

PART 03: THE ECONOMY OF ARTS, CRAFTS & CARE, AND CONCLUSION

A YELLOWHEAD INSTITUTE SPECIAL REPORT

PINASUNNIQ

Reflections on a Northern
Indigenous Economy

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Germaine Arnaktauyok,
'When Houses
(Iglus) Were Alive,'
Lithograph, 1996, by

ABSTRACT

*Pinasunniq: Reflections on a Northern Indigenous Economy** offers a vision of Inuit economic self-determination. It challenges the "common sense" Northern economic models that have historically excluded Inuit voices and continue to erase Inuit economic activity. Through economic analysis, narrative, and advocacy, the report asks critical questions about the benefits of government-led policy and approaches of industry. In contrast, it offers examples of Inuit-centered economic frameworks in practice today that prioritize sustainability, reciprocity, and care. Part 01 reviews the current landscape, reflecting on systemic barriers to Inuit-led development. Part 02 addresses traditional economic activities, particularly hunting, harvesting, and food sovereignty, emphasizing the role of Indigenous knowledge. Part 03 explores economic diversity through the arts and care-based economies, with perspectives on healing, meaningful work, and reconciliation. Ultimately, this edited report is not just an analysis but a call to action to envision and act upon a future where Inuit have the authority to shape their economy in ways that foster cultural revitalization and community well-being. *Pinasunniq* demonstrates how Inuit leadership in economic discourse can shift us toward a path for transformative change rooted in self-determination and aligning with Inuit values.

**Pinasunniq* translates loosely to "endeavour" or "venture".

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Download the full report, including Part 01 and 02 at
yellowheadinstitute.org/pinasunniq



PART 03
**The Economy of Arts,
Crafts & Care**

Reflections on the Art and Craft Economy in Nunavut

As an Inuk artist, the path to my craft has not been straightforward or easy. Other Inuit artists – and there are many of us – have taken different routes, but there are many similarities in the challenges we have faced and the recognition (or lack thereof) we receive for the contributions we make to Nunavut’s economy.

I am originally from the Kitikmeot (Qitirmiut) region of Nunavut and have been raised with my Inuinnaq and Netsirlikmeot (Natsilingmiut) roots.

After graduating high school in Iqaluit, I decided to enroll in Nunavut Arctic College (NAC) and studied for one-year in their Mental Health Program. I later enrolled in NAC’s Jewellery and Metalwork Diploma Program and graduated in 2015. Also at NAC, I enrolled in Pre-Nursing and graduated in 2019. That same year, I decided to move to Halifax and enrolled in NAC’s Transition Year Program, graduating in 2020. I am currently at Dalhousie University studying nursing; I hope to one day become a psychiatric nurse and specialize in art therapy.

Beyond my formal mental health education, I have used my training to volunteer as a counsellor at Nunavut’s Kamatsiaqtut helpline. With my arts degree, I have been able to build relationships at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the Esker Foundation in Calgary, the Nunatta Sunakkutaangit Museum in Iqaluit, and the Tivi Galleries in Kuujuaq, Nunavik, among others. I attended Indigenous Fashion Arts when it was originally named Toronto’s Indigenous Fashion Week, and alongside my visual arts, I am a throat singer and drum dancer. I have had the opportunity to share my music with director Alex Garland for the FX show "DEVS".

I enjoy my life as an artist and, over time, I have learned how to show and properly appraise my fine art and to sell to galleries and spaces that appreciate me as an Inuk artist.

THE DUAL(ING) ECONOMIES OF NUNAVUT: MONOPOLIES VS. COMMUNITY

The media often describes Nunavut as a “far away,” barren, cold, and treeless land. This creates an image of an inaccessible exotic hinterland.

But this is strange to me because, comparatively, a plane ride from Ottawa is a mere three hours; from Halifax, it’s just two. Often, during international medical emergencies, planes land in Iqaluit because it’s recognized as an international airport. Soon, there will be a ferry to Labrador. Although Nunavut is about 200 million square kilometres and covers three different time zones, the communities here are not as distant or remote as we are often encouraged to believe. But those flights that crisscross the territory are typically flown by a single airline. Canadian North has a monopoly on flights in the region, making it difficult to travel because of inflexible timelines, routes, cancellations, and high prices. The other notable monopoly in Nunavut is the Northwest Company (NWC), their stores previously owned by the Hudson’s Bay Company, which boasts being established in 1670, ironically when the King of the day “gave” them the monopoly to trade in our



Barbara Akoak, 1989, Nuliajuk spoon, 2014, Silver, copper.

Inspired by Barbara's appreciation for Inuit creation stories and legends she created a spoon in honour of Nuliajuk the Goddess of the sea.

region. For most of its existence, the NWC was the only “commercial” source of goods. For over 300 years, they have been overcharging Inuit. The NWC says shipping is why food is so expensive, even though they have had federal funding through the Nutrition North Program to reduce the costs. Interestingly, the NWC also holds shares in the Canadian North Airline.

Is it really physical geography that is limiting and separating us? Or is it how the geography is defined by a few? Remoteness is a construct to justify monopoly and price gouging. Even though there may be real costs associated with limited shipping options — i.e. heavy reliance on an airline or seasonal ship cargo and no road access to distribution centres — the argument of inaccessible faraway lands seems exaggerated to justify excessive profiteering.

