

OF NAMES AND SIGNS: REINCARNATION, INHERITANCE AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE ON THE NORTHWEST COAST

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INTRODUCTION

Anthropologists working within the tradition of Durkheim (1965) and Weber (1963) consider reincarnation to be an abstract concept, a symbolic construct whose referents are to be found in the cultural milieu and social order of a given society (see, e.g., Harkin 1990; Magnarella 1972; Somersan 1984). For societies with the belief, however, reincarnation is more than an abstraction: it is a psychological and emotional reality.

Persons in such societies hold convictions that they were other persons in previous lives, and not uncommonly they believe they know who these other persons were. The spirit of an ancestor may communicate its intention to be reborn in a dream before birth or a child may be born with birthmarks or other distinguishing signs that indicate who he or she was. The child may be said to behave in ways characteristic of its previous incarnation and may be credited with memories of that person's life (Matlock 1990c; Stevenson 1987).

Anthropologists have not been much concerned with such cases, although not a few ethnographers have recorded them (see Matlock 1990a, 1990c:219). They have been left largely to psychical researchers like Stevenson (important exceptions include de Laguna 1972; Mills 1988a, 1988b; Slobodin 1970). However, cases and signs clearly are essential to an understanding of reincarnation, not only because they express the belief but because they serve to maintain it. Belief in reincarnation certainly influences the interpretation of dreams, birthmarks and behaviors, and these signs themselves are taken as evidence of its occurrence. Indeed, I have suggested elsewhere (Matlock 1990a, n.d.) that signs provided the original basis for the belief in reincarnation.

Although signs furnish a way of identifying children with their spiritual forebears, signs are not always present. And when they are not, societies may fall back on expectations about how reincarnation operates. There may be, for instance, the expectation that rebirth will occur within one's matriline, and a deceased family head may be expected to reappear in the next child born after his death to (say) his niece or granddaughter. This child may then be given the name of the deceased, in recognition of his supposed spiritual descent, whether there are signs pointing in that direction or not.

In the ideal case names and signs identify the same person, producing what Rattray (1927:321) called a "pure" reincarnation, and providing, among other things, for a child to inherit property (tangible and intangible) he or she owned in the previous life (e.g., see Mills 1988a:405). Certain societies—for instance, those with exogamous clans, unilineal descent, and cross-cousin marriage—seem to be structured to bring this eventuality about. Other societies, more loosely structured, accomplish the same end through naming practices alone. Thus, rather than being an epiphenomenon of social structure,

as traditional anthropological thought would have it, reincarnation may be at its very foundation (Matlock n.d.).

I will illustrate the interplay of names and signs, and demonstrate their relationship to social structure, by examining their respective roles in Tlingit and Kwakiutl society. Both societies belong to the Northwest Coast culture area and share a similar coastal environment with subsistence based on fishing, hunting, and gathering, and have some common cultural features, including the potlatch, an emphasis on rank, a distinctive artistic style, and sedentary villages, which set them apart from other hunter-gatherers. In social organization, however, they are very different, and appear to be derived from societies of different structural types (Rosman and Rubel 1986; Rubel and Rosman 1983).

The Tlingit, along with the Haida and Tsimshian, form a northern group on the Northwest Coast. The Tlingit and Haida languages seem to be distantly related to the Athapaskan languages of the interior, while Tsimshian is unrelated to any stock in the region. All three societies are matrilineal, have exogamous clans with preferred cross-cousin marriage, avuncular postmarital residence, and avuncular succession to titles and rank. The Tlingit and Haida in addition have moieties while the Tsimshian have phratries. These structures point to a common antecedent structure, similar to that found in many Athapaskan societies bordering on the north and east (Rosman and Rubel 1986; Rubel and Rosman 1983).

The Kwakiutl, Bella Coola, and Nootka, who inhabit the central area of the Northwest Coast, are again very similar to one another, but they contrast sharply with the northern group. Their languages are Wakashan and Salish, which are related to the larger Algonquian family. Descent is bilateral and kinship groups are cognatic, there are no preferential marriage or postmarital residence rules, and inheritance passes through a variety of kinship lines. The probable antecedent structure of these societies resembles that found among the interior Salish, neighbors to the east (Rosman and Rubel 1986).

Reincarnation beliefs are widespread on the Northwest Coast and in surrounding regions. They are particularly well documented for the northern group and for the Athapaskan tribes of the interior, but they have been reported also for the central group, as well as for the Salish in the interior and on the coast, the latter forming the southern-most groups on the Northwest Coast (Drucker 1950 and Barnett 1939 provide incomplete overviews; see Mills 1988a:385-386 and Matlock 1990b). Interestingly, although both signs and names are related to reincarnation throughout this area, ideas about the reincarnation process differ in various ways.

My theoretical approach in this paper may be considered to fall under the heading of an "anthropology of consciousness." From this perspective, apparently nonempirical thoughts and beliefs are not assumed to be symbolic constructs, derivative of culture; rather, the problem of their origin is left open. Using this framework, we may treat reincarnation from the perspective of the society with the belief, that is, as if it actually occurs. Indeed, I would argue that we must take this perspective if we are to come to grips with the meaning of the

belief for the society. This does not oblige us to give up our etic advantage entirely, however, and I will make use of both symbolic (my allegiance is more to Geertz 1973 than to Durkheim or Weber) and structural (Levi-Strauss 1963, 1976) analysis.

