

Böliböli as a model of consolation in the study of archipelagic community identity and Christian traditions of consolation, philosophy, and the culture of Hulo Batu, Indonesia

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Abstract: This article explores the *böliböli* of Hulo Batu as a model of Christian consolation distinctive to Indonesia's archipelagic context, analyzing it through the lenses of Christian and philosophical traditions of consolation. To this purpose, the author employs a qualitative method involving a literature review of Aholiab Watloly's concept of the archipelagic self; Boethius's philosophical theology of consolation; and Christian traditions found in the narratives of Job and the Psalms. The study also uses Christoph Jedan's contemporary model of the theology of consolation to enrich the construction of the Hulo Batu-specific theology of consolation. The study reveals that *böliböli* embodies a four-axis function of consolation that aligns with Christian, philosophical, and local Hulo Batu cultural traditions. This article matters because it addresses tensions among cultural traditions, philosophy, and Christianity within the community. The research suggests valuing community identity and celebrating the diversity of consolation traditions in Indonesia.

Keywords: archipelagic community, *böliböli*, Christianity, comfort, consolation, Hulo Batu, identity, Nias Islands

Introduction

Humans are beings capable of experiencing grief—a universal phenomenon associated with all forms of loss, such as the death of a loved one.¹ Therefore, traditions of consolation serve to address the struggles of those who are grieving. These traditions exist across cultures, including the Hulo Batu tradition, and play an essential role in soothing grief. Conversely, without such consolation, individuals risk becoming trapped in helplessness through prolonged grief.²

¹ Mai-Britt Guldina and Carlo Lege, "The Integrated Process Model of Loss and Grief - An Interprofessional Understanding," *Death Studies* 48, no. 7 (2024): 738–752, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07481187.2023.2272960#d1e125>.

² Maria Nieves Canal Fernández, *Consolation Narratives in the 15th Century: Récits de consolation et consolations du récit* (University of Michigan, 2015). 42-47

The tradition of offering consolation has long existed within both philosophical and religious traditions. The question, however, is whether the tradition of consolation found in a particular culture aligns with the philosophical or religious traditions shared by the community. Often, these traditions are viewed as conflicting, meaning the consolation offered does not fully aid those who are grieving or in sorrow.

The traditions of offering consolation across communities are highly diverse and merit further exploration. Among the people of Hulo Batu, these traditions distinctively reflect the self-conception and identity of an island community. This characteristic is evident in their modes of remembrance and social interaction. In this article, the author highlights a consolation model originating from Hulo Batu, namely *böliböli*.

Several previous studies have examined consolation. First, Christoph Jedan has classified consolation into various models. Second, Michael Ignatieff has also written about consolation, drawing on the history of the Christian tradition and philosophy. In this article, the author uses Jedan and Ignatieff's ideas to analyze *böliböli* in Hulo Batu. Previous research on *böliböli* has also been conducted; notably, Wirnayanti Hondrö and her colleagues authored a paper titled "Makna Peribahasa dalam Lirik Lagu *Böliböli* di Kecamatan Pulau-Pulau Batu, Kabupaten Nias Selatan."³ This article contains the meaning of proverbs in the *böliböli*. Second, Digna Victoria Manaö has written a script titled "Memaknai Kembali Böliböli Sebagai Medium Penghiburan Berdasarkan Perspektif Pewartaan Kristiani di Hulo Batu".⁴ In her script, Manaö emphasizes the function of the *böliböli*, which nowadays appears to serve merely as a medium of entertainment. She reinforces the *böliböli*'s role as a source of consolation and a medium for proclamation. However, no research has linked *böliböli* to the island community's self-concept or to its specific function of consolation. The novelty is that *böliböli* embodies a four-axis function of consolation rooted in the Hulo Batu self-concept. This concept aligns with both Christian tradition and philosophy.

This article is organized into three parts. The first part examines the tradition of consolation within Hulo Batu culture as a self-concept characteristic of Indonesian archipelagic communities. The second part discusses models of consolation based on Christian tradition and philosophy. The third part explores *böliböli* as a source for a Christian theology of consolation, enriched by a four-axis function of consolation. The author argues that *böliböli* embodies a four-axis function of consolation that aligns with philosophical and Christian traditions while reflecting the identity of an archipelagic community grounded in hope in Christ.

This study uses a qualitative method, drawing on a literature review to examine existing concepts and models of consolation. The analysis of the archipelagic community's self-concept draws upon the theory of Aholiab Watloly. The author also explores various models of the theology of consolation found in Christian traditions—specifically through the narratives of Job and the Psalms—as well as in the philosophy of Boethius. Additionally, the author interviewed key figures: *böliböli* chanters Asirina Manaö and Kalina Hao. The research reveals that *böliböli* constitutes a form of consolation rooted in the community's inner energy,

³ Wirnayanti Hondrö, Martiman S. Sarumaha, and Kalvintinus Ndruru, "Makna Peribahasa Dalam Lirik Lagu *Böliböli* Di Kecamatan Pulau-Pulau Batu, Kabupaten Nias Selatan" (Telukdalam, 2022).