When we think about the economy of the North, these are considered pillars.

But despite this, in a land where two litres of milk is often \$11 in Iqaluit and more in the smaller communities, when I think about what holds up Nunavut's economy, it is the immense love Inuit have for our families, not these “common sense” monopolies. Nunavut is rich in land, full of life, culture, and water that we have protected for thousands of years.

The economy Inuit artists and crafters know revolves around the land and our families. The exports we know come from natural materials: fur from foxes, wolves, caribou, and polar bears, and the sea and ocean provide us with seals, fish, bowheads, narwhals, and belugas, to name a few.

We polish the baleen from bowhead whales and use it in jewelry and carvings. We polish and carve ivory from narwhals and walruses. There are also the minerals: gold, titanium, and iron ore, as well as gemstones like amethyst and red garnet. Soapstone becomes fine art, usually sold in galleries. It is a combination of beautiful lands, hunters and huntresses, natural materials, and our abundance of fine artists that creates our economy, or at least the art economy.

Kenoyuak Ashevak's grandchildren fondly remember when she received \$216,000 for the “Enchanted Owl” lithograph. Her prints were initially appraised in the \$2,000 to \$3,000 range. Inuit art is precious and inspiring. This is possible for many others, too. I remember Ashevak's descendant, Tim Pitseolak, once said, “No art is wrong; you made it, how can it be wrong?” He lifts up Inuit artists, and this, too, is possible for others. We can support our families, both immediate and extended, and each other as artists to move away from a Northern economy perceived as far away and vast, supported by airlines and grocery monopolies. We are, and can be, so much more.



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SUPPLY AND DEMANDING MORE: THE FIGHT FOR EQUITY IN ART

Tim Pitseolak was one of my mentors in my art career very early on. When he told me my art could not be wrong, he was talking about the criticism we get — from Southerners and Inuit, too. It can be a struggle to be considered authentic or legitimate. I have held this close to my work and seen how it's played out in practice. One example is from my throat singing work.

Once, I was approached for an event and offered a contract, clearly copied and pasted from a template, with a modest fee. This made me uncomfortable — as if the organization was seeking a token performance and did not understand the true value of my work. But with the confidence of those who came before me, I worked with the organization and explained the history, labour, and art of throat-singing and was able to secure a fair contract, one that I believed I deserved as an Inuk artist. Unfortunately, my experience is common. There is a trend of underpaying Indigenous and racialized people in the workplace. And that is true in art as well. We deserve to collaborate and work with people that appreciate us.

We should have the space to create.

With my Inuinnaq roots in mind, I intend to make my pieces with good energy. In Inuinnaqtun, “attatak” means “amulet,” and with that traditional knowledge, I create

these pieces based on what I know from my culture. I thank my parents and grandparents for everything they have taught me. I learned how to sew from my mother, who makes clothing for the weather, with both cold and harsh and warm and hot days in mind. Her father, Abraham Kingmiaqtuq, my maternal grandfather, was a carver full-time. He was also a gallery fine artist. I have seen his work all over Canada. My father's parents were fox trappers and hunters. I remember watching them carefully work as a team to cure the skins. I grew up watching my father hunt seals. Each of them incorporated spirituality in all the steps, too. I remember my dad and his brothers pouring water into the seal's mouth after hunting it to ensure it would not be thirsty in the afterlife. It is with our traditional knowledge we should respect everything, we are even advised not to break any rocks if we do not need to.

There is an innate respect in Inuit values; therefore, I deserve respect as a living being, too. I ask for that respect in the contracts I negotiate as an Inuk artist.

I enjoy singing, drum dancing, drawing, and painting. I have been a fine artist since 2015. I thank my parents for my beautiful upbringing all over Inuit Nunangat and my Inuk ancestry. I extend my gratitude to the huntresses, hunters, and providers of the natural materials I use in my jewelry. This is Inuit economy.

Decolonial Art and Destructive Economies: Reviving the Art Capital of Canada

Art is an often neglected element of the Northern economy. But Inuit are performers, carvers, painters, crafters, and all manner of experts in material culture and art. The contribution these artists make to local, regional and national economic activity is immense and is, in fact, world-renowned. So, why is it neglected? In this interview, Kunuk Inutiq speaks with Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, the Iqaluit-based multi-disciplinary artist whose practice centres on uajaerneq (Greenlandic mask dance) and includes acting, curating, drum-dancing, music and writing. Laakkuluk's work is prolific, and she has been outspoken about issues of gender equality in creative spaces, decolonizing museum spaces, and Inuit self-determination in the North. Kunuk and Laakkuluk's discussion spans Inuit relationships to land and water and how that is (or is not) included in discussions of art, politics, and, importantly, economy.

KUNUK: As Indigenous people, we have a unique connection to the land, water, and our environment, or sila. How would you describe this very interdependent relationship in your own words?

LAACKKULUK: I can only speak to what my experience of it is and my family's experience of it because I don't want to put words in other people's mouths. I would say that as a family, we have always seen ourselves as a part of sila, nuna [land], and tariuq [sea], and that we're very lucky to be able to be experiencing it, gaining knowledge from it, and feeding ourselves from it.

