

THE SURVIVAL OF ALASKA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE LOWER YUKON
RIVER

By

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Abstract

The indigenous peoples living in remote villages of Southwestern Alaska are heavily dependent on subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping to provide for the diets of many families. There are many tribes within the region that utilize a traditional way of life that revolves on a cultural continuum relying on immediate and extended families to educate and help each other. Each person that permanently resides inside the tribal villages fits together as parts within intergenerational knowledge that utilize critical thinking skills to resolve problems related to subsistence needs. Most of the permanent residents living across the Yukon and Kuskokwim delta (YKD) utilize subsistence harvest for nourishing parts within ceremonial and traditional forms of ancestral religious or cultural practices that are unique between tribal villages. The Yup'ik peoples residing along the freshwater tributaries of both the Yukon and Kuskokwim River will be explored to conceptualize the impacts of wildlife management.

This project intends to expand research related to rural Alaska Native lifestyles along freshwater tribes reflecting notions of subsistence ways of life. This will further explore the importance of indigenous attachment between culture, landscapes and waterways. This scholarly work will be unique in the Native American Studies field to expand research related to traditional knowledge, survival, resiliency and a way of life. Many of the cultures of Southwest Alaska are wedded to land with availability of subsistence activity providing intergenerational roots to hunt, fish, gather and trap. Notions of cultural diversity will expand works of Yup'ik cultures that broadens the scope of indigenous peoples along the YKD.

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I would like to thank my family and friends for raising me in the tribal villages of YKD that helped me understand how to live a subsistence lifestyle that was ingrained with ancestral ways of harvesting local flora and fauna. Our people were a part of an intertwined community that helped nurture the growth of future tribal members that were essential parts within cultural continuity. Many of the adults and elders within the rural villages shared their trials and tribulations that helped me understand our resiliency to prolong the essential tools for survival. These ways of sharing reflects the changing seasons and ensure our wealth related to subsistence lifestyles nourishing families through harsh subarctic climates.

I would like to thank Association of Village Council Presidents, Kuskokwim Native Association, tribal communities up and down the Yukon and Kuskokwim River that had similar customary uses for harvested flora and fauna. Many of our relations were interconnected due to ancestral ties to various places such as those living near Paimiut village residing between the Yup'ik and Athabascan border of the lower Yukon River. Many of the people still continue their tribal customs as skilled hunters and providers that exercised aboriginal hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering over vast landscapes and waterways along the freshwaters of the YKD.

I would like to also thank many of the contributors of my educational achievement especially the scholarships and fellowships that helped me attain my goal for higher education. With your help, I was able travel between rural Alaska and the University of Kansas (KU). The American Indian Studies program at Haskell Indian Nations University provided me with the tools for surviving higher education. This helped me with the classes at KU for the rigorous tasks and inspiration provided by the professors that helped me with my journey toward success.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Indigenizing Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).....	2
Theoretical Concepts of Ecological Anthropology.....	4
Traditional Ecological Knowledge.....	6
Decolonizing traditional: For indigenous eyes only redux	7
Complex worldviews and cultural diversity.....	10
TEK through Dauenhauer’s <i>Life Woven with Song</i>	13
TEK through Shandaa in My Lifetime	14
TEK through Catherine Attla’s Koyukon Athabaskan stories	16
TEK through Two Old Women.....	18
TEK through Things of our Ancestors	20
TEK through Moncrieff’s work.....	21
Chapter 2: Indigenizing Subsistence Cultures	22
Ecocriticism through Indigenous literature.....	23
Conceptualizing slow violence.....	25
The Lower Yukon River subsistence culture	26
Nukalpiaq Redux	28
Oscar Kawagley: A Yupiaq worldview.....	31
Exploring parts of the Athabaskan peoples circle called community	33

Exploring Catherine Attla’s works to find subsistence	35
Reflecting cultural areas of YKD	40
Chapter 3: Alaska Natives and Food Sovereignty YKD	41
Food sovereignty: Grass-root perspective.....	43
Contact zones	45
Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.....	46
Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act of 1980	48
Place-making a rural Alaska Native subsistence way of life	48
Chapter 4: Indigenism in the 21 st Century	53
Subsistence salmon fishing rights	55
Resources for humanity.....	59
Chapter 5: Subsistence is survival	64
Tools for survival in Russian Mission, Alaska	65
Conceptualizing subsistence fishing.....	66
Subsistence trapping	72
Subsistence hunting	73
Subsistence gathering	73
Conclusion	74

Introduction

This project expands research related the foundations of indigenous knowledge in Russian Mission, Alaska with an opportunity to explore the importance of subsistence foods for Alaska Native peoples along the lower Yukon River tributary. The native village also known as *Iqurmiut* resided near the Yup'ik and Athabascan border with strong relationships to landscapes and waterways carved by the Yukon River tributary. A recurring theme of supplementing winter food storage needs enhances a voice of the subsistence user unraveling imagery, tastes and the culinary arts.

Chapter 1 explores the concepts of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and between people and places. This will be expanded to analyze elements of TEK within Alaska Native literature in order to foreground perspectives of the Yup'ik and Athabascan peoples. The chapter sets up literature for review relevant between people and places.

Chapter 2 sheds light on the concepts of environmentalism found within literature that uses ecocriticism as a tool for exploring current trends affecting indigenous people. This allows for the development of slow violence found within relationships of the colonial construct. Both Yup'ik and Athabascan literatures will be analyzed to paint a picture of survival along the Yukon River tributary.

Chapter 3 conceptualizes food sovereignty and security and its connection to indigenous people. This highlights Mary Louise Pratt's work and how it applies across the North American continent. The chapter will help describe the complex relationship between the colonial construct and Alaska Native peoples.

Chapter 4 highlights Ronald Niezen's work and its connection to Chinook fishing rights of the Pacific Northwest. This will explore elements of denigration found within policies that affect indigenous people. Further review of Niezen's work will expand and reflect the summer 2009 subsistence salmon fishing dilemma of the Yukon River tributary. The chapter will explore solutions that have potential for improving tribal and federal government relations useful for Alaska Native cultures.

Chapter 5 focuses on subsistence practices on the lower Yukon River tributary. This will conceptualize the subsistence harvesting practices and highlight indigenous knowledge systems. A brief description of the subsistence practices in the village of Russian Mission will explain the importance between people and place.

Chapter 1: Indigenizing Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

The indigenous peoples of rural Alaska have a unique way of utilizing traditional knowledge within their complex subsistence way of life. These ways are often interwoven with cultural heritage related to site specific tribal communities along the freshwaters of the lower Yukon River tributary. Maria Sháa Tláa Williams' edited volume *The Alaska Native Reader: History, Culture, Politics* provides literature from various "Native and non-Native contributors that reflect the neocolonial experience of Alaska's indigenous peoples" (Williams xiii). Her work grasps a variety of philosophical perspectives from various people across the State. George P. Kanaqlak Charles contributed a section titled *Cultural Identity through Yupiaq Narrative* that further advocates Alaska Native cultural diversity within tribes while cautioning that his "worldview will not be compared to the worldview of other families and groups within the greater *Yupiaq/Cupiaq* society" (57). He accurately conceptualized the proper method of

sharing culture found within tribes with distinct ancestral roots yet there are many situations that relate to cultural continuity in which many adults band together to protect the youth against incremental violence found within colonial wildlife management strategies that gradually deteriorated subsistence opportunities. Many of these brave men and women advocated human rights within political and social conventions voicing positive change to protect Yup'ik peoples. During the early stages of the twenty-first century, wildlife management strategies had detrimental effects upon the many tribes in the YKD that is further expanded in Chapter 3. In theory, the colonial construct distorted realities through strict regulation enforcement leading to diminish winter food storage supplies of Alaska Natives along the Yukon River and dismiss the link of low spawning salmon returns from off-shore bycatch tied to commercialization of Walleye Pollock fishery along the Bering Sea. The reality of living in divergent geographical regions from salt to freshwater based models affects the social and cultural integrity of future generation subsistence users. This project intends to expand research related to indigenous peoples of the Yukon River subsistence users and impacts of off-shore Chinook salmon bycatch through analysis of literature with various cultural complexes of the Yup'ik and Athabascan peoples and how current trends within wildlife management deteriorate subsistence ways of life.

The first goal when exploring traditional knowledge is to reflect how Western traditions conceptualize ecological relationships to the natural world, thus unraveling the foundations within indigenous peoples of North America's subsistence way of life. Fikret Berkes explains how the term TEK "is, by necessity, ambiguous since the words *traditional* and *ecological knowledge* are themselves ambiguous" (Berkes 5). He describes the concept of *traditional* utilized within indigenous knowledge base systems as individuals circumnavigate their ancestral lands utilizing cultural practices. Berkes mentions within his works that various scholars found

contradictions with “*tradition and change*” reflecting how new technologies “would affect the labeling of a practice as “traditional”” (5). This led scholars to use the term indigenous rather than traditional to avoid inaccurate definitions of harvesting practices. While I believe Berkes’ theories regarding the ways the Cree Peoples of Canada interacted with the natural world has beneficial implications, it also seems to generalize all Cree Peoples in the geographical region. Further research is necessary to expand indigenous knowledge systems to include cultural diversity such as the examples found within the Yup’ik and Athabascan cultures of the Yukon River tributary. However, Berkes’ research is useful because he found that “traditional does not mean an inflexible adherence to the past; it simply means time-tested and wise” (5). His interpretation of how people interact within indigenous cultures sheds light to constant interaction between people and places providing opportunities to explore the importance of subsistence harvests that sustained rural communities. This way of life in many Alaska Native cultures along the Yukon River tributary continue to be a common thread necessary for indigenous reciprocity where tribes become dependent on the natural world that provided shelter, food, heat and clothing on a yearly basis.

Theoretical Concepts of Ecological Anthropology

The next step towards indigenizing TEK is to understand the theoretical background found in Donald Hardesty’s work. His book *Ecological Anthropology* provided the basics of scientific methods that explored Western perspectives that relate humans to the natural world. He explores “the ways in which “environment” is used in anthropological explanation” toward human interaction (Hardesty 1). This provided the developing stage of Western science used for prescribing parts of ecological knowledge. Hardesty’s work also expanded works related to human behavior and its relevance toward environmental determinism. He mentions that prior to

the nineteenth century the “*humour theory* of Hippocrates” viewed “the human body as housing four kinds of humors- yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood, representing fire, earth, water and blood” (1). These humours were the identification traits that generalized humans based on variants to different geographical locations. Hardesty provided an egocentric perspective that was contradictory toward labeling human cultures mentioning that “the effect of climate on personality and intelligence determined other human affairs, particularly government and religion” (2). This form of thought seems attached to the colonial construct that reflected notions of conquest that tends to denigrate people living in distant places. On the other hand, indigenous peoples across rural Alaska are unlike to those forms’ generalization in that many families abstain from focusing on ill treatment toward the fellow human and are too busy making the effort to survive through harsh environmental conditions. In retrospect, Hardesty’s work provided a glimpse into the unique epistemology of Western traditions in that it uses divergent perspectives with regard to distant landscapes and will be further reflected with theories of Postcolonialism in Chapters 3 and 4.

Hardesty further reflects that environmental determinism follows Plato and Aristotle’s notions for ideal places suitable for governments to flourish (2). He conceptualized that this trend was more popular for scholarly research rather than the humour theory in the 20th century. This part of Hardesty’s work was beneficial in that it provided notions of human trait changes that were reflective to different environmental conditions and cultural diversity over various landscapes. Hardesty also explains another theory shift from determinism “toward *possibilism*” that was led by “Frans Boas who showed that the origin of *specific* cultural features and patterns was generally to be found in historical tradition rather than in environment” (4). Boas work is

useful to understand human interactions over North American places with theories crafted from observing the indigenous peoples of Canada.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The next step for understanding how TEK functions within indigenous subsistence way of life is found within Berkes' research:

Traditional ecological knowledge arose from two separate approaches, ethno-science and human ecology. The first deals largely with folk taxonomies, ethno-botanical and ethnozoological classifications, of plants and animals. The second deals with indigenous understandings of natural processes, including the relationships of human with animals, plants, and various environmental and sometimes supernatural factors. The two approaches have been joined by others emphasizing applications of traditional ecological knowledge to contemporary problems such as conservation, resource management, and sustainable development. The various approaches have intellectually distinct roots but are increasingly used together as traditional ecological knowledge matures as a discipline (Berkes 37).

This analysis helps interpret the worldview utilized by people living around a particular environment. Berkes' articulation holds the key to understanding the ways in which indigenous societies intertwine traditions with the natural world. His concepts of understanding natural processes opens an opportunity to expand cultural diversity providing that each community practiced and retained knowledge from deep ancestral roots of reciprocity that prepared future generations with subsistence opportunities on site specific places. I assumed after reading this paragraph that Berkes work highlighted examples of indigenous epistemology showing human beings interconnected to places where landscapes and waterways were parts of cultural diversity. This notion of being wedded to a way of life provides an opportunity to expand theories of denigration that will be analyzed in the following chapters.

This portion of the research project will bridge Western science with the Yup'ik worldview found in Maria Sháa Tláa Williams edited volume *The Alaska Native Reader*:

History, Culture, Politics. Harold Napoleon makes a useful contribution with his chapter *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* which shows examples of Yup'ik worldviews (Williams 121). This version of TEK will be expanded to analyze cultural diversity and explore how Yup'ik subsistence cultures attain indigenous knowledge from site specific landscapes and waterways. Napoleon's version of TEK is culturally interactive that highlighted people to places mentioning that "*Yuuyaraq* encompassed the spirit world in which the Yup'ik lived. It outlined the way of living in harmony within this spirit world and with the spirit beings that inhabited this world" (124). He accurately portrayed how grass rooted rural Alaska Native family worldviews functioned and the wedded relationships to subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping for survival. Napoleon's work sheds light to how Yup'ik people interact with site specific locations that articulate the fundamental bonds between people and place. Napoleon further expanded Yup'ik versions of TEK in which the people within cultures "knew that the temporal and the spiritual were intertwined and they needed to maintain balance between the two" (125). Here he was referring to how tribal people's dance, masks, regalia, feasts that included many types of wild foods and language communication had direct correlation within the subsistence way of life. I found his work useful that accurately interpreted how indigenous knowledge resonates in Yup'ik subsistence based cultures.

Decolonizing traditional: For indigenous eyes only redux

Michael Yellow Bird and Angela Cavender Wilson's *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook* served as a guide to help people across North America revitalize critical thinking skills. It promotes self-determination resources for indigenous scholars (Wilson and Yellow Bird). The book provided useful research for indigenous people living across

ecosystems that utilized cultural practices in accordance with adaptation to technological changes. For example, some worked on decolonizing indigenous diets:

How can we commit ourselves, our families, and our communities to work toward the decolonization of our diets? The first step is deciding that a change is necessary. Many communities have acknowledged that obesity and diabetes are a problem and have dedicated personnel to addressing it. For example, your community may have a diabetes prevention or treatment coordinator, a dietician, a fitness coordinator, a cook, or a nurse or nurse practitioner to help those who already suffer from these debilitating conditions. However, even when this recognition is present, rarely does it spread to community action. Fry bread and fatty, sugary, and processed foods often still grace the tables at community functions rather than more wholesome traditional foods. And, rather than viewing our contemporary diets as a consequence of colonization, we have increasingly and uncritically accepted this change in diet, even incorporating many unhealthy foods into what we deem “traditional” (Waziyatawin 78).