⁴ Digna Victoria Manaö, "Memaknai Kembali Böliböli Sebagai Medium Penghiburan Berdasarkan Perspektif Pewartaan Kristiani Di Hulo Batu" (Sundermann Theological Seminary, 2026).

reflecting the self-concept of the Hulo Batu people. Models of consolation have long existed within Christian tradition and philosophy, and their functions align with those of *böliböli*. Consolation through *böliböli* involves chanting that transcends written documentation; the process disseminates the island community's inner energy, offering mutual comfort following the death of a member. Thus, *böliböli* serves as a theological source of consolation for the Hulo Batu Christian community, manifesting their self-concept and identity as a community that remembers and places their hope in Christ.

Böliböli: The tradition of consolation as a self-concept of the Hulo Batu community

Archipelagic communities possess a unique identity. Aholiab Watloly outlines several conceptual frameworks regarding the self-identity of island communities.⁵ First, archipelagic communities possess a binary self-concept—one characterized by the interconnection and synergy between the individual self and the community selves. This self-concept is internalized, embodied in character, and preserved in memory. It binds each individual to the unity of their community. It emphasizes a need for every individual to have a personal space where they are uniquely remembered within that community. Second, archipelagic communities are founded upon a social-customary logic—discernible in various symbols, emblems, and systemic philosophies—that links the human body with the natural world. Third, these societies are built upon an existential awareness that actively shapes thought, emotion, and behavior in the effort to sustain life on the island. Fourth, the self-concept manifests through diverse living traditions experienced as a space of totality on the inhabited island; within this social sphere, the community possesses an inner energy—expressed through a distinctive “voicing” that serves as a way of life—imbued with profound meaning and a warm, heartfelt quality.⁶

Hulo Batu is an island group located in the southern part of the Nias Islands. It has a unique and distinctive local tradition known as *böliböli*, a form of chanted consolation. During a *böliböli* performance, a group of people offers comfort by recounting the life story of a recently deceased person. The practice involves chanting the deceased's life history, which encompasses stories of their struggles, suffering, poverty, and the limitations they faced throughout their lifetime. This tradition is unique because among communities of the Nias Islands, only Hulo Batu practices this specific form of chanted lamentation.

Another consolation tradition in the Nias Islands is known as *hoho*; Oinike N. Harefa has highlighted this tradition in her writings.⁷ Harefa writes,

To deal with suffering and human vulnerability, there is a lament tradition of the Niasan people to deal with it, namely *hoho*. According to Johannes M. Hämmerle, *hoho* is a reflective song about human life and death, and it is also an expression of the audacity of a willingness to live.⁸ As a kind of local wisdom, *hoho* is the source of strength in the process of lament. *Hoho*

⁵ Aholiab Watloly, “Konsep Diri Masyarakat Kepulauan,” *Jurnal Filsafat* 22, no. 2 (2012): 121–41.

⁶ Watloly.

⁷ Oinike Natalia Harefa, “Hoho: From the Meaning-Making Tradition of Niasan People Towards Theopoetic Spirituality,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 37, no. 2 (2023): 200–213.

⁸ Johannes Hammerle, *Lawaendrona: Si Pencari Kehidupan Abadi Hingga Ke Bulan* (Gunungsitoli: Yayasan Pusaka Nias, 2013), xiv.

is the meaning-making life process. This search for the meaning of life is not new for Niasan people. It has been a part of the spirituality of the local community for a long time.⁹

Hoho differs from *böliböli*. *Hoho* reflects on life and death, serving as a process of finding deep meaning in existence; its content focuses on contemplating the significance of life and death. In contrast, *böliböli* is a verbal narrative commemorating the deceased, intended to comfort the community and encourage it to remain forward-looking in the wake of grief. Another distinction is that *hoho* is not chanted in the same manner as *böliböli*. Although both provide consolation, the differences between them are significant. *Böliböli* is a distinctive tradition from Hulo Batu.

Famoni Nehe, a traditional leader (*Si'ulu*) in Bawoofulua, posits that *böliböli* is an oral tradition unique to the Hulo Batu people. Philosophically, it is a form of *nenunenu* (lamentation) that offers spiritual strength to those enduring suffering and loss.¹⁰ According to him, this tradition emerged in the 1880s as a response to the suffering and limitations of life experienced by the local community. At the time, most people worked as farmers and sailors with very low welfare. These limiting conditions make people reflect on their fate, lament, and find inner strength, which they express through the *böliböli* tradition.