This relationship is one that colonization has really tried to destroy over several generations of my family. And yet, we've maintained it in many different ways. Some of the aspects of having a relationship with sila is being able to be peaceful on the land together, being safe, and procuring enjoyment from it.

If I imagine or describe a scenario in which all of those aspects are playing together, it is in the middle of the summer when we're pulling up fish from our net just a few feet from the cabin that we built ourselves. The kids are gutting fish, and we're hanging them and eating them right away. And there's this feedback system where we're being fed by nuna (land) and imaq (water). And we are contributing to the lifecycle of it all. And we feel at peace with it. Also, being able to drink in the vista is such a huge part of our mental health.

KUNUK: Can you talk a little bit more about the "enjoyment" piece? We've had conversations about daring to have enjoyment in the decolonial context. And the way that you're describing being together and safe, and the enjoyment, can you describe more in terms of the importance of that for you and your family and how it feeds you?

LAACKKULUK: Enjoyment is such a huge part of decolonization because it means you have sovereignty over your environment; you know exactly what is going on around you. You are contributing to that environment. And you feel like you're an equal in every different aspect of that environment. So, in political terms, enjoyment is really about feeling and asserting your equality. But in practical terms, of course, enjoyment means being able to feel like all your senses are being fed. You're seeing things

that make you feel at peace; you're smelling things that are delicious; you're listening to things that make you feel peaceful; you're touching things — everything is tactile; you're using your muscles as much as you can.

I also think a lot about how lucky I am to be able-bodied in the ways that I am and engage with nuna in the ways that I do because of the way I can move my body. Other people have lots of different kinds of abilities, too, and they have enjoyment as well.

KUNUK: As you're talking, it made me think about ability in terms of how the traumas we experience create that further disconnect from all those senses and sense of self.

In which ways do you think that Inuit worldview principles, values, and guidance play a role in our day-to-day life?

This question is basically to affirm that with the assimilation process, we still live a life where we practice [our culture]. It's not lost. Trying to get a sense of how much we still practice our culture and our worldview. Because a lot of the conversation is from a deficit-based [perspective], and this is trying to capture the opposite of that: that we're still very much rich in terms of practicing our cultural values.

LAACKKULUK: Yeah, I would say that it's probably more helpful to see ourselves in a comparative sense rather than a deficit sense. And to show the stark differences in the way that people practice their daily lives.

And again, going to practical examples is the way that we treat our children every day, the way that we talk to them, whether it's in Inuktitut or not. There are still cultural principles involved in how we're raising them, what names or kinship terms we call them. What kind of food we give them. What kind of disciplinary action we give them.

I can see myself doing things in intergenerational ways. And then, when I look at non-Inuit families, the way that they treat their children is completely different; they use a completely different type of discipline and home educational model.

So definitely, it's a part of our everyday life, just doing this on a comparative basis. But if I talk about what we do from an internal place, it is definitely a choice that each one of us is making to continue to be Inuit within ourselves and between each other.

I often think about how the colonial forces have been so strong. If it wasn't for our ability to tell each other stories and our abilities to hunt, the colonial forces might have won, but they never have. It's that ability to tell stories, that ability to be on the land and hunt, that allows us to continue to be Inuit now.

KUNUK: The next question is how we often hear about economic development, sustainable development – terms that are trying to capture and recognize how we do economic development in the Arctic, for example. But they're often synonymous with capitalism and making money only. In what ways would you think an Inuit-defined economy would most serve Inuit?

LAACKKULUK: Inuit often talk about, again, that idea of avatittinit or inutamaat, seeing the extensions of ourselves is actually the land. Avatittinnit can mean "out on the land," but it can also mean "at the tips of your extremities," your limbs. So, in terms of being self-defined and self-sufficient, it would be making sure that we are looking after our entire bodies and minds by having a relationship with the land. And this is not in congruence with the way that modern society will.

In terms of providing ourselves with the essentials of shelter, food, and water, we can do that. We can have our own clothing; we can have our own way of looking after ourselves. But we can also create, like any modern economy, a small economy out there in the world, from Iceland to the Faroe Islands to any of the little island states, where people are providing for themselves in their own cultural contexts. And so, of course, Inuit are more than capable of doing that as well.



IN TERMS OF WHAT I SEE AS MY ROLE AS AN ARTIST IS THAT I HAVE THE CAPACITY TO TAKE THAT STEP BACK, TO SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE. SOMETIMES, I THINK ABOUT HOW ART HAS THIS CAPACITY TO BRING YOU ABOVE THE ORDINARY SO THAT YOU'RE ABLE TO SEE THINGS AT AN EXTRAORDINARY LEVEL. WE'RE EXTRAORDINARY. TO BE ABLE TO FEEL THAT, YOU'RE HAVING PROFOUND MOMENTS OF UNDERSTANDING WHEN YOU ARE EITHER CREATING THE ART OR APPRECIATING THE ART. THAT PROFUNDITY ALLOWS YOU TO COME BACK DOWN INTO YOUR ORDINARY LIFE AND MAKE DECISIONS IN A NEW WAY.

