KIĐIKMIUT UKPULIIVUT: AN IÑUPIAQ FRAMEWORK FOR BRIDGING SPIRITUALITY AND STEWARDSHIP IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

by

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Abstract

Despite decades of traction and respect that Indigenous Knowledge has gained, Western and other sources of academic sciences diverge at the point of what is acceptable, what is real, and what is valid regarding Indigenous spiritual belief systems interwoven throughout Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous management practices. My project uses Kiŋikmiut[1] ukpuliivut[2] and iniqtautit[3] as a framework to bridge the understanding for people outside our culture about how our spiritual belief system and customary Iñupiaq[4] laws ensure balance and sustainability[5] of the resources that our people depend upon. In this work, I seek to address the misconceptions that dominant Western scientific worldviews have of Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous spirituality within natural resource management. Through studying Kiŋikmiut oral histories of our elders, my project builds a framework for Kiŋikmiut governance, which maintains social order and balance in our community and our spirit world, especially as it pertains to our hunting, fishing, and gathering way of life. As an Iñupiaq Indigenous researcher whose epistemology comes from the Kiŋikmiut worldview, my research authentically presents the reciprocal relationships between our people and all living and nonliving things from our taġiuq[6], nuna[7], pitaksrat[8], and siḷa[9] and all that they provide for us. This project offers an inside view of *Kiŋikmiut Ukpuliivut: An Iñupiaq Framework for Bridging Spirituality and Stewardship in*

[1] Kiŋikmiut means the people from Kiŋigin. Kiŋigin means the high place named for the mountain that stands behind our village. The post base -miut means the people of that place or tribe.
[2] Ukpuliivut are our spiritual beliefs that are woven into our Indigenous Knowledge system and our traditional management practices.
[3] Iniqtautit are our traditional laws that govern our Kiŋikmiut ways of life.
[4] Iñupiaq means the real people. Iñupiat are the plural form of the word Iñupiaq.
[5] The word sustainability is used in relation to the framework of this project, with the understanding that the health, wellbeing, and abundance of natural resources is inextricably linked to our *Siḷam Inua* and the balance that is maintained by adhering to our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit. This concept has also been explored and described by Dr. Oscar Kawagley in the Yup'ik way. (A. O. Kawagley 1995).
[6] Taġiuq is ocean.
[7] Nuna is land.
[8] Pitaksrat means animals.
[9] Siḷa is our air/weather spirit that extends into the universe.

Natural Resource Management for the scientific community to learn from and better understand Indigenous ways of knowing in natural resource management and beyond. It presents recommendations for transforming natural resource management frameworks to build equity and respect for Indigenous Knowledge and traditional management practices to ensure adaptive, flexible, holistic management of our traditional food resources[10].

[10] Our traditional food resources are the fish, wildlife, and other resources, such as marine mammals, fish, birds, duck eggs, shellfish like crab, wild greens, berries, and more, harvested throughout all seasons of the year in accordance with our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit.

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[11] Quyanaavak means thank you very much. The feeling carries a much deeper gratitude than what the English "thank you" conveys. The heartfelt gratitude comes from deep within us.

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Table of Contents

Positionality Statement

Uaŋa Uginiisi Atuanaasii Piyiina Aŋnavagaq. Kiŋikmiuguuruŋa. Inupiaguuruŋa. Nualuaŋmiitiġa Vernae Angnaboogok. I am Iñupiaq from the village of Kiŋigin. I am the daughter of Edith Towatook Pinson, the granddaughter of Roland Kokituk and Edna Ayayat Angnaboogok, and the great granddaughter Jessie and David Aġiuqanna and Burt and Kate Aŋnavagaq. I approached this work as a researcher from within my own culture, grounded in the Kiŋikmiut worldview. As an Indigenous scholar and Tribal member, my positionality ensures that the collection, interpretation, and presentation of our Indigenous Knowledge, ukpuliivut, and iniqtautit is authentic and respectful. The validity of this work is rooted in Indigenous relationality to my family, our community, my ancestors, and our future generations. I was raised to respect the interconnected relationships we hold with our taġiuq, nuna, pitaksrat and siḷa of which we are a part of.

As Brayboy (2000) emphasized, "Indigenous people, both as researchers and participants, hold the keys to getting, analyzing, and reporting 'good data' in qualitative and ethnographic studies examining their lived experiences." Wilson (2008) also affirms that Indigenous researchers working in relationality to our people, our histories, and our culture ensure that our data is accessed and analyzed authentically and respectfully and reported with integrity. This approach is deeply in line with my experience and my framework for this project. I was raised in the village of Kiŋigin where I was taught to learn, understand, respect, and embody our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit. Our spiritual beliefs and customary laws are not abstract; they guide our decisions and actions in life and serve as the strongest ethical foundation for this project.

Throughout my life, my grandparents and my mom spoke our Kiŋikmiut Iñupiaq language. Our Indigenous Knowledge and cultural values are embedded in our Iñupiaq language. Our language carries intricate and highly sophisticated meanings and values that cannot be fully conveyed or translated into the English language without losing their spiritual and cultural context. Moreover, my mom has worked closely with me to advise me and ensure that the interpretations of this work are authentic and translated and transcribed respectfully. This is important to protect the integrity of this project.

This project is guided by my relational accountability to Kiŋikmiut, our ancestors, our elders, and our future generations. This relational accountability was demonstrated by my mom who worked alongside me to translate and interpret the Kiŋikmiut oral history recordings from the Section 14(h)(1) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971. Our Indigenous Knowledge, ukpuliivut and iniqtautit is sacred and belongs collectively to Kiŋikmiut. Some of our spiritual beliefs and customary laws, especially as they pertain to sacred places, ceremonial practices, and burial sites are not meant to be shared publicly, but to be safeguarded by our people.

Background

Kiŋigin History and Culture

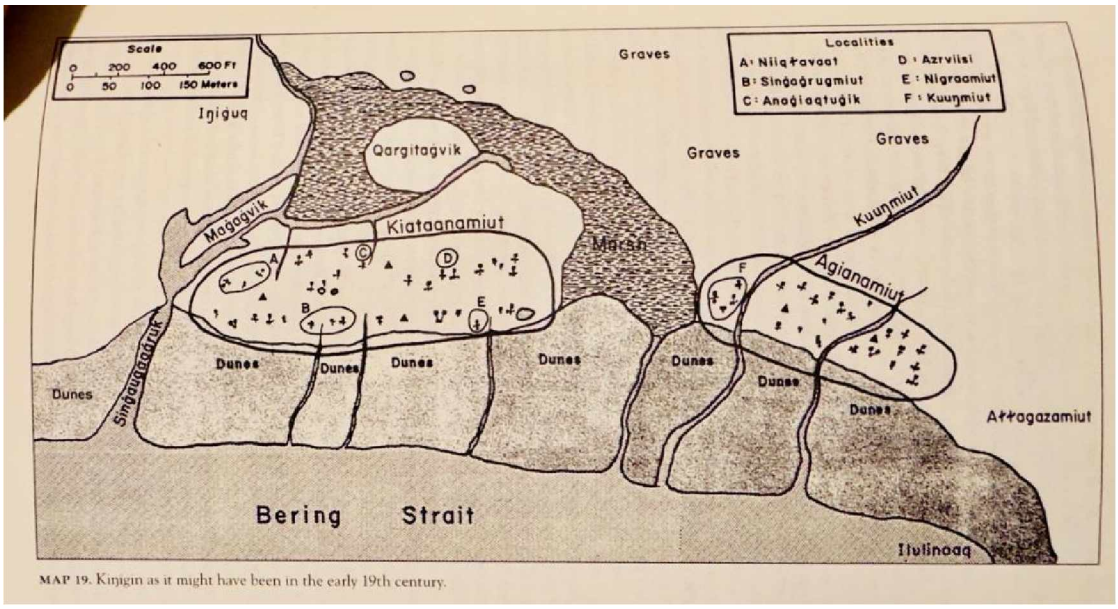

Figure 1: Kiŋigin Map. Source: Burch 2006.

Kiŋigin is our traditional Iñupiaq place name for the village of Wales, Alaska, formerly named Cape Gvozdev by Russian Explorer Mikhail Gvozdev in 1732 and renamed by James Cook of the British Royal Navy in 1778 to Cape Prince of Wales, Alaska after they "discovered" us (Fisher 1984; Cook 1821). Kiŋigin is one of the oldest continuously inhabited Iñupiaq villages in Alaska. Archaeologists and anthropologists have radiocarbon-dated the Qaṙġitaġvik site to 390-600 A.D., or 1,600-1,700 years old (Harritt 2004). However, our cultural history and span of existence is not dependent on external validation, as the Knowledge of our existence as Kiŋikmiut has been transferred orally from generation to generation for thousands of years.

