

SIXTEEN



RELATIONS BETWEEN CLANS¹

[236–244; 264–274; 121–128; 56–60]²

FOR ALL ITS HOLD over the lives of its members, the clan is not the sole organizing force among the Gilyak. Every clan, according to the basic principles of their matrimonial norms, is bound through marriage ties with at least four other clans of *akhmalk* and *imgi*. Between all the relatives of the clan arise ties of common origin from the mother (the first ancestors and representatives of each generation of these four clans are matrilineal cousins to each other), which are of great importance to primitive man. In addition, there arise ties of natural intimacy from the generations of women entwining these clans in a continuous chain of marriages. We know that in practice, however, these ties extend far beyond the original four clans, for every clan which has some matrimonial relations with a single member of another clan becomes *akhmalk* or *imgi* to the entire clan. On the other hand, every *akhmalk* or *imgi* is not only related to those clans with whom they have direct relations, but also to the latter's *akhmalk* and *imgi* clans. So every clan has, besides their *akhmalk* and *imgi* of the first degree, those of the second, third, and fourth degrees. All these clans are called *pandf*, persons of common origin [56].

Thus we discern that this clear and simple basic principle underlying the family and clan, the principle by which a man preferentially marries his mother's brother's daughter, also becomes the foundation for consanguineal ties and sympathies not only within the clan itself but across much broader, inter-clan alliances among the entire people. Owing to the unfavorable conditions we discussed some chapters back, these ties could have become amalgamated into such organizations as the phratries and tribes of the North American Indians. Instead they created an atmosphere of social unity which has paved the way for inter-clan relations.

Let us consider more closely the ties which arise between the clans which constitute the *pandf* and which take and give wives to each other. Not mere sentiments, these ties take quite definite form. First comes the mutual obligation of feeding and hospitality. This is essentially an extension to the consanguineal *pandf* of

¹ [Editor's note: The AMNH Russian typescript and the two 1933 Soviet editions titled this section, "Inter-clan Relations"; the AMNH English typescript titled it, "Gentile Inter-relations."]

² [Editor's note: Shternberg published a version of this chapter nearly identical to the AMNH Russian typescript and the 1933 Soviet editions in Shternberg, "Giliaki," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 28, no. 63 (1904h), 111–119.]

the obligation to show benevolence toward the clan deities (who as a rule are theirs through the female line). Thus the formula for inter-clan relations is that the son-in-law must be fed. This does not mean that in his household the *akhmalk* supports the *imgi* and his family continuously. It might have been so in the remote past when the husband lived in the house of his wife. But nowadays, when agnatic principles operate, the wife moves to her husband's dwelling and usually settles permanently in her husband's clan's habitation. Nevertheless the principle of mutual feeding plays an important role in the unification of the clans [57].³

Earlier we discussed a peculiar religious ceremony known as "stepping into the kettles" [chapter twelve]. At the last moment when the bride is about to leave her father's house, a big four-handled kettle is placed against the threshold inside the *yurta*, while a smaller one is placed on the outside. On leaving the house the bride and groom must step with one foot in the inside kettle and the other in the outside one. After that the larger kettle becomes the property of the bride's father, while the smaller one is taken by the bridegroom. A year after the wedding, when the couple makes a ritual visit to the father-in-law, the same ceremony is repeated but with cups. Our interest in this ceremony here lies in the objects exchanged, for they are called *nits*, or literally, "mine-yours," a symbol of mutual feeding.⁴

This important principle of mutual feeding is not restricted to periodical visits of the son-in-law, for much more serious instances may arise. In cases of real need, when a son-in-law cannot get help even from his own clan, as sometimes happens when fish change their course during the fishing season, he will pack up his family, dogs, and cattle and move to the village of his father-in-law for the entire season. Here he is ever welcome and feels completely at home. He is well fed, and everything is shared with him. Of course he is not a complete parasite, and does as much as possible for his father-in-law. But this hardly covers the expense of supporting his family, who often arrive suddenly at a time when fish have already been salted and stored for the season and getting additional provisions is impossible.

