

Cultural Report: Hadza People of Tanzania

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There are few people alive today, who can truly say that they understand the ways of our forefathers and mothers, of our ancestors. ¹We live in a society that is so wrenched away from the natural world, in favor of our modern world, that we have lost touch with almost all things that make us “Human”. A big reason for this is our separation from our food and where it comes from, from the land itself. Animals, as we all know, belong in the wild. So many of us have lost the wisdom of knowing just what it means to be Human. So many, but not all! “The Hadza of Tanzania are one of the very few societies anywhere in the world who still live by hunting and gathering.” ² The fact that there remains such a group of people in our day and age, is a testament to their skills of survival, and knowledge of their environment. “Hunter-gatherers are people who forage for wild foods, practicing no cultivation or animal husbandry.” ³ This lifestyle is very rare in the world today and is only found in other similar geographies, such as places around the equator, including areas in the Amazon Rain Forest. A big reason for what is considered to be rare behavior is quite interesting and involves the way in which Agriculture evolved within our species in general; which we will get into. Why are the Hadza so different? “Was there some sort of “failure” in the collective learning of the people there? Why didn’t the first farms, the first cities, and the first empires emerge in sub-Saharan Africa, where our ancestors had roamed and innovated for hundreds of thousands of years?” ⁴ The culture of the Hadza people is very unique, and one that allows us to learn a great deal about not only ourselves now, but where we came

¹Newenham-Kahindi, Aloysius Newenham and Charles E Stevens, “Ecological sustainability and practical wisdom from the Maasai and Hadza people in East Africa,” in *Practical Wisdom, Leadership and Culture* (Routledge, 2020), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429055508-3>.

²Frank Marlowe, *The Hadza: Hunter-Gatherers of Tanzania (Volume 3) (Origins of Human Behavior and Culture)*, First ed. (University of California Press, 2010), 1-1.

³Marlowe, *Hadza*, 1-1.

⁴David Baker, “The Origin of Agriculture in Africa,”

from as a species, learning also where we are headed to.⁵ As one of the last hunter-gatherer groups in the world, and in fact genetically one of the oldest lineages, we can learn a great deal about what our contemporaries may have lived like, how they gathered and hunted for food, and how they lived culturally and economically amongst themselves.⁶ Can any light be shed on early populations of *Homo sapiens*, if not other species of hominin?⁷ We will explore these questions and find out.

The Hadza People, whose locality ranges from the Cradle of Humankind, deep in Northern Tanzania, near Lake Eyasi. (Which they call Balangida) By the time of the writing of the book where some of this information comes from (2009) there was near 1,000 Hadza people living in this area.⁸ However, while they may be used to having free rein over the Savannah, aside of course from rival groups, their territory is now shrinking.⁹ The reason for this is the encroachment of that which they exactly are not, farmlands, farming, and agriculture. As with most of the wild places left on Earth, the land itself is endangered by the encroaching “concrete jungle” of modern life.¹⁰ Of course, this also has a strong effect on their economy and the way in which they interact not only with each other, but other groups, either tribesman or “city dwellers”

⁵Marlowe, *Hadza*, 55-60.

⁶National Geographic Society, “Hadza,” August 19, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/hadza/>.

⁷Frank W Marlowe, “What explains Hadza food sharing?” in *Socioeconomic aspects of human behavioral ecology* (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2004), 3-6. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0190-1281\(04\)23003-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0190-1281(04)23003-7).

⁸Marlowe, *Hadza*, 30-40.

⁹James Woodburn, “Stability and flexibility in Hadza residential groupings,” in *Man the hunter* (Routledge, 2017), 25-40. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203786567-14>.