People practice *böliböli* in funeral homes. There is no specific time to do *böliböli*. Visitors can practice it in the morning, afternoon, or evening. The main reciter leads this tradition and can recite someone's life history and know *manömanö* (parables). Several people follow the main reciter, becoming *sifagemagama* (the re-tellers). Anyone can follow the practice of *böliböli*, men and women alike. In practice, the main poet recites the deceased's life narrative, including suffering, life's struggles, a good way of life, and relationships with the surrounding environment and with God. The aim is to strengthen bereaved families and mourners.¹¹

Two concepts are linked to the meaning of consolation. The first is grieving; grief relates to the subjective internal feelings of sorrow (an affective state). The second is mourning—a form of social expression and ritualization of inner sorrow within a community that supports a fragile inner state.¹² *Böliböli* is a dual expression: both a lament and an act of mourning. It is not merely a subjective, individual lament, but a form of mourning that serves as a social expression and a ritualization of inner grief. Consequently, several people recite *böliböli* continuously. The main chanters are people familiar with the deceased's life story. Through their chanting, they give voice to their grief over the loss of a loved one while simultaneously engaging in a form of communal mourning. Consolation comes from standing in solidarity with those who are suffering and giving them strength.¹³ One form of *böliböli* recounts the deceased's harsh life journey—for instance, the poverty, suffering, oppression, and struggles they endured. An example of a *böliböli* passage is as follows:¹⁴

Ba lau ba böliböli ... da, böliböli da, ba ina e

(This is böliböli...mother)

Ba lau ba itörö sui tödöda, ba lau ba no ina e

(We are reminiscing about mother again)

⁹ Harefa, "Hoho: From the Meaning-Making Tradition of Niasan People Towards Theopoetic Spirituality."

¹⁰ Famoni Nehe, *Interview*, Bawoofulua, 30 Maret 2026.

¹¹ Nehe, *Interview*.

¹² Christophe Andre, *Consolation* (Paris: L'Iconoclaste, 2022). 1-2

¹³ Anne-Dauphine Julliand, *Consolation* (Guy Saint-Jean Éditeur, 2021). 1-7, 89-90

¹⁴ The Lyric of *böliböli* written by Digna Victoria Manaö based on an interview with Asirina Manaö; interview conducted by the author in Bawoofulua, Sunday, April 5, 2026.

Lau ba bawofanö ninadande, ba wofanö ninadande
 (Because mother has gone, mother has gone)
 Ba mairöi ita ö nö e, ba ma iröi ita ö nö
 (Mother has left us.)
 Iröi ba waideide, iröi ita ba waideide
 (Mother left us when we were still small children.)
 Ba wa iregerege dödöni'a ba wohalöwö dö e ba wa'aurini'a nö
 (Mother has gone through a lot of suffering during her life)
 Itaha jino, ba itaha deu ba itaha wa'olofo ba wohalöwönö'e
 (Mother knows no scorching heat, rain, or storms.)
 Itaha löna mana ba wanalui soguna khö ndaono nia ma'e
 (A mother is willing to go hungry to meet her children's needs.)
 Ba lau ba no... iröi
 (Now, mother has left us)
 Ba lau ba löna nifaogöfaogö fefu wa'amarase nia ba wohalöwö nia he
 (Of all the toil and hardship Mother has borne and endured throughout her life.)
 Hataö sambulu baru nidoro nia hataö sagötö eu, lau döfa tanö e
 (Nothing was included with the mother, only clothes, a coffin, and a plot for the grave.)

Applying Watloly's perspective reveals the self-concept of people in the Hulo Batu as reflected in the death rites of the *böliböli* tradition. First, the Hulo Batu possess a binary self-concept—one characterized by the interconnection and synergy between the individual and the community. *Böliböli* serves as both a personal and communal space for commemorating the deceased. The following narrative depicts an individual lamenting the passing of a mother; for the Hulo Batu, a mother is a mother not only to her own family but to the community as a whole:

Ba lau ba itörö sui tödöda, ba lau ba no ina e
 (We are reminiscing about mother again.)
 Lau ba bawofanö ninadande, ba wofanö ninadande
 (Because Mother has gone, mother has gone.)

Second, the Hulo Batu community is built on socio-customary ratios typical of archipelagic communities. This is expressed in the *böliböli*, which accepts death as part of the natural process and is expressed through communal mourning. The phrase "mother is gone," repeated many times, emphasizes their existential awareness that their mother is truly gone.

Hataö sambulu baru nidoro nia hataö sagötö eu, lau döfa tanö e
 (Nothing was included with the mother, only clothes, a coffin, and a plot for the grave.)

Such is the passing of a mother: she leaves behind everything she possessed on this earth—save for a simple garment, a coffin, and the plot of land that serves as her final resting place. This aspect also reminds us of the transience of human life on earth; whatever one owns will eventually be left behind, including one's children.