My Kwakiutl material refers mainly to the tribes of Fort Rupert (the Kwagul, or Kwakiutl proper), from about 1890 to 1930, the period during which Boas (1890-1966) did his field work and George Hunt collected most of his texts. My Tlingit material, taken mainly from de Laguna (1954, 1972), relates to the northern or Yakutat Tlingit in the early 1950s. I will also draw heavily on Kan (1989) and Goldman (1975), both of whom have a reconstructionist orientation. Unless there is reason to believe otherwise, I will assume that the ethnographic data accurately reflect the beliefs and practices of an earlier era, and the model of reincarnation in relation to social structure I propose is meant to approximate the pre-contact situation, not the modern one.

FATE OF THE SOUL

The prevailing world view on the Northwest Coast, as throughout native North America, is animistic, in Tylor's (1920) sense of the belief that all of nature, even inanimate nature, possesses souls and spirits. The human body is seen as a house or container for the soul, which preexists birth, may separate from the body during life, and survives death. The body may in fact be home to more than one soul or spiritual entity, each with a different origin, function, and destiny (Hultkrantz 1953).

De Laguna writes that the Tlingit "make a distinction between the 'ghost' that is associated with the corpse and the graveyard, and the 'spirit' which is a non-material reflection of the person as he was in life" (1972:765). After death ghosts go to a metaphoric ghost town and evidently stay there, while spirits go to a land of the dead but may visit the living in their dreams and are the aspect of the person that reincarnates. Kan (1989:53-54) agrees, but distinguishes between two aspects of the spirit, one which leaves the land of the dead to reincarnate and another which remains behind.

The course taken by the spirit (equated by de Laguna 1972:765 with the "soul") after cremation or burial depends upon a person's manner of death. The soul of one dying of natural causes (e.g., sickness or old age) goes to the ordinary land of the dead. The souls of those who have died violent deaths (e.g., by murder or accident) go to "Heaven" or "Land Above," while the souls of the wicked such as murderers, thieves, and witches go to "Dog Heaven."

The land of the dead, the Land Above, and Dog Heaven are all located above the earth, and the deaths that get one to them are sharply distinguished from death by drowning or by exposure in the woods. Those who drown or die from exposure are taken by Land Otter Men and transformed into beings like themselves. They continue to live in this form, although in another sense they are dead and their bodies may be given ordinary funerals if found. The latter practice suggests that persons who die in these ways are thought to reside both with the Land Otter People and to have regular ghosts and souls

(de Laguna 1972:766). After dying in the realm of the land otters, souls may be reborn on earth (1972:777).

For the Tlingit, all persons are reincarnations of deceased ancestors (de Laguna 1972:776), but it is not clear that everyone can expect to be reborn. De Laguna (1972:769) quotes one informant as saying that bad people reincarnate, whereas good people cross the river to the land of the dead. The same informant contradicts herself by saying that one is reincarnated seven times before it is possible to cross the river, a belief which probably is not aboriginal (1972:769). There is also some question about whether souls can be reborn from Dog Heaven, although de Laguna (1972:777) is able to cite the case of a witch "(albeit one who had repented and in the course of time been reinstated...)" who was said to have been reborn.

Reincarnation may be planned. That is, a person may state before death, the family into which he or she hopes to be reborn (de Laguna 1972:778-779; also Dall 1870:423; Krause 1956:191, citing Veniaminov; Stevenson 1966, 1974; Veniaminov 1984:399). According to de Laguna (1972:778), the choice of parents may be made after death as well. It is also possible to choose one's sex (1972:779).

Unfortunately we do not have a detailed summary of Kwakiutl soul concepts similar to the ones de Laguna (1972) and Kan (1989) have given us for the Tlingit. Boas and Hunt seem not to have taken much interest in them, and relevant notes are scattered through the texts. The longest discussion appears in Boas (1940). Goldman (1975) is unable to add anything of consequence.

Like de Laguna, Boas contrasts the soul with the ghost: "The the ghost is not the soul, for it is only seen when it gives notice to those who are going to die, those who see him; for he has the whole body of a man, and his bones are those of people who have long been dead. It is not the same as a soul...." (1921:726-727; cf. 1940:616-617). But the relationship between the two entities may be different for the Kwakiutl. In an early passage, Boas (1891:610-611) says that the soul leaves the body two days before death and becomes a ghost for a while before reincarnating. This is consistent with the account given by Charlie Nowell, who says that "when a person dies his soul becomes a ghost. The ghost lives until he dies, and then goes to another world or returns to his relatives to be born again" (Ford 1941:220).

Elsewhere Boas (1896:579) draws a rather different picture of the soul's fate after the body's death. The souls of sea hunters become killer whales, we are told, while the souls of hunters of land animals become wolves, in which forms they die before they reincarnate. Hunt later obtained much the same account from a shaman. According to this man, the souls of sea-hunters go to the home of the killer-whales, the souls of land-hunters go to the home of the wolves, twins return to the salmon from whom they were born, and common people become owls (Boas 1921:727). The text immediately preceding this one presents another variation, in which the souls of sea-hunters go to the land of the killer-whale, the souls of twins return to the salmon, and common people become ghosts (1921:716).

What appears at first sight to be two different traditions—in one of which common people become ghosts and another in which they become owls—may in fact be different facets of a single belief system. Boas, in an essay first published in 1927, asserts that “the soul is identified with the owl and every person has his owl. If it is killed his soul is killed” (1940:619, 1966:169). However, in a later text Hunt states, “For the owls of men are not the souls, for the owls of men are only one side” (Boas 1930:257). That is, the human being is associated with the owl only partially; the death of an owl may lead to the death of the person with whom it is associated, but this does not imply the extinction of the person’s soul.

The seemingly different traditions therefore are not irreconcilable. Each Kwakiutl has an owl, an “owl mask,” to which his spirit goes at death. He will in fact now become an owl, “for now he will fly about at night” (Boas 1930:257). But at the same time his soul is transformed into a ghost. This latter transformation, as also the transformations into wolves and killer-whales, is not permanent, and the transformed soul will later detach itself and become reincarnated in a new human body.

