

Chapter 4: Yup'ik Nations: the Myth of the Peaceful Eskimo, and Mirco-nation Warfare

NOTE: this is an unfinished draft which I am making available in the interest of open discussion. Some of the citations may be incomplete. I have not done a final fact-check. Also, it is still in outline form, which is how I usually work. And, there are a number of long, quoted or paraphrased paragraphs, which I would hope to further analyze and digest.

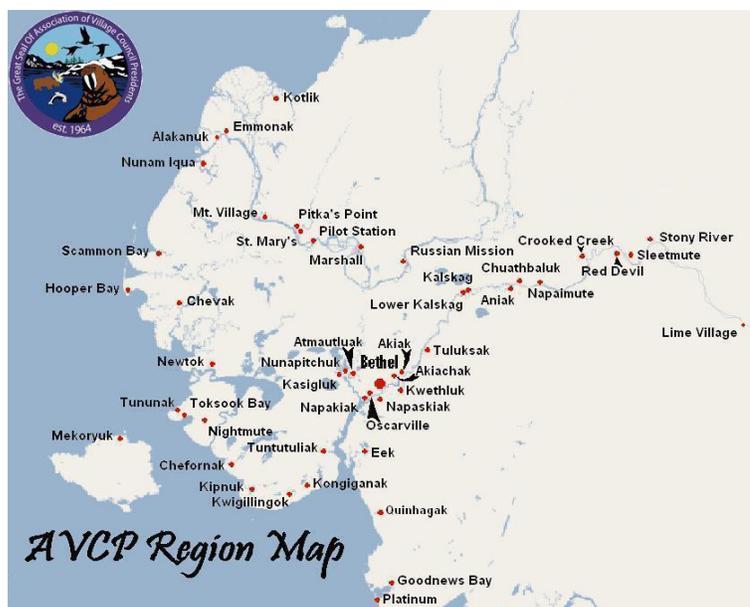
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I. Y-K Delta

The vast delta area of the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers is the homeland of the Yup'ik, literally "real people" in the Yup'ik language. The two rivers flow through a vast flatland, breaking up into tributaries, sloughs, and lakes, rich with wildlife, and a haven for seasonal wildfowl. The rivers and lakes teem with fish, and sea mammals also make their way up the main rivers. In an area of such rich resources, the population is distributed widely across the landscape.

As explained by the unified tribal council, the Association of Village Council Presidents, "The Region is a vast and beautiful corner of the world. Tucked between two of Southwest Alaska's mightiest rivers – The Yukon and the Kuskokwim – this unique, isolated area is the traditional home of the state's indigenous Yup'ik, Cup'ik and Athabascan people. The region is approximately 58,000 square miles (roughly the size of New York State), and encompasses 56 federally recognized tribes. Residents practice a subsistence-based lifestyle, with hunting, fishing and gathering providing the vast majority of their food."¹

¹ www.avcp.org "About Us"



II. Beliefs

“The Yupiaq people live in an aware world. Wherever they go they are amongst spirits of their ancestors, as well as those of the animals, plants, hills, winds, lakes and rivers. Their sense of sacredness is of a practical nature, not given to abstract deities and theological rationalization. Pragmatism is the theme of their sacred ways. The Ellam Yua, or Creative Force, is not given the same ultimate stature as the Biblical God. Because nature is their metaphysic, Yupiaq people are concerned with maintaining harmony in their own environment. The Creative Force is acknowledged and often given gratitude, though it is the immediacy of nature that is most important. The Yupiaq people have many taboos, rituals, and ceremonies to observe and practice that poignantly signify a harmonious ecological orientation. They behave accordingly because of what their culture has taught as well as an abiding belief in what they and others have experienced first hand. There are mysteries of the world that to Yupiaq are unfathomable, such as the Ellam Yua, but these are accepted. Such mysteries keep them humble and ever mindful of the powers around them.”² Oscar Kawagly

² Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagly? ?

