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Slaviq: An Expression of Native Alaskan Orthodoxy

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Abstract

Slaviq is an Orthodox Native Alaskan celebration beginning on the feast of the Nativity of Christ, marked by indigenous people throughout Alaska. It is especially celebrated among the Yup'ik people in mainland southwestern Alaska in the Kuskokwim River delta region. Slaviq or "starring" lasts from three to ten days involving processions by the congregation, and especially the choir, from the church to homes of villagers wishing to host the celebration. At each host's home a short prayer service is sung accompanied by the spinning of the Christmas star affixed to a pole held generally by young men. This is followed by a short sermon delivered by the priest or even a reader, and then by the singing of Orthodox liturgical hymns in praise of the Nativity of Christ, Ukrainian koliady and folk songs from the Carpathian Mountains describing the feast day, and American Christmas carols. This paraliturgical celebration is followed by the distribution of candy and gifts by the hosts to all the guests, and a festive meal for more senior members of the community who are present. Traditionally, this meal consists of dried fish, often salmon, fermented foods, and moose and reindeer soup followed by akutaq, a dessert containing berries mixed with animal fat. This study analyzes the historical and contemporary practice of celebrating Slaviq, viewing it as a cultural adaptation and expression of the indigenous Yup'ik ethical code enacted within an innovative Orthodox practice.

Keywords

Native Alaskans, Orthodox Christianity, Christmas, Starring

Introduction

In a world of increasing connections and linkages between people, societies, and nation states brought about through public and social media, a globalizing world in which communicational simplicity and transactional simplicity seem to coexist, many indigenous peoples are seeking to live out their own changing late modern lives by creatively incorporating aspects of the altering world around them. In doing so, they attempt to rethink their use of knowledge and skills prominent among their own kin and forebears.

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With the resulting serious environmental consequences of climatic changes, the importance of geography and one's place in a global geography is evident. Many of Alaska's indigenous peoples, particularly those living further from commercial centers dominated by non-indigenous people, consistently engage in a subsistence economy to a greater or lesser degree. In this way, they are intricately tied not only to climatic changes, but more fundamentally, to the particular lands and water from which they continue to draw harvest.

If indigenous knowledge is conceived of as both a storehouse of cultural knowledge and as a set of strategies called upon to manage a changing socio-cultural and natural environment, it is evident that this transmitted yet innovatively adaptive knowledge is essential to Native Alaskans' success in managing a constantly altering geography.[1] A sense of place and time in the cultural relations among the 'real people' as the Yup'ik refer to themselves, as well as their relations with non-human beings, are implicated. It is also place or location that is a contributing factor to one way of defining indigenous religion.

What, then, are the parameters of 'indigenous religion'? Do the indigenous persons in question use or agree with this terminology? In a perceptive essay involving a critique of his own definition of 'indigenous religion,' James L. Cox attempts to set forth a minimalist description. He acknowledges his reliance on the sociologically-inspired definition of religion of Danièle Hervieu-Léger which he interprets as neither substantive nor functional. Cox contends that "the necessary or indispensable condition for religion to be present in any human activity, *its fundamental defining characteristic* requires the existence of an identifiable community," which is linked by kinship ties as well as geography, and "which is constituted by its being bound by and subservient to an overpowering authoritative tradition that is passed on from generation to generation."[2] Cox assumes that this tradition is transmitted structurally through kinship ties according to lineage which may not always be the case. He also acknowledges that this identifiable community or communities can also be adherents of a religion with a universal cosmology such as Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam. But these religions, he maintains, are not necessarily bound to a particular geography.

One aspect of Cox's definition that is problematic is his conflation of religion with society, making every community, however defined, engage in its own distinct religion that is tied to a geographic territory. A second problematic aspect of his definition is his implication that competition is the only means by which two religions or authoritative traditions can interact.[3]

1 Hiroki Takakura, "The shift from herding to hunting among the Siberian Evenki: indigenous knowledge and subsistence change in northwestern Yakutia," *Asian Ethnology* 71, no 1 (2012): 44.

2 James L Cox, "Kinship and location: in defense of a narrow definition of indigenous religion," in *Religious categories and the construction of the indigenous*, ed. by Christopher Hartney and Daniel J. Tower (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 43.