The interval between lives is expected to be brief. Boas tells us that “the soul of a deceased person returns again in the first child born after his death” (1891:611). Moreover, although Boas does not mention it, it seems that the soul may divide after death and enter more than one child (Mills 1988b:44). Among the Tlingit, where a similar belief is found (de Laguna 1972: 779-780), the converse is also possible: the soul of more than one deceased ancestor may occupy a single living body (1972:780). The alleged processes involved in these beliefs are linked to names, and we will meet them again later under that heading.

The major point of contrast in Tlingit and Kwakiutl soul beliefs lies in ideas of the soul’s fate following bodily death. Although several possible destinies are imagined in both societies, the approach to these is very different. For the Tlingit, it is the manner of death that decides where one’s spirit will reside before reincarnation, whereas for the Kwakiutl it is one’s social grouping. Kwakiutl twins return to the salmon and hunters become the animals they pursue, while other persons become ghosts. All, however, eventually are reborn among men.

SIGNS OF REINCARNATION

Tlingit beliefs about the land of the dead and the fate of the soul after death are said to derive from stories about persons who seemed to die, travelled to the land of the dead, but then returned to life (de Laguna 1972:767; Swanton 1908:461). In some versions (de Laguna 1972:772-775), the stories are told by those who have reincarnated.

De Laguna (1972:767) recounts the story of a Sitka man who died, though at first he did not realize this. “He could see his own body, sitting propped up, as they used to prop up a body before burning it. He tried in vain to get back inside his body...but he couldn’t” (1972:767).

The spirit watches as the mourners begin to burn his body, and feels himself growing warm. He tries to follow his

relatives as they leave his body, now reduced to ashes, but finds himself unable to do so. Instead he begins to think of the land of the dead and to walk there. The way is rough, because he stayed too long at the pyre. Finally he reaches a river on the opposite bank of which is a town. The inhabitants come for him and ferry him across in a canoe. Those newly arrived, like himself, have the appearance of living human beings, but those who have been there longer have sunken eyes, moss over their faces, and trees growing out of their heads (de Laguna 1972:767).

Later, the spirit is helped back across the river by the spirit of his grandmother. He sits down on the riverbank and falls asleep. There he remains for nine days, the riverbank caving in a little each day, until he becomes aware that he has fallen into the water. He hears someone say, “He’s born already!” He is picked up and looks around at his mother, whom he recognizes as his former sister (de Laguna 1972:767-768).

The nine days are said to represent the months of gestation, the sliding bank to be the baby moving in the womb, and the river water the amniotic fluid and afterbirth (de Laguna 1972:769). The newborn baby is recognized by his former wife as her husband, “apparently by a cut or scar on his foot.” He then reaches “for his wife with a smile,” but he is “so ashamed of his sister that he wouldn’t suck her breast, and they had to get a woman of a different tribe (sib, in the opposite moiety) to suckle him” (1972:768). Thus, the baby itself is said to recall its previous life.

Boas (1890:844-845) describes another Tlingit return-from-death story that concludes in reincarnation. The importance of birthmarks as identifiers for the Tlingit is mentioned also by Veniaminov (1984:399), Swanton (1908:463), Jones (1914:234), and Stevenson (1966, 1974).

Swanton records the story of a child who “cried persistently” when talk of a recent war came up. Told to keep quiet, “the infant spoke out saying, ‘If you had done what I told you and let the tide go out first we could have destroyed all those people.’ The child was the same man who had been killed” (Swanton 1908:463). In some cases the statements imputed to children are more elaborate (see Stevenson 1974:216-269), and they may be combined with birthmarks and so-called “announcing dreams,” in which a mother or close relative dreams that a spirit intends to be reborn to her (the term is taken from Stevenson 1966; see also de Laguna 1952:182, 1972:776; Veniaminov 1984:399).

Kwakiutl references reveal clearly that these people recognize the same signs of reincarnation as do the Tlingit. Boas describes announcing dreams (1925:17, 51) and says: “If a child is born with a birth-mark similar to that of a deceased relative, it is believed to be the same person reborn” (1932:202). Ford tells us that “proofs of reincarnation were numerous: the baby might look like the deceased, he might have a birthmark where the ancestor had a scar, or, as an adult, he might evince a special skill such as wood carving which could only mean that he was an experienced wood carver reborn” (1941:29). See also Hazlitt (1858:32) and Spradley (1969:188).

If one or the other of twins has a birthmark, this is taken

to indicate the place the child was speared in its salmon incarnation (see Boas 1932:203, who lists several references to his own work, including 1921:673, 713).

Twins' birthmarks need not all have this derivation, however. In one case, a young woman, a twin, tells her mother that she will be reborn to her father's younger brother's wife, as a boy, and will have a scar on the back of the hand similar to the one she then had. The designated woman becomes pregnant shortly thereafter and in due course gives birth to a boy with a scar on the back of his hand (Boas 1930:228).

In another case, a man, again one of twins, has just hidden the goods he has been accumulating for a potlatch when he is murdered. After his son has grown and married, he is reborn to him and his wife. Boas continues:

The boy when a few years old cried and wanted to have a small boat made, and when he had got it asked for a bow and arrows. His father scolded him for having so many wishes. Then the boy said, "I was at one time your father, and have returned from heaven." His father did not believe him, but then the boy said, "You know that A— had gone to bury his property, and nobody knows where it is. I will show it to you." He took his father right to the place where it lay hidden, and bade him distribute it. (Boas 1891:611)

In a third case (the only other case I have found in Boas), an elderly woman (once again one of twins) before she dies asks the chief Great Bear whether he would like her to become his child, and whether he would like her to be a girl or a boy. Great Bear "asked her to become a boy, and seven months after her death his wife gave birth to a son, although she was quite old and had had no children since a long time" (Boas 1891:614).

