lose our children." M3

"In the past, our animals were allowed to graze anywhere, but now some areas are prohibited for grazing. Only for some months can we use the protected lands for grazing. The government law introduces this." M17

3.4. Participant Observations

3.4.1. Desires for Modern Items among Young People

I observed that most of the respondents were wearing modern clothing, except for two older men who were also their leaders. A few young Himba women wore full traditional attires, but most young men and women were all dressed in modern clothing. Several of them had mobile phones. For Orue village, which is more remote than Otjamaungu, almost all the respondents were wearing traditional clothes.

During my longer stays with the Himba people, I observed a deep curiosity and a strong desire among the young men for modern items such as cars and sophisticated cell

phones. When I gave them transport, they often talked about how wonderful cars are and how they desire to own them. They also observe carefully as one drives, showing a great interest and yearning for it. Some men have expressed wanting to educate their daughters like me so they can drive and speak English.

3.4.2. Cash Has Become a Very Important Aspect of the Himba People

When I often arrived for fieldwork in the communities, someone was always looking for a job, including young and older men and women. The young men are especially keen on finding a job to earn an income. Almost every young man wants to find work for some cash, so many go to urban areas to look for work. I also observed Himba women and children begging for money, especially from tourists.

3.4.3. Internal Conflicts

I also observed internal conflicts, such as fighting for land. Since some have taken up individualistic attitudes and self-determination to improve their lives, the communities do not always welcome this, and some become jealous and create conflicts. We were hoping to help the community start a community vegetable garden, and they had initially allocated a beautiful piece of land close to the river. However, some opposed the idea, which resulted in a land conflict, and eventually, the community had to abandon the land and allocate a different piece of land for the community garden, which is now flourishing. I have also observed that because of some beliefs and superstitions, some are afraid of breaking out and forming their own identities or becoming successful, believing they will be bewitched if they succeed. These are some of the internal conflicts that could hinder progress and the adaptation capacity. One respondent expressed the following:

> "In this community, if you start a garden or project and they see that you are succeeding, they will start complaining that the land you have taken is for everyone, trying to stop you. It is hard because people are jealous of each other." H11

> "The headmen are not cooperative and do not work in the interest of the people." H18

3.4.4. Some Himba People Are Open to New Developments and Ideas

I also observed that the communities eagerly welcome clothes donations for adults and children, and young boys desire football brand t-shirts. Most welcomed modern buildings for schools and clinics and were interested in establishing gardens to grow food. The influence of modernization was more pronounced in villages close to urban areas than in remote villages. I also observed that polygamy is dying out.

3.5. Are There Still True Himbas Today?

All respondents agree that there are a few true Himbas today, if at all. The tribe has adapted to new cultures over the years. Generally, all participants agreed to the changes within their ethnic group. They do not look or live like they did in the past. There is a transition from the true original Himbas to the current mixed culture. It is also hard to differentiate between different totems, stages, and statuses of Himba people in the present compared to the past. More opinions from two elderly Himba women and a young Himba man are detailed below:

> "There are no "True" Himbas anymore! We do not even dress like true Himbas anymore." M2

> "Now, the Himba are just in-between; they are neither fully modern nor fully traditional. They are caught up between tradition and modernity. It is as though the Himba now live on the fringes of two cultures. Most young people are not wearing traditional clothes anymore. Even my wife used to wear traditional, but not anymore. The culture is changing daily." M17

Not all is lost, however. The Himba may have adapted new aspects into their culture, but there are still deeply rooted beliefs and practices that distinguish them as Himba people.

