7 Life in Ruins: Forced Migration and Littoral Persistence in Chukotka

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Abstract Like other regions of Russia's North, Chukotka (Chukotka Autonomous Okrug) was subjected to dramatic changes during the last century. With long-lasting societal impacts, the inhabitants of predominantly native coastal villages along the Bering Strait were subjected to relocation policies implemented by the Soviet state that left dozens of settlements and hunting bases deserted; yet extraordinary resilience and novel strategies of coping with Sovietisation, subsequent loss, and infrastructural collapse created new forms of communities in Russia's easternmost federal subject.

The chapter explores local reactions of North Pacific coastal communities to translocal forces through time. Focusing on individual strategies of resilience and place-making amidst a relocated population, the chapter thus addresses the central role of space, infrastructure, and ecology in relation to a shifting maritime landscape as well as the specific impacts of equally changing state policies in a North Pacific borderland.

7.1 Introduction

For Russia, the twentieth century was a time period of deep-seated changes, revolutions, and systemic collapse. Especially in the Russian North, centuries-old traditions and subsistence practices were replaced by new cultural and economic patterns, which accompanied and implemented the Soviet Union's master plan of a new society for all of its citizens. The industrialisation of the Soviet Union was a "total social fact,"[1] an interwoven societal phenomenon where various economic, legal, political, and religious relationships overlap, that fundamentally affected native and non-native communities in a long-lasting way. In Chukotka (Chukotka Autonomous Okrug), Russia's easternmost district, the inhabitants of predominantly native coastal villages

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1   Mauss, *The Gift*, 76–77.

at the Bering Strait were subjected to relocation policies implemented by the Soviet state that left dozens of settlements and hunting bases deserted. The state-enforced resettlement of native communities, which peaked during the 1950s and 1960s, led to a creeping depopulation of a coastline whose intricate settlement history traces back for thousands of years (Fig. 1 and 2). On the Chukchi Peninsula alone, more than eighty settlements were abandoned or closed in the course of the twentieth century.[2] The village relocations were part of a larger struggle over environment and space that exposed the fundamentally different spatial strategies and logics of the Soviet state and native communities.[3] Traumatic loss of homeland and the vanishing of traditional socioeconomic structures, which had replaced traditional ways of living, sent devastating ripples through the fabric of native communities, often with disastrous results for societal health.[4]

State-enforced resettlement policies intertwine political macro-processes, local communities, and cultural and ecological change in the uprooted landscape of relocation. Industrial impacts and forced relocation altered the ecology of and access to subsistence areas in a permanent way, ultimately leading to a major "social–ecological regime shift"[5] for the affected communities.

The forced relocations of native, coastal communities were part of the Soviet Union's larger agenda of mastering (*osvoenie*) the Russian North, a "high modernist"[6] tale of an unfinished utopia that ultimately ended in its infrastructural collapse. Infrastructural investments and their subsequent demise thus had fundamental impacts on "the notions of speed, distance and space"[7] in the affected communities.

However, extraordinary resilience and novel strategies of coping with Sovietisation, subsequent loss, and industrial collapse created new forms of communities. Community resilience, as the ability to respond to adverse situations and to bounce back after shock and disaster, plays a crucial role in the continued survival of Chukotka's native coastal communities in modern times. A community's flexibility and the resources it has available to actively respond to new challenges through new connections are key to minimising and recovering from socioeconomic disasters.[8] Revitalisation of traditional

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2   Bogoslovskaia, "List of the Villages," 1–12.
3   Demuth, *Floating Coast*.
4   Holzlehner, "Something Broke," 1–16; Pika and Prokhorov, "Big Problems," xxix–xl.
5   Wrathall, "Migration," 584.
6   Scott, *Seeing*.
7   Schweitzer, Povoroznyuk and Schiesser, "Beyond Wilderness," 60.
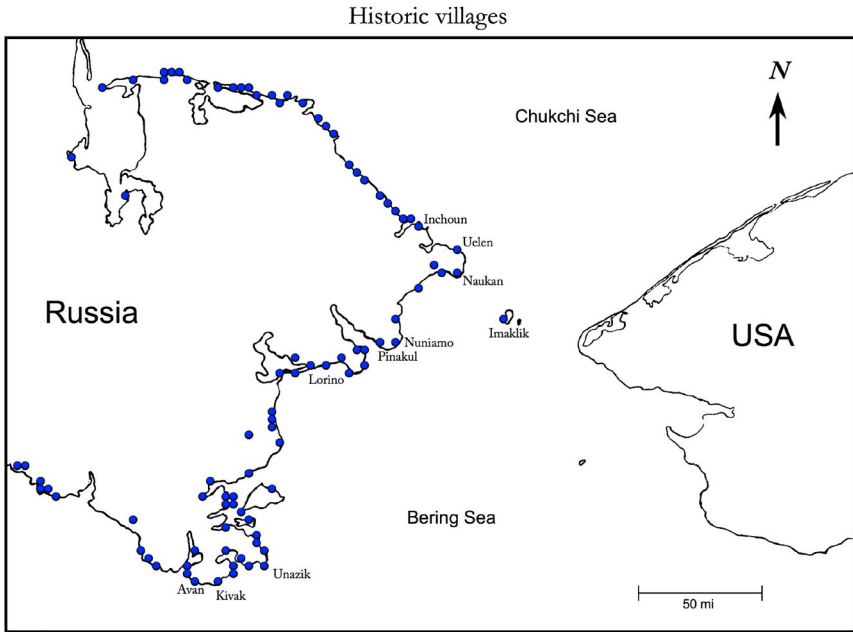8   Hastrup, "Arctic Hunters," 245–270.

