

From Clan to *Kwáan* to Corporation The Continuing Complex Evolution of Tlingit Political Organization

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Like many Native American groups, the Tlingit of Southeast Alaska traditionally were organized into corporate descent groups, known as clans. The seventy or so Tlingit matrilineal clans composed not only the foundation of personal and social identity, but also the central units of governance, through which such vital political functions as land tenure, resource production, distribution, and trade, and war and peace-making were managed. However, clans' sociopolitical prerogatives were severely undermined by the forces of Western contact and colonization beginning in the eighteenth century. By the early 1900s conditions were so stressful that a syncretic revitalization movement, the Alaska Native Brotherhood, was launched by Alaska Native leaders seeking to replace fractious clan-based governance with a unified political organization that could more effectively advocate on behalf of Natives within the dominant society.

This political revitalization movement from within was followed by two important institutional reform movements imposed from without by the federal government in an effort to create greater isomorphism between federal and native institutions. The first was the Indian Reorganization Act of 1936, which enabled the formation of tribal governments at the village level (or *kwáan* in Tlingit). The second was the landmark Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, which laid an entirely new socioeconomic organization on Alaska Native regions and villages in the form of for-profit corporations. While the imposition of these new governing entities might have spelled doom for the clans as political organs, in fact it has not. Indeed, at the dawn of the new millennium, the clan system remains a vital component of political

organization and is itself being revitalized. This paper examines the major forces in the evolution of Tlingit politics from a political-ecological perspective, focusing on the distribution of power and control over scarce resources among various levels of the Tlingit sociopolitical organization and between the Tlingit polity and state and federal governments. I argue that, while Tlingit sociopolitical organization has proved adaptive to changes wrought by Euramerican colonization, in the late twentieth century it has become so complex, multifarious, and elaborated that the polity risks becoming involuted if not maladaptive in the new millennium.

ECOSYSTEMS AND POLITICAL EVOLUTION

The links between the evolution of indigenous political systems and ecological factors governing key natural resources have long been recognized in anthropology (Steward 1955; Service 1962). In the native North American culture area known as the Northwest Coast, stretching from northern California to Southeast Alaska, researchers have posited a strong correlation between abundant natural resources and complex forms of sociopolitical organization (Kroeber 1939; Drucker 1951, 1983). Ethnographers proposed that large quantities of localized resources, particularly salmon, allowed Northwest Coast societies to support higher populations and sedentism, and this, in turn, led to the development of more complex social and political institutions. These features helped to define the Northwest Coast tribes as unique among hunting and gathering peoples. In contrast to most of the world's foragers, whose politics were characterized by egalitarianism and small-scale, flexible institutions, Northwest Coast groups boasted formal local and regional sociopolitical structures and a high degree of social stratification, including slavery.

Yet while the basic assumption about the relationship between Northwest Coast ecological abundance and sociopolitical complexity is ultimately valid, it does not go very far toward explaining the proximate causes for the evolution of very diverse political systems within the culture area over time. More recently, Northwest Coast scholars have begun to consider these issues in detail, and a range of important socioecological factors have been emphasized as contributing to the unity and diversity of political development among various Northwest groups (see Suttles 1968; Fladmark 1975; Schalk 1977; Richardson 1982; Drucker 1983; Ames 1994; Matson and Coupland 1995; Moss 1998; Thornton 1999b; Ames and Maschner 1999). These factors include: (1) macroenvironmental changes; (2) spatial and temporal variation in resources; (3) increased availability of and reliance upon marine re-

sources, especially salmon; (4) the advent of preservation and storage techniques; (5) the production of surpluses for trade; and (6) conflict and stresses related to sedentism, population growth, environmental circumscription, and resource competition. These factors combined in different ways at different times to produce a variety of complex foraging societies along the Northwest Coast over time.

Strictly speaking, then, there is no such thing as a pure aboriginal or "traditional" form of governance among the Tlingit or any other group. Rather, these political systems have been evolving continuously over the past five to ten thousand years. What is more, they continue to evolve in response to the current environment, a landscape in which valuable resources are gained not just through the domestic production of natural resources and regional trade and ceremonial networks, but also from the state and federal governments and participation in the global economy and international social movements.

SOCIOPOLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN THE EARLY CONTACT AND RUSSIAN ERAS (1750-1867)

The earliest recorded encounters with the Tlingit occurred in the mid-eighteenth century when Russian and other European explorers began to journey along the northwest coast of America. They were followed by European and American traders who tended to interact with their Tlingit business partners in relatively instrumental and coequal ways. Until the Russian American Company's colonization of Sitka in the early nineteenth century, contacts were largely limited to trading encounters. Even so, whites were quick to recognize the complexity of Tlingit social political organization, which included a nobility (assumed to be "chiefs"), a slave strata, and powerful roles for women (see de Laguna 1983). At the same time, there also was a great deal of misrecognition on the part of the newcomers as to the degree of division and relationships and prerogatives among the various levels of Tlingit sociopolitical organization. For example, early visitors typically assumed that each Tlingit village had a single chief.

There were in fact six major levels of political organization at the time of contact (see table 1), which can be ranked from broadest to narrowest as follows: nation (*Lingít*), moiety (no Tlingit term), village/region (*k'wáan*), clan (*naa*), house group (*hít*), and person (*k'áa*) (see Thornton 1997). Some might object to a "person" being considered a political unit, but when we consider that persons were ranked within Tlingit society and bestowed with hereditary names and titles of political significance that essentialized and publicized political identity as an element of personhood, it seems logical to include it.

Table 1.

