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Living with "slow upheavals": unsettling a resilience-based approach in Ittoqqortoormiit (Kalaallit Nunaat)

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Introduction: This article explores how narratives of changes reflect concerns about latent threats to the material and immaterial dimensions of individual and collective lives. Using decolonial approaches and critical ethnography practices in Ittoqqortoormiit (East Kalaallit Nunaat), we empirically challenge resilience frameworks by expanding the body of research on slow violence—unsensational, gradual harm that exacerbates the vulnerabilities of ecosystems, non-human entities, and disempowered individuals and groups—in the context of transdisciplinary and community-based climate change research.

Methods: We conducted repeated stays in the community from 2019 to 2023 and practiced deep-hanging and critical ethnography. Our results are supported by the analysis of 33 open-ended interviews.

Results: The research participants provided valuable insights, characterizing changes as slow upheavals, which we define as events that are not sudden or whose impacts manifest gradually and whose severity and salience are subject to deliberation. Local experiences do not align with narratives of rapid change and also contest modern ontologies that depict the world as stable and controllable. Instead, they express alternative onto-epistemologies of living in or "becoming-with" evolving worlds.

Discussion: Through a dialog with critiques of colonial and neoliberal interpretations or approaches to resilience, we demonstrate the centrality of place-attachment in supporting agency and hope amid experiences of marginalization. We point out the need to move toward agency-based resilience frameworks that take account of lived experiences. We encourage listening to diversified discourses on the climate and ecological crisis, which is inextricably intertwined with the multidimensional upheavals experienced by diverse communities in the Arctic and beyond.

KEYWORDS

narratives of changes, decoloniality, critical ethnography, agency, slow violence, place-attachment, marginalization, lived experiences

1 Introduction

The lived experiences of the communities at the "frontline" of climate and environmental change, such as those in the Arctic, are often overshadowed by global and science-based narratives (Baztan et al., 2017; Bravo, 2009; Bremer et al., 2019; Holm, 2010; Stephen, 2018). Yet, the responses of Arctic communities to these changes is significantly influenced by their individual and collective identities, their knowledge systems and their connections to the

wider world (Hastrup, 2018; Krupnik and Jolly, 2002). The Arctic as a whole is currently experiencing a multitude of changes, many of which are associated with rapid ecological and faster climate change in polar regions. For instance, by 2050, the Arctic Ocean is predicted to be seasonally free of ice (IPCC, 2022). These changes are imposing significant challenges on Indigenous peoples, impacting their way of life and way of being (Nuttall, 2018). Despite these communities being less accountable for the crisis, they are facing its most intense effects. The climate and ecological crisis, intertwined with multidimensional upheavals, also reveals the necessity to explore other epistemologies and ontologies that have been historically ignored. It is therefore essential to challenge the current understanding which remains firmly rooted in the Western epistemic tradition (Sultana, 2022, 2023; Tuana, 2022).

The objective of this article is to examine the concept of resilience from the perspective of community members of an Arctic community, rather than from the vantage point of external sources. We adopt a critical stance in examining approaches to resilience, challenging perspectives that perpetuate the status quo and passivity, particularly those that are shock-based or based on thinking around short-term resilience (see Wardekker, 2021). The concept of resilience has been adopted by a wide variety of fields (Alexander, 2013; Moser et al., 2019) using diverging ontologies, normative interpretations, and framings (Wardekker, 2021). In among others the literatures on social-ecological systems and climate change adaptation, it was used to challenge modernist 'predict-and-prevent' science and policy, which aimed for quantification and optimized control of risks (e.g., Dessai and van der Sluijs, 2007; Pugh, 2014). Complexity, uncertainty and interdependencies made this untenable and the perspective of resilience focused on how systems and communities might navigate shocks and stresses regardless. Many applications can be found where the concept is used to help cities and communities navigate an uncertain future (Sitas et al., 2021; Wardekker, 2021). Yet, there are also many examples where actors diluted resilience in technical and managerial approaches (Fitzgibbons and Mitchell, 2019; Forsyth, 2018) or where it became embedded in neoliberal, individualistic ideology (Joseph, 2013) that perpetuates the status quo of social and environmental injustices (Kane and Vanderlinden, 2015; Pugh, 2014; Reid, 2012). Implementing resilience can clearly have pitfalls. For instance, the goal of making systems more resilient and faster to recover from shocks might overlook the question of whether those systems *should* be preserved, and for whom they are beneficial or detrimental. An emphasis on community capacities and resources to recover and adapt from disasters might overlook *who has access* to these and who has not. Much then depends on who controls the narrative on what resilience means and how it should be implemented in specific situations. What are their agendas, biases, blind spots, and strengths? The approach chosen can either empower local narratives or reinforce existing inequalities (see Borie et al., 2019). This may be particularly challenging for (post-)colonial and development contexts, where resilience discourse risks becoming rooted in colonial knowledge and power structures (e.g., Amo-Agyemang, 2021), and the narrative is often determined by external actors, such as national-level or international organizations and donor countries (see Béné et al., 2014; Fraser et al., 2017; Sou, 2022). The emphasis placed on adaptability and flexibility in resilience frameworks might suggest that communities will be able to withstand adversities without addressing the underlying structural causes of their vulnerability (Walker and Cooper, 2011), such as colonial structures and legacies (Cameron, 2012; Chandler et al., 2020; Reid, 2018) and the resistance to them (Coulthard, 2014; Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen, 2016). Thus, a decolonial critique calls for a rethinking of resilience, emphasizing agency, historical context, and resistance against oppressing systems, while challenging its role in normalizing inequitable power structures and colonial legacies (Tuck and Yang, 2012). In line with the aforementioned call, we employ a narrative-based approach to examine changes, shocks, upheavals, and their subsequent consequences as they are framed within the lived experiences of individuals of Ittoqqortoormiit (Kalaallit Nunaat), who are directly impacted by the climate and ecological crisis. Finally, the article posits that the prevailing comprehension of climate change in the Arctic, as it pertains to traditional resilience, is inadequate to fully grasp the upheavals confronting Arctic communities. In the Arctic, the lived experience of these upheavals is inextricably linked to slow-moving changes that connects to agency-based adaptability, a sense of belonging to the living places, and processes of marginalization that are entwined with colonial legacies.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Case study: a perspective rooted in Ittoqqortoormiit

Ittoqqortoormiit is the northernmost town on the east coast of Kalaallit Nunaat, located at the mouth of the Kangertittivaq [Scoresby Sound], the world's largest fjord. Ittoqqortoormiit was settled in 1924–1925, primarily by *Iivit* [*Inuit* from East Kalaallit Nunaat] from Tasiilaq, at the direction of the Danish colonial authorities, as a way of asserting its sovereignty over the entire country. The community has long relied on subsistence hunting as its main source of income and it remains an important aspect of the local food supply (e.g., muskox, narwhals, seals, polar bears) although it is also an important aspect of local identity (Sandré et al., 2024a). The town was established in a geographically remote area, with the nearest settlement located 800 kilometers to the south. This isolation is further compounded by the presence of sea ice for more than half of the year. However, the remoteness that shapes peoples' lived experiences is also highly connected to sociopolitical factors. In 2009, the *Self-Government Act* was a significant milestone in Kalaallit Nunaat's path toward greater autonomy from Denmark. This act expanded the powers granted to Kalaallit Nunaat under the Home Rule Act of 1979, allowing for greater control over internal affairs. The act has also led to an overhaul of administrative divisions, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of municipalities; the country went from 18 district to just four, then five municipalities in 2018. As the result, Ittoqqortoormiit has been incorporated into the much larger municipality of Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, ruled from the capital of Nuuk, located on the west coast. Given the historical marginalization of East Kalaallit Nunaat by the central colonial administration and then by the post-colonial administration since 1953 (see Sandré, 2024), the division between East and West Kalaallit Nunaat after the 2009 municipal amalgamation has further centralized power in Nuuk, the capital, and sidelined the eastern population.