Third, the Hulo Batu community is founded upon awareness of existence—an awareness that actively shapes the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors required to sustain life on the island. Consequently, within the *böliböli* narrative tradition, stories recounting an individual's struggle for survival are vital; they ensure the community remembers that person's fight to live on the island and the role they played within the community. The following narrative illustrates the struggles a mother faced during her lifetime. A mother willingly makes

sacrifices for her children; this account also reminds all mothers in the community of their role as givers of life.

Ba wa iregerege dödönia ba wohalöwö dö e ba wa'aurinia nö
 (Mother has gone through a lot of suffering during her life)
 Itaha jino, ba itaha deu ba itaha wa'olofo ba wohalöwönö e
 (Mother endures the rain and hunger to work)
 Itaha löna mana ba wanalui soguna khö ndaono nia ma'e
 (A mother is willing to go hungry to meet her children's needs.)

Fourth, the Hulo Batu community possesses a lived tradition experienced as a space of totality on the island they inhabit. A distinctive tradition of vocal expression is manifested through the chanting of *böliböli*.

Within the social sphere, the Hulo Batu community harbors an inner energy that finds expression through *böliböli*. During death rituals, this inner energy emerges as consolation and (verbal) remembrance that transcends mere documentation. As it is chanted, the energy of grief over the loss permeates both personal and social spaces, serving as a source of consolation and a means of strengthening the community that has lost one of its members.

Models of consolation based on Christian tradition and philosophy

Offering consolation is an act of sharing in suffering or mutually strengthening one another to bear a burden. Such comfort aims to enable the person being comforted to move forward with life and regain the conviction that life is worth living.¹⁵ Consolation was once a subject of philosophy—a discipline that teaches how to live and die. It also became part of Christian theology through texts containing narratives of consolation.

In this article, the author presents two examples of the theology of consolation: one from the Christian tradition and the other from philosophy. The first is the theology of consolation in the Christian tradition, found in the narratives of Job and the Psalms. The second is consolation in the philosophical tradition, as seen in Boethius' narrative.

Consolation in the Narrative of Job and the Psalms

Grief can become an individual's sole obsession. Job's grief was of this sort; he was inconsolable, consumed entirely by thoughts of himself and his plight. Accepting the reality that God is incomprehensible and unknowable, Job held fast to his innocence while accepting God's inscrutable word. In Job's narration, consolation may not require an admission of guilt, yet it demands repentance and acceptance.¹⁶

In Job's story, God demands absolute obedience as a condition for comfort. God also demands faithfulness to the truth. Job refuses to admit guilt. He insists on being acknowledged as innocent—by God and by his false comforters. Thus, Job lives within a paradox: on one hand, he remains faithful to God, while on the other, he demands justice. By demanding justice, Job demonstrates his conviction that justice can be realized in this world and that God has the power to grant it. Ultimately, Job's story teaches that while obedience brings comfort,

¹⁵ Michael Ignatief, *On Consolation: Finding Consolation in a Dark Times* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 2021).

¹⁶ Ignatief, 20.

self-alienation and a lack of faith in God bring none.¹⁷ Comfort comes from God beyond all forms of human strength.¹⁸

The story of Job conveys that human beings are destined to endure sorrow, whose meaning is not apparent while the suffering unfolds. If we were to find ourselves in suffering and could already discern its meaning, we would truly be beyond all comfort. Therefore, like Job, we must learn to persevere, hold fast to the truth of our faith, and reject false consolations—such as the belief that we deserve to suffer.¹⁹ In time, Job found comfort. According to Sameer Yadav, the comfort he eventually found lay in restoring bonds of fellowship with his fellow human beings.²⁰

The Book of Psalms also contains lament and consolation. Psalm 13:2 reads, “How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?” (NRSV). The psalmist does not doubt God’s existence, and this distinguishes the nature of his sorrow. He grieves, yet finds consolation while waiting—amidst his doubts—for a sign of God’s grace. The psalmist’s doubt can liberate us from spiritual nostalgia—the feeling that there was once a world we can never recover. The Psalms help us understand that humanity never had a time when it possessed unwavering faith in God, free from the intrusion of doubt and sorrow. Doubt is not a sign of a lack of faith; rather, it tests and deepens faith. A life of faith should feel like a test of human resilience. If we find our faith running dry, the Psalms encourage us not to fear despair. By acknowledging despair, the Psalms teach us hope’s true meaning. This spirit drives us to strive for a life lived in hope. Psalm 30:5 reads, “...weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning” (NRSV).

In a modern world rife with disbelief, ancient texts like the Book of Job and the Psalms continue to offer strength and comfort. These books possess an extraordinary capacity to address human doubts regarding the baffling nature of the world, the absence of justice, the cruelty of fate, and the longing for a world where one can find validation and meaning. The fact that these books—thousands of years old—are still read, copied, and rescued from the flames affirms that believers are not alone in their quest for meaning in this world.