Waziyatawin’s theory of decolonizing traditional within cultural perspectives provided valuable perceptions toward ecosystems. This model helps with critical thinking skills that helps reattach place based intergenerational holistic models within rural Alaska Native Yup’ik and Athabascan subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping cultures. In retrospect, rural Alaska Natives in the lower Yukon River live in diverse ecosystems with flora and fauna over landscapes and waterways. This was different for many of coastal tribes that utilized indigenous knowledge near saltwater for retaining wild foods available for consumption. Adaptation using new technologies was always connected to cultural traditions as families refill winter food storage needs. Eating healthy from subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping is a common thread for people living in YKDs Wade Hampton County. Most often Alaska Native tribes within the region relied on traditional landscape and waterways harvesting models to provide for winter food storages. The younger generations continue to be an important attachment to each tribal community that engaged themselves with learning tools for survival over harsh subarctic or Arctic environmental conditions and inject new technologies for prolonging the subsistence way

of life. Products from the convenient stores are not as efficient for feeding families and are more expensive than subsistence harvests. Ann Fienup-Riordan's work with the Yup'ik people found that "hunting and fishing remain important in southwestern Alaska-both for what these activities produce nutritionally and as a focus of a preferred way of life" (Fienup-Riordan 24). This conceptualized the interconnected relationships between humans and the natural world that highlighted the importance for YKD tribal villages.

Dr. Daniel Wildcat's *Red Alert! Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* provides valuable insight for collaboration with indigenous knowledge and Western science to mitigate climate change. He came up with a most useful term of indigenous ingenuity:

The indigenous ingenuity-or, as Haskell Indian Nations University graduate Curtis Kekahbah of the Kaw Nation called it, the indigenuity: the ability to solve pressing life issues facing humankind now by situating our solutions in Earth-based local indigenous deep spatial knowledges-of tribal peoples constitutes a practical merger of knowing with doing. Their lifeways embody knowing as doing-a wonderful doing, not at all simplistic or easy, but an ability to work with what they have available and the wisdom to ensure, such as they can, that they can continue doing it (Wildcat 48).

Wildcat discusses a useful term for defining ways in which tribal people have a long standing relationship with place based natural worlds. The indigenous knowledge of surviving harsh environments ties in with cultural traditions of indigenous people. He implied this in a work written with the late Vine Deloria Jr. by expanding the concepts of "seven-generation thinking" where we are at the "center of life, preceded by three generations that followed by three generations" (91). Wildcat conceptualized how Native Americans and Alaska Native tribal traditions are trustees to find ways in which resources continue to secure the well-being of future generations. He expresses this mentioning that "the life that surrounds us can teach us valuable lifeway lessons, if we pay attention to our relationships and interactions with the land, air, water, and other-than-human living things" (74). Wildcat reflects upon how traditional indigenous

knowledge has benefits for prolonging cultures over vast landscapes and waterways. He accurately conceptualizes this describing how people that live “their lives outside the walls of man-made buildings and exercise attentiveness to their environment universally affirm the existence of intraspecies communication systems” (75). This further articulates how the seven generations thinking provides a sense of belonging for the upcoming tribal peoples that are wedded to diverse ecosystems. Wildcat’s book opens the door for an opportunity to explore theories of intervention that is useful for many tribal communities along the Yukon River tributary to redress current societal problems of youth born after 1971 and improve the quality of life for rural Alaskan Natives.

Complex worldviews and cultural diversity

Writing and interpreting literature about indigenous peoples is a complicated task. Devon Mihesuah’s book *So You Want to Write about American Indians? A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars* presents research related to cultural diversity across America. She mentions that Natives are capable of interpreting ways of life through “tribal stories and history from a tribal perspective” (Mihesuah 62). This concept supports the fact that tribal membership has the advantage to authentically articulate ways of life within the boundaries of ancestral lands. Mihesuah pushes this further by mentioning how it is impossible for non-members to completely understand the worldviews within tribal cultures (62). Mihesuah’s accurately portrays how indigenous nations like the Yup’ik and Athabascans have cultural diversity within each separate community that reflect attachment to places and is useful for exploring Yukon River tribes in Alaska. Hundreds of tribes across the landscapes and waterways hold keys to interpret stories through practicing traditions nurturing the growth of knowledge used for survival. Most often the roots of culture flows around place based education where ancestral methods of harvests are

the foundation of knowledge. Therefore it is often impossible for outsiders to grasp the importance of subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping way of life that reciprocates with each tribal community with ancestral ties to places. In retrospect, there are many indigenous cultures living in the YKD that have been utilizing traditional ways of harvesting foods. Chapter 2 will be useful in further analysis that uses ecocriticism for exploring cultural diversity through literatures of Alaska and expand the Native American Studies field related to subsistence ways of life.

A book edited by Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn titled *Indigenous Experience Today* explores the concepts of “indigeneity” that defined the interrelationships between people and place. This idea was grounded within theories of Postcolonialism and was a valuable tool in geography for researching indigenous cultures. Cadena and Starn conceptualized an important part that defined cultural diversity and the connection to places:

What it does mean is that indigenous cultural practices, institutions, and politics *become such* in articulation with what is not considered indigenous within the particular formation where they exist. Indigeneity, in other words, is at once historically contingent and encompassing of the nonindigenous-and thus never about untouched reality (Cadena, Starn and Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. 4).

Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn showed the interactive relationships between different peoples over site specific places. This highlights the fact that indigenous peoples have distinct cultural practices that are encoded through tribal traditions. Indigeneity captures how different tribes adopt or reject tools for survival from nearby communities that improve the quality of life over indigenous landscapes and waterways. Alice B. Kehoe conceptualizes this attachment in Alfred L. Kroeber’s work explaining that “culture areas are “geographical units of culture” that correspond “to regional floras and faunas, which are accumulations of species but can also be viewed as summation entities”-in modern words, a total ecology” (Kehoe 13). This sets up the

foundations for indigenous epistemology that utilized indigenous knowledge with local resources. Kehoe further mentions that people in the “region must adjust their diet, shelter, and other biologically demanded practices to the conditions of that region” and that “people borrow ideas from and adjust to adjacent social groups” (13). Conceptualizing these cultural areas shows the locations that are important for indigenous peoples over landscapes and waterways. Cadena and Starn further expanded indigeneity noting that it “materializes in an intricate dynamic among converging and competing agendas, visions, and interests that transpire at local, national, and global levels” (Cadena, Starn and Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. 12). This helped expand the notions of fighting for human rights related to a way of life that prolong the existence of people distinct from others.

The YKD has basically three predominant indigenous cultures found on the Association of Village Council Presidents website:

AVCP was established in 1964 by visionaries, our elders, village leaders, who saw a need for our villages and region to work together. Their primary efforts were to protect the land and resources that our people lived off of, protect our children, and promote education in the changing world.

Today, over forty years later, AVCP has become a strong regional entity, promoting the welfare of our Yupik, Cupik and Athabascan people from Lime Village to Kotlik onto Platinum and Russian Mission. Criss-cross the location of the villages, and it is about the size of Florida, larger than 26 states (The Association of Village Council Presidents "From the President's Desk").

Many of the indigenous peoples living in the YKD are ingrained with the subsistence way of life and have been utilizing hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping for sustenance. Indigeneity provided each culture area with distinct language variants and traditions that are unique to place based ways of life. Thorough exploration of the cultures surrounding the area is needed to provide a background of understanding diversity used by the people living in the region. Other

works from Southeast Alaska will also help to expand the interrelationships to places and conceptualize the way of life.

TEK through Dauenhauer's *Life Woven with Song*

Nora Marks Dauenhauer is from the Tlingit people of Southeast Alaska. Her book *Life Woven with Song* set the foundation for understanding the indigenous rural Alaskan way of life within harvests of flora and fauna and for understanding TEK from the complex worldview related to culture and survival. She has a unique literary method that unravels lifestyles around the Southeastern Alaskan shores saturated with customary traditions flowing through the way of life.

Dauenhauer uses TEK as she describes her family working to stay alive. She strings together memories of her entire family enjoying work through the juxtaposition of fishing to eat and provide for cash economy (Dauenhauer xi). The goal to survive extrapolates the social dependency within a distinct culture where local resources supplement means for survival. The complex worldview she describes roots between elders and children pulling traditions through a doorway within proper ways of living. This TEK is molded through her family that helps keep the people alive. The bonds between people, landscapes and waterways are common threads that many indigenous Alaska Natives have. This ideology has useful implications that expand to other cultures that continue to live on ancestral homelands.

Dauenhauer mentions an important part within TEK that interprets worldviews situated within her family. She mentions that her collection of memories leading to a book had “recurring themes of food and land, salmon and the rain forest” (xi, xii). These elements were ingrained within family harvesting practices shared through intergenerational practice.

Dauenhauer mentions that her work reflected different perspectives dating far back to her

childhood leading toward becoming a grandmother (xii). This segment sets the foundation that TEK reflected the importance of preserving a way of life interwoven within cultural survival. The ability to pass on traditional ways of harvesting within seven generations thinking will be assumed as the top priority for people that decide to permanently reside over ancestral homelands. This cultural connection to flora and fauna over landscapes and waterways has positive reinforcement influences on the well-being people. This concept is highlighted on one of her stories:

My fondest memories of dryfish camp are of the site at the eastern end of Icy Strait. The site was selected for its multiple uses. Not only was it near the source of fish from streams or trolling, but berries were abundant and the hunting was good. We could leave for our winter village not only with dryfish and saltfish, and fermented fish eggs, but also with deer meat and berries. The berries! Sometimes Pop would get angry with the women, grumbling, “Too many berries!” as he tried to find a place to put them on the boat, but in the winter they tasted so good as dessert after eating the salmon dryfish! (16).

She provided a glimpse to the importance of living a lifestyle that shows the positive reinforcement of surviving on subsistence foods. The childhood memories in connection with the landscapes and waterways fit within the seven generations thinking where passing on the ways of life is crucial for protecting the well-being of indigenous peoples. Her work shows the interrelationships of people and places.

TEK through Shandaa in My Lifetime

TEK translated between Belle Herbert’s Gwich’in to English language text provides an historical account within origins of life setting precedent within a way of life. Her stories are from the Athabascan cultures that provide some background to indigeneity. Herbert reflects past experiences providing account of surviving on the land near the village of Chalkyitsik. This culture area is further up the Yukon River yet there are many foods that are similar to those of the lower river. In 1979, the Alaska Humanities Forum sent a team to record her life stories.

Herbert at the time of recording was between 105 to 127 years old. The editors and translators mention that Gwich'in differs from English language and had to use stanzas to reflect the pauses and meaning of the original (Herbert and McGary 5, 6).

Herbert tells of a childhood story that reflects the importance of people and place:

Then
there
Near Circle
my mother
stayed with my uncle William Pilot's wife,
working on fish there,
and we stayed around there.

After that
they divided up the fish
they had caught and
they had caught quite a few fish.
We did that all that summer.
Then fall came
and it got dark (29).

Herbert reflected a time in her life when she was taking care of her mother. The intergenerational dependency within family structure showed how cultures survive. The ability to rely on extended family helps prolong TEK according to place. This way of life has beneficial implications that highlighted how some Gwich'in people live together to survive. Indigeneity of the subsistence cultures of the lower Yukon River Athabascan peoples also appreciate the help of extended families to procure salmon during the early stages of the summer months. This ensures that enough fish will supplement the diets of families that permanently reside inside culture areas. Herbert's recollection of working as a youth to attain enough food storage grasped the involvement and determination of youth using ancestral subsistence practices over site specific landscapes and waterways.

TEK through Catherine Attla's Koyukon Athabaskan stories

The stories of Catherine Attla are another example of translated works that reflected relationships between Athabaskan peoples and culture areas. Some of the lessons in her stories extracted the interconnectedness to various landscapes and waterways (Attla and Jones *K'etetaalkkaanee, the One Who Paddled among the People and Animals : The Story of an Ancient Traveler* vi). Other stories revitalize the ancient religious relationships between the people and surrounding universe (Attla and Jones *Bakk'aat*Ugh Ts'*Uh*Uniy = Stories We Live By : Traditional Koyukon Athabaskan Stories* 3, 4). In either case Attla's stories provided a glimpse into the realm of place based education systems of various Alaska Native cultures that reverberates the dynamics of TEK.

Attla mentions a story about an “epic tale of a traveler who paddled all summer and walked all winter” (Attla and Jones *K'etetaalkkaanee, the One Who Paddled among the People and Animals : The Story of an Ancient Traveler* viii). She further states that the story is customarily told in parts separated by days during the course of the winter nights. This method of knowledge is useful and helps shed more light of a time when “people and animals could talk with one another” (viii). Attla conceptualized indigeneity within the Koyukon art of storytelling with a culture area further up the Yukon River tributary. Her methods of sharing stories showed how the Athabaskan cultures use subsistence lifestyles to educate the youth in the tribal community. Each day fits within a cultural tradition that unwinds a different story providing the ways of life used by other living beings related to place. This method has intergenerational benefits to show how some Athabaskan cultures reconnect family to places with ancestral histories providing nourishment.

The other story she reflects show the dynamics of cultural understandings within the spiritual worldview. Attla reflects why the world is the way it is through a corridor of creation. Her story is filled with medicinal power that is respected within the Koyukon traditions (Attla and Jones *Bakk'aat*Ugh Ts'*Uh*Uniy = Stories We Live By : Traditional Koyukon Athabaskan Stories* 16). These stories represent many parts within the lives of people that reflect the meanings within life seen through the eyes of the people. In one story she reflects how a boy was training to become a “medicine man” (31). The boy practiced subsistence lifestyles within the natural world over frozen landscapes and waterways. The boy went through trials and tribulations of finding fresh foods to eat. One specific story relates to setting a “blackfish trap” over a frozen lake where at first the main character was unlucky when setting the trap incorrectly (35-37). This method of storytelling helps the listener imagine the vast landscapes and waterways while learning proper methods to capturing food to eat. Attla’s story continues with the main character using traditional ways of setting the trap given by the mother. She continues on mentioning that the boy had better luck when using what the family told him:

Then his mother told him lovingly, “Ggaadooggaa, remember that blackfish trap you set for your brothers and sisters? Go check it.”
 He started back to it. He arrived there.
 He checked the trap.
 It was full of fish.
 He barely managed to drag it out of the water.
 He returned home, bent under the weight of a pack full of blackfish.
 After that he regularly brought home blackfish.
 They started living on that next.
 He continued to sleep a lot (37).

Attla has ingrained some traditional forms of sharing with the family while living within a site specific tribal community. She makes notice of the forces that the natural world has on the subsistence harvesting person when improper ways of setting traps has its repercussions that expand outward to specific instances. Attla mentions about family structures and the need to

feed many people that in turn also provides good luck to those that are trying to attain wild foods. Attla's work shows how life lessons and the bond with ancestral landscapes and waterways within an Athabascan culture used indigenous knowledge for proper ways of harvesting foods beneficial towards educating the youth.

