

# Why don't they all move south?

## PROBLEM SOLVER OR OPPORTUNITY SEEKER

In 2016, I attended an exhibition hosted by Manulife called *Arctic Adaptations*. The evening showcased a project of the same name, which took place while Nunavut was celebrating its 15th anniversary in 2014. Participants explored innovative architecture proposals prepared by five design teams, each of which comprised “a Canadian school of architecture, a Canadian architecture office with extensive northern experience, and a Nunavut-based organization.” Each team was given a single aspect to focus on, choosing either housing, health, education, arts, or recreation in Nunavut communities. I was impressed by the presentations, as they provided suggestions for a shift from northern architecture being a “problem solver to an opportunity seeker.” Important work like this helps me believe in reconciliation. It was the attitude present in some of the attendees that discourages me.

The guest I brought spoke Mandarin, and she acted as a translator during a conversation I shared with a group of Chinese economists. The beginning of the discussion was going smoothly enough. I was sharing the ongoing projects we have for Inuit in Toronto, as well as my limited knowledge surrounding issues facing northern communities. It was during this part of the conversation that I was asked the question, “Why don't they all move south?” I wasn't sure how to respond, so I remained silent as my mind scrambled to find a satisfying answer to an unexpected question. As a

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result, the conversation switched to Mandarin and I watched my participatory role change from an ambassador to a spectator. I asked my guest what they were saying, and she told me that they were working out the costs that would be associated with moving the entire Inuit population to Edmonton, Montreal, and Ottawa—figures that would better be discussed, in my opinion, with regard to subjects like sustainable architecture in the north (the theme of the event).

I wish I could say that this was an isolated and rare occurrence. The unfortunate reality is that it reflects a mindset that has been, and remains, a pervasive point of view tainting the relationship between Indigenous people and the rest of the country. The perspective that I'm speaking about is the terrifying and belittling belief that Indigenous people *belong* to the state. This belief has led to horrifying acts that have plagued our communities for hundreds of years. Residential schools, forced relocation, and the “Sixties scoop” are among these acts, and they have found their way into the public sphere largely through the voices of non-Indigenous celebrities. The fact that Gord Downie (I do want to add that I'm a huge Hip fan) has become the image for reconciliation in the eyes of a number of Canadians reflects the reality that we are seen by many as something that belongs to the state. The truth is, we can speak for ourselves, and

we have been speaking this entire time. But no one has been listening.

## EMPOWERMENT, NOT DEPENDENCY

When I think about reconciliation and how we need to hold the Canadian government, and by extension the Canadian population, accountable for the damage that has been done to our communities, I think in terms of creating a sense of empowerment among our people as opposed to a sense of dependency. We are entirely capable of taking care of ourselves. We did it for thousands of years before settlers arrived to claim our lands. We weren't killing ourselves before colonization. We weren't killing ourselves before our identity and our land were stolen from us. We didn't choose to live in the communities we were brought to. We were placed there, by force. In northern communities, after Inuit were moved into our new settlements, the RCMP killed our dogs so that we couldn't travel out onto the land anymore. They made us completely dependent on their resources.

What we have lost as Indigenous people throughout the history of colonization is control over our land, lives, and destinies. What we want back is sovereignty over our environment and our communities. I understand that trauma is not something that damages the victim alone, and that the abuser is also susceptible to experiencing pain. Reconciliation is a journey of healing together. It's my hope that we can all consider what this means. 🍁



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