

BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY: ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES ON MARRIAGE PRACTICES IN ETHIOPIA, NAMIBIA, ROMANIA AND SENEGAL

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine and compare the traditional marriage practices of four culturally distinct communities: the Amhara in Ethiopia, Damara>Nama in Namibia, Crișana in Romania, and Diola in Senegal to understand their cultural significance, evolution, and resilience in the face of globalization and modernization. Employing ethnographic research methods, including field surveys, structured interviews, and literature reviews, the study highlights the pre-marital, marital, and post-marital rituals that define the cultural identity of these groups. The findings reveal both unique and shared elements in engagement ceremonies, dowry practices, wedding attire, and familial roles. While some communities, such as Crișana and Amhara, exhibit a blend of tradition and modernity, others, like Damara>Nama and Diola, remain more rooted in traditional norms. The insights gained contribute to broader understandings of cultural diversity, social dynamics, and the evolution of traditional practices in a globalized world. By documenting and analyzing these marriage practices, the research contributes to preserving the cultural heritage and can foster cultural appreciation for tourist experiences capitalized in some countries through the living museums (i.e. Damaraland, Mbunza, etc from Namibia).

Keywords: cultural identity, marriage practices, Amhara, Nama/Damara, Crișana, Diola

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INTRODUCTION

Ethnographic research helps in understanding the cultural nuances and authentic practices of a community. This understanding can be used to create more genuine and respectful tourism experiences that honor local traditions and practices (Adams et al., 2019). Ethnographic studies often involve the local community, giving them a voice in how their culture is represented and shared with tourists. This can lead to more sustainable and empowering tourism practices (Frohlick and Harrison, 2008). The current study is ethnographic research about the passage rite of marriage of specific traditional communities from Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal, meant to foster cultural understanding and promotion of tradition and folklore from these countries. Ethiopia, Namibia, Senegal and Romania have a rich cultural heritage, and marital traditions reflect this diversity. Weddings often involve a blend of ancient rituals and modern practices where religious ceremonies hold significance. The current study is conceived as a comparative study meant to foster cultural understanding and preservation of traditions. It relates to traditional marriage practices across Ethiopia, Namibia, Senegal and Romania countries which can enrich our understanding of cultural diversity, social dynamics, and the complex interplay between tradition and contemporary influences. By comparing these diverse cultural contexts, we gain insights

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into the unique customs, rituals, and beliefs associated with marriage in each country. It helps preserve and document traditional practices that may be at risk of fading away due to globalization and modernization, as by comparing practices, we reveal differences and similarities between these cultures. Investigating how traditional marriage-related practices coexist with modern influences provides valuable insights related to gender roles, power dynamics, and family structures.

Ethnographers consider the wedding, by its rich and complex content, the most significant popular artistic manifestation (Todincă, 2005). There are three dimensions in a person's life such the pre-existence, existence and post existence marked by as many biological natural manifestations such as birth, conception and death (Todincă, 2014) or coming of age initiations for boys and girls (Bell, 1997) which shape the ensemble to which human life events revolve around. Related to the marriage event of human existence, many ethnographers, sociologists, demography researchers have approached it from the angle of their specialization. This has yielded a rich and complex material, either descriptive or interpretative (of concepts, terms, comparisons etc). The load of meanings and symbols with manifestations about life places the marriage ceremony as a highly ranked passage rite. The conscience of traditional communities gets new social valences as marriage pinpoints a starting point and a new way of living in the community life and taking part at its formation. The idea of a "new wedding" of life gets important existential meanings due to the preparation of the wedding ceremony in the smallest details which heralds the aligning with "the rest of the world" (Todincă, 2005). The protagonists pass from one status to another, separating from a family group and integration into another one. From this perspective, marriage is a combination of spiritual, religious, magical, aesthetic, judiciary and economical shapes to which the whole community participates.

It emerges as a collective manifestation more related to social, community and family life. At this manifestation the members of the community are joining hands through music, dance, poetry and due to its holy nature, it takes the shape of an existential holiday (Todincă, 2014). Therefore, the whole nuptial ceremony reveals a festive optimism where the human being is vital in relation to the biological power of nature, thus giving a meaning to life that the world isn't a chaotic place but a meaningful home, it opens a new vital cycle by the perpetuation of the human species. People from the rural world more authentically penetrate the mystery of this rite of passage through the festive traditions and ceremonies. The current study aims to research the traditional wedding-related practices of four communities such as that of the Amhara from Ethiopia; Damara and Nama from Namibia; Crișana from Romania and Diola from Senegal (i.e. Casamance area) (Figure 1).

