

NIAS REVISITED: HEAD-HUNTING, CHIEFTAINSHIP, AND ALLIANCE

BY

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The large island chiefdoms of the Pacific currently play an important role in theories of state formation and political evolution (cf. Earle 1991; Kirch 1984). It is puzzling, then, that one of the most unusual and best-described chiefdoms has been almost entirely ignored by theorists since the 1940s. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Nias, an island off the western coast of Sumatra, became a subject of great interest to ethnologists and archaeologists. After a bitter sixty-year struggle, the Dutch colonial power had finally defeated the large chiefdoms of the southern tip of the island and had sent exploratory patrols into the interior. Near the coast, the patrols found splendidly fortified settlements perched on hilltops, with broad paved avenues crowded with megaliths and flanked by drainage conduits, and "chief's houses" eight to ten stories high. Photographs taken by European visitors in the 1920s show hundreds of warriors dragging huge blocks of stone up the hillsides to the villages, to be shaped into monuments for the chiefs. Nias quickly attracted the attention of scholars such as the archaeologist Robert Heine-Geldern, who exclaimed over the "stupendous technical accomplishment" of the hilltop settlements of the south (Heine-Geldern 1972: 309). The so-called "Megalithic culture" of Indonesia, then a major focus of archaeological investigation by Heine-Geldern and others, appeared to be alive, indeed flourishing, among the chiefdoms of south Nias.

But despite the wealth of ethnographic description that eventually accumulated—one bibliography lists over two hundred entries published before World War II (Suzuki 1958)—the expulsion of the Dutch from the Indies restored the island to the obscurity that their presence had temporarily interrupted. It was not until 1973 that the possible comparative significance of Nias was again advertised, in a brief article

by Peter Suzuki entitled, "Autochthonous States of Nias, Indonesia: Extinct or Extant?" After an exhaustive survey of prewar studies of Nias, Suzuki came to the conclusion that the fifty or so *öri* (political units) that existed at the time of the Dutch conquest constituted "autochthonous states." Suzuki went so far as to take Robert Winzeler to task for not including the *öri* of Nias in his survey of indigenous Southeast Asian States. Winzeler replied, not unreasonably, that if *öri* were states, "each would have on the average a population of 4,000 and a territorial base of 13 square miles." Therefore, Winzeler suggested, "it seems to me that what the political units of Nias exemplify is what is generally understood by the concept of chiefdom" (1977: 752-53).

In anthropological terminology, the dividing line between "chiefdom" and "state" is drawn along the frontier of kinship. Chiefdoms, however large or sophisticated, are exclusively organized by ties of kinship—a chief owes his position to his place in a kinship structure. In states, kinship organization is superseded by formal legal authority: permanent institutional structures not dependent on kinship ties. Among the types of state recognized by anthropologists, pride of place goes to autochthonous or "primary" states, which are thought to have emerged spontaneously from pre-existing chiefdoms. Obviously, the number of autochthonous states cannot be large. The earliest civilizations of Mesopotamia, China, Peru, the Indus Valley, and Mesoamerica are generally accepted as autochthonous states, although even these are controversial (cf. Claessen and Skalnik 1978).

The island of Nias is only about 75 miles long by 35 wide, and it lies a mere 70 miles from the coast of Sumatra, in widely traveled seas. Whatever form of political system existed in Nias in the nineteenth century, it is unlikely to have been a pristine autochthonous state. But an important aim of studies of autochthonous states is to understand the processes by which chiefdoms, which belong to the "tribal" or "primitive" world, undergo the transformation to state. Most chiefdoms known to anthropology appear to have been stable systems, which can be made to appear as incipient states only with the aid of a good deal of imagination.

But a chiefdom in which the social pyramid is rapidly enlarging, warfare progressively extending territorial boundaries, and kinship organization becoming subordinate to a legal structure; in which settlements undergo a tenfold expansion and a proliferation of monumental architecture, while the wealth of the rulers multiplies through their expansion of long-distance trade, exemplifies most of the

features that archaeologists identify as immediate precursors to the birth of a new state. All of these features were ascribed to the chiefdoms of southern Nias by European observers in the years preceding the Dutch conquest in 1900 (cf. Donleben 1848; Fehr 1894; Modigliani 1886, 1890; Nieuwenhuisen and von Rosenberg 1863), and Nias quickly became one of the major sites for speculation about the origins of indigenous Indonesian civilizations. Much of the theorizing was highly speculative, influenced by the evolutionary and diffusionist theories of the era. It was also, not surprisingly, inconclusive. The most detailed records (and implausible speculations) were authored by E.E. Ws. Schröder, a classically educated colonial officer who presided over the conquest of the *ōri* of southern Nias. Schröder was subsequently appointed head of the colonial administration for the entire island, and set about a process of intensive exploration and ethnological investigation that resulted in the publication in 1917 of the most compendious account of any Indonesian society, *Nias: Ethnographische, Geographische en Historische Aanteekeningen en Studiën*.

