

A Socio-Cultural and Christian Educational Perspective on the Philosophy of *Sōkhi Mate Moroi Aila* in the Nias Ethnic Community-Indonesia

Amirrudin Zalukhu¹, Dirk Roy Kolibu²

¹Postgraduate Student of Universitas Kristen Indonesia

²Universitas Kristen Indonesia

Email: rudizalukhu408@gmail.com

Abstract

Sōkhi mate moroi aila can be translated as better to die than to bear shame, is a local wisdom of the Nias community in the form of a philosophy of life that has influenced the formation of the identity of the Nias people who are willing to die in order to maintain the honour of themselves and their families. This philosophy has negative impacts, such as poverty, disharmony in the family, acts against the law but can also have a positive impact to raise the spirit and fighting power to achieve a better life. The philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* in this research is written based on the author's experiences and reflections as a person born, raised and nurtured in Nias culture as well as additional information from informants, selected books and journals. In this research, the author encourages the participation of the church and indigenous people to re-interpret the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* from the perspective of the Christian faith that can bring peace to the common life of the Nias people.

Keywords: *Sōkhi Mate Moroi Aila, Nias Philosophy, Nias Marriage Customs, Nias Folk Festivities, Nias Faith And Culture.*



A. INTRODUCTION

As social creatures, humans always want to live together with others and with other creations of God. Humans interact with others in society and also interact with their natural surroundings [1]. Which gives birth to lifestyles, habits and mutual agreements. The result of this interaction develops into a culture or local wisdom. Local wisdom in the form of worldview and understanding that grows and develops in the community in each region has an impact on the lives of local people in responding to every problem and in fulfilling the needs of the local community [2]. Koentjaraningrat said there are seven elements of culture (cultural universals), including: "equipment, livelihoods and economic systems, social systems, language, arts, science, and religion [3]. Gazalba explains that social systems include "kinship systems, political organisations, legal systems, and marriage systems [4]. One of the elements in the culture of Nias society that is an element of culture and social system is the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila*.

The philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* means that it is better to die than to bear shame. This philosophy is deeply rooted in the Nias community, and can be seen in daily life in the search for necessities of life such as farming, hunting, gardening, and marriage customs, as well as in social relations. This philosophy is not only an identity

but also a value of honour that must be fought for in everyday life. Prof. Suahasil Nazara, a Nias people who is currently the Deputy Minister of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, said that the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* can be a motivation for Nias people to persevere in their search for life, as well as live according to the corridors of the law so that they do not bear shame and do not make other people, communities or nations bear shame because of immoral attitudes and actions. Marinus Gea, Nias people who is currently a member of the House of Representatives for the 2014-2019 and 2019-2024 periods said that the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* motivates Nias people to uphold commitments, encouraging the acceleration of community progress in achieving high achievements, better economic competition and political competition. However, the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* often causes legal problems when applied out of place, such as fights between individuals, between groups or even persecution leading to death.[5]

Some previous studies related to the local wisdom of Nias people such as *hoho faluaya*, [6] *famadaya harimo*, [7] *hendi-hendi*, [8] *hombo batu*, [9] *maena*, [10] *fondrakō*, [11] and several other studies on Nias culture, but researchers did not find research on the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* in the lives of Nias people significantly in national and international journals.

This paper on the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* is expected to contribute thoughts on the meaning, impact and implementation of the right and appropriate in the lives of Nias people so as to create peace. Through this paper the author introduces Nias society and culture, describes the implementation of the *sōkhi mate moroi aila* philosophy along with its positive and negative impacts, and provides an overview of the *sōkhi mate moroi aila* philosophy from a socio-cultural and Christian education perspective. please start with the issue of research. Ensure the issue is backed with sufficient previous studies which will enable the readers to see the research gap and abstract novelty of the study. Use Elsevier Vancouver to cite such as given in this article as example [12].

B. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative research approach with an autoethnographic research type. Autoethnographic research is based on the experiences and reflections of the author [13]. In autoethnographic research, the author describes matters related to the essence of human experience of the philosophy that develops in society. The author becomes both the researcher and the object of the research [14]. The author became the main informant or object of research because the author knows and follows various traditional rituals of the Nias community. The author was born, raised and nurtured in Nias culture. The author attended primary school and junior high school on Nias. The author married a woman from the Nias tribe by following the traditional rules of Nias marriage.