In Ittoqqortoormiit, the loss of local agency to decision-making has resulted in significant decisions regarding the community being

made in Nuuk, with only one local representative representing the town. In recent years, the inhabitants of Ittoqqortoormiit, known as Ittoqqortoormeermii, have faced multidimensional transformations. For instance, the town is experiencing a significant population decline driven by the migration of educated community members to Nuuk, falling from 509 inhabitants in 2008 to 364 in 2024 (Statistics Greenland, 2024). The number of *Piniartoq* [professional hunters] has also decreased from 32 in 2001 to just 11 in 2023. Further exacerbating the lack of services, the permanent doctor was progressively removed in the 2010s without further explanations, obliging local inhabitants to travel to other parts of the country, Iceland, or Denmark for medical care and education. After the 2020s, Ittoqqortoormiit is not directly connected to other parts of the country. There are only two flights per week between the town and Iceland, which are often delayed due to weather conditions. Two cargo ships deliver food supplies for the whole year in July and September–October. The drastic changes occurring in Ittoqqortoormiit and the persistence of marginalization processes constitute an ideal case to understand and potentially challenge approaches that support the glorification of adaptation and resilience, especially in Arctic regions (see Reid, 2018).

2.2 Interview methods: paying attention to narratives of changes

2.2.1 General value of a narrative approach

The research was centered on people's narratives of changes, specifically what individuals consider to be the most salient changes in their community and environment. In other words, we were interested in the ways people make sense of and respond to their world, how they articulate their identity, attachment to place, and also influence their judgments about the past and views about the future (Moezzi et al., 2017; Vanderlinden et al., 2020). Specifically, the use of a narrative-based approach in climate change adaptation research may serve four purposes (Bremer et al., 2017): elucidating the historical evolution of science-based climate change narratives; examining how these global narratives impact on the general public and policy-makers; enhancing the dissemination and communication of climate science; contextualizing climate within a cultural framework. In this research, the emphasis on narrative serves as a rhetorical methodology that enables the reframing of accounts based on lived experiences. Narratives are particularly crucial in situations of epistemic or environmental injustice, as they empower people to speak (Ottinger, 2017), contribute to the recentering of knowledge from the margins (Dutta et al., 2022) and foster empowerment (Datta, 2018).

2.2.2 Value and limitations in the context of the research

While the researchers' underlying interest was initially centered around experiences of rapid climate and environmental evolutions, the broad emphasis on a large category of "changes" made room for emerging concerns that might not originally have been within the researchers' scope. To capture these narratives, our methodology was based on open-ended interviews. These interviews were organized around key questions: *"With respect to your lived experience in Ittoqqortoormiit, as a member of this community, could you share with me the significance and meaning this place holds for you?; How has your experience changed over time with respect to the* various *forces shaping it?; What is your relationship with the outside world?."* Thirty interviews were conducted by the first and the fourth authors during extended stays in Ittoqqortoormiit between 2021 and 2023 (including one online in April 2021 while the town was still locked down during the Covid crisis). We also incorporated three interviews conducted during a one-week preliminary fieldwork trip in 2019 by the second co-author. In total, from 2019 to 2023, 22 community members were interviewed (five were interviewed twice and two three times along the research process). Overall, the sample is representative of the diversity of experiences within the community since the range of interviewees remains relatively broad. However, the perspectives gathered tended to come from individuals with greater economic, social, and cultural capital than the average population, and who were typically younger than the average population. Many of research participants were individuals who were already inclined to engage in research activities. Although some had not previously participated in research and were surprised to be invited to take part. A significant challenge in recruiting research participants was therefore the tendency to prioritize individuals with a higher level of proficiency in English. As our research approach was to establish relationships with the research participants, we were constrained by our inability to master Tunumisut, Kalaallisut, or Danish, which are the three main languages taught in Ittoqqortoormiit. A way to mitigate this bias was the recruitment of research participants through snowball sampling, The interviews were held in Tunumisut, with four different paid local interpreters (n = 11), in English (n = 20) or Danish in cases where the research participant and the researcher were both fluent (n = 2). Interviews were also conducted with teachers, local politicians, tourist officers, office workers, students, retired people, unemployed, etc., all of whom lived in the community for at least 5 years. According to ethical standards, especially in the context of small groups, the interviewees are anonymized and given pseudonyms (see Appendix 1).

2.3 Ethnographic fieldwork methods: deep hanging out and critical ethnography

Since our goal was to understand how local residents made sense of their experiences in a changing world, we adopted a "deep hanging out" approach (Geertz, 1998). This method involves immersive, informal participation in the community extending beyond structured interviews or observations, allowing the researcher to engage more naturally in the daily lives of participants, to build relationships and gain insights through lived experience. Although the research focused on experiences of and resilience to climate and environmental change, we ensured local relevance to the community through open-ended research questions. Furthermore, strict guidelines would have been inconsistent with critical ethnography practices (Madison, 2020). The latter entails adhering to "an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice" (p. 30). It also involves committing to actions that promote change or minimize harm while remaining attentive to our own positions as researchers, individually and collectively through a practice of *critical reflexivity* throughout the research process (Bourdieu, 2022; Kohl and McCutcheon, 2015).

The research approach was thus shaped within the field and tailored to its specific socio-historical context. The first and fourth co-authors undertook seven extended stays of between 3 weeks and 2 months in September–November 2021, May–June 2022, November

2022 and June 2023. The second author conducted a one-week fieldwork in 2019. These stays in the community were usually conducted individually, except for short overlapping periods.

2.4 Coding methods: a dialogic process for qualitative analysis

The interviews were analyzed following grounded theory coding methods (Saldana, 2015), using *Atlas.ti 9*. Centrally, they are based on emergent categories, meaning that the codes are not predetermined, but rather emerge from the data. Friese (2014) suggested that noticing, collecting and thinking are not successive or linear process. We, therefore, adopted a continuous *dialogical process* between the categories that emerged from people's narratives *(analytical lens)* and existing concepts that were identified as salient *(theoretical lens)* (Figure 1). This is consistent with our ethnographic fieldwork methods, since this coding approach requires repeated engagement with the community.

The *analytical lens* involved becoming familiar with a consistent sample of 15 interviews whose analysis allowed salient categories to *emerge*. These emergent categories allowed us to identify common patterns and to orientate our gaze toward pre-coding categories from which the salient concepts could emerge. Alongside the transcription process, seven code groups were created, corresponding to salient categories derived from the raw data. Prior the systematic coding, initial code groups and initial codes emerged following familiarization with the interview corpus (Figure 2). These categories were also informed by the progressive encounters with salient concepts during and after the first deep hanging out period. The *theoretical lens* reconstructed the qualitative materials through *association* by systematically coding them, progressively associating the codes with theorization, with interpretation being informed by the ethnography and field notes from deep hanging out (Penalva et al., 2015). The results section aims to reflect this research process as accurately as possible by actively illustrating the dialog between empirical findings and theoretical framings, especially in the design of the idea of "living-with."

