

What is the transition from *Endurance* to *Resistance*?

Throughout the 27 years I've known and worked with Zacharias Kunuk people often ask us what we've learned from each other. I have a long list of answers, both practical things – how to skin and butcher a large mammal with a rusty \$10 pocket knife – and intangible qualities I've seen, admired and tried to emulate in Zach and many other Inuit I've known – like the true meaning of *endurance*, that mysterious ability to keep going after 'normal' people (like me?) would 'normally' quit and go home. For example, after a long, chilling, frustrating day out hunting caribou and seeing nothing, no animals, no tracks, when all right-minded *qallunaat* like me would long ago have started home empty-handed thinking we'd tried our best and looking forward to warming up, from Zach and other hunting buddies like Paul Apak and Pauloosie Qulitalik I learned right away that Inuit don't think like that. Each time I'm sure we're going to turn around for home after the next tea break, they just keep going again, further ahead, still watching, still searching, until by that mysterious cognitive power that must be embedded in their Inuit concept of *endurance*, they find the caribou, way further than we thought they were.

But of course caribou were there! Where else would they be, on Mars? Traveling with Zach I learned that a certain kind of *giving up* was perfectly natural in my culture, as if something broken can-not-be-fixed, or as if the caribou we've been looking for all day simply can-not-be-found. That's how white guys give up: it's broken, there's nothing more I can do, there's no caribou, they must be on Mars, let's go home. To Inuit, those thoughts are literally absurd. If your snowmobile breaks down in the middle of nowhere at -40, giving up actually isn't even a real choice, is it? You *can't* give up. What will you do, cry? Die? Sit next to your broken machine and pray? Inuit just keep trying every possible thing they can think of again and again and again even if their fingers are frozen and their efforts keep failing, until nine times out of ten they fix the machine. Because machines *are* fixable, just like caribou do *not* go to Mars. Solutions are actually *facts* to Inuit, while to me as a *qallunaaq*, the *not*-solution seems like the 'fact,' the belief that trying harder doesn't work. Inuit are realists, they know caribou don't travel to Mars so if hunters keep hunting sooner or later they will find them. They know machines built by human beings can be fixed by human beings sooner or later, so if they just keep trying they will fix it. After traveling and hunting with Zach for years, I still may not understand what endurance means to me in my culture but I do understand what *endurance* means to Zach and most Inuit in their world. Success is the fact; quit is the dream.

Zach's answer, when people ask what he's learned from me after all these years, is a lot simpler. He always says the same thing and it's only one thing: Norman never takes no for an answer. Zach has traveled with me in the southern world all these same years I traveled with him in the Inuit world. He has watched me deal with other *qallunaat*, bankers, lawyers, government bureaucrats, corporate flunkies, coop managers, researchers, big shots, greedy exploiters, PhD progressives, heads of funding agencies and bosses of bosses, and what he's learned from me is Don't Take No for an Answer. To Inuit, almost unbearably and culturally *polite*, who value non-interference and respect the right of other individuals to make up their own minds, there is a logic of acceptance when someone says No – it's their human (i.e. Inuit) right. Refusing to accept a No answer seems rude and aggressive to Inuit, arguing back about it seems childish, i.e. not-adult. So what is the relationship between Zach's *endurance* and my *resistance*? What is the relationship between Inuit surviving in their world and surviving in the 21st century?

Inuit are human beings who *hunt* wolves, but who became sheep when the southern world appeared to them not more than 100 years ago: as traders and priests whose negotiating style was 'take it or leave it' or 'follow me or burn in hell'; then as RCMP officers with guns on their hips and government administrators who made rules with absolute power; then as teachers in residential schools who did what we now know they did; and finally as transnational corporate mining executives, lawyers, engineers, scientists and government regulators, all of whom have 'herded' Inuit into communities that feel like refugee camps where they live like sheep, while the *qallunaat* surrounding them, who say No, spread out into Inuit land and do whatever they want.

During three decades of friendship Zach and I probably wondered the same curious thing about each other's tribe. I wonder, Why do Inuit who are wolves on their land act like sheep in town? Zach must wonder, How can *qallunaat* who are sheep on Inuit land be wolves in town and all over the world? As Zach's friend, co-artist and business partner in giving Inuit a voice in world media, I keep waiting for Inuit to bring their wolf-way of knowledge and power into their now 21st century town reality, to adapt those famous traditional IQ values of resourceful, collective and tireless *endurance* to the town-problems and town-decisions facing them in ceaseless exhausting waves every day.

