

THE SOCIOCULTURAL
IMPLICATIONS OF EMERGENCY
EVACUATION AMONG MEMBERS
OF THE HATCHET LAKE FIRST
NATION

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Abstract

Almost every year, Aboriginal communities are evacuated from northern regions of Canada to nearby cities because of threats due to forest fires and flooding. In this thesis, I present the perspectives of twenty members of the Hatchet Lake First Nation, who were evacuated from Wollaston Lake in northern Saskatchewan during the summer of 2011. My main research question is, how do residents of Wollaston Lake describe experiences of disruptions to well-being and distress during the evacuation and in the evacuation centers? My methods are qualitative, as I conducted open-ended interviews and participant observation while residing in the community for six weeks during the summer of 2012. Following the approaches of Geertz (2000), Garro (2000), and Mattingly (1998), I engaged in a narrative analysis of these data. Three main themes are evident in community members' discussions of their experiences.

First, participants focus on the ways that the fire and displacement disrupted the well-being of fellow community members and, to a lesser degree, their relationships with the land surrounding their town, and their roles within the community. Residents of Wollaston Lake portray a version of well-being that is rooted in the social, rather than individual, self. The second theme relates to family roles, as mothers, fathers, adult children, and guardians describe the various ways that these roles were disrupted during the fire and evacuation, and the distress elicited by these disruptions. These narratives are indicative of the discrepancies between the circumstances experienced during the fire and evacuation, and the values and behaviors that they associate with family roles. The third theme relates to expectations and blame, as community members recall the various ways that the evacuation failed to meet their expectations, and they attribute blame to those that they deem responsible for these inadequacies. Specifically, community members focus on expectations relating to the handling of the threat of fire, the organization of the evacuation, and their interactions with members of the host communities.

These findings indicate the incongruities between current emergency management practices in Saskatchewan and the needs of this community. The implication of these findings is that, in order to minimize distress during future disasters, organizers must develop plans that account for the distinct social norms and vulnerabilities of the communities with which they work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Almost every year, communities are evacuated from northern Saskatchewan and other regions of northern Canada because of threats of forest fires and flooding. Residents are transported from their homes to nearby cities, where they wait to hear if and when they can return home. They typically stay in school gyms, motels and recreation centers. Sometimes, community and family members are separated from each other and brought to different locations.

During June of 2011, residents of Wollaston Lake were evacuated to Saskatoon and Prince Albert because of the impending threat of forest fire. Wollaston Lake (colloquially termed ‘Wollaston’) is a community of roughly 1300 people in northern Saskatchewan, where many of the residents are members of the Hatchet Lake Denesuline First Nation. The evacuation, caused by a giant (4400 hectares) forest fire encroaching upon the community, involved the transportation of residents to southern cities, where they stayed for approximately ten days in evacuation centers (CBC 2011a). Community members found the evacuation challenging for a number of reasons, including separation from other community and family members, inadequate food and water during the early stages of the evacuation, and mistreatment from residents of host communities.

Community members’ narratives suggest that the emergency evacuation caused distress by diminishing residents’ senses of well-being. According to Mathews and Izquierdo (2009), well-being refers to, “an optimal state for an individual, community, society, and the world as a whole. It is conceived of, expressed, and experienced in different ways by different individuals and within different cultural contexts of different societies” (5). Residents’ narratives suggest that the organization and implementation of the response to the 2011 fire and evacuation contributed to a reduced sense of well-being by failing to consider local and regional norms of social life. They identify ways in which organizers and provincial policy-makers contributed to their hardships, and make recommendations that they hope will reduce distress during future evacuations. These narratives are situated within the context of community life at the time of the interviews, as narrators use the fire and evacuation as an idiom of chronic disruption, that is, an event that is indicative of ongoing challenges to well-being in the community. In addition, they discuss the ways that these ongoing disruptions increased locals’ vulnerability to the challenges of the fire and evacuation.

This focus on well-being is not typical of disaster anthropology, but is an increasingly important element of medical anthropology. Anthropologists normally examine disasters through the lens of political ecology, a field that “combines concerns for ecology and a broadly defined political economy. Together this [field] encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself” (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987:17). However, the sorts of disruptions described by community members are similar to those portrayed in illness narratives, and for that reason, I draw on narrative theory in medical anthropology to analyze and explain the disaster narratives.

My main research question is, how do residents of Wollaston Lake describe experiences of disruptions to well-being and distress during the evacuation and in the evacuation centers?

Sub-questions include:

1. What aspects of the evacuation experience caused distress?
2. How do residents describe coping with distress?
3. How do residents describe helping others cope with distress?
4. What idioms and metaphors do community members invoke when describing experiences of distress?
5. How do these idioms and metaphors fit in with the community’s history and shared experiences?
6. How do community members describe their experience with government and social services programs that were implemented to help the community during and after the evacuation?
7. Did these programs contribute to a perceived reduction or increase in distress?

1.2 Literature review

According to Oliver-Smith (1999), there is no consensus as to the definition of ‘disaster’ within anthropology or the social sciences in general. Researchers conducting disaster studies use definitions of the term that are of particular application to their subject matter and research agendas. For my purposes, E. L. Quarantelli’s (1985) description of “disasters as social constructions of reality in perceived crisis situations that may or may not involve physical impacts” (47) is the definition best suited to the present circumstances. This definition requires the presence of (a) a belief that a physical agent may cause “danger to such important values as life, well-being, property, and social order” (48) and (b) “a socially constructed perception of a

crisis situation, that is, a situation that necessitates unexpected collective action because it involves high-priority values” (48). In regards to Wollaston evacuees’ experiences, the belief that the fire could cause significant damage and even the loss of life and the concomitant distress of the community evacuation, imply that the forest fire and displacement were perceived as disastrous.

As described above, ‘well-being’ refers to an “optimal state” (Mathew and Izquierdo 2009:5) of being. Research regarding the well-being of residents of Aboriginal communities in Canada is growing, particularly in studies of climate change. As Parlee and Furgal (2012) suggest, “the well-being of northern Indigenous people has been an important consideration in recent studies on arctic environmental change” (1). The Canadian International Polar Year (IPY) program is the most recent example of this sort of research. Investigators involved in the program have examined well-being in more than fifty northern Canadian communities. Parlee and Furgal summarize these outcomes, explaining that, “the well-being of Indigenous people varies widely within and between communities and regions in northern Canada” (2). In addition, researchers involved in the IPY program have found that, “Northern communities have long considered the lands and resources around them as key to their well-being” (Parlee and Furgal 2012:17). Research more specific to northern Dene communities includes a study by Parlee, O’Neil, and the Northwest Territories community of Lutsel K’e, where 350 members of the Lutsel K’e Dene First Nation (2007) reside. The authors found that well-being among residents of this community involves living in the “Dene way of life” (118), through maintaining traditions (i.e. hunting, speaking Chipewyan language), health, and self-governance.

In regards to the Wollaston evacuation, most of the residents’ narratives focus on the ways that the fire and displacement diminished well-being by causing or contributing to suboptimal conditions. In addition to these acute disruptions, community members describe ongoing, ‘chronic’ disruptions that precede the disaster event, as well as the ways that these chronic disruptions contributed to the community’s vulnerability to the disaster. Community members sometimes engage in discussions of acute disruptions in order to address concerns regarding chronic problems. In doing so, these acute issues serve as idioms of chronic disruption.

This notion of an ‘idiom of disruption’ draws on the concept of an ‘idiom of distress,’ which is defined by David E. Hinton and Roberto Lewis-Fernández (2010) as, “individual

embodied expressions that are linked metaphorically to key conflicts at the interpersonal and societal level and that are often based on local ideas about the functioning of the body and mind” (211). Idioms of distress differ from idioms of disruption in terms of the sorts of expressions that they represent. Idioms of distress denote expressions of hardship, pain, and conflict, while idioms of disruption are demonstrations of interruptions and disconnections between one’s experience and their sense of well-being. I define idioms of disruption as individual or collective expressions that are linked metaphorically to local understandings of suboptimal conditions that arise from interruptions in social continuity and cultural cohesion, and are often based on local ideas about (the ideals associated with) well-being. In some circumstances, idioms of disaster may also be invoked. These are individual or collective expressions that are linked metaphorically to perceptions of crisis.

Benjamin Nick Colby (2009) describes some of the different ways that ethnographers have conceptualized ongoing disruptions to well-being. He explains Oscar Lewis’ controversial notion of a “culture of poverty” (53), which refers to a sort of culture that exists “in the slums of cities around the world that, once started, became a self-perpetuating pathological culture” (53-54). Characteristics of Lewis’ culture of poverty include “authoritarian attitudes and behavior, violence, lack of family solidarity, focus on instant gratification, [and] male abandonment,” (54) among others. In addition to Lewis’ work, Colby describes Robert Edgerton’s proposition that “all societies have some beliefs and practices that may be maladaptive, whether for everyone in the society or some of its members” (54). As Colby notes, both Lewis and Edgerton hold “a conventional concept of culture, one that draws a line around people who are inside the culture . . . as opposed to outsiders” (54).

According to Colby (2009), recent ethnographers of well-being engage with a more current anthropological paradigm, one that views “culture as a process” (57). One of these ethnographers is Carolina Izquierdo (2009), who describes her findings from a study about a group called the Matsigenka, from the Peruvian Amazon. She explains that her participants, “feel that their well-being is drastically in decline” (67), as they “behold a breakdown of the body and the society, an existential crisis wherein the individual and close kin search for a culturally coherent explanation for their distress” (68). Izquierdo describes an example of this sort of enduring disruption, highlighting the unavailability of “alternatives for dealing with

illnesses . . . that do not respond to the limited biomedical treatment available, and may not even be recognized by health workers” (71).

According to Izquierdo (2009:71), “the Protestant evangelical church stamped out the cultural healing practices of Matsigenka shamans through wholesale demonization of their practices.” Although some efforts have been made by the locals to develop and incorporate “curers” (71) who can treat some of these illnesses, “curers can only partially alleviate the sense of malaise and of ill-being felt by many Matsigenka today” (71). Thus, the lack of care for individuals suffering from illnesses not recognized by biomedicine represents an ongoing disruption to community members’ senses of well-being.

Anthropological studies of well-being often focus on characteristics that are enduring, in that they contribute to, or diminish, participants’ senses of well-being over a long period of time (i.e. Adelson 2000; Izquierdo 2009). Acute disruptions, however, are also significant. For the most part, they are portrayed in terms of family roles; the roles of mother, father, adult child, and guardian are all described as having been disturbed in ways that are specific to each of these roles. According to Gay Becker (1999), “people themselves generate categories of normalcy, although they may later take issue with those categories when they no longer fit with life experience” (15). She suggests that, “narratives of disruption are people’s efforts to integrate disruption and its aftermath with prevailing cultural sentiment” (15). Wollaston evacuees’ narratives of the fire and emergency evacuation offer examples of “categories of normalcy” (15) regarding roles, which take on an enhanced significance because of the evacuation. The categories relate to ideals associated with family roles, which are then contrasted with the circumstances of the evacuation, as these conditions challenged evacuees’ abilities to fulfill these responsibilities.

This focus on family and community social relations is commonly found within literature on well-being, as Izquierdo (2009) explains that,

The immediate and extended family offers fundamental support for the Matsigenka, who tend to believe that if they serve their families and follow a strict code of behavior informed by shared cultural values, then happiness and well-being will result. (84)

The report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples suggests that many Canadian Aboriginal peoples maintain a similar perspective on family. The Commission was established in 1991, in an effort "to help restore justice to the relationship between Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal people in Canada, and to propose practical solutions to stubborn problems” (AANDC 2010). The commissioners “held 178 days of public hearings, visited 96 communities, consulted dozens of experts, commissioned scores of research studies, reviewed numerous past inquiries and reports” (AANDC 2010). According to Volume Three of this report, “families consistently occupied the central position between individual and community . . . It was the vision of restoring the vitality of individuals, families and communities *in concert* that mobilizes the energy of the vast majority of Aboriginal people who spoke to us.” (Canada 1996b:9). Daniela Heil (2009) describes a similar social dimension among her participants, who are residents of an Aboriginal village called Murrin Bridge, in New South Wales, Australia. Heil suggests that her participants are “social selves” (102), in that “responding to kin and social obligations are prerequisites for constituting ‘being well’ –or ‘well-being’” (102). Among Wollaston evacuees, remaining socially connected and caring for fellow community members is similarly foundational to their senses of well-being.

According to Garro and Mattingly (2000), “The meaning one attributes to emplotted events reflects expectations and understandings gained through participating in a specific social and moral world” (3). Dimensions of evacuees’ moral world are evident in their accounts of unmet expectations relating to the fire and evacuation, as they identify the discrepancies between their experiences and their understandings of the proper ways to handle these sorts of circumstances. As Linda Garro (2000) writes, “In talking about illness . . . individuals remember, drawing on their experiences and knowledge to link the past with present concerns and future possibilities” (70). Wollaston evacuees similarly draw on past experiences with forest fires to interpret the challenges they faced during the current one, and to make recommendations for alternative methods for handling similar situations in the future.

In addition to these moral and temporal dimensions, some evacuees find certain people or organizations (i.e., the provincial government) responsible for producing the circumstances that made them vulnerable to this sort of disaster. Vulnerability is a key area of focus for disaster anthropologists. According to Anthony Oliver-Smith (2007), the vulnerability paradigm was developed following the publication of Hewitt’s *Interpretations of Calamity* in 1984. Hewitt suggests that disasters are best understood by focusing on “the conditions of inequality and subordination in a society rather than the accidental geophysical features of a place” (Oliver-Smith 2007:27). Anthropologists working in less developed countries, where sometimes

“normal daily life was itself difficult to distinguish from disaster” (Blaikie et al. 2003:10) found that explanations based on physical processes did not capture the dynamics of the situation. They, along with other social scientists, developed the concept of vulnerability in order to better understand the social processes that are inherent to disasters.