KUNUK: Can you talk a little bit about your work in that context, the role of the arts, and the importance of expression – of decolonizing the ways we've been forced to function in capitalistic and destructive economies?

LAACKKULUK: I work as an artist full time. One of the funny things that I find happening right now is that even though I live in Nunavut, I live in the Arctic, almost zero of my income comes from the Arctic or from Nunavut at the moment. I'm being paid to be an artist by mostly Southern institutions, which I

find strange because Nunavut is considered to be the artistic capital of Canada in so many different ways. But you know, that might just be a phase of where my work is coming through at the moment. Maybe I'll have more Nunavut-based work in the next month or two just because of the versatility and flexibility that I have to have as an artist.

In terms of what I see as my role as an artist is that I have the capacity to take that step back, to see the bigger picture. Sometimes, I think about how art has

this capacity to bring you above the ordinary so that you're able to see things at an extraordinary level. We're extraordinary. To be able to feel that, you're having profound moments of understanding when you are either creating the art or appreciating the art. That profundity allows you to come back down into your ordinary life and make decisions in a new way.

So that's kind of what I see my role is: being able to take the time and effort to lift up to a different level than the ordinary life in order to help myself, my family, and the community people I engage with to go back down and make new decisions in new ways.

Aesthetic beauty does play a role — making beautiful things or making beautiful thoughts. That is a part of it, but not necessarily the end goal. I don't need to make beautiful things. And as a result of that, keeping that in mind, I do find that I don't always fit in with people. I have a different way of thinking or a different way of creating, and I create challenges sometimes. I think that's important so people reassess who they are. They can either reassert themselves or try different ways of engaging in the environment around them. So, it's the creation of art. The appreciation of art, I think, has a huge role in decolonizing or engaging in non-destructive economies, that's for sure.

KUNUK: We're in the land claim era. So we've established these institutions as part of a governance structure that we've adopted — government, Inuit organizations, hunters and trappers. How would you like to see these organizations playing a role in the overall economic well-being of Inuit?

LAACKKULUK: I think one of the most important things is taking away the idea that the product of each of these organizations turns into an economic number, dollar amounts. Money comes into, for example, the Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO), which creates all sorts of programmes and activities based on its mandate. But it doesn't mean that there's a certain dollar amount that comes out from all of this programming and mandate. It's really important to see the cultural value and its effect on the whole person. And I really like thinking about Inuit — I mean all human beings — as whole people. But in this context, so many times, Inuit are not treated as a whole person. For example, at

the doctor's office, they just look at how "H. pylori is affecting your guts," but they don't focus on the mind-gut connection. Or somebody's got to quit smoking, but how nicotine addiction, or the soothing effect of smoking, is blanketing a deeper socio-psychological issue is ignored. It's very small aspects, not taking into consideration the entirety of that person who belongs to a family, who is literally living in certain circumstances and is applying themselves in different ways.

It's so important for the different organizations to see how they affect the whole person and the network of people coming together. I think when you do that, it's easier to go away from the monetary value of each of these places.

KUNUK: When these organizations are so focused on money and not the actual impact they're having on lives, they seem very disconnected from our communities.

LAACKKULUK: I found that particularly frustrating when I was working in the nonprofit sector — both in the daycare system here in Nunavut, as well as in the art system — where nonprofit societies have that word right in their title. You're not supposed to be focusing on making a profit through them, but the actual model of how to set up an organization and its governance is totally mirroring the corporate profit-making world. So, even though you're trying to make an artistic product, an artistic project, you still have to make sure that all the funding models, all the governance models around this project, are all supposed to make this pinnacle of capital. And here we are, you know, looking after kids in daycare or making a play. You can't count that way. You can't look at the work as a capitalist project. But that's the only way of assessing within the nonprofit world.

KUNUK: Conversations around how you create other ways of measuring success, or how we define success, become very difficult conversations around pride and self-empowerment or empowerment. Do you have any thoughts on that?

LAACKKULUK: We've been touching a lot on it already in the conversation in terms of finding ways of amplifying people's self-directed enjoyment in life and assessing a person by their entirety. Not just going in for doctor's appointments or looking after different aspects of your



I GET A SENSE OF HOPE FROM LOOKING AT HOW YOUNG PEOPLE EXPRESS QUEER LOVE. I THINK THAT'S ACTUALLY ONE OF THE BIGGEST THINGS THAT GIVES ME SO MUCH HOPE: SOMETHING THAT IS SO FEARED BY MAINSTREAM SOCIETY, BY CHRISTIANITY, BY COLONIZATION. IT'S LIKE THIS BEAUTIFUL BLOOM COMING OUT, AND ALL OF US ARE WORKING REALLY HARD TO MAKE SURE THAT BLOOM KEEPS PROLIFERATING.

humanity, but organizations treating you as a whole person. How are you doing as a family member? How are you doing as a community member? How was what you are contributing to the organization affecting your entirety?

KUNUK: And then the last question is, what are some of the things you hope for your children, or your young relatives, in terms of types of work, workforce, or education in the future?