Tlingit sociopolitical organization (1750–1912)			
<i>Level</i>	<i>Sociopolitical Unit</i>	<i>Political Status</i>	<i>No. of Units</i>
1	Nation (<i>Lingít</i>)	Weak political status based primarily on common language and culture	1
2	Moiety	Important for organizing reciprocal exchange in ritual politics	2
3	Village (<i>kwáan</i>)	Weak political status based on common habitation, usually of a single winter village	13–18
4	Clan (<i>naa</i>)	Central sociopolitical unit based on matrilineage	70+
5	House (<i>hít</i>)	Based originally on the segment of a matrilineage residing in one house	200+
6	Person (<i>káa</i>)	Sociopolitical status acquired by birth, but big names/titles also reserved for highborn Tlingits who distinguished themselves	10,000+

Nation

Tlingits can be said to have constituted a nation only in the weakest sense during this early contact period. Although they recognized a certain degree of unity among themselves, including a distinct language, geography, and culture, they were not governed, as some Westerners mistakenly supposed, by a single leader or government. Indeed, at the time of contact, Tlingit culture was in a period of northern expansion, and with few exceptions, villages and social groups were becoming increasingly scattered and fragmented rather than unified. Consider that the village of Yakutat, at the northern frontier, stood several hundred miles and many days canoe journey from Cape Fox, at the southern boundary of Tlingit Country (Lingít Aaní). Such expansion and distancing favored differentiation over unification. Significantly, there is no generic term for nation in Tlingit, and foreign nations typically were conceptualized as *kwáans* or clans.

Kwáans

Similarly, Europeans sometimes mistakenly assumed that Tlingit villages, or *kwáans*, were governed by autonomous political units like those found in Western towns and villages. Here again the reality was more complex. The term *kwáan*, derived from the verb "to dwell," simply marked Tlingit individuals as inhabitants of a certain geographic region, typically the totality of lands and waters controlled by clans inhabiting a particular winter village (at other times groups were typically dispersed into seasonal subsistence camps). *Kwáans* themselves typically did not act as political entities; unlike Western town and village governments, there were no *kwáan* councils or assemblies to issue ordinances, mete out punishments, or raise revenues. All of these activities were carried out at the clan level, although, as we shall see, the *kwáan* was to emerge as a major political entity in the twentieth century.

Moieties

Like *kwáans*, moieties formed a vital component of Tlingit identity but played only a minor role in politics and governance. Just as *kwáans* categorized people as inhabitants of certain regions, moieties (from the French term for "half") identified Tlingits as members of two major supermatrilineages, Raven (*Yéil*) or Eagle/Wolf (*Ch'áak'/Gooch*), under which the approximately seventy major clans were grouped.¹ There is some evidence to suggest that the moieties evolved from two ancient clans, the Laayneidí (the Raven side) and the Shangukeidí (the Wolf side), as the Tlingit, lacking a generic term for moiety, used these clan names to label the two superlineages (Swanton 1908, 423; de Laguna 1972, 1: 450). Although politically weak, moieties were important threads that linked and organized members of disparate communities and clans into opposing but reciprocating "sides" that carried out major ceremonial exchanges through such rituals as marriage and the potlatch. But moieties had no singular leaders or governing authority beyond that of their constituent clans.

Clans

The exogamous, matrilineal clan is the oldest and most basic unit of Tlingit social structure and the foundation of both individual and group identity. Tlingits consider a person to be of the mother's clan, a child of the father's clan, and a grandchild of other clans. Traditionally, this identity formed the basis for nearly all social action. Clans or their localized segments, known as house groups, owned and maintained use rights to physical property, including salmon streams, halibut banks,

hunting grounds, sealing rocks, berrying grounds, shellfish beds, canoe-landing beaches, and other landmarks, as well as symbolic property, such as stories, songs, regalia, crests, and other cultural icons, including clan ancestors. These possessions, or *at.óow*, composed the foundation of Tlingit identity, and each clan was conceived of as having not only its exclusive property, but also its own unique "personality" and ways of being (de Laguna 1972, 1: 451). Virtually all legal and political authority was vested in the clan. Clans or their localized segments, rather than regional "tribes" or *kwáans*, made war and peace, conducted rituals, and organized material production. Traditionally, in times of conflict, loyalty and "patriotism" were always with the clan, a reality that created inherent structural tensions in interclan contexts, such as marriage, residence, and ritual (de Laguna 1983). The centrality of the clan is further reflected in the fact that some neighboring groups, like the Haida (Deikinaa, "Way Outside Clan"), were conceived of as clans.

An important but often overlooked aspect of clans is their geographical basis. Two aspects of clan geography are particularly significant: origin and distribution. Origin refers to the location where the clan was founded as a distinct social group and is typically from where it derives its name. The majority of Tlingit clans adopted their names from the geographic areas they inhabited, and the linguistic construction of such clan names invoked a sense of belonging or being possessed by the named place. For example, *Caanáx*, the Tlingit name for Port Stewart in Behm Canal, was settled by a Tlingit group who then became the *Caanáx.ádi*, literally the "beings of" (or "possessed by") Port Stewart. These origin sites were often taken as crests by the clan and also were considered sacred property (*at.óow*). Clans not named for natural sites often took their identity from some aspect of the village geography, such as an architectural feature of their clan house (for example, the Kaagwaantaan or "Charred House People") or its location within the village (for example, the Deisheetaan or "End of the Trail House People"). The linguistic homology between clan names and sacred geography served to reinforce strong material, social, and spiritual ties to place among clan members, and the understanding of these ties was considered to be an essential component of one's heritage and identity (*shagóon*).

The geographic distributions of clans are noteworthy because of their discontinuity in space. Segments of a single clan are typically dispersed in several, often nonadjacent, communities or *kwáans*. For example, the Teikweidí are found in the northernmost *kwáan*, Yakutat, and the southernmost, Sanya and Tongass, but nowhere in between except Angoon. This dispersed network of multilocal clans, which evolved through the twin processes of fission and migration, contributes to a social geography with its own spatial logic and unity. As de Laguna

suggests (1960, 17–18), the logic and unity of the clan geography has a profound influence on a Tlingit individual's basic knowledge of physical geography and the history behind it. Thus, through his clan's oral traditions, a Yakutat Teikweidí of the Bear House has some sense of the historical geography in the vicinity of Ketchikan and Prince of Wales Island (where the Teikweidí were formed) and Sitka (where they migrated after a conflict), despite the fact that they lie hundreds of miles to the south and he may have never personally traveled to these places (compare de Laguna 1972, 225–26). Because the social body of the clan has ties to these places, so too do its individual members, despite their relocation, segmentation, or other distancings in space. These multiple ties to place are embodied in the clan's *at.óow* and *shagóon*, including names, ancestors, regalia, songs, stories, and the like. Tlingit history and geography, then, must be read through the clans. Both male and female clan leaders carried special authority and titles and to this day in Tlingit are referred to as *Naasádeháni* (Clan Head) and *Naa Tlaa* (Clan Mother).