According to Oliver-Smith (2007), Blaikie et al.’s (2003) definition of vulnerability is the most commonly used working definition. They define vulnerability as,

The characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard. It involves a combination of factors that determine the degree to which someone’s life, livelihood, property and other assets are put at risk by a discrete and identifiable event in nature and in society. (Blaikie et al. 2003:11)

Vulnerabilities (combinations of factors), coupled with a hazard, result in disaster. Key determinants of vulnerability include demographic as well as socioeconomic factors (i.e. class, age, health status, immigration status, ethnicity) (Blaikie et al. 2003; Bolin and Stanford 1999). Many chronic disruptions influence the impact of hazards on communities, and act as vulnerabilities within the context of disasters. Vulnerabilities are also central to Canadian emergency management policy as, according to Public Safety Canada (2011), one of the goals of disaster risk reduction is “decreasing vulnerability of individuals and society” (14). Within Wollaston evacuees’ narratives, vulnerabilities include having no road leading out of town, and no Chief and Council in office at the time of the evacuation. According to Gregory Button (2010), disaster victims often engage discourses of blame and responsibility as coping strategies and ways of making sense of their experiences. However, because victims are frequently unaware of the different roles and responsibilities of the various officials with whom they interact, they often attribute blame indirectly.

In addition to explicit discussions of expectations and vulnerabilities, community members engage with particular metaphors in describing their experiences. According to Hoffman (2007), “The belief systems of people experiencing or expecting calamity are rife with symbols dealing with their situation” (113). Becker (1999) explains that within narratives of disruption, metaphors may be used “to call attention to the significance of disruption and loss, to recreate a sense of continuity in life, and portray conflicts relating to disruption that were difficult to resolve” (62). Some of these features are evident in community members’ narratives.

1.3 Methods

1.3.1 Community Profile and Demographics

In order to understand how residents experienced the evacuation, it is necessary to situate them within the context of not only their own community and region, but also that of the places that played a significant role in that experience.

Wollaston Lake is situated in the Athabasca region of Saskatchewan, located in the northeastern corner of the province. The community is built along the east and west sides of a lake, also called Wollaston Lake. Most community members, teachers, and nurses live east of the lake, though some residents and all seven RCMP officers live on the west side. The east side is home to an elementary school, high school, band store, band offices, health center, and hockey arena, while the airport, small fish plant, motel, RCMP offices, and cemetery are all located west of the lake. During the summer, community members use a dirt road to get from one side of the community to the other, a distance of approximately 2.2 km. In the winter, residents drive roughly 350 m across an ice road to get to the other side of the community. Because there is no permanent road leading to Wollaston, community members travel to and from town via an ice road during winter months, or a barge during the summer. Air travel is also an option, though price is a limiting factor. According to an RCMP community profile of Wollaston, “there are almost no industries and no jobs which leave little for people in the community to do” (Plamondon and Daudelin 2012). Some are able to find work with local service providers (i.e., the health center, schools), while others find jobs outside of the community, often at nearby mines or fishing lodges. According to the RCMP, “hunting, fishing and trapping play a giant role in the survival of the Dene people to this day” (Plamondon and Daudelin 2012), and many locals spend parts of their winters hunting caribou or working trap lines.

During the 2011 evacuation, most residents were brought from Wollaston to Points North, which is roughly 50 km west of the community. According to the Points North Group of Companies (PNGC) website, Points North serves as a permanent “base camp for companies that have mineral interests in the area and as an expediting service for area outfitting lodges and northern communities” (2011). The camp, operated by the PNGC, provides a number of services, including overnight accommodations and meals, transportation services, heavy equipment rentals, and a mechanics shop. PNGC also builds and transports ready to move homes to nearby communities (including Wollaston), and sells lumber and fuel. Unfortunately,

no statistical information regarding the population characteristics of those residing in Points North is available at this time.

From Points North, evacuees were brought to either Prince Albert or Saskatoon. Prince Albert is 570 km southwest of Wollaston, while Saskatoon is 702 km southwest of the community (see Figure 1.1). These urban centers differ drastically from Wollaston, specifically in terms of population and population density, average age, and languages spoken. In regards to population, a 2006 census reported Wollaston's population as including 953 permanent residents, though reports suggest that the total number of residents at the time of the evacuation was between 1300 and 1400 individuals. The local population density is 8.8 people per square kilometer. In Prince Albert, the 2011 population was 42,673, with a population density of 22.6 people per square kilometer. Saskatoon, a much larger city, had a population of 260,600 in 2011, and a population density of 50 people per square kilometer. The number of private homes also differs between Wollaston and these southern cities. Wollaston has 182 homes, while Prince Albert reports 16,005 private dwellings, and Saskatoon reports 104,237 residences (CBC 2011a, 2011b; Statistics Canada 2007, 2012a, 2012b).

Wollaston's population is, on average, much younger than those of Prince Albert and Saskatoon. In Wollaston, 40 percent of the local population is 14 years old or younger, and the median age is 19. In Prince Albert, just 21 percent of the population is 14 and under, and the median age is 35.9. In Saskatoon, 17.9 percent of the population is 14 years old or younger, and the median age is 35.4 (Statistics Canada 2007, 2012a, 2012b).

In regards to language and identity, 940 (out of 953) of Wollaston residents report an Aboriginal identity, and 98 percent have knowledge of an Aboriginal language. Ninety-one percent of the population identify an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue, and 93 percent "speak an Aboriginal language most often at home" (Statistics Canada 2007). Most community members identify 'Dene' as their first language. This term, used locally to refer to both the language and the people, is formally termed 'Dene Suline,' meaning "the people" (PAGC 2014). Dene Suline, also spelled Denesuline, replaces the term 'Chipewyan,' as Chipewyan is commonly viewed within the region as being an outdated and somewhat derogatory term. This is likely due to its origin, as, according to Smith (1981), the term Chipewyan is derived from a Cree term "meaning (those who have) pointed skins or hides" (283). Smith suggests that the term is "an allusion to a method of cutting their hunting shirts or preparing beaver pelts, which

the Cree ridiculed” (283), and that the Dene people believe that the term originated when Cree people told English fur traders “that they [Dene] had tails and were not true humans” (283). As the narratives in the following chapters indicate, Dene is the predominant language among residents of Wollaston Lake. In the RCMP’s community profile of Wollaston, the authors explain that,

Despite the influence of satellite t.v. and an increased rate of trips to the South, Dene continues to be the language of use in the community. Church services, commerce and general conversation are all conducted in Dene for the majority of the people. Most of the elders do not speak very good English if they speak it at all. A lot of the youth grow up speaking Dene and don’t learn how to really speak English until they go to school. (Plamondon and Daudelin 2012)

According to Statistics Canada, less than one percent of the population speaks English only. No statistics are available regarding the percentage of the population that is fluent in both English and an Aboriginal language (Statistics Canada 2007).

In Prince Albert, 85.3 percent of the population report English as their mother tongue, 10.1 percent report a non-official language as their first language, and 3.1 percent speak French as their first language. Of the 10.1 percent that speak a non-official language as their first language, just 0.8 percent speaks Dene. Ninety-five percent of the population report speaking English only at home, while 2.9 percent report speaking a non-official language at home (Statistics Canada 2012a).

In Saskatoon, 82.7 percent of the population report English as their mother tongue, 14.3 percent report a non-official language as their first language, and 1.5 percent speaks French as their first language. Ninety-one percent of the population reports speaking English only at home, and 6.5 percent report speaking a non-official language at home. Of the 14.3 percent that speak a non-official language as their first language, less than 0.4 percent speaks Dene (Statistics Canada 2012b).

Clearly, the differences between Wollaston and the urban centers that they were evacuated to are significant, specifically in terms of population characteristics and language.

1.3.2 Ethnographic Context

According to Smith (1981), Hatchet Lake is one of five regional bands that developed among the Dene in northern Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the southern areas of the Northwest Territories during the mid-nineteenth century. Each of these bands was, at the time,

associated with a caribou foraging range and migration route. Dene social organization was historically structured around both “the hunting group and the personal kindred” (276), and, according to Sharp (1979), subsistence activities, especially hunting caribou, were “the underpinning of their social system” (6). Smith suggests that “caribou was of overwhelming importance to the Chipewyan, structuring their seasonal cycle, seasonal distribution, socioterritorial organization, and technology; it was the focus of religious beliefs and oral literature” (1981:272). According to Tanner and Rigney (2003), the Dene also engaged in trapping, often for commercial purposes. Regional bands were composed of several hunting units, which were in turn “established around a founding male with sufficient authority and ability to hold or recruit sons’ and daughters’ conjugal families” (Smith 1981:276). However, these units, as well as regional bands more generally, were fluid as nuclear families sometimes shifted between hunting groups and bands (Sharp 1979).

According to Smith (1981), parents were historically responsible for arranging marriages for their children. Eastern Dene communities, including Wollaston, favored “pseudo-patrilineal cross-cousin marriage” (277), meaning marriage between cousins whose relationship is the product of “marriage, adoption, or a step-parental relationship” (277). According to Sharp (1979), these and other marriages formed a foundation for the three types of family structures that existed within regional bands. The first is the “basal unit” (19), which refers to a couple and their children. A second, slightly larger, structure includes an individual’s nuclear birth family, plus their spouse’s nuclear birth family, as well as the individual’s children and grandparents. The third structure includes those previously listed, as well as aunts and uncles, both blood related and related through marriage, and cousins. This “group represents that collection of blood relatives from whom one may reasonably expect assistance and to whom one first turns when venturing beyond the confines of the immediate family” (19). According to Smith (1981), “the widely dispersed bilateral kindred provides the basis for cooperation, sharing, and hospitality” (276). This social dynamic is reflected in Van Stone’s (1963) finding that the Dene group that he worked with had a largely familial social organization, one in which “there is complete and indiscriminate sharing” (62) of caribou meat. Notably, the evacuation narratives outlined in the following chapters indicate that the sort of familial support that Sharp (1979), Smith (1981), and Van Stone (1963) describe appears to apply, to some degree, to fellow community members as well as family members. This is likely due, at least in part, to

understandings of kinship among residents, as it is widely acknowledged within the community that most residents are related to one another, either through blood or through marriage.

Various ethnographers indicate the prevalence of gendered roles in Dene communities. Smith (1981), for example, suggests that historically women were responsible for organizing the camp, as “they erected the lodge and broke camp, pulled the toboggan on the trail or carried loads on their packs, prepared fires and cooked, prepared hides . . . and cared for the children” (279), among other activities. Men were responsible for hunting large game and fishing. Both Goulet (1998) and Sharp (1988) report similar findings, and Sharp also suggests that “the category male is much more highly valued than the category female” (32), though males rarely interfere with the women’s work within households. The roles described in the following chapters suggest that these gender constructs are likely perceived, in some form, among members of the Hatchet Lake First Nation. However, given that participants neither explicitly discuss gender, nor associate the challenges of role disruption to gender, further research would be needed in order to draw any conclusions regarding local understandings of these constructs. According to Smith (1981),

Because of their marginal position to the transportation and trade routes, dependence upon the caribou, and relative indifference to most European trade goods, sociocultural change was slow and limited among the Caribou Eaters who remained in their ancestral lands; they did not undergo a substantial impact of the ‘modern’ era until the 1960s. (280)

Here, the term ‘Caribou Eaters’ refers to five Dene bands, including Hatchet Lake, that reside in northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Each band is associated with a caribou foraging range. According to Sharp (1988), this “basic transition from a bush dwelling subsistence economy based upon hunting, trapping, and fishing with a quasi-nomadic pattern of dispersal throughout their territory to a semi sedentary village economy” (5) occurred during the 1950s. During these early days of permanent settlement, Smith (1981) suggests, residents found that the advantages (i.e. a nursing station and emergency health services) of living in town sometimes failed to offset the challenges of village life, as, for example, men had to leave behind their families to hunt, and the distance of the settlement from the normal range of the caribou made transporting meat back to the settlements difficult. Sharp (2001) also describes problems relating to the federal government’s allocation of newly built homes, as community organization was “in accordance with federally established regulations that took account of need, family size, number of small

children, and other factors” (12). Problems arose when “the new owner would have to move away from the cluster of kin that lived around the site of their old cabin” (12). Individuals tried to remedy the situation, but had little success. According to Sharp (2001), “it was not until the Dene themselves gained control of the administration of the housing program and began to build houses where people wanted them that the problem vanished” (12).

According to Jean Guy Goulet (1998), who conducted qualitative research with members of the Dene Tha in northern Alberta, his participants “live their lives according to a distinct indigenous tradition . . . in a context that includes numerous Western institutions” (193). Goulet suggests that these individuals “draw on Western institutions [including religious institutions] to complement their own practices” (193). Similarly, many residents of Wollaston Lake identify as members of the Roman Catholic Church, while also drawing on indigenous traditions, including those relating to patterns of subsistence. Sharp (2001) explains that, “for two generations now the majority of the Dene have lived as village dwellers” (6). Although their economy continues, “to depend more and more upon a melding of wages and government payments, these outside resources remain insufficient to support the Dene” (Sharp 2001:6). Northern communities, including Wollaston, continue to rely on hunting and fishing as central forms of subsistence. Among Wollaston residents, these traditions, as well as community members’ shared history of familial support and focus on hunting are evident, and are reflected in their evacuation narratives.

