

## SIX



### THE MORAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL NORMS

[67–76; 94–107; 182–190; 93–98]

THE UNIQUE NORMS of sexual intercourse described in the previous chapter, wide in their sanctions and strict in their interdicts, have affected the Gilyak in two diametrically opposed ways.

The wide field of legitimate sexual intercourse open to both men and women tends toward a general sexual laxity. Chastity, sexual moderation, and conjugal faithfulness are unknown concepts among the Gilyak. Occasionally, among married women we may find exceptional individuals who remain more or less faithful to their husbands. Among men, to take the testimony of the Gilyak themselves, such exceptions do not occur at all. The most respected members of the tribe discuss with great zest the liveliest of amorous adventures. A career full of romantic intrigues in no way depreciates the reputation of a gentleman (*urdla nivukh*). In my presence, and before an audience of respected old men, a young Gilyak, Laruk, told of his numerous romantic escapades amidst general acclamation and gay laughter, boasting for instance that in one village he was responsible for the birth of no less than 20 children. Such an attitude on the part of old and respectable men towards the sexual laxity of the young is possible only in a community where sexual intercourse within a group is legitimate and practiced on a large scale [93].

If I ever heard elders rebuke the young for sexual excesses, it was always for economic reasons, as love affairs often kept them away from work in the house. Pregnancy in girls was also censured. But here the special consideration was the fear of possible intercourse with an individual of a prohibited category and particularly the uncertainty of parenthood. As a rule, however, the love affairs of the young are open secrets and call forth no rebukes. It is the usual thing for young men to spend several months visiting the villages of their "fathers-in-law," where so many *ang'rei* girls are at their disposal. The older generation, far from opposing them, are highly satisfied, as the unmarried *imgi* ("son-in-law") is the favorite guest in every household. The women have the same attitude as the men towards what we term sexual morality. However, they must be careful where total strangers, individuals outside of the *pu* class, are concerned; for that reason they always assume an air of stern inaccessibility. In the end, women are as susceptible as the men.

To deny the Gilyak all sense of sexual morality would be unjust. In reality his conduct is well within the bounds sanctioned by his community. When it comes to

prohibited categories of behavior such as outbursts of jealousy before one's *tuvng* and especially sexual intercourse with individuals of forbidden groups, these categories are adhered to with a rigor quite unknown amongst ourselves in spite of the fact that these prohibitions often lack all foundation in physiological, psychological, or any other prudent considerations (as, for instance, the prohibition of intercourse between the most remote agnatic cousins). During my many years' stay with the Gilyak and after extensive inquiries, I heard of only two or three cases of open violation of sexual prohibitions. The most striking case occurred in the village Tamlavo, where a young Gilyak, after the death of his father, lived for a while with his young step-mother, whom the father had bought shortly before his death. This occurrence caused a sensation in all Sakhalin and was generally regarded as monstrous. Another well-known case was that of a young Gilyak, Pavlinka, who married a woman from his *imgi* clan, that is, from a clan which took wives from Pavlinka's own clan. Now, Pavlinka was a very Russianized Gilyak who served as policeman and looked down upon the customs of his people. Another Russianized Gilyak from Tamlavo (Allykh) forced the council of clansmen, who were as usual debating the question of who was going to get the widow of the deceased, to give her to him, although he as an *aki* ("elder brother") had no right to her whatsoever. This, however, was an exceptional case and accepted as such by the community. Nonetheless, in the first two cases the culprits were forced into voluntary exile; they had to settle outside the limits of the village, condemned to a lonely existence and deprived of all the benefits of clan life. I repeat, however, that these were exceptional cases, predicated on changing psychological attitudes transformed under the influence of foreign culture.<sup>1</sup>

As a rule, the mere suggestion of sex in connection with an individual of a prohibited category evokes an instinctive reaction of disgust. The rare cases where love springs up between such individuals are looked upon by the Gilyak as instigations of an evil spirit, and as thoroughly unnatural, not only among men but among animals as well. As mentioned before, even a dog that commits incest is killed. The attitude towards people is quite the same. It is not uncommon for lovers belonging to prohibited categories to kill themselves at the instigation of their relatives. In one of the songs of such an unfortunate pair the woman complains that her sister called her a bitch, and her beloved a devil (because he was her uncle); and that all her loved ones—father, mother, and sister—kept telling her, "Kill yourself! Kill yourself!" Meanwhile the object of her criminal passion may have been a remote relative of her own age, brought up in some distant place; their love, according to our standards,