LAACKKULUK: So, my panik (daughter) just started university this past fall. And when she was born, when I gave birth 18 years ago, I thought, "Wow, that's almost 20 years in the future. I hope she can go to a university in Inuktitut, in the homeland." And it hasn't quite happened. But I always still hope you know that there are more and more opportunities for all three of my kids to be able to enter a space where they feel like they are comfortable as these modern mixed-heritage Inuit learning more Inuktitut, learning more land skills, and feeling like they're contributing as equal members of our society.

KUNUK: What do you think that would do? In terms of the personal and social effects of having an Inuit university delivered in Inuktitut?

LAACKKULUK: The effect would be that we have self-direction as a society. We already know that intellectual thought, rigour, and critical analysis exists. It's just that with these huge waves of colonization coming over, we're never able to fully assert this idea of us being university-providing community members.

It would cause families to stay together. We're going through this massive feeling of empty nesting. Our daughter lives far away from us now. And she has to fend for herself without inussiutit (Inuit food). So it would keep families together, assert what

we've always known about ourselves, and create, again, coming back to the beginning of the conversation, this environment of intellectual safety and intellectual enjoyment.

KUNUK: What do you see as the biggest barrier to creating spaces for a decolonized approach, whether it's our relationship to the land or how we define our economy?

LAACKKULUK: I think the biggest barrier is this multifaceted ball of monopolies controlling far too much in the Arctic. There is not enough housing, not enough food sovereignty, not enough self-determination. You can't say it's just one thing — it's this very complicated ball of different aspects of colonization that isn't allowing this to happen. We're always talking about these transient qallunaat (white people) that come and really run this place, run Nunavut. Or they don't even come to Nunavut; they have jobs based in the South, and they're working so hard for mega dollars to control Inuit lives from away. You know, if there was an end to this pervasive transience — these thoughts coming in, thoughts leaving, thoughts coming in, thoughts leaving — and there was more consistency and more long-term, like from birth onwards, education about how to be in this place, we'd be a lot better.

KUNUK: What gives you hope?

LAACKKULUK: I get a sense of hope from looking at how young people express queer love. I think that's actually one of the biggest things that gives me so much hope: something that is so feared by mainstream society, by Christianity, by colonization. It's like this beautiful bloom coming out, and all of us are working really hard to make sure that bloom keeps proliferating.



Photo Credit: Shari Fox

ROMANI MAKKIK

Reflections on Meaningful Work: Working for a Community Organization

The most important thing I have learned working for the Ilisaqsivik Society is that in a time of “reconciliation” between governments and Indigenous people, between the South and the North, we need to consider what “reconciliation” really means. Ilisaqsivik is one of the few places where one can truly reconcile with one’s past, with one’s trauma, and better understand the collective trauma of our people – Inuit. It is also a place to reconcile the ideas of “workforce” and “workplace.” I have seen these through some of the people I have met through Ilisaqsivik. Inuit are thinking about different ways to create meaningful work, especially to support our fellow Inuit, and especially after having helped themselves with the support of Ilisaqsivik.

FOUNDING AND GROWING ILISAQSIVIK SOCIETY

Founded in 1997, the Ilisaqsvik Society is a registered charity and not-for-profit organization in Clyde River (Kangiqtugaapik), Nunavut.

Ilisaqsvik strives to provide programs, services, and space that draw on and support Inuit culture and language and help people realize their full life potential. Ilisaqsvik supports individuals' physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being through every stage of life to create thriving, sustainable communities. Ilisaqsvik designs and delivers various community programs — dozens every year. Everything from prenatal and children's programs to a youth drop-in centre, to various training programs, such as on-the-land skills through the full-time Angunasuktiit hunting instruction program and environmental research and monitoring through the Ittaq Heritage and Research Centre (a division of Ilisaqsvik), to delivering the Inuusita Ingiranivuu or "Our Life's Journey," Inuit Counsellor Training and Mentorship Program, the only Inuktitut language counsellor training program in Nunavut. Ilisaqsvik also runs the school breakfast and lunch programs, an early childhood education program, after-school programs, and a youth and adult drop-in library with access to computers to use the Internet. They also have Elders and sewing programs running throughout the year.

These programs are all delivered in Inuktitut, and all the work, the ways of teaching and doing, are planned by Inuit, for Inuit. That is what I love about Ilisaqsvik Society. Working there feels like coming home and feeling complete being in my world.

I grew up in Igloolik, Nunavut, and have worked with Ilisaqsvik for the last few years, travelling for my work in and out of Clyde River. I had the opportunity to work in Inuktitut, which I have had to relearn. Through that process, I have come to understand that although I speak Inuktitut, I speak more English-Inuktitut, meaning I tend to translate word for word, sometimes losing the meaning of what I am trying to say. I also have had to unlearn the strict rules around work that I had learned in Western institutions, like at other workplaces, in university, in high school, from Settlers, where I had to

work in certain ways by "leaving my feelings at the door," for example, or sometimes, working in environments where I did not feel safe. By not feeling safe, I mean in the sense of often feeling helpless in some jobs due to policies and practices that did not allow me to navigate or understand how to work within and with what felt like confined agencies. Leaving me feeling disempowered in the work I was attempting to do. I am grateful for the opportunities I had to learn from Settlers, but I felt disconnected from my community and fellow Inuit because I was trying to behave, talk, and be like the Settler. A whole other way of speaking, thinking, and doing, feeling like I had to fit into a prescribed behaviour, all the while trying to make sense of it.