Schröder and his colleagues were particularly struck by the extent of the differences between the *ōri* of the south and the smaller and more modest village communities found elsewhere on the island. Only in the south did one find monumental architecture, strong alliances between lineages, elaborate feast cycles, and rigid social stratification. If the southern *ōri* were not exactly states, what were they? Here we propose to revisit this question by dusting off some of the pieces of the puzzle that scholar-administrators like Schröder were attempting to fit together. We are emboldened to do so by the work of two modern anthropologists, Wolfgang Marschall and Andrew Beatty, whose recent fieldwork in Nias provides a fresh context from which to view the questions raised by scholars of the colonial era. During the summer of 1981, Steve Lansing spent six weeks in south Nias checking various points raised by Schröder and apparently confirmed by the work of Marschall, who conducted a year's fieldwork in 1976–77. Marschall carried out his fieldwork in the territory formerly controlled by the largest and most powerful *ōri*, the Maenamölo. By the time of Marschall's fieldwork, Christianity had replaced the native religion, and the political and economic structure of the old *ōri* had largely disintegrated. Despite all this, Marschall reached the conclusion that

in the Maenamölo there existed a great political organization above the lineage ties. It was an organization which, with its rules of law and its administrative order, with its religious unity and established territorial border already was taking the shape of a state. This organization found its clearest expression in large feasts, which were celebrated at certain intervals at Hilionadakhi as confirmations of law and renewal, which were binding for the whole Maenamölo. (Marschall 1977: 130)

Andrew Beatty's account of fieldwork in a village in central Nias (1986–88) describes a very different social world, in which the institutions of the *öri* did not exist until they were deliberately introduced by the Dutch in 1918. Beatty's analysis generally confirms the major points made by colonial scholars: compared with the large chiefdoms of the south, in central Nias social stratification was less rigid and the hierarchy of rank more fluid; chiefs did not control the allocation of productive land; marriage to the mother's brother's daughter was not prescribed; and settlements were much smaller than those of the south.

The present essay was written as a contribution to this festschrift for Clark Cunningham, and does not claim to be definitive; it is merely an attempt to reconsider some of the questions left unanswered in the ethnography of Nias. It was offered for inclusion in this volume because the questions at issue are also central to our understanding of the societies of the eastern archipelago, such as the role of competitive feasting, of prescriptive alliances, and head-hunting. Without pretending to resolve these issues with respect to the Nias *öri*, we propose simply to reexamine the pieces of the puzzle as they appeared to colonial scholars, and examine their interpretations in light of the current models used by anthropologists.

Early Observations of Nias

Nias appears periodically in Arab documents before the seventeenth century warning mariners to avoid the island and its headhunters (Ahmad 1960: 33; Schröder 1917: 313). In 1669, the Dutch East India Company (hereafter the VOC) entered into a treaty of friendship with a collection of Nias chiefs, each of whom is described as the ruler of a territorial unit termed an *öri*. The interest of the VOC was spurred by the importance of Nias as a source of slaves. A seventeenth-century French admiral

describes a flourishing human commerce, in which Nias chieftains exported slaves to the port of Baros on the coast of Sumatra, from whence they were shipped to Batavia and elsewhere in the islands (quoted in Schröder 1917: 314). The treaty of 1669 came to naught, but by the early nineteenth century the Dutch were in a stronger position, and they renewed their interest in slaves from Nias. A report to the Dutch government in 1822 estimates that an annual total of 1,500 slaves reached Baros (211). Soon thereafter, the trade shifted to the northern port of Aceh. In the 1830s, the Dutch captured this trade from the Acehnese (Donleben and Berghuis 1854). A few years later, in a rather ironic response to the rise of the antislavery movement in Europe, the Dutch used the suppression of slavery as a pretext for a military expedition against Nias. The northern part of the island, weakened by endless warfare and slave raids, was easily subdued. But an expedition to the south in 1844 met unexpected resistance. A Dutch landing force of 140 men found themselves confronted by a large force of well-disciplined warriors, bearing firearms apparently acquired from the slave trade. The Dutch were repelled, and a long period of armed struggle began between the colonial government and the chiefdoms of the south. In 1856, a fortress was constructed on a beach at Lagundri Bay, under the guarding cannons of a brig. But the fort was destroyed within a year by an earthquake. For the next few decades the Dutch contented themselves with sending an occasional gunboat to fire on rebel villages. In 1879, an armed steamboat was permanently established at Padang, on the Sumatran coast, for the purpose of pacifying the southern Nias chiefdoms.

Meanwhile, in the north the colonial administration was becoming solidly established. Missionaries began to flourish after about 1865, but attempts to introduce missionaries in the south were decidedly unsuccessful; in 1886, two German missionaries were forced to flee for their lives (Anonymous 1913). For decades, the chiefdoms of the south remained effectively independent of the colonial power, despite the "alarums and excursions" caused by the appearance of the steam warship off the coast. The ship would fire its cannon into a nearby village and land a company of marines to set fire to any houses still standing after the bombardment. But the islanders did not always get the worst of these encounters. On several occasions, Dutch landing parties were met by superior numbers of well-armed warriors, and beat a hasty retreat (Schröder 1917: 720–39).