Over 27 years I've seen Zach become the 'wolfiest' Inuk in the town world of any Inuit I know. He was lucky: born in 1957 in a sod house at Kapuivik, he was one of the last generation still born on the land in a traditional hunting family. He was 9 years-old before he ever saw a white man, dropped off in 1966 to go to school in English in the new refugee camp of Igloodik, but he escaped being snatched away to the residential school and stayed in Igloodik until dropping out after grade 8, when the Igloodik school ended. He was a hunter and an artist, he carved sculptures first for quarters to see films in the community hall and then for thousands of dollars to buy the arctic's first Betamax video camera in Montreal in 1981 and bring it home to Igloodik with the town's first TV. Zach was never 'educated' enough to qualify for one of those government jobs so he never got into the beast of the bureaucracy, never was a wage-slave for *qallunaat* bosses except for a few awful months in the 1970s drilling offshore for Panarctic Oil. Not brainwashed.

But still. Translating Inuit *endurance* into in-town *resistance* is a struggling transition for any traditional Inuk. Learning NOT to take No for an answer requires forcing oneself to act in ways Inuit feel are socially inappropriate, to be *impolite*, boastful and rude. On the other hand, Inuit respectfulness and *politesse* evolved among people who were working together for a common purpose, and all putting the interest of the community above the desire of the individual. What happens if you're dealing with people whose greed might put your community last?

Thirty years after Panarctic Oil, Zach finds himself in a very different relationship with a very different company, Baffinland Iron Mine (BIM), 70% foreign-owned by the world's largest steelmaker, ArcelorMittal, itself owned by the 21st richest man on earth, Mr. Lakshmi Mittal, an Indian billionaire with a \$100 million house in London. While Panarctic was big and eventually became PetroCanada down south, BIM is bigger, a \$6 billion development that will last 100 years, with a 150 km railroad, deep-water port, giant supertankers and foreign control, in a political atmosphere of global financial crisis and government 'streamlining' of giant resource projects.

If BIM goes forward as they propose, building the port at Steensby Inlet and an airport to fly employees in and out, using the Foxe Basin ecosystem as their supertanker shipping lane and running a railroad across the frozen tundra, the 4000 year-old Inuit homeland of north Baffin Island will be transformed forever. Apart from abstract issues like global warming and human rights, Inuit know certain *facts*: bowhead and beluga whales and walrus will be run over by supertankers and the walrus calving grounds will be destroyed; caribou that normally migrate across winter ice will drown when they find the ice broken by daily shipping all year round; arctic char in the region's lakes will be killed by the noise of blasting tunnels for the railroad; nesting grounds for countless bird species (gyrfalcons, snow geese, jaegers, arctic terns etc.) will be disturbed by constant helicopter and jet traffic; and of course, Inuit harvesters of walrus, seal, polar bear, caribou, fish and birds will lose their traditional hunting life as its ecosystem becomes too different, and therefore too dangerous, to use.

The same thirty years after Panarctic, Zach himself also is different: Cannes Festival award-winner, Officer of the Order of Canada, world traveling spokesperson for Inuit language and culture, member of Igloolik Hamlet Council and sometime Deputy Mayor, Hamlet representative to the 42-member regional Baffinland Working Committee, Board member of Nunavut Development Corporation and most recently, at April 30, 2012, elected Igloolik's Board member to Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA), the Nunavut Land Claims regional agency responsible for negotiating Baffinland's Inuit Impact and Benefits Agreement (IIBA), and for representing Inuit land claims interests in the Environmental Review process of the development before approval.

Zach also is co-producer with me, through our company Isuma Distribution International and our website IsumaTV, of Digital Indigenous Democracy (DID), a new media project funded by the Canada Media Fund Experimental Stream to put new communication tools into Inuit hands to improve information and participation by Inuit in their own language in the Baffinland review process. DID is not an anti-mining project, it's a pro-communication project, designed to fulfill what Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver calls "the moral and constitutional obligation to consult" (*Globe and Mail*, March 13, 2012), an obligation now confirmed by Canada's Supreme Court and a growing body of international law.

Again: what is the relationship between *endurance* and *resistance*? What is the relationship between acting in the Inuit world and acting in the 21st century? How can Zacharias or even many Inuit standing together say No to Lakshmi Mittal and his army of lawyers and investment bankers and paid scientists and paid-off Canadian partners? Can Inuit who never quit, chasing scarce and dangerous animals through a frozen wilderness, bring the same *endurance* to defending their lands and lives against transnational giants and streamlining governments? And if Inuit don't ever say No in town, will there be any land left once it's dug and blasted and changed forever? Stay tuned. It will all play out over the next 12 months, in life and online at www.isuma.tv/DID.

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