INUIT HEALING AND SAFETY

Speaking, thinking, and doing with my fellow Inuit, amongst Inuit, I feel like I finally really understand the importance of worldview. I came in as an academic, a researcher, an observer, a listener, and an analyzer, feeling like an outsider. It still happens, and it makes me think more about what "reconciliation" with our past really means. The Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC, 2013) translates "reconciliation" into Inuktitut as "saimmaqatigiingniq," and the way they have translated it back into English means "a new relationship when past opponents get back together, meet in the middle, and are at peace" (QTC, 2013:14-15). How do we reconcile with the trauma and pain of our "past opponents" when it is all worldview?

I have come to realize that, as Inuit, we need to have the time and safe space to work through our own trauma and pain and recognize our individual, family and collective trauma. This includes in our workplaces. Inuusita Ingiranivuu, or Our Life's Journey, is delivered by Inuit who have learned counselling skills and are using their lived experience and knowledge to teach those who are already and want to continue to help their fellow Inuit through counselling. Inuit working for Inuit. Inuit being part of the change from the bottom up.

Ilisaqsvik's counsellors and the majority of their employees are Inuit from Clyde River or people who moved there from nearby communities. The frontline workers, early childhood educators, food program

coordinators, hunters, seamstresses, administration support, and youth working at Ilisaqsivik are all Inuit. The majority of the staff I have encountered have participated in Inuusita Ingiranivuu and found it useful to improve their family and work relationships. The Board of Directors, who approve the policies and procedures that direct Ilisaqsivik, are all Inuit. In March of 2024, the organization hired its first Inuk Executive Director, making the entire staff Inuit.

As a charity and non-profit society, Ilisaqsivik pulls together funding that enables them to hire people in the community, contributing to the economy of Clyde River. There are limited options for employment there unless you land something with the Hamlet office or Piqusilirivik, the Inuit Cultural School operated by Nunavut Arctic College and located in Clyde River. You could get employment at the Baffinland Iron Mine, which would often have you flying in and out to the mine site over 100 kilometres away. Currently, major construction is happening for a small craft harbour, and some people have been able to obtain employment with that project, but it is seasonal and temporary. Realizing there are few to no employment options made me think of how much we, as Inuit, need to be involved more in community development, program development, and delivery, including policy development. We must have the time and space to think of where and how we want to work with and for Inuit, and more importantly, how we can do things in different ways. As Inuit, and maybe for Indigenous people in general, we have to think about how to do things from both worldviews: how the Inuit do it and how the Settlers do it.

Participating in Inuusita Ingiranivuu for the last five years has helped me see the importance of having a sense of purpose, particularly as it relates to the wellness of our people.

Ilisaqsivik was created because community members saw a need for Inuit counsellors to be available as Inuklut speakers. From one counsellor, the organization has grown to employ a large team, even people from outside of Clyde River, working as community counsellors, counselling training facilitators, as well as Trauma Response Team members, who are called upon when a crisis response is needed in a community. People can attend training in Clyde River to build skills. The resilience and passion I see in Clyde River to help their fellow Inuit has been very inspiring and gives me hope for more involvement of our people in social, systemic, and institutional change.

Since making [“Wounded Healers,”](#)¹⁹ a video about my experience with healing and counselling at Ilisaqsivik, I have worked with the organization, helping update their Inuusita Ingiranivuu training manuals based on observations and participation in the workshops. I have also assisted with managerial duties as and when needed. I have felt a sense of purpose, for once, in helping my fellow Inuit. Ilisaqsivik has made me think about what Inuit-centred programs and policies really look like for Inuit.

Photo Credit: Aimo Paniloo; Clyde River, Nunavut



INUIT-CENTRED FOCUS WITH NON-INUIT ALLIES

While this kind of programming should be Inuit-led, it still has a role for non-Inuit. Ilisaqsivik draws on the expertise of southern firms and consultants, especially now that the organization has grown so large. Finance, payroll, and human resource administration are mostly southern-based contractors and non-Inuit, with Inuit staff in Clyde River acting as bridges between other staff and local administration. Training plans and professional development are included in work with southern consultants to transfer skills and build capacity at the organization so that they can be run locally in the future. This has made me think of how non-Inuit can be our allies or accomplices, working to make change with us and for us. Rather than imposing priorities, goals, or ideas, their focus is on administration and similar duties, supporting and enabling staff to continue strengthening their skills. The Board and staff come up with programs and delivery methods that enable them to lead. All the while, the staff are also very aware of community dynamics and how those can contribute to the organization's operations.

One time, I observed how the Clyde River staff managed when programs and space were overbooked. The way the staff of three different programs happening at all once were able to maneuver and manage people who were learning and doing different activities at the same time, all the while a drop-in program was going on, and having after-school coordinators prepare for the end of the day was exciting to witness. Everyone worked together to

manage the overcrowded space. Staff did not complain or say once that they would have to cancel one event to accommodate another; they made it all work. Watching everyone move in a perfect dance in the little space the organization currently has in the old health center was great. The people on the ground know how to ensure there is space for everyone and opportunities stay open. I have observed a need for a certain level of flexibility and understanding of the needs of the staff and what is going on at the community level. I believe it has to do with the fact that Ilisaqsivik ensures they keep an Inuit-centred focus, and they do this by accommodating the needs of the staff, being understanding and trusting that the people have their own way of ensuring accountability. Being reflective of their actions.

