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# *Dalihan na Tolu* as a Bond of Social Cohesion

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## Abstract

The present paper tries to explore how a triangular social relationship works and why it has been maintained until now. By examining *dalihan na tolu* as a social foundation and by interviewing some figures of Mandailing's culture it is found out that the triangular relationship which is based on marriage consist of *kahanggi* (one or a group of people deriving from the same ancestor), *mora* (one or a group of people from whom the *kahanggi* gets a wife) *anak boru* (one or a group of people to whom the *kahanggi* gives a wife). The relationship among the members of *kahanggi* is based on intimacy, the relationship between *kahanggi* and his *mora* is based on *honour* and the relationship between *mora* and his *anak boru* is based on affection. The status of *mora* and *anak boru* is not fixed but it may change depending on the marriage condition. If one gives a daughter to somebody, he becomes a *mora* and if he takes a daughter from somebody else, he becomes an *anak boru*. Only the status of *kahanggi* which never changes. In this way the *dalihan natolu* social network becomes bigger and bigger and unites more and more people.

**Keywords:** *anak boru; dalihan na tolu; kahanggi; mora; triangular social relationship*

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## 1. Introduction

It is not unusual that an area is occupied by people of diversity. They may be different in ethnicity, religion, culture, language etc. Areas or countries where diverse people live are such as Canada, India, Malaysia and Indonesia, just to mention a few. At some areas people of diversity may live harmoniously, and peacefully. They are socially integrated. They establish unity in diversity. On the contrary, at some other areas there are continuous conflicts as between Israelis and Palestinians. Canada, Malaysia and Indonesia as multicultural countries are famous for the good social integration in those countries (Wikipedia). And India serves as an example of country where people of great diversity (caste, religion, language, ethnicity and culture) live harmoniously without serious conflicts (Roy,2011).

Mandailing, a district that belongs to Indonesia, is occupied by a number of different ethnic groups with similar language,culture and to a certain extent is also similar in religion, Islam. They are mainly different in ethnicity. The Mandailing society has since the past been united by *dalihan na tolu*.

*Dalihan na Tolu* which literally means ‘a fire place made of three stones’ is a metaphor showing a triangular relationship which originated from marriage in Mandailing society, a patrilineal society inhabiting the southern region of North Sumatra.

*Dalihan na Tolu* as a social foundation for Mandailing society was established by their ancestor’s long time ago and it survives and is still maintained by the members of the society at present. The aim of establishing *dalihan na tolu*, of course, to build a cohesive society. A society where elements of society such as individuals, groups, associations as well as territorial elements are integrated as viewed by Mc Cracken (1998).

The triangular relationship is formed by three parties, they are *kahanggi* (a group of people having blood relationship or descendants of the same ancestor), *mora* (a group of people from whom *the kahanggi* get their wife) and *anak boru* (a group of people to whom the *kahanggi* gives daughters or sisters as wife).

The three parties even though they are not derived from the same ancestor, but they are united by marriage. This triangular relationship is called *markoum marsisolkot* which means ‘being closely related’ (Lubis, 1993).

The present paper tries to address (1) how the triangular relationship is established and (2) how a cohesive relationship can be maintained based on the marriage-based triangular relationship.

## 2. An Overview of *Dalihan na tolu*-based relationship

It is believed that Mandailing is a sub-ethnic group of Batak, the origin of the five sub-ethnic groups that is Toba, Mandailing/Angkola, Karo and Pakpak/Dairi. Even though some disagree especially Mandailing’s Karo’s and Pakpak’s society members that they are related to Batak, but until now there have been no empirical evidences found which can support their disagreement. Even when we look at the social relationship system of the five sub-ethnic group, they have the same system although with different names. In Toba they call it *Dalihan na Tolu* as it is called in Mandailing/Angkola which consists of *dongan tubu*, *hula-hula* and *boru*, in Simalungun they call it *Tolu Sahundulan Lima Saodoran* which consists of *sanina*, *tondong* and *boru*, in Karo it

is called *Rakut si Telu* which consists of *senina*, *kalimbubu*, and *anak beru* and in Pakpak/Dairi it is called *Sulang Silima* which consists of *sinina*, *kula-kula* and *beru* (Nasution, 2005; Tarigan, 2016; Munthe, 2011; Natalia, (2015).