As our parents, grandparents, and ancestors have told us, aipaani[12] the village of Kiŋigin was made up of three separate villages: Qaṙġitaġvik, Kiataanamiut, and Againamiut, which each

[12]Aipaani is the Iñupiaq word meaning: a long time ago.

had their own qargi[13]. Kiataanamiut and Agianamiut were separated by Sinŋaugaaġruk River. Greist (1961) noted that Qarġitaġvik was inhabited until around 1845, then it became an abandoned settlement located behind Kiataanamiut. A conflict between the two settlements caused the Qarġitaŋmiut[14] to flee and abandon their village all at once, after a man of one of one of the settlements killed someone from the other settlement. An aŋatkuq[15] cast a heavy fog. They tied up the muzzles of all their dogs to keep them quiet and fled to Pt. Hope and Barrow in the night (Pinson 2016; Seetook and Seetook 1976). From then on, Kiŋigin consisted of two villages, Kiataanamiut and Agianamiut. My ataata's family was Againamiut and my aaka's family was Kiataanamiut. I grew up Againamiut.

A creek separated Kiataanamiut and Agianamiut, with Kiataanamiut being the larger, more powerful village on the north side of town. Agianamiut was located up on the hill on the south side of town. Each village had two qargik. One of Kiataanamiut qargik was named Kaiyuwatuuq, and the other name is unknown. The other two qargik of Agianamiut were named Ugiyuataġik and Tutuŋaliq (Burch 2006). In 1854, these two villages still held strong animosity between one another and occasionally fought (E. W. Nelson 1900, 257). By the 1920s, Kiataanamiut and Agianamiut remained separate villages with their own qargi but were allowed to freely interact with one-another, where intermarriage also took place (Curtis 1930). At present day, Kiŋigin consists of one village, but still associates each side of the village with the old settlements of Kiataanamiut and Agianamiut to describe the side of town that one resides, on the north or south end.

[13] The qargi is the men's ceremonial house, which is used only by men to work on hunting equipment, tools of all kinds, sleds, and weapons. It also holds ceremonial celebrations and dances. Qargik is the dual form of qargi.
[14] Qarġitaŋmiut translates to the people of Qarġitaġvik, as the post base –miut indicates the people of a certain place or tribe.
[15] An aŋatkuq is a shaman. Aŋatkut is the plural form meaning shamans.

Our elders said Kiŋigin was chosen as a prime location of our village for the abundance of marine mammals that supplied the needs of our whole community throughout the hunting seasons (Seetook and Seetook 1976). Our umialit[16], or respected whaling captains and leaders, took care of our people by hunting to provide enough food for the entire community. All the edible parts of the animal were prepared and stored away for winter and upcoming celebrations. Every inch of our resources was utilized so that nothing was wasted. The skins, bones, teeth, iłgauik[17], iuluq[18], and even hooves, were used to make tools, hunting equipment, and expressions of art for sale and trade. Mutual respect for our land, animals, and natural environment was maintained, for each holds a spirit that determined the destiny of the hunters' success and bountiful gifts from our creator (Angnaboogok 2016).

The arrival of outsiders & the distrust that followed

The arrival of the first outsiders brought with them alcohol, illness, and tragedy to Kiŋikmiut that forever tainted our relationship with naluaġmiu[19]. The Yankee Whalers arrived in the mid 1800's and introduced our people to alcohol, swindlers, rape of our women and young girls, and tragedy. The worst tragedy of all occurred in 1877. The late Buster Seelkoke (Seelkoke 1975) recalled the tragedy that occurred in the spring of 1877, just off the coast of Kiŋigin, a massacre where 13 Kiŋikmiut aŋuniaqtit[20] were killed at the hands of Captain George Gilley and his crew. These Kiŋikmiut aŋuniaqtit had gone aboard Gilley's small whaling ship, the William H. Allen, to trade for some goods. The first order of business, insisted by the captain, was to furnish them cheap liquor as a prerequisite to trade, knowing that he could make better bargains

[16] An umialik is an expert whaling captain, hunter, and leader who earned this status through experience and acknowledgement of this status. Umialit is the plural form of umialik.
[17] Iłgauik are the intestines.
[18] Iuluq is the Iñupiaq word for the reindeer leg or bowhead whale tendons that are used to make thread.
[19] Naluaġmiu are white people.
[20] Aŋuniaqtit are hunters.

with them under the influence (W. T. Lopp 1900). The trading began with an Umialik, who had four wives asking for four needles, one for each of his wives. Captain Gilley refused to trade four needles, stating that it was too much to give. However, the Umialik knew that the value of his trade was sufficient for four needles. [This tragedy occurred after Kiŋikmiut learned from previous trading experiences to stand up to protect our people and refused to be taken advantage of with cheap liquor in exchange for furs from swindlers that often seduced and raped their women and daughters (Greist 1961)].

Captain Gilley proceeded to beat the Umialik down in price for the traded goods including the finest pelts of furs in exchange for sewing and hunting implements. From there, tension heightened and the Umialik became angered. In an instant, Captain Gilley ordered his men to kill all Kiŋikmiut men onboard. Gilley's actions to fight and kill our people were influenced by a recent incident [where according to Gilley] some Kiŋikmiut men had recently gone aboard another whaling ship and took possession of it to obtain a barrel of molasses (W. T. Lopp 1900). This fueled Gilley's actions to attack and kill the Kiŋikmiut men onboard. His sudden attack left our people completely unprepared to defend themselves. Many scrambled for their lives and tried to escape. Those who ran to hide onboard the ship were quickly pulled out by gaff hooks. Thirteen Kiŋikmiut aŋuniaqtit were shot, stabbed, and clubbed to death (Seelkoke 1975), then thrown overboard. Their wives came out in qayaqs[21] to rescue the wounded and retrieve their dead husbands who were thrown overboard, leaving the village with great tragedy and great loss, as these men were the providers who hunted for their families at a time when our survival relied completely on hunting, fishing, and gathering traditional foods from the land and

[21] Qayaq is a traditional Iñupiaq boat. Its frame is made from driftwood or whale bones (in the past) covered by ugruk (bearded seal skins) with a small opening at the top.

the sea. Three wounded Kiŋikmiut men survived to tell the truth of what happened to their families and our community (W. T. Lopp 1900).

These 13 Kiŋikmiut aŋuniaqtit were buried together in one mass grave on the Kiataanamiut side of town marked with the jawbones of the bowhead whale. Each man who lost his life was honored and represented with one whale jawbone raised over their grave (Seelkoke 1975). After the incident, Captain Gilley was going to hide what happened. However, word started to spread about a bloody incident involving Captain Gilley and Kiŋikmiut. Soon after, Captain Gilley released a one-sided, false story of what happened, and as the years went by, other stories were published in news articles, books, and other publications (Andrews, Clarence L. 1939; Bockstoce 1995; Greist 1961; Lopp-Smith 2001; Taliaferro 2006). However, none of the stories published told the true story of what happened, according to the surviving Kiŋikmiut men who lived to tell the story.

After this tragic incident, whaling ship captains would not anchor or stop in Kiŋigin noting that our people had a bad reputation among whalers and traders (Lopp and Thornton 1891). The resentment for the white man[22] was strongly felt among Kiŋikmiut at the time of the first missionaries, William T. Lopp and Harrison R. Thornton's, arrival in 1890. Lopp and Thornton (1891) said, "…since that time [1877], the place had been avoided by white men as if plague stricken." However, upon his arrival, Lopp said, "Natives were peaceable, friendly, and intelligent instead of ferocious, hostile, and stupid as we were led to expect." However, animosity in the village was strongly expressed against the mission teachers initially.

[22] The "white man" in this context is a label not of racial identity so much as political identity - an opposition between the colonizing outsiders and the Kiŋikmiut. It is also a literal translation of the Iñupiaq word naluaġmiu and often how our elders referred to who the colonizers were when they came.

George Ootenna was born in 1876, the year before this tragedy. His father and uncle were both killed by Captain Gilley and crew. He resented white men because his family was slain to death by them, and he remembered growing up being hungry often. Elingnok's[23] eldest son Iyatunguk was one of the Kiŋikmiut men that died at the hands of Captain Gilley (E. Lopp 1893). Elingnok and his wife grieved heavily for their eldest son who was a successful hunter that helped provide for their family. Three of Eluksuk's brothers were also killed in the Gilley massacre. The surviving families of those killed by Captain Gilley and crew held the most resentment toward naluaġmiu (E. Lopp 1893).

The surviving family members could not take Captain Gilley and crew's lives to avenge their loved ones' deaths. This caused them great suffering, shame, and sorrow, which later led to vengeance on other naluaġmiu. The following lives were taken by Kiŋikmiut as a direct result of the 1877 tragedy. In 1893, three young Kiŋikmiut men murdered one of the first missionaries of Kiŋigin, Harrison Thornton (W. T. Lopp 1933). Thornton did not get along with Kiŋikmiut. He treated them inferior as the white Americans treated African Americans during this era. Thornton encouraged the Lopps to stop feeding Kiŋikmiut the same kind of foods they ate, stop visiting them, and stop inviting Iñupiaq men and their wives to their home (Lopp and Lopp 1892-1893). Thornton often used his revolver to intimidate them and even used it on schoolchildren (E. Lopp 1893). He threatened Kiŋikmiut that the Bear and Revenue Cutter would destroy their village with its guns if anything were to happen to him (Jean Ray 1975). The motive of Thornton's murder was fueled by the way he treated our people and the unfulfilled obligation to avenge the deaths of their family members killed in the Gilley massacre. Maurice Montgomery (1963) noted, "The circumstances of the murder of Harrison Thornton illustrate clearly the nature of

[23] Elingnok is pronounced Iliŋniq and was also spelled Elignok and Alignok by ethnographers/missionaries.