Life for the Yup'ik depended on hunting and gathering at the correct place at the correct times; their beliefs were and are a crucial underpinning to sustaining life as Yup'ik intellectual, scholar, philosopher, and teacher Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagly explains above. The Yup'ik also identified as distinct nations or societies, as did the Iñupiat. Anthropologist Ann Fienup-Reardon who has worked closely with Yup'ik elders for decades still uses the term “regional group” and explains, “the closest Yup'ik language equivalent for “regional group” is *nunalgutkellriit*, meaning, “literally people from the same village or place... people who consider themselves related to each other and share use of a common subsistence range.” They acknowledge shared territory, and speak a common dialect. And as Fienup Reardon notes, “although tiny by contemporary standards, each regional group viewed itself as socially and territorially distinct and was willing to wage war to remain so.”³ The nations were cohesive, and like the Iñupiat, had both allies and enemies with whom they were at war. A period of warfare called the Bow and Arrow Wars likely lasted at least 500 years, beginning around 1300 and lasting until shortly before the arrival of the first Russian fur traders. The arrival of Russian traders brought an end to the era of warfare, not because the Russians stopped the battles, but due to the devastation brought by introduced diseases. As Ann Fienup Riordan says most succinctly, “Death was stopped by death itself.”⁴

Russian incursions had far less impact on the Yup'ik than on the neighboring Unangan, or the Sugpiaq. Incursions into Yupik territory came towards the end of the period of Russian domination, when the Russian state had denounced its former conquest and enslavement methods. In the Yukon and Kuskokwim river drainages the Russians sought to establish fur

³ Fienup-Riordan, Ann and Alice Rearden, *Anguyiim Nalliini/Time of Warring, The History of Bow-and-Arrow Warfare in Southwest Alaska*, Fairbanks, UA Press, 2016. P. 18

⁴ Fienup-Riordan, *Time of Warring*, p. 16

trading posts more on the model of the English and French. But their supply lines were stretched thin, their few posts were isolated, and they often lacked competitive goods to trade.

III. Nations

Elder Charlie Moses explained in a recent article in the local paper the origin of his *Nunakauyarmiut* tribe, the people of Nelson Island: “Today, they are known as part of the Central Yup’ik Eskimo of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Region, and are those separated linguistically as having a Nelson Island (Qaluyaat) dialect.” Moses explains his understanding that the *Nunakauyarmiut* were all descended from one family, and through mutual agreement, were led by a Council of Elders. Their complex culture, their wisdom and values, and their belief in “Ellam Yua” sustained them in good years, and in bad. According to Moses, “They also practiced the conservation and preservation of their natural resources and environment, by never wasting, over harvesting, or destroying their land and/or waters.” The Yup’ik Elders called this history “*nutemllaq*.”⁵ Moses also emphasizes the role of trade as a part of the economy, in addition to subsistence. “During good seasons they were able to gather, prepare, store, or bury large quantities of dried fish, oil, meat, and edible plants.” “They traded these goods with other tribes, near and far.”⁶

IV. Yup’ik

The Yup’ik are the largest ethno-linguistic population in Southwest Alaska, with about 21,000 people. Like the Iñupiat, the Yup’ik people all speak the same language with distinct dialects. In Chevak the language is referred to as Cup’ik, and in Nunivak as Cup’ig, words that

⁵ Charlie Moses

⁶ Charlie Moses, *ibid*.

are also used in place of Yup'ik to denote a person of this group.⁷ A majority of residents still speak their traditional language, and the roughly 10,000 Yup'ik speakers are the largest groups of Native speakers today. Yupik areas have led the state in the development of Native language immersion schools.⁸

Yup'ik ancestors settled along the coast beginning at least 3,000 years ago. By 2,000 years ago they were living in large semi-permanent villages.⁹ Most rural communities today originated from traditional hunting, gathering or fishing camps. Ann Fienup-Riordan, perhaps the premier anthropologist working in the Yup'ik areas theorizes that 15,000 people inhabited the Southwest coastal area in the early 1800s, organized into approximately twelve sociopolitical units, ie Nations. "Each nation viewed itself as socially and territorially distinct."¹⁰ "Yup'ik and Cup'ik still depend upon subsistence fishing, hunting and gathering for food. Elders tell stories of traditional ways of life, as a way to teach the younger generations survival skills and their heritage."¹¹ The ancient settlements and seasonal camps contained small populations, with numerous settlements throughout the region consisting of extended families or small groups of families.

Perhaps a thousand years ago, the Yupik experienced a growing population. The Yupik population expanded in numbers, and began to expand geographically. Small groups moved up the Kuskokwim river, and travelled over the divide to the headwaters of the Nushagak River. Moving down the Nushagak, they settled in what is now the Bristol Bay region.