TEK through Two Old Women

Velma Wallis wrote a magnificent book that reflects another Athabascan culture's story about surviving the elements of Arctic conditions. She conceptualizes a unique tribal perspective that reflected how many of the rural Alaska Natives today are seminomadic that follow subsistence foods during the changing seasons. This way of life is a pattern that applies to many of the tribal villages along the Yukon River tributary that have ancestral ties to site specific places and permanently reside within cultural areas.

She mentions an important guideline about the story:

Later, at our winter cabin, I wrote the story down. I was impressed with it because it not only taught me a lesson that I could use in my life, but also because it was a story about my people and my past—something about me that I could grasp and call mine. Stories are gifts given by an elder to a younger person. Unfortunately, this gift is not given, nor received, as often today because many of our youth are occupied by television and the fast pace of modern-day living. Maybe tomorrow a few of today's generation who are sensitive enough to have listened to their elders' wisdom will have the traditional world-of-mouth stories living within their memory. Perhaps tomorrow's generation also will yearn for stories such as this so that they may better understand their past, their people and, hopefully, themselves (Wallis xii).

Wallis captures the importance of storytelling that has life lessons useful for educating future generations. Her work provided notions of positive reinforcement that conditioned human development and conceptualized examples of indigenous knowledge systems ingrained with elements of cultural survival over landscapes and waterways. She mentioned how this story passes through the generations and eventually Wallis's mother tells it to her. This significance of

her works reflects history that predates the arrival of Western cultures and precautionary measures are needed to prevent unnecessary misinterpretation of the way of life (xiii).

Wallis captures an important aspect of subsistence lifestyles over a vast frozen landscape with “bands of people dressed in furs and animal skins, huddled close to small campfires” and was always on the move searching for food (1-2). This way of sharing knowledge about proper clothing shows a cultural area’s importance of using subsistence caught game as sources of clothing in the Arctic. In retrospect, I found that many rural Alaska Natives residing inside remote communities today follow similar traditions using as much of the flora and fauna as possible for survival. She also reflects another form of TEK where ancestral knowledge and indigenuity provided useful skills:

That day the women went back in time to recall the skills and knowledge that they had been taught from early childhood.

They began by making snowshoes. Usually birchwood was collected during late spring and early summer, but today the young birch would have to do. They didn’t have the correct tools, of course, but the women managed with what they had to split the wood into four parts each, which they boiled in their large birch containers. When the wood became soft, the women bent it roundish and pointed at the tips. Putting two of these half-rounded sides together, the women awkwardly drilled many little holes into both sides with their small pointed sewing awls. The work was hard, but despite their aching fingers the women continued until they finished the task (31-32).

This form of TEK reflects place based education models that use stories as a way of making use of what the earth provides. The ability to survive in the Arctic involves an ability to craft pots from earthen materials like birch bark. These tools of survival continue today in many villages along the Yukon River as a common practice. In retrospect, survival was ingrained within epistemologies that braided through harvesting practices used by bands and families within the Athabaskan cultures. This means that oral traditions provide guidelines for using indigenous knowledge with harvested flora and fauna to condition a way of life over place based traditions

utilized through practice. Wallis provided an example that is useful for Western cultures to understand why ancestral lands are important to rural Alaska Native survival.

TEK through Things of our Ancestors

TEK found within an edited book by Ann Fienup-Riordan reflect how tools were used to harvest flora and fauna. Fienup-Riordan book has translated works of Yup'ik elder knowledge from Southwest Alaska to explain cultural uses for a collection of artifacts held at a museum in Germany. The elders handled and explained how to use Yup'ik collections of hunting and fishing gear. Her work is useful in that it provided an opportunity for my research project to support cultural continuity related to subsistence ways of life for the people living in YKD. One specific tool that opens door to history relates to an old harpoon point as three elders recollect TEK to hunt seals along coastline (Meade, Fienup-Riordan and Ethnologisches Museum Berlin. 7, 9). Storytelling in this form provided each person an opportunity to explain the way of life that was based primarily on subsistence foods. The harpoon point was reflected during a hunt:

Then after that-the same story were usually told a little differently in each area-after that he looked around and saw a bearded seal sitting on the ice at the edge of the open water. He approached to hunt it. When he was close enough to strike the seal he started to life his harpoon, and the other man appeared on the other side with a harpoon in his hand ready to strike. Both men were ready to strike the seal at the same time.

Then a man from Hooper Bay held back his harpoon. He didn't want to strike before the other man did. He waited for him to strike. Then after the other man harpooned the animal he thrust his own *asaquq* [weapon used to kill seals sleeping on ice], and they both hit the animal (9, 11).

This highlighted the importance of subsistence hunting that captured the traditions of Yup'ik culture. The seal is a sufficient food source that is customarily hunted near the saltwater coasts of Alaska. The elders used their knowledge of hunting that eventually made the story more realistic by explaining proper hunting techniques. Each recollected memories of their past yet was also applicable to present day situations of subsistence hunters navigating the shorelines

along the coast. This highlighted indigenuity of the Yup'ik people of YKD and their determination to feed families and prolong subsistence based cultures. The elders explained an important cultural connection to place mentioning about the hunter that saw a “bearded seal sitting on the ice at the edge of the open water” (9). This highlighted TEK passed down through the generations with elements of transition between knowledge to practice with the ability to find areas where the animal lives.

The elders in the book mention the interdependency of place based subsistence uses as they unraveled an old “king-salmon gill net” made with fibers from a “young willow bark” (85). The net was crafted from flora indigenous to the landscapes of Southwest Alaska. The indigenuity of crafting nets from earthen materials showed the resiliency of Yup'ik families to retain winter food storage needs. The elders recollected the summer seasons when many of the people used “kayaks” as means for transportation (49). This was a vessel used for conducting all subsistence practices whether it was directly like setting a net or indirectly by gathering net mending material. The elders recollected life in rural Alaska mentioning that “a fisherman might catch a total of twenty king salmon in a season. People considered a man who caught twenty king salmon to have caught plenty” (85). This highlighted how Yup'ik cultures secured food storages and the ability to harvest fish is necessary for nourishing communities dependent on subsistence ways of life.

TEK through Moncrieff's work

Catherine Moncrieff wrote a thesis on TEK related to salmon harvests along the Middle and Lower Yukon River Alaska. Her work reflected the knowledge systems within villages along the Yukon River that utilized salmon for food. Moncrieff uses interviews to find out more about indigenous knowledge observations related to salmon behavior and the changing salmon

runs (Moncrieff iii). This research intended to bridge the divide between rural Alaskan TEK and State or Federal fishery management strategies.

I found Moncrieff's work useful in that it reflected the 2000 Yukon River subsistence salmon fishery and highlighted a time when low salmon returns resulted to theories of denigration toward Alaska Native cultures. She captured the tensions resonating between tribes and the Federal and State fisheries management regarding limitations of harvest (130). Subsistence fishing on the Yukon River is considered by tribes as one of the most important food sources that supplemented winter food storage needs. The Federal and State fisheries management implemented fishing schedules and the windows of opportunity for each village were diminished (130). She highlighted the reality that many people sacrificed wage labor and other harvests to attain enough salmon necessary for feeding a family. The TEK explored within her work showed recent trends within fisheries management strategies and explored how diminished subsistence harvests caused a problem for Yukon River peoples. In retrospect, TEK utilized by indigenous peoples to retain food storages shows the determination of rural Alaskans to ensure the well-being of place based communities.

Chapter 2: Indigenizing Subsistence Cultures

Rural Alaska Native subsistence way of life for the indigenous cultures living within freshwater tributaries relied on each other to supplement cultural continuity. Many of the traditions are ingrained with ancestral roots that are distinct from each other that have unique tribal practices interwoven with survival. Most of the indigenous knowledge framework depended on family structures that continue to thrive over the mountainous boreal forests that converge to bog tundra near the mighty Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers. These tributaries carve

through the river banks between the shores of permafrost and gravel. The subsistence way of life found over the vast landscapes and waterways are braided with site specific hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping that accompany ancestral grounds for revitalizing culture. This place allowed for rural Alaska Natives to ensure survival of their kin and thrive over the harsh climates found across the Arctic and subarctic. Exercising the right to subsist while living on the environment provided ingenious grass rooted people an ability to function properly with the natural world. Many have distinct methods used for creating tools for survival. Both the Yup'ik and Athabascan cultures had differences that were relative to indigenous flora and fauna. These allowed for site specific ingenuity molding knowledge and practice related to survival techniques. This method of instruction shared within the seven generations thinking continues to be important practice taught between elders and youth. The Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers nourished people with undisturbed access to food sources that kept cultures alive. One of the most common related to art of storytelling that ingrained indigeneity with spatial relationships to site specific places. These practices were cherished and told at the end of fall season when adequate winter food supplies from harvested flora and fauna fed locals through the upcoming months. The interdependency between subsistence and tribal cultures was inalienable in that it nourished survival techniques within each Alaskan community. I appreciate the generosity of indigenous knowledge that continued to be the foundation for protecting our youth in rural Alaska Native villages.

Ecocriticism through Indigenous literature

Ecocriticism is an important literary tool that has valuable methods for connecting literature with present day cases, media and social behavior within North America. This allowed for brief analysis of indigenous works to paint an image of cultural continuity and how colonial

laws and news media create a social atmosphere for Yukon River tribes attempting to protect subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping rights. Indigenous people from rural Alaska Native villages have always considered the natural world an important part of their ancestral connections to family traditions. This has been ingrained within a subsistence way of life that is pertinent to the well-being of indigenous peoples. On a yearly basis many rural Alaska Native cultures across the state are intertwined with the natural world that continued their revitalization of indigenous knowledge by including youth participation. This lifestyle is inalienable in that it is more important to protect these relatives within places that reverberate between the seven generations thinking and deep spatial attachments to stories, dances, food sources and survival. Traditional homelands are the foundations of cultural diversity as Alaska Native peoples engage themselves in customary subsistence ways of life. Any denigration to this environmental attachment has often caused more harm than good resulting toward traumatic events to people.

Ecocriticism is a useful term that explores literary texts to reflect the conditions of life over different environments. Dana Phillips research about the “truth of ecology” highlighted the complexities of nature and mentions that it is “thoroughly implicated in culture” (Phillips 577-78). Undertaking this task involved analyzing indigenous perspectives to explore Alaska Native tribal attachments to landscapes and waterways. This sheds light to theories of denigration as people were subjected to restrictions on the Yukon River tributary. Phillips further explores ecocriticism that provides insight to analyzing indigenous epistemology through her work to find “what is the truth of ecology in so far as the truth is addressed by literature” and how “literature addresses that truth” (578). His works explored the possibilities of interpreting various cultural practices found through literature and the relationship between people and places. Using ecocriticism with works written about and by Alaska Natives has benefits to expand the Native

American Studies field. The first related to exploring how Alaska Native literature is filled with culturally relevant material. Many of the authors of *Alaska Natives in the Interior* and *YKD* have imbedded notions of subsistence cultures that need analysis. The other sheds light on how culture is portrayed and the relevance to current trends through news media. Each author I explore will expand works related to cultural diversity weaving important food source needs near landscapes and waterways. This part of the research intends to examine differences between Yup'ik and Athabascan subsistence lifestyles from Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers to the Bering Sea. The languages and cultures between the two are different with customary ways of living in harmony with the land. However, each had deep social and cultural relationships to subsistence ways of life that is embedded within indigenous knowledge where interaction with the natural world nourished oral traditions and ensured survival.

Conceptualizing slow violence

Rob Nixon conceptualized slow violence within the framework of environmental literature. His research provided an opportunity to expand current trends of environmentalism with Alaska Native works. He defined the foundation in the following quote:

We are accustomed to conceiving violence as immediate and explosive, erupting into instant concentrated visibility. But we need to revisit our assumptions and consider the relative invisibility of slow violence. I mean a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous but instead incremental, whose calamitous repercussions are postponed for years or decades or centuries. I want, then to complicate conventional perceptions of violence as a highly visible act that is newsworthy because it is focused around an event, bounded by time, and aimed at a specific body or bodies. Emphasizing the crisis, like domestic abuse or post-traumatic stress, but it is particularly pertinent to the strategic challenges of environmental calamities (Nixon)

Nixon captured the realism of victimization within the colonial construct that gradually tore apart indigenous cultures and denigrated the quality of life. His theory of slow violence will be the focus of this research project that explores various examples in the following chapters. His

theory of slow violence is applicable to subsistence users along the YKD that continually face societal problems on a yearly basis. Nixon work reflected the “environmentalism of the poor” where resource development, exploitation and despoliation impacts indigenous peoples (Nixon). His work provided an opportunity to expand notions of slow violence with Alaska Natives living along the Yukon River tributary that are affected by unemployment and how wildlife management strategies have gradually deteriorated the social well-being of future generations. Nixon work conceptualized social movements addressing positive change that had more leverage in “enhancing the international visibility” of current trends in the 21st century (Nixon). Rob Nixon’s theory of slow violence will provide an opportunity to explore the erosion of cultural continuity and advocate positive changes to improve humanity.

The Lower Yukon River subsistence culture

I grew up in the tribal village of *Iqurmiut* also known as Russian Mission, Alaska. Our culture is mixed between the borders of the Athabascan and Yup’ik peoples with ancestral ties to Paimiut which is an old village below Holy Cross, Alaska. Ann Fienup-Riordan makes note of this place in her book *Hunting tradition in a changing world* mentioning of Yup’ik “encroachment eastward” that happened during “the late nineteenth century” (Fienup-Riordan 9). The communities within the culture area had deep ancestral roots to Paimiut with relatives that utilized indigenuity for surviving the subarctic climates of Southwestern Alaska. Many of our elders in Russian Mission continue to unravel stories of our ancestors and the dedication to prolong subsistence traditions through culture and making us aware to be respectful to the other indigenous peoples across the rural Alaskan landscapes and waterways. The YKD consisted of peoples distinct from each other within various tribal villages along the freshwater tributaries of the Yukon and Kuskokwim. Through exercising our traditional subsistence ways of life, I knew

that these tools of survival were crafted over the course of thousands of years that gradually adapted through ancestral ingenuity to provide nourishment for future generations. Our dependency on indigenous flora and fauna supplemented the ability feed ourselves and ensure the survival of our tribal peoples. Cultural diversity is found between each Alaska Native village that had deep ancestral roots to site specific places on the Yukon River. The literature I will be exploring with ecocriticism come from distant tribes where indigeneity plays an important role yet with my indigenous knowledge and subsistence background I will attempt to portray how our generation born after 1971 became victims of slow violence that eroded inalienable subsistence rights reserved for Alaska Native tribes. The literature explored weaves common goals shared internally by various authors that attached indigenous knowledge for ecocritical analysis toward specific foods over places held by tribes that painted pictures of dynamic landscapes and waterways across Alaska. Survival depended on supplementing winter food storages ascertained by families crafted through cultural continuity that benefited the future generations and braided with intergenerational knowledge that provide for customary trade between communities that united people. Molly Nichols' research on ecocriticism conceptualizes this idea between people and place where she mentions that it "is often considered to be earth-centered, primarily concerned with animal rights and environmental conservation, emphasizing natural purity and 'belonging'" (Nichols 100). This is true in that rural Alaska Natives along the Yukon and Kuskokwim tributaries have historically protected their subsistence ways of life regardless of the policies applied by the colonial construct that is conceptualized within the intricacies of indigenous place.