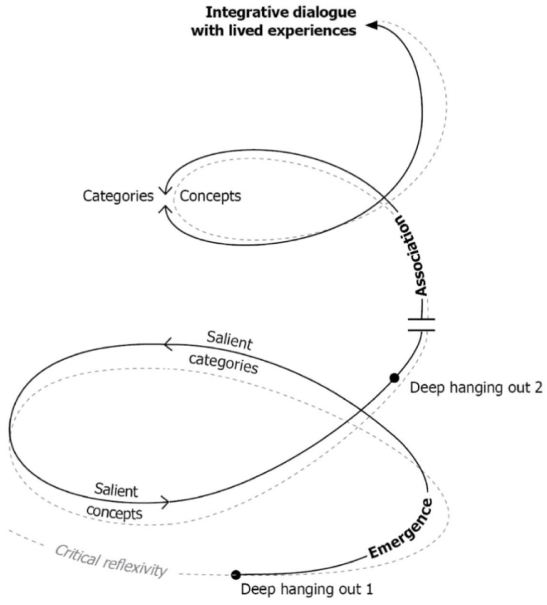

FIGURE 1
A dialogical process through emergence and association.

3 Results

In Ittoqqortoormiit, our results indicate that the experience of changes is deeply associated to environmental and sociocultural slow-moving changes. The idea of "living-with" emerged in the early stages of the research as a way to navigate with changes lived as part of the landscape (3.1). Fostering this dialog, we further show how marginalization (3.2.1) and belonging (3.2.2) are crucial in the lived experiences of the inhabitants of Ittoqqortoormiit.

3.1 An emergent category: "living-with" changing climate and environment

Our results document how individuals experience life in a rapidly changing world, with a focus on the impacts of climate change, evolving human-nonhuman relationships, and the complexities of existing within a broader global context. A variety of changes were underlined—including climate change-driven changes, a decrease in population and hunters, impacts of hunting quota reductions, a lack of services, and the loss of political influence— while their potentially wide-ranging consequences were usually described as gradual and not everyone saw them as salient. In other words, changes can be seen as an integral and inherent part of the landscape, often not discussed explicitly but rather experienced through adaptation by the community members (Quotes *#1–3*, in Table 1). For instance, changes in sea ice extent and thickness were regarded as gradual and unremarkable, and uncertainties were regarded with a cultural attitude of acceptance, which contrasts with the Western perspective of predicting and controlling (see Sandré et al., 2024a):

> "I don't have any real expectation for when the ice will break up, because it is the weather that controls that in the end, I expect it will happen next month but I can't tell, it is Mother Nature who is in control." #3 - Lars, employed, May 2022.

These transformations are evident and observable within a human lifetime, shaping personal narratives and influencing interactions between residents and the broader world. The uncertainties accompanying these transformations are viewed as a natural part of life, with community members not focused on minimizing them. For example, shifts in sea ice extent and thickness create challenges for traditional hunting practices and limit mobility in the area. Although there is a clear perception of diminishing ice cover, this phenomenon is understood as gradual, varying from year to year (Quotes *#4–7*):

> "Weather has changed. Like last year the ice was gone but this year the ice is here. Every year it changes." #7 - Pele, employed, June 2022.

Concurrently, there is a widespread observation that the number of polar bears has increased in the region, a change attributed either to climate shifts or to the introduction of hunting quotas in 2005. The

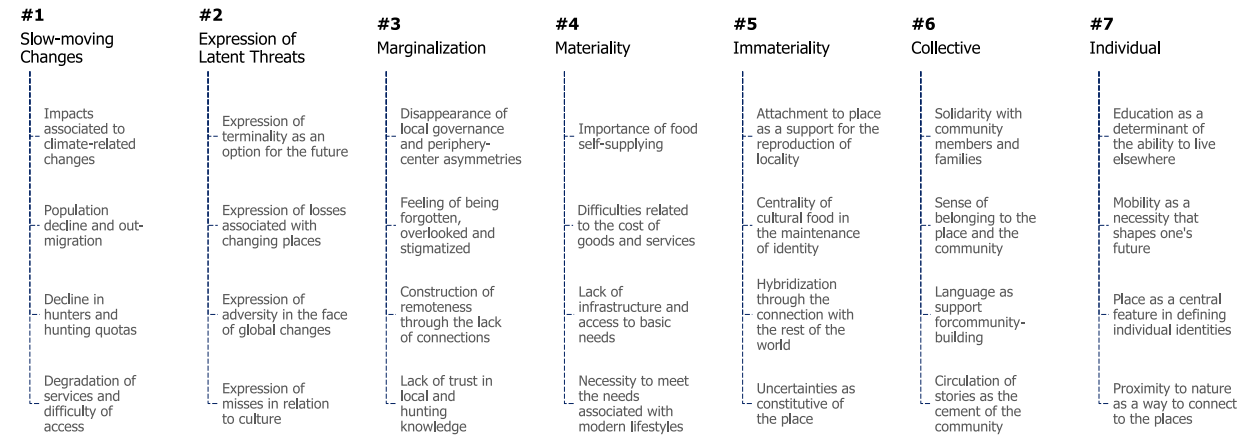

FIGURE 2
Initial codes (--) by initial code groups (#).

growing presence of polar bears in the town is seen as a significant change, associated both to threat and fascination by the community members (Quotes *#8–11*):

> "When I was a boy, I never saw polar bears in the city. I left for my education back in 2006, and came back 2/3 years ago. During that period of 10-12 years, polar bears have come much closer to the town, and sometimes even in the town. This has to be due to climate change. Also, there's a hunting quota for polar bears and that has helped the number of polar bears to go up. When I was a boy there were no quotas, so you could catch then all year, also there was more floating ice, driving ice. Today, with the quotas and lack of driving ice, there are more polar bears on the land and many are hungry." #10 - Aaju, employed, September 2021.

As changes regarding polar bears, changes in the landscape are observed and interpreted through an intimate knowledge of the place, affecting daily activities and shaping memories, including how the community responds to extreme weather events like storms or the witnessing of glacier disappearing (Quotes *#12–15*):

> "This summer, with my brother, we were in the south of the fjord and we saw that the glaciers have changed a lot. Before, the glaciers went out into the sea and now, they don't. A lot is gone. Last time was in 2009, or 2010, I was dogsledding, each summer I go sailing over there, but I didn't notice, but this summer it was a lot different. There have been many changes in the last 10 years." #14 - Alan, Piniartoq, September 2021.

Yet, the community's ability to shape its present and future (Nash, 2005), has been restricted especially after losing political power to the western coast. This limited agency is captured in common responses we encountered in our interactions with the local administration: "We have to ask to Nuuk" (informal conversation, 2021). Although environmental changes present numerous challenges, they are therefore perceived as less pressing than sociopolitical shifts:

> "There's less ice. The ice has become less thick and it comes later. And it breaks up much earlier, but this year is very different, this year is kind of like the way it was in 2005 to 2008 […]. 2011 was the first time I experienced the ice breaking up in January and there was open water and that happens now almost every year, but it was the first time for me. That was quite a big experience. So, the winters are getting shorter, but just not this winter. Winters have been shorter and shorter. So, for me personally, it's a shame because I like to go dog sledging, and hunting with the dogs. But it's still a long winter compared to many places in West Kalaallit Nunaat where there is no sea ice anymore. So, I think there are changes but people are very good at adapting here. I think the challenges with politics and all that is much bigger than the challenge with climate change." #4 - Vivi, part-time, May 2022.