Interestingly, all three of these cases are said to involve twins who are reborn. The ability to recall previous lives seems to be among the "supernatural powers" twins are reputed to have (see Boas 1891:614). Twins, however, are not the only ones with whom signs of other sorts are associated. Announcing dreams and birthmarks have a more general currency. And as among the Tlingit, it is possible—at least for twins—to decide on their future families before death, and to change sex between lives.

NAMES AND SIGNS

A Tlingit child is given one or more names at birth. These names include "real names," nicknames, and teknonymous names (which indicate the relationship of an adult to a child, e.g., "father-of-so-and-so") which had previously belonged to a lineage ancestor, the person who is believed to be reincarnated in the child. Ideally this person is the closest maternal relative then recently deceased; there appears to be no requirement that it be any particular relative (de Laguna 1972:782).

A child's names may come from the father's side of the family, because they too are considered close relatives, even though they belong to a different clan. In the latter case, de Laguna (1972:781) considers it "doubtful" that the names would then be inherited within the child's clan, because they would properly belong to the clan of the paternal grandfather. Her informants interpreted the circumstance of the same

name owned by two or more clans to mean that the clans shared a common origin (1972:781). Significantly, clans sharing a name are all of the same moiety. Names may under no circumstances leave the moiety (1972:780).

There is a definite association between the name a child receives and the person believed to be reincarnated in it. Kan cites unpublished field notes of Olson's to the effect that "those to be reincarnated go to a place no one knows where and when they come back they carry (as a bundle) under their arm that same name which is therefore given to them" (1989:72). When the birth has been heralded by an announcing dream or the baby has a suggestive mark or scar, the names come from this person (de Laguna 1972:782). Cues may come also from persons who have stated in advance of death their intention to be reborn to certain women (1972:778-779).

Failing signs or prearrangements, a suitable name may be chosen and simply bestowed on a child. In this case, the reincarnation is achieved in the act of naming. This is because the spirit of the deceased now knows to whom to attach itself. "He didn't chose his mother; they just named the boy," de Laguna was told. When the child is named, "then he knows who he is, what spirit he belongs to. When she announces it, he knows it, and the dead spirit knows it then" (1954:183). This statement is interesting because it implies not only that reincarnation is normally accomplished by the will of the dying or deceased, but that signs are associated with the intention; if there are no signs it is because there was no intention, and child and spirit are brought into association through naming. Compare de Laguna (1972:782).

Occasionally a Tlingit child is not given the name of the person with whom he or she is identified by signs. This may happen, for example, if the signs point to rebirth in the wrong moiety. The same English name may then be given to the child, but not the same Tlingit name (de Laguna 1972:780). Such a division of names reveals two things clearly: (a) the importance of signs in recognizing reincarnations, and (b) the paramount necessity of keeping names within the moiety. Among some Athapaskan groups, an erroneous rebirth may be corrected by adoption into the appropriate lineage (Mills 1988a:405), but de Laguna and other workers have not noted this practice among the Tlingit.

Mistakes in naming sometimes occur. De Laguna (1972:714-715) recounts the case of a chief who unintentionally killed two of his nephews by stabbing them in the course of trying to teach them a lesson. After the chief's death, his name was given to the son of his daughter's son (and a great-grandniece), but later "a scar or birthmark was noticed on his body" (1972:715). Although the boy was thereby recognized as the reincarnation of one of the boys who had been stabbed, his name was not changed (1972:782). A change of name would have violated no rules in this case, but it may not have been made because the chief's name was believed to be the more important one to perpetuate.

Kan (1989:71) observes that, in a sense, the names, rather than their holders, are the true members of the Tlingit house, the perpetuation of the names being necessary for the perpetuation of the lineage. As long as there are enough

persons alive to hold the names, all is well, but if not enough children are born to replace members who have died, members of other houses or clans may be adopted and given the unused names. Kan's adoption is different from that mentioned by Mills (1988a:405) in that it does not have the explicit purpose of correcting an erroneous rebirth, and it could only work if the population deficit were limited to a single house or clan.

The response to a general decline might be to give a child names from more than one ancestor. Mills (1988b:53) discusses this explanation of the practice of multiple naming among the Tsimshian Gitksan. De Laguna's (1972:779-780) informants were unsure about its implications for the Tlingit. One doubted whether multiple naming meant multiple reincarnation, because "two spirits fight one other." The uncertainty may indicate that the practice is a recent development, at least in its widespread application. Indeed, multiple naming is not mentioned by any of the early workers among the Tlingit (Dall 1870; Jones 1914; Krause 1956; Swanton 1908; Veniaminov 1984) who discuss other aspects of their belief in reincarnation.

Possibly multiple naming became widespread early in the contact period, when population declined drastically, but has remained in the culture through the more recent population increase. If this is so, the expanding population might be expected to account for the opposite occurrence, that is, the giving of a single name to more than one child (or different names from the same person to different children). Mills (1988a:403), on the other hand, suggests that such divided reincarnation among the Gitksan "may be related to the prestige associated with high chiefs' names," with chiefs reincarnated multiplying more frequently than their subjects.

The decisions that are made when signs conflict with expectations or desires concerning reincarnation are of very great interest. Signs unequivocally denote reincarnation, and yet when they conflict with other imperatives, these take precedence. Nothing could more clearly reveal the social side of reincarnation for the Tlingit. The reasons for this strong social emphasis on a process which is conceived at the same time to be psychological and spiritual (and, signs such as birthmarks suggest, partly physical), will become more evident later. We turn now to Kwakiutl naming practices.