Eskimo law." Although Kiŋikmiut did not carry out anything wrong in the murder of Thornton, per our customary laws, his murder endangered the community with the impending retaliation of Captain Healy and others who Thornton swore would destroy the village if anything were to happen to him. Therefore, Kiŋikmiut Umialit sentenced the three young men to death for the murder of Thornton and killed them themselves.

Then In 1898, Aasaaruk, the son of one of the 13 Kiŋikmiut men also killed in the Gilley massacre, avenged his father's death after he became a young man. He was just a baby on his mother's back when his father was killed. When he grew old enough to understand what happened to his father, his mother told him he would have to avenge the death of his father (W. T. Lopp 1900). This was the customary law for Kiŋikmiut of his time. When Aasaaruk became 21 years of age, he shot a naluaġmiu man named Frank Boyd, who was a miner in Kotzebue at the time. Then in 1899, two Kiŋikmiut men killed two naluaġmiu near Kotzebue Sound to avenge the death of their relatives also killed by Gilley and crew (E. Lopp 1899). These deaths were a result of heavy mourning and vengeful feelings of the surviving family members of the 13 Kiŋikmiut victims of the Gilley massacre (W. T. Lopp 1933).

Generations of Kiŋikmiut lived with this tragic loss. We were taught to respect this mass grave, to never bother it or build anything in its place. Too many publications were written from the perspective of Gilley. Greist emphasized that much has been written about Kiŋikmiut about this tragedy that is far from the truth. Montgomery said, "The whole question of the history of missionary work among the Eskimos has yet to be investigated."

The truth behind the "Gilley Affair" must be told a from our perspective because it has deeply affected our relationship with outsiders, especially with naluaġmiu. This tragic massacre, compounded by the colonization, assimilation, and Christianization of Kiŋikmiut by the

missionaries and U.S. government schoolteachers caused many generations of Kiŋikmiut, including myself, to inherit and continue to experience the never-ending cycle of inter-generational trauma from our ancestors' time. We do not fully know the extent of cultural genocide done unto us by outsiders and how much our grandparents and ancestors went through. The following two examples further illustrate this reality. Colonial powers have long used storytelling to cast themselves as the victims or the saviors, shaping narratives that distort the truth of our Indigenous history and lived experiences. Miranda Wright described in her MA Dissertation how Ivan Petroff, a census taker and writer for Hubert Bancroft in the late 1800s, wrote about an incident involving an Athabascan Indian who was incarcerated at a federal prison in the late 1800s. Miranda emphasized Petroff's account was entirely one-sided, untrue, and from a colonial biased perspective, as referenced below.

> Petroff was not the only one who held claim to obtaining the "real story", much like the tabloids of today. Another version of "the real story" was authored by Capt. Haynes (1940), an employee of an early fur trading enterprise on the Koyukuk river. Haynes wrote an exotic article for a national 54 magazine in which he claimed personal association with a participant in the event of 1851. Like Petroff s account, that of Haynes cannot be verified, and the article contain several obvious errors. Probably the best known of these tales is Freuchen's "The Law of Larion" published in 1952. This novel based on a few historical facts is a flight of fancy which winds an intriguing tale of barbaric savagery in the wild north, pitting the indigenous inhabitants against foreign entrepreneurs. Many historians of Alaska choose to accept these fictitious accounts. As stated above, the majority of these publications are based on western perceptions of economic and political pressures. While these issues were real factors in the disruption of the social order of the Koyukon people, the attack was not carried out with the intentions of economic or political gain. For the Koyukon, a matter of spiritual importance, it was and still is a shaman's war (Wright 1995).

Also, an excerpt from the Report on the Work of the Bureau of Education for the Natives of Alaska, 1915-1917, written by James Maguire, a teacher who reported on the *Annual Report*

of the United States Public School, Cape Prince of Wales, Bering Strait, sheds some light into their agenda to strip us from our spirituality and culture. He said:

> Undoubtedly a fair proportion of Wales people believe that the white man's way is superior to their own and try sincerely to follow it as best they can. However, there are many who will cling to their own manners and customs to the end of their lives and whose dead bodies will be hauled up among the rocks of Cape Prince of Wales Mountain, where their bones will be scattered and mingled with those of their ancestors. The older Wales native is a hopeless case, and unobstructed advancement will only begin when he is gone for good. Probably we are too enthusiastic in the matter of advancement and perhaps too impatient to see accomplished that which required generations for its development. However, we know certain Eskimos whose sole ambition is to improve not only themselves but their race in general. Such ambitious natives are found in every community, but they are exceptional enough to be most interesting. The salvation of the race lies with the present-day school pupil.

The colonization, assimilation, and Christianization of our people stripped our Iñupiaq language, spirituality and entire belief system, ceremonies, singing and dancing, and our cultural identity from us. These elements of our culture were completely forbidden for nearly half a century or more. Over this time, our way of life completely changed.

Problem Statement

Siuliavut ipkua[24], those who lived before us, lived in harmony with our lands, waters, ice, air, and universe through a reciprocal relationship that sustained Kiŋikmiut culture and way of life for thousands of years. Our health and wellbeing as Iñupiat are interdependent on the health and wellbeing of our taġiuq, nuna, pitaksrat, and siḷa. This reciprocal relationship between all living and non-living things was held in balance and maintained through our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit, which are deeply embedded in our Indigenous Knowledge and traditional management practices. Our Knowledge, history, and stories were transmitted orally from generation to

[24] Siuliavut ipkua means those who lived before us.

generation through our unipkaat[25] and quliaqtuat[26]. However, more than a century of colonization, assimilation, and Christianization, including the imposition of Abrahamic religions, into Western systems took over our formal education, natural resource management, religion, health care, and economy, and in doing so, suppressed and silenced our Kiŋikmiut ukpuliivut and iniqtautit across all of these spaces.

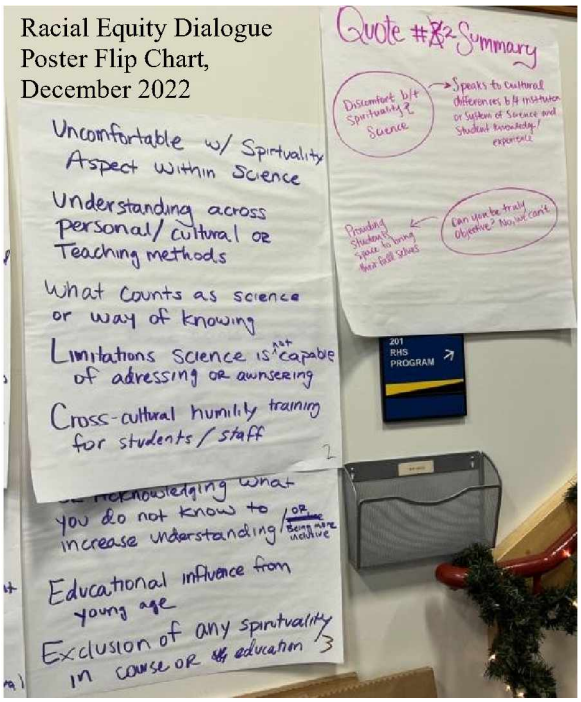

Figure 2: Racial Equity Dialogue Notes. Fairbanks, Alaska. December 2022.

It is important to mark the distinction between Indigenous spirituality and religion, an area often misunderstood by the academic and scientific community trained in Western tradition. To explore this further, I share a pivotal experience from attending a racial equity dialogue hosted by the First Alaskans Institute and the NSF/NRT[27] Tamamta Fellowship Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in December 2022. At this dialogue, I experienced a profound shift in consciousness during a particular discussion about Indigenous spirituality during a breakout activity.

I was seated next to my friend and Tamamta Fellow, Tazia W'ally Sthaathi Tá Wagner, who is Ts'msyen, Łingít, and Haida from Metlakatla, Alaska. Together, we were explaining how Indigenous spirituality is at the core of Indigenous Peoples' governance and management of our lands, waters, and resources. During the discussion, a participant of our breakout group

[25] Unipkaat are our oldest stories that are thousands of years old.
[26] Quliaqtuat are stories about one's life experiences.
[27] The NSF/NRT stands for the National Science Foundation – Research Traineeship.

mentioned that "spirituality does not belong in science." In that moment, my jaw probably hit the floor. I experienced firsthand how Western scientific frameworks do clash with Indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems. Another scientist at the table, whose familial connections are deeply rooted in Anabaptist religious traditions, shared that they were trained to view spirituality and science as separate, as spirituality was associated with Christianity and organized religions. They were taught that science is the pursuit of truth based on evidence, in contrast to religious truths that are based on belief and faith – absent of evidence. For this reason, many Western trained scientists equate spirituality to religion. I chose not to use the term spirituality throughout most of this paper and have instead used our Iñupiaq words ukpuliivut (our spiritual beliefs) and Siḷam Inua[28], the spirit of our whole universe, from the air to the intelligence and consciousness that connects us to that spirit of all, which encompasses the human, human-animal dimensions, and everything in between.