Consolation in the Narrative of Boethius

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480–525 AD) came from an ancient Roman family that had served as consul to emperors and popes for centuries.²¹ Boethius’s father had served as a Roman consul. After his father’s death, Boethius was orphaned and adopted by Quintus Aurelius Memmius Symmachus, the head of the Roman Senate. Boethius received an education grounded in the finest classical works and quickly gained a reputation for exceptional intelligence. Among his equally well-educated peers, his intellect set him apart as *primus inter pares*. By the year 510 AD, at the age of thirty, he had been awarded the honorary title of consul, just as his father had been.²²

Although Boethius held a high-ranking position in the kingdom, his heart remained set on his studies. Whenever he had spare time, he worked in Rome’s library. He studied the

¹⁷ Ignatief, 21.

¹⁸ Maurice Lamm, *Consolation The Spiritual Journey Beyond Grief* (The Jewish Publication Society, 2004). 103-107

¹⁹ Ignatief, 22.

²⁰ Sameer Yadav, “A Joban Theology of Consolation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 117, no. 2 (2024): 181–203.

²¹ Ignatief., 69.

²² George Colville, *Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy* (London: Chiswick Press, 1556), x.

works of Cicero and Seneca and eagerly sought to translate the complete writings of Aristotle and Plato into Latin. By doing so, Boethius hoped to ensure the continuity of philosophical learning. Ultimately, however, he completed only a small fraction of these translations, as he was constantly called back to serve the king.

Boethius may have seen his public life as fulfilling Plato's ideal that rulers should be guided by philosophers. He might even have dreamed of one day becoming a philosopher-leader himself. Whatever his motives, Boethius's life was marked by success. In 522, he became *magister officiorum*—the head of the royal household—effectively serving as the king's prime minister and chief civil servant.²³

The situation reversed when barbarian kings finally conquered the Romans. These kings treated Roman nobles—Boethius included—as mere servants of their whims. They mocked Boethius's intellect and imposed thankless tasks upon him, even while he was expected to fulfill his duties as a royal consul. Boethius did not hesitate to rebuke these rulers as they plundered Italy, enriched themselves, and neglected to feed a populace heavily dependent on Rome's grain supply.

Boethius was ultimately imprisoned for challenging the barbarian kings' political authority. As a political prisoner, he drew on philosophical insights about consolation to endure and accept life's hardships. Boethius was a successor to the Greek and Roman philosophical traditions; he also lived within the Christian tradition and was deeply familiar with the Pauline epistles and the Psalms. Within him, these traditions converged like tributary streams: the rich classical heritage and the Christian faith he embraced.

Boethius's consolation, like the Psalms and the Book of Job, is an unflinching portrait of a radical crisis of faith afflicting a man who now actively wonders whether his burden would be easier to bear if he understood God. Ignatieff quotes from Boethius's writings as follows:

I am utterly amazed that ... punishments for crime oppress good people, and that evil people snatch away the rewards owed to virtues. And in fact, I would be less amazed at this were I to believe that all things are confused together by chance occurrences happening at random. But as it is now, the God who is the helmsman makes my incomprehension that much greater. Hope is not placed in God in vain, and prayers are not made in vain, for if they are the right kind, they cannot but be efficacious. Avoid vice, therefore, and cultivate virtue; lift your mind to the right kind of hope and put forth humble prayers on high. A great necessity is laid upon you, if you will be honest with yourself, a great necessity to be good, since you live in the sight of a judge who sees all things.²⁴

Boethius's writings consoled him after he had endured various painful phases of life as a political prisoner. Spiritual exercises enabled him to gain mastery over his inner world, allowing him to come to terms with his imprisonment. Boethius's comfort also stemmed from his integrity and moral character.²⁵ Amidst an era of moral decline and a court environment rife with corruption, there is compelling reason to believe that he steadfastly upheld his integrity in both his public and private life. This strength of integrity is further underscored by the hope that the integrity and noble character he maintained until his death would not be in vain.

²³ Ignatieff, *On Consolation: Finding Consolation in a Dark Times.*, 69.

²⁴ Ignatieff., 74-75

²⁵ Colville, *Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy*, xix.

Questions arise regarding Boethius's writings on consolation as he faced the harrowing moment of his execution. Some wonder whether his own words could offer him comfort once he knew he was to die. Boethius wrote about consolation to discover one's true self through hardship. What about his own approaching death? Was that consolation futile? Boethius did not write merely for himself; he protected the hope that future generations would remember who he was through his writings.