Unlike the Toba sub-ethnic group which has a lot of *margas* (clans) the sub-ethnic group of Mandailing has only dozens of marga such as Nasution, Lubis, Pulungan, Rangkuti, Parinduri, Lintang, Dalimunte, Tanjung, Batubara, Daulai, Matondang and Hasibuan (Lubis et al., 2017).

The *Dalihan na Tolu*-based relationship is laid on three different principles. The relationship among members of *kahanggi* should be based on closeness and intimacy. Since they are blood-related, one should treat another as his own brother even though they do not belong to the same parents but they are tied up by the same *marga* (clan). There is almost no taboo among them. They should not talk very politely as they should to their *mora* and they even can make a joke if they want.

The relationship between *kahanggi* and *mora* is based on honour. *Kahanggi* treats his *mora* as an honourable person. He must both speak and behave politely to his *mora*. *Mora* is viewed as the source of blessing

*Mora* is viewed metaphorically as the sun in the sky which cannot be stared at (*mata ni ari na so gakgahon*), a big tree as a hiding place (*banir na bolak parkolipan*), a lantern in the darkness and a walking stick in a slippery road (*sulu di na golap, tungkot di na landit*). While the relationship between *kahanggi* and his *anak boru* is based on affection. *Kahanggi* whose status as *mora* for his *anak boru* should love his *anak boru* (note that *anak boru* consists of the *kahanggi*'s married daughters and/or sisters with their husbands). As the *mora* of *anak boru*, *kahanggi* should not respect his *anak boru* as he does to his *mora*, but he should be polite and be kind to his *anak boru* even though he can ask his *anak boru* to do something for him, one thing which he cannot do to his *mora*. *Anak boru* must highly respect his *mora*. He must be responsible to keep the glory of his *mora*. When the *mora* asks him to do something, he may not (as it is impolite) reject it, he must obey his *mora*'s request. But on the other hand, if *anak boru* needs help (advice and material help) he can reveal it to his *mora*. *Anak boru* is metaphorically termed as *si horus na lobi si tamba na hurang* (Lubis, 1997) which genuinely means one who can make use of a surplus if there is any and will be responsible for a deficit (a surplus or deficit of material).

Status of *anak boru* and *mora* is not fixed. In other words, one can be an *anak boru* and a *mora* in other situations. (Nasution, 2005). Only the status of *kahanggi* which never changes since the members of *kahanggi* are tied up by the same blood or ancestor. If A marries a daughter of B, A becomes an *anak boru* of B and B is a *mora* of A. When B marries a daughter of C, B who is formerly a *mora* of A now he has become an *anak boru*, no longer a *mora* in relation to C.

The norm of the triangular relationship does not only function verbally, e.g. an *anak boru* should not speak impolitely or rudely to his *mora* but also non-verbally. For example, a son-in-law as a member of *anak boru* is not allowed to be close physically to his parent-in-law as his *mora*. On certain occasions, of course, like a work place one can be close to another physically such as when cutting down a big tree together or when planting rice at a rice field but the physical closeness occurs only during the work is progressing. When the situation becomes casual and with the presence of other people as in a coffee shop they should stay apart.

### 3. How the triangular relationship works

To make it clear of how the three parties are forming a unity; let us see how a big and important job like a wedding party is accomplished.

When a *suhut* (host) intends to have a wedding party as to marry off his son or daughter he must invite his *kahanggi*, *mora* and *anak boru* to have a prior meeting concerning with how the party will be hosted. The absence of one, two or the three sides cause the wedding plan to fail (The host or the family alone cannot host the party even though financially he can afford it but it is contrary to tradition (Lubis, 1993).