With the Kwakiutl it is necessary to make a firm distinction between commoners and nobility. Tlingit social power is vested in house and clan chiefs, below whom other persons are arrayed in a series of graded ranks, based on considerations such as wealth and prestige (de Laguna 1972:462; Kan 1989:85). The Kwakiutl house chief is the most powerful figure, but he has as a sort of council other holders of house seats, or names. These names have been passed down, generation by generation, from the earliest days. Chiefs names were those adopted by the lineage progenitors when they first descended into the world of men (Boas 1920:116), and other house names were those of their sons (1966:53).

Eldest sons—or in the absence of sons, eldest daughters—are expected to succeed to the chief's position, and remain in the house. Boas (1920:116) says that if the parents are of equal rank (as ideally they are) the second born might be assigned to the mother's house. He does not know what would happen

if there were not enough seats in the father's house for all the children, unless they also were reassigned to the mother's house. Because there seem to have been no more than four seats available in each house (see Goldman 1975:50), younger children who did not have seats would have had very low rank. Members of houses which could not trace their names back to the initial mythic period also had relatively low rank and are called "common people" by Boas (1920:116).

A Kwakiutl child is named first for the place where it is born. It will keep this name for two months, and then at ten months it will receive its child's name (Boas 1966:364-365). The ten-month wait is noteworthy, because ten months is thought to be the length of gestation (1966:360). The naming thus represents a social rebirth parallel to the imagined spiritual rebirth, and immediately signals a central concern with reincarnation in its social aspect.

We know regretfully little about Kwakiutl commoners' names and naming practices. We cannot even be sure that the Kwakiutl attempt to name their children for the deceased relatives they are believed to reincarnate. Assuming that they do, knowing that they recognize the same signs of reincarnation, we may suppose that they must encounter the same difficulties in reconciling their beliefs with their social imperatives. Mills' (1988b:44) report of multiple naming must refer to commoners, because noble names may be held by only one person at a time.

For the nobility, the name of the eldest son descends by primogeniture, from eldest child to eldest child (Boas 1920:116). Thus, signs can have no effect on the naming of the eldest child, but they may come into play with younger children, whose names may be reassigned by their bearers at will (1920:118). We may imagine that it would be considered most desirable for the nobility to reincarnate in their direct descendents, so as to continue spiritually the lineage that will be continued through the name, though the texts do not tell us that this is the case. It is interesting in this connection that Charlie Nowell's second son was recognized as the reincarnation of his father's second oldest brother, "by the scar that was on his right temple" (Ford 1941:167). Nowell himself was a second son (1941:41). The birth order is preserved here, confirmed by the scar.

It is interesting also that in two (and perhaps in all three) of Boas' cases described above, not only noble, but chiefly lines are involved. This is indicated in the second case by the fact that the murdered man was burying goods for a potlatch at the time he was killed, and that he "bade his father distribute" these goods after he had shown him where they were, because hosting potlatches is an activity of chiefs (Boas 1925:91). The boy is the eldest son of his own (eldest) son, again preserving the birth order. The other two cases involve women, and evidently social position is not so important for them. In the third case, the woman desiring to be reborn to Great Bear is not even a member of his family, whereas in the first case, the family may or may not be noble.

We know little about Kwakiutl commoners, of course, because Boas and Hunt paid virtually no attention to them (see Goldman 1975:215-219). We cannot know why they made

the decision to stay so close to the nobility, but it is revealing of the importance of the nobility in Kwakiutl life. Social differentiation ("stratification" would be too strong), being legislated by myth, is much more marked among the Kwakiutl than among the Tlingit. Perhaps this helps to explain the differences in the two societies' conceptions of the afterlife. For the Kwakiutl, we recall, where the soul goes depends on a person's occupation or characteristics of birth, whereas for the Tlingit it results from his or her manner of death.

BIG NAMES

Birth names (personal names) are not the only ones a Tlingit can expect to receive. Individuals in even minor positions in the social hierarchy possess at least one honorific or "big" name, by which they will be called at a potlatch (de Laguna 1972:785). What (following de Laguna) I will henceforth call big names are thus often called "potlatch names" or "feast names" in the literature. These big names carry rank and the acquisition of names is a way of increasing rank. For house chiefs, the names behave like titles, and bring with them powers, privileges, and responsibilities that affect every facet of social life.

Like personal names, big names are held by clans and though they may cross clan lines, they may never pass out of the moiety. They are handed down from older to younger brother, from maternal uncle to nephew, from paternal grandfather to grandson (de Laguna 1972:786). Big names are not linked to signs and are not directly tied to reincarnation, "although the fact that the recipient was often a direct matrilineal descendent of and a member of the same house as the name's previous owner often led to the view that the former resembled the latter, in one way or another" (Kan 1989:71).

This comment by Kan suggests an association of birth names and big names, and indeed the two types of name seem to have been identified to a large extent. There is general agreement in the literature on Athapaskan and northern Coast societies that a child is expected to ascend to the big names he held in his previous life, especially if he was a chief (Adams 1973:30; Mills 1988a:403; Seguin 1984:126). But because big names, unlike birth names, may be held by only one person at a time, the attainment of big names may take some years, and the reassumption of a name is not guaranteed (de Laguna 1972:786; Mills 1988a:404).