Historic villages

Fig. 1 Historic villages (T. Holzlehner).
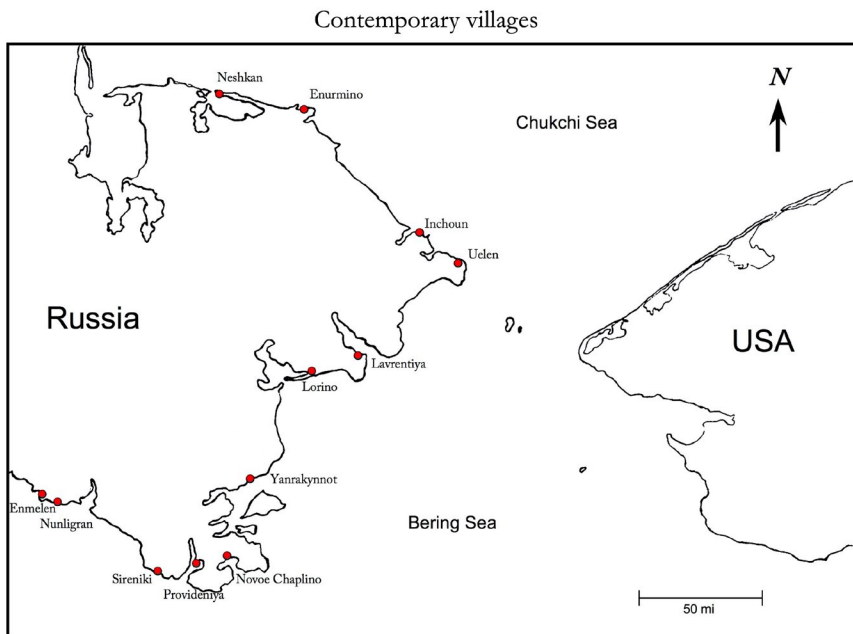
Contemporary villages

Fig. 2 Contemporary villages (T. Holzlehner).

hunting technologies and the resettlement of formerly abandoned native villages is only one aspect of the current realities that gave rise to new forms of habitation in the ruins of a volatile past. In what follows, I intend to explore local reactions of Arctic coastal communities to translocal forces through time (the Sovietisation of the High North, the Cold War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union). Focusing on individual strategies of resilience and place-making amidst a relocated population, I address thereby the central role of space, infrastructure, and ecology in relation to a shifting maritime landscape as well as the impacts of equally changing state policies.

7.2 Destruction of (Littoral) Space: Relocation

The native coastal population of Chukotka was subjected to a twofold loss in the twentieth century: the large-scale, state-induced and enforced closures of many native villages combined with the subsequent resettlement of the population to centralised villages; and the following collapse of the Soviet economy and infrastructure. Chukotka truly represents a "shatter zone" in the sense employed by J. C. Scott:[9] a region at the periphery of a nation-state characterised and shaped by the effects of state-making and unmaking. The village resettlements on the Chukchi Peninsula during the 1950s and 1960s coincided with Khrushchev's new economic policy that had as its central goal the strengthening and centralisation of local economies.[10] Reduction and amalgamation of individual villages to larger economic units were an intrinsic part of that strategy. Economic consolidation (*ukreplenie*) was the operative key term, a policy-driven concept that had as its stated goal the transformation of many collective farms (*kolkhozy*) to larger economic units in the form of state-owned enterprises (*sovkhozy*). These major transformations of the built environment had severe socioeconomic impacts, ranging from subtle strategies of "time–space compression"[11] to plain "infrastructural violence"[12] expressed in the demolition of house and the closing of villages.

The Soviet industrialisation of the Russian North was, on yet another level, a process of double ruination. In addition to the destruction and

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 9   Scott, *Not Being Governed*, 7–8.
10   Grant, *House of Culture*, 240.
11   Harvey, *Postmodernity*, 264.
12   Rodgers and O'Neill, "Infrastructural Violence," 401–412.

reordering of native space, accompanying processes of "cognitive enclosure"[13] profoundly changed native life-worlds.

Traditional subsistence practices in the Russian North were fundamentally changed by the large-scale collectivisation and industrialisation of embedded local economies. The mixed economies of indigenous coastal settlements were centralised and combined in processing plants, where shift work and predetermined catch quotas profoundly reorganised traditional subsistence activities on a temporal as well as a spatial scale. Thus, social, kinship-based ties were increasingly replaced by economic relationships.[14] In addition, the introduction of coal-fired heating plants in coastal villages severely disrupted walrus rookeries in the vicinity of historic settlements, and village closures removed many villagers from their traditional hunting and fishing grounds and relocated them to locations where direct subsistence resource access was often limited or scarce.[15]

Based on a fundamentally distinct logic of space usage, these new economic practices thus led to an antagonistic use of littoral space that regularly collided with local senses of place during the Sovietisation and industrialisation of native Siberia.[16] Historically, native coastal settlement sites in Chukotka were chosen according to their suitability for land-based maritime subsistence activities. Thus, maximum access to subsistence resources, such as drinking water, sea mammal migration routes, salmon runs, or plant gathering sites, were paramount in choosing the optimal place for a settlement site.[17] Diametrically opposed to the indigenous spatial logic, the Soviet economic planners and engineers valued maximum maritime infrastructural access to villages and state enterprises. The construction of deep-water ports, servicing facilities, and suitable terrain for house construction were thus one of the primary motives for the concentration of the native population in centralised villages.[18] Indigenous economic space was, therefore, replaced by an economy that was based on a fundamentally different utilisation of space.[19]