3 Cox, "Kinship and location," 50.

Cox maintains that a universal religion can become indigenized only when it is made subservient to the traditional authority of the indigenous group.[4] This logic seems to eliminate the possibility of an indigenous group adopting or even coopting another religious tradition and thus, incorporating an authoritative tradition newer to the group into its original religion, or conversely, adapting its present tradition to one that is newer to them in a complementary manner. Nevertheless, Cox maintains that indigenous religions are highly adaptive.[5]

Yup'ik context

The case of the Native Alaskans and one particular multi-day celebration is representative. What is very powerful about the winter celebration of Slaviq or 'starring' among the Yup'ik people is the enduring or persistent quality of an indigenous ethical code over time and space; and, its strict adherence to Orthodox Christian beliefs pertaining to the birth of Christ.

The Yup'ik are the largest group of indigenous people in Alaska living in the western, southwestern, and southcentral areas, particularly in the Yukon-Kuskokwim River region in western mainland Alaska. The Yup'ik people live in approximately seventy villages of between two hundred and one thousand persons each, many of whom have some knowledge of the indigenous language. There are two dialect groups, the Yup'ik and the Cup'ik, and three major Christian denominations, Moravian, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox. Indigenous culture and knowledge among the Yup'ik people have remained more stable over the past century, compared to other indigenous peoples of Alaska, partially as a result of the perseverance of an indigenous ethos, partially as a result of later contact with Euro-American society. The Yukon-Kuskokwim River region has proved less attractive to non-indigenous visitors and business enterprises as there are relatively few commercial resources in the area. A persistence of traditional social patterns (living in villages), subsistence lifestyle (some seasonal hunting, fishing, gathering of greens and berries), and knowledge of or interest in revival of indigenous language are evident among the Yup'ik people.

Various aspects of Yup'ik indigenous knowledge have significantly changed over the generations but what continues to be emphasized is the indigenous ethical code which encompasses social relations of various kinds as well as human relations with the non-human world. This code of ethics is transmitted from the older to the younger generation by community elders. It seems that adherence to this code is part of the maintenance of the authoritative tradition that Cox refers to in his definition of 'indigenous religion.'

In a late nineteenth-century Russian monastic source compiled by the Valaam Monastery the strict ethical code which Native Alaskans adhered

4 Cox, "Kinship and location," 50.
5 Cox, "Kinship and location," 53.

to and transmitted includes patience, quick learning ability, adopting of useful skills, endurance of hunger and pain, respect for diligence, good will, hospitality, marked generosity, gratitude, selflessness, trustworthiness, disinterest in wealth, absence of pride and vanity, and respect for parents and elders, be they one's own relatives or not.[6]

Native Alaskans believed that domestic relations influenced human-non-human relations and could affect the outcome of a hunting or fishing expedition. They tended to be peaceful and tranquil. Instead of administering corporal punishment to children, elders verbally inculcated the indigenous ethical code to misbehaving children.[7]

This Orthodox source maintains that shamanism was present but that shamans did not affect the adherence, inculcation, or transmission of the ethical code. They had only to do with relations with the spirit world and only in specific circumstances. In the late nineteenth century Native Alaskans also believed in the immortality of the soul, that is, in the afterlife.[8] The dead were believed to dwell among the living as shades and were capable of good and evil. The living did call upon them for help in dangerous situations during their hunting and fishing expeditions.[9]

Native Alaskan beliefs regarding the dead and their strict ethical code are aspects of Yup'ik indigenous religion that are part of a storehouse of traditional knowledge that has been transmitted and selectively implemented from the latter nineteenth century to the present day in their extended celebration of Orthodox Christmas.

The importance of a diachronic approach to understanding the cultural significance of these aspects of traditional knowledge is evident from the emic emphasis placed on the transmission of these beliefs from generation to generation.

Slaviq: a theme and variations

A distinctly Alaskan and Yup'ik example of this process of transmission is the celebration of Orthodox Christmas and its after-feast known as "starring" or Slaviq. Slaviq is a ritual event celebrated from three to ten days starting on Christmas with processions by the congregation from the church to various villagers' houses accompanied by the singing of Orthodox liturgical hymns in praise of the Nativity of Christ, folk songs from the Carpathian Mountains describing this feast day, and Christmas carols.[10]

"Starring" originated in the Carpathian Mountains in the sixteenth century as a grassroots religious response by Orthodox laity to forced Latinization of the Orthodox Church in that region. The songs and customs

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6 *Очерк из истории Американской Православной Духовной Миссии (Кадьякской миссии 1794-1837 гг.)*, ed. Valaam Monastery (St Petersburg: Tipografiia M Merkusheva, 1894), 20-21, 23, 24, 27-8.