Nukalpiaq Redux

Written works completed by anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan looked in ways that Southwestern Alaska Native people survive through harsh environmental conditions. In one of her books *Hunting tradition in a changing world*, she explores the cultural ways of life for the people living on the “Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta” (Fienup-Riordan 9). Her work has beneficial implications to the importance of continuing the subsistence lifestyle. One of the paragraphs she conceptualized intergenerational teachings:

The hunters who gave the most thought and care toward the animals they sought were richly rewarded, both socially and materially. The *nukalpiaq*, or good provider, was a man of considerable importance in the village life. Not only did he contribute wood for the communal sweat bath, and oil to keep the lamps lighted, he also figured prominently in midwinter ceremonial distributions, during which local extended families vied with one another to gather and redistribute surplus (12).

The term *nukalpiaq* is a common term used by Yup’ik peoples to identify a person that signifies wealth within tribal epistemology. This word has many meanings utilized by people in the YKD that signifies a good hunter and gatherer that also proven themselves resourceful to the tribe and teaching ways of survival. Fienup-Riordan mentions of designated places where youth observed older generations make tools and were encouraged “to perform helpful acts, while keeping their minds filled with thoughts of the animals on whose goodwill their lives depended” (12). She accurately conceptualizes the importance of subsistence practices that is wedded to Yup’ik community. Ecocritical analysis related to subsistence provides an opportunity to explore cultural awareness reciprocal to relatives. This will also further expand notions of trauma within the framework of slow violence. On the letter written by the U.S. Senator of Alaska Mark Begich to the Committee on Indian Affairs he mentioned that “subsistence resources represent a major and often primary source of nutrition for the vast majority of Alaska Natives” (Begich).

His findings are true in that living on this sustainable way of life has always been the most important and reliable food source for rural Alaska Native communities. Inside YKD, the deep rooted Yup'ik peoples relied on the *nukalpiaq* to supplement the diets of families in need of nutrition. These skilled practitioners were highly valuable in that they functioned properly within traditional subsistence practices. The *nukalpiaq* continued to be the family provider serving the food source needs of youth, elderly disabled, widows, less fortunate and those that live in extreme poverty. These people helped combat starvation and extreme weather conditions with food, shelter and animal hides for clothing crafted within indigenous knowledge. Subsistence within the rural Yup'ik villages is often the only reliable food source that offsets deficiencies in the lack of wage labor and diminished welfare systems in place that funnels through the high costs of groceries from nearby convenient stores. In August 5, 2009 a report of these conditions were documented by the Alaska Newspapers, Inc. The findings are as follows:

The villages in AVCP's region have the highest unemployment rate, the highest jobless rate and are the poorest in the State of Alaska. Many families are dependent on public assistance for survival. The unavailability of work, the dependency on public assistance payments and the hopelessness that accompanies such dependency has been linked to a myriad of social problems. High rates of alcohol and substance abuse, suicide, depression, and domestic violence have all been affiliated with chronic unemployment. While the unemployment rate for the State of Alaska is 8.4 %, the unemployment rate for the Bethel census area is 17.3% and the unemployment rate for the region's Wade Hampton census area is 31.3% (Alaska Newspapers).

The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) continues providing assistance to tribes in the YKD and has been dedicated in helping with training and other available programs. The Alaska Newspapers listing of present conditions shows current problems with impacts to social and cultural parts of tribal communities. The reality of unemployment has been significant to the populations affecting the peoples' ability to thrive under impoverished conditions. More than often an inability to fit within the cash capital economy has led many rural Alaska Natives to

return to subsistence cultures. However, slow violence within the gradual erosion of traditional subsistence practices found in wildlife management policies have taken its toll on seven generations thinking that distorted an ability to survive over ancestral lands. Research related to indigenous peoples along Alaskan's freshwater tributaries is a necessary approach toward resolving differences over living on the bounty of landscapes and waterways. These indigenous roots are parts of humanity where our youth follow the traditions of nurturing tribal communities. It is only in this place that the indigenous person feels welcome in this world by continuing the tradition to feed the community. The positive atmosphere is tied in with immediate and extended families where a sense of pride is always present and inalienable. The *nukalpiaq* is a part of the foundation where inner traditional customs are interwoven with subsistence practices.

The colonial construct needs to understand the way of life from site specific rural Alaska Native indigeneity that is imbedded within constant interaction with the natural world. This pertains to different cultures that reflect unique epistemologies between tribes and the way of life. Art Davidson and Harold Napoleon conceptualized a Yup'ik version:

We did not always have these problems of the meaning and purpose and approach to education. Before the erection of school houses and the introduction of professional teachers to whom Western civilization entrusts the minds of their children, education was growing up in a village. Education was done in the home with the father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, brother and sister, uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends. Education was also given by the weather, the sea, the fish, the animals, and the land. Children at a very early age came to terms with the elements. We did not have to worry about relating education to life, because learning came naturally as a part of living. Education was the process of living from the land, of subsisting, of surviving (Davidson 241-42).

Using ecocriticism to understand this philosophy helps to identify what is most important for new and upcoming generations. The interdependency between people and place dedicated to reside in rural Alaska Native villages are highly dependent on indigenous flora and fauna for

survival. The indigenous knowledge between extended family revolves within cultural continuity where people use indigenuity for making life easier. Inside these social institutions of learning ancestral methods of harvest are integrated with new technologies through adaptation to changing environments. The first sentence conceptualizes views from within where a tribal community had always been attached to the natural world where survival was crucial to utilize ways of surviving. This is conceptualized by Harold Napoleon using the knowledge of Frank Nokozak who reflected a story of a person that shared “their things with the people who did not have them” (246). His description shows the tradition within rural Alaska Native Yup’ik villages that provided nourishment for the less fortunate and embodies survival techniques over the subarctic Alaskan landscape. TEK is also understood as elements of hope practiced through intergenerational hegemony as people band together in sharing the bounties of indigenous flora and fauna. The remaining paragraph grasps the underlying importance of allowing subsistence cultures to flourish mentioning that it permits “Yupik people to live a fuller, richer life” (245). These survival techniques are the foundations on which Alaskan tribes in the YKD have strived to flourish toward the future.

Oscar Kawagley: A Yupiaq worldview

The interdependency between people and their ancestral homelands is found in Oscar Kawagley’s book *A Yupiaq Worldview a Pathway to Ecology and Spirit*. His works conceptualized the epistemology of some tribes along the Lower Kuskokwim River. His story told through the teachings of his late grandmother explored the interrelationships of all living beings that nourished a culture that rely on interactions with indigenous flora and fauna (Kawagley). This conceptualized epistemologies shared within grass rooted Yup’ik peoples in

YKD that made use of natural surroundings to identify methods of harvest and tools for survival.

Kawagley reflected indigenous knowledge of elders within community:

Some shamans and lost hunters spent up to a year with animal people. During that time they learned their behaviors, their likes and dislikes, and how they were to be treated when they gave of themselves to the hunter. There was ready communication between humans and animals, displaying a feeling of oneness, a unity of being (28).

His explanation of local knowledge shows the intergenerational traditions of sharing tools for survival. This helped explain cultural diversity of Yup'ik peoples living within communities across the YKD. The experienced hunters and gatherers attained their indigenous knowledge through family and culture. This further explored the concepts of Yup'ik community where Kawagley's stories added in-depth perceptions toward epistemological lessons often sought for traditional forms of perpetuity held sacred by various people within a tribe. The education also served a purpose in prolonging the seven generations thinking toward subsistence rights shared between local peoples and the natural world.

Kawagley conceptualized the reality of Yup'ik language variants that were complementary to changing season. His ideology that "Nature is the Yupiaq metaphysic" highly reflected the processes that make up tools for survival (52). Often this epistemology is imbedded within various nearby hunters and gatherers of the YKD. Subsistence fishing is one of the most important food sources that provided nourishment in tribal societies. Kawagley conceptualized the importance as a Native youth:

I chose the fish camp for selfish reasons. I remember it as being a place of happiness and warm weather, as well as a place for orderly Yupiaq industry. Also, it presents a cornucopia of traditional and modern technologies. Although we did not have technical names for many natural processes, we used natural, scientific principles in preparing our food (104).

His story of finding a place was important for indigenous knowledge that highlighted parts of cultural continuity. The availability of food sources provided an opportunity for family and youth involvement for subsisting over landscapes and waterways that supplemented ample winter storage needs enjoyed with the freedoms practiced over places. The seven generations thinking rejuvenated youth with indigenous knowledge and practice that continued to be an important attachment for those that permanently reside in the YKD.

Exploring parts of the Athabascan peoples circle called community

Using ecocriticism with Miranda Wright's works helps to understand the importance of education using Athabascan culture. Her interaction with elderly people created a circular model with Native values related to the four seasons that reflected the "concept of community involvement in education" (Wright 125). This work was intended to help bridge intergenerational cultural traditions to help students appreciate their heritage. Their ways of revolving around subsistence practices of hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping revolve within Alaska's Interior. They utilize as much of the animal as they can making warm clothes with the hides that help with surviving the cold temperatures. Many people helped with this process and were highly skilled through practice over landscapes and waterways. Wright's work utilized the benefits of sharing indigenous knowledge that was useful for Native educators to provide culturally relevant sources to intervene with "a balanced education" and meet the needs of the "Western education system" (128). This philosophy in to the making has great beneficial qualities for restructuring the education system where the importance of culture is the foundation of surviving within tribal communities. In rural Alaska, these tools for survival are most important for the person that decided to stay within the community and easily function on a subsistence based lifestyle. Wright mentions that the circle tied language to parts of annual

subsistence practices that Athabascan cultures utilize in four seasons. She mentioned how the educators collaborated to create a useful model for Native peoples:

I went back to the University of Alaska and worked with other Native educators there. We started exploring different models and looking at the cyclical nature of activities and how they progressed from one stage to another throughout the year. We divided the circle into four quadrants representing spring, summer, fall, and winter. The basic premise was to use the four seasons as a vehicle for discussion. The seasons allow for cyclical change: birth, growth, maturity, and reflection, much like the birth of new plants and animals in spring, the growth associated with summer, the maturity of harvest of fall and the reflection and celebration during winter (125-26).

The design of this project has useful cultural benefits within continuity of indigenous peoples across Alaska. The concept of awareness is embedded within the four seasonal cycles where the teaching style uses cultural observations of local surroundings, language, traditions and attached subsistence harvesting practices. I liked how the circle was structured in that it shows the birth of all living things that offered students to engage themselves within the natural environment tying indigenous knowledge with subsistence practices. This knowledge was tied with ancestral traditions that dates far back in time and was relevant to present day conditions that revitalized cultural continuity still seen in rural Alaska Native villages today. The Gwich'in steering committee website shows the importance of the caribou that fits within the circle:

For thousands of years, the Gwich'in have relied on the caribou as their primary food source, and despite the inroads of modern civilization, that remains true today. The caribou are also deeply intertwined with Gwich'in culture-as Gwich'in leader Sarah James has said, "The Gwich'in are caribou people... Our whole way of life as a people is tied to the Porcupine caribou. It is in our language, and our songs and stories." Further reductions in the size of the herd could make it difficult or impossible for the Gwich'in to continue the connection they have maintained with the caribou for millennia (Gwich'in Steering Committee iii).

The caribou is the most important food source for the Gwich'in who stood up against slow violence effects of opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) oil exploration. The

committee further mentioned an important fact related to environmental denigration that had potential for causing a “serious blow to the ability of the Gwich’in to continue their subsistence culture that is reliant on the Porcupine Caribou Herd” (iii). The caribou had always been an important food source that is crucial to the well-being of the people living near the Arctic Circle. There have been many accounts throughout my life where I listened to large group presentations at environmental summits including other rural Alaska Natives gatherings across the state that explained how vital the caribou was to the Gwich’in culture. Many of the people use the hides as clothing during traditional dances like those seen in front page clips on the Alaska Federation of Natives website convention held in Anchorage, Alaska 2011 (Alaska Federation of Natives). There is great care in making garments of that nature and usually the finished product is very decorative. The food source has been tied in with their cultural traditions and is the most important part of their cultural continuity.

Exploring Catherine Attla’s works to find subsistence

The book *K’etetaalkkaanee the one who paddled among the people and animals* by Catherine Attla, sheds light to a cultural relevance of oral traditions that provide key accounts of traditional ways of storytelling used by various northern Athabascan tribes. This story also shows cultural diversity of rural Alaska Natives scattered across the state that have unique ways of teaching their younger generations the meaning of life and how indigenous knowledge continues to be a part of survival on the dynamic environment. Culture is well defined within Catherine Attla’s work that followed strict traditions in that these stories are only told during the winter months. Her work intends to educate the younger generations of cultural heritage that tied in with intergenerational knowledge. This book is a compilation of well-crafted literate artwork filled with imagery reflecting cultural traditions that is wedded between indigenous peoples and

their subsistence way of life. Attla reminds the reader that these stories were passed down by “her late grandfather Francis Olin, a medicine man of the Koyukuk River” (Attla and Jones *K'etetaalkkaanee, the One Who Paddled among the People and Animals : The Story of an Ancient Traveler* ix). These forms of oral traditions are often more sacred in nature that provided imagery towards ancestral teachings that benefits the youth with the beauty of culture. Attla describes an important part of epistemology:

Catherine Attla often speaks of her belief in the religious importance of these stories. She believes that they have been filling the spiritual need of the people for years, and they have been the Bible of the Athabascan people. To many of the Koyukon people who are Christian, the stories are like another testament, and telling them is like praying. Traditional stories are meant to entertain, educate and inspire-to cause the reader or listener to think. People believe that telling these stories not only instructs and entertains, but also shortens the winter and brings good fortune to the storyteller as well as the audience (ix).

The reader was intended to see the cultural continuity of her people according to a site specific way of life in rural Alaska. The indigenous perception provides imagery to understand the valuable flora and fauna that thrived over landscapes and waterways vital to the well-being of the people. Her storytelling structure allowed the listener to use self-awareness toward spatial relationships to culture. She further mentioned that these stories fit in with the “Raven cycle in Koyukon tradition in that it must be told in its entirety and in a specific order” (viii). She makes notice that order is vital to the way in which this oral tradition is told that ties in with the cultural continuity of her people. This method of storytelling preserves a relationship to the natural world with respect serving a purpose for subsistence rights. In many Alaska Native cultures the art of storytelling has been the backbone upon which youth are attached to the well-being of a tribal community. In retrospect, each of her short stories filled with life lessons provided self-awareness of other living beings. The first story is about a family living in a fish camp that sets the scenery of warmer temperatures:

In the time very long ago,
many people were staying at a
fish camp. People were working
very hard, putting away fish.
There was a boy named Betohoh
who slept and slept and slept.
Between the short periods of time
that he worked, he seemed to
sleep a lot. One day he was walk-
ing around on the beach where
people were cutting fish. Some
camp robbers were busy carrying
away fish eggs. They were
taking the fish eggs and carrying
them away one egg at a time (2).

