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Ethnicity in the making: the Tlingits of south-east Alaska on the eve of the 21st century

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The Tlingits of south-east Alaska provide a fascinating example of the construction of ethnicity by indigenous people at the end of the twentieth century. In order to survive as an ethnic group and to protect their language and culture from the economic and cultural pressures of mainstream society, contemporary Tlingits have modified their traditional norms, cultural codes and even clan loyalties. They have reinterpreted their cultural legacy and introduced innovations in order to maintain their distinct ethnic identity. One result has been a conflict between old and new loyalties, between traditionally and non-traditionally oriented Tlingits. The contemporary situation is full of paradoxes since, in order to sustain their traditional culture, Tlingits have had to reinterpret and transform it, and it is the most acculturated and assimilated people who are most enthusiastic about their indigenous heritage.[1]

Modern Tlingits and an identity crisis

The ethno-demographic pattern of Alaska has changed drastically over the last 150 years. During the gold boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Alaska was flooded by thousands of white migrants who accounted for about a half of its population between 1900 and 1940. The next wave of migrants arrived in the 1940s and 1950s with the development of Alaska as an area of strategic military importance during and following World War Two. Finally, a third migratory wave occurred in the early 1980s encouraged by rapid economic growth. As a result, the Alaskan indigenous population has dropped from 98.4% to 15.3% of the total Alaskan population during the last 150 years (Jacquot 1974; Williams 1988; Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Section 1990).

In 1980 there were 7,192 Tlingits in south-east Alaska, who comprised the overwhelming majority of indigenous people. In addition, there were 1,011 Haida, living mainly in the southernmost areas, and 1,208 Tsimshians on Annette Island. There were also a small number of Aleuts, Athabascans, Cherokee and other Native Americans in the State. By the mid-1980s migration to Alaska had decreased, and emigration had exceeded immigration by the end of the decade. The indigenous population accounted for 19% of the inhabitants of south-east Alaska by the early 1990s. Also at that period, newcomers began to settle in towns such as Yakutat and Angoon which were occupied mainly by Tlingits and where the indigenous language and culture had survived better than

elsewhere. During the last few decades many indigenous Alaskans have left their native country, moving mainly north to Anchorage and south to areas of the west coast such as Washington, Oregon and California. In 1990, 9,676 registered members of the Tlingit and Haida tribal union lived in south-east Alaska. Of the remainder, 1,128 lived in Anchorage and 7,197 in other regions of the U.S.A. (mainly those mentioned above). The same pattern was observed in the early 1970s (Worl 1990: Table 1).

Popular areas of employment for Tlingits include commercial fishing, logging, health care and administration and, for the more highly educated, engineering, education and the law, although these latter occupations are available for only a few Tlingits and vary in frequency in different areas. For example, in the town of Hoonah the bulk of the working population is employed in education, health care, the building industry, service industries and small-scale trading.[2] Only a few people are engaged in fishing, logging, crafts and business (U.S. Department of Commerce 1989: 897; Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska 1990: Hoonah 9-11). Since at least the 1970s traditionally-oriented Tlingits, such as the inhabitants of Hoonah, have been gradually abandoning their traditional occupations, especially fishing. Nowadays the occupations of such Tlingits are limited to those fields which do not demand sophisticated modern technical skills and knowledge.

In recent decades high birth rates and a slight decrease in mortality have resulted in the Alaskan Native population having more dependents for each able-bodied person than whites in Alaska. There are 74.5 minors and 8.3 seniors for every 100 indigenous people of working age (that is, 18 to 65 years), whereas the figures among whites are 43.1 and 5.2 respectively (Williams 1988: 11). Such figures apply to Hoonah where, as in other small Tlingit towns, unemployment is high at 28.8%, especially among the young. As a result, overall incomes are very low. For example, in Hoonah in the 1970s, the average income per annum was $20,000 per household or $4,500 per person. To put it differently, about 80% of the local population lived below the poverty line (U.S. Department of Commerce 1989: 924, Table 27; Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska 1990: Hoonah 7). It is important to remember that these figures exclude traditional forms of subsistence, particularly fishing which is still an important survival resource for Tlingits. On the other hand, the traditional fishing economy was in decline during the 1970s and 1980s, as was mentioned above.