Houses

As Tlingit society expanded demographically and geographically, clan lineages were both aggregated (into the above-mentioned supermatrilineages or moieties) and subdivided into localized matrilineages known as houses (*bít*) or house groups. The Tlingit term refers to the residential units themselves, which traditionally were named after and sheltered members of a matrilineage and their conjugal families. Where clans were small, residing in a single multifamily structure, the clan and house group were effectively the same entity. But population pressures and other pressures naturally led to the formation of new houses and sublineages over time. House leaders carried the title of *Hít S'aatí* or "Master of the House."

House groups had both a physical and sociopolitical reality. Physically, houses, like clans, were always intimately linked to their place of origin, even if the original house itself was destroyed or relocated. Sociopolitically, a Tlingit was always a part of his or her mother's house, regardless of where he or she resided, unless an individual formally established a new house in the context of a potlatch. The house group was also the core unit in the domestic mode of economic production. While the physical reality of the multifamily clan dwelling has been replaced by nuclear family dwellings, the sociopolitical house is still recognized and matrilineal ties are still reckoned through it. House groups maintain their integrity not only through the framework of kinship and ancestry (*shagóon*) but also through leadership (*bít s'aatí*), property (*at.óow*), and coordinated social, ceremonial, and economic activities.

Persons

Finally, at the level of personhood, all Tlingits were bestowed with birth names that were considered *at.óow* of the house or clan and inherited matrilineally. As a component of personhood, names distinguished not only clan/house identity but also hereditary social rank, as the names themselves had different values (Emmons 1991, 261). The lowest-ranking members of Tlingit society, slaves (*gux*), were not always given proper Tlingit names because of their status as property rather than persons within the political system. In contrast, the high-ranking members of free society, the *Aanyádi* or “Children of the Town” were given the more valuable names at birth. As a consequence, birth names ultimately placed significant constraints on their carrier’s future political status. However, political status was not wholly the product of birthright or ascription. The highest-ranking names of a particular lineage were reserved as titles and were given only to high-born members (or, rarely, to exceptional commoners) who merited chiefly status through their own achievements. These were almost exclusively men whose achievements were measured by their success in organizing and intensifying economic production and expanding the redistribution of goods and sociopolitical alliances through trade, marriages, ritual potlatching, and other means. As elites, these titleholders also controlled clan *at.óow*, including the distribution of nonmaterial possessions such as clan histories, songs, stories, names, and other specialized knowledge. In many ways, these leaders resembled the so-called Big Men of Polynesian societies (Johnson and Earle 1987). In return for some measure of economic control, Tlingit elites provided their clan members with security, prestige, social networks, and valuable nonlocal goods.

To these fundamental sociopolitical units should be added two other important dimensions of Tlingit politics and governance during the pre- and early contact period: slavery and gender. It is not clear whence slavery emerged as an institution on the Northwest Coast, but oral and archaeological evidence suggests that it predates eighteenth-century contact by at least several hundred years and perhaps several millennia (see Ames and Maschner 1999). Nineteenth-century estimates of the Tlingit slave population vary widely, but in most *kwáans* it did not seem to exceed 10 percent of the overall population. Tlingit slaves were typically captured in raids or wars from neighboring groups as far south as Puget Sound or purchased from the Haidas, and slave status was also considered hereditary (Emmons 1991, 40–41). Donald (1997) argues persuasively that slavery evolved on the Northwest Coast as a means for elites to maintain and enlarge their economic and sociopolitical status by capitalizing on slave labor to intensify economic production for exchange. Slaves were not only instrumental in harvesting resources but also in defending and processing them. Especially in

"patchy" resource areas such as salmon streams, where runs were concentrated in both time and space, slave labor could boost production vastly. In addition slaves performed a variety of other menial tasks in attending to their wealthy owners and served as a kind of currency in the ritual economy wherein they might be sacrificed or freed to consecrate certain transactions, such as the raising of a house.

Women had a special status in Tlingit politics and were a dynamic force in sociopolitical life. While they typically (excepting the absence of a suitable male heir) did not assume formal offices or titles beyond that of matrilineal "clan mother," women exerted enormous influence in economic, political, and social spheres, and could also become powerful shamans within the spiritual realm (de Laguna 1983, 81–82). They regulated and managed household production and finances and also intra- and interethnic trade. Vancouver (1801, 4: 254–55; see also de Laguna 1983, 81) was among the earliest to remark upon the powerful role of women in Tlingit country, observing in 1793 that

In all the commercial transactions the women took a very principal part, and proved themselves by no means unequal to the task. Nor did it appear, that either in these or in any other respect they were inferior to the men, on the contrary, it should rather seem that they are looked up to as the superior sex, for they appeared in general to keep the men in awe, and under their subjection.

At the same time, perhaps because of their individual power but collective lack of office, women were seen as destabilizing forces and sources of conflict. Thus, oral histories tend to scapegoat women as the causes of natural disasters, internecine warfare, and other calamities (see Swanton 1909).

Federations

A final level of political organization found among the Tlingit and other Northwest Coast groups was the federation or confederation (Drucker 1983). These aggregations of clans were forged primarily for the purposes of war and ceremonial activities and may have become more important after the devastating depopulation that resulted from early nineteenth-century epidemics, especially the smallpox outbreak of 1835–1837, which reduced the Tlingit population by half or more in some regions (Boyd 1999). However, federations did not constitute permanent political entities, but rather temporary alliances designed to achieve short-term political goals. Even major military alliances such as those formed to destroy early Russian outposts at Sitka in 1802 and Yakutat in 1805 were temporary and fragile. As de Laguna (1983, 79)

points out, "Some Sitkans simply absented themselves from the fight, and remained friends with the Russians; victorious clans at Yakutat fought over the booty taken. There were no long-term stakes to support a political union."

Still, with the exception of Sitka, where the Russians reasserted control of the village in 1804, Tlingit political acumen and military strength were enough to keep Russian expansion in check. Tlingit clans continued to govern themselves and their aboriginal territories with little disturbance, beyond the quasi-political impacts of trade and disease, until the end of the Russian era in 1867.