I have had to unlearn the things I learned about “working 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday,” or incorporating one of the eight Government of Nunavut-defined Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Societal Values, like pilimaksarniq or pijitirniq,* just to name a couple. Ilisaqsivik and the programs they deliver are defined by the people, as much as possible, such as the Angunasuktiit, sewing programs, and Inuusita Ingiranivuu. They are built from Inuit experience, knowledge and wisdom. Ilisaqsivik and other community wellness organizations, such as Tukisigiavik, Pulaarvik Kablu Friendship Centre, Aqqiumavik Society and the Cambridge Bay Friendship Centre, strive to provide access to work, money, food and a way of life by providing employment and various training programs to ensure Inuit have access to some of their basic needs at times.

*Pilimaksarniq or pijitirniq translates to the training or development of skills to be confident





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RECONCILIATION AND THE ECONOMY

Ilisaqsivik can be a safe space to learn, share, eat and hang out. People build friendships, and once an individual starts getting help, they may have an impact on their family and the community; they may have a sense of belonging and may even find purpose. People who attend Inuusita Ingiranivuu learn to become counsellors with their fellow Inuit and have the space for self-reflection to ensure they are strong counsellors. One of the best things I heard from people I have spoken with has been that they have come to recognize the work needed to address the trauma of our past. Recognizing that although we have collective trauma due to colonization, our great-grandparents', grandparents' and parents' experiences are theirs, for us to honour and recognize. As younger generations, we have our own hurt and strengths to recognize.

To get this in Clyde River, amongst my fellow Inuit, from Elders and new friends, who are using their experience, strengths and hope to address our collective trauma has been enlightening, but it also has me wondering about partnerships between community non-profit organizations and government services, such as mental health or family services.

For Inuit and community non-profit organizations to be part of social, systemic, and institutional change, we need better and stronger engagement from government services and Inuit organizations to share our ways of doing. We need better recognition of our Inuktit terminology and language to help address some overdue changes. We need stronger partnerships to provide mental health awareness and access to resources, which could include community counsellors, trainers, and more people to help people.

The unification between NGOs and the government to support Inuit in recognizing options for the help and support they want is overdue. Partnership can include outreach and information about emotional and mental health, intergenerational trauma, addictions, and other contributing factors to the state of Inuit wellness. The government needs to do better at reaching Inuit and providing information and access to mental and emotional health resources that would enable our people to support each other in ways we want and actually heal to participate in economic activity, whether it is the wage economy or hunting economy. Inuusita Ingiranivuu is one way Inuit have found ways to help our fellow Inuit through counselling, addressing past trauma, and responding to ongoing trauma, such as sudden loss and grief, rather than imposing approaches others think may help us. Why not ask us about our experiences, knowledge, and wisdom for true reconciliation?



CONCLUSION



Re-Imagining Economic Development in Inuit Nunangat

This report is meant to help generate dialogue on Inuit-defined economy, its trajectory and, perhaps, reimagine that path. The chapters in this report centre Inuit perspectives on the concept of economic development with a focus on the hunting economy, arts and economies of care, and community-based efforts that renew and build Inuit values and connections. Meanwhile, it challenges the status quo of resource development, which offers few clear benefits to Inuit but significant threats to Inuit ways of life and the land itself.

The report's authors have reflected several essential and overlooked themes in the discussion on a Northern Indigenous economy.

First, the report underscores the paramount importance of Inuit economic activity, such as hunting, which not only provides food security and cultural continuity but also represents significant socioeconomic value.

The report raises a crucial question: Should these activities not be recognized as the starting base for thinking about what an economy is? Frameworks for a “conservation economy” or “hunting economy” challenge the mining-or-nothing scramble we see today and offer a more balanced approach that respects the land.

Moreover, by using an economic analysis, the report demonstrates that investments in Inuit-led economic sectors yield higher job and income multipliers compared to the mining sector. This finding strongly supports the argument for a diversified economic approach that includes substantial support for land-based activities.

Second, the “economy,” as it is traditionally conceptualized, exists in a compartment seemingly independent of culture and Inuit lived experiences. However, this is not the case for Inuit visions, where social, legal and cultural elements of life are integral.

Amidst this conceptualization, Inuit values and language are critical. How we talk about the economy should flow from Inuktitut – once again – pushing us toward balance.

The research we’ve produced here also shows language education in schools leads to better academic outcomes and overall well-being, a key element to actually participating in economic activity, broadly imagined.

Third, we know Inuit face significant socioeconomic inequalities, including lower educational attainment, wage disparities, and limited employment opportunities in high-paying sectors. Even when Inuit seek to participate in the wage economy, they face significant structural barriers maintained by a non-Inuit class that is only interested in status quo power relations and economic benefits. This is racism and discrimination, and there appear to be few avenues to challenge or address this, meaning generations of socioeconomic inequality for Inuit will be reproduced unless change is made.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is a re-orientation of Inuit self-determination in discussions of the economy. Of course, Inuit organizations often advocate for economic development and, in some cases, even in some cases mining – but under their terms – because this is Inuit land, and their voices and interests should be privileged. This includes reclaiming control over economic activities and resources and reimagining the economy through Inuit values and Inuit power.