3.6. Perception of Nature and Change in the Environmental Infrastructure

Since the perception of what nature constitutes is socially constructed and can change depending on changes in values, I wanted to understand the Himba people's current views of nature and their perception of changes in their natural environment and why. The majority of the respondents believe that they are part of nature and that nature is essential for their survival. Below are some views of nature from the respondents (Figure 7).
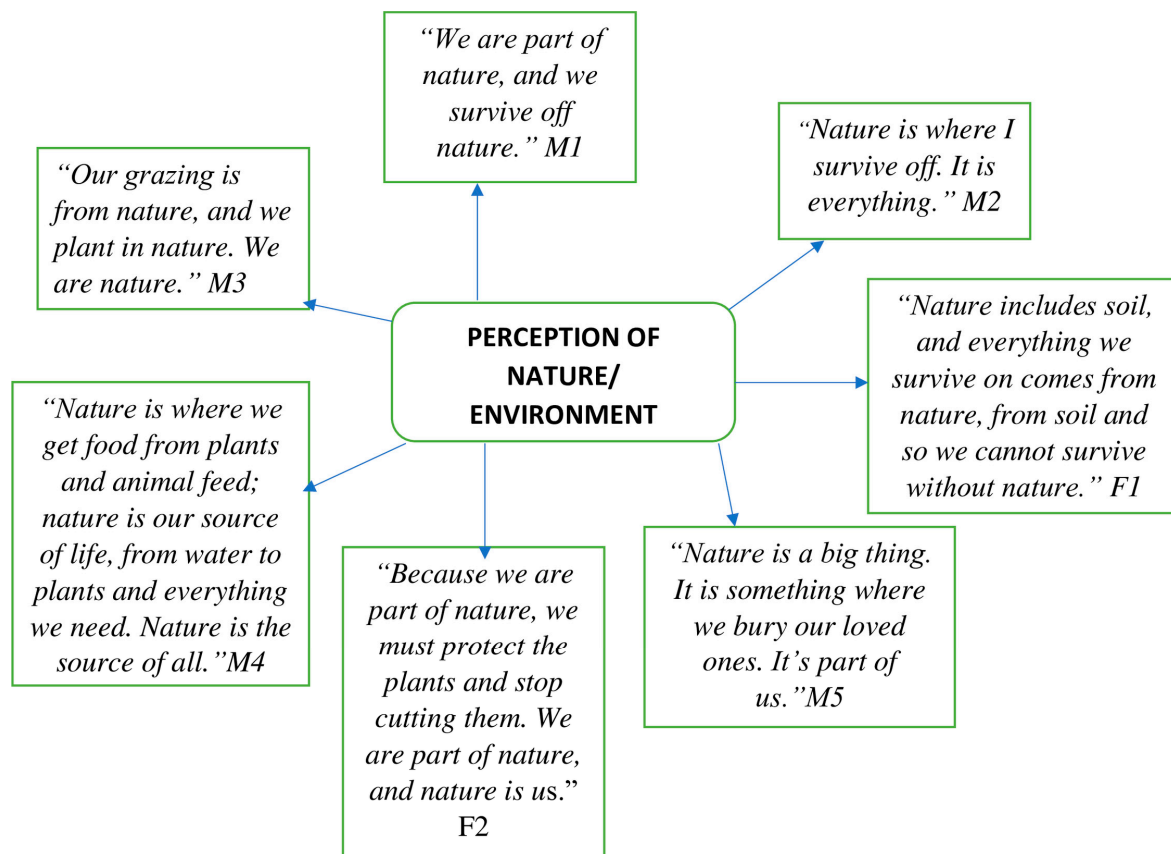

Figure 7. Respondents' perceptions of nature.

Upon being asked about the status of their natural environment, all the respondents expressed that it is in a very bad state. Some expressed that it is now damaged, and others said it has died. Figure 8 shows the opinions of the respondents on the state of their environmental infrastructure.