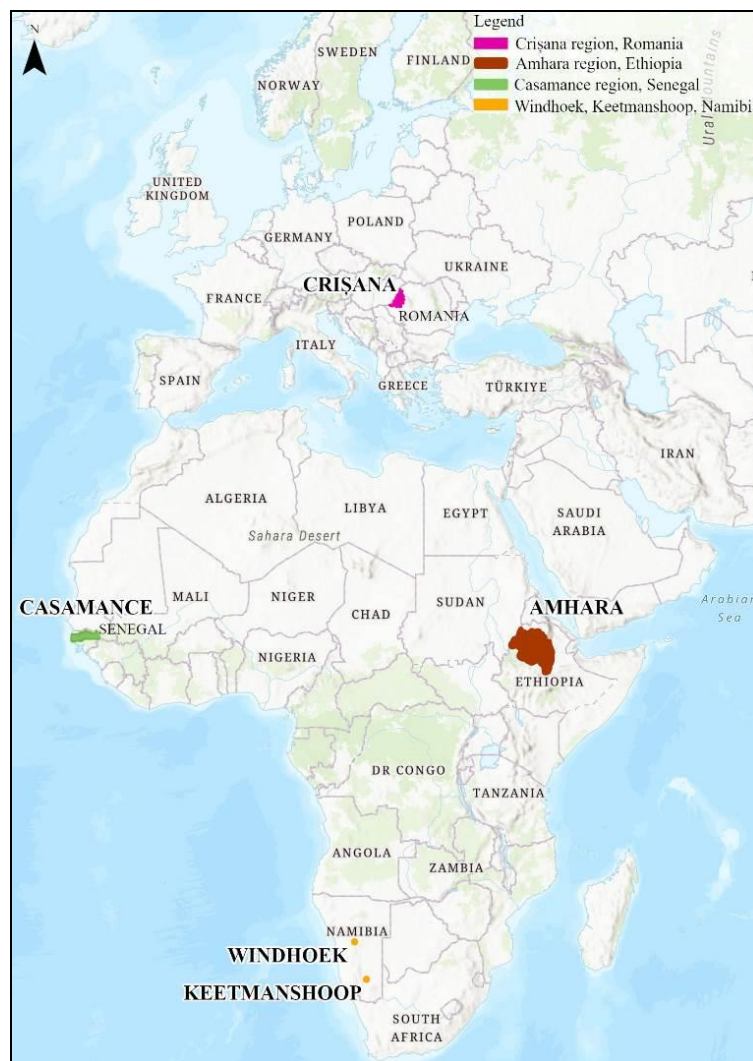


Figure1. Surveyed Amhara, Damara>Nama, Crișana and Diola communities from Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal (Source: Authors'elaboration)

Traditional marriage in Ethiopia is a long-standing institution, characterized by unique customs (Mossie, 2019). Ethiopia, one of Africa's oldest nations, also has a distinct legal history. Its ancient legal codes, such as the twenty-fourth chapter of the Fitha Negest, deal specifically with marriage, providing a framework for family-related matters (Augustyniak, 2007). Marriage in the Amhara region of Ethiopia is particularly intertwined with cultural traditions, religious values, and social structures that have been passed down for generations (Shiferaw et al., 2017). This overview examines the traditional marriage practices of the Amhara people, focusing on premarital, marital, and post marital customs.

Namibian wedding has become an extravagant and expensive ritual (Pauli and Dawids, 2017). Studies have indicated how these marriages transformations are linked to the spread of modernization. Weddings have become a significant arena for expressing class distinctions and it has led to the emergence of an elite class of people that will invest as much money and creativity to exhibit and celebrate their distinctiveness during weddings (Pauli, 2011). Until the 1970's, the decision to marry within local communities in the Damara culture was rarely tied to the economic background of the groom, bride, or family (Pauli and Dawids, 2017). Today this is not the case, as Namibian weddings have become expensive rituals. What is now experienced at these traditional weddings is the addition of new and innovative status markers such as expensive décor, food, and clothing (Pauli, 2012) and this has made the ordinary Namibian unable to afford a wedding. Weddings have thus not only become extremely expensive rituals, but their ritual design has changed substantially, becoming much more elaborate and complex. In the Damara culture the term 'struggle marriages' has been brought forth to indicate how costly it is to get married within these communities. The marriages are usually between local community members who have only recently acquired some form of income (Pauli and Dawids, 2017). Furthermore, the Namibian marriage has been researched by Pauli (2010); Pauli (2011); Pauli (2012); Pauli and Dawids (2017); Pauli (2018); Pauli (2019); Pauli (2022); Melber (2014) and Wallace (2011).

Senegal, a country located in West Africa, is made up of several ethnic groups spread across several regions. Each ethnic group guards its traditional heritage, its customs and way of life. Regarding marriage within different ethnic groups, there is a clear difference between them. Traditional marriage in the Peul community, for example, is different from that in the Diola community. The traditional Diola community, located in the south of Senegal, is devoid of centralized authority or established administrative and judicial mechanisms. Indeed, among men, there is a large entity which constitutes their community: the *bukut* community. It is very often after this initiatory stage which marks the life of men that a boy can aspire to marry. Marriage, it must be remembered, is a union between two people with the aim of founding a family. Despite globalization, some societies still remain rooted in tradition, so it is very often the parents who go looking for a wife for their son, appreciating the values of the future wife's parents.

Concerning Romania, the wedding event takes place on a similar scenario across all geographical space with slight differences according to social and economic life of rural communities where this event takes place (Todinca, 2005). Among the family practices, one of the most complex manifestations is given by the wedding ceremony with its multiple legal, ritualic and folkloric implications forming a big show in which all the community is involved. The works of researchers related to marriage in Romania are relevant such as that of Gorovei (1985); Gorovei (2002); Bernea (1967); (1990); Pop (1991); Marian (1995) and mainly those referring to the wedding of Bihor County, which overlaps Crişana region include the ethnographic research work of Pompiliu (1967); Bocşea (1971); Parasca (1977); Vasilescu (1970) and Graur (1972).

Pre-marital practices

Some of the pre-marital practices in the four countries analyzed are highlighted below, emerging from references' consultations as well as interviews. In Ethiopia, in the Amhara region, arranged marriages are still common, and families play a central role in selecting a spouse. Traditionally, it is the groom's parents who search for a suitable bride. Before any formal marriage negotiations, they ensure that the families are not related by tracing their ancestry up to seven generations. Another key factor in choosing a bride is ensuring her virginity (Augustyniak, 2007). Moreover, premarital negotiations often center on the exchange of dowries and bride wealth (Basazinewu, 2018). Once the families agree to proceed, they set up a formal meeting called *ketero*, during which the details of the wedding are finalized. As the wedding day approaches, preparations begin. The families gather wood for cooking, seek help from relatives for food preparation (*lemat*), and collect necessary items like water containers and brewing materials for traditional drinks like *Tella* (beer), *tej* (honey wine), and *Areke* (AllaboutETHIO, 2024; Dessie and Bekelcha, 2023).

In Romania, in the Crişana region, the traditional pre-marital norms relate to the fact that the lad and the maid mostly knew each other from some events of the villages, such as holidays, fairs, etc. After having met, they asked for permission to marry from their families. If permission was not granted, they would elope (Bala, 2011).

