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# Grave Vows: A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Varying forms of Ghost Marriage among Five Societies

Lucas J. Schwartze

*Abstract: Marriage is one of the most ubiquitous social relationships in human societies. However, the forms this institution takes do not follow the same patterns across all cultures. This paper examines one of the rarer forms of marriage; ghost marriage. After introducing the societies that practice this rare form of marriage, the similarities and differences between the forms this practice takes are examined. Various scholarly explanations for this form of marriage are presented as well.*

## Introduction

Pasternak et al. note that in all known human societies adults generally spend some, if not the majority, of their lives in a bonded relationship, which is often referred to as marriage (Pasternak et al. 1997:77). The forms this relationship takes, however, are so varied that the creation of a single definition of marriage has proven to be difficult. Marriages can occur between one male and one female, one male and several females, one female and several males, two males, or two females. Additionally, in some societies, marriage can occur between two people who are no longer living and even between the living and the deceased.

Ghost marriage tends to contradict almost every definition of the term 'marriage' that anthropologists have proposed. For example, Ember and Ember suggest defining marriage as "a socially approved sexual and economic union, usually more or less permanent, and it subsumes reciprocal rights and obligations between the two spouses and between spouses and their future children" (Ember and Ember 2007:161). Ghost marriage, though, does not involve an economic union between two people, nor does it involve a socially approved sexual union. Unfortunately, there is not a satisfactory way of defining marriage that includes even so rare a form of matrimony as ghost marriage.

While the creation of a new definition for marriage is not the goal of this paper, given that the subject is only one of several variations of matrimony, it may prove beneficial to provide some basis for speaking about marriage. Pasternak et al. point out the problems that arise from trying to use definitions that incorporate the combination of economic and sexual functions (Pasternak et al. 1997:82). They also provide the definition proposed by Gough that marriage is “a relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship is accorded full birth-status rights common to normal members of his [or her] society or social stratum” (Pasternak et al. 1997:83).

This definition has some very useful points that can be applicable to certain forms of ghost marriage. For example, among the Nuer and Atuot of the Sudan, ghost marriage has the purpose of providing a male heir to the deceased individual, even if the deceased is not the genetic father. This definition allows for this type of relationship to be considered a marriage because it does not insist that the genetic father and nominal father be the same, nor does it insist upon a combination of sexual and economic functions. However, this definition loses applicability in the face of the Chinese and Japanese examples, in which no children will be born into the union as there is no living spouse in either of these variations of the practice.

Given the great diversity of marriage forms, it may be more beneficial to consider what the society under examination regards as marriage. In addition to aiding communication with the community under examination about their practices, it is possible that the native perspective will provide much greater insight into their own practices than would be gathered by forcing their cultural practices into a previously created rigid category.

The goal of the present study is to examine the rare practice of ghost marriage. After discussing the research methods utilized in this study, the societies that practice this form of marriage will be introduced. This will be followed by a discussion in which comparisons and contrasts will be made between these societies. It is hoped that this preliminary study will be able to provide some insight into the motivating factors that result in the practice of ghost marriage. It is also hoped that readers will come to recognize that, while the term ‘ghost marriage’ is frequently used to describe several cultural phenomena, these phenomena may be very different from one another despite sharing a common name.

## Research Methods

The data used in this study were compiled from various articles published in academic journals, as well as from chapters in edited volumes. There have been two major difficulties in researching this topic. First, there is a scarcity of material on the topic of ghost marriage. In total, only nine sources were acquired that dealt with the topic. However, even among those nine, the topic of ghost marriage was often glossed over in only a few sentences. Rather frequently, the topic of ghost marriage was treated as a peculiarity worth mentioning, but ultimately not relevant to the researcher's goals. The articles dealing with Chinese and Japanese ghost marriage tended to run contrary to this trend. However, those articles dealt explicitly with the practice of ghost marriage.