This work is in stanza form due to the Athabascan to English translation separated in two columns that fits within each page. This highlighted the intricacies of indigenous epistemology that has cultural definitions hidden within respective places. The interpretation between the two is complex that has meanings only understood within indigeneity with deep ancestral ways that formulated a way of life. Attla's story is filled with self-awareness structures found within rural Alaska Native cultures. The beginning introduces the reader to a fish camp setting where the people reside during summer subsistence fishing seasons. Most often this place is culturally important to the people residing near freshwater tributaries like the Yukon River in Alaska that have long standing relationships to places valuable for harvesting food to feed family. Many of these campsites are designated places that are braided with ancestral roots that properly maintain salmon preparations that fit in culturally relevant ways of life. Attla's description of the other living beings found living next to the people in the camp shows the interaction that expands the concepts of community. The camp robbers Attla notes are a type of bird found across the landscape that took fish eggs from the peoples stash for food. Attla further continues with the next following story of the motherly bird:

“Is that the only reason Betohoh awoke? Last summer he threw rocks at the leg of the one who was putting away fish eggs. It was then that Betohoh broke his grandfather’s leg with a rock. That is why he is bedridden now,” she told him.

She brought in about four fish eggs and boiled them. She made a broth from them. She said, “New-comer, come eat.” They used to call any newcomer *neeyonenh*. He went to the place where the food was being served. He must have been hungry. He began to eat. He put the fish egg broth up to his mouth (7).

Attla captures the reality that other living beings use fish eggs processed inside fish camps to feed small families. This conceptualized the reality that salmon is an important food source that is utilized by relatives in nature. Her work highlighted how families took care of each other to attain local food sources. This also implied the notions of belonging within rural Alaska Native communities where the youth attach to stories shared by older generations.

Catherine Attla has another book where she looks at “stories of medicine power” (Attla and Jones *Bakk'aat*Ugh Ts'*Uh*Uniy = Stories We Live By : Traditional Koyukon Athabaskan Stories* 16). In this book there are many encounters with other living beings found within the natural surroundings. Attla started the story creating an image of a boy that grew up with his immediate family. The boy was in search of medicine powers that were hidden within the subsistence lifestyle. Each day his mother helped him with encouragement to check his traps and snares over the landscape and waterways to feed the family with fish and small game (31-37). These daily events of looking for food helped the boy explore the natural surroundings and

improve the ability to capture animals. Attla provided the importance of working hard to help a family survive. In one part she conceptualized how a hunter operated within a rural Alaska Native culture using the story about porcupines. Attla mentions at the footnote of a page about the importance found within Athabascan cultures showing respect to food sources:

She was asking him to hunt porcupines, which, metaphorically, resemble crooked sticks. Because Athabascans commonly refer to game indirectly, she assumed that he understood her figurative reference (39).

This ideology is often vital to the hunters that tie in with the subsistence ways of life. In retrospect these lessons found within indigenous knowledge and practice are parts of customary traditions that referred to instances of bad luck. Having the mother teach his son the rules of harvesting makes reference on how some rural Alaska Natives pay respect to their ancestral teachings that is understood in common with the people. Her notions of mentioning animals by name had drawbacks especially if a family is primarily dependent on subsistence hunting and fishing. From what I understand within rural Alaska Native communities across the state through interaction and trade is the similarities in respecting the spiritual connections related to animals and believe that human senses have direct impact to hunters thus bringing forth instances of bad luck. In retrospect to her story, slow violence related to gradual disrespectful treatment within hunting practices will have negative impacts to the well-being of a family. The lessons within her teaching allowed the listener to learn from trials and tribulations over site specific places. Attla's stories of respect have great implications of ancestral teachings where the story of a mother raising the children has ties with a person attaining medicine power. On the Alaska Native Heritage Center website the concept of education is provided:

The Athabascan culture is a matrilineal system in which children belong to the mother's clan, rather than to the father's clan, with the exception of the Holikachuk and the Deg Hit'an. Clan elders made decisions concerning marriage, leadership, and trading customs. Often the core of the traditional culture was a

woman and her brother, and their two families. In such a combination the brother and his sister's husband often became hunting partners for life. Sometimes these hunting partnerships started when a couple married.

Traditional Athabascan husbands were expected to live with the wife's family during the first year, when the new husband would work for the family and go hunting with his brothers-in-law. A central feature of traditional Athabascan life was (and still is for some) a system whereby the mother's brother takes social responsibility for training and socializing his sister's children so that the children grow up knowing their clan history and customs (The Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum).

The women in the Athabascan culture have a significant role in teaching their children the importance of culture.

Reflecting cultural areas of YKD

Theories of ecocritical analysis and slow violence provided an opportunity for expanding research related to indigenous knowledge in the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers exploring the importance of protecting inalienable Alaska Native subsistence rights. This method of analysis reflected how various cultures provide a background toward indigeneity over diverse landscapes and waterways. Many education tools are encoded through cultural heritage shared within a community. Indigeneity provided that both the Yup'ik and Athabascan peoples had differences in hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping practices yet some similarities relate to respecting the animals used for sustaining communities within culture areas. The subsistence way of life is wedded to the rural Alaska Natives along the Yukon and Kuskokwim River tributaries interwoven through oral traditions. Many of the hunters explored within the literature provide dynamic imagery of peoples harvesting foods with valuable lessons attained during subsistence practices. These parts of survival imbedded within Yup'ik and Athabascan cultures showed the importance of indigenous education that is vital between elders and youth. Many that decide to

stay within culture areas need access to subsistence for supplementing the well-being of community.

The *nukalpiaq* is a Yup'ik term referring to a good hunter and provider. Most often this commonly referred to males who were important people within tribal communities that provided food and animal hides for clothing. The *nukalpiaq* also acted as a teaching tool that helped younger generations master the art of subsisting and proper ways to provide for the elderly disabled, widows and those that lack hunting and fishing gear. The high cost of living within rural Alaska Native villages across YKD is statistically one of the highest in the nation. The inability to capture a cash capital economy along with harsh colonial policies that despoil winter food storage needs had traumatic results to people living in Yup'ik communities.

The old village of Paimiut marked the border separating Yup'ik and Athabascan peoples. This is where some of my ancestors lived before moving to the village of Russian Mission. This place had strong connections to freshwater indigenous flora and fauna that provided indigenuity for hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping. The indigenous knowledge helped me explore the importance of subsistence to rural Alaska Native villages along the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers. This does not mean I am an expert yet I feel confident that my subsistence background further expands notions of what food sources are important for the two cultures.

Chapter 3: Alaska Natives and Food Sovereignty YKD

Conceptualizing food sovereignty from a rural Alaska Native perspective has beneficial implications for people that utilize cultural areas for subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping grounds for survival. Harvesting indigenous sources of food has always been the only way of survival that revitalized cultural continuity within the Yukon River watershed that carved

between the mountainous boreal forests converging into marshy tundra. The unrestricted access for ascertaining indigenous flora and fauna continues to be the backbone of rural Alaskan tribes supplementing our diets and providing shelter in subarctic climates. The natural world near culture areas provided tools for survival as indigenous knowledge passed on to youth with skills for crafting traps with earthen materials used for capturing various wild fauna over local landscapes and waterways. Ample precipitation tumbling down slopes of rugged mountainous terrain dragged silt and sticks into the mighty Yukon River. Herbivores such as moose and porcupine foraged over country sides in search of densely patched forests filled with fresh flora. The carnivores and omnivores pursued feasting on animals and leftover carcasses. Freshwaters were filled with various white and red meat fish swimming up and down the Yukon River tributary providing ample sources for subsistence users. Each year our people anticipated good harvests in hopes of revitalizing cultural continuity. As fall season approaches these places were the teaching grounds tied in with indigenous knowledge revolving within ways of subsisting. Many of these traditions are treasured by fellow tribal members that sustained our survival through yearly subarctic climates. The weather in Alaska continues to be unpredictable and violent as winter temperatures are capable of freeze icicles on the tips of black spruce trees scattered across the boreal forest. Having inalienable rights related to subsistence harvests is crucial to the well-being of people that permanently reside within YKD. Clothing crafted from hides attained through hunting and trapping along with wild foods containing healthy fats ensured survival. This tactic safeguards traveling through culture areas as people crossed through summer rain storms or winter snow blizzards in search of food. The lower Yukon River supplemented the people with valuable sources of driftwood that procured traditional ways of survival using indigenuity for carving fish traps, cooking utensils and providing firewood near

homelands. The availability of harvesting willow trees near landscapes and waterways supplemented our needs to cure and dry subsistence foods. Most often many of the trees are within arm's reach of shorelines that released desirable smoky flavor to a variety of wild game. This preserved foods supplementing our diets during subsistence practices as many embarked on journeys through culture areas.

Food sovereignty: Grass-root perspective

Francisco Menezes' work explored the concepts of food sovereignty that is useful for attaching to rural Alaskans dependence on wild food resources. His work provided an opportunity to expand research about culture areas where indigenous flora and fauna are critical for survival:

Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce the staple foods of its peoples, respecting their productive and cultural diversity.

Food security is the guarantee that everyone has permanent access to good quality of food in sufficient quantities, based on healthy eating habits and without adversely affecting access to other essential needs nor the future food system, which should be implemented on sustainable bases (Menezes 29).

Menezes exploration within the context of food sovereignty and security conceptualized how indigenous people maintain nutritional needs critical to the survival. He mentioned an important catalyst that raised awareness during 1996 that impacted farmers where "commercial globalization" fueled the needs of the "North American Free Trade Agreement" and discouraged "domestic productions of staple crops 'encouraged by the World Food Summit'" (29-30). This was an effort by the commercial industry to focus on widespread control of food products such as corn over places and further develop areas used for production. The prospects of food sovereignty and security advocated freedom for domestic productions and highlighted the rights of farmers to diversify their crops. In retrospect, this notion is an important segment that sheds

light of the impacts of commercial industries over the lives of people utilizing culture areas like those of the YKD who subsisted on wild game providing winter food storage needs.

Rural Alaska Natives living within YKD fought continuously against the colonial construct that attempted to diminish hunting and fishing rights. Jeannette Lee captured this in her research mentioning that Alaska Natives have been engaged within court cases “over policies that draw little distinction between sport hunters and fishermen and the largely indigenous, rural population that relies on wild game, such as moose and salmon, for food” (Lee). Indigenous people were underrepresented within management strategies that limited concerns from Alaska Native cultures. In retrospect, food security had potential for supporting tribal communities that sought to ensure survival of future generations’ and support youth in participating with subsistence practices. However, the lack of recognition had drawbacks that diminished subsistence harvesting cultures that was already denigrated from the high costs of living in remote Alaskan villages. Lee highlighted the conditions inside towns where “a gallon of fuel and a box of breakfast cereal can cost more than \$8 apiece” (Lee). Slow violence from underrepresentation to protect Native subsistence rights in the courts threatens food security of future generations that sought permanent residence in rural Alaskan villages. This dilemma would have detrimental effects leading youth toward a sense of hopelessness and alienation from attaching themselves to cultural continuity. Improvement within the colonial construct is needed to include measures that attempt to involve indigenous people primarily dependent on subsisting on landscapes and waterways. Furthermore, this had potential for helping younger generations born after 1971 seeking refuge inside Alaska Native cultures enabling youth as providers for the tribe.

Contact zones

Mary Louise Pratt's book *Imperial eyes* provided excellent research related to theories of Postcolonialism with an opportunity to use expand notions of decolonization. This book explored indigenous empowerment for people living under the colonial construct. She defined an important piece that identified "contact zones" as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination-like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (Pratt 4). These places are scattered across the Americas where indigenous people encounter colonialism that gradually erode cultural autonomy and inject policies that dramatically change behavior. Her definition of contact zone is useful in that it attempts "to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (7). This will be expanded to include rural Alaska Natives and their encounter with colonialism that shift changes to the subsistence way of life.

Stephen Pevar's book *The rights of Indians and tribes* provided an account of Aboriginal hunting and fishing rights within tribal, Federal and State government relations. Pevar mentions that the United States "Congress has *plenary power*-full and complete power- over all Indian tribes, their governments, their members, and their property" that was asserted through the Supreme Court (59). He further mentions that those powers extended further in that it regulates "every aspect of on-reservation hunting and fishing, and may even abrogate the right of Indians to engage in that activity and eliminate the reservation" (222). The contact zone in Pevar's work provided the background of the federal government's interests to regulate Indian people.

Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971

Fae Korsmo's work on the alaskool website mentioned that Alaska Natives did not sign any treaties and Congress enacted laws like the "Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971" that ultimately divided the landscape in to "twelve regional for-profit corporations" holding "fee simple title rather than tribal reservations" (Korsmo). This was a problem for rural Alaska Native subsistence users living in culture areas. Pevar highlighted how the act also compensated the loss of aboriginal title with \$952.5 million and provided "ownership rights to 40 million acres" (Pevar 300-01). Of those 40 million acres allocated, 22 million was distributed out to two hundred village corporations according to population size and was incorporated under state laws. The remaining 18 million acres held subsurface rights for the regional corporations. December 18, 1971 Congress intended ANCSA to settle Alaska Native land claims with more than one quarter Indian blood quantum with enrollment inside respective regional corporations as shareholders. Some tribes like Venetie were unsuccessful in claiming the lands under Indian country that would provide reservation status "under the supervision of the U.S. government" (21, 301). This social experimentation resembled slow violence that despoiled access to subsist on culture areas. Korsmo highlighted that Congress intended to extinguish aboriginal hunting and fishing rights in hopes that the lifestyle was replaced by "the modern cash economy" (Korsmo). This did not fit well within rural Alaska that was completely wedded to culture areas. Anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan found that the "fundamental view of the meaning of subsistence harvesting activity remains largely unrecognized outside rural Alaska" and "the unequal power relations favor the non-Native perspective" (Fienup-Riordan 25). This conceptualized how non-indigenous policy gradually eroded prosperity related to Native ties to available food sources for future generations. Fienup-Riordan highlighted a traumatic event on a

report in 1987 in the YKD mentioning how the “U.S. Public Health Service clinical psychologists Barbara Doak and Barbara Nachmann” work on youth suicides and other violent deaths found that “social disruptions and the nontraditional character of the region were contributing factors” (22). Their work provided a glimpse to the deterioration of Alaska Native youth born after 1971 that resonates cultural and social distress. However, Doak and Nachmann noted that there was no conclusive circumstances that inflict harm yet sheds light to the problems existing in YKD (23). The reality of living under impoverished conditions that separated indigenous people from subsisting is only a small part of the trauma. This project will explore the customary traditions within acts of survival.

One of the studies titled *Suicide Among Indigenous Peoples: What Does the International Knowledge tell us* by Antoon Leenaars, Marlene EchoHawk, David Lester and Lindsey Leenaars explored the problems faced within communities. The authors found that:

Culture is rooted in one’s land. It is a vast heritage. It is a worldview. The colonialists initiated actions to destroy that meaning and this deeply affected the mind and spirit of the people. The best analogy that I can offer from the North is the iceberg. In the Arctic, icebergs are large and what people are beginning to struggle with in the North is likely the tip of the iceberg (Leenaars 484).