Big names are validated and assumed at a potlatch, and largely restricted to use there (Kan 1989:71). The word "potlatch" is a jargon of the Chinook traders of the Coast and adjacent inland areas, and the institution is found throughout the region. It includes a feast, but its central feature is the giving of large amounts of wealth of various kinds to the assembled guests. Among the Tlingit, a potlatch is sponsored by a wealthy person for members of the opposite moiety (de Laguna 1972:606; Kan 1989:182). A potlatch is normally reciprocated at a later time by the guests, who as hosts try to maintain and advance their status and rank by outdoing their former hosts (now their guests) in their often lavish gifts.

Traditional anthropological analysis has focused on the

gift-giving and status aggrandizement, interpreting the potlatch strictly in economic and political terms (e.g., see Rosman and Rubel 1971), but Kan (1989) has shown that this approach fails to take into account the religious purpose of the ritual. The deceased cannot directly partake of food or goods, but they may utilize them if they are burned, drowned, otherwise destroyed, or, by generalized extension, given away to one's opposites (1989:185). A major purpose of the potlatch, therefore—and the reason it is associated with the bestowal of big names as well as with other important events—is to obtain ancestral sanction for the activity in question. Significantly, big names take effect only after goods have been distributed and the name has been used by a member of the opposite moiety in addressing its new bearer (de Laguna 1972:786).

The major Tlingit potlatch is the mortuary potlatch, the concluding event in the cycle of mortuary rites. The potlatch is held a year or more after the funeral, and one of its purposes is to assure the deceased's spirit safe passage to the land of the dead. By this time also, according to Kan (1989:42), the reincarnating spirit of the deceased is expected to have been reborn. In the course of the potlatch, "the dead person's names and regalia were ritually bestowed upon his matrikin, while his position in the social order, his title, wealth and spouse were publicly given to his successor" (Kan 1989:42; cf. de Laguna 1972:787).

The Kwakiutl have two sets of big names, both reserved for the nobility. One set is represented by the name the child receives at ten months. The child will later be given a young man's name, which will replace his child's name, and which will be replaced in turn by other names (Boas 1921:820-835; 1925:111-131). The entire sequence of names normally (1920:121) remains within a house, passed down from a father to his children. Apart from the name of the house chief, which must always descend to the eldest child, house names may be assigned by their bearers to whomever they wish, providing only that this person is hereditarily qualified to receive them (1920:118). The supplementary names, like the name conferring basic rank, are introduced in myth, having been obtained, along with various related powers, by the early ancestors from supernatural beings (see Goldman 1975:57).

A second set of big names, called "marriage names," passes among houses rather than within them. A man receives a marriage name or names from his father-in-law. A chief might divorce and marry several times during his life, and at each marriage, his father-in-law would give him a new name or names (Boas 1921:786), which he would be expected to pass on to his family and his future sons, and to his own sons-in-law. Marriage names might also be given by the maternal grandfather directly to his grandson at the time he receives his (ten-month) child's name from his father (1920:118-119). Each marriage name, like each house name, carries rights, powers, and prerogatives, and by accumulating names, a person rises in rank.

As with the Tlingit, none of these big names are valid unless and until they are accompanied by the distribution of property at a potlatch. Hunt likens the ritual to baptism: "And

it is the baptism of the Indians; the giving away of blankets fastens a name on a child" (Boas 1925:111). A father first distributes property to secure his child's birth name, and does the same for each of the child's subsequent names. Marriage names (and marriages too) also are validated at a potlatch. Boas (1966:77) understood the potlatch to involve an "interest-bearing investment of property," the interest running as high as 100%, but Goldman (1975:163-168) has challenged this view, stressing the ritual and religious significance of the event instead.

Although big names may not be held by more than one person at a time, in the post-contact period, at least, it has become proper for one person to hold a name (and hence a seat) in more than one house (Boas 1920:115-116). Hunt (Boas 1925:99) tells of a man who held no fewer than five names (or seats) in different houses. The holder (usually in these cases a chief) would have correspondingly greater rank, though the religious purpose was to keep the names alive when there were too few qualified bearers for them (Goldman 1975:38). The fact that this practice developed during the post-contact period under conditions of population decline increases the likelihood that these were the conditions under which multiple naming involving birth names developed as well.

Because only one person at a time may hold a house name, and because these same names are given away by a father to his eldest son as the child grows, in the normal course of affairs a chief will have divested himself of all his names by the time the child reaches maturity. The chief himself may then be only 35 years old (Goldman 1975:59), but he has become the "old man of the house" and takes a low-ranking seat in the front of the house during ceremonial occasions (Boas 1925:229). It is considered fortunate to have children to whom to pass on names (1925:101). A "dead name" may be resurrected, but without the status which formerly accrued to it (1921:967). The most propitious time for passing on a name, Goldman (1975:27) notes, is when the bearer is at the height of his powers, before he has begun to decline, but after the heir has been prepared to take his place.

Goldman (1975:27) equates the name transmitted before death with the "ancestral spirit," which he distinguishes from the "personal soul." Furthermore, he says: "The personal soul departs at death to join with owls or other animals. The name soul remains forever among men" (1975:62). He thus denies the Kwakiutl a belief in reincarnation in any usual sense, which leads him to conclude that "the concept of preexistence is little more than an intimation" (1975:57). In this he is clearly wrong, as we have seen. He appears to have been misled in part by Boas' (1940:619, 1966:169) statement, later amended by Hunt (Boas 1930:257), to the effect that when a person's owl dies, his soul dies with it. He also misses the significance of cases and signs.