In sum, we hope we have made a compelling case for rethinking economic development in Inuit Nunangat. At the least, we hope that this report brings others to the discussion of the economy in the North. We need to hear from Inuit and Indigenous people more generally about the role of resource development, energy, transportation and construction, and the growing and often extractive research economy. We need to hear about the economic activity generated by the service economy and the arts. We need more conversations to fill other gaps, including in tourism, entrepreneurship, and other sectors. There is much more to consider amidst the drive for a higher and higher gross domestic product (GDP) that speaks to cultural vitality and wellness. Those perspectives should be privileged in policy, regulatory, and legislative discussions instead of being relegated to performative inclusion, as is currently the case.

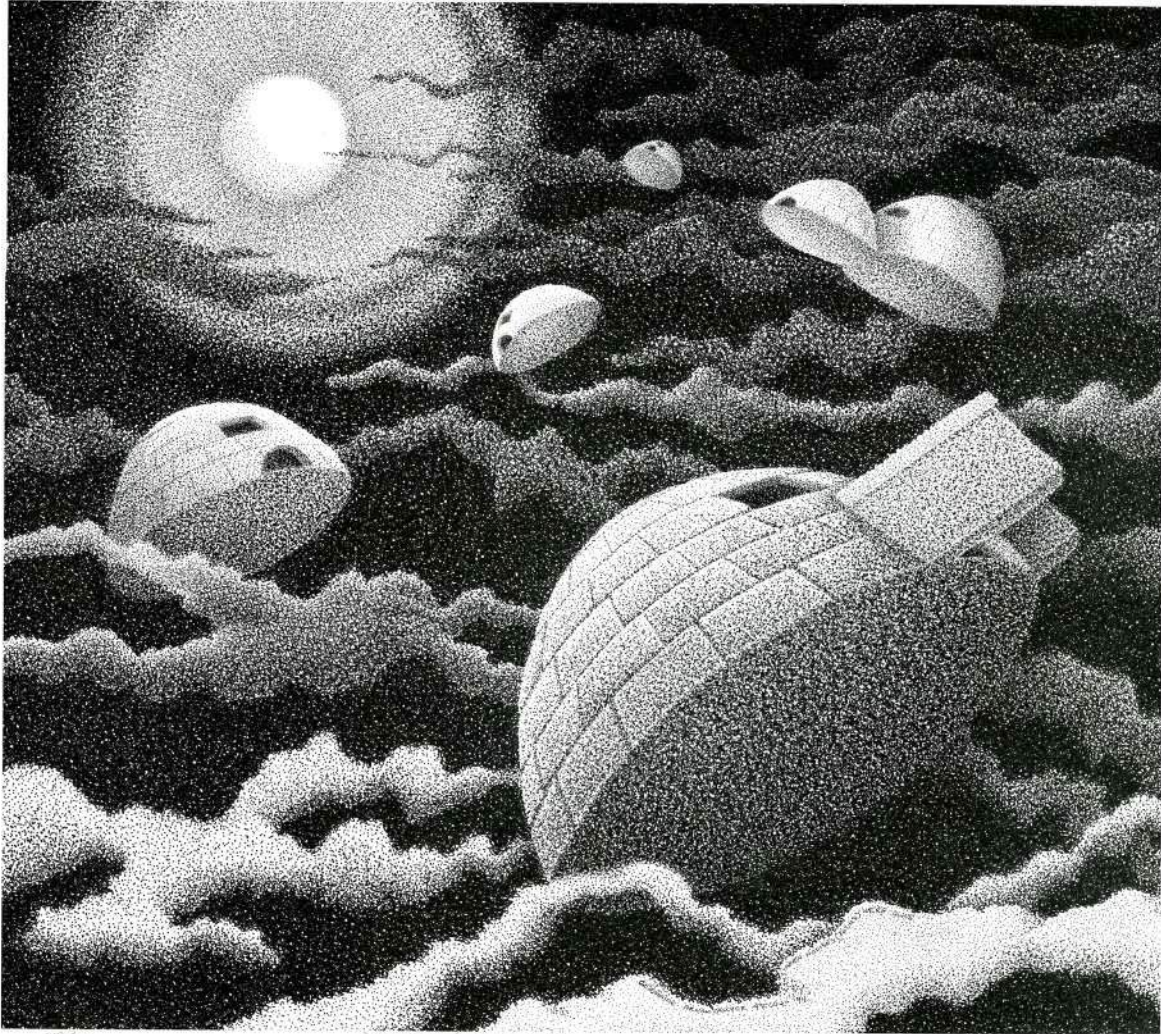


Illustration Credit: 'When Houses (Iglus) Were Alive,' Lithograph, 1996, by Germaine Arnaktauyok

Endnotes

– Romani Makkik, “Reflections on Meaningful Work: Working for a Community Organization”

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