3.7. Land Use Change and Cultural Shifts

Regarding land use change, many respondents expressed that because of many changes, such as environmental pressures, government regulations, and events like drought, the Himba people have also changed how they use their land. Keywords used by the respondents included words such as rotational grazing, garden, government, cattle, population, and land (Figure 9). Many have attempted to make more gardens due to the dearth of livestock impacted by drought. Some also expressed that the government has put up measures on how the land should be used, including forbidding some pieces of land to be used, so they are no longer allowed to graze anywhere they wish as it was in the past. Others expressed that they have now begun to practice rotational grazing. Some respondents are advocating for environmental protection and sustainable practices such as planting trees and allowing the land to rest to ensure sustainability. Figure 10 illustrates some of the opinions expressed by the respondents.
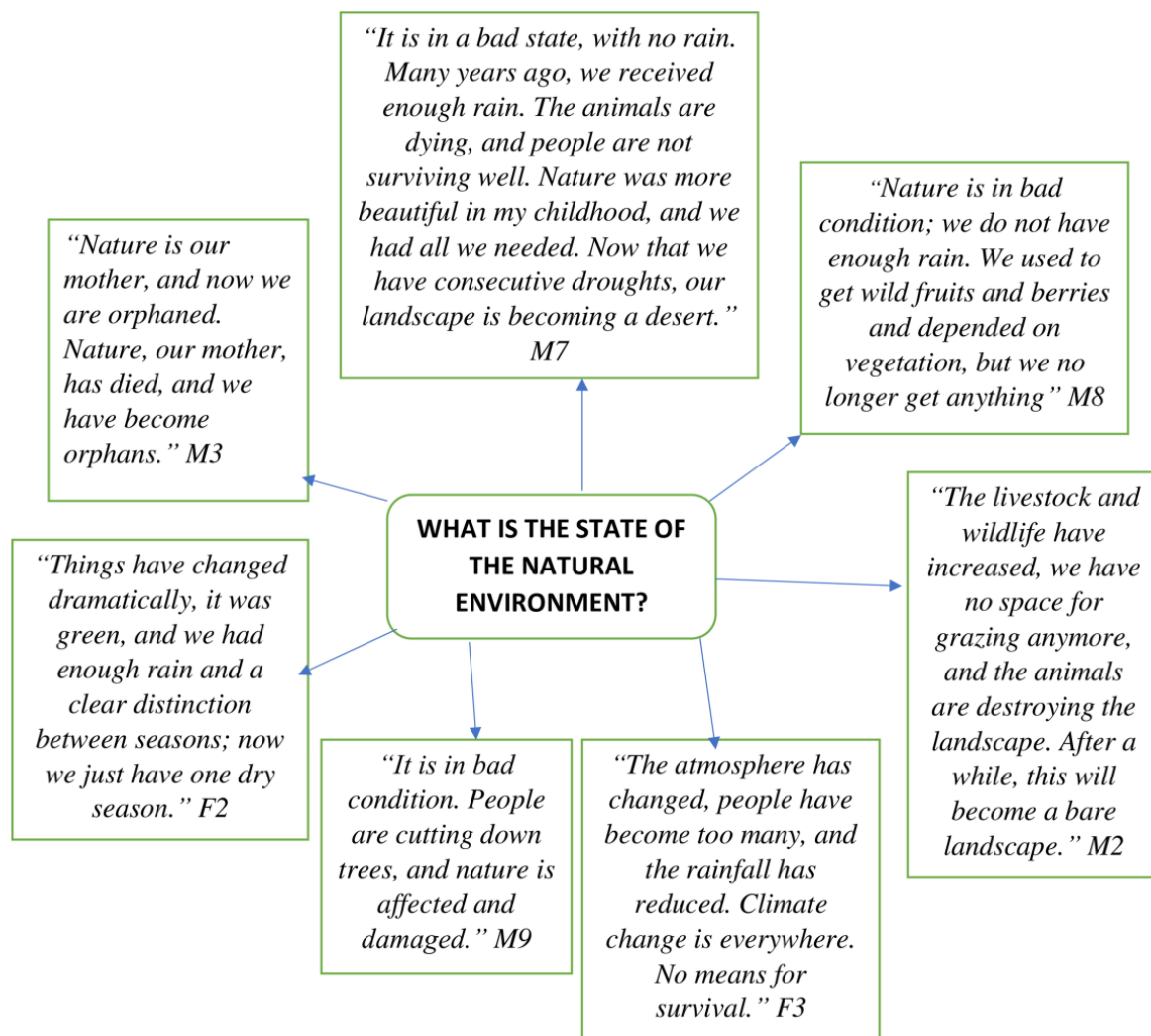
"It is in a bad state, with no rain. Many years ago, we received enough rain. The animals are dying, and people are not surviving well. Nature was more beautiful in my childhood, and we had all we needed. Now that we have consecutive droughts, our landscape is becoming a desert."
M7

"Nature is in bad condition; we do not have enough rain. We used to get wild fruits and berries and depended on vegetation, but we no longer get anything" M8

"Nature is our mother, and now we are orphaned. Nature, our mother, has died, and we have become orphans." M3

WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT?

"The livestock and wildlife have increased, we have no space for grazing anymore, and the animals are destroying the landscape. After a while, this will become a bare landscape." M2

"Things have changed dramatically, it was green, and we had enough rain and a clear distinction between seasons; now we just have one dry season." F2

"It is in bad condition. People are cutting down trees, and nature is affected and damaged." M9

"The atmosphere has changed, people have become too many, and the rainfall has reduced. Climate change is everywhere. No means for survival." F3

Figure 8. Opinions of the respondents on the status of their natural environment.