1.3.3 History of the Evacuation

According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC),

When an emergency occurs or is imminent within a First Nation community, it is the responsibility of the Chief and Council to use all available resources to respond to the situation. If the emergency goes beyond the First Nation's capacity to respond, the Chief and Council are responsible for notifying AANDC and the provincial or territorial emergency measures organization, and for declaring an emergency. (2011)

From this point on, “The main responsibility for emergency management rests with provincial and territorial governments” (AANDC 2011). There was no Chief and Council in office on June 1, 2011, when the fire grew and became a serious threat to Wollaston. Instead, the community health director called a state of emergency and initiated the evacuation process. The community was vacated over a period of 24 hours on June 1 and 2. Although two charter airlines have bases in Wollaston, fire and smoke nearing the runway meant that outside evacuation services were required. The Royal Canadian Air Force responded by deploying four helicopters to Hatchet

Lake. The helicopters brought community members, in order of priority based on potential health risk, to Points North where they waited 9-12 hours to be transported to Prince Albert or Saskatoon. Residents were brought to several evacuation centers, including school gymnasiums and recreation centers. In the days following the evacuation, community members and organizers that had access to vehicles helped to reunite children with their parents, who were often evacuated to different cities. According to Denechezhe (2012), life at the evacuation centers was complicated because of difficulties addressing community members' health concerns, a lack of access to laundry facilities, language barriers, difficulties in obtaining blankets and pillows and in providing children with activities, and problems with youth drinking and unwelcome media attention. Denechezhe states that, "everybody was traumatized" by the time that the community members returned home on June 10, 2011 (Narine 2011).

1.3.4 Narrative Methodology

Over a period of six weeks during the summer of 2012, I worked with a translator from Wollaston to conduct fifty-nine open-ended interviews regarding evacuation experiences. According to Garro (2003), narrative is a fundamental way that humans "try to make sense of how things have come to pass and how our actions and the actions of others have shaped our history" (20). Garro suggests that narratives of "troubling experiences" (33) are rooted in personal experiences and understandings, as well as available cultural frameworks of an event. From a methodological perspective, then, it was important to frame this research in a way that would elicit narrative data. As such, narrative analysis of community members' experiences has been critical in developing an understanding of the different ways that community members engage with various cultural understandings of the evacuation, as well as the ways that residents conceptualize their personal experiences during and following the evacuation in relation to their interests and concerns in the present.

All community members were invited to participate in the project. We recruited participants using five different methods, including pinning posters with sign-up sheets around town, recruiting during conversations, going door-to-door asking residents to participate, calling residents on the phone and asking if they would be interested in participating, and networking through existing participants. Most of these methods were somewhat useful in recruiting participants, but the most effective method was telephoning residents to ask if they would be interested in doing an interview. The success of this method may be attributed to the rapport that

we were able to develop over the phone, as well as the convenience of being able to organize a suitable time and place to meet. Among the fifty-nine participants with whom we spoke, three quarters are between the ages of 20 and 49, and seven participants are Elders (ages 60 and up). Almost two thirds of the participants are women. From this data set, I selected twenty interviews to be analyzed for the purposes of this thesis. These interviews were chosen using three criteria. The first is that the selected interviews are those that are rich sources of data; the second is that they represent a balance of male and female participants; and the third criterion is that the sample includes interviews characterizing the experiences of young and middle-aged adults, as well as Elders. Three of the twenty interviews included in this analysis were conducted in Dene, with the help of a local translator. All participants are referred to using pseudonyms in place of their names.

The first few interviews that we conducted began with a fairly open invitation to “tell me about your experiences of the evacuation last summer.” We chose this approach because it allowed participants to articulate their experiences in a relatively unencumbered manner, and we believed that it would elicit responses that focus on the most memorable and enduring aspects of their experiences. Early on, we found that participants seemed uncomfortable responding to these sorts of questions. In response, we offered participants the option of either telling us what their experience was like, or having us ask them specific questions.

Prior to the start of the project, I developed an interview guide that I planned to use to ensure that the narratives addressed each of the stages of the evacuation. Working with the local translator, I re-worked the guide to better fit the stages of the evacuation that she identified, and we developed specific questions that we would use to facilitate the narratives. These stages and questions include:

1. Noticing the fire
 - a. How did you first find out about the forest fire?
 - b. What did you think when you saw the fire?
 - c. How did you find out that you were going to be evacuating?
 - d. Did they tell you what you could bring with you?
 - e. What did you bring?
2. Waiting to leave Wollaston
 - a. Did someone pick you up to go?

- b. Did you go to the airport or the high school?
 - c. What was it like waiting there? Did people seem worried? Panicky? Calm?
 - d. How long were you waiting there?
 - e. Did you have to stop at Points North or did you go straight to Prince Albert?
 - f. Who were you with?
3. Waiting at Points North
- a. What was it like at Points North?
 - b. Did you feel like the people there were treating you well?
 - c. How long were you there?
 - d. What did you do to kill time?
 - e. Do you remember what sorts of things you were worried about in Points North?
 - f. Which plane did you leave on?
 - g. Did they tell you where you were going?
 - h. Who were you with?
4. Arriving/staying at the evacuation center
- a. Did you go to Prince Albert or Saskatoon?
 - b. What did you do when you first got there?
 - c. After registration, where did they put you [gym or hotel]?
 - d. How did you spend the days there?
 - e. How was it trying to sleep there?
 - f. What sorts of things were you worried about then?
 - g. Did you use anything that the Red Cross was offering?
 - h. Did you need anything that they weren't offering?
 - i. Were you able to contact your family?
 - j. How did you cope with being worried?
 - k. Were you able to stay informed about what was going on with the fire?
5. Going home
- a. How did you find out that you'd be going home?
 - b. How was the flight back?
 - c. Who were you with?
 - d. What did you think when you saw that all the trees and everything were gone?

6. Being home

- a. What advice would you give to someone going through a similar experience?
- b. Did you think evacuating was a good idea?
- c. Who did you see doing the organizing and leading the evacuation?
- d. If there was an evacuation in the future, what would you do differently?

We rarely asked all of the questions in the guide, but we were vigilant in ensuring that all of the questions were addressed. Often, we found that participants became more comfortable speaking with us during the interview, and tended to tell their evacuation narratives after we asked them a few questions. Others focused on answering the questions, rather than telling their stories.

In addition to these questions, I presented the first few participants with six photographs (see Figures 1.2 to 1.7) of the various stages of the evacuation taken by residents and others, and asked them to describe the scene and relate any stories of experiences relating to that scene.

These photos depict:

1. Clouds of smoke filling the sky behind the buildings in the community.
2. Roughly thirty adults and children lining up in front of two small buildings, waiting to evacuate Wollaston Lake.
3. About twenty children and adults walking in a line onto a Hercules aircraft in Points North, guided by three workers.
4. About twenty-five evacuees walking away from a Hercules aircraft that had landed in Saskatoon, being aided by a representative from the Red Cross.
5. A gymnasium full of roughly twenty-five cots lined up beside each other. A blanket and a pillow sits on top of each cot and four workers can be seen setting up more cots.
6. About twenty-five children and young adults sitting in small groups along the walls of a gymnasium talking to each other and playing games.

Follow-up questions focused on exploring evacuees' experiences in greater detail. However, I found that the photos did not elicit new details or stories. Instead, evacuees offered a very literal description of what they saw in the photographs. For this reason, I eliminated this section of the interviews.

My methodology for conducting narrative analysis is informed by the approaches of Geertz (2000), Garro (2000), Pollock (2000), and Mattingly (1998, 2000). My approach is inspired by Geertz (2000), who responded to a question that was raised in anthropological circles

following the publication of Malinowski's *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* in his book, *Local Knowledge*. According to Geertz, Malinowski's *Diary* highlights the difficulties that Malinowski experienced in trying to develop an understanding of his participants' perspectives. The question that was raised is this: How can anthropologists "see things from the native's point of view . . . when we can no longer claim some unique form of psychological closeness, a sort of transcultural identification, with our subjects?" (56). Geertz answers this question by suggesting that anthropologists reject an approach to fieldwork that is oriented towards attempting to experience the world through the eyes of one's informants. Instead, he recommends that ethnographers strive to identify the meanings of the concepts that participants use to understand their world and to connect these notions with a general conception of the "features of social life" (56) in the community. After developing an understanding of these concepts, the ethnographer may begin to interpret his or her findings using theories and models developed within their discipline(s).

Geertz (2000) uses the term "experience-near" to refer to the concepts that participants "perceive 'with' – or 'by means of,' or 'through'" (58). Experience-near concepts are those that the informant "might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on" (Geertz 2000:57). 'Happiness' and 'friend' are examples of experience-near concepts in many Western communities. Geertz uses the term "experience-distant" (57) to refer to concepts that specialists invoke to "forward their scientific, philosophical, and practical aims" (Geertz 2000:57). For example, 'vulnerability' is an experience-distant concept. The job of the ethnographer is to develop an understanding of their participants' experience-near concepts within the context of the community, and to interpret these ideas using experience-distant models.

One way to gather these experience-near concepts is to collect narratives. According to Garro (2000), "narrative provides a window on the processes involved in relating individual experience to preexisting explanatory frameworks available within a cultural setting" (72). The experiences that participants describe are situated within "culturally available knowledge" (Garro 2000:71), though it is important to note that there is significant variability between participants in how this knowledge may be invoked during recitations of narratives pertaining to past events. Thus, individuals recounting their narratives draw on sources of knowledge that may not be widely shared among community members, resulting in stories that incorporate different beliefs

in unique and sometimes conflicting ways. The utility of collecting the individual narratives of members of the Hatchet Lake First Nation pertaining to the evacuation is that (1) these narratives illuminate the experience-near concepts that are significant to each narrator within the context of locally available knowledge, (2) the narratives indicate the effects that the evacuation has had on the present-day lives of evacuees, and (3) this type of analysis sheds light on the conflicts that evacuees perceived prior to and during the emergency evacuation.

Narrative analysis has allowed me to develop an understanding of the aspects of the evacuation that Wollaston Lake residents believe to be significant. According to Pollock (2000) and Mattingly (2000), engaging in a narrative recounting of events requires that the individual looks back on their experiences and selects, deliberately or otherwise, a sequence of events that is chosen and ordered to convey their perception of the importance of particular aspects of their experience. By analyzing these facets of the evacuation experience, I have been able to associate meaningful aspects of the evacuation with different groupings within the community. For example, in chapter three, I describe the distress that mothers describe experiencing when they found that they were unable to communicate with one or more of their children. A large proportion of their narratives focus on this disruption, indicating that many mothers (more so than fathers) place great importance on their ability to communicate with their children.

Narrative analysis is also informative because, according to Garro (2000), narratives of past experiences offer insight pertaining to how individuals relate these experiences to their present circumstances, within the context of their available cultural knowledge. The narratives that I collected one year after the evacuation specify the ways that the evacuation has affected Hatchet Lake community members in the long term. An example of the long term effects of disaster are offered by Jencson (2001), who worked with a neighborhood that was affected by the Minnesota Red River Valley flood in 1997. She found that community members' experiences of working together during the flood incited a sense of community cohesion and support that lasted long after the floodwaters were gone. In chapter two, I offer an example of a long-term effect of the fire, including the "post-traumatic" (Jennifer) anxieties that some community members describe experiencing in the year following the evacuation.

A third aspect of narrative analysis that has been useful for this project is that it has allowed me to identify community members' experiences of conflict during and following the evacuation. According to Mattingly (2010), narrators are motivated to present themselves as

actors confronted with conflict. They structure their stories around events that they consider to be relevant to the plot of their narrative, eliminating events that do not move the story forward. Through narrative analysis, one may identify perceived conflicts. An example of this type of analysis is Fordham and Ketteridge's (1998) description of a community in Scotland where residents were forced to evacuate their homes because of flooding. Through narrative, female evacuees recall how moving into temporary housing with limited bathroom and laundry facilities, coupled with the belief that women alone are responsible for childcare and the home, created conflict. The women recall difficulties obtaining childcare and maintaining their temporary homes while unassisted by male members of the community. In chapter four, I describe the conflicts that Wollaston evacuees recall, focusing largely on clashes with the provincial government, specifically in regards to wildfire policies.

The stories that we collected were transcribed and subsequently analyzed. I focused on identifying concepts and themes that reappear in several narratives, and I created an index of themes and associated subthemes. These topics were further analyzed to identify pertinent idioms and metaphors invoked by community members to describe their experiences. As Riessman (2000) suggests, an acknowledgment of my role, as the narrator's audience, has been essential in the analysis. According to Mattingly (1998), both the narrator and the audience play a role in the construction of a narrative. It has been important to recognize my role in the analysis by maintaining an awareness of the ways that my questions and responses influence the structure and content of the narrative. It has also been important to consider "contexts (local, cultural, historical) in the interpretation of narratives" (Riessman 2000:130), in order to confirm the validity of my interpretations of the experience-near concepts that I have identified. The six weeks that I spent living in the community significantly contributed to my ability to attend to these contexts.

1.4 Evacuation and Fire Management Protocols

According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), "The main responsibility for emergency management rests with provincial and territorial governments" (2011). However, the federal government has legislative authority over emergencies affecting Aboriginal communities and reserves (MAAND 2011). The office of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (MAAND) has developed a National Emergency Management Plan (NEMP), in order:

To harmonize AANDC's policies, plans and procedures with those of provinces, territories and other federal departments to contribute to a coordinated Government of Canada response to emergencies impacting First Nations communities. (MAAND 2011)

The plan “describes the roles and responsibilities of the Department and its partners in emergency management” (MAAND 2011), although a report recently published by the Auditor General of Canada (2013) suggests that, “Agreements to clarify roles and responsibilities are either absent or unclear. According to Department officials, these weaknesses make it difficult to administer the federal emergency management program.”

The NEMP does not outline the particulars of evacuation proceedings, as these are delegated to the provinces and territories. Because Saskatchewan's emergency evacuation plans are not available to the public, I use the province of Ontario's Emergency Response Plans to outline the likely steps involved in initiating and coordinating emergency evacuations in northern First Nations communities. The involvement of the AANDC, and the consistency of Ontario's evacuation plans with the narratives presented in the following chapters, suggests that the organizers of the Wollaston evacuation used similar plans.