I think Goldman (1975:62) is wrong as well to ascribe to the Kwakiutl a belief in a "name soul" similar to that found among the Inuit. For many Inuit (Eskimo) groups the name soul is the personal soul, or at any rate is the soul involved in reincarnation (Wachtmeister 1956). For these people, reincarnation and naming are one and the same. Their concept

is rather different from that expressed by de Laguna's (1954:183) informant, who said that when the child is named, the associated spirit knows to whom to attach itself. In de Laguna's case, although they are linked, spirit and name are not equated; and although the data at my disposal do not allow us to say with certainty, it seems more likely that the Kwakiutl concept would resemble the Tlingit than that it would match the Inuit.

There may be a sense in which big names are felt to possess "soul." This would not be surprising under conditions in which names have an eternal existence, being passed down through the generations in an unbroken line, while their bearers come and go. The idea that names possess soul is supported by the fact that people mourn a name that will have no bearers to continue it. But this does not seem to me to be a compelling reason to think that the names are considered to be ancestral spirits, if by this we mean (as Goldman seems to mean) that it is through names that reincarnation is effected.

There is rather more reason to interpret Kwakiutl big names in terms of guardian spirit beliefs (see Hultkrantz 1953). For one thing, there are supernatural powers attached to the names (see Goldman 1975:61). The association of the names with the life cycle would make more sense if they embodied (or were tags for) tutelary spirits, the replacement of one name with another as the child matures representing the association with increasingly powerful spirits. Again, the father's surrender of his names would make more sense if he were relinquishing genii rather than parts of his own soul.

Similarly, Charlie Nowell named his second son—the one with the scar on his forehead—Alfred (a Western name) rather than Nulis, the name of the father's brother he was recognized as being (Ford 1941:167). That the child thereby was left bereft of his ancestral soul seems rather doubtful, but the action becomes comprehensible if it is an independent spirit that is involved. Still more reason to think of the names in this way comes from the fact that objects (such as feast dishes and house posts) may also be named; when they wear out, an exact replica is fashioned, and the name transferred to it. But the objects are not considered to possess souls; rather, they are provided as temporary lodgings for spirits on ceremonial occasions.

Viewing big names as being in part tags for tutelary spirits helps us to understand another important aspect of them: the way in which they may be considered property. Big names may serve primarily a ritual function or they may entitle their bearers to certain rights or powers. These prerogatives are especially apparent in the case of chiefs, but there are numerous other hereditary positions as well, such as, for the Kwakiutl, the right to tally dishes at a potlatch (Boas 1925:56) or assemble the houses of a clan (1925:59). Some rights—such as the rights to fishing grounds of berry patches—are the property of the house, but many others are held by the individual (1920:125).

To the degree that big names and their attendant privileges and powers may be considered property, they are inheritable. House names are passed on by their holders before their deaths, to members of the younger generation in the same

house. Marriage names are also inheritable, though generally from the father's father, through the mother, to the grandson. Obtaining the big names owned by one's namesake may be considered a type of succession, if it is not an actual succession to an office, such as that of the chief.

In a general sense, these comments apply to the Tlingit as well as to the Kwakiutl (Boas 1920:125). Tlingit big names do not appear to have guardian spirit qualities, but the Tlingit, like the Kwakiutl, make a distinction between property held by the clan and that which is owned by the individual, and among the latter, between that which is bequeathed directly from an individual to his heir and that which is passed to others in the society before reaching the heir. The namesake of the deceased (theoretically his reincarnation) can hope and often is expected to acquire both these classes of property when he reaches maturity. The Tlingit, however, announce the succession and distribute the deceased's possessions at the mortuary potlatch, rather than at a potlatch preceding the death.

The Tlingit link between signs and personal names, and personal names and big names, is quite explicit. The personal name (and even more the big name) brings with it a social persona, which may also be considered a type of property. Because the names are the property of the clan (and therefore of the moiety) we can understand why it is so important to reincarnate within the same clan if not moiety, and why signs pointing in other directions must be overridden. The same considerations apply to the Kwakiutl, although for them personal and honorific names are associated to an even greater extent. A man, especially if he is noble, would want to be reborn into the same house so that he could succeed to the same positions he held in his previous life. Moreover, inasmuch as many prerogatives are linked to birth order, he will want to resume the same position in the family. Boas' cases showing just this happening thus are exactly what we would expect to find.

REINCARNATION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Tlingit are organized into matrilineal moieties, comprised of clans, the clans themselves consisting of lineages, or houses. Clan members understand themselves to be related as brothers and sisters "or, if differences in generation are stressed, as mothers, mothers' brothers, grandmothers, great uncles, and the descendents of these persons in the maternal line" (de Laguna 1972:451). The house is a miniature version of the clan, sharing in the rights of the larger grouping, but possessing its own rights as well. Moieties serve to divide the population into two groups with reciprocal ceremonial obligations, but are not themselves corporate bodies.

The moieties and clans are exogamous, and marriage normally links two clans of opposite moieties. It is considered especially appropriate for the spouse to be a member of the father's house or clan. A paternal aunt or her daughter is the preferred wife, a paternal uncle or paternal aunt's son the preferred husband. When chiefly lines are involved, the preferred marriage is between a man and his mother's brother's daughter (who might at the same time be his father's sister's

daughter). Parallel cousins belong to the same moiety and thus are classificatory brothers and sisters. In earlier days intra-moiety marriage was, not surprisingly, considered incestuous, and was forbidden (de Laguna 1972:490).

Reincarnation fits into this structure in rather interesting ways. Ideally, as we have seen, reincarnation follows in the moiety, clan, and house of the deceased (in descending levels of importance), and empirical data from cases seem to show that it does in fact. "To judge by alleged instances," de Laguna says, the new mother may be "a sister's daughter, daughter's daughter, or sister's daughter's daughter, or sometimes a son's daughter or even a sib 'sister' whose relationship is so remote" that it cannot be traced (1972:777). Stevenson's (1966) data for the southern Tlingit reveal a similar preference for the maternal line.