By 1900, the south was declared pacified, but no official parties actually reached the interior until the chief administrator, Schröder, began sending police patrols in 1905. Head-hunting was commonplace, and the suppression of this custom became the usual pretext for police action. Schröder mentions that "at first I tried persuasion." In the village of Hilisimaetano, he recounts, he made a particular effort to discourage the taking of heads, "to which I received the logical (for these heathen) answer that this wasn't possible, because the country would fall into ruin from bad harvests, diseases, and other disasters" (Schröder 1917:416).

Head-Hunting, Slaves, and Rice

Nias is located very close to the equator, in the zone of tropical rain forests. Rainfall is extremely heavy most of the year. The primary subsistence activity is swidden agriculture, the major crops dry rice and potatoes, along with the usual subsidiary vegetable crops. Schröder noted that famine was a growing problem in several districts of southern and central Nias, and suggested that one of its causes, in addition to sheer population pressure, was the fear of headhunters, which made villagers afraid to cultivate fields distant from their fortified villages.

The evidence for population pressure in Nias came from several sources. Population estimates are inexact, but even the lower estimates indicate a relatively large overall population to be supported by subsistence farming. A government census in 1981 estimated the population as 531,000, with an average density of 95 persons per square kilometer (Beatty 1992: 2). Schröder estimated the population in 1908 as approximately 200,000, but cited other estimates ranging from 135,000 to 300,000. Indirect evidence for population pressure on the land is provided by colonial records indicating the large-scale importation of food from Sumatra. In 1908, for example, an estimated 2,575,000 kilograms of Sumatran rice were imported to Nias. Schröder, who explored the island more extensively than any other European, frequently comments on the prevalence of famine. He states that swidden cultivators tried to change their plots each year, but were sometimes compelled to use the same field uninterruptedly for several years. Clearly he regarded famine and malnutrition as major problems for the colonial administration.

The effects of this heavy pressure on the rain forest are obvious today. Most of the forests have disappeared altogether. According to Schröder, in 1917 it was necessary for chiefs from the densely populated

southern villages to obtain large logs for construction from the center of the island—evidently they were dragged for miles by teams of warriors—because large trees no longer existed in the south. Yet the sheer size of the logs used to construct the chief's houses in the south testify to the existence of mature rain forests in the not-very-distant past.

Thus, much evidence points to severe and increasing population pressure on the agricultural resource base, leading to deforestation. It is in this context that we may view the results of Schröder's initial (1905–10) explorations of the southern and central regions of the island (the northern portion having been brought under Dutch control decades earlier). Along the coast, he found very large villages on hilltops, surrounded by fortifications, and noted: "Whereas in the South, city formation has taken place wherein up to several thousand people live in one fortified settlement, elsewhere the inhabitants mostly live in smaller groups, of at most several hundreds" (1917: 31). But as Schröder's patrols pushed inland, they found that the central district of Aramo and surrounding regions (the valleys of the Eho and tributaries) appeared to have been depopulated. Many large villages had been abandoned, and the remaining population was largely in hiding, terrified of southern head-hunting parties. Schröder reports that judging by the size and numbers of abandoned villages, the central district had once been densely populated. He attributes the depopulation of Aramo to organized head-hunting raids conducted by the largest southern chiefdom, the Maenamölo *öri*. According to Schröder, the chiefs of the Maenamölo forbade head-hunting in the south—heads taken in southern villages were not accepted for feasts or rituals—but caused a steady stream of headhunters, some of them apparently members of a professional "guild," to attack Aramo. Schröder states: "Aramo was nearly murdered to the last man, only part of the population having escaped to the North. Through this alliance (the Maenamölo), it was possible to conquer the region in one series of wars. Of the prisoners of war from these areas, I was told, the children were sold for three batu, and the women for six to nine" (1917: 444). Aramo was apparently the primary source for the thousands of slaves exported from Nias to Sumatra.

Schröder's descriptions of settlement patterns in the immediate postconquest era have recently been partially confirmed by Alain Viaro, who for some years has been conducting an architectural survey of Nias. Viaro reports that most of the older villages of south and central Nias were located in remote sites for defensive purposes. Now that head-

hunting and warfare are prohibited, these villages are being abandoned in favor of more accessible locations:

Les anciens villages subsistent encore au sommet des collines à proximité. Les anciens sites, difficiles d'accès pour des raisons défensives, situés au sommet des grands escaliers et tournant le dos à la mer, sont peu à peu abandonnés. [The ancient villages still subsist on the summit of the nearby hills. The old sites, difficult of access for reasons of defense, situated at the summit of grand stairs and turning their backs to the sea, are slowly being abandoned]. (Viaro 1981: 17)