If families granted their permission, then some steps were compulsory. The boy accompanied by his father or a trustful orator went to the girl's house and it was there that "negotiation" began. The bride's father was asked what he gives the daughter after marriage (i.e. land, cattle, household items). After agreeing upon it, the news was spread into the village that the deal is done, and dowry is agreed upon (Mihancea, 2016). Some maids would have dowry chests in which they kept pillows, covers, tablecloths, usually hand-made by the bride's mother. Marriage up to three-rank degrees of relativity was forbidden. The callers were the ones to call people to the wedding, one or two weeks before the event. Those who promised to come to the wedding had to drink from the bottled plum brandy and it was considered a pledge (Mihancea, 2016). Courtship of the maid is part of the premarital rituals. After all parts convened to the marriage, the engagement was a premarital pledge sealed by an engagement ring or not.

In Namibia, a pre-marital ritual refers to the marriage asking ritual. Only about one-third of all couples marrying before the 1970s had this ritual, and even then, they were modest and inexpensive. But from the end of the 1970s

onward, marriage asking became more common and progressively extended into a costly engagement. For example, the 1984 marriage asking of a wealthy politician, businessman, and livestock owner, resembled the engagement. However, the wealthy politician asking ritual was still relatively small compared to later ones. At that ritual, only a dozen guests had the meat of a cow, soft drinks, and beer. Since the 1970s, “marking” the bride with jewelry (earrings, necklace, bracelet, watch, a diamond ring) also raised expenses. It is now common for the groom to buy engagement and wedding jewelry. None of these luxury goods were present at engagements and weddings prior to the 1970s. From then onwards engagements grew in scale, cost, and complexity, and now more than 70 percent of all marriages include a marriage asking ritual and an engagement ceremony (Fuller, 1993; Gockel-Frank, 2007).

In Senegal, in the Diola community, we can notice different stages which can lead to the finalization of a marriage. Indeed, these steps can begin when the future wife or her family has accepted the first gift offered by the young man. In traditional Catholic families, the marriage proposal process continues with a visit to a delegation from the boy's family with palm wine which is a very respected drink in traditional Diola of Kassa ceremonies.

This visit is very often done with the greatest discretion near the father of the young girl, in order to prevent people with bad intentions from going against the proposed marriage proposal. “Marriage certifies the entry of men and women into the adult generation by allowing them access to social rights” (Dieme, 2018: 197). The father of the family is often the person informed first and in turn he will share the purpose of this visit with his wife (the mother to the daughter). The mother will in turn inform her daughter, so the whole family will be aware.

Traditional and modern marriage practices

Traditional and modern marriage rituals were revealed from ethnographic literature in the four countries analyzed, as well as interviews. A specific ritual for the Amharic community during the marriage is the rule of *semania*. In this practice, the couple signs a quasi-contract, often referred to as a “contract of equals,” signifying mutual respect and partnership within the marriage (Dessie and Bekelcha, 2023). The wealth exchanged during the marriage, referred to as *tilosh* in Amharic, varies depending on the social and economic status of the families involved. Despite these variations, the exchange of dowry and bride wealth remains vital in maintaining family honor and social cohesion in Amhara marriage traditions. Amhara weddings are often elaborate affairs, with celebrations lasting several days. These festivities include religious rituals (Figure 2), communal feasts (Figure 3), and symbolic ceremonies that represent the union of two families. One of the most important traditions is the blessing of the couple by elders and priests, who pray for divine protection and blessings over the marriage. Many couples also seek the church's blessing, reflecting the deep religious significance of marriage in Amhara culture (Dessie and Bekelcha, 2023; Vergoesen, 2017).



Figure 2. Amhara crown marriage (Source: Authors, 2021)



Figure 3. Amhara marriage (Source: Authors, 2021)

In Namibia, until the 1970s wedding celebrations were modest. The earliest weddings recorded were celebrated in the 1940s. There is little information on Damara weddings before the 1940s or during the German colonial occupation (Fuller, 1993; Gockel-Frank, 2007). Two conditions strongly influenced wedding practices before the 1970s: Christianization and the white settler economy. For example, when a marriage ceremony took place in 1985 the couple both worked for a white farmer. Contrary to the widespread practice of celebrating a wedding at the bride's birthplace, after their wedding ceremony during Sunday mass, they celebrated on the settler's farm. It was a modest wedding, typical of the time. The bride's dress was simple, and the groom wore a new pair of trousers and new shoes. The wedding food, sponsored by an aunt and the bride's mother, consisted of two goats. For entertainment, some Damara>Nama songs were sung. Weddings were usually held several months after the engagement (Pauli, 2009). Since the 1970s, new ritual practices and consumption goods, like wedding cakes and wedding receptions, were incorporated. Inspirations came from other Namibian groups, e.g., Herero, Owambo, and Afrikaans, and from magazines like the South African Drum. Today, women's magazines and newspapers, such as The Namibian, that print photographs of national elite weddings influence brides, grooms, and their families. The ritual marriage-cow slaughtering is also a

recent development, again significantly raising wedding costs. Elder informants stressed that during the first half of the twentieth century, only the male kin group chased and slaughtered a cow, if the ritual took place at all (Schmidt, 1981/2:63). Today, slaughtering is common. All recent weddings include this ritual practice. Since the 1980s this practice has added another location to weddings. Previously, weddings were celebrated only at the bride's family house; now it includes the groom's family house. When it became increasingly common in the 1980s to host an official wedding reception, a third location was added: the reception hall. From 2000 to 2004, 60 percent of weddings were held at a reception hall. Wedding attire has also changed. To entertain and impress the guests, the hall is decorated with flowers and sometimes a band is hired. Unlike the informality of the two-family houses, the reception at a wedding hall is formal, and although one of the most luxurious moments of the wedding, it often lasts less than two hours. Usually, hundreds of guests are invited to a wedding reception and huge amounts of food, and drinks are served. From the 1970s onwards, Fransfontein elite weddings have changed from a modest ritual into a conspicuous celebration. The emerging African bourgeoisie (Wallace, 2011:267) of the 1970s and 1980s increasingly expressed its status through their weddings, and this process has continued, Fransfontein weddings stimulate envy and emulation (Veblen, 1994).