**THE SEVERE STRESS OF THE
AMERICAN MILITARY PERIOD
(1867-1912)**

Tlingit leaders were both bewildered and insulted by Russia's sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867. A U.S. Treasury Department agent at the time correctly discerned that their "dissatisfaction . . . did not arise from any special feeling of hostility, but from the fact that it was sold without their consent" (in Hinckley 1996, 76). The Tlingit position was "that their fathers originally owned all the country, but allowed the Russians to occupy it for mutual benefit in that articles desired by them could be obtained from the Russians in exchange for furs." But Russia had no right to sell the territory because, save for a portion of Sitka town, they did not control, much less legally own, any of it. From a Tlingit perspective, Russia not only sold a territory it did not legally own, but did so without consulting the owners, and pocketed all the proceeds of the illegal sale. This lack of legitimacy of the transfer of Alaska remains an issue among Tlingit leaders to this day. Alaska's Treaty of Cession itself contained only brief mention of Natives, declaring that "The uncivilized tribes will be subject to such laws and regulations as the United States may, from time to time, adopt in regard to the aboriginal tribes in that country."

As it turned out, Tlingit leaders had good reason to be concerned, for the sale ushered in a new era marked not by "mutual benefit" but increased colonization, domination, and exploitation resulting in severe ecological, political, economic, and cultural stresses. Between 1867 and 1912, Alaska was ruled by a military regime that proved ill-equipped to deal with these stresses and whose violent and reactionary tendencies greatly exacerbated problems. The military government's tenure was marked by immorality, lawlessness, and aggression. Within a few years of its takeover, the military initiated bombardments against four major Tlingit villages (Kake, Angoon, Wrangell, and Yakutat), typically in response to Tlingit infractions "provoked by the misconduct of the white population" (Bancroft 1960, 723). The military also aided

and abetted the trafficking of liquor among Alaska Natives. Surveying the situation in 1869, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Vincent Colyer (see Hinckley 1996, 80) called for the military's removal: "A greater mistake could not have been committed than stationing troops in their [Alaska Natives'] midst. They mutually debauch each other, and sink into that degree of degradation in which it is utterly impossible to reach, either through moral or religious influences."

But many non-native Alaskans and incoming fortune seekers appreciated the military's big stick in clearing the path for development. As one local paper put it, "there must be government and the strong hand of power to enforce the law, spread civilization and extend our trade and commerce" (Hinckley 1996, 80). The civilizers came in the form of missionaries and schools, and the fortune seekers in the form of commercial fishers, miners, and loggers, who were followed by waves of homesteaders, fox farmers, and other settlers. At first Tlingits tried to deal with these newcomers much as they had dealt with the Russians, doing business as best they could on their own terms. Thus, Chilkat-Chilkoot Tlingit packers offered themselves for hire to transport Klondike gold prospectors' possessions over the Chilkoot Pass to the Interior but insisted on maintaining their control over the passes themselves, which were their traditional trade corridors. This worked only temporarily, however, as the Natives were soon overwhelmed by the gold rush hordes. Similarly, fishing and hunting rights were gradually usurped, sometimes to the point of ecological stress, by commercial fishers, hunters, and trappers, who were aided in their efforts by the U.S. military.² For example, in 1890 the marines were called to Sitkoh Bay, a productive fishery between Angoon and Sitka, where two local groups of Tlingits had joined forces to prevent the Baranof Packing Company's schooner from fishing for returning salmon. The Natives claimed the company, which ran a cannery near Sitka, had no right to fish in its waters without their permission and payment of royalties. But the marines intervened on the side of the company and the Tlingits were escorted to Sitka while the schooner proceeded with fishing (Thornton et al. 1990). By 1897 there were nine major fish canneries operating in Southeast Alaska, and the non-native population had swelled considerably, further exacerbating the situation. Surveying the scene that year, U.S. Fish Commission representative Jefferson Moser lamented,

A Native, whose ancestors have lived on a certain stream for many generations, and whose rights are respected by other natives, supplies a certain cannery with his catch, as possibly he has been doing for years. A rival cannery tells the Native he must sell his catch to it, and that otherwise their men will fish the Native's stream. The result is

overfishing, complaints, bad feeling, blows, and threats of bloodshed. So far as can be learned, there are now no legal rights or title to any fishing grounds in Alaska except what force or strategy furnish.

The combined stress of resource competition and depletion, forceful encroachment upon traditional territories, cultural assimilation efforts through missions and government schools, and other changes brought a period of great cultural distortion among the Tlingit. Drunkenness, intraethnic violence, and other social ills increased. The old sociopolitical order based on the clans began to weaken, as their authority and prerogatives were challenged on many fronts. That the whole society did not melt into chaos is testimony to the strength of the clan and house system, which persisted even as lineage members began to occupy modern nuclear-family-style houses. At the same time, by the early 1880s, the military government had begun to capitalize on the sociopolitical breakdown in classic colonialist fashion by attempting to co-opt what they assumed to be the "chiefs" or strongest clan leaders in each *kwaan* as official "policemen," complete with uniforms and deputies (Beardslee 1882, 46–50; de Laguna 1983, 80). In this way Tlingits could enforce the new laws on their own villages/*kwaans* rather than the military having to intervene. As de Laguna notes, "Within each kwaan throughout the 1880s there occurred the predictable debate between village accommodators and those Tlingit of diminishing number who bitterly rejected the 'new way'" (1972, 1: 186).

A small ray of light in this otherwise dark period of Tlingit history seemed to come with the passage of the 1884 Organic Act. This legislation provided resources, such as education, to Alaskans without regard for race and pointedly avoided extending the reservation model to Alaska Natives. In it the federal government also attempted to guarantee by decree that Alaska Natives "would not be disturbed in the possession of any lands actually in their use or occupation or claimed by them." Yet the government did little to stop larcenous frontiersmen from dispossessing the Natives and provided indigenous groups with no means of securing legal title themselves. In fact, Tlingits were not able to own land legally until the allotment act (known in its 1887 form as the Dawes Act) was extended to Alaska in 1906. But even this legislation, which provided up to 160 acres for Native homesteads, was based on assimilationist notions of individualized land ownership and farming, and contained no provisions for communal ownership or any recognition that, as hunter-gatherers, Tlingit property tenure and needs were different. Rather than a single tract of land, they needed control over various resource patches (fish streams, halibut banks, shellfish beds, berry patches, and the like) that provided their livelihood and were differentially distributed in space (Goldschmidt and Haas 1998, 17).