This conceptualized slow violence as indigenous peoples deteriorated under policies that separate people from places. The authors found that culture is an important attachment that bonds people together. In retrospect to ANCSA, this highlighted how denigration of culture areas and depriving access to subsistence foods led to poverty through despoliation of hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping rights. In theory, this work reflected the hopelessness that preceded youth suicides caused by gradual erosion found within contact zones that afflicted Alaska’s indigenous people born after 1971. The concept of being an iceberg is in itself separated from the whole glacier that captures being torn off as receding ice sheet.

Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act of 1980

Pevar mentioned that Congress eventually enacted the “Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA)” providing rural subsistence priority “over all other uses” and “requires the U.S. Department of the Interior to enforce these subsistence rights if the state fails to do so” (Pevar 302). These aboriginal rights were restored for Alaska Natives that did not fare too well after ANCSA. Pevar’s work reflected another attachment titled Public Law 83-280 mentioning that in “1958, Alaska was added by Congress as a sixth mandatory state” providing “full criminal jurisdiction in Indian country” (123). This law allowed for the state to administer fishing and hunting enforcement yet did not “authorize state *legislatures* to exercise regulatory (legislative) jurisdiction over Indians or tribes” mentioning that U.S. Supreme Court interpretation allowed the federal government “plenary power over Indian affairs” (59, 123). Pevar’s work provided insight to the extent of Federal and State laws that applied to rural Alaska Native people.

Henry P. Huntington highlighted an important part of ANILCA that was applicable to Alaska Natives. He explained that Title VIII of the act intended to address subsistence users that included both Native and non-Native peoples in rural areas. This correlated to the state’s constitution prohibiting racial discrimination and provided opportunities for local hunting and fishing in remote Alaskan places (Huntington 59). Title VIII was an important segment for rural people across the state to continue their subsistence practices along many of the freshwater tributaries like the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers.

Place-making a rural Alaska Native subsistence way of life

The rural Alaska Native subsistence way of life in Southwest Alaska is a vital component that rooted to indigeneity according to place. Keith Basso’s work described this perfectly with

the Apache's concept of place where the "sense of place quite simply *is*, as natural and straightforward as our fondness for certain colors and culinary tastes" (Basso xiii). This concept had beneficial implications that further illustrated the interdependency between people and place found within indigenous communities. Indigeneity was an intimate connection where "place-making" occurred to construct "the past, a venerable means of *doing* human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities" (7). These findings replicated the customary uses within culture areas that had important values to people. In retrospect, there are many tribal groups scattered across the landscape like those from the Yup'ik peoples of the YKD. The differences between cultures rooted to places that corresponded to interaction with indigenous flora and fauna. For example, many of the tribes living along the Bering Sea will have different subsistence foods than those on the mainland. Many tribes near saltwater will have easy access to seals and whales while people living in freshwater tributaries depended on moose or porcupines. This expanded the notions of indigeneity that reflected tribal interactions with culture areas yet some similarities existed and used in trade, social gatherings, ceremonies and traditional dances. For example, those living near the coastal area where the permafrost tundra converges with the saltwater have longstanding relationships with the nearby flora and fauna with dancing traditions reenacting indigenous knowledge of survival. This is quite different for those living further inland where the culture area of freshwaters carve between mountainous boreal forests converging with marshy tundra and resonate dancing traditions according to place. Ann Fienup-Riordan's research describes the YKD as "Yup'ik territory" that continue to be one of "the most populous Alaska Natives and among the most traditional Native Americans" (Fienup-Riordan 9). Her work accurately portrayed our people on areas where the people practice cultural continuity. She goes on

providing examples of staple foods like sea mammals, “salmon, migratory waterfowl, caribou, and small game” (9). Other foods were a vast array of flora such as berries and plants that added to the diets of tribal peoples. One of the places I wanted to expand on was my ancestors that were briefly introduced in her work near “the vicinity of Paimiut on the Yukon River” where the Yup’ik “came in contact with Athabascan people” (9). The place-making of these peoples were distinct from their neighbors and had good relationships to ancestral hunting and fishing grounds. In Zagoskin’s journal entries November 26, he painted an image of the people near the Yup’ik and Athabascan border along the lower Yukon River tributary:

The native from Ikogmyut did not know the crossing from this village. Zaplatka, who arrived from his camp, helped us to hire two guides. No one could decide to go along in such severe weather.

In the evening there was a simple party, that is, without masks. The melodies of the songs and the kind of dance were the same as those of the natives of the lower Yukon, but here on the border between two different peoples, the quickness of the motion is taken from the Inkilik (Zagoskin, Michael and Arctic Institute of North America. 205).

The book referenced to a village called Russian Mission where Zagoskin recognized a cultural distinction between two separate cultures. I realized while growing up in Russian Mission that the spelling of the Yup’ik village changed to *Iqurmiut* yet the meaning did not. Pevar lists the federally recognized tribe in his book as “Iqurmiut Traditional Council” or “formally Native Village of Russian Mission” (Pevar 394). Zagoskin’s journal entries highlighted the winter season that was dedicated for dancing traditions and was also practiced by most tribes nearby in the surrounding YKD area. What he did not mention was our winter food storages that supplemented the entire tribal community and continues today as the source for tribal feasts.

The relationship between subsistence users and wild game across the YKD continues today as one of the most important parts of indigeneity according to place. Editor Maria Sháa Tláa Williams book *The Alaska Native Reader: History, Culture, Politics* had Yup’ik versions

written by Harold Napoleon titled *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* where the “community treats all animals with respect or face starvation as a result of an offended spirit” (Williams 126). These survival techniques are vibrant within many YKD communities that utilize place-making and seven generations thinking as the basis for indigenous knowledge. I assumed after reading his descriptions of introductory diseases and the turmoil that followed within the contact zone that nearly wiped out Alaska, he provided an example of Alaska Native resiliency adhered by cultures today. Oscar Kawagley conceptualized this in his book about fish camps where “from the early times to the present consists of tents for housing, a smokehouse, fish racks, and racks for drying out nets” that also served “as a family’s home for the duration of the fishing season” (Kawagley 54). His works provided an example of food sovereignty that reflected cultural continuity along the YKD. Pevar accurately conceptualized an attachment of indigenous place-making:

The right to hunt and fish was expressly guaranteed to many tribes in their treaties with the United States, but this right is presumed to exist even if the treaty does not mention it. As the Supreme Court explained in 1905, a treaty should not be viewed as a grant of rights to the Indians but as a taking of rights from them; thus, if a treaty is silent on the subject of Indian hunting and fishing rights, those rights were not limited by the treaty and are presumed to still exist in full force. Each tribe is presumed to retain its traditional right to hunt and fish, regardless of whether its reservation was created by a treaty, statute, or an executive order, and regardless of whether the reservation includes any of the tribe’s original homelands (Pevar 216).

Pevar described a reserved status of Indian tribes that retained rights to hunt and fish on homelands. His terminology conceptualized the background of subsistence harvesting cultures that fit within indigenous knowledge systems. The creation of a reserved status provided that the federal government recognized aboriginal hunting and fishing rights adhered within place-making. In theory, William M. Bryner work expanded the concept through an article on the *Alaska Law Review*:

Subsistence as sustenance has persisted among Alaska Natives for various reasons. The region's harsh climate, its distance from other food sources, high regional unemployment among Alaska Natives and Natives' relative lack of cash reserves combine to make reliance on natural resources a virtual necessity. Nutritional concerns may also compel Natives to use locally harvested resources as a food staple. In addition, some Native Alaskans have complained that non-Native foods fail to satisfy their hunger. In short, disruptions in the ability to harvest subsistence resources negatively affect the physical welfare of subsistence users (Bryner 296-97).

Interdependency between tribal peoples and places ensured survival on wild foods ingrained within indigenous knowledge systems. Most often this way of life is wedded to Native communities relying food security within landscapes and waterways. Bryner conceptualized the attachment as "subsistence as culture" within the tribal "complex web of relationships that distinguish" rural Alaska Natives according to place (299). The foundation of indigeneity was the cultural connection within the seven generations thinking that provided opportunity for ascertaining winter food storage needs. Any deprivation caused from despoliation through wildlife management strategies that limit harvest has been the catalyst leading to denigration. Most often these escalate taking form of "suicide or alcoholism among individual Natives" (304). In recent years the prior has been the demise of rural Alaska Native youth. In 2008, *The Anchorage Daily News* shed light on this subject where the "state Department of Health and Social Services" provided that "Alaska has consistently ranked at or near the top in per capita" (James, News and Staff). The findings also suggested that youth suicides were at an alarming rate throughout the state. Yup'ik populations of Southwest Alaska are just as afflicted by this event that has been a problem in need of healing. In recent years the "Association of Village Council Presidents' pilot project" partnered with nearby agencies to find ways address suicides in relationship to "historical trauma" (The Association of Village Council Presidents "Icwa Receives Domestic Violence Grant" 8). The working group understood that historical trauma

resonated within a larger framework that was tied to some form of racism toward indigenous people.

Chapter 4: Indigenism in the 21st Century

Ronald Niezen's work examined theories of Postcolonialism discovering that "indigenism" is a "international movement that aspires to promote and protect the rights of the world's "first peoples"" (Niezen 4). He based his findings on the United Nations goals to help indigenous peoples. Indigenism accurately conceptualized mass social movements for positive change that "share the same claim to have survived on their lands through the upheavals of colonialism and corporate exploitation" (4-5). This concept will be further explored to analyze rural Alaska Native subsistence Chinook salmon fishery along the Yukon River and their plight to advocate changes in management.

Research related to the successes of indigenism needs to be analyzed from tribes along the Pacific Northwest. The Makah band worked on subsistence rights since the arrival of inland fur-trading centers of Washington's Puget Sound area (Coté 43). Many of their traditional ceremonies related to potlatch, dancing, and regalia have crests that show the importance of whaling societies. Coté wrote about how assimilation and acculturation since the 1876 Indian Act of Canada "divided indigenous nations into separate political-administrative units known as bands" (58). This act eroded tribal autonomy already afflicted by disease epidemics. Her book explores impacts of colonialism such as the 1884 anti-potlatch where "any kind of ceremony was subject to prosecution" (53). These acts gradually eroded tribal autonomy to places that were enforced by the colonial construct. Coté later mentions that

Beginning as early as the late 1800s, the Makah, as well as other tribes in the Pacific Northwest, began bringing lawsuits to fight for their treaty rights to fish;

they have continued ever since to engage in legal skirmishes with the state of Washington, which has a record of attempting to prevent tribes from exercising these rights. Fishing was central to the coastal tribes' economic and cultural survival. Their subsistence was dependent on the return of the migrating salmon (115-116).

The subsistence salmon harvesting practices were an important part of food sovereignty for the Pacific Northwest tribes. Côté mentioned that over the course of several decades many of the tribal nations sought treaty rights and finally in “February 12, 1974,” a settlement was reached in “*U.S. v. Washington*” (120). Presiding over the case was “Judge George H. Boldt” finding that the “tribes have the right to fish “in common” with other citizens” and were entitled up “to 50 percent of the harvestable fish that passed through their usual and accustomed fishing areas” (120). This was a monumental case that ensured food sovereignty for the people of Pacific Northwest utilizing salmon for nourishment. The success of retaining rights to fish in the State had weight on the rest of the country.

American Indians and Alaska Natives in North America were not immune from the continental drive towards assimilation that attempted to withdraw indigenous people from practicing traditional cultures. Some Indian agents were allowed to police the reservations in hopes of fostering civilization:

In the 1880s, the police were joined by a complementary institution, the courts of Indian offenses. The instigator of the courts was Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller, who in December 1882 called attention to “a great hindrance to the civilization of the Indians, viz, the continuance of the old heathenish dances, such as the sun-dance, scalp-dance, etc.” Such practices, he insisted, led to a war spirit and demoralized the young. He objected to the practice of polygamy among the Indians, which could not be afforded when the Indians supported themselves by the chase but which now seemed to flourish when the government furnished rations. A third hindrance to the advancement of the Indians he found in the influence of the medicine men, who kept children from attending school and promoted heathenish customs. Nor could he abide the practice among the Indians of giving away or destroying property of a man who died. “It will be extremely difficult to approach much towards the civilization of the Indians,” Teller concluded, “while these adverse influences are allowed to exist” (Prucha 646-47).

The ban victimized indigenous peoples that practiced culture outside the norms of civilization. The courts issued fines and possible imprisonment if Indians were found guilty of breaking the law (647). Confiscation was also common practice if Indian agents sought to end “savage and filthy” customs like the Sioux that killed annuity cattle similarly “reminiscent of the bygone buffalo hunts” (648-649). The convictions held a certain level of severity to living conditions leading up to the beginning of the twentieth century.

Lewis Meriam along with ten other professionals worked seven months at “ninety-five reservations, agencies, hospitals and schools” and in February 21, 1928 titled a report called “*The Problem of Indian Administration*” (808-809). The report was monumental showing the problems associated with Indian policies. Regardless of the incompetence and inefficiency of the respective personnel did it seem more heart-broken to read conditions resembling trauma toward cultures. However, the report led to reforming Indian policy like in November 27, 1935 ending the old rules of the courts of Indian offenses (954). This lifted the ban on Indian cultures providing freedom to practice traditions. However, I want to explore if courts of Indian offenses hybridized and progressed into the 21st century.

Subsistence salmon fishing rights

Decades passed since the implementation of Canada’s 1867 Indian Act when Charlotte Côté conceptualized ways in which indigenism protected tribal fishing rights in the Pacific Northwest. One of the most inspirational fishing rights causes I felt was vital to designing this written work relates to Washington tribes. State, commercial and sport fishing enterprises restricted salmon fishing through conservation measures that slowly eroded indigenous fishing. The tribes defied state laws using media attention for actively publicizing arrests made during the conflict (117). Eventually, a case lands in federal court exercising treaty fishing rights that

avored the tribes and affirmed their “economic, spiritual, and cultural connections to their marine space” that could be exercised “regardless of state laws and regulations” (119-121). Coté reflects theories of indigenism that resembled resiliency and revitalization of autonomous human rights connected to subsistence salmon fishing. She mentions how treaties from colonial powers helped preserve subsistence fishing for the Makah. Salmon was part of their diet and the Judge ruled “Washington State was forbidden from regulating Indian fishing without adequately showing that no other measures would preserve the fish and, if measures were taken, that they were reasonable and necessary for conservation” (120). This prioritized mitigation that allowed tribes to intervene and rework implements of conservation.

The Fish and Wildlife management strategies are in the middle of all the attention for the past few years regarding food sovereignty of Alaska Natives living along the Yukon River tributary. The first example related to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) underwater sonar equipment at the village of Pilot Station that “underestimated the number of fish for the first two weeks of the season” (Hopkins "Another Weak King Salmon Run Pinches Yukon River Villages Sonar: More Fish Got up River Than Thought, but Situation Still Bleak"). The salmon started its journey up the Yukon River during the middle of June 2009 and residents near the mouth had already captured, cured and dried fish caught from set nets. On June 8, 2009 a news release issued by fisheries Commissioner Denby S. Lloyd reported a low Yukon River bound Chinook salmon run. The report highlighted “the 2009 season with the expectation that subsistence conservation measures, beyond those used in 2008, will be required in an effort to share the available subsistence harvest and meet escapement goals” (Lloyd). This led toward slow violence for indigenous peoples with State enforcement criminalizing subsistence fishing practices. The “Division of Wildlife Troopers under the Alaska Department of Public Safety”

used pontoon planes scavenging the Yukon River for rural Alaskans that violated the State's ban on Chinook salmon (State of Alaska). Major conservation efforts were in place as the salmon traveled up toward the Canadian border. Slow violence was captured on a newspaper article reflecting a family harvesting winter food storage needs:

June 12, 2009, John Chikigak, 65, was given a ticket for \$275 for fishing during the closure of subsistence fishing on the Yukon River.