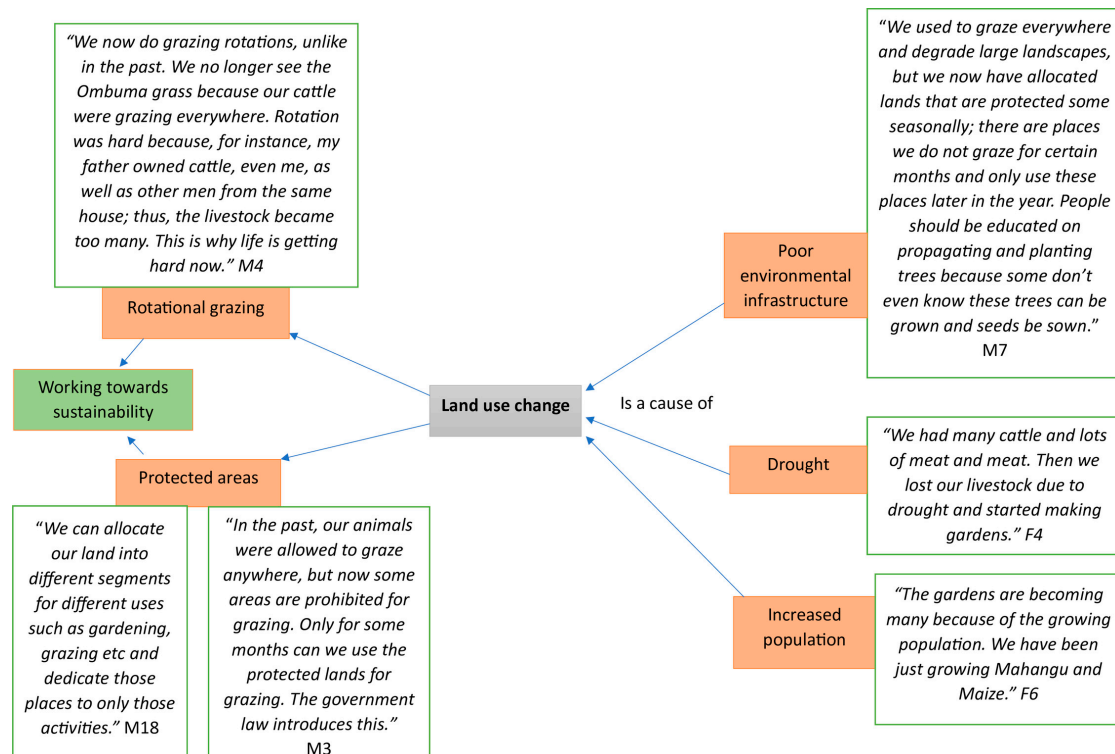**Figure 9.** Word cloud showing keywords the respondents used to describe the land use change.

Figure 10. Respondents' thoughts on land use change and associated codes generated in AT-LAS.ti desktop.

4. Discussion

This study sought to explore the changing cultural landscape of the Himba people amidst many outside forces and pressures. I was interested in understanding the cultural transformations happening in the Himba communities and the reasons behind these transformations. The study reveals that the Himba culture has experienced significant change over the years and introduced new aspects to their culture. Young people, especially young men, expressed that the perceived changes were good for them. Twenty-eight years ago, Jacobsohn (1995) [2] conducted a study to explore the change in the material culture of the Himba people. She reported that among her respondents, the younger people saw the changes brought by modern times as positive and full of new possibilities. In contrast, older individuals were understandably devastated as their cultural foundation crumbled before their eyes. The same is true for this study. Many young people feel that the changes are warranted and have welcomed them. I observed that young men especially have a deep yearning for modern goods and facilities. Even though the Himba elderly were unhappy with the new cultural changes, they agreed, to some extent, that some changes have made their lives easier. It seems that many Himba people who recognize the benefits of Western systems are still haunted by the paradox of the things they like about their culture and the good things coming with modernity and globalization. While recognizing that modern goods made some aspects of their lives easier, it also brought many losses in their culture. Generally, older people are of two minds regarding the modernization to which they are exposed. They welcome the comfort of mass-produced goods, yet they also observe the disruption it causes to their social structures [2].

Similar patterns have been observed in various indigenous cultures. For instance, the Aawambo people in Namibia experienced significant transformations after the introduction of Christianity and modernization. These changes were so profound that certain cultural elements were completely eradicated [17,24]. In Nigeria, the Igbo tribe also underwent significant shifts in their traditional religion and cultural values due to influences from modernity [25]. This led to a dilution and fragmentation of Igbo traditional beliefs and

practices through cultural diffusion between the Western world and the Igbo community. Therefore, as emphasized by Brasche (2003) [17], the concept of "losing one's culture" is not applicable when considering a global perspective because culture is not static; it continually evolves and adapts.