According to Ontario's Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (OMCSCS 2013), evacuation plans may be initiated in a number of different circumstances, including notification from a community that an evacuation may be necessary, “advice from a federal department that an evacuation may be required” (OMCSCS 2013), and “receipt of a community's Declaration of Emergency” (OMCSCS 2013). According to the NEMP, the decision to evacuate is based on “a consensus of opinion between the First Nation Chief and Council, AANDC and the corresponding provincial EMO [emergency management organization]; or a present or imminent event that requires prompt coordination of actions to protect the health, safety and/or welfare of people” (MAAND 2011). It is important to note that at the time of the 2011 evacuation, there was no Chief and Council in office. This is because the fire and evacuation occurred during local elections and, in Wollaston, the local council is disbanded during elections. References by residents to the actions or responsibilities of the Chief and Council during the evacuation are, while common, nonetheless misattributed.

Following the decision to evacuate, a threat assessment is conducted to determine the urgency of the situation, to provide information to the community and government, and to aid in evacuation planning. During the evacuation, the local health organization, along with the Chief

and Council or an appointed person, divides the population “into [three] categories according to priority” (OMCSCS 2013). These include medical evacuees, meaning individuals that require specialized medical transportation services; Stage 1 evacuees, meaning those that “are defined as vulnerable populations” (OMCSCS 2013), including “persons with disabilities, seniors, children, pregnant women, and those with medical conditions” (OMCSCS 2013), and their caregivers; and Stage 2 evacuees, “all remaining residents of the community” (OMCSCS 2013). The narratives described in the following chapters indicate that organizers of the Wollaston evacuation prioritized evacuees more or less in accordance with these categories.

Notably, Ontario’s Emergency Response Plans suggests that,

Ideally, the host community should be located as close to the home community as possible. It is preferable to host community members together, even if it means hosting them farther away from their home community. This mitigates the risk of families being separated and makes the return of evacuees less complicated. Notwithstanding this recommended practice, a host community’s capacity may be such that it is unable to accommodate an entire community. Where an entire community may not be hosted together in close proximity to the home community, and if the situation allows, the community’s preference should be discussed with the Head of Council, First Nation Chief, or appointed person. (OMCSCS 2013)

Some of the consequences of separating family and community members are discussed in the following chapters.

According to Ontario’s Emergency Response Plans, EMOs maintain “a list of potential host communities for First Nations (i.e. communities that have hosted in the past or have expressed a willingness to host)” (OMCSCS 2013). However, these communities may opt out of hosting particular evacuations. Host communities are responsible for offering activities and services to evacuees, including, for example, providing security, information, translation services, recreation, food services, and local transportation. In addition, host communities are responsible for registering evacuees, though they may request additional support from other municipalities and non-governmental organizations, including the Canadian Red Cross (OMCSCS 2013).

When provincial authorities determine that the home community is “in a safe and ready state” (OMCSCS 2013), they will advise the displaced community to return home. For this determination to be made, the province must establish that the threat of the hazard has subsided, and that local services and infrastructure are functioning sufficiently to support residents. Either

the Chief of the evacuated community, or an appointed person, then decides when the community will return home. Local leaders, along with EMO liaisons, will then “develop priorities and manifests for the return flights” (OMCSCS 2013). Evacuees typically return home in an order that is opposite to that of the evacuation, in order to ensure that services are in place to support vulnerable community members by the time that they return home (OMCSCS 2013).

Unlike the handling of emergency evacuations, the provinces and territories are not required to consult with local governments before initiating responses to wildfires. In Saskatchewan, according to Michaels (2013), provincial “action on wildfires is predicated on the values (human life, communities, commercial timber, and major infrastructure e.g. power lines) that may be threatened if a wildfire is allowed to burn unmanaged” (2). Policy indicates that if a wildfire threatens one of these values, the province will take action by, for example, either extinguishing or monitoring the fire, depending on the circumstances. The purpose of this sort of approach is to strike “a balance among the costs of suppression, the protection of important values, and ecosystem benefits that can occur when a wildfire is allowed to burn naturally” (2). The province’s top priority is the “protection of human life” (6) followed by the “protection of community” (6). When a fire is within 20 km of a community, the province will “provide initial attack and sustained attack on wildland fires . . . with the intent to extinguish all wildfires that pose a threat” (6). Among residents of northern communities in Saskatchewan, this policy is commonly referred to as “Let it Burn.” Community members’ narratives demonstrate some disagreement in their assessment of the adequacy of these protocols and their implementation despite the firefighters’ success in protecting Wollaston’s residences and infrastructure from the fire.

1.5 Conclusion

In the chapters that follow, I describe the ways that community members recall the disruptions to their senses of well-being as a result of the forest fire and emergency evacuation. I begin by focusing on disruptions to well-being that relate to fellow community members, including both ongoing and acute disruptions. I then examine well-being in relation to kin, detailing the ways that various family roles were disrupted, how these disruptions were mediated, and how they are described by community members. I then move my discussion from disruptions to expectations, focusing on community members’ comparisons of their experiences to their expectations. This relates to attributions of responsibility, as community members

identify certain parties as being accountable for the challenges of the evacuation. Throughout these chapters, I argue that the procedures of the evacuation are misaligned with community members' normal social behaviors, and I engage with medical anthropology to situate these discussions theoretically.

Wollaston Lake is one of many communities that have been affected by the growing number of forest fires and flooding in Saskatchewan. Because evacuations occur almost annually in this province, it is extremely important that researchers learn about the ways evacuations are experienced. As researchers, we have a responsibility to our participants to provide policy makers with the most informative and current research as is possible. In doing so, we can contribute to policy changes that reduce the distress that disasters have the potential to incite. It is imperative that we begin to understand the experiences of members of northern communities so in order to begin a process of change.

Chapter 2: Community Well-Being

2.1 Introduction

According to many community members from Wollaston Lake, the challenges that were produced by the forest fire and emergency evacuation diminished their senses of well-being prior to, during, and following these events. Participants' discussions of well-being are largely characterized by a focus on concerns for the well-being of fellow community members, and on motivations to respond to the challenges of the fire and displacement in ways that would maintain their well-being. In a study focusing on beliefs regarding well-being among members of an Aboriginal community in New South Wales, Australia, Daniela Heil (2009) recalls that her participants describe well-being "usually in reference to the well-being of others and rarely to the speaker's own self" (88). Heil suggests that these narrators focus on their "social selves" (88) rather than "individual selves" (89). In a study concerning perceptions of health among members of the Whapmagoostui Cree Nation from northern Quebec, Naomi Adelson (2009) similarly describes finding that her participants conceptualize a version of well-being that is based on both social relations and relationships with the land. Their understandings of well-being refer to "the assertion of one's proper sense of place in a broadly defined social and physical Cree landscape" (113). Adelson suggests that, "being alive well," (113) which is her English translation of a Cree term that relates to well-being, "is the ability to sustain oneself as a member of a Cree community and hence a complex kin and social network" (113). This community is one where, "there is a basic and vital connection between the land, its resources, and the Cree people" (113). Adelson explains that this connection with the land and its resources is demonstrated through "hunting and bush-related activities [which] remain an important aspect of life for the Cree of Whapmagoostui" (113). Community members from Wollaston similarly emphasize concerns for the land in their discussions of the fire and displacement.

Residents also describe identifying with particular social roles within the community, and some recall these roles being disrupted during the fire and evacuation. In discussing these disruptions, community members expose beliefs regarding the appropriate and inappropriate ways that particular social roles should have been enacted during the evacuation. As such, these narratives "reflect people's interpretations of . . . moral ideologies" (Becker 1999:17). For example, some of the men in the community complain of being unable to protect Wollaston from the fire. They suggest that, as trained firefighters, they bear some social responsibility to

safeguard their community, and describe experiencing distress when they found that this was not possible.

In addition to discussions of the challenges attributed to the forest fire and emergency evacuation, some describe pre-existing disruptions to well-being. They suggest that these problems contributed to the challenges of the evacuation. In many cases, the forest fire and evacuation served as a sort of ‘acute’ disruption, experienced within the context of chronically suboptimal community socio-economic conditions that have existed for some time. As described in chapter one, the forest fire and displacement often represent idioms of chronic disruption, as community members engage our discussions of these experiences in order to discuss broader disruptions to well-being in their community. In some circumstances, particular chronic disruptions are also identified as vulnerabilities, as they contributed to the challenges of the fire and evacuation.

In this chapter, I focus on discussions of well-being, both in relation to fellow community members, and to the land. I suggest that evacuees focus on protecting and maintaining the well-being of fellow community members, and I link these considerations to discussions of relationships with the land, disruptions to roles, and to ongoing disruptions to well-being. I begin with a discussion of challenges relating to the fire, followed by those that are attributed to displacement.

2.2 The Forest Fire

Responses to the forest fire vary depending on whether or not the narrator considered the fire to be a threat to the community. In this section, I describe community members’ reactions to the fire, beginning with discussions of the fire as nonthreatening, followed by discussions of the fire as a hazard, as well as focusing on the ways that community members describe responding to this danger. I also explore community members’ recollections of their reactions to returning to Wollaston and seeing that the blaze had decimated much of the forest surrounding their town.

2.2.1 Reactions to the Fire as Nonthreatening

Narrators that describe having some knowledge of forest fires and the local environment, specifically tree size and wind patterns, do not recall being concerned that the fire would enter residential areas of Wollaston. Among these residents, existing knowledge of the local environment subverted the extreme distress of which other community members complain. For example, Matthew, a father and grandfather in his fifties, explains, “Here, you see our trees?

They're small. They [forest fires close to Wollaston] are just little brush fires." He recalls, "I wasn't worried . . . Look at the trees. They're not very big." For similar reasons, William, an Elder, recalls, "I wasn't worried . . . I didn't have much on my mind." Ruth, an Elder, mother, and grandmother, explains that the fire was not likely to enter into the community because the direction of the wind was not conducive to this sort of movement. She explains, "I didn't think it was necessary . . . [for] people to be evacuated because the wind was - I know it [would] come closer but it wouldn't come into the community. I just know it." Among these residents, knowledge regarding the characteristics of the local land and environment prevented distress relating to fears that the fire would enter the community.

2.2.2 Reactions to the Fire as Threatening

Many others describe concerns that the fire would reach the community. Jennifer, a mother in her forties, recollects,

By the time the emergency was declared, the fire was just a few meters away from the runway, which is the airport . . . We seen the fireball just take off and hitting trees like it was. It got out of control . . . We could just see a fire coming too near to the community.

Daniel, a father in his mid-twenties, recalls being nervous about the fire because, "it was just going . . . close" to the community. Michelle, a young mother, also recollects, "When we noticed there was a big fire going around town . . . I got really scared." Some also recall being concerned that the blaze would spark the propane tanks, located in the center of town, causing a large explosion. Thomas, a man in his early twenties, explains, "rumor gets around quick . . . [and] they said the propane farms were possibly going to be a threat." Heather, a mother and grandmother in her forties, also recalls, "you start hearing, like, [that the] fire's right around here and they got that propane tanks over here . . . I heard that . . . if that thing blew up, this thing [Wollaston] would be nothing." Jennifer similarly recollects, "The most concern that they [the organizers] had was . . . [for] the propane tanks because it wasn't, from my understanding, it hasn't been upgraded to a safety standard." Matthew explains, "I think the propane really panicked people. Somebody pressed the panic button when somebody mentioned the propane." Among these community members, beliefs that the propane tanks were not upgraded to safety standards represents an understanding of an existing vulnerability and threat to community members' safety, which was exacerbated by the fire.

2.2.2.1 Fighting the Fire

Two of the men that I interviewed describe responding to concerns that the fire would reach Wollaston by suggesting that they bore some responsibility to fellow community members to protect the community by extinguishing the blaze. These men, Paul and Jeffrey, volunteered to fight the fire and were distraught when they were not recruited to do so. As both men self-identify as firefighters, this rejection was disruptive to their senses of well-being. To begin with, Paul, a father and grandfather in his fifties, recalls, “I even offered them my help [in fighting the fire] . . . but nobody responded back to me.” This was distressing, as “I’m qualified to do something like this, especially for evacuations. I got papers [credentials] that I could have used from [the community that I’m originally from].” He suggests that participating in the firefighting efforts would have made his experience less challenging, as, “Then I could have been showing them . . . how certain things are done.” For Paul, this rejection is linked to an ongoing disruption to his sense of well-being, as he suggests that he was excluded because he is an “outsider.” He explains, “I’m looked at as an outsider because I’m not from the community, even though I’ve been living here . . . [for a long time]. No, they don’t make you feel like you’re a part of the community.” Paul’s inability to fight the fire elicited an acute disruption, as it enhanced the disruption caused by his ongoing problem of feeling marginal in the community.

Jeffrey, a father in his thirties, also self-identifies as a firefighter, and associates his sense of responsibility to protect the community with this role. He explains, “I wanted to help with the fire in case it got close . . . because I am a certified crew boss for firefighting.” He describes the role in relation to concerns for fellow community members, explaining, “I’m a certified firefighter, so I don’t want to see something like that happening to anybody else’s house, in any which way. So I was going to try to be here to save them as much as I could.” He continues, “I wanted to help the people if the fire came close at any time.” Jeffrey remained in Wollaston to fight the fire but was unable to do so because a crew from outside of the community was brought in to extinguish it, disrupting local firefighters’ roles. He explains, “It’s their [community members’] town. Why not have them save their own town . . . instead of getting people that are three hours away?”