This Western tendency to equate spirituality with organized religion and separate it from science reflects a worldview that differs significantly from Kiŋikmiut. Without our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit, a foundational part of our Iñupiaq identity and Knowledge system would be missing. Without our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit, a foundational part of our Iñupiaq identity and Knowledge system would be missing. I now understand why some Indigenous students, who have been in programs and courses offered by the UAF College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences program, shared that they were made to feel that they had to leave their Indigenous culture, identity, and worldview at the door when they came to class. Our spirituality is not separate, and cannot be separated, from our Indigenous Knowledge systems, our governance, and management

[28] Siḷam Inua is the spirit of our whole universe, from the air to the intelligence and consciousness that connects us to that spirit of all, which encompasses the human, human-animal dimensions, and everything in between.

systems. It is interwoven in our Knowledge system and central to our governance and management.

This experience during the racial equity dialogue revealed to me how vital it is to share my experience with the academic, research, and natural resource management communities with the aim of bridging the understanding between the two knowledge systems and worldviews. That being said, we **do not expect anyone outside our culture to understand our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit**. **What we are asking for is respect for our Indigenous Knowledge system, our traditional management practices, and our worldview.** True understanding cannot exist without having lived experience within our culture. Therefore, the goal should not be to fully understand, but rather to respect the validity of pluralistic worldviews. More than that, we are calling on institutions to **MOVE OVER**, adapt, and make space for our people to co-produce knowledge and research and co-manage our natural resources in partnership with our governments (Behe and Angnaboogok 2018).

There has been a long-standing call by Alaska Native leaders, past and present, as well as allies and scholars to confront and dismantle the deep inequities imbedded in research and natural resource management frameworks rooted in Eurocentric colonialism (Alaska Federation of Natives 2006-2024; Berger 1985; C. J.-Y. Carothers 2021; Carothers and Black 2022; Inuit Circumpolar Council 2009; Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2015; Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2019; Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2020; Stotts 2009). Conflicting cultures and worldviews within natural resource management regimes, along with conflicting legal and constitutional frameworks, have led to imbalanced and divided management frameworks that undermine Alaska Native ways of life and threaten our cultural, physical, and spiritual survival.

Unresolved Settlement – An Incomplete Settlement of Alaska Native Hunting and Fishing Rights

While this paper does not dive deeply or fully into the historical and legal context of federal Indian law and the impacts from significant acts of congress, including ANCSA, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980, and other laws and policies that have shaped state, federal, and international management regimes that Alaska Native Peoples are subject to today, I will provide a brief overview and highlight an incredibly important and extensive body of work conducted by Thomas R. Berger, who was commissioned by the Inuit Circumpolar Council in 1983 to lead the Alaskan Native Review Commission, which examined the implementation and impacts of ANCSA on Alaska Native Tribes.

Through this effort, Berger traveled to sixty-two villages and towns in Alaska, to hear Alaska Native evidence and testimony about ANCSA. This work culminated into the book *Village Journey: The Report of The Alaska Native Review Commission*. This effort raised Alaska Native voices from the village to be heard at a pivotal time in history. This Journey resulted in recommendations in three primary areas: land, self-government, and "subsistence" for changes in the law for Alaska Native Peoples to retain control over our lands, hunting, and fishing rights that sustained our people and culture for thousands of years. These recommendations from our Alaska Native Elders and leaders remain just as relevant today as they did then.

I also would like to share some of the concerns raised by our Alaska Native Elders in *Village Journey*, to help you understand what it was like for our people to suddenly be told by outside governments that our customary laws governing our hunting, fishing, and gathering ways of life were no longer recognized as the law of the land in our own homelands. This drastic shift occurred despite the fact that Alaska Native Peoples and Tribes have, since time immemorial,

held inherent sovereignty, as affirmed by the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). In particular, Articles 3 and 4 of UNDRIP state:

> Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions (Assembly 2007).

This is necessary to note because all of a sudden, we had this blanket land claims agreement that threw all Alaska Native Tribes and Peoples together in a melting pot. As sovereign Tribal nations, our people should have held the authority to negotiate our land claims agreement in a way that fully recognized, protected, and guaranteed our rights to hunt, fish, and gather our traditional food resources within the settlement.

To engage meaningfully with these issues as they are voiced by our elders, who were our leaders during this era, I ask that you set aside your personal biases and the cultural lens you see the world through. This is necessary to begin to understand my positionality, engage with the issues presented, and remain open to shifting your understanding. The following quotes, reflected in *Village Journey*, speak to the level of uncertainty and the stark issue of our land claims agreement failing to address and uphold the right of Alaska Native People and Tribes to our hunting, fishing, and gathering way of life.

> One of the things that I feel that was a major mistake made by our Native leaders in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was the extinguishment of the aboriginal fishing and hunting rights... – Caleb Pungowiyi of Savoonga, then President of Kawerak, Inc.
>
> We Iñupiat are meat eaters, not vegetarians. We live off the sea mammals…The Bering Sea and Chukchi Sea are our gardens. – Jonah Tokienna of Wales (Kiŋigin)
>
> The first result of the settlement was to separate all the people that used to be together…Regions became different regions…Boundaries were fought over… – Jack Wick of Larsen Bay

> These are laws and regulations that are imposed on us. These laws and policies are not created with the sole purpose of protecting and sustaining hunting culture and ways of life. They are implemented to promote conservation of those resources. However, at the end of the day, they continue work in our favor. – Jasper Joseph of Emonnak
>
> The wildlife regulations interfere with daily life, especially in the villages. Wildlife enforcement efforts target the wrong people for punishment and end up causing more problems than they solve. – Greg Moore of Kotzebue
>
> They came up with a thing called subsistence, or rural residence, and that is not only for Native people but all people who are living in rural Areas. I think that one way to quickly eliminate any of the Native hunting and fishing rights in Alaska is to use the subsistence in place of aboriginal hunting and fishing rights. – Bonnie McCord of Tyonek
>
> Ever since this claims settlement came, [I've] heard some regulations. Somebody made laws. Eskimos did not make them. We do not go outside our state and tell other people how they should live…We do not make rules and regulations for them so they will have a limit on certain items of food…When we try to hunt and provide ourselves and feed our family, our children, somebody comes around and tells us, "If you catch birds, if you catch moose, or if you gather food, we will put you in jail. We have rules and regulations that you have to follow. – Jasper Joseph of Emmonak
>
> The single biggest fear that we Inupiat have concerning ANCSA is the fear of losing control over our own lands, which we need for subsistence purposes. – Jimmy Stotts of Barrow

Although Congress enacted Title VIII of the ANILCA in 1980 to address the purported extinguishment and incomplete settlement of Alaska Native hunting and fishing rights, it did not completely solve the issue. Berger noted in *Village Journey* that ANILCA's most important feature is the recognition of the obligation that the federal government has to protect the "subsistence" rights of Alaska Native Peoples in a legal context that derives from the Constitution, where Congress declared that:

> In order to fulfill the policies and purposes of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and as a matter of equity, it is necessary for the Congress to invoke its constitutional authority under the property clause and the commerce clause to protect and provide the opportunity for continued subsistence uses on the public lands by Native and Non-Native rural residents (Berger 1985).

Initially, Title VIII of ANILCA was set to have an Alaska Native priority to hunt, fish, and gather (Illingworth 2022). However, the State of Alaska objected to a Native preference and

adopted a regulation in 1982 followed by a statute in 1986 to enact a rural subsistence priority on State and private lands in Alaska. That followed with heavy opposition from special interest sports hunting and fishing groups and anti-"subsistence" groups, which resulted in court litigation, where the Alaska Supreme Court ruled in the *McDowell Case* of 1989, that the subsistence priority violated the Alaska State Constitution (McDowell v. State 1989). Since 1990, the federal government manages subsistence hunting and fishing on federal lands and ensures a rural priority (U.S. Department of the Interior n.d.). The State of Alaska continues to manage subsistence on state and private lands without giving a rural priority. Not only is the whole fish and wildlife management system extremely divided in Alaska, but this issue also remains a grey area and an incomplete settlement altogether.

The entire fight for our hunting and fishing rights has hinged on federal preemptive laws that protect our hunting and fishing rights. The first federal preemptive law designed to protect Alaska Native Subsistence was the Reindeer Act of 1937. This Act concluded that Congress did have a responsibility to protect Alaska Native People and their rights just the same as they did for the Lower 48 American Indian Tribes. Case and Voluck (1984), pointed out that the Reindeer Act concluded that,

> The natives of Alaska, including the Eskimo, are held to have practically the same status as the Indians of the United States. The Federal Government has recognized this responsibility. It is likewise the responsibility of the Federal Government to protect and look after the social and future economic welfare of these natives.

The Katie John case of 1985-2014 was another major win for Alaska Native hunting and fishing rights, as its ruling extended the subsistence preference of Title VIII of ANILCA to federally reserved navigable and unnavigable waters, including all lakes, rivers, and waters where the government retains water rights. Although the State of Alaska fought this case and

appealed it every chance they got, the US Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal on the case in 2014 (Illingworth n.d.).