The loss of traditional occupations, high unemployment, low income and low standards of living are associated in cause and effect relationships with an increase in social problems such as alcoholism, drug consumption, antisocial behavior (including homicide and suicide), incest, domestic violence, a growth in the number of single mothers, and the like. Suicides among indigenous Alaskan youngsters, especially males aged 14-25 years, occur twenty two times as frequently as in the U.S.A. in general. Up to 70% of suicides, and most antisocial action in general, occur under the influence of alcohol (Governor's Interim Commission on Children and Youth 1988: 73, 75). Such problems are increasingly common among the indigenous population of Alaska in general, and Tlingits are no exception according to my informants, although every community has its own specific pattern. For example, Kake is characterized by an

especially high suicide rate while high drug consumption is typical for Angoon.

Why are there these problems? A very low standard of living is obviously one of the main reasons since, as a rule, social problems are mostly prevalent among the poorest families (ibid.: 95). However, Tlingits themselves tend to explain them as resulting from culture shock caused by the introduction of new cultural values, the decline of traditional culture, and the marginalization of people, especially the young (cf. Arutiunov 1987: 94).

Tlingit culture has been seriously affected by the activities of the Presbyterian Church and Alaskan Brotherhood. The Church used to prohibit everything that, in its view, contradicted Christianity (such as rituals, folk beliefs and many customs including potlatch), and the English language dominated and still dominates in schools. For a long time, the Tlingit language was forbidden in schools, violations of this rule being severely punished. There are still very few indigenous Alaskans working as school teachers, and the curricula are of a standard American type. Until very recently, children left their native cultural environment to go to boarding schools, and the youngsters had no access to traditional knowledge.

Tlingits, especially their leaders connected with the Enlightened Alaskan Brotherhood, traditionally valued knowledge as an important prestige resource. As a result, they believed that the American education system could help them to overcome social and cultural problems, and allow them to gain respected positions in American society. Consequently, many parents encouraged their children to receive a standard American education and consciously avoided teaching them Tlingit language and customs. Thus, in recent decades Tlingits have become the most educated of the indigenous inhabitants of Alaska (Jacquot 1974). There are many intellectuals among them, including elderly people. Almost all Tlingits are fluent in English, and many of them consider it their mother tongue. At the same time, competence in Tlingit is rapidly declining. This process is well-known in Hoonah where, in the 1970s English was the only language spoken by those aged 17 years and younger, and only a third of those over 18 years of age were more or less competent in Tlingit. Overall only 3% of local people spoke mainly Tlingit and limited English (U.S. Department of Commerce 1989: 870, Table 25).

The mass media have also had a significant effect, particularly on Tlingit identity. Sergei Kan describes a funny and very instructive case dealing with the introduction of new subjects into joking performances at contemporary potlatches. In an amusing 'cowboy and Indian' game the cowboy role is performed by a respected Tlingit leader, and the Indian role by a white man adopted by the clan (Kan 1989: 418). To put it another way, the 'cowboy' and 'Indian' roles are loaded with a clear social meaning rooted in social status differences. In fact, this case does not seem at all funny when one considers that the mass media and schools continually provide Tlingit children with an image of a smart, generous cowboy confronting 'wild Indians'. Tlingit children are implicitly pressured to adopt a white identity, and a negative attitude towards Native Americans is cultivated (Worl n.d.: 10; Shnirelman 1991). Hence, there is an identity crisis for many teenagers and young adults. When all their attempts to become whites fail completely, frustration, disorientation and culture shock result. Understandably, many of my informants insisted that a return to their traditional culture and values would put an end to

alcoholism, drug consumption and suicides.

Tlingit marriage and adoption practices today

The preceding discussion raises several important issues: what is Tlingit culture today? How can it be interpreted? What does its restoration and the return to former values mean? Who are its bearers and protectors? And, finally, what does it mean to be Tlingit today?