In addition to the author being the main informant, data was also obtained through additional information [15]. Additional information was obtained from books, documents, journals, historical stories told verbally to the present generation

by the ancestors of Nias people in the past. The information and data were analysed and interpreted according to their content and context. Autoethnographic research is generally not closed to the subjectivity of the researcher in making interpersonal judgements on the object under study [16]. Such is the case in this research. The author's understanding and experience of the philosophy of Nias society is part of this research, complemented by information and data obtained from other parties. In the end, the results of this research process will be outlined in the form of a research report in a flexible structure [17].

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Overview of Nias Society and Culture

Nias Island, in the Nias language is called *Tanö Niha*. Nias Island is an archipelago located in the western part of Sumatra Island, Indonesia, precisely located at 0 12' - 1 32' North Latitude, and 97 - 98 East Longitude. This area is administratively within the province of North Sumatra. The island is inhabited by people who call themselves *Ono Niha* (Nias tribe).[18] In everyday communication, people use the Nias language called *Li Niha* [19].

Ono niha has a social hierarchy structure that is divided into two groups, namely; The nobility and the common people.[20] The aristocracy is the group of people who have an abundance of wealth and the traditional leaders. Ordinary people are those known as *si lõ ana'a* and *si lõ bawi* (no gold and no pigs). The nobility associate themselves with the upper world, while the common people are associated with the lower world. This grouping resulted in two conflicting groups in Nias society. The traditional leaders had the highest strata of the nobles, almost close to the gods. The social strata of the ordinary people depended on their wealth such as gold, pigs and the ability to organise traditional feasts (*owasa*).

Nias cosmology recognises the ambivalent dualism of the "upper world" (*Tetehöli'ana'a*) ruled by the god Lowalangi and the "lower world" ruled by Laturedanö [21]. This concept is easily seen in the way Nias people live, for example in the pattern of traditional houses, customs, and social stratification which is divided into 2 large groups, namely the upper and lower parts. The Nias tribe has a belief that the origin of Nias society is from the "upper world", which is called the myth of *Tetehöli'ana'a* [22]. The Nias believe that they are the creation of the gods, who are considered their ancestors. The ancestors of the Niasa people descended (*nidada*) from *Tetehöli'ana'a* [23]. So, they refer to themselves as the original inhabitants (*sowanua*). Other tribes that live on Nias Island are referred to as migrants (*sifatewu* or *sanawa*) [23].

The story that developed in Nias society is that all necessities such as houses and equipment, measuring instruments or scales (*afore* = pig measuring instrument, *lauru* = rice measuring instrument, *fali'era*= gold weighing instrument), all types of plants, animals, including areca nut, gambier and betel nut, including *osali* (meeting hall), *Adu* (statue) have been passed down from *Tetehöli'ana'a* as a necessity for the Nias people [24]. Nias people always pursue *lakhömi* (glory), pride, wealth,

name/position which are considered to give life force and happiness [25]. Lakhömi in Nias society can be achieved through efforts such as obeying customs and maintaining *famoni* (taboos). *Famoni* is an attempt to keep away from places and words that are considered taboo and sacred. In social life, Nias people are subject to *fondakö* (customary law). *Fondakö* and *famoni* are two things that must be obeyed, if they are not obeyed, they will receive curses and disasters [25].

2. The Application of Sökhi Mate Moroi Aila's Philosophy in the Life of Nias People

a. The Philosophy of Sökhi Mate Moroi Aila in the Economy and Education of Nias People

Based on Presidential Regulation No. 63 of 2020 concerning the Determination of Disadvantaged Regions for 2020-2024, it is stipulated that the criteria for a region including Disadvantaged Regions are: community economy, human resources, facilities and infrastructure, regional financial capacity, accessibility, regional characteristics. Based on these provisions, Nias is included in the category of disadvantaged regions. Given the underdeveloped condition of the Nias community in terms of economy and education, many productive age people from Nias Island go to big cities such as Medan, Padang, Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung and several other cities to find work and continue their studies to improve their welfare and education. As migrants in foreign countries, Nias people who work and study outside Nias generally have the determination to improve their lives and help families who are economically struggling on Nias. To realise these noble intentions, Nias people are quite diligent and tenacious in doing a job and in achieving their goals. This attitude is driven by the philosophy of *sökhi mate moroi aila*, working and learning as hard as possible rather than enduring the shame of returning home a failure.

b. The Philosophy of Sökhi Mate Moroi Aila in the Social Strata of the Community

The social structure of Nias society is known by three groups of people who are patterned on the situation of *Tetehöli'ana'a*. [23] The first group is Salawa or Siulu. *Salawa* or *Siulu* are people who are trusted to be leaders in the community. *Salawa* or *Siulu* is an image of *Lowalangi* (God) who is believed to be the god of goodness and the god of war. The second group is *ono mbanua*. *Ono mbanua* are ordinary people, the common people. *Ono mbanua* is the image of *Laturedanö* who is believed to be the god of evil. The third group is the Ere. Ere (priest) is the image of *Silewanazarata* who is known as the god of balance between good and evil.