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of 1972 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 also include protections for Alaska Native "subsistence" hunting of marine mammals and allows for the creation and sale of handicrafts and clothing made from marine mammal skin, bones, and other parts. Although the MMPA's protections are another layer of governance over what Iñupiat and other Alaska Native Peoples who live and reside on the coast of Alaska can hunt, it has helped to protect our rights to hunt marine animals including bowhead whale, polar bear, walrus, seals, etc. The MMPA works to our advantage in limiting the taking of these animals to "any Indian, Aleut, or Eskimo who dwells on the coast of the North Pacific Ocean or the Artic Ocean to take marine mammals in a non-wasteful manner for subsistence purposes or to create authentic Native handicrafts or clothing" (Marine Mammal Commission 1972).

The downside to the MMPA is it prevents Inuit from trading and importing marine mammal edible and non-edible parts, such as polar bear and seal skins from across Inuit Nunaat[29]. It also prevents the sale of the edible parts of the marine mammals and subjects Alaskan Inuit and other Alaska Native Peoples to fines and enforcement actions that criminalize our people related to a wide array of offenses, including but not limited to the sale of raw parts of the animal, transporting animal parts across international borders, unintentional take, and confliction between federal and state laws and jurisdictions. The MMPA also still has an unsettled issue regarding its blood quantum requirement that the hunter must be at least one-fourth Alaska Native and be living in a coastal community to hunt marine mammals. It is noted

[29] Inuit Nunaat means Inuit homelands.

that recent developments have been underway to provide flexibility by recognizing Tribal enrollment as a valid criterion for eligibility (NOAA Fisheries 2025). However, Alaska Native Peoples are still among the most heavily regulated people in the United States when it comes to our hunting and fishing.

There are numerous other wildlife treaties and laws that specifically relate to Alaska Native peoples, including the Migratory Bird Treaty with Great Britain of 1916, the Migratory Bird Treaty with Mexico in 1937, the Migratory Bird Treaty with Japan of 1974, the Migratory Bird Treaty with the Soviet Union of 1976 (now known as the Russian Federation), The Fur Seal Convention of 1957 that was implemented by the Fur Seal Act of 1966 and expired in 1984, the International Whaling Convention of 1946 implemented by the Whaling Convention Act of 1950, and the Polar Bear Convention of 1976 implemented by the MMPA.

The extreme divide and imbalance, rooted in the collision between Indigenous worldviews and Western legal, political, and scientific systems imposed on us, has been intentionally orchestrated and upheld by dominant Western scientific institutions and natural resource management systems. These institutions, including natural resource management regimes, continue to perpetuate colonial, fifteenth-century Eurocentric Christian ideologies, upon which international law and United States Federal Indian Laws are founded upon (Grichner 2010). As a result, Alaska Native hunting and fishing ways of life have become constant uphill legal battlegrounds. Our people and our communities face fines, become entangled in court cases, and the confiscation of valuable, and sometimes irreplaceable, hunting and fishing equipment that is critical not only to our physical survival but to cultural survival as well. This also has a significant negative impact on our Peoples' mental health and wellbeing.

Beyond the legal uphill battles, the mismanagement of our traditional food resources and competing sport and commercial hunting and fishing has contributed to massive salmon crashes in the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers as well as communities across the Norton Sound region of Alaska. At the same time, the population of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd has been in decline, with the Alaska Board of Game and the Federal Subsistence Board having proposed heavy restrictions or bag limits on Iñupiaq communities in the North Slope, Northwest Arctic, Bering Strait, and other areas of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. Alaska Native People are always the first to be targeted with heavy restrictions on our hunting and fishing when fish and animal populations decline (Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2015; Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2020; Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2023; Stevens and Black 2019). At the same time, outside interest groups, including sports hunters, commercial fisheries, and guiding industries continue to operate unchecked without being held accountable or comparable restrictions. Although our people have the best available Knowledge from over the 10,000 plus years we have been stewarding our lands and waters, and resources and the capacity to manage our traditional food resources, our Tribes and governing bodies of our communities are still denied the power and authority to do so (C. J.-Y. Carothers 2021; Carothers and et al , Survival Denied 2013; Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2015; Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2019; Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2020).

It is urgently necessary to dismantle the deep inequities embedded in the research and natural resource management frameworks in Alaska. Our people hold the Knowledge and capacity to manage our traditional food resources, as our traditional management practices are thousands of years old and are still relied upon today (Atlas, et al. 2021). Since time immemorial, Iñupiat and other Alaska Native peoples have relied on Indigenous Knowledge and traditional

management practices for our physical and cultural survival. We have stewarded our lands for thousands of years with the most sustainable practices. Yet, we are continuously excluded from the management and decision-making processes over our traditional food resources. Instead, we are criminalized in our own homelands for living our culture and ways of life that remain critical for our survival. At best, we serve as advisors to numerous state and federal boards and management organizations that operate under a single-species approach to management on someone else's agenda, calendar, authority, and timeline.

On a deeper level, our Iñupiaq and Alaska Native ways of life remain under attack, with continued modern-day colonization through Western institutions that retain power, authority, and control over the governance, education, and management of our traditional food resources. As James Stotts, former president of the Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska, stated in his 2009 address to the Alaska Federation of Natives in his speech *Food Security The Happy Criminal Life*:

> We are becoming criminals in our own territories. Elements of our culture are being outlawed or severely curtailed through regulation and legislation. Many of these onerous laws concern fish and game resources and our ability to harvest them to feed our families. At times, it feels like we're on the verge of getting starved out" (Stotts 2009).

A decade later, his message remained the same. In his 2019 address to the Alaskan Inuit Food Sovereignty Summit, Stotts reaffirmed:

> We are not able to manage our food resources using our knowledge and practices due to 'outside' imposed policies, regulations, and other intervening factors. Elements of our culture and way of life are being outlawed. Today we face uncertainties with a management system that's fragmented between international agreements and state and federal government. Further fragmentation occurs within the many government agencies concerned with different aspects of fish and game management. The management of our traditional food resources has become a political issue (Stotts 2019).

Our cultures and ways of life depend on hunting, fishing, and gathering. These practices are guided by our traditional management systems centered on providing for the entire community and sharing our traditional food resources within our community and across regions. For example, a vital rite of passage requires a young hunter to give away their first catch, a tradition that reflects humility, generosity, and responsibility to our Tribe. However, outside imposed management systems clash with our cultural values by enforcing regulations, such as individual catch limits, which undermine and go against our cultural practices.

We must critically examine and address the systemic inequities embedded in Western academic research and natural resource management frameworks to move forward. Just as importantly, we must also address the misconceptions held within Western scientific worldviews that continue to marginalize, and mis conceptualize Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous spirituality within natural resource management.

Distinguishing Kiŋikmiut Ukpuliivut from Spirituality and Religion

Our Kiŋikmiut ukpuliivut cannot be translated into English and is indescribable in the English language. There are no equivalent words in the English language that can fully describe or hold the meaning our connection to Siḷam Inua and the interdependent relationships that sustain and hold our Iñupiaq society in balance. Everything in our culture has a spirit, and all elements of our spirit world and our homeland on earth are interrelated and interdependent. Although this section is focused on the distinction between Kiŋikmiut ukpuliivut from spirituality and religion, it cannot be separated out from our iniqtautit, our Iñupiaq language, and our Indigenous Knowledge.

Because of the stark differences between cultural worldviews, the use of the term spirituality to describe Indigenous spirituality often leads to misinterpretations about it being connected to Christianity and organized religion. The Miriam Webster dictionary's definition, for example, defines spirituality as: 1) something that in ecclesiastical law belongs to the church or to a clergy, 2) sensitivity or attachment to religious values, or 3) the quality or state of being spiritual. This Webster definition reflects a Western view of spirituality and a very narrow idea that is not representative or relatable to Indigenous spirituality.

To explore the issue further, Burch et al. (1994) contrasted the general Christian worldview with the traditional Iñupiat worldview, noting that the Christian worldview is humanist with the understanding that only humans have souls, and those souls are only being associated with the human body. In contrast, he stated that the Iñupiat worldview is animist with everything embodying a soul: the land, animals, every object, and every person. He also learned while living among and studying Iñupiat that other "nonempirical creatures" can embody a soul or sprit. In addition, Margaret Lantis (1950) reported that in the "myths of the Eskimos", any person's soul could travel away, even while he or she is living and could encounter animal spirits upon which animals could take human form and live among the people. She contrasted the "religion of Eskimos" in Alaska to center around the following ideas that 1) most taboos related to the food supply, 2) in the "myths" the saviors of the stories saved people from physical dangers instead of from sin, 3) that most spirits took form of a human, animal, or physical form except for Siḷa, which was took a purely spiritual form.

The issue of spirituality is incredibly important because in Alaska; it was the basis for the Alaska Supreme Court reversing the ruling that Carlos Frank, Athabascan from Minto, Alaska, unlawfully transported illegally taken game, a moose that was harvested for a potlatch. In his

argument, Carlos Frank contended that enforcing this regulation violated his constitutional right to exercise his religion. At the same time, in 1979, Congress had recently enacted 42 U.S.C.A. § 1996 (Supp. 1979), which states that,

> It shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, and Native Hawaiians, including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites.