<sup>1</sup> [Editor's note: The AMNH Russian typescript, 69; Shternberg *Giliaki*, 184; and Shternberg *Sem'ia*, 94, include a footnote which reads, "There are also exceptional cases of a different type, when marriage norms are transgressed in favor of competing norms valued more highly by society. This can take place during times of epidemic, when a man's widow may not be able to marry according to levirate rules. In that case, in order that the woman remain in the clan of her dead husband, she can be given to any member of the clan, of ascending or descending line, by provision of the clan council." In the margins of the AMNH Russian typescript, Kreinovich's characteristic hand penned, "?" The quotation is not found in the later AMNH English typescript. Whoever later translated the AMNH Russian typescript into English, as a result of the frequent exchange of texts between Boas and Ratner-Shternberg between 1927 and 1933 (appendix A), appears to have incorporated this and other marginalia from Kreinovich.]

would be considered quite natural. The feeling of sexual repugnance in regard to individuals of prohibited degrees has become as instinctive with them as it is in our own community with respect to one's mother and sisters. We must also describe as almost instinctive the Gilyak's remarkable control of jealousy wherever the relations of their individual wives to group-husbands are concerned. In the absence of such remarkably developed attitudes, the realization of their sexual norms would have been impossible. Unbridled jealousy would have put an end to group marriage, while, in the absence of their well-developed aversion or indifference to individuals of prohibited categories, a great many of the norms would have lost their hold [95].

The question now arising is, how were these attitudes developed? One of the most important factors in this development was the classificatory kinship system. From an early age boys and girls know the terms applied to the various individuals, as well as the sexual rights and obligations associated with them. In that way, the relations between the various classes of persons are from childhood onwards established and regarded as completely natural. As in our education when we develop sexual indifference to parents, children, brothers, and sisters, so too among the Gilyak; owing to common terms and an early consciousness of the prohibitions, a similar feeling is developed, not only towards one's own mother and father but towards all "fathers" and "mothers," all father's brothers, all "sisters" and "brothers," and so on. Similarly, if the child knows the rights of the *pu* to their *ang'rei*, the mature man has learned to look with indifference on his wife's affairs with his *tuvng* and her *pu*. At the same time he is far from indifferent when an outsider is concerned. Then his wrath knows no bounds. He either kills the adulterer in *flagrante delicto* or fights a fierce duel. Moreover, if even his own *tuvng* were to permit himself in his relations with the man's wife—a breach of the customary privacy of sexual relations—his equanimity would be shaken and the culprit would be forced to leave the village.

Together with this education (and one might say the almost hypnotic effect of the kinship terms), the development of these attitudes in the Gilyak is still more powerfully stimulated by various avoidance rules. Their aim is twofold: One is designed for those individuals between whom the greatest possible reduction of jealousy is necessary, the second for those who must avoid sexual intercourse with each other. These interdicts act not only through suggestion and habit but also as strict religious taboos. To infringe on one, in the eyes of primitive man, is a terrible sacrilege. The power of the avoidance taboos and the attitudes they foster may be gathered from the following incident related by Iokhel'son. A Yukaghir approached his brother by mistake with undue familiarity. When he suddenly became aware of his mistake, he dropped dead. Below is given Iokhel'son's own account of that remarkable incident, which, however, would equally apply to the psychology of the Gilyak.

There lived two brothers. With them lived [their brother-in-law] the husband of their elder sister, to whom it is allowed to speak. For that reason both brothers laughed and joked with him . . . But the brothers stood to each other, as usual, in non-speaking relations. Once the elder brother, on returning from the hunt, found the youths of the village playing games and dancing. The younger brother, who happened to be in his brother-in-law's

fur coat, was among the dancers, his back turned towards the brother who had just arrived. The latter, taking the younger brother for his brother-in-law, approached him from behind and thrust his arm between the other's legs with the intention of scaring him for fun, but happened to touch his genital organs. The younger brother quickly turned around. Then the older one recognized his mistake, and "from shame" dropped dead on the spot. An autopsy was made, in accordance with custom, in order to ascertain the cause of death, and his heart (so says tradition) was found to be broken in half [96].<sup>2</sup>

Now let us turn to the avoidance restrictions themselves. The interdicts of the first category refer to persons of the same sex and are designed to reduce jealousy between all those individuals who are in the same class as regards group marriage. It is interesting to note that this interdict in many clans applies to men only, women being free from it. The reason for the exclusion of women seems to be ascribed to the effect of the regular practice of polygamy in individual marriage—polygamy itself being considered a good school for self-possession towards a woman's partner in marriage.<sup>3</sup> The Gilyak woman is not obliged to react against the infidelity of her husband even found in *flagrante delicto* with a woman outside of his *ang'rei* class; the man, finding himself in the same position, must wreak blood vengeance. There is, therefore, all the more need for preventative measures against jealousy amongst men.