7 *Очерк*, 26.

8 *Очерк*, 31.

9 *Очерк*, 30-31.

10 *Following the star*, 1987. Film accessed on KYUK website, http://kyuk.org.

associated with this celebration are unknown in Russia, and perhaps for that reason, this ritual activity contributed to the maintenance of an Orthodox identity in parts of western Russia and Ukraine which were occupied by Poland into the mid-twentieth century.[11] Slaviq was introduced in Alaska up in the Yukon River region in 1878 by Orthodox priests familiar with the Ukrainian tradition of singing Christmas songs composed in eastern Europe.[12] Some of the songs still sung by the Yup'ik today have been part of their collective memory since then.

Preparations for Slaviq begin in the summer and fall, and include drying fish, particularly salmon, and picking berries for the festive meal to be served at each Slaviq host's home. Part of the autumnal moose catch is also reserved for the occasion.[13] In late November or early December the church choir begins practicing the hymns and songs for the church services and those to be sung at the house visits. Although handwritten or printed copies of hymns and carols have been available, most singers, even those not in the choir, know the songs from memory, whether they be in Yup'ik, Church Slavonic, or Ukrainian.[14]

For a number of decades after the introduction of Slaviq to the Yup'ik people the order of events for the celebration included the following elements: Prior to the beginning of the Christmas church service the lanterns at each grave at the church cemetery would be lit. At the conclusion of the Christmas service a brief separate service for the commemoration of the dead, called 'panikhida' in Church Slavonic, would be sung at the church. Then, two young men proceed out of the altar carrying icon banners and one or two wooden stars affixed to wooden poles. In the center of the stars is an icon of the Nativity of Christ. The icon and star-bearers face the congregation with downcast eyes, exhibiting modesty, another Yup'ik value. The first Slaviq service of the season begins in the church following the divine liturgy on Christmas Day itself. The congregation led by the choir and its director sing Orthodox hymns first, followed by Ukrainian koliady and perhaps a few Christmas carols. Although many of these were songs passed down and sung every year, there seems to have been no objection to adding new songs to the repertoire. The sung part of the service ends with the singing of 'Many Years'—a blessing and prayer for a long and productive life for all.[15]

What is especially important about Slaviq is the spinning of the stars, unique to the Alaskan Slaviq and Finnish carolling.[16] According to one Yup'ik priest, the spun star represents the faith which is alive within those present and the faithful departed.[17] The young men holding the poles with

11 Ann Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays: Yup'ik lives and how we see them* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 94.
12 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 97.
13 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 98.
14 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 98-9.
15 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 103.
16 Harri Huovinen, personal communication, June 15, 2023.
17 KYUK: Public media for Alaska's Yukon-Kuskokwim delta, January 10, 2017, https://www.kyuk.org/arts-culture/2017-01-10/napaskiak-celebrates-slaviq.

the wooden stars spin the star during the singing. The icon in the center remains stationary. Since the singing could continue for twenty minutes, or quite a bit longer in some cases, the continued spinning of the star frame around the icon is something of an athletic feat which continues to interest young men, especially as they can compete with one another when two stars are spun simultaneously during the same service.[18] A short sermon is then given by the priest, a church leader, or even a layman, which includes references to the importance of adhering to the Yup'ik moral code as well as Christian teachings.[19]

The clergy, star-bearers, choir, and congregation then process with the star to the house of the first host (usually the priest). The visitors have been compared with the Wise Men following the Star over Bethlehem to find Christ.[20] Once inside many of the elements of the sung service would be repeated. A house visit at Slaviq is considered a considerable blessing for the host family.[21] "Starring" can take place in the home because "home is a holy place where God can be found," according to one priest.[22] The order of the songs remains more or less the same with the church hymns sung first, followed by koliady, and concluding with Christmas carols, although more recently there has been considerable variation in order. At some point, 'Many Years' is sung, although it is unclear whether this concludes the sung part of the short service during a house visit or whether 'Many Years' is sung after the meal at the conclusion of the house visit. What does change is the language in which the hymns and songs are sung: More recently, English is used more frequently in place of Slavonic.[23]

In a short video of a recent celebration of Slaviq,[24] the singing begins with several odes of the Nativity canon in Slavonic followed by the troparion of the feast, also in Slavonic. Then, a Ukrainian koliada is sung in English. The singing of 'Many Years' (in English) to the hosts of this Slaviq celebration concludes the video. The 'Many Years' is introduced with a prayer incorporating the text of the final stikhiron of "Lord, I have cried unto Thee" from the Nativity vespers service in which the thanksgiving offerings to Christ from all of God's creatures are described. During the singing a young boy continuously spins the star.