As a consequence, few responded to the initial application period for allotments. While some did successfully apply, in many cases the process of acquiring legal title took decades.

As a result, the Organic Act guarantee was virtually meaningless, as encroachment, exploitation, and land grabs by outsiders continued. By the end of the century, Tlingit leaders were making concerted appeals to government officials for protection from these invaders but to no avail. Those with sympathetic ears, including Jefferson Moser, recognized the pressing need to address Native land rights and the tragic consequences that would ensue if nothing was done:

Whenever the "Albatross" anchored near any locality either permanently or temporarily inhabited by Natives, a delegation of the older men or chief came on board and requested an audience. The powwows which followed invariably took the form of relating the oppression of the white men. . . . These streams, under their own administration, for centuries have belonged to certain families or clans. . . . No Indians would fish in a stream not their own except by invitation, and they cannot understand how those of a higher civilization should be—as they regard it less honorable. . . . They claim the white man is crowding them from their houses, robbing them of their ancestral rights, taking away their fish by shiploads; that their streams must soon become exhausted; that the Indian will have no supply to maintain himself and family; and that starvation must follow. . . .

. . . My own sympathy is with the Indians and I would gladly recommend, if the way were clear, the establishment of ownership in streams; but it is impracticable, and I can only ask . . . whatever law is framed, that a liberal balance be thrown in his favor. (Moser 1899, 43)

But when Tlingit leaders carried their complaints against white encroachment, dispossessions of their lands, and other grievances to those in power, the reception was often less than sympathetic. The meeting of Tlingit leaders with Territorial Governor John Brady in December 1898 is a case in point. Emphasizing his knowledge, occupancy, and use of the landscape, Kadashan, a clan leader from Wrangell, argued, "Ever since I was a boy I have heard the names of different points, bays, islands, mountains, places where [we] get herring, [hunt] and make camps, that is why I think this country belongs to us" (Hinckley 1970, 270). Unfortunately, he and his fellow leaders received a rather patronizing dismissal from the paternalistic governor who insisted that the Natives were "better off" than they had ever been and that if they

wished to progress and become more "civilized" they should follow the white man's lead.

At the same time, the missionaries, especially the Presbyterians, worked tirelessly on this civilizing mission, which began by dispossessing Natives of their culture, since it was thought to be an impediment to their becoming civilized and productive members of society. By 1910 all the Tlingit villages had become Christianized (Kan 1991, 367).

SOCIOPOLITICAL REVITALIZATION, ANB, IRA, AND CCTHITA (1912-1970)

In his seminal essay, "Revitalization Movements," Anthony Wallace (1956) characterizes a revitalization movement as a conscious movement by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture in the face of stressful conditions. Most revitalization movements, he showed, follow a five-stage process in which a culture group moves from (1) an old steady state of health, to (2) a period of individual stress brought on by outside forces, to (3) a period of cultural distortion in which basic institutions begin to break down, followed by (4) a revitalization movement in which a charismatic prophet emerges to define and legitimize a new code for living, which ushers in (5) a new steady state. While the model has its limitations, it is useful to consider it in light of this important period in Tlingit political history in which, following a period of severe stress, a revitalization movement takes hold in the form of the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB), a syncretic, pan-ethnic organization with strong political and sociocultural objectives. This internal revitalization movement was followed by the formation of other new village, regional, and statewide Native political organizations hatched from within and without.

The Alaska Native Brotherhood (1912)

Significantly, the ANB was founded the same year that the first Alaskan territorial government was elected and the military period officially came to a close. While the military era had been hard on the Tlingit, they expected even less from the new territorial government. As non-citizens they were unable to serve in the legislature and had no vote in the 1912 elections. Moreover, as Tollefson notes, "the declining Tlingit population acknowledged it could expect little assistance from a legislature recruited from the people who represented the source of many of their problems" (1982, 58). This was despite increasingly vociferous calls from Native individuals, social groups, and organizations alike for citizenship and basic civil rights. In the meantime, Tlingits continued to suffer.

The founding and energizing of the ANB was not the work of a

single charismatic leader, but rather a group of dedicated men. Among this group, two important marginal but influential figures stand out: Peter Simpson and William Paul. Peter Simpson, a Tsimshian (former Tlingit rivals) and devout Christian originally from outside of Alaska, became the ANB's first president and is credited with leading the charge for land claims. William Paul was a mixed-blood graduate of General Richard Henry Pratt's legendary assimilationist boarding school at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, attained a postgraduate degree, and became a lawyer and fierce advocate of Native rights. Borrowing heavily from the missionary paradigm, ANB leaders first adopted a code that was hostile to traditional Tlingit political organization and cultural customs and seemed to embrace the civilizing and assimilative objectives of the missionaries and General Pratt. These included the cultivation of a Christian lifestyle and the repudiation of aboriginal religion, ceremonialism, language, dress, and divisive clan politics.³ But to these acculturation initiatives was married a potent set of political objectives—citizenship, voting rights, land claims, desegregation, and equal opportunity in education—dedicated to the betterment of a new ethnic minority, Alaska Natives. A half century prior to the more famous 1960s civil rights era, Southeast Alaska Natives had framed much the same agenda.

Initially, the organization was very successful in fulfilling its revitalization agenda. Membership was organized by *kwáan* or village "camps" rather than clans or house groups and was open to anyone, even non-Natives. Within a short time, a sister organization, the Alaska Native Sisterhood, was founded. By 1922 numerous camps had been formed, and an Alaska Native, William Paul, had been elected to the territorial legislature. At the end of the decade Natives could claim citizenship, the vote, the right to hold legal title to property, and the right to attend desegregated public schools; moreover, the Tlingit and Haida had launched a major land claims suit through the ANB. Paradoxically, then, while pursuing cultural assimilation, the ANB gave birth to a strong tradition of ethnic politics in Alaska. And, ironically, by the 1960s these ethnic politics had spawned a movement within the ANB to relax its opposition to the perpetuation of traditional Native customs.