So then, the change in some cultural practices of the Himba has led to feelings of loss and remorse among some Himba individuals. According to Baumann (1997:4), as cited by Brasche 2003 [17], "there are no gains without losses, and the hope of a wonderous purification of gains from losses is as futile as the proverbial dream of a free lunch." So, as the Himba people adopt new aspects into their culture that benefit them, it is also guaranteed that there will be some losses. Brasche (2003) [17] highlighted that it is normal for humans to draw influence from various sources, debunking the concept of a singular, pure culture. Jacobsohn (1995) [2] recorded that even some of the core aspects of the Himba culture were borrowed from other cultures at some point. For example, she recorded that when she interviewed the adult Himba men in 1995, they expressed that in the past, married Himba men did not cover their hair. Instead, they wore braided hairstyles similar to those of the Himba women, although their hair was shorter. When old people saw the ovaNgambwe people's hairstyle, they imitated it and incorporated it into their culture as a distinguishing feature for married men, a hairstyle called "ondumbo." Jacobsohn further noted that this new hairstyle (ondumbo), which became a norm, was only introduced in the 19th century. By the 1990s, the traditional "ondumbo" hairstyle was increasingly being substituted by Western-style hats and caps, and today, married men no longer wear the ondumbo hairstyle. There is no longer a distinction between married and unmarried Himba men.

All the respondents in this study concurred that they had perceived changes in their culture in terms of their dressing, hairstyles, diet, gender roles, marriage practices, use of modern items, sending their children to school, and adoption of an individualistic attitude. According to Cameron (2013) [5], the Himba traditional dress is of significant political, social, and cultural merit and status, signifying a deep cultural pride in traditional Himba. Like the Maasai, the Himba people used to distinguish different age groups through their clothing and hairstyles. However, this practice is gradually disappearing [18]. Just as the Himba have adopted modern clothing, the traditional clothing of the Maasai has also evolved. In the past, they used hides from livestock to make their clothes, but nowadays, most Maasai wear shukas sheets that are typically red or blue in color [18]. The trend of abandoning traditional clothing can be seen in various African tribes like the Igbo in Nigeria [26], the Oshiwambo tribe in Namibia [17], and the Maasai in Tanzania [18]. Similarly, among the Aawambo people in northern Namibia, hairstyles were once used as visual indicators of a girl's age, clan membership, and social status. However, such distinctions are no longer prevalent within Oshiwambo culture today.

Historically, the Himba women did not consider Western clothing as prestigious for themselves. Instead, they valued attires made from calfskin and embraced their natural beauty by adorning their bare limbs with ochre. These elements were symbols of health and beauty [2]. The women associated their calfskin skirts, the white cone shell on their chests (symbolizing a cattle horn), and their red-ochred bodies with the attractiveness and value of the highly respected 'red' cow [2]. While the remote village Himba women may still feel this way, the Himba women residing in towns such as Opuwo have started wearing modern clothes. Most young and some older men saw new Western clothes as comfortable and necessary. In this study, some Himba women who wore modern clothes did not feel proud about it and expressed that they felt lost, and their fathers would not be proud of them because they looked like they were orphans.

We see here that some Himba people are under pressure to conform to modern lifestyles and adopt modern clothing, though they do not feel proud about it. So, some aspects are now seen to depict shame as the Himba people face ridicule and mocking from other tribes, especially when they travel to urban areas where the Himba culture is less highly admired by other tribes and by Himba youth [5]. Many indigenous societies

have faced immense pressure to assimilate into modern culture, leading to stereotypes, discrimination, and ridicule. For instance, the Igbo people expressed conflicting emotions as they yearned for the familiar cultural environment that has unfortunately been labeled as backward, barbaric, and archaic [25,27]. The Aawambo people in northern Namibia experienced similar sentiments [17]. Likewise, the San people of the Kalahari have endured extensive discrimination and stereotyping, to the point where even the name "bush man" is a derogatory term [26]. Sadly, globalization has not advocated for their well-being [26]. In this study, I observed an acceptance of modern clothes and external beliefs, especially among the young Himba people, and Cameron (2013) [5] observed the same. The elders expressed that the young people had lost respect for their parents and ancestors and were more interested in securing jobs and earning money than living a pastoral life. We see various agents of cultural change and loss at work within the Himba communities, and they are under tremendous pressure to conform.