Consolation is intended for those living amidst injustice and misfortune. The stories of Job, the Psalms, and Boethius are narratives of human beings enduring suffering—even when that suffering leads to death. While the stories of Job and Boethius are heroic tales, they also represent journeys of faith and conviction; they require philosophical reasoning to cultivate the inner strength needed to bear suffering, injustice, and death. Ultimately, the lives of Job and Boethius serve as sources of strength and consolation within both the Christian tradition and philosophy.

Models of Consolation

Society today recognizes several models and methods of consolation. Christoph Jedan classifies consolation into three models.²⁶ The first model is the metaphysical and moral model. This model posits that human suffering arises from the discrepancy between human expectations, interests, and goals and the reality of the world that must be faced. Worldly reality does not always align with human interests, desires, and objectives. This contrast between expectation and reality often gives rise to human suffering. Consolation responds to the suffering caused by such discrepancies and contradictions. The aim of consolation within the metaphysical and moral model is to eliminate this discrepancy and foster a reconciling identity.

Hans T. Weyhofen argues that this discrepancy can be resolved in two ways.²⁷ The first approach involves aligning one's interests, desires, and goals with the world as it truly is. The second approach entails rejecting what the world offers by transforming one's perspective toward eschatological hope. Metaphysical and moral models of consolation appear, for instance, in treatises and sermons that articulate a therapeutic worldview to comfort the suffering. These metaphysical models appear in both philosophical and Christian traditions. The narratives of consolation in the Book of Job, the Psalms, and the works of Boethius fall under this first model. The second model is that of biographical memorialization. This model focuses on "alienation" and "communion." Regarding alienation, Marcel Mauss argues,

We live in a society where there is a marked distinction (although nowadays the distinction themselves now criticize this distinction) between real and personal law, between things and persons. This distinction is fundamental; it is the very condition of part of our system of property, alienation, and exchange.²⁸

On the other hand, Mauss argues that deep within human beings lies a universal fellowship revealed through a global sense of "us" (communion). In this model, suffering is

²⁶ Christoph Jedan, "What Is Consolation? Towards a New Conceptual Framework," in *Consolationscapes in the Face of Loss Grief and Consolation in Space and Time*, ed. Christoph Jedan, Avril Maddrell, and Eric Venbrux (New York: Routledge, 2019).

²⁷ Hans T. Weyhofen, *Trost: Modelle Des Religiösen Und Philosophischen Trostes Und Ihre Beurteilung Durch Die Religionskritik* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1983), 249-252.

²⁸ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Cohen and West, 1966), 46-47.

an existential loneliness—an alienation of the sufferer from themselves and from communion with others, the world, or a transcendent source of meaning. Consequently, consolation within the memorialization model requires restoring communion from this state of alienation; it entails a shift in the sufferer's perception of the world—specifically, accepting suffering as an existential condition. While this can occur in silence, dialogue plays a crucial role, allowing one's suffering to be articulated and shared with others. In the modern era, one avenue for consolation is (auto)biographical memorialization. Biographies and memoirs serve as remarkable paths to consolation in modern times. A biography preserves an individual's uniqueness; its very existence presupposes an acknowledgment of individual grief and keeps memory alive. Boethius's narrative, written in a biographical form, can also be categorized under this model.

The third model is professional consolation. This model addresses the alleviation of individual grief that neither the metaphysical model nor the biographical memorialization model resolve. In "normal" cases, the bereaved can cope with loss in their own way, drawing upon spiritual resources and social networks comprising family and close friends. Professional consolation emerges as a bridge between these categories and simultaneously as a source of support: practitioners are professional therapists—trained in medicine, psychoanalysis, or psychology—who offer "healing conversations" to address pathological or complicated grief. However, one must not underestimate the time this process requires—a development that must be fully realized. In its early stages, "therapeutic conversation" was an elite phenomenon; it was time-consuming. The emergence of professionalized consolation coincided with rising prosperity and higher levels of general education. Terms such as "coping", "resilience", and "process" became new keywords in the field of professional consolation. A characteristic genre of this new type of consolation is the grief handbook—a resource useful for professional counselors but also accessible to a wider audience. Ideally, these handbooks are updated periodically to incorporate new findings. Grieving individuals are expected to complete four tasks: accepting the reality of the loss, processing the pain of grief, adjusting to the reality of the world, and forging a new relationship with themselves and their community. Professional therapists understand the grieving process and can help clients complete these tasks if they get stuck along the way.

Through these three models of consolation, grieving individuals are expected to overcome their sorrow. Metaphysical and moral models are often found in the consolation traditions of religion and philosophy, including interpretations of the Book of Job, the Psalms, and Boethius's writings. The biographical memorialization model is found in modern society, exemplified by biographical writings about individuals. Among certain traditional ethnic groups, memorialization models have long existed through artifacts and oral narratives. Meanwhile, the professional consolation model is carried out by experts who have undergone the necessary education and acquired the skills to help others move beyond their grief.