The Indian Reorganization Act (1934–1936)

Just as the ANB was consummating its revitalization movement from within at the regional level, calls for reform of federal Indian policies were beginning to come from critics inside and outside of the government. This reform movement climaxed in 1934 with the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which was extended to Alaska in May 1936 (49 Stat. 1250). The act accomplished a number of important objectives, including the following:

- The policy of severing and allotting tribal lands to individuals, as provided for in the 1887 Dawes Act and other allotment legislation, was abolished (this did not prevent allotments from being granted on other public lands).
- Key provisions of the 1884 Organic Act were extended or renewed, including existing periods of trust placed on Indian lands and restrictions on alienation of land.
- Indian groups residing on the same reservation (in Alaska's case, in a "well-defined neighborhood, community, or rural district," since reservations were largely absent) received the right to organize tribal governments to provide for their own welfare in which were vested specific sovereign rights and powers over tribal lands and other assets and to negotiate with federal, state, and local governments.
- IRA tribes, in turn, could form business corporations to own, hold, manage, operate, and dispose of property of every description.
- A financial support structure was created whereby loans and other federal funds could be channeled through IRA entities for economic development, education, and vocational training.
- The Secretary of the Interior was authorized to restore tribal ownership of lands, proclaim new reservations, and extend existing ones through the acquisition of new lands and water and subsurface rights for IRA tribes.

This was the Indian New Deal, an innovative and evolving compact between Natives and the federal government in which tribal organization, values, and institutions were legitimated and empowered for the first time in Alaska.

But what were its effects on the already evolving Tlingit socio-political structure? The most powerful and enduring result was that it boosted the *kwáan* as a political entity. Just as they had formed ANB-ANS camps, all of the major Tlingit *kwáans* quickly formed IRA governments, and the two political entities were often closely allied. Things might have been different had the visionary William Paul succeeded in his 1936 attempt to reorganize the ANB into an IRA business corporation on the logic that a regional entity would have access to a larger pool of money than a dozen or more disparate village entities (Mitchell 1997, 272). But Paul's effort was defeated by delegates from these very entities, who wanted to keep politics centered at the *kwáan* or village level.

The Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (1939)

In 1935, Congress authorized the Tlingit and Haida Indians to file a lawsuit in the Court of Claims to obtain compensation for the extinguishment of their aboriginal title to lands. William Paul, who had spearheaded this campaign, sought to have the ANB take control of the land claims suit by designating the ANB executive committee as the Tlingit and Haida Central Council in charge of the suit. But again he was unsuccessful, a majority of the local camp delegates being opposed. Instead, the Department of the Interior supervised the creation of a separate entity to manage the suit; thus, the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA) was born, composed of delegates from all of the major IRA tribal (*kwáan*) areas. CCTHITA filed their land claims suit in 1947. In 1968, three decades after its authorization, the land suit was finally settled when the Court of Claims awarded the Natives \$7,546,053.80 for the value of lands previously taken without compensation—less than 10 percent of the \$80 million they had sought. The court also held that Indian title to some 2,634,744 acres of Alaska had not been extinguished, but these claims were carried over to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (Worl 1990, 156). Rather than cease existence, CCTHITA remained a vital regional organization after the settlement, administering the settlement funds and soliciting grants and contracts to provide services for its constituents. In 1992, after initially being denied, the organization became a federally recognized tribe, the only multiethnic, regional, non-IRA government to gain such status (won through intensive lobbying). Today CCTHITA remains a key socioeconomic and political force in Tlingit and Haida local, regional, and state affairs.

In sum, during this period of political revitalization, Tlingits added three important layers to their already complex social organization. The political revitalization model, like the ecosystem model, suggests that these new institutions arose as adaptive responses to a changing environment. In this case the changes were not limited to the ecological sphere; they also came in the form of profound stresses within the sociocultural environment due to colonial domination. The most important response to this new landscape was a central shift in politics from the clan to *kwáan* as Tlingits, beginning with the formation of the ANB and its village-region camp structure, sought to adapt their political structure to deal more effectively with the territorial and national governments. Through the Indian Reorganization Act, the federal government reinforced this shift by enabling *kwáans* to form tribal governments with significant powers not unlike those of Western municipalities, which resulted in similar improvements in Native–non-Native

political relations. These dual processes of institutional isomorphism allowed Tlingits to make considerable headway in the areas of civil rights and land claims, culminating in the filing of the major land suit by the third new political entity, CCTHITA. But the most radical changes were yet to come.

**THE CORPORATE ANCSA-AFN ERA
AND INVOLUTION OF THE
SOCIOPOLITICAL ORDER (SINCE 1971)**

When, as part of its graduation from territory to the forty-ninth state in 1959, Alaska earned title to 30 percent of its lands (the federal government retaining control over some 60 percent of old territory), pressure on the federal government to settle Native land claims began to build. With the discovery of oil on Alaska's North Slope in 1968 and with state and corporate interests eager to develop it, the impetus reached a crescendo. After decades of negotiations, hearings, lawsuits, recommendations, and proposals, efforts to resolve the issue suddenly came together in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971. Considering the enormity and complexity of the task, not to mention the high stakes, the bill was drawn up rather hastily and pushed through Congress. After all, the legislation constituted not only a major cash and land transfer but radical social engineering. Its major provisions included the following:

- Aboriginal land title was permanently extinguished. Except for Annette Island in Southeast Alaska, existing Native reserves were revoked.
- Aboriginal hunting and fishing rights were extinguished.
- As compensation for loss of 90 percent of Alaskan lands, Natives were to be compensated at \$3 per acre, a total of \$962.5 million.
- Natives received title to approximately 10 percent (44 million acres) of Alaska.

Twelve regional Native corporations (a thirteenth was later added for Alaska Natives residing outside of the state) were established to control the settlement lands and money. Eligible Natives became stockholders in these for-profit corporations. Most Tlingits were enrolled in Sealaska Corporation and received one hundred shares of stock, but those born after 1971 received no stock. Villages also formed corporations and secured a title (but not mineral rights) to a portion of the lands according to the number of eligible shareholders enrolled. ANCSA distributed the settlement money on a per capita basis; accordingly, Southeast Natives, 21 percent of the state's Native population, received some \$250 million.

McBeath and Morehouse (1994, 112) rightly characterize ANCSA as the "equivocal product of the overlapping termination and self-determination eras of federal Indian policy. It speaks the language of self-determination, but it does so with a distinct accent of termination and assimilation." Notwithstanding ANCSA's seemingly generous terms, its extinguishing of aboriginal rights was very much consistent with earlier treaties negotiated with tribes of the lower forty-eight states. At the same time, however, it created two new units of sociopolitical organization: the regional corporation and a dozen *kwáan*-level village corporations.