If grandparents are routinely reborn in grandchildren, and if the grandchildren are given the names of the persons they are believed to reincarnate, then we would expect to find the same alternate generational pattern in naming. Indeed, this is just what Halpin (1984) found in her analysis of Hartley Bay Tsimshian feast names. Levi-Strauss (1982:175) uses the Tsimshian and their belief "in the reincarnation of the grandfather in the person of the grandson" as an example of the repetition of names in successive generations, a practice he calls "periodic naming." Rosman and Rubel (1971:45) take the association a step further when they enlist reincarnation and the "inheritance of names" among the Tlingit and the Haida in support of their structural model for these societies.

Levi-Strauss (1982:174) noted that a systematic association between naming practices and certain types of social structure could not be ruled out. We may ask whether there is a particular type of structure with which periodic naming might be associated. The answer would seem to be that we may expect to find it especially in societies such as the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian, that is in societies with some form of dual organization, marriage rules requiring moiety or clan exogamy, and unilineal descent, because this type of structure would be particularly likely to reunite the same lineages in successive generations. This would be especially true where there is a preference for marrying into the father's house, as among the Tlingit. I am currently investigating the relationship between reincarnation and the same structure, using a cross-cultural sample.

Interesting, the Kwakiutl also know of cross-cousin marriage, although it appears to be a comparatively rare event, confined to a few lineages (Boas 1920:117, 1921:781, 1966:50). The reason Boas gives for it is noteworthy. It is due to a "strong desire to retain the privileges in the narrowest limits of the family" (1920:117). Compare Rattray's (1927:317-331) treatment of cross-cousin marriage among the Ashanti of northern Ghana. In Ashanti cross-cousin marriage was practiced most especially by the royal family, and with the same purpose, that is, to keep valuables from leaving the line through marriage to outsiders. When reincarnation is brought into the picture, we can see that this amounts to saying that the valuables will be preserved for inheritance by family members in their future lives (cf. Rattray 1927:324).

Cross-cousin marriages (Boas includes them under the heading of "endogenous marriages") account, as I have said, for only a small minority of Kwakiutl alliances. For the most part, houses and lineages are exogamous, the ideal marriage being with a person of equal rank in another village (Boas 1920). Kwakiutl social structure is a good deal more complex than Tlingit, and although Boas (e.g., 1920, 1966:37-76) struggled to understand it, later analyses (e.g., Goldman 1975; Levi-Strauss 1982) have held him not to have been altogether successful. Boas referred to as "tribes" what I here, following Goldman (1975), call villages, and designated by the native term *numaym* what I will continue to call (following Levi-Strauss 1982, heretofore unacknowledged) a house.

Goldman (1975:32) comments on the way in which Kwakiutl society is "simultaneously hierarchical and oppositional," thanks to the two sets of (big) names and ritual privileges, one kept in the house and the other exchanged through marriage. We find the same tension expressed in Kwakiutl reincarnation cases. In contrast to the matrilineal descent expected by the Tlingit, descent is through the father's line in Ford's (1941) case and in two of Boas' (1891, 1930). In Boas' third case (1891), no family relationship is indicated. So it is also with James Sewid's daughter Louisa, who was thought to be "one of the old people from Gilford Island who was killed during the massacre there, because Louisa had a little mark under the eye just like that old lady" (Spradley 1969:188). Thus, we have three cases of patrilineal descent and two cases in which the reincarnation appears to have come from outside the family. Probably it is not coincidental that in both of the latter, women are involved.

Tlingit social structure is fairly rigid, with preferential marriage rules seeing to it that the same families are related generation after generation. Reincarnation is expected to occur in such a way that one is reborn into the same family in line to receive a name one held in one's previous life and to resume one's social position. Kwakiutl social structure by contrast is more open, marriage and descent rules are more flexible, but these again are reflected in apparent expectations about reincarnation. For those of some status and rank, the ideal seems to be to stay within the family, whereas other persons (especially women?) are free to participate in various families in successive lives.

Taking a Durkheimian view of this situation, we might argue that reincarnation patterns reflect social structure because the former are modelled on the latter. This argument, however, fails to explain the origins of social structure, and it fails to come to terms with the fact that belief in reincarnation is said to be based on empirical signs. To assert that the interpretation of signs is culturally mandated would be to push the problem back a step, not to solve it: where did the belief come from, and why is it so widespread? Why should it be associated with certain structural principles? An anthropology of consciousness, on the other hand, provides a direct answer to these questions. By granting the belief an existence independent of social and cultural variables, it can fully acknowledge the role of signs, and is in a position to suggest that certain social structures developed as a way of

taking advantage of the reincarnation process (cf. Goldman 1976:208 on Durkheim).

From the point of view of reincarnation, placing inheritance at the center of social structure makes perfect sense. But this view of course is very different from that of Levi-Strauss (1976). In the *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, he argued that incest was the driving force behind the nuclear family, the principal rationale for segregating wife-takers and wife-givers. He portrayed marriage as an exchange of spouses and goods. Certainly it is this, but we may suggest (taking our lead from Kan 1989) that primitive exchange had a primarily religious and only secondarily an economic function (cf. Goldman 1976:129-130), and that marriage was likewise often as much a religious as a secular undertaking (cf. Goldman 1975:Chap. 4). Incest, also, may have more to do with religion than biology, as is indicated by the fact that it is often classificatory kin, not biological kin, with whom marriage is prescribed or prohibited. Levi-Strauss understands this last problem in regard to cross-cousin marriage, but characteristically interprets it as implying that this type of marriage is "an elementary formula for marriage by exchange" (1976:129).

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