"I was just trying to feed my family," said Chikigak. "My wife is 75-years-old, and I am 65. We support three of our grandkids, and we don't have jobs. We need our dried fish," he said. "I don't want to hurt anyone, I just want to feed my wife and grandkids," he said.

Jim Valcarce, a Bethel lawyer, has taken up Chikigak's case and had vowed to help anyone-at not cost-who has been ticketed for subsistence fishing.

"We all know that any problems with a lack of fish on the Yukon is not due to locals trying to feed their family," said Valcarce. "It's a basic, fundamental right to eat, and I'm proud to represent Mr. Chikigak, who I consider a true hero" (Wells).

The inability for the elderly people to provide food security for their family was a huge blow to the cultural well-being of younger generations. Being criminalized had repercussions for youth that witnessed *nukalpiaq* penalized and catch confiscated by the wildlife troopers. The slow violence fueled by impoverished conditions often leads to other forms of self-destructive acts resonating from lack of food sources that placed the burden on younger generations. Twitchell mentions in newspaper article that Chikigak had "been fishing for kings before Alaska was a state" (Twitchell). His case was taken up by a Bush Lawyer of Bethel Jim Valcarce and "[o]ne by one the tickets got dismissed; something Valcarce claims was not his doing" (Twitchell). However, the elderly man was not able to recover the confiscated salmon taken by the Alaska Wildlife Trooper (AWT) and was seen as a major loss to winter storage needs. These forms of victimization continued on through the course of the remaining summer as more people were harassed by the Fish and Wildlife management subsistence fishing regulations.

During the end of June 2009, rural Alaska Natives from the village of Marshall embarked on one of the most inspirational protest fishing that year. A newspaper article mentioned the residents wanted to capture enough kings to help supply “local elders, widows and other villagers” with enough meat to last the upcoming winter (Hopkins "Villagers Fish in Protest During Closure-Yukon River: Avcp President Says State Should Crack Down on Pollock Fleet, Not Subsistence"). The AWT found out about the incident and launched an investigation scavenging the village for what the State categorized as an illegal act of civil disobedience. This form of slow violence through criminalization was ambiguous when concerned people on the newspaper article reflected the off-shore Bering Sea Aleutian Island (BSAI) bycatch wasting hundreds of thousands of Chinook salmon per year. The salmon was integral to the well-being of Alaska’s freshwater communities and was valuable for keeping the body warm during cold winters. Chinook always provided food security for tribes along the Yukon River and the Native village of Marshall maintained that tradition. The slow violence for people practicing salmon harvesting cultures through criminalization of statewide fishing bans percolated through the course of the entire summer season. This further diminished the ability for rural Alaskans and tribes to adequately capture enough winter food storage needs. In theory, this event may have attributed to denigration related to traumatic events from less severe restriction towards off-shore commercial exploitation and lack of recognizing indigenous subsistence fishing rights.

Meanwhile, a catalyst resonates as the North Pacific Management Fisheries (NPMF) commercialized Walleye Pollock fishery along the BSAI where Chinook salmon were unintended bycatch, also known as “incidental catches by U.S. commercial groundfish fisheries” (NPFMC xviii). The bycatch “either discarded or donated through the Pacific Salmon Donation Program” severs itself from spawning up some freshwater tributaries (1, 2). In reality, the fish

was sorely needed to feed peoples along the Yukon River and provide for winter food storages. The hundreds of thousands bycatch salmon would have supplemented the diets of entire families in freshwaters near the Bering Sea. This led to a domino effect through the course of weekly teleconferences as enraged Alaska Natives along the Yukon River sought reparations for their subsistence food storage losses. Lower Yukon subsistence fishing communities compared the inequality with inhumane law enforcement freshwater conservation measures that were more severe than the penalties toward the commercial fleets wasting Chinook bycatch from the BSAI Walleye Pollock fishery. Subsistence was and continues to be the only reliable food source in rural Alaska especially for those that suffered through unemployment and attempted to feed families in need of nutrition. The slow violence that ensued reflected the colonial construct's treatment toward indigenous peoples that further impoverished conditions and led to other forms of self-destructive acts within social and cultural denigration. In 2007, "Chinook salmon mortality in BSAI Pollock directed fisheries" topped up to "121,757" fish discarded as waste not intended for supplementing NPMF capital gains (NMFS). The colonial construct were blinded to the fact that those fish were forever severed from returning to Alaskan freshwater tributaries. The indigenous populations along the Yukon River felt that federal and international intervention was needed to restructure Alaska Native subsistence fishery and critically analyze low spawning salmon returns. The incidentally caught freshwater bound Chinook salmon would have fed entire communities yet, served as the backbone of slow violence in the 2009 victimization of indigenous peoples living along the Yukon River tributary.

Resources for humanity

The 1880s courts of Indian offenses seemed to hybridize in Alaska as indigenous people became victims to the AWT law enforcement. In theory, the main goal toward civility continued

preventing heathenish customs within indigenous knowledge systems that intended to provide nourishment to local people. The banning of subsistence Chinook salmon fishing is an example that protrudes from this dilemma. However, some resources are available for rural Alaskan freshwater fishermen to take on the challenge of food sovereignty.

Ryan Peel's work related to the *Katie John v. United States* case was monumental in that it "concerns the creation of a priority for subsistence fishing rights for rural residents and whether the federal or state government should manage the fisheries" (Peel 263). Governor Tony Knowles at that time sought State jurisdiction for regulating subsistence with *Katie John* at the center of Alaska Native subsistence salmon fishing rights. The State of Alaska had their own agendas that would have eroded federally recognized tribal peoples self-determination seeking who had "priority of subsistence fishing rights for rural residents and whether the federal or state government should manage the fisheries" (263). Governor Tony Knowles at that time attempted to limit federal intervention over Alaska's navigable waters. *Katie John* wanted to protect her family ties to the way of life still vibrant near the old town of Batzulnetas that resided a "fish camp located in the confluence of the Copper River and Tanada Creek, which is situated within the boundaries of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park" (270). Fishing had been closed since 1964 when the Alaska Board of Fish and Game stopped people from harvesting fish with nets and fish wheels. Some twenty years later "*Katie John*, Doris Charles, and the Village Council of Mentasta applied to the Alaska State Board of Fisheries for permission to reopen Batzulnetas for subsistence fishing, the board denied the request" (270). Eventually a lawsuit was filed in 1985 and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decided "that the subsistence priority applies to navigable waters in which the United States had reserved water rights" (270). The reserved water rights doctrine upheld a purpose the federal government needed to fulfill with the people from that fish

camp. Katie John's victory protected her rights to fish for salmon due to the State of Alaska's noncompliance with ANILCA (279). This precedent applied to other Alaskan freshwater tributaries that consist of indigenous peoples utilizing subsistence salmon as one the main food sources.

ANILCA Title VIII Subsistence Management and use section 801 cites rural Alaskan priority for "both Natives and non-Natives on the public lands and by Alaska Natives on Native lands is essential to Native physical, economic, traditional, and cultural existence and to non-Native physical, economic, traditional, and social existence" (96th Congress). Congress recognized that subsistence in rural Alaska was important for survival. This entitled preference to rural areas that have no other means to replace food sources harvested from landscapes and waterways. Congress also intended to "protect and provide the opportunity for continued subsistence uses on the public lands by Native and non-Native residents" and include "personal knowledge of local conditions and requirements to have a meaningful role in the management of fish and wildlife and of subsistence uses" (96th Congress). This highlights the weight of TEK and how tribal consultation allowed the ability for advocating positive changes in restructuring policies that fit the needs of rural Alaskans.

Another potential document beneficial to the well-being of Alaska's indigenous people comes from the working group for international human rights. If ratified by the United States, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 46 articles will have positively changed the discourse of Alaska Native peoples (General Assembly). This document had potential for standards "of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect" (352). From an Alaska Native perspective, this had potential for improving cooperation between cultures for mitigating solutions that improve relationships with indigenous peoples.

Article 2 highlighted this “to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity” (352). Subsistence ways of life in rural Alaska ties with aboriginal rights to hunt, fish, gather and trap. The inability to maintain adequate food sources from wildlife enforcement had its consequences to the people that rely on annual harvests to maintain family structures and include our youth to engage themselves as providers of the community.

Article 3 pertained to rights to self-determination to “freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development” (352). The 2009 freshwater Chinook salmon conservation measures had direct impact to the lives of indigenous peoples along the Yukon River. This article would have changed the discourse of enforcement and support parts of the reserved water rights doctrine. Other benefits include the reinforcement of Congressional acts that pertain to Title VIII of ANILCA.

Article 18 had potential to provide more tribal representation to “participate in decision-making matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions” (355). In theory, this Article would have added representatives to improve measures that did not affect summer Chinook salmon fishermen. This also had potential to bridge the gaps between TEK and Western science and reshape policies to avoid discrimination.

Article 20 had potential for protecting the subsistence ways of life:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment on their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.
2. Indigenous peoples deprived of their means of subsistence and development are entitled to just and fair redress (355).

Salmon fishing is vital for survival of rural Alaska Native peoples however some wildlife managers suggested people to use other species of fish such as northern pike. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defined useful terms like bioaccumulation which is “a process by which chemicals are taken up by a plant or animal either directly from exposure to a contaminated medium (soil, sediment, water)” and biomagnification where chemicals “increase from transfer through the food web” (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency). The biomagnification of mercury in fish has been a hot topic in many tribal communities. I recalled accounts throughout my life where women were concerned about the detrimental effects related to ingesting contaminated pike. TEK provided us that pike are permanent inhabitants of nearby tributaries that have a higher chance of biomagnification from tailings of environmental degradation such as soil erosion and open pit mining. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services created safe daily intake of northern pike taken from the Yukon River. This document indicated a recommendation that “*All Lower Yukon River area pike may be eaten in up to 8 meals per month if fresh, and in up to 1 meal per month if dried*” (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). The research was geared for educating pregnant women with adolescent children about the problems of ingesting the fish. In retrospect, Alaska Natives should not be influenced in replacing salmon with northern pike. Lori A. Verbrugge, Ph.D. provided research that sheds light to the effects of mercury:

Fish can contain environmental contaminants they pick up from the water or sediments they live in, or the food they eat. Concerns about the health risks of contaminants have prompted many states, and several federal agencies, to advise the public to limit consumption of fish. Worldwide, the most notable fish contaminants are mercury and persistent organic pollutants (POPs). Mercury is a toxic metal that can damage the developing brain. Too much mercury may affect how children behave, learn, think and solve problems later in life. Thus, babies in the womb, nursing babies, and young children are at greatest risk for adverse health effects from mercury exposure. National studies have shown that all fish

contain some mercury, with varying concentrations based on species, location, age, and other factors. POPs, which include polychlorinated biphenyls, dioxins, and organochlorine pesticides, are a group of toxic chemicals that do not degrade very rapidly in the environment or in the body. Adverse health effects that have been associated with POPs exposure include hormone disruption, learning and behavior changes, immune system suppression, and cancer. POPs exposures from consumption of Alaska fish are very low, and have never been found to cause adverse human health effects (Verbrugge 1).

Low recommended daily intake of Arctic northern pike provided scientific evidence that is needed for consideration to educate wildlife managers. The risks are too great for younger generations to consider replacing foods that are contaminated with mercury.

Chapter 5: Subsistence is survival

The lower Yukon River is a part of a large watershed that contained valuable flora and fauna within sanctuaries for both plant and animal life. Most rural Alaska Natives permanently residing inside communities along the tributary are wedded to subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping lifestyles. The landscapes carved by the fresh waterways provided cultural continuity and was proactive toward nourishment and indigenuity for crafting tools for survival. Most harvested foods were stored for ceremonies and feasts that a family shared with the rest of the community. This method procured ancestral relationships to culture areas providing food sources to the rest of the village enhancing indigenous knowledge systems. Other ways included the indigenuity of crafting clothing from hides that helped people combat subarctic winter conditions. Many types of traditional clothing continue to protect our families from environmental elements that passed down the generations.

Sadly, the discourse of today resonate conflicting ideologies regarding food sources that affect indigenous peoples of the lower Yukon River. Some of these revolve within statewide wildlife enforcements that tend to despoil a family needs through stages of criminalization. This

had detrimental effects to the perpetrator yet gradually denigrates a hunter socially and culturally destroying the core family structure. Within the rural Alaska Native perception an inability to harvest has ramifications within slow violence molding notions of self-destructive behaviors and domestic violence. Sadly this form of victimization is rampant that is seen today by many of our relatives as a problem that needs to be tended to. Even talking circles and other forms of psychiatric help do not have the capability to heal the core root of the problem. The indigenous subsistence way of life is often overlooked by the colonial construct that fuels hopelessness preventing positive changes that improve living conditions. Within parts of indigeneity all individuals are parts of a whole where elderly disabled, widows, youth and the less fortunate provided survival to intertribal well-being. Victimization resonating from policies that hinder an ability to harvest wild foods has been profound in disassembling parts within the whole that captured the imagery of icebergs receding away from glaciers. The most specific is the well-being of the core family structure where the youth play an important role as a future provider. The subsistence activities ensured the physical welfare of users. Through that perspective Alaska Natives have a binding relationship that proceeded to ancestral roots of surviving the subarctic.

Tools for survival in Russian Mission, Alaska

Working with subsistence foods over rural Alaska required patience and indigenuity. Certain parts of the Alaskan landscape have birch bark that has water holding capabilities. This was sometimes shaped into baskets that were used for boiling water while away from the village. With the help of elders and youth these tools for survival continue to be an integral part of survival. Most often this knowledge passed through the generations with valuable notions of living in a tribal community. During each fall season these baskets were sometimes used to

collect berries over the vast tundra landscapes. Other times when lost in a severe winter blizzard this survival technique saved the lives of family members. As time passes plastic and other containers traded with the Western culture were more sufficient yet the traditional part of harvesting continued.

Many of the people within the rural village utilize the availability of new technologies where saws, tools, boats and other forms of all-terrain vehicles improved the ability to continue subsistence lifestyles. Some people had wage labor jobs to purchase goods from the convenient stores or shipped in from urban areas. This totally changed the diets in a flash as many types of fatty and sugary foods were available for consumption yet the locals in our village depended on subsistence foods as means for surviving. In retrospect living on the bounty of our culture area prolonged our seminomadic traditions of following harvesting patterns according to the seasons. This was a common occurrence for families that used both old and new technologies to perform subsistence practices at various sites.