Thus, the experience of change in this context is multifaceted, deeply rooted in both environmental observations and sociocultural frameworks. Based on our preliminary understanding, we outlined a form of *"living-with resilience,"* i.e., a way of coping with changes primarily driven by the cultural acceptance of uncertainty and powerlessness to reduce it. The latter framing intersects with theoretical consideration toward the concepts of becoming-with and slow violence that further resonates with our analysis.

3.2 An integrative dialog with lived experiences: marginalization and belonging

"Living-with" emerged as an attitude toward changes. However, these changes are intertwined with two other categories of experiences that are crucial in the narrations of the inhabitants of Ittoqqortoormiit: the experience of marginalization (3.2.1) and the expression of belonging and place-attachment (3.2.2). Therefore, these aspects are examined in dialog. This dialog aims at reframing the understanding of climate change in the local experiences of slow-moving changes, while recognizing that both socio-political changes and climate changes therefore constitute latent, or non-abrupt changes, which can ultimately threaten material and immaterial dimensions of the existence. In doing so, we render responsive a resilience framework to address issues such as power imbalances, challenges related to ways of living, and threats

TABLE 1 Summary of the code analysis related to "living-with" changing climate and environment.

Code	Description	Key quotes
Living with changes	• Change is an inherent **part of the landscape**; people tend to adapt to it; • The scope of these changes is **noticeable within a person's lifetime;** • Uncertainty is viewed as **an integral aspect of the experience**.	• *#1 - Aaju, employed, September 2021: (see in the text)* • *#2 - Nuka, employed, October 2021: "We can prove to the world that climate change is real […] I can say that we, from Ittoqqortoormiit are the living proof that there is climate change because back in the 80s, the ice would be 2.5 m thick. Now, we are lucky if it reaches 1.5 m. Our summers are getting longer and longer, and the hunting season gets shorter and shorter […] it's lucky we are adaptive people, so we just adapt to it and overcome it."* • *#3 - Lars, employed, May 2022: "I do not have any real expectation for when the ice will break up, because it is the weather that controls that in the end, I expect it will happen next month but I cannot tell, it is Mother Nature who is in control."*
Change in sea ice	• Changes in sea ice extent and thickness present **challenges for hunting practices** and mobility; • While **a noticeable reduction in extent and thickness** is observed, it is seen as gradual; • These changes bring **a range of challenges**, which are seen as less salient than sociopolitical changes.	• *#4 - Vivi, part-time, May 2022: (see in the text)* • *#5 - Aka, employed, June 2022: "Yesterday they stopped snowmobiles from travelling on the ice, it's too risky, the ice is breaking. Sometimes it's earlier and sometimes it's later, when the ice breaks. It has always been like that, changing from year to year, with ice breaking in June or July, maybe more so June."* • *#6 - Peter, employed, May 2022: "This year, the ice edge is like it was in the olden time, but in recent years, the last 20 years, the ice edge only went this far. This year, we have a lot of ice, it has been a very long time since we have has so much ice."* • *#7 - Pele, employed, June 2022: (see in the text)*
Changing relations with polar bears	• The **population of polar bears is seen as increasing;** • This is attributed to either **climate change or the introduction of quotas** in 2005; • The growing presence of polar bears in the town is perceived as **a significant threat but also with fascination.**	• *#8 - Inuk, Piniartoq, September 2021: "I am happier now, because I can see, hunt and wait for polar bears […]. If a bear comes, I can go there quickly and admire them. I am happy waiting and watching them. I feel more complete. Once, I waited all day, 5–6 h for a bear I has seen coming in the distance to arrive […]. I can wait for hours and hours for the bear to arrive. I'm fascinated by bears.* • *#9 - Regina, employed, October 2021: "I had just gone home from the sport hall walking. I heard people outside my house filming the polar bear. He was eating the dog food. We tracked this polar bear. It was near my dogs. I think everyone in the community is scared of meeting polar bears close up. They do not want their kids to be outside after it gets dark because they are afraid they might meet a polar bear. It is quite normal that we get visits from polar bears inside the town."* • *#10 - Aaju, employed, September 2021: (see in the text)* • *#11 - Inuk, Piniartoq, September 2021: "Now that the climate is changing, the ice is no longer safe. Also because of bear quotas, we can only hunt bears for 2 months, February, March and then it's impossible. In April, May, June, the quota is exceeded: there are plenty of bears, but none that we can hunt, that's why people do not go there anymore: It's a pity for the people. They cannot do anything. People cannot go to the edge of the ice because there's no more bear hunting, they cannot hunt, they cannot move around because the bears cannot be killed."*

(Continued)

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TABLE 1 (Continued)

Code	Description	Key quotes
Changes in glacier, snow and storms	• Change **impacts the experience of the place** (e.g., memories, mobility); • Coping with storms is **part of the experience of the place;** • The variety of change is observed through **intimate knowledge of the landscape and of places**.	• *#12 - Lise, political leader, July 2022: "You can witness climate change first-hand here, because in the last few years it has starting raining and we are starting to have big storms. The wind grows stronger and stronger, and it's threatening to witness that first hand. Before, growing up here, you would never have rain in summer or autumn. It would just start snowing slowly at the end of fall and then the snow would accumulate. We would have a normal winter and then in spring—late spring—it would start raining and the snow would begin to melt. Witnessing climate change here throughout the year, you can really see that sometimes we do not have any, or hardly any snow at all. And then maybe the next year or year after we get a lot of snow. Like, we have pack ice now. But sometimes, it really never fastens on to the land, it's not stable and it just breaks off. Then sometimes, we have thick ice like this year where the ice does not move although if we have strong winds that could take it out."* • *#13 - Aaju, employed, September 2021: "The temperature is very high in some places. Already in the 90s, people started to notice. Just like the glacier I mentioned before that is getting smaller, I noticed that when I was teenager because I lived there during the summer all my childhood. Sometimes hunters tell me: "this land is changing." There was a place on land that just started gradually thawing, they did not know it was permafrost, but they just said it was dropping, but it must be permafrost. Also, the glacier is getting lower and lower. You could normally dogsled all the way to this place, it is not safe anymore, here as well, it is not safe anymore. I used to go to these 3 locations, and it is not safe anymore. It must be the same story all over because we do not travel to this part or other part, we just wait longer until we have the ice. But we see over time. When I was a boy, when we sailed at this time there would be a lot of icebergs, sometimes you could not see the edge, today you can, more or less."* • *#14 - Alan, Piniartoq, September 2021: (see in the text)* • *#15 - Aaju, employed, September 2021: "Also, the small ice-sheets are disappearing, you can see that. There is a place up the mountain, just outside, around here. It is quite normal, but I think it is early this year, but like most places in the world, we sometimes get a lot of snow, precipitation, extreme rains, sometimes we have extreme snow. When I was a kid, we used to travel on snowmobile on the other side of the fjord. There is a glacier down there. When I was a boy, there were 5 houses. Today there is one that can be used, the others not anymore. When I was a boy, we used to live there during the summer every year. There is a glacier, not very big, but it used to be higher. Every half an hour, twenty minutes, we could hear it grumbling. Today, you hear nothing and the glacier is half the height."*

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linked to the scarcity of services. Ultimately, the examination of place attachment and belonging, emphasizing the significance of identity, emotional ties to the place, the affirmation of cultural ways of being, and expressions of hope and optimism for the future.