⁷ Alaska Native Language Center <https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/languages/cy/>

⁸ Alaska Native Language Center <https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/languages/cy/>

⁹ Funk

¹⁰ Another figure cites 13,000 in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region, 3,000 around Bristol Bay and 500 on Nunivak Island. 500. [1990, p. 153]

¹¹ <http://www.alaskanative.net/en/main-nav/education-and-programs/cultures-of-alaska/yupik-and-cupik/>

Now the Yup'ik population is represented in two regional corporations: The Calista Corporation controlling lands in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta, and the Bristol Bay Corporation, in a vital fishing area that has attracted a diverse Alaska Native and outsider population.

V. Community life and the Qasiq

Yup'ik community life revolved around the *qasiq*, (*qargi*, in Inupiat, called *kashim* by the Russians) which was both a place: a men's house or community house, and a lifestyle. Men lived in the *qasiq*, and young boys joined their male relatives there, "where they lived, worked, ate, bathed, slept and learned how to be men."¹² Men told stories while they worked on their tools and equipment. While men generally lived in the *qasiq*, women and children lived in individual *ena*, or small sod houses, built partly underground to conserve energy community ceremonies including with singing and dancing also took place in the *qasiq*.¹³

When one thinks of the clothing that might be necessary to survive in the sub-arctic, and to hunt and fish in all weather, one can begin to appreciate the achievement and contributions of women to arctic cultures. While Yup'ik men hunted for both fish, and land and sea mammals, women processed and scraped the skins to make not only clothing perfectly adapted for its function, but also boots and shoes, and the skin covering for boats.

Frank Andrews Sr. recalled that his ancestors "were never heavy with a tool kit." They carried in their minds what they needed to live rich lives in the harsh environment of the Bering Sea coast." Andrews generously shared and passed along his knowledge and wisdom towards the end of his life, working with Yup'ik translators Alice Rearden and Marie Meade and anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan to document his knowledge of life on the Bering Sea coast.¹⁴

¹² <http://www.alaskanative.net/en/main-nav/education-and-programs/cultures-of-alaska/yupik-and-cupik/>

¹³ <http://www.alaskanative.net/en/main-nav/education-and-programs/cultures-of-alaska/yupik-and-cupik/>

¹⁴ Frank Andrew, and Ann Fienup-Riordan. *Paitarkiutenka = My legacy to you*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008

As both he and his translators note, his knowledge was very specific to one particular area, in this case, the *Canineq* (lower coastal) area at the mouth of the Kuskokwim River. “When he talked about kayak building, tomcod fishing, or bird hunting, it was based on his own experience in the area surrounding *Kwigillingok*, where he spent his life.” As the authors acknowledge, “each individual possessed an enormous amount of information and remarkable skills in order to live life on the in the harsh environment.”¹⁵

VI. Nations

Historically a group of inhabitants constituted a village which was then named for the location. One or more villages might then also identify as a collective. “For example, *Qissunaq* village was occupied by *Qissunamiut*. The suffix -miut means ‘the people of.’ The place name plus the -miut suffix includes all people living in the main village and all people living in smaller family camps in the general vicinity of the village who assembled in the main village for events throughout the year.”¹⁶ These associated villages would constitute what Burch would identify as a Nation. Anthropologist Carolyn Funk, identified distinct nations among the Yup’ik, similar to those in the model identified by Burch among the Iñupiat further north.¹⁷

VII. Warfare

A. Significance of Warfare

During a period of nearly 500 years, from about 1300 to the early 1800s, the Yup’ik world was at war: The Bow and Arrow Wars. While it was not much talked about, again, Yup’ik elders were well aware of this past, and evidence is all around, in place names, and in remains of ancient defensive villages. The prevalence of warfare and battle has now been brought into the

¹⁵ Frank Andrew, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Caroline Funk, “Bow and Arrow Days,” *Ethnohistory* 57:4 (Fall 2010) 529

¹⁷ Funk, 2010, p. 528-529

light and further delineated in multiple stories recently compiled by anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordon and translated by Alice Reardon, working with local elders, with the support of Calista Corp. The existence of warfare and the telling details in the stories provide further evidence that there were indeed Yup'ik nations willing to go to war to defend the honor of their nations and their borders.¹⁸ Yup'ik villages formed regional alliances to defend against alliances of those they considered enemies and mounted attacks and revenge attacks. "The full range of conflict extended to encompass almost the entire Y-K Delta, and most Yupiit."¹⁹ Anthropologist Patricia Partnow, through interviews and oral histories, extends the range of the war onto the Alaska Peninsula where Yup'ik people gradually, or perhaps violently displaced Sugpiak.²⁰ Funk identifies regional social and political groups. "defined by territory, language, social affiliation, and historical relationships"²¹ As with the Inupiaq nations to the north identified by Burch, "each region has specific and distinctive cultural attributes, including dialect and local histories," even though "Commonalities in Yup'ik culture transcend local group definitions"²²