Although similar precedents were set by other States for similar religious exceptions regarding hunting animals out of season, this precedent in Alaska should be extended to other Alaska Native "spiritual" or "religious" ceremonies. The distinction between Indigenous spirituality and Western conceptions of spirituality and religion is not only an issue of language and terminology. It holds legal, political, and cultural implications that shape governance and policy. Understanding this distinction is important before moving into my theoretical framework, which is grounded in a Kiŋikmiut Inupiaq paradigm, not a Western paradigm.

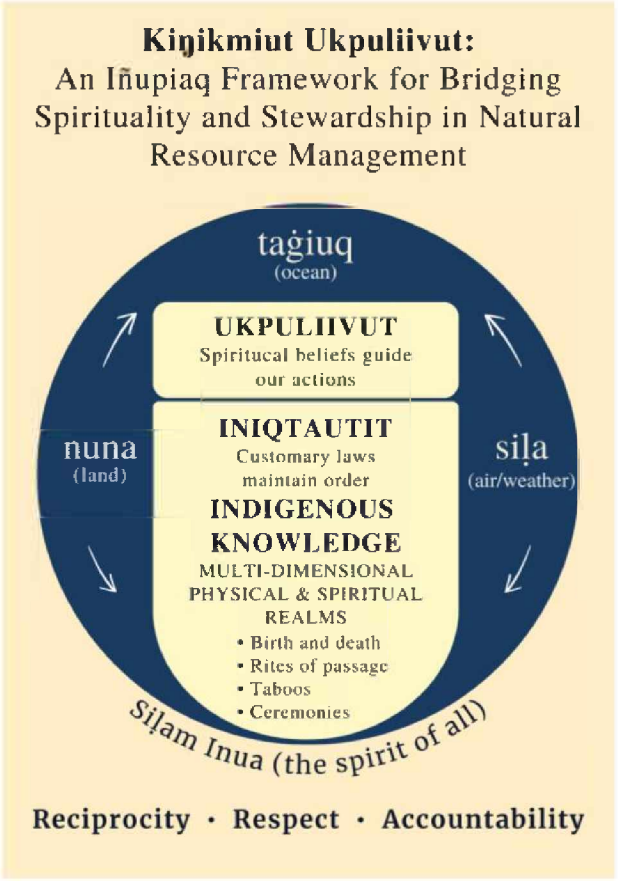

Figure 3: Kiŋikmiut Ukpuliivut: An Iñupiaq Framework for Bridging Spirituality and Stewardship in Natural Resource Management

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for my project, *Kiŋikmiut Ukpuliivut: An Iñupiaq Framework for Bridging Spirituality and Stewardship in Natural Resource Management (hereafter "Framework,")* is an Indigenous framework rooted in Kiŋikmiut ukpuliivut and iniqtautit as the

foundation for knowledge production, governance, and stewardship. This Framework is deeply informed by the lifelong lessons and experiences I learned from my mom, grandparents, and Kiŋikmiut elders that have shaped my understanding of the responsibilities entrusted to us to take care of one another, our taġiuq, nuna, pitaksrat, and siḷa. It is held together through principles of relationality, reciprocity, and responsibility as guiding principles in knowledge production and natural resource management. Please note that there are numerous dimensions of our physical and spiritual realms that could not all fit in the bulleted list. They include including birth and death, rites of passage, taboos, kinship, ceremonial celebrations, hunting and human-animal relationships, traditional healing, aŋatkut[30], art, Iñupiaq dancing, life expectancy, our quliaqtuat and unipkaat.

These guiding principles are further affirmed by Shawn Wilson (2008) and Margaret Kovach (2021), who emphasize that Indigenous research is rooted in relational accountability, the understanding that Knowledge is not just a product but a relationship that has its processes of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility, all while being accountable to our community. In this context, relationality means that Knowledge is held together and generated in relationship to our family, community, ancestors, lands, waters, and all that we co-exist with. Reciprocity holds us to our values of sharing and the responsibility of giving back to our community. These three principles are interconnected and woven together through relational accountability.

Our Kiŋikmiut worldview aligns with these principles. It does not separate humans from other living things or impose a hierarchy within these relationships. It understands that our people, taġiuq, nuna, pitaksrat, and siḷa exist in relation to and interdependence with one another.

[30] Aŋatkut are our shamans.

Our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit maintain these relationships in every aspect of our spirituality and customary laws, which are contained in our oral histories, quliaqtuat, and unipkaat.

Another key distinction I wrote about in (2023) is that although Iñupiat have adapted to certain aspects of Western lifestyles over time, some social scientists and economists continue to impose their own definitions of what our economy is. Often, they refer to modern Alaska Native economies as "mixed economies" or "subsistence economies" through the lens of a cash-based system that attempts to assign a dollar value to our natural resources, including our traditional foods. These external assumptions lead to misconceptions of our authentic Iñupiaq value system that sustains our traditional economy.

The traditional Kiŋikmiut economy cannot be separated from our cultural and spiritual identity and worldview, even today. Our Iñupiaq value system does not allow for a monetary value to be placed on our traditional food resources because it goes against our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit. Our spiritual beliefs and customary laws are centered on the survival and wellbeing of our family, elders, and the entire community. They are grounded in a profound and intricate system of reciprocity and sharing. Aipaani[31], our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit governed all aspects of our way of life, which orchestrated balance between all living and non-living things.

Just as our Kiŋikmiut ukpuliivut, the term and meaning of iñuuniaġvik is indescribable in the English language. No words in the English language can describe or hold the meaning of this interdependent and interconnected web of how our *Iñupiaq* society functions and is held in balance. Our *Iñupiaq* way of life cannot be contained or understood from within a piece of paper; it has to be lived. For this reason, our unipkaat and quliaqtuat were oral, told in our language, and

[31] Aipaani means a long time ago, since time immemorial.

embody deep emotions and life lessons rooted in our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit. Our iñuuniaġvik is our environment where we live off the land, the ocean, the rivers, and all that provides for our sustenance and survival. Our iñuuniaġvik is our sole purpose for living and being. We cannot trade it for anything; it cannot be replaced. Our iñuuniaġvik is sacred to our soul (Pinson 2023).

With this foundation laid, perhaps those outside our culture can begin to understand how our people, culture, and way of life are a part of the ecosystem and how everything within our ecosystem is interconnected and interdependent. Our traditional Kiŋikmiut economy must be understood through this lens. Academic and scientific communities must learn from and enter meaningful relationships with us so that our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit can be upheld. That requires a deeper understanding that we bring to the table of how our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit hold our Siḷam Inua in balance, and how they govern our actions across all aspects of our way of life. Our Iñupiaq system of governance is what sustains the health of our resources and, in turn, ensures the survival of our people, culture, and way of life.

The conceptual framework for my project is rooted in our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit, which have governed our people as a society socially, including morally and ethically, and through customary law. Our ukpuliivut are our spiritual beliefs that guide our actions as Kiŋikmiut, from the moment we wake up in the day and throughout all the decisions and choices we make in life. Our ukpuliivut constitutes what it means to be Kiŋikmiut. These ukpuliivut go hand in hand with our iniqtautit, our customary laws that govern and keep social, spiritual, and cultural order for Kiŋikmiut and our entire universe as a society in our earthly life and our afterlife. These ukpuliivut and iniqtautit cross over numerous dimensions of our way of life, including birth and death, rites of passage, taboos, kinship, ceremonial

celebrations, hunting and human-animal relationships, traditional healing, aŋatkut, art, Iñupiaq dancing, life expectancy, our quliaqtuat and unipkaat (Angnaboogok 2016).

As mentioned throughout this paper, this Framework emerges from a profoundly relational worldview in which all living and non-living things, our taġiuq, nuna, pitaksrat, and siḷa are interconnected and exist without hierarchy. Our governance and traditional management system is a holistic and has ensured our survival through reciprocity, respect, and accountability. Through these core principles, our Indigenous Knowledge is held and transferred from generation to generation through direct family lines and the spiritual relationality of those who are named after a family member or loved one who has departed this earth and entered the spirit world.

Our Knowledge is collectively owned as a community, with the understanding that it has been passed down from generation to generation through our ancestors. Through reciprocity, Knowledge is shared from family to family and held together as a community. Just as the taġiuq, nuna, pitaksrat, and siḷa sustain us, we must also give back to them to ensure the health of our ecosystem and maintain balance of our Siḷam Inua. Our Knowledge and actions are governed by our responsibility as stewards of our land, water, animals, resources, and all that we exist in relation with.

These principles reflect the spiritual beliefs and cultural laws that govern our people and keep our Siḷam Inua balanced and appeased. Many ukpuliivut and iniqtautit govern our behavior, especially regarding our hunting, fishing, and gathering way of life. We are referring to these when we say that researchers and the state, federal, and international natural resource management regimes do not understand how we as a people live in harmony with our natural resources and our environment. These beliefs and customary laws inform

our traditional management practices that have been utilized for thousands of years. However, this depth of Knowledge and responsibility is often overlooked and misunderstood by those outside our culture, despite the fact that our people hold the capacity and a profound responsibility to managing our traditional food resources.