After the sung service and the short sermon, the guests are seated, many of whom are out of town relatives and friends of villagers visiting for Christmas. The host family begins the generous distribution of gifts to every guest, young and old. The gifts could include candy, soap, socks,

18 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 113.
19 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 113; KYUK, January 10, 2017, https://www.kyuk.org/arts-culture/2017-01-10/napaskiak-celebrates-slaviq.
20 KYUK, January 6, 2021, https://www.kyuk.org/programs/2021-01-06/how-slaviq-is-celebrated-in-the-y-k-delta.
21 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 102.
22 KYUK, January 10, 2017, https://www.kyuk.org/arts-culture/2017-01-10/napaskiak-celebrates-slaviq.
23 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 106.
24 Arnall'aq, "Slaviq 2023," posted January 10, 2023, YouTube, 8:41, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmQOkF0BpBU.

toys, and children's clothing. Senior members of the community take a place at the dining table which might be covered with a tablecloth and a lit candle in the center.[25] The festive food is blessed either by the priest or church leader, or even a layman. A festive meal is served, traditionally consisting of locally gathered available natural resources such as dried or frozen fish, often salmon, moose or reindeer soup, fermented foods, and *akutaq*, a dessert containing the berries picked the previous summer. Once the first group has finished other senior guests can take their place at the table until all have been served.[26] Many younger guests simply eat standing or seated on the floor in the same place where they had previously been singing.

It is evident from ethnographic accounts starting in the 1950s that Slaviq is not an exclusively Orthodox celebration, but more broadly Yup'ik and in fact, Native Alaskan. Among other news reports on Slaviq, one recent report on the passing of an elderly woman, made mention of the fact that although Maggie Mary Otto was not Orthodox she was known to host "Russian Orthodox Christmas" by cooking walrus for her community every year.[27]

Following the first house visit, all who wish to join the procession and subsequent house visits, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, rise, gather outside, and, led by the young men carrying the icon banners and stars, process to the next house to be visited. There, the sung service, distribution of gifts, and festive meal are repeated, with certain variations in the topic of the sermon or the types of gifts. What is not clear from historical or contemporary sources is whether any singing, praying or instruction occurs while traversing the geographic distance between houses, or if the visiting group remains silent, attempting to regain energy for the next house visit. These house visits could continue into the early morning hours, each house hosting fewer people as fatigue set in and guests decided not to go on to another house. Celebrating Slaviq involved a considerable amount of endurance on the part of the priest, church leaders, and choir over the course of a number of days. This quality of endurance, in and of itself, is also highly valued in the Yup'ik ethical code.

Historically these house visits used to run for the ten days between Christmas and Epiphany, each house being visited up to three times, depending on the number of interested hosts in the village having the financial resources and energy to acquire the gifts to be distributed as well as preparing up to three festive meals for a large crowd. This practice continued into the mid-twentieth century in some villages at which point the visits were limited to one per house and the entire Slaviq ritual event lasted three days.[28] More recently, there has been variation in the number of days Slaviq continues, somewhere between three and seven.

25 KYUK, January 7, 2019, https://www.kyuk.org/arts-culture/2019-01-07/q-a-with-father-michael-trefon-on-slaviq-celebration.
26 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 103-4; KYUK, January 6, 2021, https://www.kyuk.org/programs/2021-01-06/how-slaviq-is-celebrated-in-the-y-k-delta.
27 KYUK, October 2, 2017, https://alaskapublic.org/2017/10/02/as-permafrost-thaws-village-cemeteries-sink-into-swamp/.
28 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 108.