Marriage patterns among contemporary Tlingits during approximately the past one hundred years give a key to modern Tlingit identity and demonstrate how it is established.[3] 8,257 people lived in Sitka in 1988, of whom 1,676 (20.3%) were of indigenous origin, mainly Tlingits. My survey includes 118 Tlingits which encompasses 7% of all Tlingits in Sitka. There were 65 females and 53 males among them; 88% of them was over 20 years of age. Thus, the great bulk of my sample consisted of adults. It is reasonable to assume that many of their parents had married before the middle of 20th century, and their grandparents in the late 19th or early 20th century. In 58% of the cases surveyed both parents were Tlingits, while in 35% of cases only the informants' mothers were Tlingits, and in 7% of cases only their fathers.

Cross-cultural marriages were common among the second and third descending generations, and the tribal endogamy index was less than 60% even before the mid-20th century. During the last three to four decades an even more marked pattern has emerged with cross-cultural marriages accounting for up to 60% of all marriages, outnumbering internal marriages. At the same time, violations of the rule of clan exogamy have increased drastically, and the number of endogamous clan marriages equals exogamous ones. It is worth noting that a violation of the clan exogamy rule was punishable by death in the early 20th century (Oberg 1934). Finally, the great bulk of cross-cultural marriages before the mid-20th century occurred with whites. A new trend has emerged in the last few decades: Tlingits have begun to search for spouses mainly among the other indigenous populations of Alaska, the Northwest Coast and the U.S.A. in general, as well as among Mexicans, Asians, and the like. Obviously, these new trends undermine the traditional social structure based on matrilineal clans and moieties which is still of great importance for many contemporary Tlingits (Petershoare 1985: 19-20; Kan 1989: 409; Kan 1991).

The offspring of cross-cultural marriages are, as a rule, considered to be Tlingits, at least when they are born within Tlingit territory. A number of those having non-Tlingit mothers is progressively growing: marriages of Tlingit men to non-Tlingit women accounted for 16% of marriages before the mid-20th century and have increased to 28-33% in the last few decades, a trend which looks set to continue. Given that matrilineal descent persists and is respected among modern Tlingits, what is the mechanism that determines Tlingit identity for the offspring of cross-cultural marriages? It is adoption: that is, the formal incorporation of the alien spouse into a clan of the moiety opposite to that of the Tlingit spouse. Such adoptions occur as part of potlatches arranged primarily in order to commemorate deceased clan members. Formerly, a potlatch occurred a year after a person's death, but nowadays it takes place on the fortieth day, according to

Russian Orthodox Church rule. Numerous guests from other clans are invited to the potlatch, which is arranged by the relevant clan and is typically accompanied by many ceremonies and rituals, including adoptions. Formerly, adoption was practiced mainly for orphan children who, as a result, were raised by matrilineal relatives in accordance with the matrilineal descent principle. The Tlingit custom emphasized social rather than biological kinship, and the main event was a reincarnation of the deceased matrilineal relative's spirit ('step-uncle') which moved into the adopted person together with a clan personal name (Petershoare 1985: 16). The same idea is the implicit basis for the contemporary adoption of non-Tlingit spouses by Tlingit clans.

I collected information about contemporary adoption practices from seven people, five of whom had personally experienced this ritual during the last few decades. Although their experiences differed slightly in the sequence of events and in that some elements appeared to be optional, the following general pattern emerged. An individual to be adopted put on the special dress and head-gear of the respective clan. The adoption ritual was commonly run by a household head or lineage leader who selected a name for the individual being adopted. The ritual began with clan songs, then the leader pronounced the chosen name three times, after which all the potlatch participants repeated it three times in chorus. Simultaneously the ritual leader took a coin or a dollar bill, touched the adoptee's forehead with it, and passed it to the opposite clan. This was followed by the performance of a dance belonging to the host clan by the adopted individual or his or her representative. Dancing took place behind an improvised curtain (a blanket) which was held on each side by members of the opposite moieties of the Eagle and Raven so that the audience could see only the dancer's head.