3.2.1 Being in the margins: peripheral experiences

The pervasive prejudice from both Danish and West Kalaallit Nunaat residents against individuals from the East coast of Kalaallit Nunaat is manifested through stigmatization and discrimination, often marginalizing the Eastern residents. It resonates with the community's history of being located on the so-called "back side" of Kalaallit Nunaat, where inhabitants on the eastern coast were granted fewer rights than those on the west coast. They were only fully integrated later after Kalaallit Nunaat became part of Denmark in 1953. For instance, in the East coast, colony councils and colony managers persisted until 1956 and the easterners only gained the right to vote for the Danish Parliament in 1960 (Sørensen, 2007; Schultz, 2023). This history and its ongoing dynamics, are reflected in expressions from people's narratives such as: *"we feel forgotten"* or *"we are born to be slaves"* (informal conversation, 2022). This marginalization extends to the subalternization of the Eastern dialect (Tunumisut), which differs from both the dominant Western dialect and the national language, further exacerbating socio-cultural imbalances of power (Quotes *#16–19*, Table 2). Political disenfranchisement is another consequence, as the town of Ittoqqortoormiit lost its status as an independent municipality in 2009, resulting in governance decisions being made from the West coast. This centralization has created a widespread perception that West coast officials only visit the municipality for short-term assessments, reporting back without fully understanding local contexts:

> "I started to think about Ittoqqortoormiit not just as part of Kalaallit Nunaat or Denmark, but more like: this is our land, this is our home, this is our country. I started to think of it as 'them' and 'us'. Our government is them and we, the people from here are us. I mean you can't force people to move to someplace else […]. Many things were moved more than 1000 kilometers away. It was difficult. I mean this transition process took many years. So, many felt as if they were forgotten." #16 - Aaju, employed, June 2022.

As a result, local leaders' voices and knowledge are frequently excluded from decision-making processes, leading to a disconnect between governance and community needs (Quotes *#19–22*):

> "Centralization started in 2009, when everything moved to Nuuk. Everybody said it's better in Nuuk, because there are more people there capable of dealing with everything. It has become too Western, too Nuuk-centered, it became too much, in Nuuk, they only respect their way of working. All the towns were self-governing and could ask their political leaders for what they needed because it was locals working there. […] Due to the isolation of the place, centralization is a bad thing. The vision that Western coast has only suits bigger towns, they have no idea how it is to live in a small town like here" #20 - Lise, political leader, July 2022.

The aforementioned lack of local involvement is also expressed on matters regarding hunting regulations wherein hunters' knowledge are silenced (Sandré et al., 2024a). In consequence, the limitations on hunting and the harsh conditions of the hunters' life have also led to a sharp decline in professional hunters and a reluctance of the younger generation to pursue this profession. The latter is seen as severe threats to the sustainability of the local hunting community (Quotes *#23–25*):

> "Hunting is why it made sense to live here. Because it was something you could live off, even 16 years ago it still felt like it was a hunting community. There were more than 500 dogs. You would see hunters going out every day with dogs in summer And of course, there were all those institutions, like the school and the hospital. More people worked here than now, as I mentioned. But I think the biggest change is that it got more and more difficult to live off hunting, in part because of all the quota regulations. Also, you can't really export many things to other countries like polar bear skins. So, to make a living off the resources that we have here has gotten more difficult over the years. At the same time, life has changed, you have cell phones now. You need the internet if you have a family. You want to give your children those things that all the other kids have. So, if you're a hunter, you need to be very good. If your wife has a job, you have some income all the time, or if you're a very experienced hunter, you can make it work but it has gotten more difficult to live off the land here. That's what made sense to have this community here." #25 - Vivi, part-time, May 2022.

The loss of local political power has also resulted in a lack of services, human resources, and infrastructure, which poses significant challenges for the residents of Ittoqqortoormiit and is perceived as an unfair consequence of external governance. Educational opportunities are also constrained, as students have traditionally had to relocate to Nuuk after the 8th grade to pursue further studies, creating additional barriers for the youth of Ittoqqortoormiit (Quotes *#26–30*):

> "Many are moving to another place for a better life and to find work somewhere. Sometimes I think maybe they can return to Ittoqqortoormiit and work again somewhere, but there is the problem with everything being in Nuuk. Maybe in the future, the community of Ittoqqortoormiit will move to Nuuk and Ittoqqortoormiit will be closed. But for me that's not going to happen." #30 - Ivalu, employed, July 2022.

3.2.2 Experience of being a place-based community

Attachment to place is deeply ingrained in the community's relationship with the natural environment, the landscape, and the shared memories and knowledge that define their collective identity. As a hunting community, the practices of sharing and self-supplying cultural food are central to the conception of a "good life," reflecting a way of life that values mutual support. This place-based identity is also influenced by interactions with outsiders, such as tourists and researchers, which contribute to a broader sense of belonging. A deep connection to the land and the specific way of life is frequently expressed by people in self-descriptions, which often include sentences such as *"I'm born and raised here."* Experiences abroad often evoke feelings of homesickness and a sense that "something is missing" coupled with a strong "urge to come back," underscoring the

TABLE 2 Summary of the code analysis associated with peripheral experiences.

