

Yup'iks have begun to fight back

by James R. Charlie Sr.
for the Tundra Times

TOKSOOK BAY — Many, many years have passed without a complete understanding of the two cultures present in our midst.

Yup'ik culture, tradition and rituals were very much alive in and around Yukon Kuskokwim Delta villages, but within a few centuries, that once strong society began to deteriorate. With this deterioration, the grip of unity began to break loose along with it. Although many changes take years to work on, they amounted to a whole lot more once you put those years together.

OPINION

Yup'it Kaniautciat *The Way Eskimos Talk*

The customs and rituals reach their almost nonexistent status beginning with the coming of the Christianity to the delta settlements.

Many dominant Yup'iks, especially the elders who played very important roles in each of their communities lost part of their identity as leaders, and all of these customs and rituals that were once very important for the continuation of unity among the Yup'iks were forced to be eliminated in order for the people to become part of the Christianity.

Several denominations that came to the people/settlements began to play a leadership role, and as a result the lines were drawn, a barrier between these closely knitted people was created.

Not a single denomination respected the other, and instead became more like enemies. Even though the people are closely related they were divided by the faith in which they began to practice and believe.

Although many of them hesitated to give up their customs and rituals, they were forced to give them up because the new leadership that takes shape in

their midst considers the customs and rituals as the works of the evil one. Because of all this, those customs and rituals that were very much alive were put away, many of them forever.

Even today, they are not part of the Christianity and still yet, some denominations still question and criticize the other because that sense of unity is no longer as strong as it used to be until just a few short years ago when a group of concerned church leaders finally realized that many customs and rituals would have been incorporated as part of the Christianity since the Christianity itself evolved from another culture entirely different from ours.

This division of once united society was caused by those very people from within our own society who did not dare to weigh the difference between Yup'iks' and Christianity's customs and rituals, and as a result, the teaching of the Christianity robbed the elders' role in leadership. The elders were stripped of their role as teachers of the society, and sure enough, the elders lost the respect and guidance they provided from time immemorial to their people and, therefore, lost control.

And so, the Christianity prevails in conquering another dominant, self-sustaining society and left a big scar on once united and strong Yup'ik society.

Then comes another force almost equal, but stronger in nature than the Christianity, which also has a heavy effect on what little is left in Yup'ik culture. The standard of living freely was heavily affected.

Once nomadic society concentrated into different settlements, what we call villages today, in order for their children to go to school.

We were forced to learn the ways of yet another culture, completely different from our very own. Upon returning, we had a hard time adjusting to the living standards in our own homes. Many of them failed to come back in order to live in the society they have soon adapted to.

Few of us who managed to come back and raise families had the full knowledge of the way we could depend on land and its rich resources for living because we were educated in the way that we could not possibly survive as dominant Yup'iks. But believe it or not, some managed to become hunters and tough providers for their families once more, while some of us earn our living doing office work and doing other work.

This other force, another way of life, which we call Western society also brings in many problems that did not exist among Yup'ik people. It creates more division even among the families, very much worse than Christianity. Its bait was money and alcohol, and as individuals and communities, all of us are caught in this snare, and there is no way in sight to get out from it.

Instead, we are caught tight in this snare that some of us began to live and think like them, and a lot of our young people began to depend on their parents even though they are able to support themselves because of drugs and alcohol.

Many of our elders, who once could manage to hunt and subsist even at old age began to live luxurious lives, waiting for the public assistance check each month. Because of all this easy lifestyle, they became frustrated and started doing things that they had never done before, like gambling and playing bingo to ease their minds.

The good role model that once played very important among the elders turned upside down since they don't have a voice in their village anymore. Both the Christianity and Western way of life was a big slap on the face of our elders, and they became silent ever more.

The Christianity and Western society robbed the Yup'iks of their customs, rituals and tradition, and many don't care any more how they should live, and they start to take their own lives.

This conquering force, like Christianity, did not dare to try to learn

more about Yup'ik way of life, but invaded villages and began to play more like a dictator because they show no respect at all to our customs and people and started to prosecute our people using the entirely different methods of disciplinary actions, putting them in jails for what they have been doing from time immemorial.

We, still, are considered as minority class even though we have gained majority class from being indigenous people of the land, and these two societies that come into our midst have been here since last hundred years dominate us even today.

The Yup'ik people are dominant people in our region, and this other society is trespassing in our midst, and yet it plays a stronger role than our elders since this other society is money and power hungry, and many of the indigenous people are sometimes considered as nothing more important than the animals around us.

The people from this other society, especially those who said they are here to help us, still question our customs, rituals and standards instead of trying to incorporate some of those to what they call their guidelines, and still do not respect us, and they question what little we practice today when it comes to settling disputes.

This is one of the reasons why the Yup'ik people have begun to fight back in order to keep their identity as indigenous people, and most of all because they are sovereign.

My fellow Natives, if we must work together in harmony, we must also understand each other because if we don't, we are going to face many obstacles in a way. We must also understand each other's view if we must step forward side by side regardless of who we are to fight for our very own freedom to exercise our very own Yup'ik rights and standards.

We must prevail, not fail, for the good of our own society. And so let us be united in all what we do and try to achieve our dreams united, not divided for our own sake and our children and their children's sake.