Böliböli as a source of Christian theology of consolation

Consolation rooted in religion is an important process because religion offers several significant elements.²⁹ First, consolation rooted in religion represents a human encounter with

²⁹ D. Klass, "Grief, Consolation, and Religions: A Conceptual Framework," *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 69, no. 1 (2014): 1–18.

transcendent reality. *Böliböli* is an indigenous tradition in Hulo Batu that offers traditional consolation, born of the existential reflections of people living in an archipelagic community. It would be a pity to reduce the *böliböli* narrative to mere entertainment. Given its noble purpose of providing consolation, this tradition could be enriched by Christian consolation. Texts from the Book of Job and the Psalms, for instance, could be incorporated into the narrative of the deceased's life story as they are reflected upon and recited. This narrative encompasses how the individual, during their lifetime, bore witness to the God in whom they believed as a Christian. *Böliböli* can even serve as a medium for witnessing to God. An individual's journey of faith and spirituality is also part of their life story and their encounter with transcendent reality—namely, the Triune God in whom they believed within the Christian tradition.

Secondly, consolation is a human perspective on the world that forms the foundation of our individual life narratives. The Hulo Batu people hold a metaphysical worldview. Death is accepted as an existential reality; for those who have embraced Christianity, the prospect of life after death offers genuine comfort to the community.

Thirdly, consolation rooted in religion is lived out within a community where transcendent realities, worldviews, and personal experiences are validated. As an island society with a binary concept of self, individual identity cannot be separated from the community's collective self-conception. Confronting death can challenge both a person's sense of self and their understanding of the world around them.³⁰ A failure to provide comfort can lead to an identity crisis.³¹ In Christianity, living in fellowship constitutes a communal identity. Thus, living in fellowship aligns with the Hulo Batu community's self-conception.

Böliböli: Four-axis consolation function

Enriched by Christian tradition, *böliböli*—as a source of a theology of comfort—can be further enhanced through a four-axis function of comfort.³² The first axis is *böliböli* as a mechanism for managing grief. This function tends to presuppose a negative view of grief in general—or, more specifically, of grief that is excessive and uncontrolled. Persistent and uncontrollable grief can be soul-destroying; therefore, grief requires regulation. Managing grief also concerns the relationship between the individual and the community. In certain societies, grief is socially constructed and can thus be tempered. Existential grief is understood to be within the control of the grieving person. In the Hulo Batu community, *böliböli* functions as consolation that embraces both the personal and the communal. By recalling the lives of the deceased, people find consolation through expressing and regulating grief.

The second axis is *böliböli* as an effort to endure suffering, drawing upon the inner energy of both the individual and the community. Grief can endanger a person if it carries the potential for self-destruction. Consolation, in this context, is an act of endurance achieved through inner cultivation. This axis is also linked to the moral values prevailing within the community.³³ The deceased's life story establishes a foundation of integrity and morality that

³⁰ Dean Anderson and Joanna De Souza, "The Importance and Meaning of Prayer Rituals at the End of Life," *BJN* 31, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2021.30.1.34>.

³¹ Rebekah Lamb, "Christian Consolation and Theology's Task Today," *Theology in Scotland* 78, no. 1 (2021): 17–22, <https://doi.org/10.15664/tis.v28i1.2181>.

³² Jedan, "What Is Consolation? Towards a New Conceptual Framework," 33.

³³ Kanila Hao, *Interview*, Bawoofuloa, March 31, 2026

exemplifies the community's resilience. The bereaved find comfort and discover an inner strength greater than they imagined; they learn to overcome the challenges of loss admirably and rediscover their place within a resilient community. Thus, *böliböli* also serves as a source of forward-looking strength, motivating them to carry on with life. In this regard, within the Hulo Batu Christian community, *böliböli* is enriched by Christian traditions. Hope for endurance is found in Christian tradition—for instance, in the Book of Job and the Psalms.

The third axis is *böliböli*'s function as a therapeutic narrative about death. Scientific research also acknowledges the importance of a spiritual-metaphysical foundation in grief therapy.³⁴ This function offers a worldview perspective that shows how death can be accepted, regardless of the grief it evokes. Within this consolation, there are interconnected narratives of healing. Examples include the ideas that death is part of nature, that death is like sleep, or that death is a transition to a place that feels like home. These healing narratives provide a general metaphysical framework for death; they operate at a high level of abstraction. *Böliböli* embodies existential narratives concerning death. In this context, the Christian tradition—with its inherent dimension of transcendence—can reinforce *böliböli*'s function. Christianity offers rich eschatological concepts centered on the hope of life after death. In the Old Testament, the story of Job and the Psalms offer comfort.