Data were available for only five societies that practice ghost marriage. These five societies are the Nuer and Atuat from southern Sudan, the ancient Greeks, the Singapore Chinese, and the Japanese. The fact that several of the articles only briefly mentioned ghost marriage has also led to another problem with this line of research. As noted above, there has been a bias in favor of data about Chinese and Japanese forms of ghost marriage, as the articles on these cultures provided much more in depth data on the practice than the articles on African cultures. In addition to the dearth of detail about ghost marriages, the African data tended to have very little variation, thus making contrasts between the groups within this part of the world far less productive than contrasts within the Asian data. This bias in amount of data will be reflected in the amount of time spent in consideration of each group, as there is simply more data available about the Asian groups than the African groups. There was only one article available about the ancient Greek practice of ghost marriage. Unfortunately, it was only one page long and just barely glossed over some of the pertinent issues, such as explanations as to why ghost marriage was practiced. It was included in the present analysis, though, as any contribution to the total pool of data from which to make comparisons and contrasts can only be beneficial to the overall study.

The second problem encountered while researching this topic was the scarcity of recent data. Six of the nine articles were written prior to 1980, and among those six, three were written prior to 1960. While the data from the older articles is quite relevant, there has been little done with the data since it was presented. This has led to a shortage of theoretical perspectives on the data differing from the perspectives of the original authors. Furthermore, the lack of follow up data impedes the analysis of patterns of change through time.

## The Societies Practicing Ghost Marriage

### *African Groups*

#### *Nuer*

There are two societies in Africa for which there is documentation denoting the practice of ghost marriage. These societies are the Nuer and the Atuot. Both of these groups practice a pastoral subsistence strategy, and live in Southern Sudan. The Nuer are most known for the study of them done by Evans-Pritchard. Singer notes, though, that there tends to be a male focused perspective in this work (Singer 1973:80-81). However, while she stresses the need to move away from an androcentric view in anthropological research, she does not provide a feminist perspective on ghost marriage among the Nuer (Singer 1973). With regard to ghost marriage, Singer informs the reader that among the Nuer, if a man dies without an heir, one of his brother's wives will marry the deceased brother's ghost, and the children they beget will be the heirs of the deceased brother (Singer 1973:83). She also mentions that, in a variation of ghost marriage, a barren kinswoman may occasionally adopt the male role and take a wife, and as in the previous case, all children born to the wife will be considered the children of the "ghost pater" (Singer 1973:83).

Verdon's 1982 article provides a little more detail about the Nuer form of ghost marriage. He states that when a man dies, his cattle are passed on to his son, but if a man dies without a son, it will then go to his brother (Verdon 1982:571). However, the brother is expected to use the cattle he received as part of the bridewealth for acquiring a bride for his deceased brother's ghost (Verdon 1982:571).

Unlike Singer, Verdon also provides two explanations for the development of this marriage practice. First, he notes that ghost marriage helps to create familial bonds and brings cattle into the family of the bride, which can be invested into the bridewealth of a male relative in order to increase the likelihood that he will be able to procure a wife (Verdon 1982:575). Second, he was told by his informants that ghost marriage is important in that it provides a means "to create a line of male heirs for a dead man" (Verdon 1982:575). However, it is noted that this practice is only extended to initiated males as only they have the right to hold cattle (Verdon 1982:575). If a man does not own cattle, there is no need to provide an heir as there are no cattle for the child to inherit.

#### *Atuot*

The Atuot are a group who were studied by Burton in 1978. After examining the Atuot, Burton came to the conclusion that there is an association between the Atuot's increased participation in the cattle trade and a decrease in the frequency of ghost marriages (Burton

1978:398). As was the case among the Nuer, among the Atuot if a man died unmarried or without an heir, a ghost marriage was performed for him, and any children the wife might beget were considered the children of the deceased man in name (Burton 1978:402). However, Burton also notes that if a man dies with a living daughter, the daughter may adopt a male role and then take a wife to provide an eventual heir for the deceased man (Burton 1978:402). In either case, when negotiating the marriage arrangements, some cattle are exchanged as bridewealth while the rest of the deceased man's cattle remain in his patrilineal descent group. Burton also asked the Atuot why they performed ghost marriages, and interestingly the response given did not acknowledge the economic benefits of keeping cattle in the patrilineal descent group.

The Atuot told him that they performed ghost marriages to maintain the family name of the deceased man, and Burton noted that there is linguistic evidence to support this reason (Burton 1978:402). Burton reports that the word for 'ghost marriage' in the Atuot language can also mean "to hold up straight," saying "[t]he central notion expressed in ghost marriage per se is the intention to 'hold the name of a man straight' so he will 'stand' or be remembered" (Burton 1978:402).