The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), a centralized, statewide political body formed in 1967 to lobby for a just land claims settlement, constituted yet another new layer of sociopolitical organization. AFN's board included leaders of the ANB and other local and regional tribal entities. Although influential in the framing of ANCSA, AFN's real success has come in advocating on behalf of Native corporations and tribes since the settlement. Unlike the temporary federations of the Tlingit in the early contact period, AFN seems destined to become a permanent political fixture. Over the past two decades, the federation has been a consistent and effective political force in shaping the implementation of ANCSA and other federal and state policies of concern to Alaska Natives. It maintains a well-staffed office in Anchorage and a strong presence in Juneau and Washington, D.C. AFN also holds an annual convention each October that is attended by hundreds of representatives from Native tribal and corporate entities throughout the state. Most recently, AFN has taken up the mantle of subsistence rights for rural Alaska Natives as competition over fish and wildlife resources and management authority (state vs. federal government) has increased. Native subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering rights received only minimal recognition in ANCSA (in contrast to its bold provision to extinguish aboriginal hunting and fishing rights) and weak and controversial protections through subsequent federal statute in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA, P.L. 96-487) of 1980. ANILCA established a priority for subsistence uses of wild resources over sport and recreational uses and an allocation preference for rural residents over urban residents on federal lands in the state. Efforts to legislate a Native preference failed primarily because of opposition from non-Native groups and the state. Today subsistence production continues to be a vital sector of the economy in rural Alaska, but questions of who should qualify for subsistence and how it should be managed remain flashpoints of controversy (Thornton 1998, 1999a).

ANCSA corporations have had a major impact on the state's economy and correlative dynamic effects on local, regional, and statewide politics. While Sealaska Corporation, recently ranked among the top five Alaska companies in revenue, has prospered, many regional

and local Native corporations have struggled financially. Some attribute Sealaska's success to traditional Tlingit-Haida cultural values and business acumen. Like their ancestors, the corporation's approximately 16,000 shareholders also have benefited from a rich resource base. As for-profit corporations, ANSCA corporations are under pressure to develop their lands and resources and convert them into dividends for their shareholders. However, such corporate values can be at odds with those engendered by the sustainable, low-impact subsistence economies that characterized traditional Native communities. Values conflicts, along with Native inexperience in managing corporate enterprises, plagued many corporations in the early post-ANCSA period. Eventually the corporate culture also created a new elite, typically younger, well-educated Natives, whose expanding power base often came at the expense of traditional economic and political leaders, and whose handsome salaries raised new issues of social stratification.

Congress, like many non-Natives, assumed that as the modern industrial economy expanded, traditional Native economies and cultures would be easily absorbed and transformed. But this has not been the case (see Berger 1985). On the contrary, there has been a strong backlash against aggressive natural resource development carried out by Native corporations, and shareholders have demanded that these institutions provide other benefits besides dividends, such as educational scholarships, culture and heritage preservation programs, and political clout on a wide range of "traditional" Native issues, including subsistence rights. This has led to some puzzling—some would say ironic—images, such as the buttoned-down CEO of Sealaska Corporation, a major logging and mining company, passionately advocating for Native subsistence protections before the AFN, and arguing that these rights should be defended by civil disobedience if necessary (Loescher 1999).

Today AFN attempts to speak with one voice for Tlingits and other Alaska Native groups on a range of issues. Yet, as the diversity and complexity of Native interests, needs, and sociopolitical organization increases, this is not always easy to do. ANSCA regional and village corporations do not always agree on policy and strategy, and their interests, in turn, may be at odds with local tribes, whose interests, in turn, may be supported by some local clan leaders and opposed by others. The political landscape became even more complex in 1993, when the Secretary of the Interior listed 226 Alaska Native governments (largely those created through the IRA) as federally recognized tribes with inherent sovereign powers over their members and territory. In Tlingit country this move served to energize and reinvigorate tribal governments at the *kwáan* level, giving them not only new legitimacy and power but also access to federal funds through grants, loans, and compacting agreements. Native organizations do not always work to-

gether in pursuing these funds, and in some cases they may find themselves in direct competition for limited government resources. This has been true, for example, of CCTHITA, a regional organization with federal tribal status, which recently has found itself in competition with *kwáan*-level tribes for federal funds.

These structural issues are further complicated by identity and ceremonial politics, which are still primarily played out according to and rooted in clan and house group affiliations. Though they don't hold title to lands and natural resources, clan and house lineages still control much of the remaining ceremonial regalia and other symbolic property. This property, or *at.óow*, still plays a central role in the conduct of memorial parties, or potlatches, which are attended by thousands of Natives all over Southeast Alaska each winter and are as well financed as ever thanks to ANSCA corporations and other organizations that contribute resources and whose workers participate and contribute as well. Ostensibly, memorial parties are held a year or more after the death of an important person to "pay off" clans on the opposite side, or moiety, for taking care of the deceased and helping to "wipe away the grief." But these potlatches are really "total social phenomena" (Mauss 1967; Kan 1989) that accomplish numerous socio-cultural functions beyond the management of grief, including the bestowal of clan names and titles, the negotiation of individual and group status, and the redistribution of thousands of dollars worth of goods and resources through gifts that serve to legitimate the host clan's prerogatives.

Similarly, clan and house group ties play a role in who leads Native political organizations and how jobs in corporations and tribes are filled. Is it nepotism for the leader of a local tribe to employ his matrilineal relatives, or a cultural responsibility? Despite bureaucratic procedures, such tensions continue to inform Tlingit politics across the local and regional levels. It is sometimes the case that different lineages control different units of the sociopolitical organization within the same community and may even use them in rivalrous ways, while in other cases leaders strive to maintain a representative balance between clans and moieties within tribal politics. Many Tlingits would like to see clan leaders play a stronger role in decision making at all political levels. For example, at a recent conference on historic sites (historic sites being among the lands the corporation selected as part of the ANCSA), Sealaska Corporation attempted to include leaders of all the major clans and to divine a stewardship role for them in managing their own traditional properties. Clan leaders were very receptive to this idea in principle, but some bemoaned the fact that, unlike federally recognized corporations and tribes, most clans had little practical means to finance such a role. This is reflective of just how much the political landscape has changed since 1900, when clans and house groups

controlled the bulk of symbolic and material resources. Interestingly, at least one clan, the Sitka Kaagwaantaan, has sought to form a non-profit corporation in order to raise funds necessary to manage its clan property and other affairs. Other clans may follow suit.