It is difficult to ultimately judge the costs and benefits of the relocations for the local indigenous population, as conflicting historic accounts and oral narratives represent different versions of the multifaceted resettlement history. Some Russian ethnographers have stressed in the framework of development

13 Habeck, "Be Seated," 155–156.
14 Schindler, "Rights in Chukotka," 57.
15 Holzlehner, "Social Engineering," 7.
16 Ssorin-Chaikov, *Subarctic Siberia*.
17 Holzlehner, "Social Engineering," 8.
18 Krupnik and Chlenov. *Yupik Transitions*, 251.
19 Holzlehner, "Engineering Socialism," 1970.

the positive effects of the relocations on living conditions, health and education,[20] or economic organisation and consolidation,[21] while others have highlighted the rather anomic effects on societal health.[22] Equally divided was the opinion among the affected population. For instance, the closure of the traditional Siberian Yupik[23] Settlement of Unazik (Chaplino) and the relocation of the population to the newly built town of Novoe Chaplino in 1958 was seen rather differently in terms of its necessity and its resulting positive and negative effects on the community, as the following local voices attest.

Like most of Chukotka's coastal settlements, the historic village site of Unazik was literally built on the shore along a narrow sand spit, enclosed by a fresh water lagoon on its landward side. These precautious settlement locations were frequently flooded, especially during fall storms, and the population had to temporarily retreat to higher ground, therefore requiring settlement mobility between shoreline and higher terraces further inland.[24] The village's role as a trading hub had already peaked at the turn of the last century with the demise of trans-Beringian trade.[25] Depleted sea mammal populations, largely an effect of over-harvesting by commercial whalers, exacerbated the uncertain subsistence situation and led to periodic famines along the coast. At first, many of the smaller villages and camps in the vicinity were abandoned, and people moved to Unazik, further attracted by stores, medical facilities, and a newly built school (the first Siberian Yupik school was opened in 1916). Despite the immigrations from neighbouring camps, by 1926, Unazik had already lost half of its population; 252 people remained.[26] Unazik itself was also affected by the famines, as Olga Mumichtykak remembered:

> My mother told me, when she was a child [around 1905–1910] lack of food was a big problem in Chaplino [Unazik]. A lot of people died of starvation and left for Uel'kal' afterwards. Probably half of Chaplino left, a long time ago, before we were born. But up to that

20 Krushanov, *Chukchei*, 186.
21 Bat'ianova and Turaev, *Narody*, 573–576.
22 Krupnik and Chlenov, *Yupik Transitions*, 286.
23 Siberian Yupiks, or Yuits, are a Yupik Eskimo people who live along the coast of the Chukchi Peninsula in the far northeast of the Russian Federation and on St. Lawrence Island in Alaska. They speak Central Siberian Yupik (also known as Yuit), a Yupik language of the Eskimo–Aleut family of languages.
24 Krupnik, *Arctic Adaptations*, 39.
25 Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers*, 357.
26 Ibid., 133.

date Chaplino was a big village, like a city […] For me, the hunger started right after the war. Back then, all the men went in wooden boats [*vel'boty*] to Alaska for ammunition and did not return for a long time. The women stayed behind alone in Chaplino and we suffered a lot from hunger.[27]

In addition, Unazik's precarious location on two conjoining sand spits that expose the site towards the sea led to frequent flooding of the village, especially during the fierce, annual fall storms. During these storm events, people fled to the old settlement of Tyflyk, located on a small bluff four kilometres north of Unazik:

One time I remember very well, I was very young [around 1910–1915], when they fled Old Chaplino. That fall the waves were so strong that all the *yarangas* [reindeer skin tent] and meat caches flooded. I was very young and they put me on a skin hide and ran with me. Everybody fled Chaplino to Tyflyk.[28]

Flooding was a frequent event, and imminent shore erosion was the official reason that the settlement was closed in 1958 and its whole population moved to the newly built village of Novoe Chaplino (New Chaplino), twenty miles further inland. Aivangu, a Siberian Yupik author and former inhabitant of Unazik, underscored the rationale in the optimistic language of the time:

1958, due to the presence of big waves and the hardship of our settlement, the collective workers accepted the decision to realise the relocation. And so, in 1958, at a picturesque site at the end of Tkachen Bay, started the construction of a new central building for the collective farm. They carried out the relocation largely in 1959 and had already finished in 1960. And now our village is renamed to New Chaplino. It is truly new because nothing is left of the old. All the Eskimo now live in beautiful, well-constructed apartment houses. The village looks striking.[29]

27 Olga Mumichtykak, in Krupnik, *Pust' govoriat*, 34–35.
28 Aleksandr Rachtika, in ibid., 27.
29 Aivangu, *Nash rodnoi Ungazik*, 52.