However, while ghost marriages do provide children to carry on the family name, Burton notes that there is some negativity directed towards children who were born from women married to deceased men (Burton 1978:403). These children may be seen as orphans, a status that is negatively viewed by Atuot society (Burton 1978:403). However, there is no description of what this means for the child.

In addition to providing heirs and maintaining cattle, the Atuot also believe that it is necessary to provide a wife to an unmarried deceased man in order to appease his spirit and thus prevent vengeance from the spirit world (Burton 1978:403). This is especially true in cases in which an older brother dies unmarried. The Atuot allot the cattle to be used as bridewealth among a group of brothers so that the oldest brother will always be the first to marry (Burton 1978:403). It is believed that if a younger brother should be married before his older brother, even if the older brother is deceased, disaster from the vengeful spirit will befall the family (Burton 1978:403). Thus, even if it delays the younger brother's own wedding, the older brother must marry first.

Burton assumes that there was a much higher frequency of ghost marriage among the Atuot in the past and discusses its decline. He reasons that because the principle way to acquire cattle in the past involved cattle raiding and warfare with neighboring groups, more men died young (Burton 1978:404). Since the men died trying to acquire cattle, it is unlikely that they had been able to provide the bridewealth to marry prior to their deaths. Thus they would have to have a wife

provided for them after their death, delaying their brothers marriages until later in life when the family group had acquired more cattle to provide his bridewealth payment (Burton 1978:404). However, by the time Burton was writing this article, he notes that the Atuat had become very proficient at the cattle trade, which enabled men to acquire cattle for bridewealth much more easily than before, and thus men married younger and were less likely to die without a male heir (Burton 1978:404).

### *Chinese*

The data on the Chinese practice of ghost marriage come primarily from Singapore. Unlike the two African groups described above, Topley notes that among the Singapore Chinese, specifically the Cantonese, it is much more common for a ghost marriage to be arranged between two deceased individuals than between living and deceased individuals (Topley 1955:29). Not only is this form of ghost marriage more common, but Topley even notes that in the Cantonese section of Singapore there are often marriage brokers who specialize in arranging ghost marriages between deceased men and women (Topley 1955:29). Occasionally, the marriage is arranged early enough that the funeral rites and the marriage rites may occur simultaneously, including moving the bride from her grave to her husband's grave to symbolically finalize the marriage (Topley 1955:29).

Among the Singapore Chinese, there are multiple reasons for practicing ghost marriage. Topley begins by stating that if a family manages to obtain a living bride for their deceased son, they can gain a grandson after the death of an unmarried son through ghost marriage. Additionally, a living bride becomes a daughter-in-law, who will be available to help with the domestic tasks of the family (Topley 1955:29).

The Chinese also have a custom which maintains that a younger brother should not marry before his older brother, and thus a family may arrange a ghost marriage in order to allow a younger brother to marry without incurring the spiritual wrath of the deceased brother (Topley 1955:29). Additionally, it is believed by some Chinese that if the spirit of the deceased man is unhappy he may bring about various disasters regardless of the marital status of any brothers he may have, and thus they might arrange a ghost marriage simply for the sake of appeasing his spirit (Topley 1955:29).

The final reason Topley mentions for the existence of ghost marriages among the Singapore Chinese is that it ties families together into new kinship groups (Topley 1955:29). Topley notes that ghost marriages to form social bonds were much more common in the past, but that at the time of the article's authorship she could not find any instances of its occurrence (Topley 1955:30). Freedman claims that

another reason for ghost marriage for unmarried people, either male or female, is to “establish a place on the [family] altar” where they will be counted among their ancestors, whereas unmarried individuals will not be placed on the altar (Freedman 1970:165).

Schattschneider mentions, though, that spirit marriages in China are more common for female children, as male children can be memorialized on their father’s tablet in the ancestral altar, whereas women are not permitted to be memorialized on their parents’ altar (Schattschneider 2001:856). Due to the custom of a woman not being permitted to be memorialized on her parents’ altar, Schattschneider says that in Taiwan an unwed girl’s spirit might be married to her sister’s husband, and her memorial tablet would then be placed in his family shrine (Schattschneider 2001:856). Schattschneider draws comparisons between unnamed African groups and the Chinese to claim that in both of these groups ghost marriage occurs to ensure memorialization of the deceased (Schattschneider 2001:856). However, this view overlooks factors such as the economic reasons for ghost marriage among the African groups participating in this practice.