Such reconfiguring of roles and relationships among various Tlingit sociopolitical entities may be inevitable given the increasing complexity of the political landscape. As table 2 summarizes, modern Tlingit sociopolitical organization now contains some twelve major entities, twice as many as the aboriginal structure (table 1). This modern political structure was hardly planned; rather, as we have seen, it evolved in response to a variety of internal and external factors. The key question is: has it evolved into an adaptive and practical sociopolitical organization for the modern world, or become a dysfunctional Hydra-like behemoth with too many heads? It is perhaps too soon to answer this question fully, but at present one concern is whether the process of political revitalization has turned to involution. In other words, Tlingit sociopolitical organization has become so intricate, elaborate, and entangled that it risks becoming stagnant or inefficient, if not retrograde or maladaptive. This kind of critique has recently been leveled at the ANB, which critics complain has become too caught up in its own tradition and protocol (it is said that ANB officers know *Robert's Rules of Order* better than anyone), is slow to promulgate resolutions, and often ineffectual in carrying them through, and thus lacks the capacity to adapt and respond effectively to pressing political issues. Systemic involution also affects the individual actor, who may desire to effect some political change, but finds the prospect of articulating and marshaling backing among all the various elements of the polity too daunting or wearisome. Hence stagnation may prevail.

CONCLUSIONS: A NEW RENAISSANCE FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM?

As the new millennium dawns and Alaska Native entities and interests continue to multiply and diversify, new stresses on the Tlingit political system are evident. In the past, Tlingit sociopolitical organization has been almost uncanny in its ability to adapt to environmental pressures and sociocultural changes. Prior to contact, they had developed perhaps the most complex political organization among the world's hunter-gatherers, a system well tuned to capitalize on the patchy wealth of Pacific Northwest temperate rain forests and fish stocks. When faced with onslaughts on their ecological and cultural systems by the intense forces of U.S. colonization, missionization and acculturation, and military rule, Tlingits responded to the stresses by launching a powerful revitalization movement, the ANB, which transcended clan and tribal divisions, adapted to the dominant culture, and fought successfully for

Table 2.

Tlingit sociopolitical organization since 1971

<i>Level</i>	<i>Sociopolitical Unit</i>	<i>Political Status</i>	<i>Units</i>
1	Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN)	Statewide advocacy organization, composed of representatives from ANCSA and other entities	1
2	Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB)/ Sisterhood (ANS)	Grand camp organized at the regional level (although some camps exist outside of Southeast) and composed of delegates from communities at the <i>kwáan</i> level	1 Grand Camp and dozens of local camps
3	ANCSA Regional Corporation (Sealaska)	For-profit corporations control land and other economic resources and wield considerable political clout	1 in Southeast (13 statewide)
4	Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA)	Regional organization; has annual meeting and local community delegate structure, but no local camps like ANB; maintains large day-to-day presence, providing a variety of services	1
5	Nation	Weak political status based primarily on common language and culture	1
6	Moiety	Still an important component of individual identity and ritual exchange; ties cut across villages	2
7	Village (<i>kwáan</i>)	Increasing political status based on centralization of political functions at the village level	13–18

Table 2 (cont.)

<i>Level</i>	<i>Sociopolitical Unit</i>	<i>Political Status</i>	<i>Units</i>
8	IRA/tribal governments	Kwáan-level unit created by federal government in 1935 with most becoming federally recognized tribes in 1993; have sovereign powers and access to federal resources	13
9	ANCSA village corporation	Not as wealthy or powerful as regional corporations, although some have done well; may vie with tribal government and other kwáan-level entities	12 in Southeast (171 statewide)
10	Clan (<i>naa</i>)	No longer the central sociopolitical unit, but still a key entity, particularly in ceremonial culture, identity politics, and supralocal alliances	70+
11	House (<i>hit</i>)	Weakened by the separation of the sociological house from the physical structure; still important in ceremonial culture and local identity politics but not as significant as the clan	200
12	Person (<i>káaa</i>)	Acquisition of big names/titles still based on ascription and achievement, but more so on the latter; personal status also earned through leadership in tribal organizations	15,000+

civil rights and justice on behalf of all Alaska's indigenous peoples. Over the next sixty years, many new levels of sociopolitical organization were added, both from within (AFN, CCTHITA) and from without (IRA tribes, ANCSA corporations), further increasing the institutional isomorphism between Natives and non-Natives and facilitating political action on both sides.

In fact, the proliferation of Tlingit and other Alaska Native political and quasi-political institutions (not to mention those representing all Native American and indigenous peoples) is almost dizzying. In barely two centuries of contact, Tlingit sociopolitical structure has been transformed from a complex, six-level polity to an even more dynamic and complicated political organization with at least a dozen layers. While new layers have been added, none have been taken away. Even clan and house group affiliation still play a strong role, and will likely continue to do so in the identity politics framework of the post-modern age. Yet, with increased competition for resources and clout within the crowded political sphere, the Tlingit political system risks becoming involuted unless key institutions are reformed, are realigned, or form strategic partnerships with other entities. Fortunately, strategic alliances between various units are becoming more frequent, particularly in certain critical contexts, such as in the battle for subsistence rights, repatriation efforts, and Native language education. Expect more realignments and partnerships, and perhaps a new revitalization movement and political organization or two, as Tlingits seek to adapt to conditions in the "global village" of the twenty-first century.

NOTES

- 1 With one anomalous exception, the Neix.ádi (probably of Tsimshian origin, see R. Olson 1967), who called themselves Eagles and intermarried with both Raven and Wolf.
- 2 It should be noted here that the majority of lands aboriginally used and occupied by Southeast Natives were actually appropriated by the U.S. government with the creation of the Tongass National Forest between 1902 and 1909 and Glacier Bay National Monument (later Park) in 1925.
- 3 In fact, some groups, such as warring clans from Sitka and Wrangell, had to have a traditional peace ceremony before joining the ANB.

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