The contemporary adoption ritual is an adaptation of an old ritual, comprising traditional elements and retaining some traditional symbols. For example, the songs and dances imitate old forms devoted to the spirit of the deceased, *yeik utee*. Also, in former times the dancers hid themselves behind a blanket with only their picturesque headdresses visible above it, supposedly appearing to the audience as manifestations of the spirits. When the dancing was over, the performers wiped the sweat from their faces with the blanket which was then presented to the most respected guest. This act expressed 'the idea that the hosts are giving part of their own selves to the opposite moiety' (Kan 1990: 357). The contemporary ritual of adoption contains similar symbolism, albeit in fragmented form and supplemented with modern elements. In particular, the manipulations with a coin or a dollar bill mentioned above symbolize not only shared substance, but also the high value of the name received by the adopted person, a role which in the former days was played by the valuable Chilkat blanket used as a curtain and, since European settlement, by money paid to the guests of the opposite moiety by members of the host clan. Nowadays adoption rituals usually take place in a building belonging to the Alaskan Brotherhood and the money goes to this organization rather than to the clan. Such money is one of the main financial sources for the restoration of Tlingit culture.

The adoption of non-Tlingit spouses by Tlingit clans plays an important social role. In former days an orphan or illegitimate child failed to enjoy full membership of Tlingit

society; clans refused to deal with such children since they had no 'proper' relatives who could support them and arrange the required rituals (Petershoare 1985: 15). That is why both parents had to be affiliated with Tlingit clans, and it explains the importance of adoption as a means of gaining clan membership. An especially important result of adoption was that it enabled the children of non-Tlingit women to be affiliated into the clan structure via their mother's adopted clan.

Curiously enough, contemporary candidates for adoption need not have any special training in order to take part in the ritual and to be adopted. Competence in the Tlingit language and culture is not required, although such knowledge is acknowledged where it exists. On this issue my informants differed in their attitudes and experiences. Some of them said that nobody had trained them for the adoption ceremony; others regarded the ritual as a reward for their careful observance of Tlingit norms of behavior; still others felt that one had to train oneself both emotionally and physically before the ritual. Thus, a knowledge of Tlingit traditions seems to be a matter of choice. Some women felt neither the desire nor any pressure to learn the Tlingit language and culture even after many years of marriage to Tlingit men. Others, including a young white woman, enthusiastically learned the Tlingit language and demonstrated a strong interest in Tlingit culture.

During recent decades the range of categories of people eligible for adoption has broadened. Nowadays, Tlingits adopt those whites into their clans who have made a special contribution to their culture and society, such as anthropologists, museum staff, administrators and political activists. For example, they have adopted E. Greenin, the former Governor of the State of Alaska who struggled against racial discrimination, and former U.S. President Carter who put an end to logging at Admiralty Island. Also, in order to raise money for cultural programs Tlingits sometimes adopt wealthy white people who agree to pay large sums of money for the privilege of being a Tlingit.

The practice of adoption helps the offspring of cross-cultural marriages to become full members of Tlingit society, and sometimes this continues for several generations. One Tlingit man, whose mother was of Athabascan and Russian origin, married a white girl. Since his mother and wife had been adopted by Tlingit clans, both he and his children are considered to be Tlingits. It is in this way that recent generations of Tlingits have come to include people of non-Tlingit ancestry.

Here lie the roots of a conflict caused by different interpretations of kinship in Tlingit culture, on the one hand, and the mainstream society, on the other. The former emphasizes the social basis of kinship and the latter the biological. This is clearly demonstrated by the rule which states that Sealaska Corporation shareholders must have no less than one quarter Native blood (Worl 1990: 156). Ethno-racial differentiation still forms the basis for official documentation of people in the U.S.A.: categories commonly used on health-care questionnaires, application forms and many other documents include Euro-Americans, Afro-Americans, Mexicans (Latinos), Asiatic Americans, and Native Americans (Hollinger 1995). This principle is also used in order to establish the land rights of indigenous Alaskans and to provide them with benefits. Although every Native American regardless of the blood principle can receive a tribal card, only those having no less than one quarter Native blood can claim grants from the Federal Government for

education, health care, and the like. In future such rules may stimulate a growth of internal marriages among Tlingits.