To increase the awareness and understanding of how our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit are related to natural resource management and to establish the Knowledge and capacity we have to govern our resources, the following table illustrates some of our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit (Angnaboogok 2016). This is an excerpt from my earlier work as an undergraduate student where I attempted to stitch together our Kiŋikmiut spiritual belief system before Western contact. Some fields have been purposely omitted for the following table because some of our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit are sacred and not meant to be shared publicly. Again here, I ask that you set aside your personal biases and the cultural lens you see the world through to try to engage with our Knowledge and cultural worldview as I have presented in the table below.

Table 1: Examples of some of our Kiŋikmiut ukpuliivut and iniqtautit.

II. Rites of Passage
When a young hunter gets their first seal/ugruk[32], they must give it away to an elder.
III. Taboos
A. Hunting Taboos
You cannot spear a flounder belly side up. You will have fewer flounders because they are ready to lay eggs.
Food from the land and the sea cannot be cooked together. (The full story behind this is not included here).
You should not stay late into the evening out in the country without a shelter. You may encounter something or a spirit wandering the land. You should not sleep on the tundra, or an inugutaq[33] might move you, or a tiġiaq[34] may go in your mouth. If you must stay out in the country, it is better to have a partner to look after one another.

[32] Ugruk is a bearded seal.
[33] Inugutaq is a little person.
[34] Tiġiaq is a weasel.

If you sleep out in the tundra, the white fox will go after the men's testicles. A white fox came up to them, crawling on its elbows.
You cannot dump your hair from a haircut outside, or the birds will use it for their nest.
You should not eat berries piled up in the tundra because the isriġaq[35] or inugutaq put them there. (The full story behind this is not included here).
You cannot kill an aaġluq[36], or the spirits of the whale will come back and take your life. The killer whale is our protector and protects hunters at sea from the dangers of being out in the sea. (The full story behind this is not included here).
You cannot kill a qaaqasragzruk[37] because they are sacred and are known and respected for bringing daylight to our people. (The full story behind this is not included here).
You cannot kill qilamiitat[38], white lemmings that fall from the sky
If you do wrong to animals, they will come after you if you die and have revenge on you.
If you make animals suffer, you will suffer when you grow old. And your suffering will follow you into your afterlife. (The full story behind this is not included here).
Only take what you need. Work on your catch right away. Do not waste your catch, or the animals will know and will not give themselves to you in your next hunt.
To be a successful hunter, the hunter must share their catch to be blessed in their future hunt.
A hunter cannot say what he is going hunting for or become boastful about what he or she may catch, or they will not be blessed with a successful hunt.
A hunter also must not boast about their equipment or how much they have, or it will come back to them, and they may see hardship in their future.
You cannot make an ice fishing hole in front or back of another's fishing spot. Fishing holes can only be made to the right or left of another fisher's hole.
If you encounter a nanuq[39] and are facing it, you should throw your mitten to your left because they are left-handed, and it will throw them off and give you time to get away or kill it. And before you shoot it, it has to face you.
Don't camp halfway between Siŋik and Shishmaref. It's a haunted place and common for people to get lost and disoriented in the area.

[35] Isriġaq is a hiding man.
[36] Aaġluq is a killer whale.
[37] Qaaqasragzruk is a raven.
[38] Qilamiitat are sacred white lemmings that fall from the sky.
[39] Nanuq is polar bear.

> If you get lost hunting, you cannot follow any mirage. You have to overpower it and try to ignore it, or it could lead you to death.

Our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit are unique to Kiŋigin and our people. They reflect the specific relationships, teachings, and responsibilities passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. Other villages have their own spiritual beliefs and customary laws. When we say we have the capacity to manage our traditional food resources, we are referring to the profound system of Indigenous Knowledge our people have, embedded with our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit that govern our people, land, water, animals, resources, and all that we exist in relation with. **NO ONE is more qualified to manage our resources than our people.** We are raised with these ukpuliivut and iniqtautit. They shape how we live, treat one another, and care for the environment. They determine our future and our afterlife. They are strongly upheld and respected by families and the entire community.

Project Methodology

Resources 1: Oral Histories

A central component of this project involved transcribing and interpreting oral history recordings established by Section 14(h)(1) of the ANCSA, which are part of a broader archival oral history collection housed at the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Anchorage office under the ANCSA Program. These recordings originate from my hometown of Kiŋigin. They contain sacred and restricted information and Knowledge communicated through our unipkaat and quliaqtuat as they relate to our ukpuliivut, iniqtautit and traditional Kiŋikmiut "historical" sites and burial sites. I grew up with all of the elders in this collection, and they have all since passed away. Section 14(h)(1) of ANCSA granted Alaska Native Regional Corporations the right to apply for land title to claim lands based on the significance of our cultural histories and

traditional use areas as it relates to those sacred places and lands. The BIA is the federal agency responsible for carrying out this provision, which also made them responsible for conducting archaeological field investigations and research, including documenting Alaska Native oral histories (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs n.d.).

Because these oral history recordings contain sacred and sensitive content, they are protected by the Bureau of Indian Affairs office. To obtain access to them, I had to prove that I was a tribal member of the Native Village of Wales and agree that I would utilize these recordings for the benefit of my community. This work required significant time, patience, and care to listen to, translate, and transcribe them with the proper context and understanding. I could not have completed this work without my mom, Edith Towatook Pinson, a fluent Iñupiaq speaker, who worked closely alongside me to help translate several of them from Iñupiaq to English. This process required cultural fluency, the lived experience in growing up in Kiŋigin, and living our culture.

Through a careful and time laborious process, we interpreted the meanings conveyed in Iñupiaq to English. This involved not only translating words but the meaning through our Kiŋikmiut worldview. This required deep commitment to ensure the authenticity of the voices of our elders and to uphold the integrity of our unipkaat and quliaqtuat in its spiritual and cultural context. We spent many hours carefully replaying each compact disk, which originated from tape recordings. The audio quality was low and often hard to understand what was being said over a crying baby, other background noises in the family home, or wind blowing outside. On average, a typical 60-minute recording took at least 10 hours to transcribe fully. My mom's contribution ensured the translation and interpretation remained authentically Kiŋikmiut.

Table 2 includes the recordings of Kiŋikmiut elders interviewed under the ANCSA 14(h)(1) Oral History project.

Table 2: ANCSA 14(h)(1) Oral History Recordings, recorded in Kiŋigin.*

ANCSA 14(h)(1) Oral History Recordings, recorded in Kiŋigin*				
File Number	Interviewee:	Interviewer	Date	Duration
76BSN002	Andrew & Mabel Seetook	Kathryn Koutsky	June 5 & 10, 1976	47 minutes
75BSN003 Continued	Winton Weyapuk, Alfred Sereadlook, Andrew & Mabel Seetook	Katheryn Koutsky	October 18 1975	61 minutes
75BSN004	Clarence Ongtowasruk, Kakaruk/Ablowaluk*	Katheryn Koutsky	October 18, 1975	61 Minutes
87TEL007	Mabel Seetook	Margie Connolly and Fred Harden	July 17, 1987	20 Minutes
87TEL012	Winton Weyapuk	Margie Connolly and Fred Harden	July 30, 1987	65 Minutes
87TEL013	Katie Tokienna	Margie Connolly and Fred Harden	July 31, 1987	35 Minutes
87TEL014	Katie Tokienna	Margie Connolly and Fred Harden	July 31, 1987	30 Minutes

*Some recordings were done elsewhere, such as Nome or Teller, and were lumped together with recordings done in Kiŋigin. I did not transcribe the Kakaruk/Ablowaluk section, as they are not from Kiŋigin and outside the scope of this project.

Archival and Ethnographic Information

These oral history recordings are extremely important, as they contain primary, firsthand sources of information and Knowledge orated authentically by Kiŋikmiut elders. They offer their real-life experiences, stories, Knowledge, and lessons passed down to them by our elders and an understanding rooted in our culture and hometown. While early explorers, researchers, and ethnographers came to our homelands with extractive intentions to study our people under a microscope through colonial lenses for their benefit and to advance their interests and individual

careers, their contributions to the literature on my hometown, Kiŋigin are acknowledged and have been referenced where relevant. However, this project prioritizes the voices of Kiŋikmiut, recognizing and affirming our people as the true and rightful Knowledge holders, culture bearers, and voice in this work.

Broader Impact and our Kiŋikmiut Iñupiaq language

Throughout this project methods paper, I used the Kiŋikmiut Iñupiaq language because our language holds meanings and understandings that cannot be fully expressed in English without losing its cultural and spiritual context. As my mom, Edith Towatook Pinson, explained:

> Our language is very descriptive and complex. English does not describe our Knowledge, our spiritual, and cultural connections. English was not our first language growing up. You let the Iñupiaq language die when you use only English.

She further emphasized that Iñupiaq place names, for example, carry life-saving Knowledge for hunters and travelers. To maintain strong authenticity and retain our Iñupiaq language, I have included a glossary of Iñupiaq terms used throughout this paper. This glossary contributes to my community, especially for younger generations seeking to learn our language and deepen their understanding of our Kiŋikmiut Knowledge. The transcriptions produced are a significant contribution to my hometown Kiŋigin. They are a valuable resource for our people to better understand our oral histories and our relationship to our lands, waters, and territories. These transcripts can also serve as an important tool for advancing our political self-determination, particularly in resolving the incomplete settlement of our hunting and fishing rights and the ongoing battle to protect our inherent rights to live our culture and way of life.