Scholars have identified differences between Inupiaq warfare and Yup'ik warfare. While Inupiaq warfare existed, it involved generally large number of continually shifting alliances. By contrast, Yup'ik warfare seems to have been regional, involving 'longstanding conflict between two groups of allied nations.'²³

In particular, again we have here the problem that by the time European or American observers arrived, the entire system of Nations was nearly entirely wiped out. Only the most

¹⁸ Ann Fienup-Riordan and Alice Reardon, *Anguyim Nalliini/Time of Warring, The History of Bow-and-Arrow Warfare in Southwest Alaska*, U. of Alaska Press 2016.

¹⁹ Funk, 526

²⁰ Patricia Partnow, *Making History: Alutiiq Sugpiaq life on the Alaska Peninsula*, U. of Alaska Press, 2001.

²¹ Funk, p. 526

²² Partnow, *Making History*

²³ Fienup-Riordan, *Time of Warring* p. 61

culturally aware would have been able to see the evidence. To others, the Yup'ik appeared to be a culture of small distributed settlements living close to the land and sea, with no political structure at all. And anthropologists asserted that this was not only a timeless culture, but in the development of the "Myth of the Peaceful Eskimo," that the Yupik had been living peacefully in these communities, little varying for thousands of years.²⁴ Yup'ik people have been telling anthropologists stories about warfare for a hundred years. The response from the anthropologists (until quite recently) was that hunter gatherers did not have warfare, and they had the evidence from their comparative culture research to prove it. Evidence disrupted their theories, so they disregarded it.

B. Evidence

1. Oral History

The "Bow and Arrow Wars," a period of violent warfare in cycles of attacks and retribution among and between various Yup'ik Nations began perhaps as early as the 1300s. In Yup'ik, oral histories, "more recent than mythic time, but before colonialism" which can be linked to known places in the landscape are called *qanemciq*. These are the stories recorded on the oral history tapes. Ann Fienup Riordan and Alice Rearden have assembled a range of oral histories about the Bow and Arrow Wars, collected over a long period of years by themselves and others, including material recorded during the ANCSA process. According to those who told the stories, "War was a continuous factor in the lives of their named ancestors."²⁵

²⁴ Fienup-Riordan, "Yup'ik Warfare and the myth of the peaceful Eskimo," *Eskimo Essays: Yup'ik Lives and how We See Them*, Rutgers, 1990, p. 146 [Google books link](#)

²⁵ Ann Fienup-Riordan and Alice Rearden, *Anguyim Nalliini/Time of Warring*,

C. Causes

1. Beliefs of Anthropologists

While many anthropologists have heard of these events, they have had difficulty believing them, as anthropologists long believed that there was no such thing as warfare among hunter gatherers, or micro-nations. With no context into which to place these stories, anthropologists at first saw these incidents as anomalies, or isolated and unexplainable. Then as they began to accept that there was indeed warfare, they have come up with various structural explanations: that warfare started possibly due to the incursion of “a violent Yupik nation or nations,” or a wandering group of especially hostile people. Or, that attacks were a response to Russian interruption of indigenous trade processes in the 1700s, even though only the Russian goods arrived in area, not the Russian’s themselves.²⁶ Or, that warfare was symptomatic of ongoing group fission and populations shifting.²⁷ Improved technology may have allowed for population growth, and spread of population inland and upriver. Conflict may have been between coastal and up-river people, involving competition over resources.²⁸

2. Yupik reasons

Yet, in the oral histories, Fienup Riordan notes, the Yup’ik themselves never cite competition for resources as a reason; instead it was always revenge for “insults, adultery, theft, murder, or other intolerable acts of aggression.”²⁹ According to Paul John: “They evidently went to war with one another because people sought revenge for their relatives, because they felt defensive, and not because of food or land” And Joshua Phillip agreed, “The land was not the issue, they were just killing each other. The concept of taking land away did not exist in the

²⁶ Caroline Funk, “Bow and Arrow Days”, *Ethnohistory* 57:4 (Fall 2010)

²⁷ Funk

²⁸ Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*.