Jeffrey associates this difficulty with the ongoing problem of employers stereotyping locals. He explains that employers “don’t want them to fight fires here because they think they’re lazy.” He explains that, after being out fighting a fire, community members “are tired,

you know, after being out on the line for ten days or fourteen days or whatever.” After having a few days off, “Some guys are just still tired . . . They don’t want to go anywhere [so they say], ‘Come back and pick me up tomorrow.’” Jeffrey suggests that employers respond by saying, “Okay, blacklist him. He doesn’t want to go on [to fight] a fire!” According to Jeffrey, this perspective is unreasonable, as community members are ‘blacklisted’ for “one day’s rest. He wants *one* more day of rest but they’d rather blacklist him instead of hiring him.” Jeffrey suggests that the provincial government used this sort of logic in their decision to avoid hiring any locals to protect Wollaston from the fire. He explains, “That’s where the people are coming out with, ‘Oh, we can’t hire anybody because they’re lazy.’” Jeffrey responds to this perspective by stating, “Well, yeah! After being on the line for ten to fourteen days, you need five days off! Four days sometimes is not good enough . . . because it’s hard work!” According to Jeffrey, the fire highlights the value that he and other community members place on protecting Wollaston. For both men, the discussion of the 2011 forest fire and evacuation exemplifies an idiom of chronic disruption, an event that is representative of ongoing issues of inclusion, stereotyping, and joblessness, and an opportunity to discuss these challenges. These issues, in turn, rendered Jeffrey and Paul vulnerable to the distress that they experienced when their roles were disrupted.

2.2.3 Seeing the Burnt Forest

When community members returned to Wollaston following the evacuation, they found that the fire had burned a huge (4400 hectares) amount of the forest surrounding their town (CBC 2011). According to Parlee and Furgal (2012), among northern Aboriginal communities, well-being is “strongly interconnected with the health of the environment” (11). This is reflected in community members’ reactions to seeing the burnt forest, as many recall a feeling of “sadness.” Christopher, a father and grandfather in his forties, explains, “It’s kind of sad too, to see it all go. But, you know, that’s something that happened already and I guess nature will just have to take its course again and do it all over again . . . That is sad.” Richard, an Elder, also recalls, “it was too . . . bare and it was sad.” Jennifer describes, “it was sad because everywhere you look was just black.” Paul also recollects that it was, “kind of devastating to see that.” He explains, “The land is beautiful to me and just to see that, it hurt me a lot.”

For some, the sadness was linked to disruptions to roles in the year since the evacuation. These individuals suggest that the burnt forest prevents them from carrying out their “routines of

daily life” (Becker 1999:4) by, for example, rendering them unable to hunt in the forest surrounding the community. Robert, a father in his early twenties, recollects his reaction to seeing the land burnt, describing, “I felt [that] I wasn’t going to go hunting again [or] go trapping around the community, like just around here. So I didn’t expect to see those trees [to] be gone so I felt sad.” Matthew also explains, “There’s nothing left to hunt, no birds. It’s all burnt.” Ruth also explains, “When I came back here I was sad. I was sad because we make use of the trees. We build houses, we build warehouses and whatever . . . It was sad to see all those trees burning. It was . . . very sad for me.”

Like Adelson’s (2009) participants, these individuals describe a, “connection between the land, its resources,” (113) and community members. However, evacuees’ narratives also highlight the primacy of the well-being of fellow residents over that of the land. These individuals recall that their adverse reactions to the burnt forest were mediated by the knowledge that the fire had not harmed fellow community members and local infrastructure. Helen, a mother in her forties, explains, “The whole town could have burned and . . . it’s the people [that matter]. You can’t replace them and eventually you can replace the material things that get lost.” Steven, a father in his forties, recalls, “I was just happy no house was lost, or lives . . . not even a dog. Even the dogs made it.” For Steven, the knowledge that the community and residents had been unharmed alleviated some of the distress that he had been experiencing during the evacuation. He explains, “Once they told me that no houses was gone [and that] nobody got hurt [and] everybody was okay, I was kind of happy about it.” William also explains that the burnt forest “was okay because . . . as long as people are safe.” Thomas’ “first thoughts were like, ‘Wow, Wollaston came so close to burning down,’” but he was “happy that nobody lost anything in the fire.” For many, then, emotional reactions to the fire and to the burnt forest are reconciled through the knowledge that the blaze did not harm fellow community members and local infrastructure.

2.3 Displacement

The evacuation out of Wollaston and, in particular, the first few days that community members spent in the host communities, are described as being challenging for a number of reasons. Primarily, evacuees describe difficulties relating to the separation of community members from their families, challenges that are described in the following chapter. Community members also describe problems that they attribute to the organizers’ methods, including, for

example, lack of coordination resulting in chaos, and insufficient communication with evacuees. These complaints are addressed in chapter four. In this section, I describe challenges to well-being in relation to fellow community members. Throughout these discussions, residents portray a desire to protect and care for fellow community members, as well as a sense of gratitude in cases where these needs were met.

2.3.1 Community Well-Being During the Evacuation and in Evacuation Centers

Most evacuees recall being brought from Wollaston to Points North, where they waited for several hours before going to host communities in Saskatoon or Prince Albert. Many criticize the lack of support offered by the host community in Points North, specifically in regards to failing to make food available to evacuees. William explains, “Points North was overcrowded, there was so many people who weren’t fed. It was hot.” According to Volume Two of the report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples,

Traditionally [within First Nations communities], assistance from others was expected in times of individual need and was provided according to understood rules or norms of reciprocity — typically from specific others within the extended family and not from a central government or agency. Help was provided when required in a non-judgmental manner as a social duty or obligation, not reluctantly — for the well-being of the collective was understood to depend on the continued well-being of its individual members. This central concept remains strong in most First Nations communities. (Canada 1996a: 942)

As Parlee, O’Neil, and the Lutsel K’e Dene First Nation (2007) have written, “The capacity of people to work together is . . . an important aspect of the Dene way of life and a sign of community well-being” (120-121). This expression of Dene sociality is brought to the fore and reaffirmed in evacuees’ narratives, as many describe responding to these challenges by helping each other. In regards to the lack of food in Points North, many recall offering to share their food with others. Helen explains, “When they took us to Points North . . . a lot of the people didn’t have money and stuff like that, and we were sitting there and whoever did have money bought something and they ended up sharing.” Patricia, a mother in her twenties, recalls bringing food to Points North for her son and offering it to fellow evacuees. She explains, “I brought a couple bags for him but - and then I had to share with other kids, too, that were there.” Matthew, who remained in Wollaston during the evacuation, describes trying to have food sent to the evacuees in Points North. He explains, “We were trying to get food to them from here but . . . there was no more planes coming in or out . . . [Eventually] we found a way to bring some

bread in to the community [members] from a floatplane but at that time it was too late, everybody was gone.” He concludes, “It was out of our hands then, yeah. It’s too bad.”

Some describe being concerned, specifically, for the well-being of the Elders in Points North, as well as in the evacuation centers in Saskatoon and Prince Albert. Paul, for example, explains, “I think that the worstest part of it is the Elders . . . Especially having to sit in the terminal for eight hours . . . with no water . . . [except tap water, and] the tap water’s not so good over there.” Anna, a mother and grandmother in her sixties, also complains that, “Those people should’ve been gone [a] long time ago, you know, down there South somewhere. But they were still there [in Points North].” She describes trying to help the Elders, recalling, “I start complaining, you know? So [during the] next trip [from Points North], you know, people that were organizing got the Elder people that were there . . . on the plane.” In regards to their time spent in the evacuation centers in Prince Albert and Saskatoon, some suggest this stay may have been less distressing for Elders if they had not been separated from each other during the evacuation. Social support was clearly an issue as Patricia explains, “Because [if they were together] they could talk and they’re the same age, and then they [can] share stories and whatnot. I don’t know, it was just kind of tragic.” Ruth, an Elder, was given a hotel room to stay in during the displacement, but chose to spend her days in the evacuation center with fellow community members. She explains, “I’d rather be where everybody is so . . . I just get up in the morning and I go back to where everybody is and I stay there all day until I’m ready to go back to the hotel to sleep.”

Some also responded to challenges that developed in the evacuation centers by volunteering to help fellow evacuees. Heather, for example, recalls, “I was helping wherever I could help . . . People needed assistance on just little things or . . . for things they need [to get].” Helen recalls doing laundry for community members that did not have money to pay for the machines. She explains, “So when I went and did laundry, I went and asked a few people, ‘Do you need to have your clothes washed? I’m going to go do laundry.’” Jennifer recalls helping fellow community members by organizing staff advances on paychecks: “When you have about fifty staff members out there and they all got evacuated, everybody’s looking for pay or advances on their pay. I was dealing with that . . . I had to look after the staff.” Reflectively, she adds, “Everybody worked together that day . . . Whoever can help out helped out.” Heather summarizes this sense of supportiveness, stating, “This community always pulls together as one

when something happens. We're always there for whoever." Helen describes local social support by comparing the community with residents of the host communities. She explains, "Eighty percent of the people that live here are unemployed and . . . it's kind of like they had to rely on everybody else and in the city you can't do that, right? People aren't that sympathetic." Finally, Christopher reiterates his view of communal support, explaining, "how that works is, in a small community like that, everybody kind of takes care of themselves [each other] so in that sense, people took care of themselves [each other]. Like I took care of my nephews because their mom wasn't there."

Although many community members describe, "coming together as one," to quote Heather, some provide contrary experiences, which are reflective of the organic nature of social relations. Christopher, for example, recalls his experiences at the airport in Points North. He explains, "It's more like first come first serve . . . The kids see something [a plane] and just run to it and people started running in line and whoever runs in line just gets on the plane." Helen describes similar chaos in Wollaston, as residents were being evacuated. She explains, "we were all standing and it was like whoever was strongest and stuff like that, [that's] who are able to get in [the plane]." However, community members identify local organizers as being responsible for these circumstances, rather than fellow evacuees. Catherine, for example, suggests, "They did a little organizing . . . Pretty much, I [would] say [that] they weren't organized. People were getting mad, including me, [I] was getting mad." She continues: "It wasn't really organized, the way people would get shipped out, the way people favor one another." Thus, narrators find the organizers accountable for creating circumstances that resulted in chaos, rather than blaming fellow evacuees for participating in these situations. In doing so, they indicate that the chaos of the evacuation contrasts with the ideals of communal support that they identify with their community. Perspectives regarding the organization of the evacuation and responsibility are examined at length in chapter four.

2.3.2 Evacuees' Concerns for Wollaston and Responses to these Concerns

While in the evacuation centers, evacuees were notified of the fire's movements and of its potential threat to Wollaston. Early on, they were informed that the blaze was no longer a hazard to their community. However, this news did not diminish concerns for Wollaston, as the external threat of the fire was replaced by a threat that is internal to the community: the threat of homes being broken into and property being stolen. In particular, evacuees describe being

concerned because a few of the residents that had remained in town during the evacuation had reputations for burglaries. Paul recalls,

I was worried about what was happening at home . . . because there was a few guys that stayed, young guys that stayed behind, that were not up to good . . . [There were] some B & E's [break-in and enters] . . . so I was kind of worried because I got a lot of valuable stuff.

Catherine also describes, "I was just worried about . . . my house . . . We had an X-Box and two big flat screen TVs, and what else is there? Laptops." Jennifer also recollects being concerned about potential burglaries. She describes, "I was worried about my house since now the fire's contained and . . . [I was] making sure that my house didn't get broken into." According to Paul, "I believe pretty much everybody else felt the same way, especially when you learned that a couple [of] young guys were breaking in around here. But eventually they got caught." Some also describe being concerned for their dogs' well-being, as Steven describes, "I was worried about the house and the dog."

Distress relating to concerns for homes and dogs was alleviated for many when evacuees were informed that the other community members that remained in Wollaston during the evacuation would be caring for houses, pets, and sled dogs. Paul, for example, explains, "I was worried about my dogs too, but they were all looked after, like, they shipped in a load of dog food and stuff like that." Anna recalls not being allowed to bring her dog with her when she evacuated, but being aided by fellow community members who looked after her pet during her absence:

When I walked in [to the airport] they couldn't let my pet in . . . But they said, 'We'll take care of it.' And they [community members did not evacuate] did because I forgot to leave the key . . . [so] I phoned, and they say, 'We can't get into your house because it's locked.' And I said, 'Okay, just . . . cut . . . or shoot the lock off' . . . So they did that. So everything was okay when I get back.

Matthew, Jeffrey, and roughly forty other community members remained in Wollaston during the evacuation. Jeffrey explains, "We kind of took care of the whole community . . . We took care of people's dogs; we fed them. We were keeping an eye on the houses for the people." Matthew similarly explains, "We checked all the houses that we could, every day, every night, every morning. [We checked for] animals [and] whatever's left over in case somebody's left behind [a pet] or something." Jeffrey recalls that he and other remaining residents, "Mostly just

drove around town . . . Just keeping an eye on houses and stuff like that.” Adds Matthew, “We had to feed all the dogs and water the dogs and check everybody’s houses.”

There were also some challenges, including protecting a house from an electrical fire. Matthew explains, “We broke in there and . . . we saved one house, that bigger house that almost caught on fire because [the] fridge went, got a short.” They also worked with local RCMP officers to catch the burglars. Jeffrey explains:

We were keeping an eye on those houses [and] we heard there was two guys that were in town. They like breaking into houses, so we heard about that and so we kept an eye on those two guys . . . Sure enough, we heard that one of them went into another - one of them went into a house. One guy was working on [burglarizing] the other side of the community, and then one guy was working on this side of the community. So we kind of both gathered them up . . . and we got those guys to get on a plane and [we] sent them out.

Therefore, while some describe being concerned about their homes and pets while they were displaced, they were comforted by the knowledge that their houses, property, and dogs were taken care of by fellow community members. That some residents remained in Wollaston during the evacuation demonstrates a strong sense of community and concern for fellow residents’ well-being. Their descriptions of these actions are reflective of a relational perspective of well-being, one in which actions are motivated by a desire to help others.