In Romania, a traditional wedding in Crisana region is described by Mihancea (2016) from Cetea village. Thus, on the morning of the wedding the guests called at the groom's house headed towards the bride's house ahead with an orator who knew many orations for asking for the bride. At the bride's house, a fake bride was brought forward and tried to dance with him but was rejected. It is supposed to be a funny moment, the cheerier the fake bride, the funniest the atmosphere. Finally, the genuine bride was brought all dressed in white clothing, with a flower wreath on her head. Both the bride and the groom's convoy are accompanied by a folk music band along the way to the church, most chants are sung by women mostly related to the bride (Mîrza, 2014). At the church the religious wedding took place where the weds are given holy bread, princely crowns are placed on their heads and rings are placed on the fingers as symbol of a long-lasting communion (Negru, 2017). Then the big feast follows at the groom's place, a dance with a Romanian colors dressed-up flag and its tossing up and down as part of the dance ritual. At the groom's house the bride must overturn a bucket filled with water, the weds were sprinkled with water from it and then wheat grains were thrown upon them. During the meal and feast ceremony the bride's shoe were stolen, which the godfather had to redeem with a reward such as money or drinks. At midnight the orator would announce the lump gifts or money given to the newlyweds. Towards the morning the bride was dressed in a young wife's clothing while holding a little boy on her arms. Upon departure the guests received a bottle of brandy and after 2 weeks the newlyweds would come to the godparents for a small feast. The attire and clothing (Figure 4, Figure 5) play an important part in the marriage ceremony, the woman is usually all dressed in white at the wedding, village guests will wear the traditional folk costume at the ceremony, for women the folded shirt around the neck and hand wrist (Mozes, 2001). The woman plays a crucial role as a traditions' preserver, faith and domestic rites keeper (Bala, 2011). Marriages parties could be held at both the bride and groom's venues or to only one. The attire after the wedding party is with clothes suitable for a married woman, her long hair is twisted into a loop and covered by a head scarf.



Figure 4. Traditional marriage ceremony from Crișana region. The Ethnography section from the Crișana Land Museum of Oradea, Romania (Source: Authors, 2024)



Figure 5. The protagonists of a traditional wedding from Crișana region. The Ethnography section from the Crișana Land Museum of Oradea, Romania (Source: Authors, 2024)

In Senegal, there are more types of marriages, i.e. marriage by kidnapping, marriage by gift or loan of wives, marriage with levirate, marriage with sororate, marriage by "budji" to name just a few. Among the Diola/Jóola of Kasa, marriages follow an exogamous rule even if they take place outside the villages and neighborhoods. Marriage is prohibited not only between close consanguines, but throughout the father's line and even that of the mother, although flexibility is sometimes granted. Inter-marriage extends between different community units. Every marriage is a relationship between different families. Here, the exogamous rule is taken as a broader social expression of the prohibition of incest. After currency, there is livestock used for traditional practices. The Oussouye department is a conservative area of customs, norms and traditional values. Of course, animals given or requested during the marriage proposal process are of utmost importance. The requested livestock returns to the couple and will be used to support their household in times of need. The one given as a dowry is slaughtered or sacrificed for the benefit of tradition and the populations. Wine is an essential element in all ceremonies in a Diola/Jóola environment. According to oral

tradition, it has therapeutic and mystical virtues. The wine given by the fiancé's family is distributed as follows: a part is given to the girl's restricted family and the other to that of her mother for the same reasons (to make a sacrifice to ask the ancestors to watch over the girl and to bring happiness and fertility in the household) (Dieme, 2018).

Alongside palm wine, there are liqueurs intended for the bride's family, especially her mother's. Maternal uncles receive what we can literally translate as "iron gender". This is requested as compensation for the gender of their sister who suffered at the birth of the bride. As money and other valuable goods cannot be shared, only liquors, classified as primary consumer goods, can repair this bodily damage. Which proves that, in this patrilineal society, the maternal lineage also has a role to play. The Diola/Jóola give equal importance to the maternal and paternal branches without the filiation being undifferentiated. Each of the two lineages has a specific function. Clothing (Figure 6) is made by the parents of girls during the marriage proposal process. The boubous and loincloths of parents-in-law are gifts that serve as embellishment. The son-in-law is the one who must take his parents-in-law out of poverty, clean them of their filth. Clothing (Figure 7) appears as an external sign of well-being. At the time of marriage, the woman's parents must replace their rags with valuable clothes. Symbolically, boubous and loincloths are fabrics and the fabric encloses life. Extracted from the vital part of the tree, it embodies longevity. Thus, composed and presented, it is matrimonial compensation that materializes marriage which, in turn, opens the doors to the adult world for young people (Dieme, 2018).



Figure 6. Traditional Diola wedding dress – Dianki - Ziguinchor region, Senegal (Source: Authors, 2024)

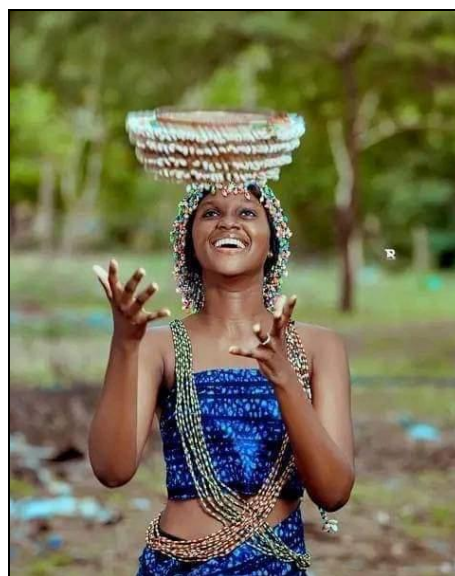


Figure 7. Traditional Diola wedding dance of the bride, Dianki-Ziguinchor, Senegal (Source: Authors, 2024)

In his work on the Diola/Jóola Banjal, Paolo Palmeri (1995) refers to the importance of circumcision in the conclusion of a marriage plan. The age corresponding to marriage maturity would be between 24 years for men and 20 years for women. Then he adds: "When he is still in the sacred forest, where he completes the complex rituals of initiation, the young man composes songs and poetry dedicated to his girlfriend. For their part, the respective parents also begin to make the first contacts with a view to the future marriage. It often happens that barely out of the forest of circumcision, the young man officially chooses his future wife. Circumcision signifies the completion of the complex rituals of initiation in the sacred forest that a man becomes mature and can choose to take a wife. The act is socially and culturally determining in the future of man in a Diola/Jóola environment (Palmeri, 1995: 244) (Figure 8, Figure 9).