Ultimately, this project contributes to my hometown, Kiŋigin, and to Indigenous scholarship. A copy of the transcriptions will be donated to my Tribe, the Native Village of

Wales and to the collection owner at the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Anchorage, Alaska office. As an Indigenous scholar utilizing Indigenous research methods, I am broadening my understanding of Knowledge production and natural resource management from an Iñupiaq perspective, drawing on our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit. This work reaffirms that Indigenous Knowledge and governance systems are intricately interwoven with our spiritual beliefs and customary laws, challenging the dominant Western scientific, governance, and political paradigms.

My work has unlocked the Kiŋikmiut language and the understanding of our *ukpuliivut* and iniqtautit from Section 14(h)(1) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act oral history recordings, which may otherwise never have been translated, transcribed, and developed into an educational, political, and governance resource for our people. The BIA ANCSA Program Manager of the Anchorage office informed me that prior to this project, no complete transcription exists with this collection. These transcriptions are culturally grounded and urgently needed as the number of living fluent Kiŋikmiut Iñupiaq speakers from our village continues to decline.

For research and natural resource management frameworks to be equitable for Indigenous Peoples, our oral, written, and visual contributions must be respected and welcomed into academic, political, and governance spaces without question. Indigenous Peoples have significant contributions to make through our Indigenous Knowledge and our cultural lens for research, natural resource assessments, monitoring programs, decision-making, governance, and management. Indigenous Knowledge leads to more robust understandings necessary to develop more flexible, adaptive, and holistic decision-making (Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2015; Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2019; Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska 2020). Our

worldview and understanding are holistic, and our Knowledge offers a broader, interconnected understanding of the ecosystem our people are a part of.

By placing Indigenous Knowledge and Western science on equitable platforms and funding bases through a co-production of knowledge approach, we can generate new knowledge that would otherwise not be understood using only one knowledge system (Elam Yua, et al. 2022). This is needed to ensure the health and well-being of our people, our traditional food resources, and the ecosystems that sustain us. It is also important for the cultural and spiritual survival of all people and our homelands.

Resources for Future Related Work

Type of literature/resources from archival collections

University of Alaska Fairbanks Alaska and Polar Regions Collection & Archive:

- Kathleen Lopp-Smith Family Papers (1807-2003)
- Clark Garber Collection (1925-1936)
- Dorothy Jean Ray Papers (1919-2004)
- Susan Bernardi Photographs (1905)
- Christensen Family Papers (1900-1950)
- The American Missionary Association (1890-1927)

Type of literature/resources from ethnographic sources

1. Books:

- Albee, Bill & Albee, Ruth. (1940). *The Alaska Challenge*
- Burch, Ernest. (2006) *Social life in Northwest Alaska: The structure of Inupiaq Eskimo Nations.*
- Curtis, Edward S. (1930). *The Alaskan Eskimo*. V. 20 of the North American Indian.
- Garber, Clark. . (1940). *Stories and legends of the Bering Strait Eskimos*
- Lopp-Smith, Kathleen & Verbeck Smith. (2002). *Ice Window: Letters from a Bering Strait Village 1898-1902.*
- Mayokok, Robert. (1965). *Eskimo Customs.*
- Nelson, Edward W. (1900). *The Eskimo About the Bering Strait.*
- Oman, Lela K. (1967). *The Ghost of Kingikty.*
- Ray, Dorothy J. (1975). *The Eskimos of Bering Strait.*
- Taliaferro, John. (2006). *In a Far Country.*
- Thornton, Harrison R. (1931) *Among the Eskimos of Wales, Alaska.*
- Weyer, Edward M. (1932). *The Eskimos: Their Environment and Folkways.*

2. Articles:

- Burch, Ernest. (1994). *Inupiat and the Christianization of Alaska*
- Sinclair, A. T. (1909). *Tattooing of the North American Indians.*

Conclusion

To complete this project, I gathered everything my mom, uncles, grandparents, and elders taught me and compiled it into this paper, *Kiŋikmiut Ukpuliivut: An Iñupiaq Framework for Bridging Spirituality and Stewardship in Natural Resource Management*. This work brings greater understanding to academic institutions, the scientific community, and natural resource management systems about how our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit are deeply interwoven within our Indigenous Knowledge and governance. Through our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit, Kiŋikmiut have maintained balance and order with everything in our universe, from our taġiuq to our nuna and from our pitaksrat to our siḷa. This Knowledge and understanding are not something we left in the past but an intricate governance system that continues to sustain our people, resources, and way of life for millennia.

Many of our elders who paved the way for us spent their entire lives fighting against the unjust and imbalanced natural resource management systems, and many did not get to live to see our hunting and fishing rights settled on our terms. Many of us, including myself, have dedicated our entire academic and professional lives to continuing this fight for equity, recognition, respect, and understanding, all while coming from a historically underrepresented and heavily marginalized place. Over fifty years of fighting the system is far too long.

I hope to have demonstrated the profound Knowledge and deeply sophisticated Framework of our governance systems and how our traditional management practices have sustained our people, culture, and way of life for thousands of years. This Framework challenges the colonial constructs of Western research and natural resource management frameworks, calling for them to adapt and make room for our ways of knowing to be fully

included in all decision-making, policy setting, and overall governance of our traditional food resources. These are Knowledge systems that have been in existence for thousands of years and sustained our lands, waters and people; they are Knowledge systems that should be recognized.

When our Indigenous Knowledge is respected, welcomed, and utilized alongside science, and when our ukpuliivut, iniqtautit, and traditional management practices are respected and valued as highly as Western Science and natural resource management frameworks, we progress closer toward a more holistic, adaptive, flexible, and balanced natural resource management framework that sustains not only our people, but all people, all resources, and ecosystems we depend on.

Glossary of Terms, including Kiŋikmiut Iñupiaq Words

Aaġluq

A killer whale

Aipaani

An Iñupiaq word meaning “a long time ago,” or “since time immemorial.”

Aŋatkuq / Aŋatkut

Aŋatkuq is a shaman; Aŋatkut is the plural form meaning shamans.

Aŋuniaqtit

Hunters

Elingnok

Pronounced Iliŋniq and also spelled Elignok and Alignok by ethnographers/missionaries

Ilgauik

Intestines

Iniqtautit

Our traditional laws that govern our Kiŋikmiut ways of life.

Inugutaq

A little person

Inuit Nunaat

Means Inuit homelands

Iñupiaq / Iñupiat

Iñupiaq means “the real people.” Iñupiat is the plural form.

Isriġaq

A hiding man

Iuluq

The Iñupiaq word for reindeer leg or bowhead whale tendons used to make thread

Kiŋikmiut

Means the people from Kiŋigin. Kiŋigin means “the high place,” named for the mountain that stands behind our village. The post-base -miut means “the people of that place or tribe.”

Naluaġmiu

White people

Nanuq

Polar bear

NSF/NRT

Stands for the National Science Foundation – National Research Traineeship

Nuna

Land

Pitaksrat

Animals

Qaaqasragzruk

A raven

Qargik / Qargi

Qargik is the dual form of qargi, the men's ceremonial house, used for working on hunting equipment, tools, sleds, and weapons. It also holds ceremonial celebrations and dances.

Qarġitaŋmiut

Translates to the people of Qarġitaġvik. The post-base -miut indicates "the people of a place or tribe"

Qayaq

A traditional Iñupiaq boat with a driftwood or whale bone frame covered by ugruk (bearded seal skins) and a small opening at the top

Qilamiitat

Sacred white lemmings that fall from the sky

Quyanaavak

Means "thank you very much." The expression conveys a much deeper sense of gratitude than the English phrase. The heartfelt gratitude comes from deep within us.

Quliaqtuat

Stories about one's life experiences

Siḷa

Our air/weather spirit that extends into the universe

Siḷam Inua

The spirit of our whole universe—from the air to the intelligence and consciousness that

connects us to that spirit of all, encompassing the human, human-animal dimensions, and everything in between.

Siuliavut ipkua

Means “those who lived before us”

Sustainability

Used in relation to the framework of this project, with the understanding that the health, wellbeing, and abundance of natural resources is inextricably linked to our Siḷam Inua and the balance maintained by adhering to our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit. This concept has also been explored by Dr. Oscar Kawagley in the Yup’ik way.

Taġiuq

Ocean

Tiġiaq

A weasel

Traditional food resources

Fish, wildlife, and other resources such as marine mammals, fish, birds, duck eggs, shellfish like crab, wild greens, berries, and more—harvested throughout the year in accordance with our ukpuliivut and iniqtautit

Ugruk

Bearded seal

Ukpuliivut

Our spiritual beliefs, woven into our Indigenous Knowledge system and traditional management practices

Umialik / Umialit

An expert whaling captain, hunter, and leader who earned this status through experience and recognition. Umialit is the plural form

Unipkaat

Our oldest stories, thousands of years old

White Man

In this context the "white man" refers not strictly to racial identity as much as to political identity, an opposition between the colonizing outsiders and the Kiŋikmiut. It is also a literal translation of the Iñupiaq word naluaġmiu and often how our elders referred to who the colonizers were when they came.

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