Geographic and infrastructural convenience was another rationale for the Unazik–Novoe Chaplino resettlement. The new village of Novoe Chaplino was located closer to the administrative centre of Provideniia, easily accessible by road and maritime transport, as a visiting Soviet ethnographer noted in the 1970s: "The new settlement is situated on the calm and deep bay, with easy access from the sea and road connection with Provideniia."[30]

State-induced village relocations are complex, multivariate events where a nation-state's developmental vision often collides with local sentiments and perceptions. Similar to the state's varied rationales for a village resettlement, the affected population's opinion and reaction is often equally heterogeneous. Another native author, Anatolii Sal'yka, paints a slightly different picture of the aforementioned relocation:

> Back in 1958 the authorities found a lot of arguments for the relo-
> cation. Apparently Unazik was about to be washed away by strong
> storms. Yes, once in a while the storms were severe, but that has al-
> ways been the case and for many centuries our ancestor-hunters, who
> picked the place for a settlement, learned to retreat further back along
> the spit. But when the bad weather had calmed down the people from
> Unazik returned to their dwellings again. The people did not fear
> the sea they respected it as a neighbour and lived on its shore. They
> enjoyed the sea, which fed and dressed them […] Yet here, where our
> native Unazik was located, only a polar station and a border guard
> post remained—and nothing bad happened to them.[31]

The fundamentally different perception and conception of the environment in respect to Soviet attitudes is striking. Therefore, to trace the interaction between communities, local ecosystems, Soviet state-building, and collapse, I suggest here a political ecology approach to state-enforced community relocations, focusing on the unequal distribution and costs of changes in environmental conditions that led to an "accentuated vulnerability"[32] of the affected communities. Central to the argument is the observation that political forces play an important part in environmental access, management, and transformation.[33]

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30 Leont'yev, "Indigenous Peoples," 21.
31 Sal'yak, *Ia uvidel*, 5.
32 Oliver-Smith, "Disasters," 25.
33 Robbins, *Political Ecology*, xvi.

The Sovietisation and industrialisation of the Russian North fundamentally changed the very constitution of native societies, and the village relocations played an intrinsic part therein. Relocated villagers suddenly found themselves in an urbanised environment that lacked the qualities and opportunities of their former settlement sites. Access to traditional subsistence sites was, in most cases, severely impeded, and the forced integration of native economies into the overarching Soviet economy led to deep-seated changes in work conditions, occupational structures, and systems of mobility.[34] Despite the idealistic developmental ideas and strategies of the Soviet planners, social and economic marginalisation of the native population and loss of traditional culture were some of the unintended results.[35]

Other forms of altering accompanied the spatial reorganisation of indigenous life-worlds that supplemented the village relocations. Native identity networks were replaced by an array of Soviet institutions (boarding schools, houses of culture, etc.), and indigenous economic networks were replaced by working brigades that created a new "difference of productive relations."[36] Many of the implemented Soviet policies were characterised by "differential access to different kinds of mobility."[37] Village relocations, temporary forced resettlement of indigenous children into boarding schools (*internaty*), and the movement of workers and administrators from the Russian heartland represented different aspects of a new, Soviet-made spatial mobility that was largely unequal in terms of the individual's ability to influence their own movement in space.

The double impact of state-building and state collapse on native cultures left its traces in the memories and practices of the coastal villagers. While I was travelling literally through the uprooted landscape of relocation with local informants, conflicting stories of the Soviet period regularly surfaced. While passing by boat or tracked vehicle past old settlements or abandoned Soviet military sites, my interlocutors often balanced memories of the negative effects of resettlements with remembrances of a working infrastructure and affluent transport possibilities. Although contradictory discourses in themselves, the uniting trope of movement through space, forced by the state and interrupted by the collapse of the Soviet state, surfaced in both perspectives. Stories of a golden age of transport and recounting of long-distance travels here

34   Campell, "Contrails of Globalization," 117.
35   Krupnik and Chlenov, *Yupik Transitions*, 258–259.
36   Koester, "Lost Villages," 275.
37   Gray, *Chukotka's Indigenous Movement*, 119.

complement stories of the lack of free movement, the coping with distance, and the detrimental effects of relocations on native traditions.

During ethnographic fieldwork in Chukotka in 2008, 2009, and 2013 on the topic of the relocations, I interviewed around thirty people who were personally affected by the resettlements in the Chukotskii Raion and around Provideniia. Most of the interviewees who were already adults during the resettlements remembered and emphasised the traumatic effects on their former lives. The slightly younger generation, who were mostly in their teens during the resettlement period, had in general slightly more positive memories, stressing new opportunities and improved facilities in the larger villages. Despite the different perceptions divided along age groups, three main themes characterise the conversations I had with people that were directly or indirectly affected by the relocations. First, the Soviet state is obviously strongly associated with the relocations. Despite a commonly understandable rationale of infrastructural improvement, the local perception of their execution first and foremost reflects on the infrastructural failure of an ill-prepared move. Second, the collapse of the Soviet state is seen as a total collapse of economic and transport infrastructure, yet the (physical) presence and absence of state agents (e.g. border guards) in different locations along the coast has very practical consequences for the everyday life of local sea mammal hunters. Third, to date, the state is perceived as exerting a strong and regulating influence on local subsistence practices (e.g. through hunting quotas). Therefore, a domestic focus, concentrating on village resettlements as a forced move from one settlement to the other, neglects the fact that the life-world of coastal villagers expands far beyond the confines of the village. Subsistence and travel space includes the coastal landscape in its totality. Consequently, the memory of forced resettlements and the nostalgia for a Soviet age of intact infrastructure fuses in a local discourse into a form of remembrance where the memory of an age of unrestricted movement through the coastal landscape plays a paramount role.