Modern Tlingit identity

How do all these factors affect Tlingit identity? In order to understand what Tlingits themselves mean by identity I interviewed several dozen people. As a result, three groups of Tlingits can be distinguished:

1. People who do not know the Tlingit language and have only minimal knowledge of traditional Tlingit culture. Such people emphasize primarily biological relationships and, sometimes, traditional links between Tlingits and their Native territory in their conception of identity. Some of them treat Tlingit identity as akin to citizenship.
2. People who are not competent in the Tlingit language but who are familiar with at least some aspects of traditional Tlingit culture or are eager to learn more. Such people emphasize cultural factors and sometimes, but not necessarily, language as key aspects of identity. However, lacking any deep cultural knowledge, they understand Tlingit culture rather differently to others such as members of group 3. Some of them stress subsistence economy; others, traditional values and education; and still others, rituals, rules of conduct, and the like.
3. For those who are fluent Tlingit speakers and have a detailed knowledge of Tlingit culture, and who are more often than not the elders or traditional leaders, the crucial point deals with the history of particular clans and lineages, their sacred attributes, legends, beliefs, rituals and ceremonies. Traditionally a knowledge of the past was highly valued and was a source of prestige, transmitted only between the generations within noble families. Since this knowledge was directly linked with power and authority, it was kept secret and circulated only within particular lineages.

It is interesting to note that acculturated Tlingits are inclined to emphasize a pan-Tlingit identity, whereas those who are conversant with the culture, stress clan loyalty above all. Why is this? What does clan identity mean for traditionally-oriented Tlingits? Formerly, the matrilineal clan was the most important social unit in Tlingit society. It was the clan that owned everything which was important for Tlingit life - names, social ranks, crests, rituals, dances, songs, legends, and especially vast territory including hunting and gathering grounds, sanctuaries, burial grounds, and the like. Traditionally, a Tlingit could not even exist as a social persona if he or she was not a member of a clan, since clan identity predetermined one's social milieu and norms of conduct. The main symbol of this identity was a person's name, which contained all the important information about its bearer. That is why, despite the tremendous changes in Tlingit society since the late 19th century, the clan structure has been one of the most persistent elements of Tlingit culture, and has recently even undergone a revival (Kan 1991).[4]

In order to understand the importance of clan territory for Tlingits one should look more closely at some crucial aspects of their identity. I came across many Tlingits who were born elsewhere and had lived far from their clan lands for a long time but who still

considered these territories to be their 'motherland' and identified with their respective communities. This is characteristic not only of traditionally-oriented Tlingits but also of a great many acculturated ones. For example, a person who was born in Juneau and lived in California for many years, recently moved to Sitka. However, he avoids classing himself as a member of the Sitka community since the latter is identified with the Kiksadi clan which, according to folklore, was the first to settle there. Instead, the man belongs to the Kagwantan clan and identifies himself with the Klakwan community in the north of Tlingit country, although he has never been there. Another informant was born and grew up in the State of Maryland and later moved to Sitka. He is aware that the lands of his clan, Dog Salmon, are situated around the old village of Shakan, and he confesses that he dreams of visiting the area. Yet another informant was born in Sitka but identifies his native land as the town of Angoon where his Deishitan clan has land rights. Thus, regardless of their birthplace, Tlingits still identify with their 'motherland' territory which is traditionally owned by the clans to which they belong.

In recent decades a favorable environment has emerged for the growth of Tlingit self-awareness both nation-wide and at the clan level. As mentioned above, in the early 20th century intensive Americanization meant that whites were an important reference group for Tlingits. Moreover, in order to be able to provide their children with an advanced 'white school' education, many indigenous parents searched for whites among their ancestors or emphasized physical similarities between their children and whites. Also, some Tlingits distanced themselves from relatives and friends and left their communities, causing a split in Tlingit society (Jacquot 1974: 62; Petershoare 1985: 18). Until recently, according to my informants, it was prestigious to be white, and often young people would seek to identify themselves with whites. However, more often than not they failed, simply because whites did not want to recognize Tlingits as part of white society. Nowadays, Tlingits like to cite a wise leader of Angoon who said, 'Here is your skin. Look what color it is. You will never wash out this color. Thus, do not forget your cultural roots'. The same idea was expressed by an informant who quoted what his grandmother had said to his mother, 'Whatever happens, remember your origin'. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, by which the U.S. Congress confirmed their legal rights to land based on their ethnicity, was a powerful stimulus for the growth of self-awareness among Alaskan Natives in general, and Tlingits in particular.

