

Review of: "Hanging on a Rope: The Current Triangular to Pentagonal Kinship Transformation in Simalungunese"

Antonio J. Bonome¹

¹ Universidad de La Coruña

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This article looks at a contemporary phenomenon, i.e., kinship transformation in Simalungunese, using criteria from both anthropological structuralism (Levi Strauss) and social anthropology. Transformation in kinship is described therein as a “renewal process” affecting both social and economic aspects that might yet suffer other radical transformations in the future.

The authors introduce all the key concepts in the introduction section and use the trope “Hanging on a Rope” as an image that recurs throughout the article to depict the power of ritual in fixing dysfunction in social structures. They also introduce an evolution in the study of kinship across disciplines during the last few decades. They detect a palpable shift from a purely anthropological focus on kinship towards social anthropological interpretations of said subject. They glean a triangular reading on kinship from Levi Strauss and use it as a springboard to describe a pentagonal structure, which, according to them, depicts kinship more accurately in the population studied. The differences in origin and purpose of both structures are clearly described in this section of the paper. Despite the lack of current specific literature on this topic, the authors make their best effort to provide contemporary sources that might support by analogy their thesis, thus engaging in a line of research that is both innovative and creative.

The next section reviews the literature about the topic under discussion; it also confirms a shift in perspective across disciplines and categorises such a shift into either classical or neoclassical studies. The authors intend to fill in the gaps they detect in both categories—gaps that obeyed many radical changes during the last decades that occurred in the population studied, which comes as a logical premise. Such a premise is partially grounded in a re-conceptualization of kinship that has been present in scholarship since the 1980s, and the authors provide sources that support their claim. A thorough literary review follows the prior section, where the methodology is also outlined. Sources are critically evaluated, and said methodology includes not only bibliographical methods but also fieldwork.

The discussion or body of the article furthers the topics suggested in the abstract by examining data collected during fieldwork and providing images that illustrate the topic in discussion. The authors also provide diagrams to further illustrate the transformation of triangular to pentagonal kinship in the population examined, which fills a gap in the literature examined regarding kinship in that specific territory.

In the last section, the authors reveal one further shift in focus from social to cultural anthropology within postmodernist perspectives, and they suggest examining such development in further studies. A more critical evaluation of the validity of

ritual and pentagonal kinship under current societal transformations in the population studied would have been in point here. With that said, this is a well-researched, properly organised, and innovative article that provides valuable information on how kinship and ritual should be further studied because of current economic and social transformations.