7.3 *Nuniamo:* A Place Destroyed and Rebuilt

Zhenia and I stared with binoculars into the hazy blue of a mirror-like Bering Sea. I had met Zhenia, a native hunter with mixed Siberian Yupik and Chukchi heritage, in Lawrentiia in 2008, when I was conducting a series of interviews on the effects of village relocations on the indigenous population of coastal settlements in northeastern Chukotka. As the brother of an old

acquaintance of mine from previous visits to the region, he not only agreed to extensively talk about the relocations and changing subsistence practices but also took me on a multi-day trip to a hunting camp several miles north of town. August had arrived with a spell of hot and calm days—perfect conditions for the walrus hunt. We were sitting on a steep bluff located in the northwestern corner of the former settlement of Nuniamo (Fig. 3 and 4) in a makeshift shelter, a wooden bench with a small roof that resembled a bus stop somewhere in the Russian countryside. Altitude above sea level matters a lot for maritime hunters, as sea mammal hunting heavily depends on the visual signs made by the breathing fountains and partial appearance of walruses and whales above the waterline. Hours of inactivity, consumed by ocean-gazing, are then suddenly interrupted by a rush of activity when animals are sighted, and the controlled panic of the hunt is channelled into the ensuing chase, kill, hauling, and butchering procedures.

Five cabins (*balki*) were built at this place during the 1990s. With old building materials salvaged from the abandoned houses of Nuniamo, the cabins are spacious and comfortable and sleep a whole family or hunting party. Two of them belong to Zhenia and his extended family. Below the cabins lie the remains of a former Soviet sea-mammal-blubber-processing factory that was built over a prehistoric settlement. Surrounded by traditional meat caches and scores of gasoline drums, the ruin of the village's economic backbone has faded back into history.

The adjacent settlement of Nuniamo was closed in 1977. At that time, Zhenia was ten years of age and was relocated with his family to Lorino, a settlement 20 kilometres to the south along the coast. As an adolescent, he later moved to Lavrentiia, the regional centre, where he works today as a marine boat inspector. For the last few years, he had been frequently visiting his former village during the summer months. It had become home to him again.

Nuniamo, a historic settlement site, was refitted with Soviet-style housing around 1958, when the Siberian Yupik village of Naukan, located at Chukotka's East Cape, was closed. As in other relocation cases, multiple rationales were brought forward by the Soviet authorities for closing Russia's easternmost Yupik settlement: it was too steep for modern housing, too close to the border with Alaska, or too small to be economically viable. Despite or probably because of Naukan's peculiar location on a steep slope surrounded by tall cliffs and within sight of Alaska—topographic characteristics that protected Naukan like a natural fortress and, historically, gave it importance as a Trans-Beringian trade hub—the predominantly Siberian Yupik population
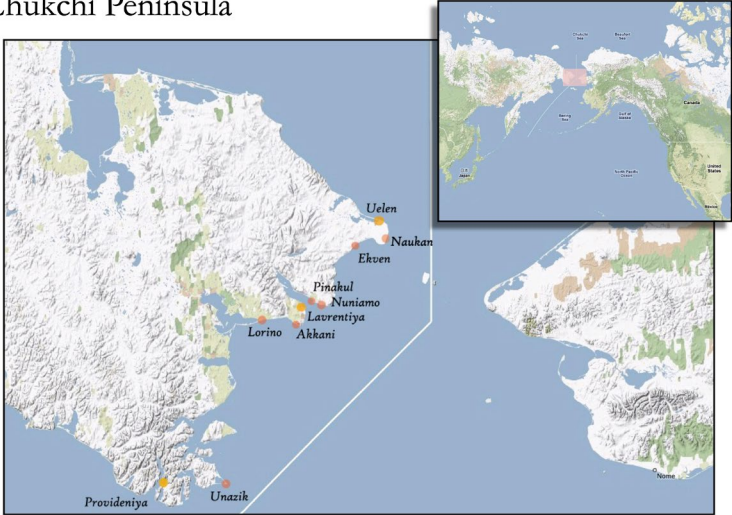
Chukchi Peninsula

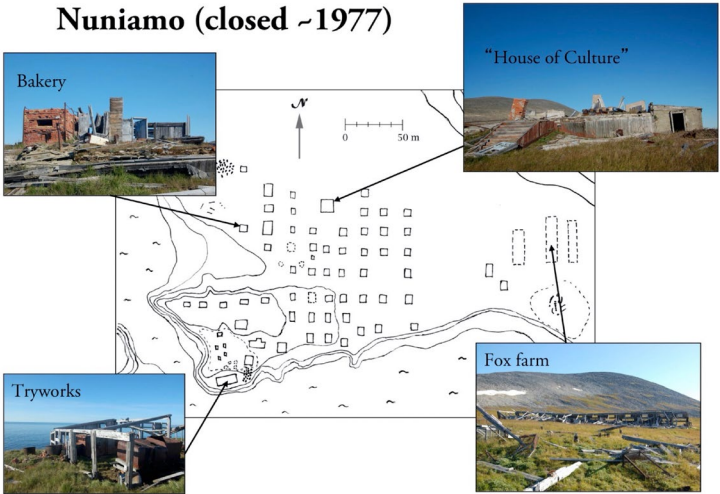**Fig. 3** Chukchi Peninsula (T. Holzlehner).