Code	Description	Quote
Being overlooked by the Western coast	• **Prejudices against the East coast** of Kalaallit Nunaat, are expressed through stigmatization and discrimination; • This discrimination is also reflected in the **subalternization of the Eastern language** which differs from the western and national language; • **Political decisions** reflect this marginalization with Ittoqqortoormiit municipality losing its independent in 2009.	• *#16 - Aaju, employed, June 2022*: (see in the text) • *#17 - Nuka, employed, October 2021: "We feel that we are sometimes the forgotten town. We get this impression when we ask for help with getting new school equipment or new teachers or nurses or police officers to work here, our requests tend to go unsupervised. They just choose anyone that will come here, even if they do not have the right qualifications. For instance, if we say we need a high school teacher, they might send an elementary teacher, maybe because that was what they could find instead of really looking. We feel overlooked most of the time […] There has been a lot of discrimination by West Kalaallit against East Kalaallit for some unknown reason."* • *#18 - Ivalu, employed, July 2022: "We also have to learn Kalaallisut [Western language], it's very hard at first. Like the first time I went to West Kalaallit Nunaat to study, I had to learn it. We only heard the Kalaallisut on the radio when I was younger, and of course on TV sometimes, but very little. When we go to west coast to study and lived there, we have to learn Kalaallisut, it's very difficult. When I speak my own language, they cannot understand me, but I can understand what they say—that's because we have heard it on the radio before. They can hear that I'm not from the west coast, that I'm from eastern Kalaallit Nunaat. When I speak in Tunumisut, my own language, only 5–10% can understand me. So, I have to learn it […] When I was younger at school in Sisimiut to study, I never said I was from Ittoqqortoormiit because I thought they would not like me anymore, it's very sad […]. When I was younger, I always felt like an outsider in West Kalaallit Nunaat, that's why I never told the people I know that I'm from Ittoqqortoormiit. I do not know why the westerners do it but when they hear somebody is from the east coast, they say: 'Go back to the east, you are not welcome here!'"*
Being governed by external decision	• Since decisions are now made on the West coast, there is **a widespread feeling that the west coast officials do not understand the local circumstances;** • Similarly, **local leaders' voices and knowledge** are often excluded from discussions; decisions are often made from far away.	• *#19 - Ivalu, employed, July 2022: "Nuuk is always deciding for Ittoqqortoormiit. Before, when I was mayor, we decided from the city hall with the seven members."* • *#20 - Lise, political leader, July 2022: (see in the text)* • *#21 - Hans, ex-political leader, May 2019: "We talked to some political visitors one month ago. And we said: We heard that news on the radio, in the news. Why do not you tell us about it?"* • *#22 - Panninguaq, business owner, April 2021: "Then there's the narwhals.... Everybody is talking about narwhals on Facebook, local people, me. Because the biologists and hunters have not work well together. Well, they have worked together but it's always the biologists who have the final say with the government, the hunters are fed-up, they do not listen to the hunters' words, only the biologists."*
Changes in the hunting way of life	• The hunting restrictions and the significant decline in professional hunters are seen as a profound **threat to the sustainability of the hunting community**; • The **harshness of being hunter** is associated with the sharp decline in hunting and the unwillingness of the new generation to become hunter.	• *#23 - Lise, political leader, July 2022: "Our struggles regarding hunting should be more publicized, because we have been really limited in hunting, with the biologists saying that we should not hunt at all, that the animals should live. We are not heard at all, the biologists keep winning this argument, pushing for no hunting of specific animals, no hunting for that animal, lower the hunting rate for this and the quota for this. And we cannot do anything about it like researchers and other countries do elsewhere. We have researchers here; we should publicize the struggle we have to live here."* • *#24- Peter, employed, May 2019: "The big change is the hunting quotas. We have more and more preys but we still have quotas. Before the quotas, everybody had dogs. But, after the quotas, fewer people have dogs because the excitement of polar bear hunting with dogsleds is gone. When I was young, I experienced this hunting because there was no quota. But now, we have quotas imposed by the West coast politicians and they listen too much to the biologists. The biologists are like forces against the people living here. If the quotas did not exist, we would have dogs. There are fewer dogs because of the quotas; you cannot hunt with dogs any more. We still have many animals here and hunters, there's around fifteen hunters."* • *#25 - Vivi, part-time, May 2022: (see in the text)*

(Continued)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Code	Description	Quote
Alteration of services	• The lack of services, human resources and infrastructure presents significant challenges for Ittoqqortoormiit residents and is seen as **an unfair consequence of the loss of local political power**; • **Education opportunities in Ittoqqortoormiit are also limited**, as students usually had to leave for Nuuk after 8th grade to continue their studies.	• *#26 - Pipaluk, employed, November 2021: "What we are missing here mainly is a doctor and a dentist, especially for the children. I cannot change the healthcare. I can complain to the hospital, but I cannot do anything. (…) It's risky to stay here, because you are not sure you can get help if you need it. I do not have it in my mind all the time, but I ask the kids to be careful."* • *#27 - Peter, employed, May 2019: "I heard from the local municipality, that in the future we will not have a doctor anymore. They are not trying to help us to have a doctor, with the municipality or the politicians. Nobody discusses the lack of a doctor here."* • *#28 - Panninguaq, business owner, November 2021: "Locally, it's getting difficult to give birth, because it's not possible in the hospital. You need to leave Ittoqqortoormiit. This impacts the population here; it is dropping because fewer women want to have babies. One month before the baby comes, you have to move to Nuuk or to Tasiilaq. It's not easy for families, because you are alone having your baby and the father is taking care of the rest of kids […]. This makes it very difficult here."* • *#29 - Vivi, part-time, May 2022: "It's a big change because about 10 years ago—I do not remember exactly since I do not have kids—but the 9th and 10th grades were moved away at some point and the parents did not want that and but it was decided I guess by the school leadership in Nuuk. But now the new head of the school managed last year to get them back to be educated here again."* • *#30 - Ivalu, employed, July 2022: (see in the text)*

importance of family and interpersonal connections in maintaining ties to the community (Table 3, Quotes *#30–34*):

> "It's difficult to leave this place because of the view you have here, when you have been born and raised here and have your heart here. Also, when you have been to all the hunting grounds around here, you leave a little bit of yourself everywhere. […] Also, when you have that much love for the place, especially the food which is a big factor in living here, because we have so many things we can just put in the freezer, catch ourselves, things that the rest of the world doesn't have. And it really changes your spirit, you can say, it's really good for the spirit when you are born and raised here […]. So, it's a difficult thing to forget when you're away from here" #34 - Lise, political leader, July 2022.

This strong sense of community is frequently expressed through a desire to "do something for the community" and to contribute to its well-being, a motivation that influences many to return after moving away, often for educational purposes. The community is described as a "big family," where solidarity, food sharing, and mutual aid are pivotal values (Quotes *#35–39*):

> "We are friendly to each other because we have this kind of instinct, a feeling that we don't have other people who can come and help us. If you need kalaaleq food, you've got to be good friends with the hunters, and likewise you provide what you can to the people, and they give you what they can. As long as we are friendly to each other and help each other, we will survive. We will survive living here and we'll keep the support flowing." #39 - Nuka, employed, October 2021.

While there is a sense of exclusion at the national level, the extended network and connections with the outside world are perceived as strengths, providing avenues to share their way of life and ensure their voices are heard through alternative channels. Despite external narratives that suggest that the town may close in the near future (see Arke and Jónsson, 2010), this outcome is countered by several arguments: important improvements in community healthcare in recent years; geostrategic importance that led to the foundation of the town; the local value in providing local weather data. The social impacts of recent town closures in Kalaallit Nunaat, e.g., Qullissat, a town that was shut down in 1972 after the mine finally closed (see Andersen et al., 2016) have made people wary of similar actions. Future development is primarily seen as being driven by local initiatives, reinforcing the belief that sustainable change must be led by the community itself (Quotes *#40–44*):

> "I think if it's going to happen, then it will be people from here that will start new activities, I don't think the government will do it, but us. So, I think people have to do it by themselves. Because we're kind of invisible sometimes." #44 - Kristen employed, June 2022.

4 Discussion and conclusion

4.1 Intersections with becoming-with and slow violence

4.1.1 Becoming-with and living-with changes

The idea of "living-with"—i.e., living with changes that are seen as unsensational, part of the landscape – that we encountered in our ethnographic practice resonates with work that emphasizes world-making practices (Crate and Nuttall, 2023). The emergent category of "living-with" resonates with notions of "becoming," as discussed by Lennert and Berge (2019): "a process of the world coming into existence through one's engagement with it" (p. 4). This also echoes Nuttall's (2009) experience: "I have been struck by the fact that people do not necessarily talk about the environment around them as

TABLE 3 Summary of the code analysis associated with place-based community.