What was observed in the celebration of Slaviq in the 1950s regarding the festive meal was that although both men and women drank port (a lighter red wine often consumed after a meal) they appeared unaffected by it.[29] Wendell Oswalt surmises that the reason for this is the religious significance of Slaviq as a ritual event announcing and celebrating the birth of Christ that was perceived by the Yup'ik as a joyous yet sober occasion. Oswalt observed Slaviq in 1956 in Napaskiak, a village on the Kuskokwim River and mentions that the conversation during the festive meal was quiet and the atmosphere subdued. Also, the length of time an individual followed the procession and singers on the house visits, singing, listening, and participating in the festive meal was indicative of a degree of piety.[30] The awareness of the proximity of the souls of departed relatives and friends continued to be significant in the 1950s. Oswalt emphasizes the emic importance of the lighting of the lanterns at each relative's grave at the cemetery.[31]

By the 1980s individual house visits were limited to one, instead of three as in the past. Nevertheless, a number of houses could be blessed within a single visit at Slaviq as the geographical distance between houses was easily traversed on foot, although the Yup'ik people had no objection to traversing the distance by car, or to splitting up the party of church leaders, singers, and icon and star bearers to cover more houses in a shorter amount of time.[32]

In a documentary film made of a village Slaviq celebration by an Alaskan television station based in the Yup'ik area in the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta in 1987 the songs sung included parts of the matins service for the Nativity. The use of English was more extensive than in the 1950s when Wendell Oswalt conducted his fieldwork.[33] What is evident from the film is that at least during the house visits, Yup'ik homes and individual rooms have a wall or corner in which many Orthodox icons are hung. This is symbolic of an altar in a church. It is in front of this corner or wall that the star-spinners stand facing the choir and guests during the singing and sermon. In this film the presence of many young people and children, and their participation in the singing is especially evident. These children are socialized gradually into the extensive, multi-day celebration of Orthodox Christmas and will likely grow up to lead it either as clergy (priests or readers), as choir directors/singers, or as hosts during house visits.

In subsequent reports dating from 2013 to 2017 from KYUK, the Bethel-based public media station, it is evident that Slaviq has become somewhat adopted into dominant Anglo-American culture in that its celebration is announced in the media. By 2013 KYUK would promote this event as a local Alaskan holiday by wishing "Happy Slaviq to all from

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29 Wendell Oswalt, *Napaskiak: an Alaskan Eskimo community* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1963), 141.
30 Oswalt, *Napaskiak*, 141.
31 Oswalt, *Napaskiak*, 138.
32 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 106.
33 *Following the star*, 1987.

KYUK" on January 7—the date Christmas is celebrated by the Orthodox in Alaska. This greeting also included an announcement that KYUK planned to air "Russian Orthodox" hymns on the radio waves over the ensuing days of Slaviq.[34]

Between the 1980s and 2013-2017 certain cultural strategies have been implemented by the Yup'ik in their celebration of Slaviq, showing its adaptability to contemporary Alaskan life. For instance, the celebration in Bethel, which is a larger town in the region, has been limited to the three days immediately following Orthodox Christmas, and takes place starting in the late afternoon and evening only. It is no longer the case in most villages that house visits regularly continue into the early morning hours. More of the hymns and songs are sung in English as the Yup'ik have become more socialized into an essentially Anglo-American church and surrounding society. Although it continues to be the case that the choir and older faithful particularly, sing some hymns in Church Slavonic, and a large number of people of various generations know a substantial number of songs in Yup'ik, which continues to be the first native language of many Yup'ik people into the twenty-first century.[35]

The variation in gifts distributed during house visits and some of the elements of the festive meal have changed over time. In Bethel in 2013 on the house visits that KYUK reported, gifts distributed did not include anything distinctly Yup'ik or Alaskan. Gifts more commonly given now include reading glasses, socks, soap, and children receive edibles such as granola bars and candy.[36]

The basic elements of Slaviq or "starring" have remained the same over the course of generations since it was introduced in 1878–1880. These include the house visits; the choral sung service accompanied by the spinning of the Christmas star; the sermon by a priest or church leader instructing the listeners in the Yup'ik moral code and in Christian teaching; the generous distribution of gifts; the festive meal; and the commemoration of the dead with a panikhida, particularly at the conclusion of Slaviq. It is these elements that have been taught and transmitted through cultural and religious socialization to subsequent generations over the century and a half that "starring" has been celebrated in Alaska.[37]

Conclusion

Slaviq can be viewed as containing a storehouse of cultural knowledge and as a strategy in the Yup'ik knowledge system which, in its celebration, imparts the enduring aspects of the Yup'ik ethical code and beliefs about the dead over the course of generations.