According to Simonsen (2008) [8], globalization is a constant force that brings cultures, identities, and values together. This interaction can sometimes result in ethnocentrism, but it also has the potential to create a blended way of life where beliefs, values, and personalities merge to form new perspectives. However, this process can also lead to instability, a lack of confidence, and a sense of being caught between different worlds. The San people in Namibia experience these challenges firsthand. Zhan (2019) [3] also emphasized that every ethnic group has its own customs, such as traditional festivals, etiquette for living, and art; however, modernization can sometimes lead to estrangement and spiritual and emotional loss in the cultural identity of people experiencing modernization. The exposure to modern ways of living has evidently affected the younger Himba generation. For example, the study reveals that young people have become more promiscuous compared to the past generation. Modernization could have contributed to the break-up of family structures, leading young people to feel lost and insecure. It could have also given them a sense of freedom to do what they wanted to do and what they saw other young people doing, especially in schools. Globalization has brought the Himba people into contact with external forces, reshaping their culture. Younger generations are exposed to global trends and ideas through television, the Internet, and mobile phones, which have changed their cultural values and practices. Asikaogu [27] also reported that globalization has broken up the family structure and the community spirit of the Igbo people in Nigeria.

Another significant shift in the Himba culture has been the introduction of formal education. Historically, the Himba people relied on informal education, passed down through storytelling and practical skills from one generation to another, like other African societies [2,17,25,27]. Some beliefs shared among the Himba regarding education include the idea that education can infect young people's brains and make them poor or lead to men without cattle or cattle-ranching skills and men without culture [28]. In the past, some Himba believed that only poor people who do not have cattle go to school [28]. However, in recent times, there has been a notable increase in formal educational opportunities for Himba children. Some Himba people have realized the importance of education, especially because times have also become challenging. However, it is still a challenge for most of them to embrace education, as sending children to school means that there is no one to look after the livestock, and oftentimes, parents and older people have to do it instead. Furthermore, as their children are being educated, they develop an aversion to their culture. In this study, some Himba parents complained that their children no longer wanted to return to poorly built houses. Instead, they preferred to move to towns and no longer wanted to return to a traditional way of life. Some thought their parents were stupid and uneducated. So, parents felt they were losing their children because of education. In Jacobsohn's (1995) [2] study, some children who went to school thought their parents were ignorant, and they called their parents dirty. Nevertheless, many now agree that schooling is necessary, and because of hard times, children should learn how to read and write.

The study also revealed that religion, specifically Christianity, influences their culture, with some who have stopped practicing traditional rituals and beliefs, such as believing

in their ancestors. A notable cultural shift in Namibia due to Christianity is that of the Aawambo people in north–central Namibia. Brasche (2003) [17] states the following:

> *The Ovambo tribe, before they embraced Christianity, had a physical appearance that closely resembled the present-day Himba tribes. Both men and women would typically wear animal skins, and unmarried women would also wear elaborate ostrich shell belts called "oshindjendje." These belts had long-scallope designs and were often decorated with shells and ivory bone buttons known as "ekipa." Ovambo women styled their hair in intricate designs using a mixture of fats and dung to hold it in place. Like the Himba people today, they applied red ochre and fat to their skin for protection against the elements. However, with the emergence of Christianity, these traditional practices gradually faded away. The use of soap for washing became more common, and European clothing replaced traditional attire. Consequently, many contemporary Ovambo individuals are unaware of their ancestors' physical features and resemblance to the Himba population. Interestingly enough, the "traditional" dresses worn by Oshiwambo women today actually have Finnish origins.*

While the massive change in the culture of the Aawambo people was mainly fuelled by religion, the Himba have resisted other beliefs for a very long time. Though it is slowly encroaching on their culture, most Himba people have not accepted Christianity; they still strongly believe in their ancestors. The influence of religion will keep increasing as the young people in schools become exposed to other ideas, and some have started going to church when away from home. This will eventually lead to a decline in traditional spiritual beliefs and rituals.

The cultural transformations within the Himba community also involve shifts in gender dynamics. Traditionally, Himba women have occupied domestic roles, while men have focused on herding and community decision-making. Jacobsohn (1995) [2] predicted that as new connections are formed between different generations and between people and natural resources in Kunene, gender roles and relations are also likely to change. This is already happening, and the results of this study indicate that gender roles have changed. Some aspects of the culture that were regarded as taboo or unacceptable, such as men cooking, men and women sitting together, and women participating and expressing themselves in meetings, are now accepted in the Himba culture.