Fig. 4 Nuniamo (T. Holzlehner).

was scattered to several other villages, Nuniamo being one of them. Local sentiments and sense of place were secondary, as Zhenia remarked:

> It was very hard for the older generation to resettle. Especially the people from Naukan missed their place very much. Naukan was a very special place, it was very hot in the summer and the people around considered it an island. For instance, people traveling north along the coast carried their boats overland from Dezhnevo to Uelen, rather than passing by Naukan and around East Cape.

Chukchi[38] from the small settlements and camps of Pinakul and Chini and Siberian Yupik from Naukan were first resettled to Nuniamo, although the move was ill-prepared and houses still unfinished.[39] A newly built meat- and blubber-processing factory that supplied walrus meat to the reindeer herders inland provided some work for the recent relocates; but it was a different occupation and a different rhythm that dominated the resettlers' lives compared to the community-based sealing and walrus and whale hunting at the closed locations. In addition, in so-called combined farms, where reindeer breeding, sea mammal hunting, and fox fur production were part of the same enterprise, the Soviet planners tried to amalgamate different subsistence activities under one economic framework. Zhenia started first working in the Arctic fox farm and later in the local sea mammal hunting collective of Lorino, work he still remembered as exceedingly exhausting: "Compared to traditional hunting, where you work as a team on your own schedule, in the *kolkhos* seven to eight people worked each shift and had to bring in an equal amount of walrus. And each person worked individually on one of the animals. These were often very long shifts, lasting up to three o'clock in the morning. It was very strenuous work." Some of those enterprises were nothing more than flimsy economic experiments. As part of the economic consolidation that started under Khrushchev during the 1950s, individual settlement sites were identified in the region to host so-called combined farms (*sovkhozy*) that mimicked industrial factories. They were often planned without considering local ecological knowledge and the long-term sustainability of locally available

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38 The Chukchi, or Chukchee, are an indigenous people inhabiting the Chukchi Peninsula and the shores of the Chukchi Sea and the Bering Sea region in the far northeast of the Russian Federation. They speak the Chukchi language (also known as Chukot), a language of the Chukotko-Kamchatkan language family.

39 Krupnik and Chlenov, *Yupik Transitions*, 275.

marine resources. One of the detrimental results was the severe reduction of walrus populations along the coast.[40] This seemed to have also been the case with Nuniamo, as the village's economic viability and the sea mammal hunter collective Lenin's Path (*Leninskii put*) lasted only several years till its final closure nineteen years later, whereupon the people were moved again.

From our vantage point above the former settlement, we could see the remains of Nuniamo's houses, neatly arranged along several rows, still attesting to the geometry of its Soviet planners. Zhenia pointed out the different buildings of his past village to me: the school, the commons, the bakery, the store, the warehouse, and the house where he was born. Partially looted by the last generation, the houses had crumbled down to the foundations. Single supporting beams, pale from the salty and glaring sun, reached like erected whale ribs into the immaculate blue sky. Abode chimneys and rusty heating pipes that still connected individual buildings recalled the former human inhabitation; rusty bed frames, tea kettles, glass bottles, and vinyl wallpaper were the scant remains of their interior architecture. At the east end of the village lay the collapsed remains of a former fox farm. Once, the farm with its hundreds of small cages had sat on tall wooden poles to raise the floor level above the winter's snowdrifts. Everything was now crumbled to a scattered mass of weathered wood and mesh wire. Close by, a large pile of whale bones spread out across the tundra, demarcating the end of the village. Wild dogs and numerous ground squirrels were the former village's sole inhabitants.

Walking through the remnants of the former settlement marks the stark contrast between the utopian discourse of Soviet modernisation, expressed through a civilisational agenda that stressed the explicit development of infrastructure, housing, education, and health, and the on-the-ground reality of the local destruction of a native settlement. Strolling with Zhenia through the remains of his former village, our "conversations in place"[41] were inspired and evoked by individual objects, as well as framed by the architectural remains of the derelict buildings that we crossed in our wandering path. Immersed in the disrupted texture of his former village life, the materiality of relocation became hauntingly tangible. Razed by chains that were pulled by bulldozers, the wood-framed houses showed little resistance. The remaining ochre-coloured trunks of brick stoves and rusted heating pipes that once connected the individual houses can only remind one of the peculiar challenges of artic housing, destroyed by its own creators. Besides the bodily experience

40 Demuth, *Floating Coast*, 129.
41 Anderson, "Talking whilst Walking," 255.

of walking through a field of material excess spread out on the shores of the Bering Strait and producing a rich place narrative, the ghost town go-along provided material evidence of the forceful destruction of the village after its closure. The derelict site triggered comments of "critical awareness"[42] that brought Zhenia's memories of the forceful relocation to the forefront:

> They officially closed the village in 1976, we were the last who left in 1979. And we were the last ones who stayed behind, when they came with the helicopter and told us: "Faster, you are disturbing the plan!" First, they could chase us out, we couldn't leave that fast, we had dogs to take care of. During this summer the helicopter came and landed over there and picked us up, only a caretaker of the dogs remained. We later moved them too.

Yet Zhenia still harboured nostalgic feelings for the place where he had spent a good portion of his childhood. He especially remembered climbing on the cliffs and compared the surrounding landscape of Nuniamo with that of Lorino, the place he was moved to with his family after the closure of Nuniamo: "Do you see this?" he pointed to the steep cliff on the other side of the small natural harbour below the settlement, "There are no cliffs like that in Lorino. I really missed that. As a child I used to climb a lot in those cliffs."