34 KYUK, *Arts, Culture & Community Features*, January 7, 2013.
35 KYUK, January 10, 2017, https://www.kyuk.org/arts-culture/2017-01-10/napaskiak-celebrates-slaviq.
36 KYUK, *Arts, Culture & Community Features*, January 7, 2013.
37 KYUK, *Arts, Culture & Community Features*, January 8, 2015.

At the time in the late nineteenth century when "starring" was introduced to the Yup'ik people, many lived in smaller camps in the summer and fall returning to the village in the winter for a period of ritual celebration. From these camps people would traverse some geographical distances to hunt, fish, and gather berries and other edible plants.[38] This subsistence lifestyle continues among the Yup'ik and has come to include a moleben, a short Orthodox prayer service of petition, sometimes for several families together and a priest's blessing for a successful harvest before moving to the summer fishing camps, as well as a blessing upon the families' successful return to the village.[39]

In the past, the village was occupied only when hunting, fishing, and gathering activities were limited due to the harshness of the winter weather. Every village was structured with a *qasgiq* or men's house in the middle, the ceremonial center of the community, surrounded by sod houses occupied by women and children. The men's house was the place where Yup'ik elders instructed young boys and unmarried men in the Yup'ik way of life, specifically in the proper understanding and implementation of the ethical code. On a daily basis, the men and young boys living in the *qasgiq* interacted with the children and women, who communally prepared the food for the entire village. Symbolically, the *qasgiq* was a center and the sod houses a periphery, the distance between which had to be traversed, generally by young men, in order for social life to continue.[40]

Similarly, the harvesting and gathering that continues today is pulled together in the village particularly in the winter around the Orthodox church activities at Christmas and Slaviq. Regarding the ethical code and its transmission to subsequent generations, the importance of generosity and sharing which was emphasized in the winter village gatherings is also evident in the distribution of gifts of candy and other simple and luxury items to sometimes as many as two hundred people by the hosts at Slaviq. Such generosity would need to be planned and prepared for, and would often set the hosts back financially to a substantial extent. The instruction by elders in the *qasgiq* in the ethical code has continued in the Christian sermons given by priests or church leaders both in the church and on individual house visits during Slaviq, and perhaps at other times as well.

Another way in which Yup'ik indigenous knowledge is transmitted to younger members of the community during Slaviq is the emphasis placed on the continued presence of the dead among the living throughout the year but especially during Slaviq. The Yup'ik *Merr'aq* was a feast of the dead celebrated in the winter in which the spirits of dead relatives and friends were invited to feast with the living community.[41] This belief in the presence of the dead is reflected in Slaviq when "the windows of Yup'ik homes are typically left uncovered . . . to admit the spirits of the departed to the feast."

38 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 110, 113.
39 Martin Nikolai 2017: personal communication.
40 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 110.
41 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 118.

Similarly, the Ukrainian practice at Christmas includes an awareness of the proximity of the souls of the departed. Ukrainians customarily "set a place at the table for the ancestors and a candle in the window to light their way."[42] Throughout the years the celebration of Slaviq has included the lighting of lanterns at the graves of departed relatives and friends, as well as serving a panikhida there. Historically this service would occur immediately prior to the house visits at the beginning of Slaviq and at its conclusion, but now it often takes place only at the conclusion of Slaviq.[43] The Yup'ik believe that in the Slaviq celebration of Orthodox Christmas, those participating are helping the departed souls of loved ones be with the living, to celebrate the feast together.

All of this reflects an aspect of Yup'ik indigenous religion which emphasizes the establishment and maintenance of proper relations between humans and non-human beings, as well as between this and the other world. These beliefs are verbally articulated and physically enacted and transmitted on an annual basis in a formalized manner through the elaborate Yup'ik, and more broadly, Native Alaskan celebration of Slaviq. This annual paraliturgical attention to the enactment of the indigenous ethical code on various levels continues an authoritative tradition that, as James L. Cox has phrased it, has proved adaptive, adoptive, innovative, yet continuous over time and space throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta among the Yup'ik people.

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42 Fienup-Riordan, *Eskimo essays*, 119.

43 KYUK, January 10, 2017, https://www.kyuk.org/arts-culture/2017-01-10/napaskiak-celebrates-slaviq.