Overall, the picture that emerges from these accounts suggests that Nias was in a transitional period at the time of the Dutch conquest, in which increasingly powerful chiefdoms were coming into being along the southern coast at the expense of their neighbors to the north. These chiefdoms used the central districts as a hunting ground for slaves and heads. For the most part, the southern chiefdoms consisted of small clusters of allied villages. But among them was one very large and rapidly expanding chiefdom, the Maenamölo, comprising sixteen villages of which several boasted populations in the thousands. In this connection we cannot overlook Schröder's belief that it was the deliberate policy of the Maenamölo chiefs to mount a sustained campaign against the central district of Aramo, going beyond ordinary head-hunting and leading to the depopulation of the region. Schröder interpreted the *öri* as a solution to the problem of head-hunting, which was at once a cause and an effect of overpopulation and competition for land (1917: 331):

The organization, the social bond, incorporated in the territory was not meant only to be a protection against outsiders, but also a mutual agreement not to hunt one another's heads. In old times (before the Dutch) this local bond was essential, because without it work in the fields was totally impossible, and one couldn't get one's living. By the establishment of the *öri*:

1. Exogamous marriage was made easy.
2. Men could protect themselves better against headhunters who would not dare enter these territories.
3. Men could help one another in case of raids.

Schröder quotes an earlier observer, Marsden, who described the villages of Nias as “independent of and at perpetual variance with one another” in 1811 (313). Thus Schröder saw the *öri* as a kind of defensive alliance that created islands of relative safety in which farming could take place. Schröder admired the effectiveness of the *öri* and proposed introducing this structure elsewhere in the island. But as he recognized, in south Nias the structure of the *öri* was based on marital alliances among lineages celebrated through competitive feasting. These alliances were founded, in the southern *öri*, on prescriptive marriage to the matrilineal cross-cousin, a rule that did not exist elsewhere on the island. Schröder’s interest in adopting the model of the *öri* for the colonial regime led him and his assistants to carry out detailed investigations of the *öri*, and to puzzle over the respective role of marital alliances and feasting in the political organization of the *öri*.

The Structure of the Öri

Schröder found that a typical south Nias village consisted of a branch (*gana*) of a patrilineal clan (*mado*). He observed that villages in south Nias consist of “branches of genealogical groups,” and that villages traced their histories in a series of migrations extending back to the time of the creation of the lineage. Political authority rested with the “heads” (Ulu) of the “older” villages, or “mother-settlements.” The head of the whole clan was called *sanoehé mado*, “eldest” of the *mado*. The head of a lineage branch (village) was termed *salawa*. A third term, *toehenöri babi*, referred to the eldest (*sanoehé*) of a group of villages, consisting of a “mother-settlement and its daughter-settlements,” and indicated the head of a particular lineage segment. In Assistant Resident A.L. Samson’s diagram of these relationships (1936: 443; see Figure 1),

1.	B	is <i>toehenöri babi</i>	for B, D, E, F
2.	C	is <i>toehenöri babi</i>	for C, G, H
3.	D	is <i>toehenöri babi</i>	for D, I, J
4.	E	is <i>toehenöri babi</i>	for E, K
5.	F	is <i>toehenöri babi</i>	for F, L, M
6.	G	is <i>toehenöri babi</i>	for G, N, O
7.	H	is <i>toehenöri babi</i>	for H, P