²⁹ AFP, 19

minds of these people.”³⁰ It’s also worth noting, however, that the stories of a wandering group of especially hostile people are still told and still being investigated by anthropologists. Many Yup’ik and anthropologists identify this “Warrior Nation,” as the *Aglurmiut*. One thesis suggests that they were originally located on the Middle Yukon, and after fighting with people there, migrated to the coastal area, and again, after fighting, eventually migrated to the Bristol Bay area. It is, indeed a fascinating story, sometimes associated with the archeological site called *Nunalleg*. Linguists remind us that *nunalleg* itself is a generic term meaning “old village” and discussions about the real name of the site and its association with the *Aglurmiut* are ongoing.³¹

D. Evidence from the stories

1. Living in fear

Stories, and oral testimony together with place names, are artifacts of an entire regional culture of warfare. The stories and testimony of violence in *At the time of the Warring* tell of the Yup’ik specifically training boys as warriors; training for lethal attacks.³²

Southwest Alaska was in many respects a place of fear, where one always had to look out for marauding others. The village of Tuntunak, built silent stone statues standing guard on a hill, the ‘pretend people.’ According to one account, “if a hunter failed to return, people assumed he had been killed by their enemies.” People located their villages defensible positions. “People were constantly alert, watching for the enemy”³³ They tell of people always on the lookout for attackers, living in fear, posting guards while subsistence harvesting, and being careful not to get too far from home. People were always aware of the constant danger from hostile raids, “at

³⁰ Fienup-Riordan, *Warring* 19

³¹ Excavation at the site is on-going. See Pratt, Kenneth L., “Deconstructing the Aglurmiut Migration: An Analysis of Accounts from the Russian America period to the present.” *Alaska Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 11, nos. 1&2 (2013), 17. And Dr. Rick Knecht and Dr Charlotta Hillerdal “Nunalleg” <https://nunalleg.wordpress.com/about/>

³² Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*

³³ Fienup-Riordan, *Warring* p21, p. 24

smaller sites and camping areas people carefully circumscribed their activity to guard against attack.”³⁴ Raids occurred only every twenty years or so, a generation, waiting for the sons of the murdered from the last raid to grow up and retaliate.

The goal of each attack was total annihilation of the enemy, and the usual mode was the sneak attack, perhaps at night, seeking to catch the men in the village unawares in their qargi. The attackers sought to block the doors, set the place on fire, and attack those who fled. To protect themselves, people dug escape tunnels from the qargi to a river bank, or a nearby swamp.

For Yup’ik over these centuries, life was in many ways defined by always looking out for attackers. Always saving up revenge. Since villages were so small, those that were nearly totally destroyed might wait a generation, living with the animus that demanded revenge, before mounting a return attack. So an attack could come at any time.

2. Technology of war

The stories also tell of technologies developed for warfare including bows and arrows designed and made to kill men. And, knowing that attacks could come at any time, they built defensive villages, elevated above the surrounding ground. Sometimes they built two rows of houses facing each other with a corridor between, closed off at both ends for protection. Qargi were routinely built with escape tunnels, and the Yup’ik built houses with underground escape tunnels. [Cite specific stories] Numerous stories describe people making last minute escapes through escape tunnels. And testimonies describe remains of tunnels in various places.³⁵

E. Archeological evidence

The stories were long ignored, easy to ignore because individually they sound so fantastical, or exaggerated. But the stories and the place names are corroborated by archeological

³⁴Fienu-Riordan, *Warring*. 21; 24

³⁵ Fienu-Riordan, *Warring*, 22

remains. Researchers have also found some written mentions from early visitors to the area. Researchers at the *Nunallaq* archeological site have found a layer of remains that were indeed completely destroyed by fire, representing the remains described in the oral history as the assailants “burned the sod houses down to nothing.”³⁶ It has been dated to around 1660. This is a much earlier date that anthropologists were able to find from oral histories. If this is the case, then the Bow and Arrow wars continued from the 1600s to the mid-1800s as a series of back and forth violence, attacks and escapes, and shifting alliances and enmities.

It should be noted that there has not been a lot of archeological investigation in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta, especially compared to areas like Kodiak Island and the Aleutians, or locations like Point Hope. Archeologists theorize earliest occupation at one site, Agaligmiut at the mouth of the Kuskokwim dates to 1300 with its destruction between 1500 and 1650. Riordan quoting oral history sources says “the destruction of Agiligmiut occurred during a period when warfare was already well-established.” So she suggests “warfare waged in SW Alaska for at least 300 yrs prior to 1800 and probably much longer.”³⁷ It should be noted that the story of the Aglurmiut, a “Warrior people” and their supposed migration into the Bristol Bay area is not necessarily agreed upon by all anthropologists. I am still sorting out my own opinion.³⁸

F. Testimony of observers

Russian explorer Zagoskin in 1842 described “an earthen fort” 46 yds. in dia. With walls 5 ft. high and 4 ft. thick.³⁹

³⁶ Funk, 2010, 556

³⁷ Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*, p. 18.