The government laws and policies have also affected the Himba culture, and though some are still practiced in secret, the majority have had to give up unlawful practices such as child marriages. Because polygamy is also not recognized under the law, those who desire to have legal marriages have also given it up. More and more young people are sticking to one spouse only. Culture and law have a reciprocal relationship, as stated by Varner and Varner (2014) [29]. Laws that promote gender equality have the potential to shape cultural values regarding the roles of men and women in society. Over time, these changes in laws can lead to gradual shifts in culture.

The culture of the Himba people is centred around livestock, which not only provides for their livelihood but also serves as a connection to their ancestors through sacrifice. However, the state of the natural environment at the current moment cannot sustain their pastoral lifestyle. Like the Maasai tribe, they find themselves facing similar challenges in re-negotiating their pastoral way of life amidst various external factors such as environmental degradation [18]. One of the primary environmental factors influencing the Himba people is climate change, leading to prolonged droughts and resource scarcity. Inman et al. (2020) [30] investigated how the Himba pastoralists were coping with drought and found that due to drought, which culminated in the loss of their livelihood, many pastoralists had fallen into abject poverty with no safety nets in the face of environmental crises. The pastoralists had more hope in growing food than in keeping livestock due to drought, showing a change in land use. Pastoralism as a way of life has become difficult to maintain, though it plays an integral role in their cultural identity. In this study, drought was one of the main threats cited by the respondents as threatening their cultural identity. Most of their cultural aspects, such as attires, ancestral worship, cosmetics, food, and various traditional

rituals, are derived or sustained by livestock, especially cattle. Drought has resulted in the loss of their livestock, which means they can no longer make their traditional attires from animal skin, sacrifice livestock to their ancestors, make cosmetics such as lotion from animal fat, and obtain meat and milk from the livestock. As a result, they are forced to find alternative ways of living, such as eating modern food, moving to urban areas in search of work, begging, and relying heavily on government drought relief and pensions. Drought is, therefore, a big force infringing their cultural practices and land use patterns. In addition, with the advent of modern hospitals, people have shifted away from consulting traditional healers and diviners in favor of modern medicine. This shift was observed by Stella et al. [25] in the Igbo tribe, where individuals now prefer to seek medical advice from orthodox doctors who can provide scientific diagnoses and prescribe suitable medications, rendering the services of medicine men and diviners ineffective.

According to Torrence and Grattan (2003) [31], catastrophes can lead to cultural change, and the more vulnerable the group, the greater the disaster, suggesting a greater potential for cultural transformation. As the Himba face these challenges, they have had to adapt their traditional practices while also finding ways to maintain their cultural identity and livelihoods. Activities that are culturally prescribed do not necessarily provide adaptive advantages and can change in response to new ecological challenges [7]. This is seen in this case, where, because of drought, the Himba people are forced to find alternative means of livelihood, which are not necessarily part of their culture. Bollig (2020) [6] noted significant changes in agricultural practices, including introducing gardens to supplement the Himba diet, especially after several drought events were experienced. This is a significant change in land use. The same thing was observed in the Maasai pastoralists. During the late nineteenth century, the Maasai people faced a string of devastating droughts, famines, and diseases. As a result, many Maasai were compelled to adopt alternative survival strategies such as agriculture or hunting and gathering. This shift brought about significant changes in their land use patterns [18]. The results indicate that the Himba traditional practices of land use are challenged and sometimes even replaced by more convenient modern alternatives. In the past, animals were free to graze wherever they pleased. However, government laws now restrict grazing in certain areas to protect the land. Grazing rotations are now implemented by some communities. The challenge in implementing grazing rotations stems from families owning a large number of livestock, as expressed by some respondents. Drought has caused a tremendous change in the way they use their land. This has made life more difficult for the Himba pastoralists, who must now re-strategize and rethink their pastoral lifestyles. In previous times, there were plenty of cattle that provided meat and milk. Unfortunately, these cattle were lost, forcing people to turn to crop farming. The introduction of allocated and protected lands is put in place for sustainable land management. The Himba people are, therefore, forced to adapt to these changes.

A cultural heritage that refuses to adapt and embrace change lacks the necessary resilience required for long-term sustainability. However, Bollig [6] stated that it is the environmental infrastructure that provides resilience. The Himba have been resilient over the years, but there is an indication that their environmental infrastructure has deteriorated, and it will take the intervention of the state and outside help to rebuild this to ensure both cultural and environmental sustainability. If it is not rebuilt, there will be no adaptability, and the Himba culture will most likely collapse under the weight of the many forces already infringing on their culture.