When the party is being held, the three parties (*kahanggi*, *mora* and *anak boru*) are present. Each has its own task. *Suhut* together with *kahanggi* functions as the organizer of the party, *anak boru* functions as worker (usually *anak boru* is responsible for tackling manual labour, inviting relatives and other guests to attend the party, cooking foods, arranging chairs, tables for the guests, washing dishes etc) and *mora*, as an honourable party functions as adviser and decision maker. They are not involved in manual labour.

The job description does not change even though the situation is not a traditional gathering. An *anak boru* should continually respect his *mora* anywhere and anytime. Conversely *mora* should care of and love his *anak boru* while members of *kahanggi* since they are originated from the same father or the same grand-father they build intimate relationship. They share both happiness and sadness. If one is in difficulty the others will directly come to support him and conversely when he has a good fortune, he will invite his *kahanggi* to share the fortune, they share the same fate.

As the system of *dalihan na tolu* directs how one will speak, behave and act towards another, for example how a son-in-law speaks to his father-in-law and vice versa, then a polite both verbal and non-verbal communication can run well.

In Mandailing tradition addressing someone using the person's personal name is less impolite. A polite way of addressing someone is by using a kinship term. For example, a son-in-law will address his father-in-law *tulang* and the father-in-law will address his son-in-law as *ba(bere)*. The address of *tulang* is not only used for his own father-in-law but also to all people (males only) whose status is similar to his father-in-law.

The use of kinship terms in addressing other people indicates that the speaker is aware of good manner and politeness. One will be regarded a kind and polite person if he/she is able to use the kinship terms appropriately even though to use kinship terms accurately is not easy and it should be learned especially when the genealogy is long and complicated.

Addressing someone by his/her name or the incorrect use of the kinship term indicates that the speaker is impolite, has broken the social norms, ill-mannered and neglect customs. Difference of age, for example between two brothers even though the difference is only one year but the use of kinship term as a polite form of address is still needed and practiced. The younger would address the elder *angkang* and the elder would address the younger *anggi*. Seniority is highly respected in Mandailing society. Ancestral seniority is regarded higher than the real age. For example, A is addressed as *angkang* by B (not *anggi*) since A's father is older than B's father but B's real age is older than A's.

It is believed that, or it is quite reasonable to believe that the use of kinship terms arouses sense of togetherness and intimacy and thus simultaneously avoids feeling of strangeness and rudeness.

#### 4. Discussion

As we have seen that the triangular relationship, *dalihan na tolu* can establish relationship based on intimacy (among the *kahanggi's members*), honour (between *kahanggi* and *mora*) and affection (between *mora* and *anak boru*).

Day by day the "social network" gets bigger and bigger. Any *marga* who takes a wife from *kahanggi* will become a new *anak boru* of the *kahanggi* and if the *kahanggi* takes any woman from a new *marga* the new *marga* becomes *mora* of the *kahanggi* and if *anak boru* gives a wife to a new *marga* the *anak boru* will become *mora* of the new *marga*. In this way *dalihan na tolu* network will become bigger and bigger. Thus, more and more people will fall into the *dalihan natolu* network. And as soon as the new comers merge with the *dalihan na tolu* they must follow the rules which prevail in the *dalihan na tolu*.

Another thing which can strengthen the triangular social relationship is that the preference for the kinship terms to personal names when addressing people. (Parlaungan et al., 2001). When one is addressed with a kinship term both the addresser and the addressee will know their status in the *dalihan na tolu* social relationship. They have known how they are related to each other and they will also know how to speak, to behave and to act to each other. Thus, feeling of familiarity and intimacy are built between them.