Instances in which a living woman is married to a deceased man generally only occur if the man’s family is sufficiently wealthy to be able to convince her to do so, or she may marry a deceased man if she was betrothed to him prior to his death (Topley 1955:29). In either case, once she has wed the ghost, the bride is expected to take a vow of celibacy (Topley 1955:29). However, if a living man marries a deceased female, usually a fiancée who died prior to the marriage, he may take another wife in addition to the ghost spouse (Topley 1955:29). Topley notes that in some instances when a living woman is married to a ghost, a white rooster will stand in for the groom during the ceremony and ride in the bridal carriage afterwards. This same rooster will then accompany her whenever she makes formal visits with her relatives from that point onwards (Topley 1955:29).

During the wedding ceremony between two deceased persons, effigy dolls may be used to represent the bride and the groom (Topley 1956:71). In addition to those effigies, paper and bamboo replicas of objects a newlywed couple would need may be offered to the spirits of the couple (Topley 1956:71). Objects include clothes, imitation money called “hell bank notes,” and furniture, which are all ceremonially burned the morning after the wedding ceremony to send them to the couple in the spirit world (Topley 1956:71).

### *Japanese*

The Japanese practice of ghost marriage takes a form very different from the other forms discussed in this paper. Rather than marriage between a living and deceased individual, or even between two deceased individuals, the ghost is married to a doll. While the term

most commonly used for these dolls is 'bride doll,' there are equivalent 'groom dolls' which can be wed to the spirits of deceased females (Schattschneider 2001:860). These dolls generally cost between \$100 and \$400 USD (approximately ¥10000 to ¥40000) and can be found not only in temples, but also mass produced for sale in department stores (Schattschneider 2001:860). Occasionally during the wedding ceremony, both a bride and a groom doll will be utilized with one doll representing the deceased while the other represents the spirit spouse (Schattschneider 2001:860). While there are only a few sources regarding this practice in English, van Bremen notes that ghost marriage within Japan and abroad has been well studied by the Japanese (van Bremen 1998:134).

The custom of ghost marriage is a relatively recent development in Japan, however. In van Bremen's article, he notes that the practice was not present in Japan until after the Ryūkyū Islands were annexed in 1872, and prior to that it was known by the Japanese as a Chinese custom (van Bremen 1998:133). However, van Bremen also notes that the type of ghost marriage practiced in the Ryūkyū Islands differs significantly from the type of ghost marriage practiced in northeastern Japan in that while the Ryūkyū Islands mirrors the Chinese variety, the northeastern Japanese variety involves marriage with "a make-believe partner" (van Bremen 1998:134). Schattschneider does mention that traditional ghost marriage between a ghost and a living person did occur in Japan's past, and such marriages usually involved financial compensation to the living spouse (Schattschneider 2001:856). The financial compensation was considered very valuable by the prospective bride, as there is a cultural belief that if the spirit of a deceased individual becomes too attached to a living person, the spirit may decide to prematurely call that living person's soul into the spirit world (Schattschneider 2001:856).

Around the 1930s the Japanese in the Tohoku (the region of Northeastern Japan) began to switch from marriage between living and deceased individuals to using bride dolls (Schattschneider 2001:857). Schattschneider's older informants told her that the switch occurred in large part as a response to the large number of young unmarried men who were dying in wars and during the Manchurian occupation (Schattschneider 2001:857). Thus, rather than trying to find equally large numbers of living women to wed the ghosts, the dolls were adopted as the best solution.

The deceased is wed to a spirit bride, who is embodied in the form of a bride doll, and the spirit itself is said to come from the Buddhist Bodhisattva Jizo (Schattschneider 2001:854). Jizo is a very familiar Bodhisattva for students of Japanese culture, as he is a pervasive figure in Japanese lore, and it is difficult to travel in Japan without encountering a stone Jizo figurine along the side of a road to ensure the

safety of the travelers. When the spirit of the deceased is married to the bride doll, his photograph is placed in a case with the bride doll, and then is enshrined with the doll for a period of up to thirty years, after which it is believed the spirit of the deceased has reached the point that it can be reborn, and thus the spirit bride is no longer needed (Schattschneider 2001:854). Schattschneider contrasts this long period of curation with the Chinese practice of destroying their effigies the next day. She attributes this to differences between Chinese and Japanese descent organization (Schattschneider 2001:856).

