

The semi-nomadic people of the Central and West African forests, called Pygmies in the West, are divided in different tribes. In some tribes, their mythology notes, that animals are transformed people who broke traditional clan rules during their lives.

The number of individuals per community differs according to tribe, habitat, and hunting tradition.

Bambuti co-operate communally in hunting, particularly using nets to catch antelope, and involving 7 to 30 families. The bounty is shared on a traditional basis. Spears are used for large animals and arrows for smaller ones.

Hunting is largely a male domain, but within the Aka also women control snares for small animals.



Pygmy with nets for hunting duikers.

A. Heymer

Pygmies have lived for thousands of years in a close bartering relationship with Bantu people, who are settled farmers. Bushmeat and other forest products are traded for grain, metal, and tobacco.

To idealize such traditional cultures sometimes glorifies the forest dwellers. Despite their tradition, several species have been so heavily hunted in some areas, that they disappeared.

A change in Pygmy traditional life began in colonial times. Many communities have become settled, working as day labourers in Bantu fields and thereby getting **dependent**.



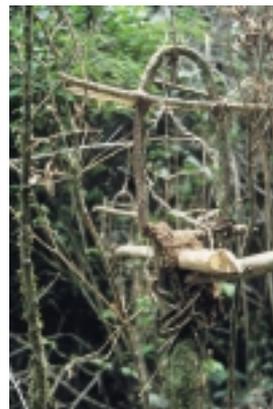
Preparing a dart with poison from plant preparations.

A. Heymer

Pygmy knowledge of the forest was used, as industrialisation and urbanisation rose demand for forest products. **Trade of bushmeat has become an important income, up to 48% of a Pygmy village.**

This **commercialisation** supplants traditional values, such as sharing of bounty and hunting taboos. Bantu and other neighbours act as middlemen for bushmeat, buying from Pygmies and selling in cities.

People come into the area to hunt from far afield, plundering and **depleting the traditional hunting areas** of the Pygmies and other tribes. **Financial and social dependence** makes it difficult for Pygmies to find other income sources.



Squirrel trap from plant material.

J. Reisch

In middle-term the forest dwellers loose the basis for self-determined survival, which also includes self-determined development.