¹⁰Woodburn, “Stability,” 55-58.

as well. Typically, the Hadza trade in goods that they make themselves, gather, or find. They are fantastic artists, and storytellers, retailing visitors with the tales of their ancestors and of the history of humankind according to their sages. Of course, one of the biggest commodities that comes with a hunter-gatherer society is food. There is nothing more valuable nor rare. ¹¹ For a person of the Hadza people to share, or trade a parcel of food, it must be for a good reason! Mainly, at least when they are amongst themselves, is trading services for other needed services, as they work within an as-needed, economic community, as we believe most hunter-gatherers societies have always done throughout *Homo sapiens* history. ¹²

The Hadza, also known as the Hadzapi, Halsa, Tindar, Watindiga, Kindiga, Kanegeju, and the Wahi, speak a completely “unique to them” language, which is spoken by no other people in the world. ¹³ This language is dubbed Hadzane by the Hadzabe (as they call themselves) is a defining feature of their culture. It is used to determine whether someone belongs to their tribe, or is an outsider, is by whether or not they speak Hadzane. ¹⁴ This language is currently endangered with only 1-2000 speakers worldwide. ¹⁵ Now considered an *isolate* language, there are no other languages that are used that have any connections or relatedness to Hadzane, making it critically endangered. This is why, if someone is a fluent speaker, there is a good chance that the person is of the Hadzabe people, chances are one, if not both of their parents are of the people. If that is the case, then they are considered to belong to the Hadza.

The religious views of the Hadza people are, as most things with them, very unique. WE can imagine, that their beliefs are something like that out of our ancestor’s worldview, and we

¹¹Marlowe, “What,” 1-5.

¹²Marlowe, *Hadza*, 20-35.

¹³Marlowe, *Hadza*, 44-50.

¹⁴Marlowe, *Hadza*, 50-50.

¹⁵IRM, “General Info ,”

would probably not be wrong. ¹⁶ Pinning down exactly what they believe as a whole is not as simple as it may seem, or in reality is, with other cultures. The Hadza believe different things depending on the person. They of course have certain traditions that they follow, especially when it comes to body deposition and burial. Anthropologists have described the Hadza as “having no religion”. ¹⁷

Among the thousand or so Hadza, monogamy is the way to go, with only “4% of men having two wives at once, and those marriages do not last long.” ¹⁸ The median age for marriage is 21 for men and around 17 years of age for women. Marriages are not arranged, and both sexes are free to choose their spouses. The act of marriage, is simply of two people living together for a period of time, but before a woman is considered married, she may seek a mate in various men, and this can lead to violent conflict, and even fatalities among the young men, leading others to intervene, “asking that the female decides on her mate”. ¹⁹ Gender appears to be mostly understood as binary within the Hadza, although there have not been many cases of gender fluid, or non-binary individuals who have announced themselves. Thus there is little understanding of their view, if they have any.

One of the most interesting things about the Hadza, is what separates them so much from any other culture on the planet, being the oldest, and final true hunter-gatherer society on Earth,

¹⁶Lake Forest College, “The Hadzabe ,”

¹⁷Coren Apicella, *High Levels of rule-bending in a minimally religious and largely egalitarian forager population* (n.d.): 3-3, https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/evoreligion/files/high_levels_of_rule_bending_in_a_minimally_religious_and_largely_egalitarian_forager_population.pdf.

¹⁸Frank W. Marlowe, “Mate preferences among Hadza hunter-gatherers,” *Human Nature* 15, no. 4 (2004): 1-3, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-004-1014-8>.

¹⁹Marlowe, “Mate,” 3-5.

we can learn so much about our early behavioral and cultural evolution from them.²⁰ They are, or so we believe, near unchanged over the millennia. Living exactly, or near to, how our ancestors lived prior to leaving the African continent. Knowing how we evolved culturally, into the first *Homo sapiens*, and to the Anatomically Modern Humans that we are today. We have come a long way, but to be able to have a window into the past, where we can see the way the Hadzabe live, is a great gift of time.²¹

The Hadza are a fascinating people, a population that is near extinct, with their entire culture facing being wiped off of the face of the Earth.²² With less than 2,000 native speakers of the language, which is the way in which the population is determined, isolation, land, and loss of their food sources, is leading to smaller and smaller ranges for the Hadza People to travel and collect food, barely enough to survive. There are many conservational agencies and groups that are attempting to do their best to preserve the Hadzane language, but there is no way to know if their efforts will be fruitful or not.²³ Only time will tell. For now, we must do all that we can to keep their unique, and special culture safe from extinction and the effects of globalization. While of course there are many benefits, keeping things special, is always a nice touch.

²⁰Marlowe, *Hadza*, 60-70.

²¹Newenham-Kahindi, Aloysius Newenham and Charles E Stevens, "Ecological," 23-25.

²²National Geographic Society, "Hadza."

²³Woodburn, "Stability," 23-30.

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