2.3.3 Responses to Youths’ Behaviors

An additional concern that community members describe relates to youth alcohol use in the evacuation centers. Jeffrey offers an explanation of why youth drinking developed, elucidating, “If you have a 15-year-old kid [with] no supervision at all [due to separation from parents and grandparents], okay, you’re allowing him to drink.” Jeffrey suggests that youths’ unfamiliarity with Saskatoon and Prince Albert contributed to the circumstances: “They don’t get out very much. They’re not . . . out in Prince Albert or Saskatoon or La Ronge, anywhere . . . So when they get to a place with no supervision . . . that’s going to happen.” Explanations of youth alcohol use are discussed in greater detail in chapter four, but here I address evacuees’ responses to alcohol-related disturbances in the evacuation centers. In addition, I discuss community members’ concerns regarding the ongoing implications of the evacuation on youths, as well as existing concerns for young people in the community.

2.3.3.1 Responses to Alcohol Use and Associated Disturbances in Evacuation Centers

Three of the men that I interviewed were hired to work as security guards in the soccer center in Saskatoon, where they helped settle disturbances attributed to youth alcohol use. Christopher explains, “They got on the booze and things got out of hand for a little while but it got under control because there were some, including myself I guess - I volunteered as a security [guard] just to help out.” Thomas also recalls, “I ended up helping out . . . I didn’t bother just sitting around, I ended up helping out and it took long hours.” Steven also explains, “After I got there about, maybe less than two hours they . . . hired me for security . . . because it’s getting too crazy . . . A lot of people were drinking . . . I guess it was getting out of hand.” The men tried to “keep the peace” by asking the individuals who were drinking to be quiet, as well as breaking up fights, notes Christopher, who recalls working as a security guard in one of the four wings of the soccer center that was used as a sleeping area. He explains, “There’s some people drinking and coming in and out, and so we kind of just sat there to keep the peace kind of thing . . . [because] there’s people sleeping there and there’s babies in there.” Steven also recalls, “Just look[ing] after people . . . Just [trying to] keep it calm, kind of thing.” Thomas similarly describes, “when lights were out, people want to sleep so we’d try to keep it down, keep it quiet.”

Steven and Thomas also recall breaking up fights in one of the evacuation centers. Steven describes, “After that first night, people were starting to get rowdy too, like [having] fights . . . So I had to keep it low profile kind of thing.” He recollects his response to the fighting, describing, “I just jump in between them, tell them, ‘Take it easy, we don’t need this. We didn’t come here for that,’ kind of thing.” Thomas suggests that the fighting may be attributed to disruptions to social dynamics among community members. According to Thomas, the fights were initiated, “Because there are people there [that were] staying with other people that they do not like. And living in Wollaston, people have a choice of staying away from each other and if you put . . . two people that don’t like each other in one room . . . something’s going to go down.” According to Thomas, some disagreements were “from back home,” and had escalated into arguments because of the living arrangements in the evacuation center. Steven, alternatively, suggests that the fights began in the evacuation center, stating, “I think it started up there.” It is likely that some disagreements began in Wollaston, and were exacerbated by the stressful living arrangements in the evacuation centers, while others were initiated in the evacuation centers.

One perspective that is consistent among the security guards is the notion that they bore some sense of responsibility to fellow community members. Christopher explains,

When I found out that I had to do some security with these guys too, I thought to myself that, ‘Well, I guess I’m stuck here so I can’t do anything more than that.’ Like I said, [there was] more responsibility that was there than anywhere else was at that soccer center, because [there were] so many kids. The majority of the young people were shipped there.

Steven’s narrative portrays a similar sentiment. During the evacuation, his girlfriend, who was in Prince Albert at the time, gave birth to their son. When Steven was informed that she was going into labor, he decided to take a bus from Saskatoon to Prince Albert to meet her. He recalls not wanting to depart from the soccer center, explaining, “I didn’t want to leave but I had no choice. [I didn’t want to leave] because I don’t want nothing bad to happen to anybody.” He recalls being worried that, “If I leave, like who’s going to be security once I leave, kind of thing. So that’s why I kind of felt bad leaving. I don’t want to leave my people. I was helping them so they won’t get hurt or anything bad happen.” Because he harbored this sense of responsibility to help fellow community members, Steven describes being surprised that he was compensated for this work, calling his payment “free money.”

Thomas was also determined to help fellow community members. He explains, I’d say it’s [a] natural instinct for me to help others [rather] than myself. I’ve done that a lot. I put other people first . . . [before] even my own well-being . . . People get tired of helping out and I try to share my weight, you know, carry some of the weight people had . . . I just basically stayed around, do what I can, help out. Never really took time for myself, except for one night.

Thus, for these individuals, protecting and caring for the well-being of fellow community members was of primary importance. Their recollections of their motivations and behaviors indicate a communal sociality, one in which community members feel a strong desire and obligation to support each other.

2.3.3.2 Impacts of the Evacuation on Youths

Some suggest that the evacuation continues to have a negative impact on young people. For example, some young adults have been setting fire to local buildings and the forest around the community. Jennifer recalls a conversation that she had with a fellow resident, explaining,

One interesting [thing that] one young . . . mother had said [is], they said, ‘These kids hadn’t experienced anything outside the community. The only time they left the

community was when . . . we got evacuated last year. Now these kids are setting fires because they want to get evacuated out of here again.'

Jennifer agrees with this statement, explaining, "That makes sense because of kids destroying [buildings and] setting fires in some areas. So I'm starting to believe that statement. It's kind of crazy but [it's possible]." Jennifer was the only community member to propose this possibility during our interviews, though several others made similar suggestions during informal conversations.

Some believe that the evacuation was psychologically damaging to young adults. Jennifer responds by suggesting that, "the community has to get together and develop a plan and get these kids looked after . . . [including focusing on] the trauma." Heather, a teacher, believes that young adults should have received some sort of counseling. She explains, "Imagine these kids that never had anything . . . counseling, or anything like that. That was my concern." Suggesting that the evacuation was traumatizing, Heather identifies a pre-existing issue that likely contributed to the vulnerability of these young people. Many parents do not communicate effectively with their children, she suggests, because they had them when they were teens themselves. Heather explains, "There are a lot of young parents, you know, and they don't know how to talk with their kids like I do . . . There's a lot of parents that don't do that." Jennifer also addresses the normalization of teen pregnancy, explaining,

I'm speaking because a lot of young people are lost in the community. They think having babies at early ages is normal. Dropping out of school is normal. Having a family at [an] early age is normal. And it's a cycle they get themselves stuck into.

The implication is that some parents lack the experience and skills to properly care for and guide their children during and after times of disruption. These women employ the evacuation as an idiom of chronic disruption, offering an occasion to discuss some ongoing disturbances to young peoples' well-being, specifically through discussions of the "cycle" of teen pregnancy, the negative impacts that this cycle has had on the children of teenaged parents, and their desire to leave Wollaston.

2.3.4 Recommendations for Future Evacuations

Some recommend that in the future, evacuees should be brought to a nearby reserve, rather than to cities. Patricia, for example, submits that, "In my opinion, I think that . . . we should've just went to Lac Brochet." She explains that, "we usually go to Lac Brochet [to visit],

which is like fifteen minutes plane ride and that's another community, like, we have family [there] and they all speak Dene and it's still a dry reserve." Ruth makes a similar recommendation, explaining,

If that were to ever to happen again, what I would suggest is [that] . . . Elders, like me, and people who have asthma [and] babies, [for] those ones it's understandable [that] you take them down south, near the hospital. But . . . [for] adults and young people that can walk [and] that are healthy, those are the ones, I think, [that] should go to other surrounding communities to be safe instead of taking them to the city.

Catherine also explains, "Instead of going all the way to Saskatoon, they could have evacuated us to Lynn Lake. Manitoba's not far . . . Or they could have sent people to Lac Brochet. That's . . . a small town." She references the drinking problems that developed in Saskatoon, explaining,

Nobody would cause any trouble there [in these towns]. People [from Wollaston] know people on that side [in Lynn Lake and Lac Brochet]. Or La Ronge [is] the closest place, so it wouldn't be such a big hassle just to evacuate them [there, instead of] all the way down south, where they don't really know anybody.

Catherine expresses some reliance on nearby communities, explaining, "Lynn Lake would help. They have a lot of good people there . . . People have good hearts everywhere . . . That's how I thought about it . . . But getting sent to PA and Saskatoon wasn't a really good idea." Thus, these community members suggest that the sense of supportiveness that they attribute to fellow community members is also attributed to familiar Dene speaking communities. For these individuals, Wollaston and nearby communities represent "safe" (Ruth) places, where the sorts of dramatic disruptions to well-being that evacuees describe having experienced in the cities are unlikely to develop.

2.4 Conclusion

Through the experiences and observations of community members in Wollaston, we can see how their notion of well-being centers around collective responsibility. Many describe being concerned for, and motivated to protect, the well-being of fellow community members. These perspectives are evident in responses to the fire as a threat, and in reactions to seeing the burnt forest. In addition, narrators describe concerns for fellow community members in regards to the evacuation out of Wollaston, and to time spent in the evacuation centers. Some describe being concerned for their homes and pets, and were comforted by the actions of fellow residents, who protected the town while most community members were evacuated. Community members

recommend that, in order to avoid similarly distressing circumstances in the future, evacuees should be brought to a nearby northern community, where the disruption to social patterns and well-being will be considerably less. Evidently, the fire and evacuation are discussed in relation to chronic community disruptions. Through the creation of idioms of chronic disruption, residents highlight the importance of both a recognition of the existing risk factors that make a community “vulnerable,” as Blaikie et al. (2003) define vulnerability, and the need to explore the broader temporal dimensions of narrative, as Garro and Mattingly (2000) suggest, to appreciate how experiences of past events narrated in the present, tie the past, present, and even the future interpretively together.

Chapter 3: Family Roles during Emergency Evacuation

3.1 Introduction

A prevailing sentiment among the individuals that I interviewed is that many of the problems that arose during the evacuation were triggered by the separation and fragmentation of families. These problems, identified earlier, include alcohol abuse, violence among teenagers, and increased distress and fear among children and their parents or guardians. According to Volume Three of the report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada 1996b), “‘the family’ in Aboriginal discourse . . . acts as a bridge or mediator between individuals and the world at large” (87). If “that family is subsequently lost or disrupted, then the individual has lost not just one support, but also the principal agency that helps him or her make sense of the world. In effect, the person is set adrift” (16). This perspective is reiterated in evacuees’ narratives, as, for example, one participant suggests that fragmenting families by separating children from their parents is “asking for a disaster” (Jeffrey). According to Gay Becker (1999), “in all societies, the course of life is structured by expectations about each phase of life, and meaning is assigned to specific life events and the roles that accompany them” (4). The Wollaston evacuation disrupted community members’ abilities to carry out roles, in particular those relating to the family, which are central to the “routines of daily life” (Becker 1999:4) in Wollaston. The result of this disruption is the “disaster” that Jeffrey and other community members describe.

According to Becker (1999), individuals that experience interference in their abilities to carry out their self-identified roles often use narrative to “integrate disruption and its aftermath with prevailing cultural sentiment” (15) and to “communicate what is significant in their lives” (Garro and Mattingly 2000:11). These narratives “reflect people’s interpretations of . . . moral ideologies” (Becker 1999:17) by describing the appropriate and inappropriate ways that given roles should be enacted. For example, several community members attribute youth alcohol abuse to the separation of teenagers from their parents. According to one community member, mothers should have been able to monitor their children, to tell them, “Don’t do that! It’s not good for the community,” thereby reducing the potential for alcohol abuse. This community member views alcohol abuse and the increased police presence and media attention that it generated as a consequence of mothers’ inability to act in their role as guide to their children.

As such, this narrative offers an example of a speaker who invokes existing values associated with family roles and behaviors in his story of the evacuation.

Many community members with whom I spoke describe their personal evacuation experiences as being challenging and causing distress. These narrators engage with idioms of acute disruption that highlight the incongruity between their perspectives regarding “normal” (Becker 1999:16) behaviors and expectations associated with roles within the family, and their ability to meet those expectations. The preponderance of idioms relating to family roles indicates that the values with which the idioms are associated, though varied among individuals, serve as a shared construct among community members. Through analyzing these narratives, one may develop an understanding of community members’ perspectives regarding ideal roles and norms, both during times of disruption and stability (Becker 1999:15).

In this chapter, I examine the ways that narrators describe their family roles as having been challenged during the evacuation, outlining these difficulties, associated idioms of acute disruption, and the efforts that community members took to address the disruption. I focus on: (1) mothers, who were challenged by their inability to make decisions regarding their child’s well-being, communicate with their children and provide comfort and safety; (2) fathers, who were unable to contact their children or assist with their care; (3) adult children, who were unable to contact and care for their parents or grandparents; and (4) guardians, or individuals who assumed the role of guardian for children who had been separated from their parents during the evacuation.

3.2 Mothers’ Experiences

During the evacuation, eight out of the ten mothers that I interviewed were separated from one or more of their children. They describe being ‘lost,’ ‘stressed out,’ and ‘anxious’ when their efforts to reconcile the disruption failed. According to Becker (1999), “people in chaos cling to their values as a source of order” (109). Mothers’ descriptions of their varied efforts to mediate disruption, as well as the challenges they experienced when those efforts were deemed ineffective, indicate the value they place on their ability to be with, communicate with, and make decisions for their children. In this section, I detail the challenges that mothers recall experiencing during separation, focusing on accounts of their efforts to maintain their connection with their children using three methods - resisting separation, attempting to make contact by

phone, and trying to locate their children - as well as highlighting challenges relating to mothers' lack of agency in making decisions and maintaining their children's well-being.