Ono mbanua can improve their social status to *Salawa* or *Siulu* by undergoing the bosi improvement rituals set out in the *fondakö*. To reach the highest *bosi*, *Salawa* or *Siulu*, the *ono mbanua* must first be married and then hold several *owasa*, which are traditional parties that invite traditional leaders and a large number of people from several neighbourhoods "*öri*" (customary areas). The *ono mbanua* who organises these *owasa* is then given the title "*balugu*" (The Lord) from the elders. *Owasa* events generally cost a lot of money, and it is not uncommon to have to borrow high-interest money from moneylenders. [26] This *owasa* is a community feast to confirm the social status

of the *ono mbanua* to become *Balugu* (The lord) or *Tuhenõri*. But what is sad about the *owasa* is that many families who organise the *owasa* end up having to go into debt to loan sharks to fulfil all the needs during the traditional feast.

c. *Sõkhi Mate Moroi Aila's* Philosophy of Entertaining Guests

Nias people have great respect for guests. The arrival of a guest is considered a blessing for the family being visited. The form of respect given to guests is in the form of welcoming them by giving betel lime (*afo*) which consists of betel leaves, gambier, tobacco, lime, areca nut. The next honour is in the form of a banquet. The host entertains by cutting 1 piglet at a cost of around Rp 800,000 or at least *niowuru* (salt-cured pig) at a cost of around Rp 240,000. The poor economic conditions mean that hosts have to borrow money or go into debt to give their guests the best welcome. This attitude of honouring guests is driven by the philosophy of *sõkhi mate moroi aila*. For the people of Nias, there is a tremendous sense of shame if a guest cannot be properly entertained.

d. The Philosophy of *Sõkhi Mate Moroi Aila* in Marriage Culture

Marriage in Nias society refers to *bosi* (social strata). The levels of *bosi* in the marriage custom,[27] namely: The seventh *bosi* is for the general public, the eighth *bosi* is for the customary head; the ninth *bosi* is for the *sanuhe ba nõi*; the tenth *bosi* is for *Tuhenõri Samõnõ Tuhabadanõ*; the twelfth *bosi* is for *Tuhenõri Balugu Samõnõ Ba'uwa Badanõ* [18].

The level of *bosi* determines the amount of *bõwõ* (dowry). According to the customary decree in *Õri Galasa Fondako Baluaha Jimbolo-mbolo* North Nias,[27] the dowry for the marriage of a daughter from the *bosi sifitu* family (*ono mbanua*/general public) dowry is 2 *balaki*, 2 *ziwalu* with a customary marriage cost of approximately Rp 40 million. Dowry for the customary marriage expenses of girls from the family of *bosi siwalu*, daughters of the Chief (*manunu manu ba nõi*) *bõwõ* amounting to 3 *balaki*, 3 *ziwalu*, and 3 *zese* with a customary marriage fee of around Rp 60 million. Dowry for the customary marriage expenses of girls from the *bosi sisiwa*, daughters of the *Sanuhe ba nõi* *bõwõ* amounting to 4 *balaki*, 4 *ziwalu*, and 4 *zese* with a customary marriage cost of around Rp 160 million. Dowry for the customary marriage expenses of girls from the *bosi sifulu*, daughters of *Tuhenõri* descendants of *Samõnõ Tuhabadanõ* *bõwõ* amounting to 6 *balaki*, 6 *ziwalu*, and 6 *zese* with a customary marriage cost of approximately Rp. 240 million. The Dowry for the customary marriage cost of the daughter of the *bosi sifelendrua*, the daughter of *Tuhenõri Balugu Samõnõ Ba'uwa Badanõ* can reach around Rp 500 million.

Nowadays, the meaning of dowry has shifted. There is a tendency for *bõwõ* to be interpreted as *bõli nono nihalõ* (paying some money to "buy" the bride). This is reflected in the value of *bõwõ* which is not only determined by the family *bosi* but also by the education level of the prospective bride. A woman from an educated family with professions such as civil servants, police and military, and various other professions, plus if her daughter also has a high education and a permanent job, then at least the dowry for *bosi sifitu* (*ono mbanua*/ general public) can reach between Rp.

200 - 400 million. So, the higher the level of education and profession of the parents and the bride-to-be, the higher the dowry.