Thus the avoidance rule applies to class-brothers (who, though they may not be related, may be married to one's class-sisters) and their children. Only on the Amur, where the old norms are decaying, is the prohibition limited to one's own brothers exclusively.<sup>4</sup> In other clans, be they one's own and collateral, women not related to one another but married to brothers (their own and collateral), are included under this prohibition. All these people among whom occasion for outbursts of jealousy may be found every day—nay, every hour—are separated from each other by an impenetrable wall of the strictest avoidance which begins at birth and ends at the grave, creating an attitude of self-suppression equal in its power to the strongest instincts of nature.

To the same category of avoidances must be added the interdicts between the paternal aunt and her niece, who call each other by the same terms as elder and junior sisters (*nanakh* and *askh*). The reason for this prohibition may be sought in their terminology itself, but another reason more serious may also be indicated. The paternal aunt, as may be seen from the terminology and from the rules governing marriage, is the orthodox mother-in-law of her niece. The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is always a rather delicate affair, especially under conditions where the woman lives always in the family of her husband, often while

<sup>2</sup> Iokhel'son, *Materialy*, XIII.

<sup>3</sup> [Editor's note: This reference to polygamy, while found in the AMNH Russian version, is absent from the 1933 Soviet editions, which rearrange this and the next paragraph in slightly different ways.]

<sup>4</sup> [Editor's note: While Shternberg, *Giliaki*, 96, mentions "one's own sister's," context suggests that the reference to "one's own brothers" found in the AMNH Russian typescript is the correct version.]

the husband is a mere infant. Although intercourse between the father-in-law and his daughter-in-law is strictly prohibited and infringements almost unknown, jealousy, though wholly unfounded, is possible. Thus the interdict barring the mother-in-law from familiarity with her daughter-in-law appears to be a safeguard against attacks of jealousy in their everyday relations.<sup>5</sup>

Prohibitions of the second category, as we have seen, are devised to prevent sexual intercourse between persons of different sex belonging to prohibited groups. For that reason we find no interdicts between persons who belong to the class of "husbands" and "wives" respectively, whether they form an individual union or not. Every man may freely converse with his individual wife, as well as with all his group-wives. However, even in the categories between whom sexual intercourse is prohibited, there are certain groups of individuals who, according to the Gilyak view, do not require the safeguard of an avoidance taboo. These are first of all the mother, and to a certain extent the father. With the mother, the sons as well as the daughters may speak and fool without any restrictions whatsoever. The same holds true for the entire class of "mothers" and "sons." The terms alone, acquired in childhood, are considered a sufficient guarantee of sexual indifference between these persons.

The father and his class are treated somewhat more strictly; he may speak or quarrel with his daughters, but he may not joke with them. The same applies to the whole class of "fathers" and "daughters." Grandfathers, great-grandfathers, grandmothers, and their grandchildren stand outside of any interdiction in regard to each other. Not so with other persons of the prohibited categories. Particularly strict are the interdicts referring to women of one's own clan. "Sisters" as well as paternal aunts, who are called "elder" sisters (*nanakh*), are strictly prohibited from speaking to them, to cast glances at them, or to indulge in obscene actions such as uncovering their bodies. This interdict extends beyond one clan, if these persons are *tuvng* to each other, as for instance, the children of sisters who married men belonging to different clans. Moreover, as we know, for every woman her "brother" is a potential father of her daughter-in-law; and for every man, on the other hand, a "sister" is a potential mother of his son-in-law. Accordingly, a woman is under an interdict in regard to the father of her daughter-in-law, real or potential, while a man is similarly restricted in regard to the mother of his son-in-law.

The avoidance prohibitions are operative in many clans between men and the wives of their younger *tuvng*, on the one hand, and between women and the elder *tuvng* of their husbands on the other. As is evident from the kinship terms, persons belonging to those groups apply to each other the interdictory terms *iokh* and *atk*, and sexual intercourse between them is of course prohibited. These terms are also used by daughters-in-law and fathers-in-law with respect to each other and, as persons belonging to prohibited groups, any communication between them is again forbidden, although not everywhere with equal strictness. In some localities—among the Gilyak of the Amur estuary—neither conversation nor joking is permitted. In

<sup>5</sup> [Editor's note: This paragraph is found in the AMNH English version only, suggestively hinted at by a single arrow drawn by Kreinovich in the margins of the AMNH Russian version. None of the Russian versions include it. In some respects the explanation of the role of the paternal aunt, found two paragraphs down, is clearer.]