3.2.1 Separation from Children

Mothers, especially those with very young children, describe not wanting to be separated from them. Some resisted the separation by refusing to leave their children in Wollaston while they were evacuated. Patricia and Michelle were unsuccessful, and both complain that their capacity to make decisions regarding their children's well-being was restricted as a result. Patricia recalls being asked to evacuate Wollaston with her son, leaving her two older daughters and husband behind. She explains that she, "didn't want to leave my other two girls . . . so I was like, 'I'm not gonna go.' But my husband told me to just take the baby, and then that he would take the two girls later." This produced distress as, "I wasn't with my whole family. I was worried about my girls here, and my husband." Michelle describes a similar scenario, as she was asked to leave her seven-year-old daughter in Wollaston while she evacuated with her six-year-old daughter. According to Michelle, "They [the organizers] told me that, yeah, I could go with my youngest but I had to leave my oldest girl." Michelle resisted the separation: "I told them that I can't . . . I told them, 'No!' Like I just yelled at them, 'I'm not gonna leave my other girl.'" The organizers rejected Michelle's plea, instructing her to, "Just get on the plane. The plane's waiting for you." Like Patricia, Michelle found the notion of separating from her family distressing. However, having limited power in this aspect of the evacuation, Michelle was compelled to leave one of her daughters in Wollaston.

Catherine was asked to evacuate without her four-year-old son due to health concerns relating to her pregnancy. She explains, "They [the organizers] were kind of yelling at me but I just said, 'No.' I played stubborn but I wasn't going to leave my son behind with anybody." She recalls the organizers telling her, "One seat open, you go," but she refused, responding, "No, I can't leave my son." Catherine waited at the airport until she was eventually told to "Get on a plane with your boy," which she agreed to do. She perceives the organizers' suggestion to separate from her child to be perplexing, explaining, "I had to take him because I never leave him. Right from when he was born I never left him." This is consistent with Michelle's explanation regarding the discomfort caused by the separation. According to her, "Since birth . . . my girls were by my side every day. If they're not here with me for a day or two, it hurts." The mothers conveyed their experience of the disruption by engaging with a shared construct

regarding the expectations associated with motherhood, one in which mothers act as the primary guardians and caregivers to their children.

3.2.2 Phone Contact

Some mothers attempted to remedy the disruptive effects of the separation by contacting their children by telephoning or text messaging them. Some were unable to do so because their cell phone batteries died or, more often, they did not own cell phones or know where their children were located. The distress and fear that these mothers felt when they initially separated from their children was reinforced if they found that they were unable to communicate by phone. They describe this distress using various idioms, including being ‘lost’ and ‘scared.’ On the other hand, mothers that were able to communicate by calling or text messaging them describe a sense of relief derived from the knowledge that their children evacuated from Wollaston safely. In this section, I describe the experiences of three mothers who were unable to contact their children, followed by three portrayals of mothers who were able to do so via phone.

Carol, a mother in her twenties, was working at a mine outside of Wollaston when her colleagues informed her that a fire and evacuation were taking place in town. She describes her reaction to the news: “I kind of got scared, confused, and lost because of my daughter. She was here [in Wollaston]. My parents were keeping her and I couldn’t communicate with my parents, my brother, nobody.” Carol recalls, “I was phoning my Mom’s [house] from the terminal in Points North. The phone was just ringing; I couldn’t get ahold of anybody, none of my family members.”

Patricia and Ruth also describe unsuccessful attempts to communicate with their children during the evacuation. Patricia found that, “there was no way to get ahold of him [her husband]. We had no cellphones.” Ruth, a mother in her sixties, recalls, “I had no money. I had no phone or a way, any way, of communicating.” This produced distress, as “I was worried, I was very worried. I was stressed, I was stressing myself out because my children like to drink.” The mothers’ inability to maintain contact with their children reinforced the feelings of anxiety elicited by the separation itself. They describe this distress using different terms, including being “scared,” “worried,” and “lost.” According to Becker (1999), potent metaphors serve to “make sense of suffering” (53). Carol’s description of feeling “lost” is an example of this sort of metaphor. This expression suggests that the norms that Carol associates with motherhood, likely relating to caregiving, were incompatible with the situation in which she found herself. Carol

was unable to act as guardian or caregiver in any capacity because of her inability to communicate with her family.

Three of the mothers with whom I spoke were able to contact their children through text messaging. These participants describe an alleviation of distress, which they attribute to this communication. Heather, a grandmother and the mother of three children who were in their teens and early twenties at the time of the displacement, evacuated from Wollaston with two of her grandchildren while her children and husband remained in Wollaston. She recalls that while she was in Prince Albert, “I couldn’t sleep [and] I couldn’t eat” while waiting to hear from her children. She recollects, “I think it was after two or three in the morning, I got a text, ‘We’re finally at Points North.’ So that was a big relief. So it was good then.”

Jennifer and Anna were also separated from their children. Unlike Heather, Jennifer and Anna were able to maintain contact with their children via text messaging throughout the separation. However, aspects of the separation were still challenging. Jennifer explains that, “of course me, as a mother, I have my two children on the other side of the community that I was worried about [at the beginning of the evacuation].” Jennifer and Anna’s access to communication prevented some of the distress relating to their children’s safety, as they knew that their children had vacated from Wollaston without incident. In addition, this communication enabled Jennifer to maintain her daughters’ well-being. When they informed her that they were hungry and had no access to food in Points North, Jennifer was able to respond by delivering food when she herself evacuated to Points North. Both Jennifer and Anna’s narratives also suggest they had some agency in regards to deciding when and with whom their children would evacuate. Aside from the initial “worry” that they describe experiencing at the start of the evacuation, the sense of being “lost” and “confused” that others recall is absent from Jennifer and Anna’s narratives. The lack of these metaphors suggests that the distress induced by the forest fire and emergency evacuation may have been more intense for mothers whose roles were disrupted through lack of contact.

3.2.3 Gathering Information

Carol, Michelle, and Patricia describe resorting to alternative means of connecting with their children when they found that communication by phone was unattainable. Their most common method was to attempt to gather information regarding their children’s location. All of the mothers eventually succeeded in doing this, allowing them an opportunity to begin to

organize their reunification. These mothers recall challenges relating to their inability to maintain and make decisions regarding their children's well-being. The prevalence of these concerns among this group likely relates to the length of time that they were separated from their children, as their estrangement lasted longer than that of the mothers that were able to contact their children by phone. In addition, it is likely that these mothers experienced or heard stories about the lack of food and seating at Points North, as well as the chaos that developed during the latter part of the evacuation out of Wollaston. The protracted duration of the separation, as well as the challenging conditions in Points North and Wollaston would likely have elicited increased concerns regarding their children's well-being.

Michelle's narrative highlights these challenges. As described above, she was separated from her seven-year-old daughter when she left Wollaston with her six-year-old daughter. After her family was divided and Michelle and her younger girl arrived in Points North, she tried to contact her family in order to locate her daughter. When that effort failed, she spent her time, "waiting patiently . . . there was at least three planes that got in and I was looking for my girl. There was no sign of her." Michelle describes becoming worried because the separation and lack of information regarding her daughter's location rendered her unable to keep her girl safe during the forest fire and evacuation. She feared that her daughter, "will probably get lost, probably she'll be left behind somewhere without anybody knowing." Eventually, Michelle and her six year old were brought to Prince Albert, where she resumed the search for her older child. She recalls, "Finally after three or four hours we got the word saying that my daughter was in Saskatoon with a bunch of people." Michelle's brother drove to Saskatoon to retrieve her. According to Michelle, "losing my girl . . . for a couple hours, it's the worst part" of the evacuation. In addition to the separation and her concern that her child would be left in Wollaston, Michelle expresses distress stemming from her inability to ensure that her daughter had food during the evacuation. She recalls that her daughter "told me that she was in a big plane with a bunch of people and she was hungry. So I hated that part, when she told me that she was hungry . . . She told me that she had to ask around for food . . . That really affected me." Her inability to meet the expectations that she associated with motherhood was clearly a source of great distress.

Helen also describes successfully locating her family. She was separated from her two sons and her common-law partner when she evacuated out of Wollaston with her younger

daughter. Although Helen does not describe refusing to separate from her sons, she does discuss the discomfort that the separation caused. One aspect of that discomfort is derived from Helen's inability to make decisions regarding her children's well-being. She explains, "Usually I'm a person that . . . has everything planned out . . . I look after my family and that's what they are used to and then putting us in a situation where it's like . . . we were kind of mindless almost." She continues, clarifying how, "as an adult, with my own kids [I] couldn't have control, didn't have control of what was going to happen. That's where I didn't like it."

When Helen's family was divided, she and her daughter were brought to Points North, where Helen began trying to locate her sons. She recollects, "pacing back and forth. I kept on going out and asking if my sons were going to be on the next plane . . . Nobody knew what was happening . . . We just sat around and every time a plane landed it was like we would go check." Helen was unable to find them, and she and her daughter were brought from Points North to Saskatoon, where she again attempted to locate her family. She did this by asking the organizers, "Do you know if my kids and my common-law are on the plane?" and "Where are they being sent?" According to Helen, "They were like, 'We don't know. We don't have the information.'" Helen responded by asking, "'Where can I get that information?' Then he says, 'We'll . . . try to find that information for you.' But they never did find it." Eventually, her sons and partner arrived in Saskatoon, where they registered at the evacuation center and then arranged to take a bus to Prince Albert. According to Helen, her sons and partner thought that Helen and her daughter had been evacuated to Prince Albert, rather than Saskatoon, and they planned to meet Helen and her daughter there. Helen recalls, "They came to register but nobody [referring to the organizers] told me [that] and they were just ready to leave to head to the bus depot. Then my daughter seen them, [and] said 'Hey!'" Helen describes a sense of relief when the family reunited, recalling, "That's when it's like, you know, [you] kind of feel like you take a deep breath."

Helen's narrative highlights two challenging aspects of her experience. One of these relates to her separation and inability to communicate with her estranged family members. She attempted, though unsuccessfully, to remedy this situation by asking organizers to help her locate her sons. The second challenge relates to her inability to make decisions regarding her family's well-being. Helen associates having "control of what was going to happen" with her role as a parent, and losing that control was stressful. The sense of relief, which she compares to the

feeling of taking “a deep breath,” was elicited when she reunited with her sons and was able to take them to stay at a hotel through the remainder of the evacuation.

Patricia also endeavored to locate her estranged family members. She describes her state of mind during the separation as being, “emotional for me, especially when I saw pictures on Facebook [of] like how close the fire was. Like it was really close and I was like, ‘I wonder where my girls are.’ Like they were behind me, just the next day. One day seemed like forever!” Patricia “wanted to know where they were at *exactly*” and “asked around, like, ‘Do you know whereabouts my husband is? Do you know where my girls are? Who is keeping after [them]?’” Similarly, Ruth recalls, “Nobody was telling me anything. I didn’t know what was going on and I was very stressed at the time because I worry too much and nobody told me where they [sons] were, too.” Ruth describes her reunion with one of her sons: “I was happy . . . That was the happiest moment, when I saw my son.”

Each of these mothers describes distress relating to being unable to communicate with their children. In addition to the separation, the mothers complain of being unable to ensure their children’s well-being. Most express their experiences of disruption using variations of idioms representing acute disruption, including ‘anxiety’ and a feeling of being ‘lost.’ The consistency of the sorts of distress that are described in response to the challenges elicited by the evacuation indicate that the evacuation disrupted some aspects of their “collectively shared image” (Becker 1999:7), or “interrelated systems of constructs” (Schwartz and Mead 1961:3) of motherhood.

3.3 Fathers’ Experiences

Out of the ten men that I interviewed, seven self-identified as fathers. Most of these men describe this role as having been disrupted when they became unable to protect their family home from fire and provide food for their children, as well as when they became unable to contact their children. As described above, mothers describe reacting to the challenges of family separation by working to reunite with their estranged children. Most fathers do not describe having done this, instead recalling coping with the separation by volunteering to help other community members. However, three fathers describe challenges that align more closely to those of mothers or adult children than those of other fathers, suggesting that the norms associated with fatherhood are not invoked in the same manner among all fathers. Rather, fathers that identify more strongly with other family roles describe the evacuation in terms of the ways that these other roles were disrupted.

3.3.1 Facilitating Well-Being

Jeffrey was returning home following a trip out of town when he was informed of the fire and evacuation. He states that he wanted to return to Wollaston to fight the fire, but was prohibited from flying into town because the airstrip was being used for the evacuation. Instead, he and his companions made arrangements to charter a floatplane that would land on a lake close to town. The group returned to Wollaston, where Jeffrey decided that, “I was going to fight the fire. If it came any closer to my house I was going to. I was going to start pulling hoses off their lines where they [firefighters] were running them and start working on my house.” Jeffrey also wanted to ensure that his family members would be safe while he guarded their home. He recalls, “standing on my house, getting up on the roof and seeing how far the fire would be and I thought to myself: If it’s coming any closer then I’m going to get my family out of here. You know, take them somewhere where they can be safe.” Eventually, his wife and children departed from Wollaston while Jeffrey stayed behind. He explains, “I thought it would be the best thing to do for them because I didn’t want them getting hurt in any way. For me . . . I would’ve fought it until I started burning. I guess that’s just the way I wanted to save my house.”

Throughout his narrative, Jeffrey engages with a belief, or “moral ideology” (Becker 1999:17), that he should be able to protect his family and their home from the fire. Initially, his ability to do this was challenged but he overcame this adversity by chartering a floatplane to take him home. This was risky because, as Jeffrey was informed by a resource officer, “If you came in on your own we can’t evacuate you. You have to stay here.” This understanding, coupled with his statement that, “I would’ve fought it until I started burning” indicates the degree to which he, as a father, harbors a sense of responsibility to protect his family and their home.