This situation has caused social problems. For the sake of family honour, the man who is responsible for paying the dowry, has to borrow money from close relatives, even from moneylenders. The result of the marriage debt has led to poverty, malnutrition for children, underage children have to work in the fields or in the rice fields, children drop out of school and cause domestic violence problems.

e. *Sōkhi Mate Moroi Aila's* Philosophy in Maintaining Personal and Group Dignity

In human life, conflict is something that cannot be denied. Conflicts can be small or large scale. Conflict can occur with oneself because one cannot accept one's reality. Conflicts can also occur with other parties, and can even lead to legal problems. As a result, in some cases, there are Nias people who solve personal problems with a shortcut, namely suicide, because they hold the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila*, it is better to die than to bear shame. Likewise, in resolving conflicts with other parties, it is not uncommon to find violent acts such as persecution and murder because they cannot accept insults and harsh or unfair treatment from someone or another group. All these attitudes are due to a misunderstanding of the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila*. As a result, the original intention was to solve the problem, but because the way to solve the problem was not appropriate and correct, it created new problems.

On a larger scale, the *sōkhi mate moroi aila* philosophy can trigger wars between *ōri*. War is common when one *ōri* defends its group's honour and pride. For the sake of honour, one group of *ōri* region does not hesitate to attack and kill people from other *ōri* regions who insult and even they are willing to give up their lives to maintain the good name of the *ōri* region. Wars between *ōri* also cause material losses. The war between *ōri* left a deep hatred and grudge for each warring party and will become a derivative grudge that is continued by their descendants in the future. In fact, this war between *ōri* has hampered the work of preaching the gospel on Nias Island [28].

3. A Socio-Cultural View of the *Sōkhi Mate Moroi Aila* Philosophy

a. Instilling Local Wisdom Values in the Younger Generation

The philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* is the local wisdom of the Nias people. Local wisdom needs to be taught to the younger generation so that they are familiar with the values that have shaped the civilization of the Nias people. It is hoped that young people will love their ancestral culture, preserve and develop it so that it can become the superiority and uniqueness of an area and can even have economic value. The rapid flow of information and communication has created unstoppable changes that have eroded local wisdom values. New values and behaviors are often not filtered, but accepted as such because they are considered more modern and especially when they go viral on social media. Knowledge of the meaning of local wisdom, specifically the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila*, is important to teach young people

so they can correctly understand the history of the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* and its proper and correct implementation in today's life.

b. Education on the Negative Impact of Sōkhi Mate Moroi Aila's Philosophy

The wrong implementation of the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* creates economic, social, educational and legal problems. To prevent these negative impacts from developing, education is needed to educate the people of Nias about the dangers of interpreting the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* incorrectly. This education is the responsibility of the government, traditional leaders and the church. The government provides counseling to the public about life as a nation, state and society. Traditional leaders provide direction to young people on how to understand and develop local wisdom so that it is unique and superior to other regions. Church leaders are responsible for teaching people how to live out the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* based on Bible truth. With these efforts, the negative impact of the wrong implementation of the *sōkhi mate moroi aila* philosophy can be minimized or even eliminated.

c. Warmth of Welcoming Guests

Indonesian people in general are very friendly and enthusiastic about welcoming guests. For Nias people, guests are the bearers of blessings and never let guests go hungry. This concept is a good understanding. This understanding needs to be improved so as to create warmth and peace in human relations with others. However, welcoming guests is not always measured by how expensive the food is. Simple food accompanied by hospitality and warmth, of course, has a value that exceeds that of a luxurious meal. Nias people need to realize this, especially those who are economically disadvantaged. They don't need to force themselves into debt to welcome guests. They can entertain by giving the best of what they already have without having to create new problems. The attitude of the Nias people in giving the best for their guests is commendable. But please note that this commendable attitude should not cause new problems, namely debt. Entertaining guests is not always by slaughtering a pig or *niowuru* by way of debt, but entertaining guests can be done through a friendly and polite attitude.

d. Improving the Quality of the Economy and Education

The philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* has inspired the people of Nias to strive for a better economic and educational level. In general, Nias people are hard workers and never give up in the face of difficulties in completing assignments and jobs. This tenacity and mental steel must be continuously nurtured, so that the individuals of the Nias people become strong individuals, keep up with the times and succeed in education, work and business.

4. A Christian Education View of the Sōkhi Mate Moroi Aila Philosophy

Based on the above explanation in relation to the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* in Nias society, the following is an analysis of the view of Christian education based on the values taught in the Bible.

a. The Future is in God.