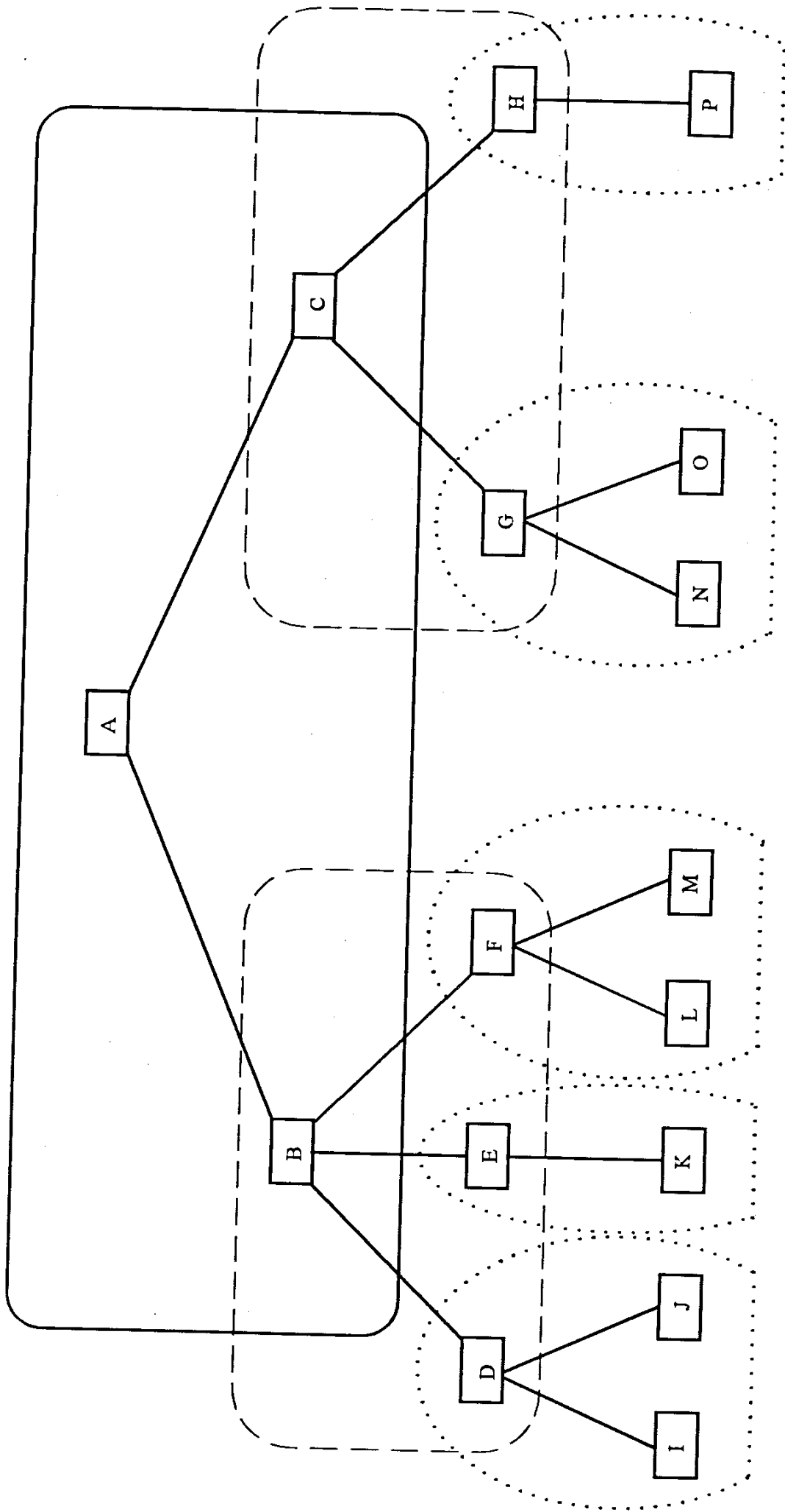


Figure 1
Organization of the Mado

Within each village, according to Samson, the elders (*sanoehe*) of the core lineage (or lineages) formed the class of Si Ulu, the heads or chiefs of the village. The political structure as described by Samson thus resembles that of a Polynesian conical clan. Indeed, if that were all there was to the political organization of the *ōri*, the parallel to Polynesian systems would be striking. But the difficulty, as Samson himself recognized, is that the effective political unit at the supravillage level was not the clan (*mado*), but rather the chiefdom (*ōri*) consisting of several allied lineages. Both Samson and Schröder puzzled at length over the structure of the *ōri*, the members of which belonged to several clans. If *ōri* were not bound by the ties of a “genealogische group,” then what held them together?

The anthropologist Wolfgang Marschall conducted fieldwork in a village in south Nias from July 1973 to March 1974. Marschall's village was located in the territory of the Maenamölo, formerly the largest and most powerful chiefdom of south Nias. Marschall emphasized the role of feasts in the formation of alliances between sovereign clans:

Indeed, in the Maenamölo there existed a great political organization above the lineage ties. It was an organization which, with its rules of law and its administrative order, with its religious unity and established territorial border already was taking the shape of a state. This organization found its clearest expression in large feasts, which were celebrated at certain intervals at Hilionadakhi as confirmations of law and renewal, which were binding for the whole Maenamölo. (Marschall 1977: 130)

However, there appear to have been not one but three distinct feast cycles that played discrete roles in the organization of the southern chiefdoms. While the various elements of these feasts—exchanges between wife-givers and wife-takers, erection of megaliths, meat distribution, titles for feast-givers, and so forth—are found elsewhere in Indonesia, the overall organization of the feast cycles seems to have been unique to south Nias. The three types of feasts were marriage feasts, title feasts (*fa'ulu*, which Marschall calls rank feasts), and law feasts (*fondrako*). My own brief fieldwork in a village of the Maenamölo *ōri* in the summer of 1981 was intended to explore what remained of these feast cycles, in order to clarify the relationship of exchanges and feast cycles to the organization of the *ōri*. In the following section, we will summarize

the role of each of these cycles. The major problem in studying the *öri*, as Marschall also noted, is that the Dutch prohibited the largest feasts soon after their conquest of south Nias. Later, missionary activity undermined the religious significance of the feasts, so that today only vestiges of the three major feast cycles remain.

Title Feasts

Part of the difficulty in interpreting early accounts of Nias chiefdoms is due to the fact that the term *öri* refers to several levels of social organization. Literally, *öri* means "circle." Every adult man had his own personal *öri*, the circle of people who attended his title feasts. At minimum, the members of one's *öri* included close lineal kinsmen. But the object of the title feast system was to enlarge one's *öri* by rising in rank. Every man might hold a series of six named title feasts, each one more expensive and larger than the last. By holding these feasts, one acquired the right to new titles (at the lower end of the cycle, Schröder calls these "big names"; later on they became formal chiefly titles). Other privileges included the right to erect megalithic monuments of various types, to make and wear gold jewelry as a badge of rank, and to participate in feasts, orations, and political decisions. Schröder describes the title feasts as follows:

A citizen in these regions (South Nias) only achieves full status when he has completed a full cycle, and a member of the important families becomes a Si Ulu (chief) only then. All this carries with it that as soon as these feasts are completed, one participates with equal shares in certain feasts to be given at a later date. The first six feasts are the same for a Si Ulu as for an ordinary man, but after the completion of this series a Si Ulu still has to complete another series (of up to six feasts). A citizen whose feasts are completed is called a "*si boto*"; a Si Ulu (chief) upon completion is called a "*ma awali*," one who is "finished." The feasts in general are called *fa'ulu*. (1917: 344)

Hardly anyone managed to complete the entire feast cycle, and it also appears that the feasts themselves were subject to regional variation. Schröder provides a brief description of the title feasts held in the village of Bawomataluo, which became the center of the Maenamölo chiefdom

after the Dutch destroyed the previous capital of Orahili. Marschall provides a slightly different list. However, Marschall notes that at the time of his fieldwork all but the first feast had been discontinued. The following summary of the title feast system is therefore based primarily on Schröder. My informants in the summer of 1981 emphasized that each region had its own particular sequence of feasts at the lower end of the scale, while the largest feasts involved the whole Maenamölo chiefdom and were thus effectively standardized.

The first feast is called *fa'ulu moroi tou* (to go upwards, to make one's way). Marschall says this is the only feast still held in his village. The main feature of this feast is the slaughter of one or more pigs, and the ceremonious distribution of meat to members of one's own *gana* (minimal lineage) and to the village chiefs (Si Ulu and Si Ila, about whom more presently). Schröder calls this feast *folala*, but provides no description. In succeeding feasts, pork and rice are distributed to an ever-widening circle (*ōri*) including members of other clans (*mado*). In addition, the amount of the "gift" or tribute for the chiefs steadily increases, ultimately including gold as well as living pigs, pork, and rice. Schröder comments:

All those who take part in one of these "citizen feasts" (because usually they try to have the feasts take place on the same day) have to deliver a certain quantity of pigs to be sacrificed, whose meat is for those who have given these feasts before (at an earlier date). Of the butchered pigs, I was told that on the first day one pig was killed, the head of which was given to the oldest of the priestesses, while the Si Ulus (chiefs) got the body . . . Apart from this pig meat the feast-givers also had to supply rice to be given out as shares (*gurakha*). (1917: 345)

Later feasts centered on the erection of a splendid variety of megaliths outside the house of the feast-giver, to serve as a home for ancestral spirits and eventually for the feast-giver's own ghost. These megaliths became progressively larger and more ornate, so that the greatest chiefs had to procure huge slabs of stone to be dragged to their hilltop houses by teams of hundreds of warriors, thus demonstrating in a very tangible way the extent of their personal circle.

With regard to the governing structure of lineages and, as shall be seen, of chiefdoms, it is important to note that birth alone did not confer

rank. Chiefs were drawn from the ranks of the Si Ulu: literally, the "heads" of the core lineages of each clan (*mado*). But a Si Ulu could become a chief only by progressing through the stages of the feast cycle. "Commoners" (*sato*), as Schröder notes, might hold only the first six major feasts, while Si Ulu might hold up to six additional feasts, earning the titles that placed them in the governing hierarchy and entitled them to a share of tribute from future feasts. The feast cycle also established a hierarchy among commoners (*sato*) who might aspire to the title of Si Ila, perhaps best described as "Talking Chiefs," who functioned as spokesmen and deputies of the Si Ulus (sacred chiefs), and who were entitled to a share of tribute from all the commoner's feasts held in their villages.

Marriage Feasts

A second major category of feasts celebrated weddings. Marschall states explicitly that marriage feasts were the major means of constructing alliances between lineages and villages. His analysis is based on the observation that matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is practiced only among the large chiefdoms of south Nias, where it continues to be seen as "the closest family tie that can be created between two *mados* (clans)." Schröder, writing decades before Van Wouden and Lévi-Strauss, nonetheless carefully noted that marriage to the mother's brother's daughter was prescribed in the southern chiefdoms, but not elsewhere on the island. He also observed that the kinship terminology reflects this preference: for most of Nias, father, father's brother, and mother's brother are all called by the same (Proto-Austronesian?) term, *Ama*, while in the south both mother's brother and his daughter are singled out.

Marschall also emphasizes the role of bride price and wedding feasts, noting that the Dutch policy of discouraging feasts "has made more difficult the process of wedding alliances between the *mados*." As additional evidence for the importance of this marriage prescription, Marschall observes that "there exists the strong pressure to marry one of the daughters of the mother's brother, and how much this is felt as a rule can be seen from this, that one must apologize to the Si Baja (uncle) and eventually give him some gold if one doesn't marry one of his daughters" (1977: 131).