Schattschneider proposes that the use of bride dolls are a coping mechanism for the grieving families, as it provides a way for exchange to occur between the living and the deceased (Schattschneider 2001:855). The primary direction of exchange, though, is from the living to the deceased. In giving the deceased a spirit bride, the families of the deceased provide the soul with companionship and hope to increase the chances of the deceased attaining Buddhahood (Schattschneider 2001:855). Schattschneider also mentions that providing a spirit bride works to soothe the soul of the deceased and prevents the spirit from becoming resentful of the living and causing harm to their living relatives (Schattschneider 2001:855, 858). Older informants testified that the dolls help to protect the surviving family members “from illness and misfortune” (Schattschneider 2001:858).

As mentioned above, it is believed that the soul only needs thirty years, or one generation, to attain Buddhahood, and once that has occurred the soul no longer requires a spirit bride. After the thirty year period, the doll is then “respectfully burned in a ritual fire or floated out to sea” (Schattschneider 2001:855). During this period of curation, many people claim that the doll begins to resemble the deceased near the middle of the curation period, before eventually reverting back to its original appearance at the end of the curation period (Schattschneider 2001:870).

Mediums have also come to play an important role in the propagation of bride doll usage. Schattschneider notes that it is not uncommon for grieving families to seek the services of a spiritual medium to enquire about the state of deceased relatives, and that the medium will often tell the family that the deceased is lonely and wishes for a spirit bride for companionship (Schattschneider 2001:857). Schattschneider also says that early on, bride dolls were primarily only given to one’s children or grandchildren who died unmarried, but by the 1990s mediums began telling the individuals who consulted with them that many of the misfortunes they suffered in life were being caused by distant relations who were unhappy in the spirit world (Schattschneider 2001:858). In order to soothe their spirits, the mediums recommended that their clients purchase bride dolls to comfort the restless spirit and eventually help it move on

(Schattschneider 2001:858). Furthermore, van Bremen notes that conducting a ghost marriage “is a posthumous rite of passage, enabling the dead soul to reach adulthood and eventually ancestorhood” (van Bremen 1998:134). It is a way for the souls of deceased children to pass through the normal stages of the life from which they were cut off. It is believed that by allowing the children to symbolically take part in the parts of adult life they missed, their spirits will not become resentful.

The use of bride dolls is not limited only to children and distant relatives, though. Schattschneider notes that even aborted fetuses may have bride dolls provided for them (Schattschneider 2001:860). It has been noted by van Bremen that ghost marriage has spread south from the Tohoku region after a televised documentary on the subject was aired on Japanese national television (van Bremen 1998:134).

### *Greece*

In 1948, Ruhemann noted that the concept of ghost marriage seems very similar to an ancient Greek tradition referred to as *epikleros* (Ruhemann 1948:60). Ruhemann informs the reader that in this form of marriage, a kinsman of a deceased man would fill in for him as temporary holder of his property until the woman who had been married to his ghost had produced a son to act as his heir (Ruhemann 1948:60). However, Ruhemann does not provide an analysis of the practice. This society has been included in this paper for the sake of completeness, in that this is a summary of all known societies that practice ghost marriage.

### Discussion

In comparing the data from these reports, the Japanese data clearly stand out as anomalous in many regards. However, there are still areas in which the Japanese form of ghost marriage overlaps with the other cultures. One interesting trend that I noted in examining the data is that none of the societies listed practice female exclusive ghost marriages. While the Chinese and the Japanese allow both men and women to have ghost marriages, neither of the African groups mentioned included female ghosts being married. This trend may be reflective of the reason for practicing ghost marriage, as I will attempt to demonstrate.

All of the groups, except for the Japanese, listed the continuation of the family name as a reason for practicing ghost marriages (see Table 1 for a summary of reasons for practicing ghost marriage). The exclusion of the Japanese from this list makes sense, though, given the form of ghost marriage they practice. They do not create new kin networks in marrying their deceased relative to a bride doll, nor is there

any possibility of offspring. There is no manner in which the family name could be passed on with this type of marriage.