It is worth mentioning that there has been a net growth of Alaskan Natives in recent decades, and the balance between non-indigenous newcomers and the indigenous population has stabilized. This has happened despite the fact that the flow of immigrants has by no means declined. It is simply that during the 1970s and 1980s the birth rate greatly increased among indigenous inhabitants while the death rate remained stable. Besides, as was discussed above, a reorientation of marriage strategies took place, and young Tlingits began to search for spouses among Mexicans, Filipinos and the like, rather than among whites. The system of values changed as well, and Tlingit identity became prestigious. That happened not only because of access to land rights but also due to the growth of Tlingit involvement in local politics. At the same time, new U.S. Government legislation froze the purchase of indigenous Corporations' lands until 1992, and in 1991

Tlingits became highly alarmed by the real threat of losing land in the near future. In the view of Tlingit cultural activists, this loss could only be prevented by a growth in ethnic self-awareness and feelings of responsibility for their own people. In order to achieve these goals, special education programs for children were introduced by Tlingit cultural activists. Adoption, which accelerated population growth, was used for the same end. Thus, the Tlingit cultural revival movement does not imply a shift towards ethnic isolation.

Revival or invention of Tlingit culture?

It is by no means easy to describe contemporary Tlingit culture in general terms, and even less so to discuss it as a revival. Sergei Kan doubts the existence of any pan-Tlingit culture since, depending on age, education, social experience, religious orientation and the like, various Tlingit groups (or 'cohorts') have distinct cultural profiles, differ in cultural competence, and understand Tlingit cultural values quite differently (Kan 1989). However the main problem lies with clans because traditionally they were the primary owners of both material and intellectual property, and jealously protected it from any encroachment from outside. In former days a careless use of a name, dance, song, narrative or the like belonging to another clan was treated as a serious offence and was severely punished including by death or inter-clan warfare. Even now traditionally oriented Tlingits are very nervous about this sort of encroachment. One elder told me how he interrupted an old Haida woman who was trying to explain the meaning of Tlingit totem poles. 'She has no right', he said indignantly. 'They are not her poles. She knows nothing about them'. For the same reason some Tlingits disapprove of the ethnographic studies of one researcher, despite her Tlingit origin; in their view she describes Tlingit culture incorrectly. They present their culture from the viewpoint of their own clans, and different clans have different views of Tlingit culture.

These complex issues make it difficult for those trying to teach children 'all-Tlingit' traditions, since in doing so they cannot avoid breaking some important Tlingit norms. In the modern context, a clan norm was first openly broken in 1968 when Jenny Marks from the Klukwaksadi clan collected together a dancing group to perform in Juneau on a holiday celebrating the successful resolution of the Tlingit and Haida land claims case. She was criticized by some Tlingits who protested against the performance of ritual dances in a non-potlatch context (Worl 1990: 157). Those who try to teach Tlingit culture to children nowadays have to overcome even more serious resistance. In Sitka special educational programs aimed at indigenous children were established by Isabel Brady, an activist connected with the local Tlingit cultural movement and a granddaughter of one of the founders of the Alaskan Brotherhood. In 1974 she invited one of the most distinguished local leaders, Charles Josef, to be a teacher.[5] Initially he was reluctant and even went to the town of Heins in the north in order to discuss the issue with the elders of his Kluknahadi clan. The elders were by no means delighted and protested against open violation of clan property in any form, especially the teaching of non-Tlingit children and the recording of clan knowledge with videos, dictaphones, and the like. To understand their response one should note that in some cases the elders were paid for the

transmission of traditional knowledge, and they did not want to lose this privilege.

Finally Charles Josef agreed to teach. He made this decision after his lucky rescue from an airplane crash which he interpreted as a sign from heaven that he was to transmit his extensive knowledge to children. Since that time, many teenagers have been trained in folk singing and dancing in Sitka, and many acculturated Tlingits send their children to these classes. This teaching violates three important Tlingit norms: first, children are trained together regardless of clan or tribal affiliation (I saw Cherokee girls among others); secondly, they learn songs and dances which belong to various clans, not only Tlingit, but also Haida ones; and finally, performances often occur at non-ritual events. As a result, these performances lose their deep traditional meaning, which is frequently ignored by both performers and audience (Kan 1989, 1990). At the same time, many Tlingits consider that such performances symbolize an all-Tlingit legacy and have educational and aesthetic value. The mechanism of transmitting the culture has also changed. Formerly men taught dancing and singing, whereas nowadays women run all the cultural programs. In brief, while attempting to restore the traditional culture Tlingit activists have built a new phenomenon, although they have used traditional resources.