The purpose of marriage in Mandailing society is not only to unite the bride and the groom but also to unite the family and the relatives of both the bride and the groom. By this principle the family relationship of the married couple will grow and broaden. This is supported by a proverb: "*Maranak sapulu pitu and marboru sapulu onom*" which literally means 'to have 17 sons and to have 16 daughters'. The number 17 plus 16 metaphorically refer to the relatives of both the bride and the groom. So, a marriage will unite many people from the side of the bride and the groom.

There are other five proverbs which expect that a cohesive social relationship should be built according to Managor, a prominent Mandailing traditional figure. The first one is *Songon siala na sampagul rap tu ginjang rap tu toru muda magulang rap margulu muda malamun saulak lalu*. This proverb literally means 'Like a bunch of *siala*<sup>1</sup>, they rise up and fall down together, when they fall and roll down, they get stained together and when time comes, they become ripe together'. This proverb shows togetherness both in a happy and an unhappy condition. One should care about the others. One should not come and visit him when he is in a happy condition only.

The second one is *Pantun hangoluan teas hamatean*. This proverb means if you are polite to other people, they will behave politely to you but if you are rude to other people, they will behave rudely to you as well. So,

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<sup>1</sup> *Siala* is a kind of fruit of tropical climate which grows in a bunch to form a rounded unity. These approximately thumb-sized pieces of fruit contain hard skin and meat inside which taste sour. They are usually used as ingredients for cooking.

the way we behave to other people may affect our relationship to them. Therefore, politeness can strengthen relationship and conversely rudeness can break good relationship.

The third one is *Tampar marsipagodangan ulang sayat marsipamenehan* (Literally 'to hit (something) to make it swollen not to slice something to make it deflated). This proverb means one should intend to support the others, to make them grow, not to make them smaller or to ruin them.

Another good proverb (the fourth one) which expects us to build friendships with friends is '*Monang mangalo musu talu mangalo dongan*' which literally means 'To win against enemies, but to lose against friends'. This proverb means that if we have a fight with enemies they must be defeated or we must win the fight but conversely a fight with friends should be avoided. It is wise to avoid a conflict with friends or relatives since it is useless to have a conflict with people who are close to us. As we often see that a conflict often happens between two individuals who are closely related even between two persons who have blood relation. This kind of conflict should not happen or should be avoided because there will be more disadvantages than advantages of it.

And the fifth proverb which advises the society to take care of the others but to throw away one's own egoistic feeling sounds: "*Bege di siriaon tangi di siluluton*" (Literally to hear one's happy news but to listen to one's sad news). This principle means that one should take care of difficulties experienced by other people, for example when one gets a misfortune like an accident or when losing one of his family members, when he knows about that he should come to support or to cheer up the mourners materially or mentally even though he is not informed formally. On the other hand, he should not expect to have a share of other people's good fortune as a wish to participate in or to attend a merry occasion like a wedding party. He would come to the party only if he is invited. He should not come if he is not invited. This proverb shows that care of the others should be grown up in our heart while egoistic or subjective feeling should be minimized. Again, as we often see that many people do not care of other people's sufferings but they will feel unhappy if they are not invited to an occasion which is not really related to them.

## 5. Conclusion

*Da lihan na tolu* as a triangular social relationship can create and strengthen cohesion of social relationship. The marriage-based social relationship forms a triangular relationship among the three groups of people: *kahanggi*, *mora* and *anak boru*. The members of *kahanggi* (people of the same ancestor) should build and maintain relationship based on intimacy among them. *Anak boru* should build and maintain relationship with his *mora* based on *honour* and *mora* should build and maintain relationship with his *anak boru* based on affection.

The three kinds of relationship can continue since each party has its own function in the system of *dalihan na tolu*. It means that overlapping function does not occur. The relationship can become intimate and harmonious because interaction between one and another is facilitated by politeness and good manner (use of kinship terms in both verbal and non-verbal interaction). And there are five well-known proverbs used in the society which support social unity and avoid separation.



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