Reason for Ghost Marriage	Nuer	Atuot	Chinese	Japanese	Ancient Greeks
Property	X	X			X
Maintain Family Name	X	X	X		
Appease the spirit of the Deceased		X	X	X	
Create Inter-Familial Bonds	X		X		
Marriage Hierarchy among Brothers	X	X	X		

Table 1. Reasons for practicing ghost marriage

The Atuot, Chinese, and Japanese data all indicate appeasing the spirit of deceased relatives in order to prevent calamity from a vengeful spirit. While this is only one of several reasons for the practice of ghost marriage among the Atuot and Chinese, this reason is of primary importance to the Japanese. In examining the data presented by Schattschneider (2001) and van Bremen (1998), the primary focus of all explanations for ghost marriage offered both by the authors and the informants indicated that the appeasement of the spirit of the deceased individual was of primary importance in ghost marriages.

Property was the primary motive behind ghost marriages mentioned for the Nuer, Atuot, and ancient Greeks. For these groups, ghost marriage served as a way to enable the retention of property, be it cattle or land, within a patrilineal descent group. While there is a scarcity of information on the *epikleros* system mentioned by Ruhemann (1948), given how similar the practice is to the Nuer and Atuot variations, it may be inferred that this is the primary force propagating the practice among ancient Greek culture. In a society in which only males inherit property, only males need to produce heirs, while an unmarried woman has no property to pass on. While it is true that the Atuot also believe that ghost marriage serves to appease the spirit of unmarried men, there is no mention of appeasing the spirit of unmarried women. Finally, the Chinese and the Nuer were both listed as claiming that a reason to have a ghost marriage is to create inter-familial bonds. It should also be noted that among both African groups and the Chinese, a custom that required the marriage of an older brother

Marriage Pattern	Nuer	Atuot	Chinese	Japanese	Ancient Greeks
Deceased X Deceased			X		
Deceased X Living	X	X	X	X*	X
Deceased X Doll				X	

Table 2. The ghost marriage patterns.

\*The Japanese traditionally practiced ghost marriage between the living and the deceased, and the practice may still continue in Okinawa.

prior to the marriage of a younger brother also provided impetus for the practice of ghost marriage.

Table 2 provides a summary of the different types of ghost marriage practiced. The table shows that marriage between the deceased and the living is the most common form of ghost marriage. Additionally, it shows that both the Chinese and the Japanese practice forms of ghost marriage that have not been adopted by the Nuer or Atuot; marriage between two deceased individuals, and bride doll marriage.

In examining the data from Table 1, the factor that is present among the Nuer and the Atuot that is not present among either the Chinese or Japanese reasons for practicing ghost marriage is the maintenance of property within a patrilineal descent group. When considered in relation to property and inheritance, it makes intuitive sense for these forms of marriage to only be present when property inheritance is a primary factor. When two deceased individuals are married, there will be no heirs produced, nor are any likely to be brought in by the marriage. Likewise, with bride doll marriage heirs will not be produced. Therefore, as neither the Chinese nor the Japanese list property inheritance as a motive for ghost marriage, these cultures have room for variation in the form that ghost marriages take.

## Conclusions

As shown above, while ghost marriage is rare, it encompasses a broad spectrum of cultural practices. It can reside in the realm of the practical, such as among the Nuer and Atuot in that it provides a way for property to be maintained within a patrilineal kin group when a man has died without an heir. However, as seen in the Japanese case, it can also have a purely spiritual context.

While the data presented are quite interesting, I believe that there are many more interesting analyses that can be done in future studies. In her article on the Nuer, Singer (1973) argued for an increase in the female perspective in anthropological literature. I wholly agree, and

feel that the study of ghost marriage would benefit greatly from a feminist perspective. The women are treated rather passively in the descriptions of cases in which a living woman was married to a male ghost.

While the data presented here demonstrate some interesting trends, any statements about these trends cannot be completely conclusive given the scarcity of data. Only five societies were examined in this preliminary survey of societies practicing ghost marriage, and while it may be possible that there are no other societies practicing this rare form of marriage, it seems unlikely that this is the case. It is hoped that in the future additional sources of data will be added to the data compiled thus far to test some of the assumptions that were made in analyzing these data.

Finally, it is hoped that new research will be conducted to provide researchers with an update on where the practice of ghost marriage currently stands. Upon surveying the bibliography, it can be seen that many of the articles utilized come from prior to the 1980s, and it is possible that the practice of ghost marriage has died out in some of these cultures. Burton (1978) noted that the practice had been declining among the Atuat as they became more proficient at the cattle trade, and one cannot help but wonder if ghost marriage has survived the thirty year span since Burton did his research.

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