Figure 8. Jola teens taken to the sacred forest during the adulthood passage rite ceremony, Efock village, Senegal (Source: Authors, 2023)



Figure 9. Feasting by the Joola community on the occasion of adulthood passage rite ceremony, Efock village Senegal (Source: Authors, 2023)

Post-marital practices

In Ethiopia, Amhara region, following the wedding, the bride typically moves into the groom’s family home. The Ethiopian honeymoon, called *yets’agula gizē*, can last from one week to three months, depending on the wealth of the groom’s family. During this period, the best man stays with the couple. The bride is expected to remain in her in-laws’ house during the day, only leaving at night. After the honeymoon, the couple visits the bride’s parents, where they stay for some time, again accompanied by the best man (Augustyniak, 2007). This time is crucial for the bride’s transition into wifehood and motherhood. After this initial period, the couple moves into their own home, usually located near the groom’s family (Dessie and Bekelcha, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The study emerges as a collaborative output among researchers and teaching staff members of the University of Bahir Dar of Ethiopia, the University of Science and Technology of Namibia, the Assane Seck University of Senegal and the University of Oradea, Romania. An ethnographic region was selected from each country, where quizzes were applied in the shape of a survey, so that we could elaborate a comparative framework based on structured surveys which collected data on marriage practices, preferences, and attitudes in Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal. The fieldwork included mobility to targeted regions to survey local communities, interviews with elders and couples who have undergone traditional marriages. We surveyed their perspectives, rituals, and meanings attached to marriage. Furthermore we examined literature and traditions related to marriage from all analyzed countries.

Structured surveys were developed to collect primary data on marriage practices, preferences, and attitudes. We sampled participants from different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and regions. The quiz included 24 close and open questions related to *pre-marital rituals* (i.e. engagement, dowry, betrothal ceremonies); *marriage ceremonies* (i.e. rituals, attire, music, dance, and feasting); *post-marital practices* (i.e. living arrangements, roles, and responsibilities) and *gender dynamics* (i.e. roles of men and women within marriage), as well as filtering questions related to gender, education, origin country and region. The quiz was applied to 35 persons from Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal, aged over 18 up to over 65 and with different levels of education (Figure 10). The response rate was unequal, thus Ethiopia yielded 30 filled-out quizzes, Namibia got 7 quizzes, Romania got 32 quizzes and Senegal got 7 quizzes. The sampled communities belong to the Amhara of Ethiopia, the Damara and Nama community of Namibia, the Crișana community of Romania and the Diola community of Senegal. The respondents’ localities for the Amhara region were from Dessa, Bahir Dar, Gondar, Combolcha, Showa, Gojjam, Burra, Deber Tabor, Deber Birhan, Zega; for the Nama/Damara community respondents came from Windhoek and Keetmanshoop; for the Crișana community respondents come from Sânicolau, Oșorhei, Forău, Cauceu, Borș, Ștei, Alparea, Tinca, Husasău de Criș, Aleșd, Nojorid, Damiș, Bogei, Satu Barba, Bogei, Marghita, Iteu, Suiug ; for the Diola community respondents come from Oussouye, Oukoute, Bignona, Ziguinchor, Kolda. The surveys were applied by the authors from August 2023 to August 2024. All respondents agreed to participate willingly to the surveys applied in Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal.

The results were analyzed and revealed similarities and differences across the four countries. The responses were centralized in a SPSS dataset and variables were processed through SPSS through comparative analysis to figure out similarities and differences among these cultures.

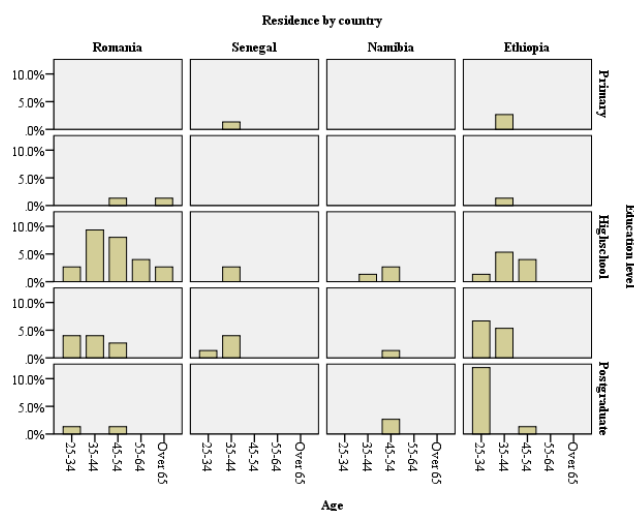


Figure 10. Residence, age and educational level of respondents of the marriage survey

(Source: authors’ elaboration based on the survey applied in Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal during May-September 2024)

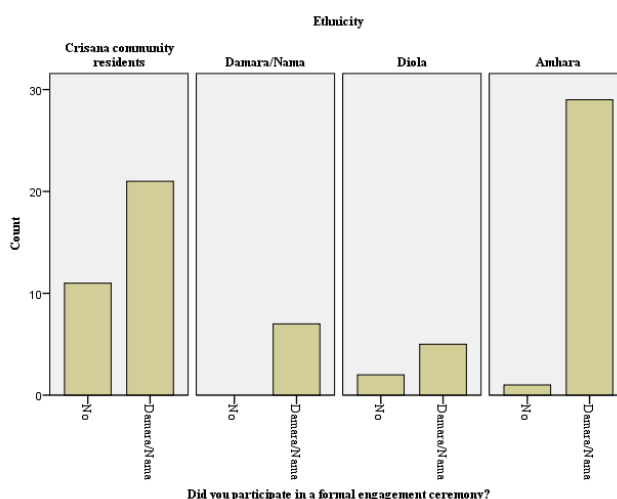


Figure 11. Participation of Crișana, Damara/Nama, Diola and Amhara communities in engagement ceremony