FIG. 13. Three generations of a Gilyak family before a summer traveling yurta made from canvas and skins, 1890s. Photo by Lev Shternberg. Source: AAN f. 282, o. 2, d. 161, l. 19.

other localities, only necessary conversation is allowed, while fooling and light talk are forbidden. Between son-in-law and mother-in-law, however, there is no avoidance. The difference in the norms of relationship between daughter-in-law and father-in-law and that between son-in-law and mother-in-law may perhaps be accounted for by the fact that the son's wife generally goes to live in the house of her husband's father and constantly meets him. The daughter's husband, by contrast, takes his wife to himself and seldom meets his wife's mother. For that reason their relations do not require any special safeguards.

It still remains to be explained how these restrictions play out. The Gilyak themselves classify the various forms of avoidance between prohibited categories by means of the following terms: *indind* ("to look"), *khernd* ("to converse," "to speak"), *lerund* ("to joke," "to play," "to have fun"), and *vakrund* ("to quarrel," "to argue," "to curse"). Not all of these four forms, however, are equally applicable to all categories. Thus we have seen that between father and daughter only *lerund* ("fooling," "joking") is prohibited, while business conversation and swearing on the father's side are permitted. The prohibition against looking, "casting glances," on the other hand, is only operative between "brothers" and "sisters." *Lerund* ("fooling") applies with equal stringency to all categories. Now as to the remaining interdict, *khernd*: That term covers two concepts, conversation or talk, and business conversation. As far as the former is concerned, the interdict is absolute; one may get along without talk, which may lead to other things. Conversation on business matters is a different affair

and cannot always be dispensed with. The elder brother, for instance, often takes the place of the father in a household, and it thus becomes impossible to avoid talking to him. For that reason, in extreme cases younger brothers are permitted to communicate with their elder brother. Short and direct address in the form of orders, business advice, etc. is always permitted between brothers, and between husband's father and son's wife, including even the use of the vocative. Still one generally tries to avoid direct forms of address. If a person outside of the prohibited category is present, the words are addressed to him or to her, but in such a way that the prohibited individual can hear them. He, in his turn, answers by the same method. In other cases, the address is put in the third person or in an impersonal form. For instance: "The son's wife may do this or that," instead of the vocative form "Sister's wife, do so and so," or "Thanks to my brother," instead of "Thank you, brother," etc. Sometimes the plural of the pronoun is used instead of the singular. For instance, while a man addressed the wife of his elder brother in the singular form (*ri*, "thou"), he usually addressed the wife of his junior brother in the plural (*rin*, "you"). Owing to the custom of evading direct address through use of the third person, it is often used instead of the second person. The third person is also used in addressing strangers in anticipation it seems that they might prove to be of a prohibited category. When an unknown Gilyak enters the house, he is generally greeted with "Where did the Gilyak come from?" instead of "Where do you come from?" This custom, brought about by the interdict against direct address and found among many other peoples, may be responsible for the origin of that strange use of the third person instead of the second, which we find in Italian, Polish, Tatar, etc. [97].

Another curious consequence of this interdict against direct address is that the Gilyak do not exchange greetings on meeting or leaving each other. It may well seem strange to us that a Gilyak does not utter any greetings, even upon returning home after a long absence or when leaving his family on a dangerous hunt which might last for several months. Yet the Gilyak are very ceremonious, always greeting their guests and seeing them off with solemn speeches and good wishes. The neighbors of the Gilyak—the Ulchi, Gold, and Ainu—exchange greetings upon meeting or leaving each other. The absence of greetings among the Gilyak is due to the fact that each Gilyak has in his house and village many persons whom it is not lawful to address. Habitual greetings might easily lead to involuntary infringements of the avoidance regulations. The interdict on conversation, as generally known, is found among many peoples. Recall the American Arapaho, for instance, among whom brothers may not speak to one another. The Yukaghir interdicts are of special interest to us. The avoidances between "brothers" and "sisters," between father-in-law and mother-in-law and their daughters, or between elder brothers and the wives of younger brothers, are common to both the Yukaghir and the Gilyak. In cases where address cannot be dispensed with, we again find, as among the Gilyak, the use of the third person.