Conceptualizing subsistence fishing

The rural Alaska Natives living in *Iqurmiut* were highly dependent on subsistence fishing. Each season provided a variety of fish that gave families a chance to tend to their fish nets, traps or hook baits. From the start of spring to the end of fall the set net was a common practice tied to the banks of the Yukon River while winter offered the chance to capture other types of fish under the ice.

In the past long before Alaska became a State our tribe used earthen materials to make fish wheels. This was a practice that was adopted from the old village of Paimiut and transplanted to *Iqurmiut*. Nowadays our people are attempting to revitalize fish wheel uses for supplementing community needs and cultural continuity. This tool for survival had been used by

other tribes up and down the span of the Yukon River tributary. The structure was crafted from earthen materials of the boreal forest with a platform stable enough to hold the weight of the spinning wheel gliding smoothly in the silted current.

During the spring season many of the families band together in their respective fish camps to prepare their subsistence gillnets. These were intended to harvest a variety of white and red meat fish that swam in the many tributaries of the Yukon River. The UAA-ISER website alaskool mentions subsistence fishing of the Yukon River peoples:

Subsistence harvest of salmon in the Yukon Region has usually been favored over commercial use by the various regulatory agencies. Salmon harvests vary greatly each year, depending on the size of the runs, weather, local water conditions, and availability of local employment. Some areas such as the upper Tanana are more intensively fished, and they require closer regulation.

Largest recent subsistence harvests of salmon, mostly chums, have been taken on the lower Yukon River, although the catch has declined in recent years. Between 1961 and 1965 the chum harvest averaged slightly more than 400,000 fish, but since 1966 this has declined to less than 200,000. During the past 10 to 15 years, the harvest of king salmon for subsistence has averaged slightly less than 20,000 fish, most of them taken in the main Yukon River. While chum salmon travel great distances up the Yukon River and its tributaries, kings comprise a larger percentage of the subsistence harvest in upstream locations on the main river (Figure 176).

Minor species harvested are pink and red salmon in the lower Yukon River, silver salmon, several species of whitefish, Arctic lamprey, suckers, burbot, inconnu, blackfish, northern pike, Arctic grayling, and Dolly Varden char (UAA-ISER).

These fish were an important part of the diet for our people. Also smaller fish provided dog mushers enough food supplies to feed their kennels of dogs on a yearly basis. Today many fish are captured year around with gillnets floating above water or below the frozen ice providing ample food sources that nourished communities. During the winter gillnets hung deep underneath more than a yard thick ice tied to stakes on tops of the frozen surface. The whitefish is a delicacy for our people in that it was frozen for later use, boiled or baked entirely. The

whole fish from the head to tail was consumed and any leftovers were placed inside buckets that was mixed with other Native foods and shared with the kennel of dogs.

Most fish are made into soups that have the capability of serving large groups of family and friends. For example, whitefish or salmon are cooked inside big pots along with a variety of vegetables and rice. This tradition of feasting is still practiced today providing enough food to feed our relatives. Most often seal oil traded from the indigenous people of the coast provides flavor to the soup. Seals do not thrive in the freshwaters near *Iqurmiut* and friends or relatives living near the Bering Sea will trade with the flora and fauna we have. Most often seal oil is only best for eating during the colder winter months of the year keeping the body warm from the high oily content. This survival technique is useful when traveling long distances related to subsistence harvesting.

Salmon is an important food source captured during the early parts of summer season. The Chinook and Chum salmon were dried at the fish camps along the banks of the Yukon River. Most often both men and women take part in checking gillnets and gathering smoke-wood from various types of willow trees. Women had their duties within the traditional family structure as they were perfectionists in cutting up the salmon with the *ulluaq* or woman's knife. This blade was shaped like the moon and each movement up and down thoroughly sliced the fish for proper drying that passed through intergenerational tribal traditions. Many utilize this meat by drying, smoking and salting the fish in brine. The meat was air dried for a while and prepared before arrival of flies due to their ability to spoil and fill the meat with maggots. The various willows are used for smoking the fish and keeping the bugs away. Kennels of dogs present at the fish camp were fed Chum salmon and other smaller fish on a daily basis. Their food is cooked inside a large open barrel cooked over a fire near the river that was efficient for easier packing

water filled buckets. The dogs are a good companion that kept most bears away from the fish drying racks. This type of food security is detrimental to the well-being of the family due to salmon spawning only once a year and threats of losing our entire winter food supply.

The biggest problem related to denigration to rural Alaska Native subsistence fishing rights along the Yukon River tributary is the implementation of the wildlife management policies that affect Alaska Native peoples. On the State of Alaska Public Safety website a description of the AWT states as follows

This program is not a part of State Government. It is an independent non-profit corporation that was organized in 1984 by citizens concerned for Alaska's fish and game resources. They believed a citizen group, working in connection with Alaska Wildlife Troopers, might help curb unlawful fishing and hunting in Alaska. Wildlife Safeguard's purpose is to promote fish and game protection by providing a toll free hotline for reporting violations, and funding a reward program for callers. It operates much like Crime Stoppers in that regard (D. o. P. S.-D. o. A. W. T. State of Alaska).

The AWT are the new addition that has been flying around inside pontoon planes over the YKD. These enforcement officers are unaware of the severity of slow violence related to being criminalized as rural Alaska Native peoples exercised aboriginal fishing rights. When a person violates the Alaska's fish and game laws such as fishing out of season the AWT are the force that issue citations and confiscate catch and gear used during subsistence. On June 21, 2011 Steve Hayes of ADFG responded to a comment during a Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association teleconference on AWT confiscated fish:

They do distribute those fish to subsistence users, although you know, they may not go back to necessarily the same community where they actually confiscated the fish from, but they do distribute them (Hayes).

The despoliation of the family's food source has traumatic effects to the indigenous person and their family. In theory this form of slow violence fueled self-destructive acts that expand out to family members where children are at risk. The threat of losing winter food storage needs

further leads to hopelessness which is a catalyst of denigration in YKD. Another theory is that enforcement plays a role to gradually erode Alaska Native subsistence rights. In any case the despoliation had detrimental effects that seem to disrespect Alaska Native cultures dependent on food security.

Building traps for harvesting certain foods takes patience and teamwork like gathering drift wood along the river or digging roots over boreal forests. This way of life is a complete workout that allowed us to continue our traditions making earthen materials while taking advantage of local resources. TEK provided us the ability to find local trees that were straight and knotless for building fish traps. Spruce trees drifting down the river at the edge of spring season ice break up were highly sought after for making those tools for survival. Any wood that was slightly twisted were saved for winter storage needs. This took months to create having to split the logs and then bend and stitch the roots to a snug fit. The trap ranged from small to large and depended on what type of fish will be captured. Ann Fienup-Riordan's book *Things of Our Ancestors* makes note of the "*taluyacuar*" that was also known by Yup'ik cultures as a fish trap (Meade, Fienup-Riordan and Ethnologisches Museum Berlin. 90-91). During winter many of the *taluyacuar* were set along the frozen banks of the Yukon River where large traps caught burbot fish. These traps were carefully placed underneath the frozen ice of the Yukon River with a fence channeling directly into the funnel. If done properly, the fish will be plentiful and the excess will be distributed out to the local Native population.

Smaller *taluyacuar* were used to capture black fish harvested during the winter months. These food sources are abundant in the lakes scattered across the tundra and our cultures have been eating these for thousands of years. These fish are also shared with the kennels of dogs as winter food storages become scarce. Each family within the tribal community had ancestral trap

lines that passed down through the generations. This trap is usually placed in unfrozen parts of lakes where the black fish come up for air. Sometimes it is difficult to set traps for these fish as parts of the ice near the lakes are thin and the risk of falling through and succumbing to hypothermia is always present. Nowadays some of the traps are made with either chicken wire or crafted from local spruce trees and roots. The funnel is placed on the top and is tied down to the lower portion so that the fish do not escape. Every other day the traps are checked and brought back home. When a family captures plenty of the fish it is customary for distributing the excess to elderly disabled, widows and those that are struggling through the winter free of charge. In this way the people are fed and cultural continuity related to the subsistence way of life is revitalized. Most often these foods are boiled over with hot water and then served. Some people like to dip these in seal oil for better taste.

Some foods like the *aqutaq* are special in that this type of dish helps with surviving the cold Alaskan climates. I grew up eating this and was typically made with whitefish or a type of salmon base. This food is filled with a type of fatty substance, berries and sometimes moose fat. This dish is often served as a desert after eating a big meal. Many of the children like this meal because they will be able to stay warm as they play outdoors for long periods of time.

When spring season arrived, many of the tribes along the Yukon River address the needs of repairing unhealthy watersheds. This was described on the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council (YRITWC) website mentioning that:

The people of the river value the watershed for many things. Among these are fish habitat for salmon, whitefish, sheefish, burbot and pike. These fish provide a stable food source for the people who subsist within the drainage. The watershed also provides for the diverse wildlife in the region such as moose, caribou, sheep and furbearers. The fish and wildlife, which provide sustenance to the people, are dependent upon the health of the watershed in which they live and raise their young. Traditional knowledge of the river indicates changes in the health of the fish and wildlife, which live in the drainage such as tumors, cysts and other

anomalies, which may be indicative of an unhealthy watershed (Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council).

This conceptualized present environmental concerns within the Yukon River tributary.

YRITWC further found that the river was “threatened by impacts of pollution from multiple sources of contamination” (Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council). These environmental impacts gradually took over the health of indigenous flora and fauna. The watershed has been affected in many ways that relate to environmental denigration. One of those revolves within the ways in which gold mining processes clean rock. In a village meeting I recalled in the past a representative of a nearby gold mine visited with the people and gave a presentation. He was an elderly looking representative and mention that cyanide was a part of the cleaning process of washing the gold. Many of the concerns that revolve with this process relates to the tailings pond as he spoke of how the cyanide evaporates when exposed to air. Indigenous knowledge provided us that the tundra connected to rivers like a sponge and any pollution had potential to affect local flora and fauna. The risks of tailings pond posed a huge concern to the health of eating wild foods. The Yukon River watershed has many places that are headwaters to spawning salmon.

Subsistence trapping

Living near the freshwater tributary offers a variety of benefits of various furs that helped us survive the subarctic temperatures. The beaver is one example that supplied edible meat and provided thick pelts sufficient for warm clothing to withstand cold winters in Alaska. Most often these small game animals were cooked inside large pots and fed to many people free of charge. Sometimes these foods are half dried from hanging outside for a while and then stored for later use. The hides are carefully carved off the meat and then scraped to ensure good quality for

making various clothing that kept the body warm regardless how frozen the air was outside. Other furs like the wolverine protected against the elements and were useful for the upper body.

Subsistence hunting

Each year many of the *nukalpiaq* had to hunt animals providing food for the tribe. The moose was a prized food source that contained healthy fats and many of our hunters took the insides like the stomach, intestines, liver, nose, tongue and heart. These parts of the animal were used because we had to gather as much of the meat as possible to feed large families during the winter. Most often a family invited guests for eating that extended friendships to elderly disabled, widows and those that are less fortunate due to their lack of transportation or hunter in the family. Porcupines are a delicacy within indigeneity that provided nourishment for our family. The meat is eaten and any leftovers were shared with the kennels of dogs. The Western cultures today do not fully understand our ways that attached us to ancestral homelands. The indigeneity over landscapes and waterways caused a feeling of nostalgia in hopes of returning back to hunting and fishing grounds and reconnecting cultural continuity. Some of the places are secret hunting spots utilized by families to attain meat from migratory birds or other valuable game meat. The migratory birds like ducks and geese provide nourishment for our people that are boiled in soups for feeding the community. The feathers from the birds also accompany our dancing traditions where men fit them on fans. Other people within the community use the whole wings for cleaning utensils at fish campsites.

Subsistence gathering

Tundra tea grows wild outdoors and is gathered during the fall season. The tea grows near bald sides of hills and on top of mountains where the terrain of shale rocks extend beyond the river banks of rocky shorelines leading up to the edge of green growth. Most people harvest

these plants when out picking wild berries. When the day is over a bundle of tea along with few gallons of berries provides good winter storage. The tea is used during feasts that accompany most meals adding flavor to our diet.

Conclusion

Rural Alaska Natives residing along the lower Yukon River tributary depended on subsistence as a means for survival. TEK provided our culture with indigenuity to attain the necessities for surviving subarctic conditions. The fish in the waterways ingrained within our cultural traditions helped reciprocate the connections between people and place. Each family was heavily involved with summer fishing that dried potential food sources within large building structures. The goal of supplementing our diets on a yearly basis helped bond extended families together. Most indigenous peoples from different culture areas understood the importance of subsistence harvests that offsets the high cost of living and provided food on plates. This subsistence lifestyle passed down the generations and was more reliable than cash capital and social welfare.

Decolonizing TEK helps rural Alaskans by analyzing the importance of indigenous knowledge that thrived in villages tying antecedent ways of living. This practice provided lessons to survive in the natural world where subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping prolonged the subsistence way of life. Traditional harvesting practices extrapolated methods of indigenuity shared with younger generations for cultural continuity that continued today by Alaska Native tribes. Each author shared their own perspectives of indigeneity providing examples of cultural diversity along the Yukon and Kuskokwim River tributaries. Their

seminomadic stories of harvesting foods along waterways explored cultural survival used by tribes dependent on flora and fauna.

Ecocritical analysis provided an opportunity to explore works related to subsistence culture. Many of the books provided an account to the importance of landscapes and waterways that was detrimental to the well-being of people. This also provided an opportunity to focus on slow violence related to parts of environmentalism that sheds light to the effects of wildlife management. The duties of the *nukalpiaq* were reflected to analyze Yup'ik cultures and show the importance of feeding the less fortunate. Future generations look up to provider for guidance and learn proper ways of harvesting wild game.

Food sovereignty is an important task that Alaska Natives need to ensure the survival of the people. ANCSA and ANILCA within the contact zone of rural communities had detrimental effects to subsistence cultures. Healthy relationships between indigenous peoples and policy makers are needed to prevent denigration to cultures. This ensured the survival of the people that live in harsh winter conditions and provide winter food storage needs.

Theories of indigenism provided an opportunity to reevaluate present conditions related to the offshore BSAI bycatch. This event had detrimental effects to people along the Yukon River where low returns of Chinook salmon affected subsistence users. ADFG and AWT conservation measures through fines and confiscating catch was a major loss to families yet there is hope as some of the cases were thrown out of the courts. The lack of respecting TEK had disadvantages that diminished subsistence fishing patterns and food sources for needy families. Tribal, Federal and State cooperation is needed to ensure humane conservation measures to protect the salmon spawning along the Yukon River tributary.

Theories related to the hybridized court of Indian offenses in rural Alaska provided an opportunity to examine how tribes mitigate food security. Washington tribes had their “economic, spiritual, and cultural connections to their marine space” settled in the “Boldt decision” (Coté 119-20). This provided an opportunity for Alaska Natives to use theories of indigenism and protect subsistence autonomy. Another useful resource is Title VIII of ANILCA where a Congressional act refined tribal, Federal and State government relations. This document provided guidance for mitigating indigenous ways of survival. The UN Declaration is a tool and if ratified by the government had up to 46 articles to help indigenous people of rural Alaska. Some pertained to human rights for the first inhabitants protecting and promoting self-determination within subsistence autonomy.

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