The same brotherly relations between father-in-law and son-in-law are manifest on hunting expeditions. The most important of these expeditions—for bear, sable, or sea mammals—require several men. And it is characteristic that in all such cases the Gilyak invites a young man from his *imgi* clan sooner than any other relative, for with him he feels more at ease than with someone from his own clan. He can

³ [Editor's note: In his 1949 chapter on Gilyak social organization, Lévi-Strauss asserted that, as in many systems featuring the generalized exchange of women, Gilyak *akhmalk* (wife-givers) were in a subordinate position to the *imgi* (wife-takers). Citing passages such as the one above from Shternberg, as well as Gilyak legends and the work of Soviet ethnographer Erukhim A. Kreinovich, Lydia Black argued the opposite case, that *akhmalk* were in the superior position. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon), 302–303; and Lydia Black, "Relative Status of Wife Givers and Wife Takers in Gilyak Society," *American Anthropologist* 74, no. 5 (1972), 1244–1248. For further discussion of relative status between local descent groups following matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, see Edmund Leach, "The Structural Implications of Matrilineal Cross-Cousin Marriage," in *Rethinking Anthropology* (London: Athlone Press, 1961), 54–104; and Burton Pasternak, *Introduction to Kinship and Social Organization* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 73.]

⁴ [Editor's note: The AMNH Russian typescript and the 1933 Soviet versions of this paragraph include further Gilyak terms for this ceremony.]

speak and joke freely with his *imgi*, whereas between clansmen there is always the chance of some prohibition being overlooked. The *imgi* themselves prefer to be with their *akhmalk*, for all the women of their own generation in the *akhmalk* clan are their *ang'rei*, upon whom they have always had marital right in the broadest sense of that word. The local youth, in turn, find compensation in the clan of their own *akhmalk* [58].

As a result of these frequent meetings, the youths of the clans, the so-called *navkh*, create many tender friendships.⁵ The custom of fictive brotherhood is very popular among the Gilyak. Usually it is expressed in the periodical exchange of gifts or in mutual aid when the need arises. One comes across many touching cases of covenant brotherhood between the *navkh*. I happened to witness such an example in the settlement Ngambevo. Two *navkh* lived together in one yurt. They were never apart, like Orestes and Pylades, and all that they had was shared. They followed each other like lovers. It is true that they were both young and unmarried; it is therefore hard to know what would have happened to their friendship later on. But such examples illustrate the type of relationship that exists between members of matrimonially related clans.

In spite of the strict agnatic principle which governs inheritance, there is one exception in regard to the *pandf*. According to the testament of wills, *imgi* inherit iron *sagund* (which goes into the bride-price), while *akhmalk* inherit fur *sagund* (which goes into the dowry). This rule makes the bride-price a mere formality of moving it from one pocket into another and is an important indication that the bride-price among the Gilyak was formerly not a price for the bride but a religious ransom. For what purpose?

The bride-price under the Gilyak form of marriage is a strange anomaly, since marriage into the mother's clan and preferentially between true brothers' and sisters' children is a religious obligation. Evidently the appearance of this institution was evoked by some change in the marriage norms. This change is well known to us. In cases where marriage with a woman from mother's clan was for some reason or another impossible, one was forced to take a wife from a strange clan. But the latter was obliged to keep its women for legitimate *imgi*, and could only consent to give their women when masking the action by some religious subterfuge, which would also result in personal profit for the father-in-law. Analogous to religious ransoms in cases of vengeance, bride-price appeared. It fulfilled both the demands of religion and the interest of the father-in-law. The *imgi* clan which violated the marriage laws covered itself by means of another legal fiction. They called the entire illegitimate clan from which they had taken a wife *akhmalk*, which at once legitimized it. In the course of time the true origins of this institution were completely forgotten, and the bride-price became a general rule even in marriages between legitimate clans. Such might be the origin of the bride-price among other peoples too.

The participation of the entire *pandf* in the bear festival was another important factor in strengthening the ties between matrimonially linked clans. It had perhaps

⁵ [Editor's note: Russian editions include a footnote here that reads, "We recall that *navkh* mutually call each other 'imgi,' and 'brothers' of their 'wives.'"]

even greater effect for clan unification than the Olympic games did in ancient Greece for the unity of the Greek tribes. The bear festival takes place every winter in one settlement or another. In well-populated settlements, it is held almost every winter. There are no difficulties in attending them; all one has to do is harness a sled and start off. Everywhere along the way, as in the settlement where the festival is being held, dogs are fed and travelers are regaled with the best of foods. But for the slight inconvenience, everything else is socially most gratifying. The festival, the procession, target shooting, and the killing and decoration of the bear are all very exciting to the Gilyak. In addition there are discussions among the cleverest and most honored representatives of the clan, wrestling contests, racing, dancing, feasting, and singing: in short, an almost endless variety of enjoyments. Against the background of a rather stark existence encompassing starvation, dangers, hardships, and general monotony, the bear festivals are about the brightest moments in Gilyak life [59].

Noisy and crowded as these festivals are, they are strictly regulated. Besides the clansmen, only *imgi* are invited there. They, in turn, may invite their own *imgi*. Fathers-in-law never participate. Thus the man who does his best to please his son-in-law is not even invited by the latter to his festival. But he in turn will be the first guest at his own *akhmalk's* festival. So there arises a continuous chain which unites the long set of clans in their socioreligious festivals.