Code	Description	Quote
Belonging to the place	• Attachment to place is characterized by **engagement with "nature," the landscape, shared memories and knowledge;** • **As a hunting community, sharing and self-supplying cultural food** is key to how people define a "good life"; • Place-based identity is also **shaped by interaction with outsiders** (e.g., tourists, researchers); • Experiences abroad often evoke **homesickness, while family and interpersonal connections play a key role** in place-attachment.	• *#31 - Alan, Piniartoq, September 2021: "This is my country, Ittoqqortoormiit, I love it, I cannot move to another land, because I live here, I grew up here, I know where to go, when I have to go, I know where, I know how. I will always live here, all my life."* • *#32 - Hans, ex-political leader, May 2019: "So, I want to talk to make sure we are understood, as a hunting community, one that hunts to survive. That it. (…) I will say it again, if this community is to survive in the future, we have to gain a bigger understanding from Europe, US, all the countries. We have been in this community for the last nearly one hundred years. So, understand us, we are a hunting community, we have to hunt to survive."* • *#33 - Nuka, employed, October 2021: "When I leave Ittoqqortoormiit for educational purposes or to go on a holiday. I cannot stay away for long periods of time because I get homesick. […] We have a different culture, even if we tend to forget. I would say, we have a different culture and another view on the world."* • *#34 - Lise, political leader, July 2022: (see in the text)*
Being committed to the community	• The ties to the community are often expressed through the desire to **"do something for the community,"** to improve its wellbeing; • The motivation is key in the **decision to come back in the community** after people have moved away (e.g., for education); • The community is sometimes described as a "big family," where **solidarity, sharing food and helping each other are key values.**	• *#35 - Aaju, employed, September 2021: "I always felt I needed to come back, this is my home, this is our land, I do not know if I felt bad but I had this urge to come back, I do not know—to do my part to make things better."* • *#36 - Alan, Piniartoq, September 2021: "We, hunters, have been together all the time, all my life. Just like a big family, that's a hunter's life, we cannot be hunters and not help each other."* • *#37 - Hans, ex-political leader, October 2021: "My first priority is the town, all the decisions are so wrong here. (…) I am trying to do my best to help people, to be a better community, in the future for many years. I can see the people are better off now, they are getting there."* • *#38 - Paalu, political leader, June 2022: "I want to do something for the future, something for the town, to get the people who left to come back. It could be nice. (…) I want to be part of the future in Ittoqqortoormiit, to defend it."* • *#39 - Nuka, employed, October 2021: (see in the text)*
Optimism about the future	• The community's extended network and **connections to the "outside world" are seen as strengths**, as there is a feeling of being excluded at the national level; • These connections allow **the community to share their way of life and be heard through alternative channels**; • Future development is primarily seen as **being initiated by local people**.	• *#40 - Nuka, employed, October 2021: "It's like I'm trying in contact with the world instead of the kalaaleq government I would like to influence. Instead, I have links to the outside where people are actually interested in coming here from different countries instead of only Denmark or West Kalaallit Nunaat."* • *#41 - Hans, ex-political leader, October 2021: "In this place, the people are friendly with each other. You can go outside and meet them and everyone is smiling. In the last five years, I can see that the community of Ittoqqortoormiit is becoming better off. (…) We can become a better community; we have worked very hard during the last 20 years. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel."* • *#42 - Peter, employed, May 2022: "For 10 years, it has been going down, but now I think it is going up again. I've seen many get their education and come back again. Almost all the young people have an education now, so the town is going up again. So maybe we only need a doctor, a local doctor from here."* • *#43 - Aaju, employed, June 2022: "I used to be more driven by fear. Today I'm seeing the possibilities instead of worrying, hoping for better days. I think most people are hopeful. Many are like me, I mean, not worrying but optimistic."* • *#44 - Kristen employed, June 2022: (see in the text)*

changing, but of it being in a constant process of becoming." (p. 299). Indeed, our results indicates that changes are not seen as external but pertain to the lived and storied experience of the place. Furthermore, Klenk (2018) emphasized the role of story in tracing this engagement, suggesting "mov[ing] away from understanding stories as cultural constructs that represent a reality and toward understanding them as the way in which adaptation is lived" (p. 332).

Within climate sciences literature, climate and environmental changes are usually described using baseline in order to assess and control by comparing from a previously experienced state considered to be stable (see on ecological baseline Ortenzi et al., 2025). A culturally grounded perspective challenges the notion of a rupture in the stability of a physical parameter, such as sea-ice (Sandré et al., 2024a). For instance, this shift moves the focus from how fast the ice is melting to what the underlying meaning of melting is Nuttall (2019) describes this as a shift from documenting liquification to paying attention to liquescence—moving from a quantifiable parameter to a fluid and less definable lived experience of a changing world. This shift also opens up the possibility of exploring human and sea-ice interactions and multispecies engagements (Oberborbeck Andersen and Flora, 2023). Similarly, Tsing (2021) highlights the importance of embracing multispecies entanglements and the unintended consequences of human actions, advocating for a more relational understanding of human and non-human interactions. In our own

encounters, faced with changing sea ice conditions, the community adopts a humble approach to uncertainty, considering it to be something that cannot be controlled or dominated but simply as an inherent part of the local experience. *Naluarnga* ["I do not know" in Tunumisut] can be understood as a way of expressing acceptance of uncertainty and a recognition of how things (be)come into being (see Sandré et al., 2024b). For instance, we were struck by how easily community members in Ittoqqortoormiit shared and accepted the unknown, reflecting Nuttall's description of Northwest Kalaallit Nunaat where "surprise is one thing people can be certain of" (Crate and Nuttall, 2023, p. 6). With the idea of "staying with the trouble," Haraway (2016), emphasizes the need to confront and engage with complex and challenging issues rather than seeking quick solutions or avoiding discomfort. Haraway argues that in a time of ecological and social crisis, individuals must learn to live and think in ways that embrace uncertainty and complexity. By understanding "climate change […] as consistent with the constant making of the world" (Nuttall, 2009), we also move our frame from the abrupt to the slow. In doing so, we propose an understanding that captures the idea of becoming-with, that rejects dualisms (e.g., nature/culture, human/non-human), and is attentive to longstanding processes that lead to slow-onset upheavals.

4.1.2 Slow violence to understand multifaceted change

Through our fieldwork and individuals' accounts of their lived experiences, we observed that climate change was one thing that people were used to discussing with outsiders. In recent years, the interest in the community was often driven by a desire for "Indigenous" life stories of adaptation to a dramatically melting world (Bloom, 2022). Yet, through conversations and participant observation within the community, we noticed that issues relating to "marginalization" were central in peoples' narration of their lived experiences. Nixon (2011) coined the term "slow violence" to describe the gradual, delayed, and often imperceptible forms of environmental harm that affect marginalized communities and ecosystems over time (Nixon, 2011). In this context, violence is seen as a process rather than as an isolated occurrence (O'Lear, 2021).

This concept, which has been expanded to include colonial and gendered violence (Christian and Dowler, 2019; Penados et al., 2022; Rezwana and Pain, 2021; Wakeham, 2022), challenges traditional understandings of violence, which are typically immediate and spectacular, by highlighting the prolonged impacts of environmental degradation and climate change. In vulnerability research, Staupe-Delgado (2022) introduces the concept of "slow calamity" to describe situations where communities and individuals face a probable, yet temporally elusive, disaster. This looming threat blurs the line between the future and the present, with deep uncertainty about the salience (i.e., the quality of being particularly noticeable or important) and severity (i.e., degree of seriousness or intensity of a particular event, issue, or consequence) of the event, and it disrupts daily life in such a way that people become detached from the disaster situation. Gergan (2017) suggests prioritizing the examination of material and immaterial losses, particularly those pertaining to the erosion of a coherent worldview and the perceived threat to our cosmic existence. She further posits that the anthropocentric narrative, due to its emphasis on humanity's unity and on the urgency of the situation, fosters the erasure of otherness and the concealment of historical domination.