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Pre-marital practices

The unique practices or rituals associated with marriage stages related to pre-marital, marital and post marital rituals are highlighted and the results are emphasized below based on the three stages. Among the pre-marital rituals, it merged

that in all analyzed countries, engagement is an important step from the marriage process which often involves a formal ceremony, where the families of the bride and groom meet to discuss and agree on the marriage. For the Amhara community of Ethiopia 38,16% of respondents participated in an engagement ceremony, for the Damara>Nama community there were 9,11% of cases involved in an engagement ceremony, for the Crișana community of Romania 27,63% and for the Diola of Senegal there were 6,57% (Figure 11). The comparison shows that the highest share is held by the Amhara community of Ethiopia where this step is currently highly significant within the marriage process. As far as the dowry exchange process is concerned, we can see that it mostly holds importance in the case of the African analyzed communities of the Amhara, Damara>Nama and Diola communities whereas for the Romanian community of Crișana region 35,53% of the respondents replied that they did not exchange any dowry (Figure 12).

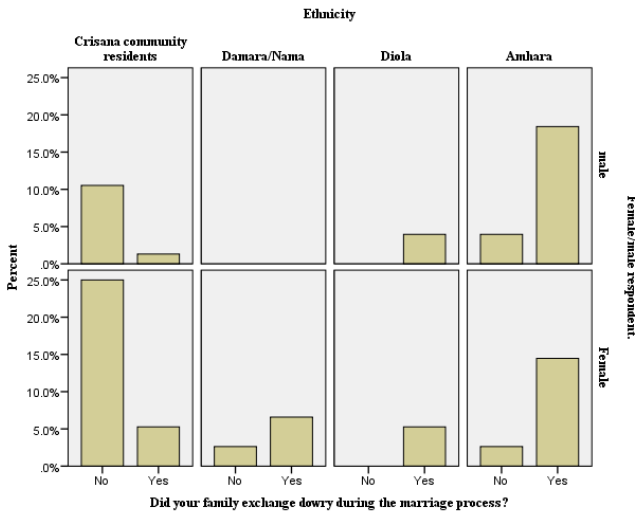


Figure 12. Dowry exchange for the Crișana, Damara>Nama, Diola and Amhara communities (Source: authors' elaboration based on the survey applied in Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal during May-September 2024)

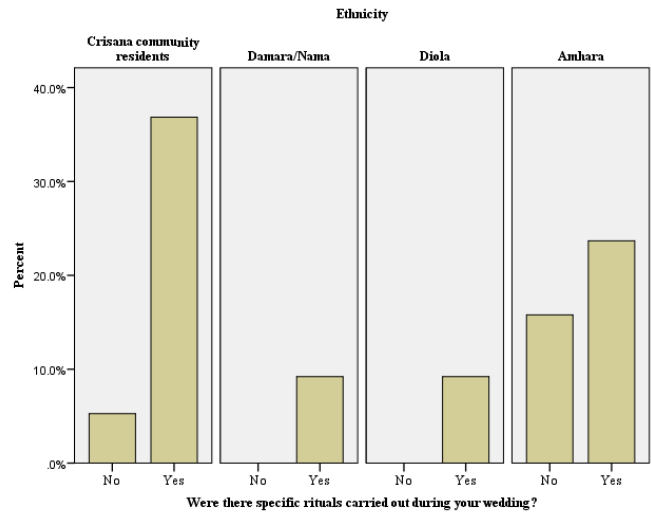


Figure 13. Respondents' answers related to specific rituals of Crișana, Damara>Nama, Diola and Amhara (Source: authors' elaboration based on the survey applied in Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal during May-September 2024)

Marriage practices

With relevance to marriage rituals, the Crișana community residents have the highest proportion of "Yes" responses, indicating a strong emphasis on rituals in their weddings. Damara>Nama has a low representation of rituals, a result also due to a smaller analyzed sample size. The Diola and Amhara groups display moderate engagement with rituals, but with noticeable variation between individuals. Overall, the data shows that cultural practices regarding wedding rituals differ significantly across these ethnic groups, with Crișana community residents emphasizing them the most (Figure 13).

As far as the open responses form the applied quizzes in the four ethnographic regions, related to specific rituals, the following was revealed: for Crisana region, specific rituals refer to an old woman dressed as a fake wife; tying of the road and asking questions; changing of the wedding dress; bucket filled with water and basil in front of the house meant to be kicked by the weds for good luck and to pass easily over hard times as meaning; throwing with wheat grains or rice over the weds for good luck; the throwing of the bun so that the one who catches it will marry next; stealing of the bride; wearing of old and new jewelry; stealing of the bride's shoe; the father who brings the bride to the altar; the weds' convoy; the villagers contributing with food for the wedding ceremony; traditional dancing, clothing and hair dressing.



Figure 14. Uivra ceremony

(Source: Authors, 2018)



Figure 15. Traditional Nama dresses

For the Diola community specific rituals emphasized by respondents relate to specific clothing, dancing, singing, dances, food and dress. Amhara community responses relate greatly to religion such as performing liturgy; spiritual music, prayer at the covenant; blessing by elders, semania and celebrating; crown marriage; communion, liturgy; wearing traditional clothes; religious program, blessing by the priest; gifting; slaughtering chicken, sprinkle milk over the bride by the groom as soon as they get home, communion, crown marriage; reading from the spiritual book; dowery ceremony; meal ceremony and spiritual singing. Specific rituals referring to Nama/Damara relate to white cow; confessions; “uitvra” (Figure 14) meaning that the wife is given by her family over to her new family along with the things to take with her to new house; clothes (Figure 15); basket exchange; slaughtering of goats or other animals; slaughtering of sheep and also on the day after the wedding; bride’s serving the meal to her family and in-laws and slaughtering of cows and sheep.

Figure 16 indicates that cultural practices concerning wedding attire vary significantly across these groups, with Amhara showing the strongest cultural adherence. The Amhara group contrasts sharply with the Crişana community, where the tendency not to wear traditional clothes is much higher. Damara>Nama shows the least differentiation between “Yes” and “No” responses, potentially reflecting low involvement with traditional wedding practices, but it is also due to the small sample sizes. Diola appears more divided but leans toward wearing traditional wedding clothes.