³⁸ Pratt, “the Aglurmiut Migration” 17.

³⁹ Cited in Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*, 23-24

Edward Nelson, one of the earliest American explorers, on an expedition for the Smithsonian 1877-81, reported that the Yup'ik he visited believed they were in constant danger from hostile raids, and he observed the sites of some of the defensive villages. He noted, "Formerly, the constant danger from hostile raids caused the people to choose locations for their dwellings which were easy of defense. This is demonstrated by the sites of ruins of the coast of Bering sea and the ruins of former Eskimo villages on the Arctic coast of Siberia, northwestward of Bering strait." thus, "built on highest points of islands near the shore, or on high capes or peninsula commanding a wide view of both sea and land."⁴⁰ Moravian missionary John Kilbuck noted the continued existence of "fortresses" at present day Hooper Bay even in 1911.⁴¹

G. Thoughts

Note: these are my own reflections, open to discussion

Anthropologist Ann Fienup Riordan questions the nature of violence in Yup'ik society, as compared with theories of other anthropologists thinking about subsistence cultures. But a larger question is the nature of violence itself, and the effect of this violent culture on people's psyches. *A Time of Warring* paints a picture of a culture that was always afraid of attack, a culture which trained its boys first and foremost as warriors. (Although it's not clear if it is all boys or just some boys.) The Yup'ik as described in this series of stories are the Spartans of the sub-arctic. In the Yup'ik society presented from the point of view of warfare, men were expected to respond and go on attacks if asked, not unlike the aggressive violent world portrayed in 'Game of Thrones,' or 'The Vikings.'

Generational trauma has become an issue related to repeated epidemics beginning in the mid -19th century, and to the traumas of assimilation, language loss, and boarding schools.

⁴⁰ Nelson, p. 244

⁴¹ AFP quoting Nelson, 1899;241, and quoting Kilbuck.

Southwest Alaska had the highest rated of TB in the world in the 1940s and '50s, and while antibiotics to cure TB were discovered in the 1950s, patients were still hospitalized into the 1960s.⁴² But what effect did 500 years of back and forth attacks do to people? Building defensive villages? Every house with an escape tunnel?⁴³

VIII. Geographic spread, to Nushagak river.

A. Geography, Spread of people and warfare east and south

Warfare and displacement could and did have ripple effects over a large geographic area. Fienup-Riordan hypothesized “population pressure from the north as Malimiut moving south across Seward Peninsula pushed others south. Warfare and raids drove Yup’ik people over the Kilbuck Mountains, the divide between the Kuskokwim and the Bering Sea drainage, and the Nushagak and the Bristol Bay area to the Southeast just prior to the arrival of the Russians.”⁴⁴ In the Bristol Bay area, they began to displace the Sugpiak-Alutiiq, as discussed separately by Patricia Partnow, studying the Sugpiak-Alutiiq on the Alaska Peninsula.⁴⁵

It’s possible to see also, within the generalized warfare, another picture, that of a “warrior group” a particularly contentious small nation that started out on the lower Yukon, and migrated over the years, after battling and being pushed out by others, until finally ending up first on the Nushagak River, then on the Alaska Peninsula. Their story is one of displacement

⁴² Linguist Michael Krauss has said in interviews that he completed his important map of language areas in Alaska by interviewing people, especially TB patients, from all over Alaska at the Alaska Native Service Hospital. http://www.newsminer.com/news/local_news/fairbanks-couple-reflects-on-lifetime-devoted-to-study-of-alaska/article_9d81999c-8939-11e6-bf9b-bf1957547077.html

⁴³ Mary Annette Pember, “Intergenerational Trauma: Understanding Natives Inherited Pain,” Indian Country Media Network, 2016.

⁴⁴ Fienup-Riordan, *Warring*, 61

⁴⁵ Patricia Partnow, *Making History: Alutiiq Sugpiaq life on the Alaska Peninsula*, U of Alaska Press, 2001.