Bluffs and cliff sites overlooking capes and bay entrances are preferred sites for hunting camps. At these places, the hunters sit for hours at a time and scrutinise the horizon for the scant reflections or breathing fountains of surfacing game. It is no coincidence that the remains of prehistoric settlements are located at the very same places. Nuniamo's elevated location is an ideal place for spotting migrating sea mammals. Moreover, walrus seek shelter from the fierce fall storms in the adjacent bays, which offer a natural stopping point for the animals in their annual migration along the coast, and the prevalence of local polynyas—areas of open water in sea ice—create perfect conditions for late fall or early spring hunt.

Later in the evening, we were sitting on the small porch of his cabin, outfitted with chairs salvaged from the movie theatre of the village's former house of culture, still scanning the horizon for walrus. The two young men who came with us to the camp had earlier spotted three adult walruses, but the ensuing hunt was abandoned as the team lost sight of the animals when they passed further north around Nuniamo Cape and a sudden wind picked

42 Edensor, "Walking through Ruins," 138.

up, making any further chase futile. Especially directed to his young fellow
hunters, Zhenia tells a story of how he drank heavily in his former life: "I
drank straight for three weeks and couldn't remember anything afterwards."
He sneaks in some advice for the attentively listening young hunters: "You
really have to want it by yourself! The people in former times didn't drink
either!" In his opinion, a place like Nuniamo, a former historic settlement,
first rebuilt and subsequently abandoned by Soviet planners, has an inherent
capacity for healing the wounds sustained in the new settlements people were
relocated to: "Here at this place you can draw energy from nature. In the
village you only drink. If I am able to bring my children and grandchildren
here to Nuniamo, everything will be fine."

7.4 Production of (Littoral) Space: Resettlement

Thus, the closed settlements are not only ruins and vestiges of a Soviet past
but, rather, play an important role in today's maritime subsistence activities, as
individuals and families have partially moved back to the formerly abandoned
settlements. From the vantage point of a sea mammal hunter, these places
offer an ideal ecology and topography for the maritime hunt. In addition, the
remote hunting camps at the old sites allow for at least a temporary escape
from the intrinsic problems—violence, alcoholism, and unemployment—of
contemporary village life in Chukotka, as they increasingly become important
sites of "material and social reconstruction."[43] Diametrically opposed to the
grim realities in the villages, revitalisation of old hunting technologies, sub-
sistence camps, and traditional forms of cooperation allow for alternative life
concepts outside of the confines of the villages. Hunting camps are, in most
cases, dry places in terms of alcohol, and traditional hunting and butchering
technologies are actively passed on to a younger generation at these sites.[44]

The five cabins that constitute the contemporary hunting camp at the
edge of the former settlement of Nuniamo were built by local hunters dur-
ing the 1990s, a time for Chukotka that was characterised by chronic food
and fuel shortages in the region but also by lesser restriction on personal
coastal travel. As a consequence, several other hunting camps were opened
in formerly closed villages along Chukotka's coast and partially resettled by
former inhabitants from settlement centres in the proximity. For example, the

43 Oliver-Smith, "Communities after Catastrophe," 51.
44 Holzlehner, "Social Engineering," 8.

former Chukchi settlement and Soviet boat repair station of Pinakul (closed in the 1970s) is almost permanently re-inhabited by an extended family and individual hunters from Lavrentiia; the former village of Akkani (closed in the 1960s) is nowadays used as a permanent hunting base for members of the sea mammal hunting collective in Lorino as well as individual hunters; Chegitun (closed in 1958), a former historic village and prime subsistence site, is nowadays regularly visited by hunting parties from Uelen.

The newly established hunting camps and resettlement patterns share common characteristics that made them attractive for revitalisation. All of the camps are located at former village sites whose subsistence usage dates back to historic or even pre-historic times, as the specific coastal topography has created microecological zones that are favourable for various subsistence activities. The places are exclusively located on bluffs or small cliffs at the end of capes where ice breaks up early in the season, by which sea mammal migration routes closely pass, and from which walruses and whales can be easily spotted by the hunters. In several of the newly established hunting camps, the existence of polynyas, spots of naturally occurring warm-water upwelling that keep parts of the coastal bays from freezing, creates favourable conditions for walrus and seal hunting in the fall and spring. The proximity to walrus haul-outs and rookeries and the existence of sheltered bays for boat landing and butchering activities also play an important role, as does close access to a fresh water source.

However, the peculiar microecology that predestines many of the sites for sea mammal hunting is not the only reason for their revitalisation. All these places have witnessed during the last several years the construction of new houses and sheds, for which building materials were extensively salvaged from the adjacent, closed villages. In most cases, the new camps have been built by Chukchi or Yupik in close proximity to, but spatially removed from, the old settlements. Building and the creation of a (new) home are powerful and meaningful strategies of re-settling (old) places.[45] The camps at the old sites are filled with contemporary activities, ranging from house construction to traditional skin boat building, which tie people to each other and to the place they co-inhabit. The architecture of the new camp, characterised by the creative re-use of artefacts and building materials from the destroyed village, represents a case in point for the widespread use of "proximal design,"[46] a

45 Bolotova and Stammler, "North Became Home," 217.
46 Usenyuk, Sampsa and Whalen, "Proximal Design," 866.

phenomenon of creative, local adaptation of imported technologies in the constraining environment of the North.