It is also true that our perceptions of "nature" or "the environment" are socially constructed [32]. The traditional way of life for the Himba people revolves around their pastoral livelihoods, which are closely connected to the environment. Their spatial context incorporates meaningful landmarks in the landscape that represent their personal history and future social and economic prospects [2]. Most respondents in this study believe that they are part of nature/environment and are not separate from nature. Jacobsohn (1995) [2] predicts that this can easily change as the descent-based authority structures, which have collaboratively overseen resource management for generations, gradually erode, and so too

will the feasibility of the local economy. Furthermore, as young Himba people continue to receive Eurocentric educations, they will eventually lose their perception of themselves as a part of the ecosystem and inevitably view the natural environment as a series of unrelated resources to be exploited to make money. This altered perception, where humans are seen as separate from nature, can be shown historically as the first phase of enormous environmental degradation in the name of development and progress [2]. The answer to our environmental crisis requires us to reconnect back to nature [33].

As the Himba people navigate cultural transformations brought by many external forces, they must strive to balance their traditional practices and adapt to new challenges. This requires careful consideration of how to incorporate modern technologies and innovations without losing the essence of their culture, and it is not an easy task. They should anticipate a potential reduction of their cultural identity due to exposure to modern ways of life and changing economic conditions. They must also adapt to new challenges, such as climate change, to ensure survival. This delicate balance is a difficult one to achieve. It is even worse when they no longer have the adequate capacity to adapt to these changes. Outside help may be needed, using participatory bottom-up approaches to address these challenges. Whatever happens, we must realize that culture is not a static concept; it is fluid and dynamic, and societies worldwide have undergone these changes. By empowering the Himba community to adapt and thrive in the face of environmental challenges, we can promote long-term sustainability that benefits both the communities and their ecological systems.

5. Conclusions

This study establishes that the Himba people are facing significant cultural transformations brought about by many outside factors, such as modernization, globalization, education, religion, and environmental pressures. The potential cultural change in the Himba is attributed to the emergence of social links and peer connections, a uniform educational system promoting values that differ from traditional Himba family beliefs, and increased governmental rules. The cultural changes experienced by the Himba people are complex and diverse. While some of these changes offer economic opportunities and empowerment, they also pose challenges to their cultural identity. Cultural resilience becomes important here; however, resilience is supported by an environmental infrastructure, which, in this case, is broken and may be difficult to rebuild. The Himba people may need to reinvent themselves, accept loss, and recreate a new culture, a culture of sustainability. This will be a big step that requires outside help. Without intervention, Himba society will be reduced to poverty-stricken communities with many social ills and no identity. These challenges may present the Himba people with an opportunity to reinvent themselves and define who they want to be in the future. As Thiele (2019) [9] noted, in cultural life, as in biological life, continuity and change are partners in a dance.

How can we enhance resilience in the Himba communities when the environmental infrastructure is damaged? Behaviours driven by human perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, values, motives, and choices can affect the environment [30]. These can be changed through various means, such as good education offered in the context of the Himba culture, genuine partnerships, and a fundamental change in values regarding our natural environment. It will require significant paradigm shifts, substantial alterations in governance systems, and a united endeavor to rebuild the environmental infrastructure [29]. Collective action will be crucial to safeguard essential systems and resources. Without the capacity to effect meaningful change, both as individual agents and as members of communities, people will not act [9].

As a tribe goes through this transition, it is important to note that the Himba culture is neither fixed nor uniform, and as some elements of their way of life are left behind, new prospects are on the horizon. Jacobsohn (1995) [2] could not have said it better: "Today, the Himba people do not need to be encouraged to stay 'traditional', no matter how quaint, simple and attractive such a lifestyle appears to jaded city dwellers. What the Himba truly

need is ongoing access to their land and water resources. They deserve the right to manage their own resources and, above all, have the freedom to determine their own future as proud citizens of Namibia". Though the Himba people now face numerous unfamiliar challenges due to the encroachment of the modern world, their historical ability to adapt to change should serve as a source of hope. Culture is ever-evolving, and the Himba should not be regarded as stagnant remnants or fossilized relics of a past time [2], and they should not be frowned upon if they choose modernity, as numerous societies have traversed a similar path.

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