The crafts have been affected by the new developments as well. The traditional transmission of skills between generations has broken down. The craftsmen whom I interviewed had learnt their skills from various sources most of which had nothing to do with the traditional means of transmission; one craftsman had learnt bone-carving from the Inuits, and another, a jeweler, was trained by Germans. Many Tlingit craftpersons now learn Tlingit designs and styles from the anthropological literature. Although they reproduce traditional patterns, they are not able to understand their basic meaning, let alone important nuances of meaning. More often than not they ignore the clan affiliation of the designs they use. For example, a bone-carver drew crests of various clans on the front wall of his house in order to attract tourists. Traditionally this was prohibited, and previously he would have been severely punished. Many Tlingits are displeased with him, but they do not want to take any practical steps against him. Craft traditions are also violated in other ways. Nowadays women learn wood- and bone-carving, which was unheard of in former times when women only learnt weaving and basket-making. According to my informants only a few youngsters are willing to learn traditional crafts, so many elders will teach anybody who is interested. Formerly crafts were strictly controlled by noble lineages and were not accessible to others. Today these crafts are taught regardless of any clan affiliation; at the National Museum in Sitka old men and women teach anybody jewelry-making, wood-carving, basket-making and bead embroidery. Formerly a clan was supplied with ceremonial artifacts (canoes, clothing, totem poles, and the like) by a clan of the opposite moiety. This rule is now frequently violated as well. One chief told me that he was provided with ceremonial clothes by his mother. He was embarrassed because it was shameful, and he had not told anybody else about it.

Thus, while building a uniform culture and reinterpreting their cultural unity, Tlingits, consciously or unconsciously, tend to ignore the intra-cultural differences which are deeply rooted in their clan society. Simultaneously, clan norms, which are declining

in importance, are also being broken. To put it differently, Tlingits are experiencing a development which was described by Ernest Gellner; not a 'cultural revival' but the formation of a modern nation based on a cultural unity which demands the sacrifice of intra-cultural differences (Gellner 1987: 10; 1983). This is obviously a case of the 'invention of culture' (Hobsbawm 1983) in which particular aspects of various clan subcultures are consciously selected, reinterpreted and used in quite different contexts. Cultural elements introduced by whites play an important role in this newly-built culture as well, since the process in question occurs in conjunction with close inter-relationships with non-Tlingits, that is, across the cultural boundary (after Barth 1969), and within the American state. The data presented here demonstrate clearly the outstanding role played by political factors, particularly by the political unification resulting from the Tlingit struggle for human rights and their lands. In some particulars this development reminds me of the emergence of socialist nations in the former Soviet Union.

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Notes

1) My analysis is based on data collected in June 1991 during fieldstudies in Sitka and other Tlingit towns. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the period 1990-1991 was an important turning point for the Tlingit people due to the adoption at that time of legislation allowing land purchase.
2) Hoonah is of special interest since it is one of a few traditional sites where Tlingit language and culture have survived to the present. Consequently, the inhabitants of Hoonah are highly respected by most Tlingits.
3) This discussion is based on data collected in Sitka in June 1991. A preliminary discussion of this issue can be found in Shnirelman 1992a.
4) The recent revival of Tlingit culture is largely due to the struggle for land. From the 1930s to the 1950s Tlingit land claims were directed at the U.S. Government in the name of particular clans. This became a point of conflict between Tlingits and the Federal Government whose approach to the land claim issue was quite different in that it preferred to deal with the Tlingits as a single body rather than with particular clans. This conflict undermined the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 which was intended to provide a final solution to the land claim issue; five south-east Alaskan Tlingit communities are still dissatisfied with the Act and consider that it in no way put an end to the dispute (Worl n.d.: 2).
5) Born 1895, died 1986.

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