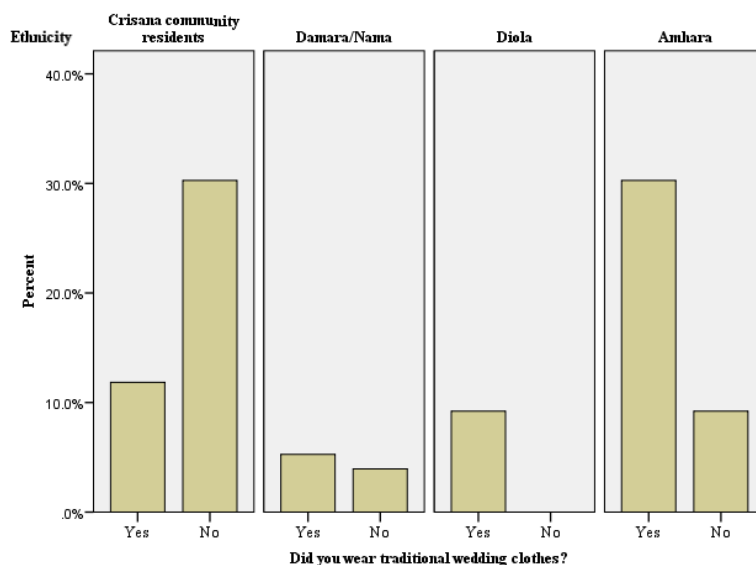


Figure 16. Respondents’ answers related to wearing of traditional wedding clothes of Crişana, Damara>Nama, Diola and Amhara communities (Source: authors’ elaboration based on the survey applied in Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal during May-September 2024)

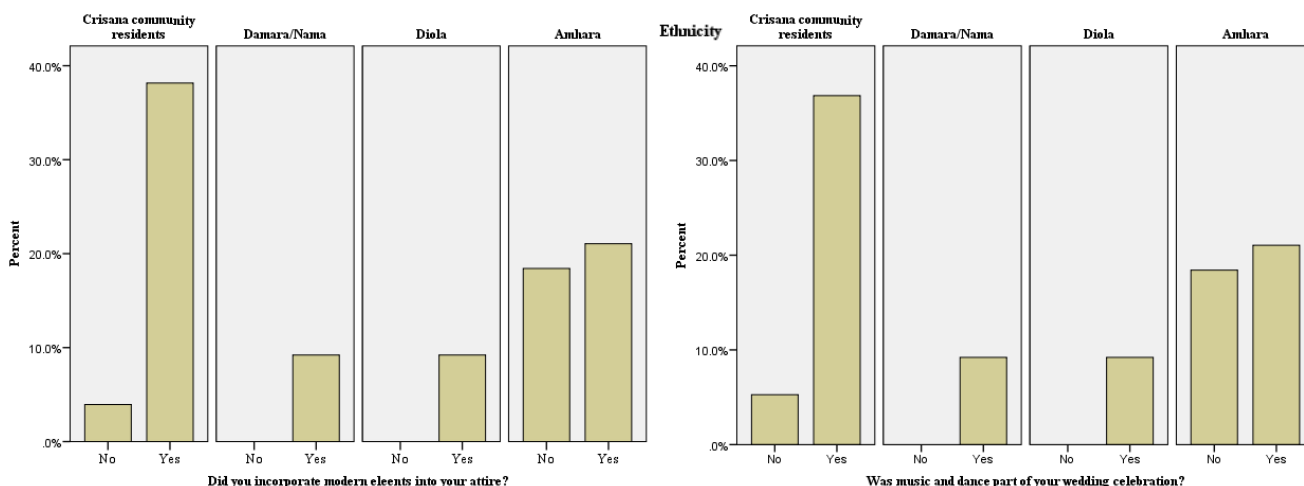


Figure 17. Respondents’ answers related to the inclusion of modern elements in the wedding attire (left) and music and dances (right) (Source: authors’ elaboration based on the survey applied in Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal during May-September 2024)

In terms of similarities of modern attire, music and dances (Figure 17), Crişana community residents exhibit a high prevalence of both incorporating modern elements into attire and including music and dance in wedding celebrations (40% for “Yes”). Damara>Nama and Diola demonstrate low percentages of engagement for both questions. Responses for both groups remain under 10%, reflecting limited adoption of modern elements and lower emphasis on music and dance in weddings. Amhara presents moderate levels of engagement in both contexts, showing a preference for traditional practices while incorporating some modern elements. In terms of differences, The Crişana community residents show more enthusiasm for both modern attire and wedding music/dance, indicating an openness to modern cultural integration. Damara>Nama and Diola are consistent in their lower engagement levels, reflecting stronger adherence to traditional norms

across both attire and wedding celebrations. For Amhara, while the adoption of modern attire leans slightly more traditional, the inclusion of music and dance in weddings shows a balanced distribution, suggesting a more significant cultural emphasis on music and dance in celebrations compared to attire.

Post-marital practices

The data suggests that Crișana community residents and Amhara are the most distinct in their living arrangements after marriage (Figure 18). Crișana strongly leans toward spouse’s familial cohabitation, while Amhara demonstrates a higher tendency toward independence. The Damara>Nama and Diola groups exhibit less differentiation between the categories, suggesting either traditional practices or unique cultural dynamics. Crișana Community Residents strongly favor shared responsibilities, which could reflect progressive attitudes or cultural norms promoting equality in domestic roles. Amhara also shows a substantial inclination toward shared responsibilities, though with a lesser "No" percentage compared to Crișana. Damara>Nama and Diola exhibit minimal engagement with the question, possibly due to cultural practices where responsibilities may not be explicitly shared or are structured differently (Figure 19).