Andrew Beatty, who (as noted above) carried out two years of fieldwork in central Nias, also confirms that "in south Nias . . . there is a

jural rule enjoining marriage to the matrilateral cross cousin" (1992: 77), while "in the center of Nias, marriage to the MBD is not strictly allowed, even if such unions—where they occur—are not regarded as gravely anomalous" (90–91). In 1981, Steve Lansing and Ursula Koch conducted a survey of 181 marriages in Hiliamaetaniha, one of the villages of the Maenamölo. Thirty-one marriages were reported to be *onojibaya*, which informants explained specifically meant mother's brother's daughter, and did not extend to other unmarried women of the mother's brother's lineage. Two weddings were also observed at that time. In both cases the weddings (held in Christian churches) were preceded by extensive negotiations concerning bride price. The negotiations were held in the bride's home and presided over by the first chief of her village. Formal speeches were made by chosen spokesmen for the bride's and groom's parties. The Toehenöri himself (see Figure 1) finally set the bride price, which was to be shared by the bride's father and his close male kinsmen. Gold jewelry was actually displayed toward the conclusion of the bargaining. According to informants, the named bride price of several ounces of gold was roughly three times the amount that would actually be exchanged. In general, all of my informants in 1981 confirmed the following points: that marriage to the mother's brother's daughters was strongly preferred, that these marriages were the strongest means of establishing ties between lineages, that bride price was set by negotiations held in the presence of the ranking chiefs, and finally that all of these customs were now steadily weakening. On this evidence, it appears that the *öri* of south Nias were deliberately bound together through a prescriptive system of matrilateral marital exchanges among lineages. Marschall also supports this view.

Law Feasts (Fondrako)

Maatschappelijk is dus ook ten aanzien hiervan de Zuid-Niasser een stap verder gevorderd op het pad van ontwikkeling en beschaving dan de bewoners van het centrum en noorden. [Socially, then, the South Niasser has advanced a step further on the path of development and civilization than the inhabitant of the center and north.] (Schröder 1917: 78)

We have seen that the term *öri* means the circle of people who participate in a title feast. But at a higher level of political organization, *öri* was also

the term for a territorial chiefdom such as the Maenamölo. This seems at first confusing, since a “personal” *öri* is quite vaguely defined, while the “territorial” *öri* or chiefdom has definite borders, a formal organization, and well-defined membership. However, the personal *öri* and the *öri*-as-chiefdom are similar in that both were constituted by feasts that drew together a circle of participants. The territorial *öri*, or chiefdom, was formally created by a type of feast called *fondrako*, which Marschall glosses as Rechtsfeste, or “law feast.” The purpose of these feasts was to draw a circle of adjacent villages/lineages into an alliance.

By means of the law feast, the alliance was transformed into a corporate political unit—the territorial chiefdom—with a formal hierarchy of chiefs drawn from the member clans, fixed territorial boundaries, a system of civil and criminal laws, and even a standardized system of weights and measures to regulate exchanges within the border of the *öri*. The metaphor used to describe the process by which an alliance is constructed is *mondrani*, a word borrowed from the vocabulary of metal-smithing, meaning the process of heating metals together to form an alloy stronger than its component metals. A territorial *öri*—in effect, a chiefdom—was thus created by the “fusing together” of lineages. The oath taken by the chiefs was termed *mondrako*. This oath was taken at the time of the creation of the *öri*, and then periodically renewed—according to Schröder, at intervals of eight years. Sometimes the *fondrako* was repeated sooner, if some natural or social disaster seemed to require a reaffirmation not only of the political alliance of the component lineages but of the norms established by the oath. Today, the large *fondrako* uniting several villages are no longer held. However, a detailed account of one such feast, held in 1926, is provided by Samson:

In Loeha Mangonia these five lineages (*mados*) came together by means of a *mondrako*, a binding oath. Through this oath they defined the location and boundaries of the *öri*-territory. In addition, economic exchanges within the *öri*-territory were regulated. A legal structure was established, and a new stage of social life was thus rung in. (1936: 435–36)

By the *mondrako* (oath-taking) were fixed:

- (1) The *öri* boundaries, not only for the five Moro’s lineages bound by the oath, but also for neighboring societies. It was

agreed that these negotiated borders should be respected. A curse would fall on whosoever failed to abide by them. This was the only regulation that affected societies outside the *öri*.

- (2) The boundaries of each *mado* (lineage).
- (3) The governing structure of the *öri*. This structure consisted of a *toehenöri*, a *tambalina*, a *fahandrona*, a *sidaofa*, and a *sidalima*. These five men formed the group of chiefs, but if necessary numbers could be increased by the addition of the *sidaono* (sixth chief), *sidafitoe* (seventh), and so forth to a maximum of twelve.

- (4) Fixed measures of contents:

a.	<i>a laoroe</i>	=	4 <i>djoemba</i>
b.	<i>a djoemba</i>	=	2 <i>hinaoja</i>
c.	<i>a hinaoja</i>	=	2 <i>kata</i>

Thus were fixed a standard measure for *djoemba*, *hinaoja*, and *kata*. These standard measures were to be entrusted to the safekeeping of the *toehenöri* (first chief). The current *toehenöri* said that he still had the standard measures in his possession.