Living in poverty is the impetus for Nias people to migrate to various regions. As migrants, some become manual labourers such as rickshaw pullers, port porters, and oil palm plantation workers. There are also those who have better opportunities such as becoming employees and staff in companies. For those who have higher aspirations, they will work while studying. What a struggle. This struggle is closely related to the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila*, never returning home before succeeding overseas.

The Bible explains that humans have a responsibility to work, which is part of the cultural mandate (Genesis 1:28). In working, Proverbs teaches us to learn from the ant who is diligent and able to recognise the seasons (Proverbs 6:6-8). Success is not solely determined by human endeavour. God is the source of all success and all human plans are within God's decree (Proverbs 16:9). Thus, to achieve a bright future, it is not enough to work hard and be motivated to improve economic life and education, but it must also involve God who designs a beautiful future for every human being (Proverbs 23:18). Thus, the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* as a driver to achieve a better future is a good thing. The struggle based on the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* must also be based on an attitude of relying on God because God is the source of all blessings.

b. God Liberates.

The impact of the *sōkhi mate moroi aila* philosophy in traditional marriage and owasa parties, which costs a lot of money from loans to moneylenders, has contributed to poverty, child malnutrition, underage children having to work in the fields, children dropping out of school and domestic violence. The costly customs of marriages and feasts should be reviewed as they have created a snare for the people of Nias based on the word of God.

When the Israelites were in slavery in Egypt, God delivered them by sending Moses to bring them out of slavery. God's word affirms, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:2). The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of Christ who brings deliverance, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to care for the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release from prison to those who are bound" (Isaiah 61:1). Paul writes that Christ came, not only to deliver from the wrath of God, but also to deliver from the injustices, economic and cultural shackles that shackle humanity, "That we might be free indeed, Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not be subject to the yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

c. Patience and humility in differences.

Differences of opinion are unavoidable. Large-scale conflicts in the form of persecution and murder can occur because personal or group pride is violated. The understanding of the *sōkhi mate moroi aila* philosophy that eventually led to persecution and murder is a wrong understanding and implementation. In dealing with every event that has the potential to cause conflict, patience and humility are

required. Proverbs 16:32 states, "A patient man is better than a mighty man; he who controls himself is better than one who takes a city." Thus, violence is not the solution to the problem. It takes greatness of heart, patience and humility to give in for the common good.

d. Hospitality is more important than food

The attitude of Nias people in giving the best to their guests is commendable. However, it is important to note that this laudable attitude should not lead to new problems, namely debt. Entertaining guests is not always done by slaughtering a piglet or niowuru by going into debt. Entertaining guests can be done in a friendly and polite manner.

e. Cultural Transformation

One thing that must be realised is that culture needs God's grace. Without God's grace, culture falls further into sin. The philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* initially had a good purpose to survive and improve the welfare of the family. But in its development, it has been influenced by things that are contrary to God's word. As Richard Niebuhr writes in his book *Christ and Culture*, there are five models that Christians understand regarding the relationship between Christ and culture, namely: Christ Against Culture, Christ of Culture, Christ above Culture, Christ and Culture in Paradox, and Christ Transforms Culture [29]. So, in looking at the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila*, the author feels that the Christ Transforms Culture model can be applied in transforming the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila*. John M. Frame argues that believers must transform culture according to the standard of God's word, "Christ Transforms Culture".

Efforts to transform the culture require the right approach because there is essentially a conflict between the value-philosophy and the gospel [30]. Spiritual leaders must live in the midst of society inclusively to present Christ and His teachings to the wider community. The secrets of the appeal of Jesus' teaching over the centuries was his closeness to the people in everyday life [31]. The coming of Christ into the world is an example of cultural transformation. Christ lived and grew in the midst of culture. Every good culture such as the ethics of honouring one's parents is emphasised by the Lord Jesus, but cultures that contradict the gospel of the kingdom of God must be transformed based on God's truth.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the above explanation, in this conclusion section the author concludes several things. Firstly, the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* has shaped the personality of Nias people who do not easily give up with life's difficulties and uphold personal and group self-esteem. Secondly, there has been a wrong understanding and implementation of the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* in people's lives so that things are found that lead to violence and acts against the law. For this reason, education on the understanding and implementation of the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi aila* is needed from the government, traditional institutions and the church. Thirdly, there is a need for a new interpretation of the philosophy of *sōkhi mate moroi*

aila in accordance with the context of social and cultural developments specifically based on the truth of God's word so as not to create a poverty trap. Fifth, the people of Nias need the grace of Christ to renew their culture and live out the Christian faith. Finally, as God's representation on earth, the church has the responsibility to guide every citizen of the church to experience the renewal of their minds (Romans 12:2) and lead them towards Christlikeness (Romans 8:29).

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