We have already mentioned the importance of sons-in-law at the bear festival. They are met many miles from the settlement and are the center of attention from the time they arrive to the time they leave. The most honorable function of the festival, the killing of the bear, is given to them. Led from *yurta* to *yurta*, they are fed to their content, and at their departure they are given the largest part of the bear's carcass.

All these honors and attentions are crowned by the serious religious ceremonies which sanction the fraternal alliance of the clans. At the beginning of the festival the *imgi* and their host exchange their *nits* (the symbol of economic cooperation for primitive man). These actions are not mere formalities; they strengthen the ties of relationship by the sanction of religious authority until they are fused into real kindred bonds. Upon their departure, *imgi* present to their *akhmalk* a dog which, together with the host's dogs, will be offered to the master of the mountains, the provider for the entire clan. The final ceremonial act is, once again, "stepping across the threshold." When a man has few clansmen or does not live on good terms with them, he leaves his native settlement and shifts his residence permanently to his *pandf*. That is why there are so few settlements inhabited by a single clan; everywhere the clansmen are mixed with their *imgi* and *akhmalk*. These ties are most important when the necessity for vengeance arises. In emergency cases, when a clan is weak gets involved in war, its *pandf* helps to "lift the bones" and to defend against the enemy. Only in the payment of *tkhusind* can the *pandf* not participate.

These matrimonial ties have even more significance in the reconciliation of hostile clans, especially if these clans belong to the same *pandf*. This is not a rare occurrence. We have already pointed out in our discussion of vengeance how the institution of fines and penalties arose due to the beneficent influence of women and the socioreligious ties linking the intermarrying clans.

Such are the relations between the *imgi* and *akhmalk* clans, relations which widen the horizon for the individual clan and extend its sympathies to a whole series of strange clans. It is a complete school of social education wherein one learns benevolence, hospitality and compassion, and social-moral behavior. Here are created those social habits and sentiments which finally extend over even larger tribal unions and eventually to mankind in general. Through our studies, we see that the term *navkh*, by which the corresponding generations of *imgi* and *akhmalk* address each other, finally became the ordinary term by which every Gilyak addresses a stranger.

The Gilyak show hospitality, compassion, and politeness to everyone without distinction, whether they be kin or strangers, whether they be old neighbors like the Oroch, the Gold, and the Ainu, or newcomers like the Tungus, the Yakut, and even the Russians, who have done so much harm. Many times, fugitive convicts have slain entire Gilyak families after they had been shown the warmest hospitality. Yet it is very seldom that a Gilyak will refuse his hospitality to a wandering Russian. When it has been the case that Gilyaks have demonstrated cruelty to fugitives, it was considered no more than blood revenge for a slain kinsmen.⁶ But isolated acts of this sort do little to change their attitudes toward strangers. Among Gilyak as among civilized peoples, of course there are national prejudices, but these arise from familiar patterns of ignorance that everywhere give rise to ideas and fears of a fantastic sort. Gilyak bear the same prejudices against even their own people living in remote locations. Hence, Gilyak of Sakhalin's northwestern shore look upon Gilyaks on the eastern shores of the Sea of Okhotsk as nothing short of cannibals, if not at least malevolent and thieving. In the same way, after the first invasion of the Cossacks in the 17th century, the Gilyak called the Russians *kinrsh* (the devil). The Cossacks gave them sufficient reason for this epithet, not only by their peculiar dress and weapons, but by their irrational cruelties and avidity for precious furs. Long after, when the Gilyak had met and lived with many peaceable Russians, they recalled their prejudices as anecdotes, and knew how to relate to their neighbors with great humanity [60].⁷

But we have wandered far from our main theme. Let us sum up.

The habits and sentiments we have observed among the modern Gilyak are a product of social relations worked out among intermarrying clans. They extended gradually over every tribesman, then over neighboring tribes, and finally over all mankind. But as we have seen, the source of these social ties between *imgi* and *akhmalk* is rooted in the astonishing organization of the Gilyak clan. It might be that the most instructive result of our long analysis is the evolution we have traced from the egotism of a closed clan, via the blood ties of *pandf*, to the sympathy and humanity the Gilyak demonstrate toward all, be they stranger or kin. From the moment when the right of marriage to the mother's brother's daughter was established, the foundation for the broad development of social habits and sentiments was laid.

⁶ The Gilyak regard Russian fugitives as a clan whose representatives answer for each other.

⁷ [Editor's note: Several sentences from this paragraph, not found in the AMNH English typescript, have been imported from the AMNH Russian typescript.]