The New Testament contains passages such as “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God... In my father's house there are many dwelling places.” (Jn. 14:1–3, NRSV); “...God of all consolation” (2 Cor. 1:3–4, NRSV); and “... For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.” (1 Thess. 4:13–14, NRSV). Faith in Jesus Christ—held by the bereaved within the experience of the surviving family—acts as a form of theological consolation.³⁵ These verses can become part of *böliböli*, allowing that therapeutic function to be present within the community of grieving people who believe in Jesus Christ. The Christian community becomes a source of restorative strength for families experiencing grief.³⁶

The fourth axis concerns *böliböli* as a means of verbally memorializing the deceased. Such a memorial can endure longer if the verbal narrative is transcribed—thereby rewriting the life of the deceased and preserving it within a narrative. Biography serves as a vessel that perfects the imperfections of the deceased's existence.³⁷ Sorrow and grief lead only to a sense of incompleteness over what has been lost, yet consolation counters such thoughts. By reframing their grief, the bereaved can work through their mourning while becoming increasingly aware that the person they are grieving has truly passed away.³⁸ In this section, the author suggests committing the oral *böliböli* tradition to writing so it can be studied from generation to generation. Through the four axes of *böliböli*, the life of the deceased is not considered

³⁴ J. J. Bockrath, M. F., Pargament, K. I., Wong, S., Harriott, V. A., Pomerleau, J. M., Homolka, S. J., Chaudhary, Z. B., Exline, “Religious and Spiritual Struggles and Their Links to Psychological Adjustment: A Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Studies,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 14, no. 3 (2022): 283–299, <https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000400>.

³⁵ Bogdan Kulik, “The Role of the Faith in Jesus Christ in the Family Experience of Grief,” *Religions* 14, no. 12 (2023): 15–23, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14121523>.

³⁶ Lauren J. Breen, “Grief Literacy: A Call to Action for Compassionate Communities,” *Death Studies* 46, no. 2 (2022): 425–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1739780>.

³⁷ Christoph Jedan, “A New Model of Consolation,” *Religions* 11, no. 12 (2020): 631.

³⁸ Melissa F. Zeiger, *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality, And The Changing Shapes Of Elegy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1957). 73

“finished”. Instead, memorialization seeks to articulate the deceased's true character and legacy, thereby enriching their reality. In written form, such a narrative encompasses aspects significant to the deceased's life—such as their occupation, family commitments, and leisure activities. This axis of consolation focuses on a clear biography that highlights the deceased's distinctive traits. While this function has long existed within the oral *böliböli* tradition, *böliböli* narratives can evolve into written biographies in the future. In his writing, Harefa argues that an individual's biography can serve as a source of theology if the narrative of their life bears witness to God and His works.³⁹

Hope is a crucial element of consolation in Christian theology. *Böliböli* aligns with Christian hope because it offers reinforcement through the prospect of survival and the restoration of life. Consolation must inspire hope—the conviction that we can recover from loss, defeat, and disappointment—and that the time remaining to us, however brief, offers the possibility of a fresh start. This hope enables us to endure. When we seek consolation, we seek more than just a way to feel better. To be consoled means coming to terms with the reality of this world without abandoning our hope for justice. In this regard, the Christian tradition enriches the concept of *böliböli*.

Conclusion

For the archipelagic community, consolation is both individual and communal. It is an act of solidarity within a shared space—accompanying the bereaved and helping them navigate difficult times. It even reaches back to the deceased, drawing meaning from the stories or words they left behind. Consolation argues for why life is the way it is and why we must press on; it opposes self-alienation from the community. One can resign oneself to death without finding consolation, just as one can accept life's tragedies without succumbing to alienation. To be consoled means accepting that we may experience sorrow, failure, and loss, yet maintaining a trusting heart—much like Job, the Psalmist, and Boethius.

Böliböli is a form of consolation that has long existed within the Hulo Batu community. Both *böliböli* and the consolation found in philosophical and Christian traditions emphasize communal life as a source of inner strength. It reflects the distinctive identity of an archipelagic people whose resilience stems from inner strength, serving as a source of comfort for the community following the death of one of its members. *Böliböli* embodies a four-axis function of consolation: managing grief, coping mechanisms, therapeutic storytelling, and biographical memorialization. Enriched by the Christian tradition, *böliböli* can serve as a source of a theology of consolation for the Hulo Batu people, reflecting their self-conception and identity as a community that remembers and lives in hope through Christ.

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³⁹ Oinike Natalia Harefa, *Evangelism as Storytelling: A Reconstruction of Evangelism from a Feminist Postcolonial Missiological Perspective* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2024).

Credit authorship contribution

Oinike Natalia Harefa proposed the primary idea, and together with Digna Victoria Manaö, they developed the concept, methodology, and original draft. The authors confirm that this work is entirely their own. They have reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take full responsibility for the integrity of their findings.

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