In light of these considerations, the potential threats that the community might face in the near future—such as the town's slowly declining basic services, the loss of place due to climate change, or erosion of identity due to fewer hunters—were not perceived as imminent dangers, but rather as challenges that could be overcome. Similarly, the various manifestations of marginalization experienced by local inhabitants were widely understood within the context of the community's long-standing history of being overlooked. Ultimately, the changes described were characterized as having both material and non-material impacts, ranging from economic issues to expressions of attachment to place and the community's sense of identity.

4.2 Unsettling resilience: slow upheavals and agency

4.2.1 Slow upheavals and the preservation of a desired future

In this article, we sought to understand the lived experiences of Ittoqqortoormeermii through the lens of the ontology of becoming and in light of slow-moving changes, that are often associated with colonial dynamics. We, therefore, propose to shed light on what we call slow upheavals: invisible, latent, or non-abrupt changes associated with ongoing marginalization, which can ultimately threaten material and immaterial dimensions of existence. More specifically, it refers to categories of events that are not sudden or whose effects manifest themselves gradually, and of which the severity (i.e., is it threatening?) and salience (i.e., how important are the things that are threatened?) can be in deliberation over time. In other words, slow upheavals represent a stealthy threat to a community's way of being and its ability to adapt or reconfigure its world in ways that preserve identity and collective well-being. They limit the ability of the community to shape their present and future circumstances, and perhaps even the ability to imagine a different development or outcome. It forecloses "the capacity to become otherwise" (Anderson et al., 2020).

By connecting lived experiences with climate change, marginalization and place-attachment, we propose to understand resilience as the preservation of a desired future—where individuals and communities feel a sense of agency and hope, i.e., desire in the face of slow upheavals. The emphasis on desire allow both the "recognition of suffering, the costs of settler colonialism and capitalism, and how we still thrive in the face of loss anyway; the parts of us that will not be destroyed" (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 647, cited in Sultana, 2022).

4.2.2 Toward an agency-based resilience

Following Spivak's (1988) understanding of subalternity as a removal of ability to shape ones' own world, Bracke (2016) argues that recognizing agency is a move away from perpetuating subalternization. In this context, agency-based resilience refers to the capacity of individuals or communities to actively shape their responses to challenges, rather than merely reacting to external circumstances. This concept emphasizes the role of personal and collective agency—decision-making, problem-solving, and proactive engagement—as essential components in overcoming adversity and building long-term resilience.

In situations where marginalization is experienced as a limitation of the capacity to actively participate in decision-making,

problem-solving, and proactive engagement, the discourse on the resilience risks oversimplifying or romanticizing ones' ability to be resilient or adaptable. Rather than viewing resilience as a passive attribute (i.e., simply bouncing back), in our approach to agency-based resilience, we recognize that people and groups, even in situations of marginalization, can influence their environments, advocate for change, leverage their resources to improve their circumstances and build solidarities, also, e.g., through recognizing researchers' agency:

> "It's profoundly in our storytelling that this issue lies, it's only storytelling, it's not written down. You have the power as a researcher to write our struggles down. But it happens often that we tell the good parts of living here and the bad parts but they only choose to focus on the bad things, and didn't really write anything about the good things. So, this is kind of dangerous because it shapes action. But you hold with the power to write down what the hunters, the normal people, the leaders are experiencing. You have the power to let us be heard even though we are so few" (Lise, political leader, July 2022).

5 Conclusion: resilience as a grounded concept

This article examined the role and (re)interpretation of resilience in the context of Arctic communities. Much community resilience literature explores resilience in relation to shocks – how communities come together in times of crisis or disaster – not on how to navigate long-term gradual pressures (Wardekker, 2021), and on views-from-outside rather than community-driven perspectives. We argue that a reinterpretation of community resilience for the Arctic should focus on pressures such as slow upheavals (attritional damage) and entanglements with historical processes such as marginalization, and on the role of agency and self-determination, place-attachment and identity, and ontological diversity as drivers of resilience. These could help build a more grounded notion of Arctic resilience, and also provide valuable insights on long-term community resilience more generally.

While critically reflecting on researchers' responsibility, we argue for a deeper understanding of resilience—one that neither traps individuals and communities in passivity nor confines them to notions of control. By focusing on slow-moving processes in which climate and environmental changes are inseparable from historical process of dominations and their perpetuation, we argue that a resilience approach must be underpinned by a commitment to supporting agency. The Arctic Council (2016) emphasizes the importance of Indigenous knowledge, self-determination, and co-management in fostering resilience. In the context of increasing marginalization, agency is also dependent on the status of the community members and on the unequal distribution of social and economic capital, and should therefore be articulated both individually and collectively.

The research supports that resilience should be grounded in (Indigenous) places, stories and agency. Our research shows that, in the case of Ittoqqortoormiit, agency is closely linked to and supported by attachment to place, i.e., "the bonds that people develop with places, bonds that are multidimensional, evolve through time" (Giuliani, 2003). Place-attachment relates strongly to immaterial dimensions (Nomikos, 2018) such as identity (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004), connection to loved ones, community, the environment, ancestors who lived, died and are buried there (Raymond et al., 2010). Our research also aims at supporting the cruciality of (Indigenous) storytelling to challenges Western narratives and allows for a reclamation of Indigenous epistemologies, worldviews and concerns (Cruikshank, 2000; Smith, 2021). This relational approach transforms not only how research is conducted, but also how knowledge is shared, understood and applied, and is therefore essential to the decolonization of research practices and concepts.

Finally, we highlight some potential limitations of resilience frameworks in addressing ontological diversity—the recognition and inclusion of plural perspectives on the nature of reality and existence. In this context, we suggest that resilience frameworks be challenged by expanding the body of research on slow violence, with the aim of understanding situations of slow upheaval, i.e., situations where change is to be understood in its multifaceted, material and immaterial dimensions. As such, it brings to light structural injustices and highlights the central role of agency and hope in helping place-based communities to confront incidences of marginalization. Ultimately, we emphasize the importance of adopting an incremental approach to resilience, following decolonial resilience literature calls for shifting to a bottom-up framework, that starts from lived experiences and promote diverse narratives of the climate and ecological crisis, acknowledging its complex interplay with the multifaceted disruptions directly faced by various communities in the Arctic and beyond.

Author's note

Kalaallit Nunaat, meaning "Land of Greenlanders" is the Indigenous term for "Greenland" in Kalaallisut (the national language of the country). While we acknowledge the public debates on the colonial roots of the name Kalaallit Nunaat and the growing preference for Nunarput ("Our Land"), we prioritize the term Kalaallit Nunaat. Kalaaleq (sing.)/Kalaallit (pl.) refers to Indigenous Greenlanders, primarily Western Greenlanders. This article employs the terms Kalaaleq and Kalaallit to refer to inhabitants of the whole country, recognizing that these terms vary according to different Greenlandic languages.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human samples in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements because [reason ethics approval was not required]. Written informed consent for participation in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardians/next of kin. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

TS: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. J-PV: Conceptualization, Data curation, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. AW: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. JG: Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Publisher's note

Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fclim.2025.1563320/full#supplementary-material

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