- (5) The *afore* (pig measure).
- (6) Bride price, according to the various classes.
- (7) Punishments for various crimes.
- (8) Measures regulating the exchange of customary quantities of gold alloys. Four are recognized:

a.	<i>sese</i> (a grade of gold)	=	2.50 guilders per <i>pao</i>
b.	<i>siwaloe</i>	=	5 guilders per <i>pao</i>
c.	<i>simo</i>	=	10 guilders per <i>pao</i>
d.	<i>balaki</i>	=	20 guilders per <i>pao</i>

Although the chiefdomwide *fondrako* are no longer held, Marschall found vestiges of the *fondrako* in 1973:

The "law feast" of the Maenamölo was forbidden, and it seems that soon after the end of this feast the smaller, within-the-village law feasts also met their end. But small feasts are still celebrated in Barosaodona each year. The village founder (i.e., lineage chief) names a day on which he wants the law feast to take place, and organizes a big feast for the village population. Then he gives a major speech, which is partly a sort of yearly report of all the important events of the past year, and partly a "seminar" on law. The village head names all the important rules which must be followed in order to be able to continue life in the village unchanged and unendangered. There are warnings for the young men not to go to the women's bathing place, warnings to all to keep their gardens in good order, and it is repeated that a young man should honor his elders and parents-in-law. All traditional rules for village life are repeated. During these law feasts (*fondrako*), the measures used in the village are also checked. So all who own volume or length measures and gold weights would fetch their measures from their houses and bring them to the *bale*, a small village shrine where the standard measures had been checked at the big law feast at the Hiliamaigila and now the measures used in the village were checked in their turn. (1977: 39)

Beatty also notes that "in many parts of Nias the ancestral decrees on measurement and exchange formed an important part of the constitution of village federations called *öri*. In the Gomo-Susua area no such *öri* federations existed until the Dutch imposed them" (1992: 189). He also observes that "the position of leading noble was formally recognized" only in the southern *öri* (277).

The *Öri* of Southern Nias in Comparative Perspective

So far we have considered evidence in support of the following points:

- (1) Marriage to mother's brother's daughter was systematically practiced within the borders of the southern *öri*, but not elsewhere on the island.

- (2) Such marriages were conceived in terms of political alliance between lineage branches (villages), organized and supervised by chiefs, and enforced by substantial penalties for those who did not abide the prescription. In the central and northern Nias, such alliances among lineages apparently did not exist.
- (3) A system of title feasts established a rank order of titled chiefs among the Si Ulu, or members of the core lineages.
- (4) Law feasts (*fondrako*) bound clusters of villages into territorial political units or chiefdoms, in which the political structure of component lineages (*mado*), based on kinship, was superseded by the formal hierarchy of the chiefdom, established by title feasts and ratified by the *mondrako* oath.
- (5) Within the territory of the chiefdom, alliances between lineages were maintained by prescriptive matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, with formalized exchanges of wealth and feasting.
- (6) *Öri* thus became not loose alliances among independent clans, but sovereign chiefdoms, able to enforce their territorial boundaries, make war, and to enforce a uniform code of laws and a system of weights, measures and exchanges within their borders.
- (7) Samson (1936: 441) notes that the leading Si Ulu had the authority to allocate land surrounding the village for cultivation each year in the southern *öri*. Beatty observes that this differs from the “democratic free-for-all in the center” (1992: 284).

It should be emphasized that each of these points ought still to be treated as tentative; for this reason we will refrain from commenting here on the possible comparative significance of the *öri*. Much of this analysis obviously rests on the work of Schröder, whose own analysis of the historical development of the chiefdoms of Nias followed what would now be described as an extreme diffusionist line (viz., “here we find the pyramid builders in origin”). Perhaps for this reason, his work has been largely neglected. But Schröder appears to have been a careful observer, and it is possible to extract a very different account of the developmental

trajectory of the *öri* from his ethnography. Following Schröder, we suggest that the territorial *öri* of the south provided a solution to a situation of intense competition for resources; a competition driven by population pressure and expressed in the forms of head-hunting and intervillage warfare. As noted above, in 1811 Marsden described the villages of Nias as "independent of and at perpetual variance with one another," which presumably made the operations of swidden farming increasingly perilous. A century later, Schröder observed that villages had to be abandoned after a few generations because nearby fields were exhausted and it was too dangerous to cultivate distant fields. Schröder provides much empirical evidence for overpopulation, deforestation, and shortening of swidden cycles. Within the territory of territorial *öri* such as the Maenamölo, however, Schröder claims that farmers were safe from fear of headhunters. Inside the borders of the *öri*, agriculture was regulated by the nobles or chiefs (Si Ulu), resulting, according to Schröder, in higher productivity because overcultivation was not permitted. The social mechanisms used to create the territorial *öri*, or chiefdom of the south—matrilateral marriage and prestige feasts—were not novel inventions in western Indonesia, but part of a common cultural heritage (cf. Singarimbun 1975). The difference is simply that both feasting and matrilateral alliances among clans were apparently pushed several notches further than elsewhere, and by means of the *fondrako* (law feasts) generated a political structure in which kinship had begun to be superseded by formal legal authority. The success of this new system of social organization may have fostered the above-mentioned cultural innovations, which appear to have been gaining momentum when the first Dutch warships appeared off Lagundri Bay.

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