IX. Trade and international relations

There were a number of trade routes through Yup'ik territories: From Lake Iliamna on the Alaska Peninsula, through territory of the Upper Kuskokwim, and then down the Kuskokwim.⁴⁶ And from the middle Yukon, over the important portage to the middle Kuskokwim.⁴⁷

Pastolik was the Yup'ik settlement closest to Inupiaq territory there is some evidence that *Pastulurmiut* acted as traders, gathering furs, seal products from other Yup'ik and trading them either to Chukchi directly or through the people of King Island, Sledge Island or Big Diomede into the Russian market, in exchange for Russian and Asian goods. They may also have fought with the Chukchi. There is evidence of a kind of defensive armor that might have come from Russia

X. Arrival of Russians

The Russian colonial imperial effort was entirely aimed at the fur resource. In the earliest years of the invasion of Alaska Native lands, the Russians enslaved the Aleuts, and forced them to hunt for furs, mostly otter. However, by the time they moved into Yup'ik territory in the Interior of Alaska, they were intent on establishing trading posts and capturing the wealth of fur which has already been traded from the area through Indigenous trading networks. The Native people were already tied into the international commodity market for furs. Yup'ik trappers had already increased their focus on trapping for trade, in response to the indirect demand of the fur market in China. Trappers on the Kuskokwim traded their furs to the Inupiaq or Chukchi traders at *Pastolik*, while those on the Yukon probably traded into the markets at *Sisualik*. By whatever

⁴⁶ Raymond L. Collins, "Dichinane'k' Hwt'ana: A history of the people of the Upper Kuskokwim who live in Nikolai and Telida, Alaska." Sally Jo Collins, ed. McGrath, Alaska, 2000, 2004.

⁴⁷ Bockstoce, *Fur Frontiers*.

route, the furs ended up in China. The Russians effort was to claim a middle man position for themselves.⁴⁸

The Russian colony headquartered in Sitka was never very profitable. They had overhunted and depleted the otter in the Aleutians, and in Prince William Sound. The Tlingit in Southeast put up extreme resistance, attacking the Russian hunting parties, and preventing them from hunting otters in their territory.

As the Russians began to look for opportunities in other parts of Alaska, they they established a fur trading post, Alexandrovski Redoubt, on Bristol Bay in 1818. In 1833 they built a fort on Norton Sound near the mouth of the Yukon River, a post they called St. Michaels, in Yup'ik territory.⁴⁹ In 1837 The Russian-American Company established the post at Ikogmiut, on the Yukon, to further their efforts to intercept the trade in furs from the Interior. Continuing this effort, they then built a post on Yukon at Ikogmiut.

“Today’s village sits on the site of an old fur trading post. The Russian-American Company, one of the largest maritime fur trade companies in the world, set up the post in 1837. Due to the amount of wildlife in the area trapping remained an important part of the culture, and while the fur industry has declined in recent years, many residents still earn some income from trapping. The settlement became an Eskimo village called “Ikogmiut” meaning “people of the point.” Russian Mission became home to the first Russian Orthodox mission in Interior Alaska which was built in 1857 by Russian-Aleut priest Jacob Netzuetov. The priest dubbed the mission, “Pokrovskaya Mission” and the village became known as Russian Mission in 1900. At one time there were two villages named Russian Mission, but eventually the village along the Kuskokwim was renamed Chuathbaluk.”⁵⁰

A Russian American Company trader also established a post on the Upper Kuskokwim, near the present village of Sleetmute. “Not long after the construction of Lukin's Odinochka, a smallpox epidemic broke out on the Kuskokwim River delta. Eskimos correctly blamed the introduction of the disease on the Russians, but some incorrectly believed that it was a

⁴⁸ See Bockstoce for details

⁴⁹ See Bockstoce,

⁵⁰ Calista Villages of Southwest: http://www.calistacorp.com/shareholders/communities#.VziPYr7_FQE

purposeful act. In retaliation, Eskimos killed Russian American Company employees at Russian Mission on the Yukon River in 1839.”⁵¹

In 1842 the Russian America Co. sent trader and explorer Lavrentiy Zagoskin from St. Michael to explore the Yukon River for the Russians. The following material from the journals of Zagoskin, as paraphrased from the work of by Ray Collins, historian of the Upper Kuskokwim, suggests the far ranging trade that all of the Indigenous Nations were already engaged in. Certainly the variety of furs must have attracted Zagoskin’s interest:

Zagoskin arrived Nulato January, 1843. The following May continuing, up the Yukon, he and his party met people from the Innoko River. From them Zagoskin learned that beaver and fox were abundant in their country and that these Indians either went out to the Yukon River with their furs to trade for white and black beads, shells, metal and tobacco, or took them down the Innoko River to trade with people at Holikachuk and Shageluk people. They were also acquainted with a large river to the south (the Kuskokwim) and from traders there they obtained clothing such as the Russians were wearing (indicating they were trading with the people of the Upper Kuskokwim.) Zagoskin's party met a party of 14 canoes further up the river, people returning from trading at Nuchalawaya, Each of the boats was loaded with marten and wolverine and a large bundle of beaver. They apparently were not happy about the prospects of the Russians interfering with this trade.⁵²

The most remote Russian post was Kolmakovsky Redoubt on the Upper Kuskokwim River

But the Russian American Co. was not ready to give up. A year later, the company constructed a new post, across the river, called Kolmakovskiy Redoubt. Russian explorer Lavrentiy Zagoskin stopped over at Kolmakovskiy Redoubt during his exploration of the Yukon and Kuskokwim river valleys in 1842. Russians seriously wanted a piece of the action in the trade in furs. However, Due to the difficult navigation on K. River, Russians transported goods

⁵¹ <http://www.akhistorycourse.org/southwest-alaska/1743-1867-era-of-russian-violence>

⁵² Collins, “Dichinanek' Hwt'ana”

overland, first from Nushagak, then from St. Michael. This was essentially the traditional indigenous trade route. At the remote end of supply lines, the Russians could never keep a stock of trade goods at competitive prices. They ended up serving as an exchange location for exchange of goods between upper Kuskokwim, Deg Hitan, and Yup'ik peoples.

XI. End of war

The Yup'ik stories of the Bow and Arrow wars end with stories of men who were brave enough to challenge the status quo and put an end to the fighting. QUOTE Need to add specific stories, here.

The end of warfare also coincided with the arrival of Russians to the area, not because the Russians stopped the battles, but due to the devastation brought by introduced diseases. Although the availability of some Russian goods did have an effect on life in the Y-K Delta, the fact that the Russians could never manage to navigate the Kuskokwim mouth to supply their posts meant that coastal Yup'ik experienced little direct interference in their lives, except, of course, that the arrival of outsiders brought devastating diseases. As Ann Fienup Riordan says most succinctly, "Death was stopped by Death itself."⁵³

A. Disease

Influenza was recorded in the region as early as 1830-31, and an epidemic was reported in Nushagak in 1832. As we have seen, the route from Nushagak to the Upper Kuskokwim was a major trade route, and a major access point for Russian trade goods. So not surprisingly, smallpox spread to the interior, and specifically to Lukn's Odinochka. As the Alaska History and Culture's website narrative explains it:

⁵³ Fienup Reardon, Warring, p. 2]

“Not long after the construction of Lukin's Odinochka, a smallpox epidemic broke out on the Kuskokwim River delta. Eskimos correctly blamed the introduction of the disease on the Russians, but some incorrectly believed that it was a purposeful act. In retaliation, Eskimos killed Russian American Company employees at Russian Mission on the Yukon River in 1839. When Lukin learned that an attack was also planned on his Odinochka he was able to prevent it.”⁵⁴

This is a little confusing, as it does not specify when or where exactly smallpox broke out on the Kuskokwim Delta and contains little detail on the attack at Russian Mission. But there were repeated small pox epidemics in 1838-39, 1852-53, and then 1861; influenza and measles decimated populations in 1900 and then Spanish influenza, 1919. Some groups like the *unalirmiut* on Norton Sound were completely wiped out. Others reduced to less than half, Pastuliq from over 250 to 116.⁵⁵ After 1838-39 epidemic, according to Fienup-Riordon, “the net effect was tremendous dispersal and shift in regional population with many individuals and local families seeking refuge with kinsmen or partners in other regions.” As she says, “it is a “testament to the strength of Yup’ik oral tradition that in the face of such devastation so many details of precontact Yup’ik life and bow and arrow warfare in particular endure in the memories of contemporary elders.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ <http://www.akhistorycourse.org/southwest-alaska/1743-1867-era-of-russian-violence>

⁵⁵ Fienup Reardon, *Warring*, p. 17

⁵⁶ Fienup Reardon, *Warring*, p. 17. See also Robert Fortune, *Chills and Fever: Health and Disease in the Early History of Alaska*. U. of Alaska Press, 1989.