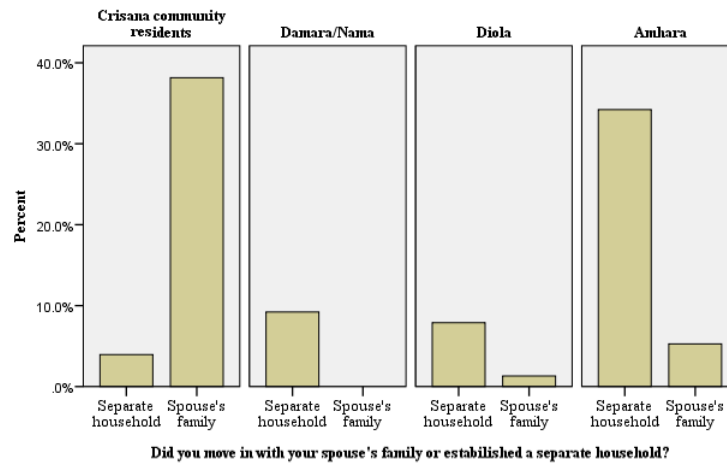


Figure 18. Respondents’ answers related to the habit of moving into the spouse’s family house or separate household (Source: authors’ elaboration based o the survey applied in Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal during May-September 2024)

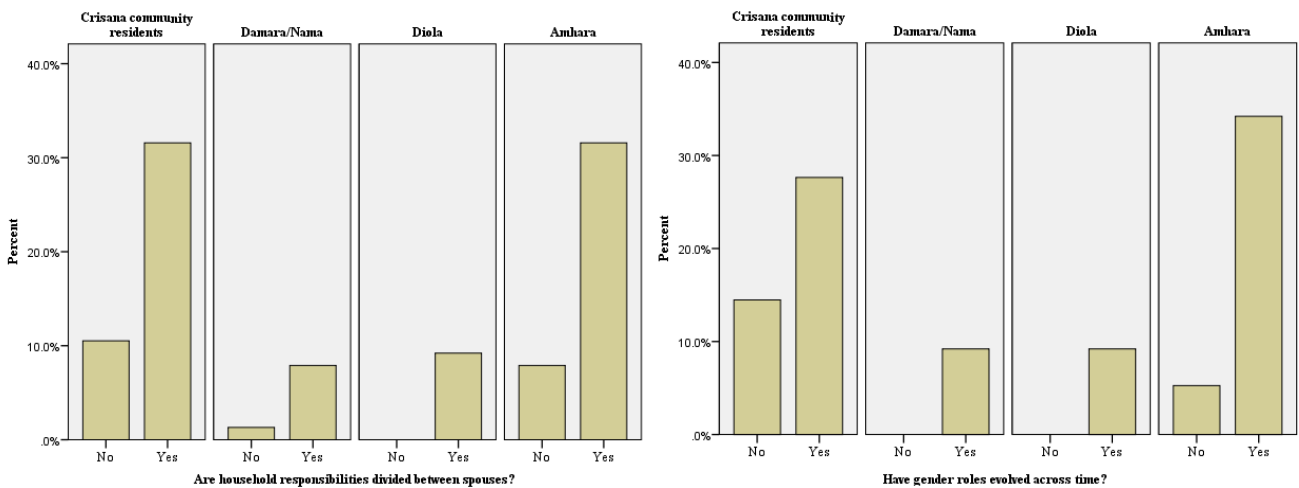


Figure 19. Respondents’ answers related to family sharing responsibilities

Figure 20. Respondents’ answers related to family gender roles evolution

(Source: authors’ elaboration based on the survey applied in Ethiopia, Namibia, Romania and Senegal during May-September 2024)

Crișana Community residents and Amhara stand out as groups with a strong acknowledgment of role evolution over time, indicating shifts in cultural or societal norms. Damara>Nama and Diola exhibit minimal engagement, with lower percentages overall, suggesting that role evolution may either be less pronounced or less openly discussed within these communities (Figure 20). Crișana Community Residents and Amhara appear to be at the forefront of modern cultural practices, reflecting a balance of tradition and societal evolution. Damara>Nama and Diola remain more rooted in traditional norms, with less evidence of modernization or evolution in societal roles.

As a concluding remark in terms of post-marital similarities and discrepancies, it can be asserted that the Crișana and Amhara community residents represent communities transitioning toward modern, egalitarian norms while maintaining some traditional aspects while the Damara>Nama and Diola remain more rooted in traditional roles, with lower engagement in shared responsibilities or role evolution. This analysis highlights a spectrum of societal evolution, with Crișana and Amhara at the progressive end and Damara>Nama and Diola anchored in traditional norms.



Figure 21. Dance performance at the Mbunza Living Museum of Namibia (Source: Authors, 2024)



Figure 22. Household activities at the Mbunza Living Museum of Namibia (Source: Authors, 2024)

CONCLUSION

This ethnographic study provides a comprehensive analysis of marriage-related practices across four culturally diverse communities, uncovering both shared values and distinct traditions. The findings highlight the rich cultural heritage embedded in marriage ceremonies, which serve as pivotal rites of passage in these societies. In Ethiopia's Amhara community, marriage reflects deep-rooted religious and social structures, while in Namibia's Damara>Nama community, weddings have transformed into symbols of social status and economic distinction. Romania's Crişana region preserves intricate rituals that involve the entire community, while Senegal's Diola community demonstrates the interplay between ancestral customs and family-centric practices.

Despite the geographical and cultural differences, commonalities such as the significance of family involvement, symbolic rituals, and the communal nature of weddings emphasize the universal importance of marriage as a social institution. However, the study also reveals the impact of modernization, with some traditions fading while others adapt and evolve. By documenting and analyzing these practices, the research contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and offers valuable insights for fostering cultural appreciation and sustainable tourism (Di Giovine, 2024).

An example of sustainable tourism practices could be considered the living museums of certain African countries, such as the Damaraland, Mbunza, Herero living museums, etc from Namibia where the immaterial culture of dances (Figure 21), household practices (Figure 22) and songs are performed for tourists; among the four surveyed communities only the Namibian respondents said that they have this tourist product available. The study findings underscore the need for continued ethnographic studies to safeguard and celebrate the diverse ways in which communities navigate the interplay between tradition and contemporary influences in their marital practices (Ye et al., 2024).

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