Formerly abandoned and now partially resettled places thus play a central role in the restructuring and revitalisation of hunting traditions and alternative life concepts, where hunting, building, gathering, and communal work are dictated by an individual timeline. The hunting camps are places of active cultural reproduction, where a younger generation is practically introduced to the intricacies of maritime hunting. In addition, due to the spatial distance from regional centres, the camps are situated beyond the practical control of border guards, whose strict management of coastal boat traffic (which results in Chukotka having, in practice, a closed maritime border with adjacent Alaska) is seen by most of the hunters as a serious interference in day-to-day hunting activities. The absence of the state and its local representatives has, therefore, created new opportunities for a self-determined life beyond the strict supervision of state agents. Closed villages that have been turned into contemporary hunting camps represent places that are generative and regenerative at the same time.[47] Active participation in the creation of a new, inhabitable environment and family-based subsistence activities combined with the peculiar qualities of those places make them into social and economic spaces that bear the potential for community regeneration. After the failed experiment of large-scale social and cultural engineering, the depopulated coastal landscape with its abandoned settlements thus represents new points of anchorage for partial re-settlements and revitalisation movements.

7.5 Conclusion: Littoral Resistance and Adaptive Strategies

Politics interacts with landscapes and the bodies that inhabit them. The resettlement policies enacted by the Soviet Union initiated a struggle over environmental access and settlement space. Fundamentally different relations to space and environment were set against each other in the course of the village resettlements. Local voices, which expressed scepticism in light of changing subsistence regimes, were silenced by a State discourse of progress and development, which related to Chukotka's coastal space and maritime environment mostly in terms of infrastructural access and control.

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47   Casey, "Space to Place," 26.

Chukotka's resettlement history is set in a contested landscape, where "local theories of dwelling"[48] collided with governmental ideas of proper housing and settlement structure. This is true even today, as the inhabitation of formerly abandoned village sites has created conflicts of interests with respect to land and subsistence rights between individual family groups and municipal authorities. With no official title to land, the new temporary inhabitants operate in a legal grey zone, often at the mercy of local authorities with their very own agenda.

T. Ingold has juxtaposed two essentially different forms of human dwelling, expressed by distinctive relations to the environment.[49] The distinction between a "building perspective," where worlds are made before they are lived in, and a "dwelling perspective," where buildings arise through human activity and interaction with the environment, sheds light on the fundamental differences between dwelling and environment in the case of native coastal cultures and the Soviet state. With the coastal village resettlements and economic consolidations, the Soviet development strategy inscribed a building and settlement plan into Chukotka's society with little consideration of local sentiments and subsistence strategies. Economic and infrastructural changes were planned and implemented from outside, and local communities had to comply with the newly made world. The opposite is true for the settlement and building structure of traditional villages, which evolved in close interaction with the environment, its peculiar coastal topography, and subsistence opportunities. The peculiar littoral culture of coastal villages, where proximity to the sea and its resources were principal in the location of a particular settlement, was superseded by a coastal culture of maximum infrastructural access and economic output implemented by the Soviet state.

Throughout its history, Arctic anthropology has heavily relied on an adaptive framework to theorise habitation patterns and procurement strategies—from Marcel Mauss' adaptive seasonal social structure of Canadian Inuit[50] to Igor Krupnik's "adaptation framework" to explain the changing settlement patterns of Arctic maritime hunting cultures.[51] Accordingly, various forms of mobility and adaptive strategies were constant partners of indigenous Arctic cultures. From this vantage point, the history of Arctic maritime cultures can be seen as a series of shifting adaptations, where populations

48 Feld and Basso, "Introduction," 8.
49 Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 186.
50 Mauss, *Seasonal Variation*.
51 Krupnik, *Arctic Adaptations*.

actively adjust to changing ecological conditions with alternating growth and decline periods. Various adaptation strategies play an important role therein by minimising risk and uncertainty, optimising flexibility of choice, maximising energy extraction, and rotating among seasonal procurement strategies. In the course of these shifts, long-term settlements were regularly abandoned and "uninhabited lands, lands belonging to migratory communities, or abandoned settlements together with their resource territories, played the role of unique temporal reservoirs."[52]

Political ecological approaches in anthropology have demonstrated that disasters do not manifest instantaneously but are, rather, produced in spaces and times that often exceed the geographic and temporal boundaries of the affected communities.[53] Consequently, resilience, as the "qualities or characteristics that allow a community to survive following a collective trauma"[54] and the subsequent ability to rebuild what was lost, must be equally framed within the broader political ecological relationships that expand beyond the confines of the community. Contemporary inhabitation and utilisation of formerly closed villages show how the coastal landscape represents not only a "reservoir" in an ecological sense but can also act as a littoral reserve by providing the space for alternatives outside of the constraints of village life. The creation of autonomous social space at these contemporary hunting camps is part of the "hidden transcript"[55] of practical resistance. The coastal landscape of Chukotka is not only a location where state forces inscribed their social and economic blueprint but also a regenerative space where hidden forms of resistance to state-enforced resettlement policies can find their very own place.

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52 Ibid., 268.
53 Barrios, "Resilience," 30.
54 Sherrieb, Harris and Galea, "Community Resilience," 228.
55 Scott, *Domination*, 191.

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