Robert also describes being protectively concerned about his family’s home. After they were evacuated, Robert stayed behind because, “I had to watch the house because there was nobody at my house at that time.” Paul and Daniel describe similar concerns. Paul explains, “I was worried about what was happening at [my] home,” referring to his concern that his home would be burglarized during the evacuation. Daniel also remarks, “I’d rather stay behind because someone had broke into my house,” though he was barred from staying in Wollaston during the evacuation.

In addition to protecting the family home, fathers express concerns relating to their inability to maintain their family members’ physical well-being during the evacuation. Jeffrey

explains, “I was just more worried that they would have a roof over their head to sleep. And a place to eat.” As noted earlier, when Matthew’s estranged family members informed him that they were hungry and unable to obtain food in Points North, he responded by trying, though unsuccessfully, to get food to them. Each of these fathers highlights concerns relating to their family members’ well-being, both in terms of protecting the family home and ensuring their physical safety and comfort. Their focus on these concerns suggests that they identify providing for and protecting family members as being aspects of their roles within their families.

3.3.2 Family Separation

The fathers also express their disapproval of their separation from and inability to communicate with family members. Unlike most of the mothers, the fathers describe responding to the separation by focusing on assisting other community members. For example, Christopher was separated from his son and grandchildren. Although both he and his son were evacuated to Saskatoon, Christopher was not able to contact him until two days into the evacuation. He explains, “It took me a while to [contact him] . . . It took me about two days to talk to him. Find out how they were doing.” Christopher recalls being worried about his son, explaining, “I was [worried], yeah. Especially because they were staying right, kind of right in the city too.” Christopher was concerned, “For him taking off by himself, my granddaughter taking off. Stuff like that. She’s just a little girl. She might be curious.”

Unlike most of the mothers, the fathers describe responding to the separation by focusing on assisting other community members. Christopher states: “When I found out that I had to do some security with these guys too, I thought to myself that, well, I guess I’m stuck here so I can’t do anything more about that.” Jeffrey also sought, “Not to think about it as much . . . I was just trying to figure out what to do in town, here, and how to stop the fire.” These fathers’ concerns for the well-being of their loved ones indicate that while the separation caused distress, their method of coping involved engagement with a “moralizing impulse” (Becker 1999:17) to protect. Although they found separation from their children to be challenging, they coped by focusing on the needs of the community.

3.3.3 Fathers with Unique Challenges

Three of the fathers describe challenges that align with other roles within the family. Both Robert’s and Daniel’s narratives highlight concerns for family members that bear more similarities to those of adult children than those of the other fathers. Their identification with the

role of adult child likely relates to their ages - both were in their twenties at the time of the evacuation, younger than most of the other fathers. Their narratives are addressed in greater detail in the following section.

Steven's experience also stands out among the fathers, as the challenges that he describes resemble mothers' descriptions more closely than those of the other fathers. Like the mothers, Steven describes distress stemming from his inability to communicate with his son during the first part of the evacuation, as well as his powerlessness to make decisions regarding his son's care and well-being. This situation developed, according to Steven, because his son was brought to the evacuation center in Wollaston without his knowledge. When he realized that his son was missing, he went looking for him, asking other community members if they had seen him. Eventually, he asked his brother: "I said, 'Have you seen my son?' He told me, 'He got on a bus with those people.' I said, 'Okay,' and then I asked him, 'Do you know where they took him?' He said, 'Yeah, high school.' So I went there," where he reunited with his son. Steven recalls that, "those people [the organizers] were driving around picking up people and the bus was driving around too, picking up people, and they took them to the high school and had them sit there for a while until the planes came." Steven describes being worried about his son during their period of separation. He explains, "I was kind of upset because they didn't ask me or anything like that. Without my consent, kind of thing . . . So they kind of took him. I was kind of upset about that."

Like the mothers, Steven describes concerns for his son's well-being during the early stages of the evacuation. He recalls that, "When I got to him, he was just crying . . . I guess he was kind of scared about all fire around us." Steven had been unable to comfort his son during the separation, and was "afraid for" him. He explains, "I wasn't afraid but I was kind of like afraid for my son because he was crying." Steven consoled his son, "I told him, 'It's okay, we'll be okay.'" Much like the mothers of young children described above, Steven expresses a desire to be with his son, to be able to make decisions regarding his child's whereabouts, and to maintain his son's physical and emotional well-being. He became "upset" because he was unable to behave in this manner. The similarities between Steven's description and those of the mothers suggests that these themes may be characteristic of individuals acting as the primary guardian to a child.

3.4 Adult Children

Four participants describe being challenged in their abilities to meet the expectations associated with their relationships with their parents or grandparents. Thomas is a male in his early twenties who was separated from his father when his father chose to remain in Wollaston while the rest of their family evacuated. He recalls, “My main concern was my dad because my dad said that he wasn’t going to go and he’s getting pretty old and I started to worry about him.” In addition, “I couldn’t get ahold of him, no matter what . . . I was worried about my Dad who stayed behind.” Their separation lasted roughly four days, until Thomas’s father drove from Wollaston to Saskatoon to join his family. When Thomas finally reunited with his father, he “felt relieved.”

Robert was also separated from his parents. Although he does not complain of being unable to communicate with them, his discomfort with the separation is evident. Robert phoned his mother as soon as he could to arrange a reunion. He recollects, “I got there [to Saskatoon], contacted my Mom. Then I went to the bus depot, went on the bus to see my mom and dad. It was like a day and half for me to see my mom and my, my daughter too.” He explains his rationale for organizing the reunion: “I had to . . . think about my child and my ex too at that time. My mom, my dad, everybody, and then [I] didn’t felt safe so I just took off to PA . . . I just went there, [to] see my family there.” Like Thomas, Robert expresses a sense of relief derived from the reunion, explaining that he “felt safe, good, happy. I felt more independent.” He describes feeling “more myself there . . . I felt happy and, you know, my family’s okay.”

Catherine, a mother in her twenties, also complains of being separated from her parents during the evacuation. She, her son, and her grandmother were evacuated to Prince Albert while her parents were evacuated to Saskatoon. Like Thomas, Catherine was challenged in that she was unable to maintain contact with her family members. She recalls that she, “couldn’t get ahold of my Mom and I was just worried because I’m the oldest and I - of course I’d be worried about my family . . . [I] didn’t hear nothing at all, just no communication whatsoever.” In addition to the challenge of being unable to communicate with her parents, Catherine felt responsible for caring for her grandmother. At the evacuation center, Catherine’s elderly grandmother “was cold. She only had . . . one blanket, *her* blanket, that’s all she had.” Catherine aided her grandmother by requesting more blankets, and then she left the center to pick up supplies for her and her son. When she returned, “my grandma’s gone . . . and I asked Red

Cross where they put her and they were like, ‘Oh, we’re sending her an hour and twenty minutes out of PA to a group home.’” Catherine, “was just so worried and like [wondering] where’s grandma and who’s with her . . . Nobody would tell me anything.” Catherine was unable to communicate with her grandmother after she was taken to the group home, and requested that the organizers “set up something, a hotel room for me to take care of her.” However, the organizers refused. Soon after Catherine returned to Wollaston following the evacuation, she was informed that, “Grandma’s gone.” Catherine’s grandmother had died in the group home in Prince Albert shortly after asking, “for my dad. But he couldn’t get to her because we were all stuck in different places.” Catherine describes distress stemming from these events, explaining that she is, “still angry about how nobody was with her.” Her narrative suggests that she believes that her family’s inability to properly communicate, coupled with her separation from her parents and grandmother, contributed to a devastating situation that culminates with her grandmother dying alone.

Daniel’s experience was unique, as he was able to maintain phone contact with his mother during the separation, and he perceives this contact as contributing to, rather than alleviating, her distress. The evacuation took place during a “very bad . . . year” for Daniel, involving problems relating to alcohol abuse. His family “were just worried about me” at the time. He states: “I wish I could go back in time,” to avoid causing his mother distress. His perspective is distinctive among the adult children, as he attributes his mother’s suffering to his own actions. However, like the other adult children, his expressions of regret indicate that he perceives his role within his family as being influential to his mother’s well-being. In addition, Daniel’s narrative offers a poignant example of the ways that existing risk factors, such as alcohol abuse, are carried into evacuation narratives.

Each of the adult children describe wanting to be with, or at least to communicate with, their parents, and they express concerns for their parents or grandparents’ well-being. This theme is perhaps most evident in Catherine’s narrative, but it is apparent in Thomas’ and Daniel’s narratives as well. As adult children, these individuals maintain a sense of responsibility to communicate with and ensure their parents’ and grandparents’ well-being. The consistency of these themes among the adult children is likely reflective of a “collectively shared image” (Becker 1999:7) regarding the upward generational expectations associated with adult children.

3.5 Guardians

During the evacuation, some community members took on care-giving roles that were outside of their normal roles, for example as guardians to children that had been separated from their parents or grandparents. Diane, a mother in her thirties, and Christopher, are two participants that fall into this category. Both explain their adopted roles as attempts to mediate a child's experiences of disruption relating to family separation. Diane, for example, cared for her roommate's daughter, whom she encountered while waiting to evacuate from the local high school gymnasium. Diane recollects, "This little seven-year-old girl, my friend's daughter, I had to take her because . . . her family were all gone too. Because if I didn't take her, nobody else was gonna take her." Diane, as well as the mothers described above, believes that mothers should act as the primary guardian to their children. Diane was willing to take on this role for her roommate's daughter, but only until she was able to reunite the girl with her family, restoring the appropriate family dynamic.

Christopher describes acting as guardian to his nephews for similar reasons. He recalls encountering his seventeen-year-old nephews when he arrived at the evacuation center in Saskatoon. According to Christopher, "I had a couple of my nephews that got out of hand because they weren't with their parents." He "took care of my nephews because their mom wasn't there." Christopher suggests that this situation is remedied in future evacuations, as "it's best to keep families together . . . It just makes it easier for everybody." He recommends that the organizers "should hook [kids] up with their parents" and he attributes the trouble that his nephews caused when they got "out of hand" as being "because they weren't with their parents." Like Diane, Christopher was willing to take on a guardianship of parentless children. However, both participants' explanations of why the separation was inappropriate indicate that they, like the family members described above, attribute the distress that many individuals experienced during the evacuation as being related to family fragmentation.

3.6 Conclusion

Many of the Wollaston evacuees with whom I spoke experienced distress during the forest fire and evacuation, attributed to disrupted family roles. Most of the mothers recall reacting to the proposed separation from their children by refusing to separate from them. When this was ineffective, the mothers attempted to contact their children through telephoning or text messaging. Those that succeeded in communicating with their children recall experiencing a

sense of relief. Those that were unable to communicate by phone recall distress, which they describe using a variety of idioms, including ‘worry,’ ‘stress,’ and feeling ‘lost.’ All of the mothers eventually succeeded in locating and reuniting with their children.

Fathers were similarly challenged by the separation from their families, though they recall responding to the disruption by volunteering to help fellow community members. In addition, some describe challenges relating to protecting their family’s home and their children’s physical well-being by providing them with food. Three fathers describe challenges that correlate to those of adult children or mothers, rather than those of the other fathers. Adult children recall experiencing a variety of difficulties during the evacuation, but most express challenges relating to communication with parents, as well as concerns for their parents’ well-being. Finally, guardians took on care-giving roles for children that were separated from their parents. The recollections and reflections that these participants express indicate that they perceive the difficulties of the evacuation to be largely rooted in the division of families, and the coinciding disruptions to family roles. In addition, these recollections are indicative of a desire to support fellow community members by helping them throughout the separation.

Chapter 4: Expectations and Responsibilities

4.1 Introduction

In addition to challenges to community members' senses of well-being, Wollaston evacuees' narratives of emergency evacuation highlight the ways that their expectations concerning how the situation should have been handled were not met. These unmet expectations are contextualized both morally and temporally. According to Garro and Mattingly (2000), "In telling stories narrators moralize the events they recount and seek to convince others to see some part of reality in a particular way" (11). Wollaston evacuees discuss this morality as they reflect on their expectations.

Comparisons are also temporal, of course, drawing on past encounters with wildfire and emergency evacuation, and offering recommendations for more appropriate ways of handling these occurrences in the future. This temporal dimension is characteristic of healing narratives, as, according to Garro (2000), "past events are reconstructed in a manner congruent with current understandings; the present is explained with reference to the reconstructed past; and both are used to generate expectations about the future" (70). Evacuees refer to both personal and shared memories of similar events in their recollections of the 2011 evacuation. According to Garro and Mattingly (2000), narrative "is a mode of thinking that marries singular circumstances with shared expectations and understandings acquired through participation in a specific culture" (24). These shared expectations, as well as notions of right and wrong and past experiences, are reflected in evacuees' identifications of responsible parties, as well as in their recommendations for future evacuations. These proposals include, for example, Paul's suggestion that emergency management personnel improve evacuation plans to avoid recreating the chaos and distress that characterized the 2011 evacuation.

In this chapter, I outline community members' descriptions of their expectations in regards to the fire and evacuation, focusing on the moral and temporal dimensions of their narratives. These expectations are divisible into three categories, distinguished by theme. These groupings are: (1) expectations regarding forest fire and evacuation prevention; (2) expectations regarding organization during the evacuation; and (3) expectations regarding treatment from host communities.

4.2 Forest Fire and Evacuation Prevention

Expectations regarding forest fire and evacuation prevention focus, in large part, on community vulnerabilities. According to Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (2002),

The conjunction of a human population and a potentially destructive agent does not inevitably produce a disaster. A disaster becomes unavoidable in the context of a historically produced pattern of ‘vulnerability,’ evidenced in the location, infrastructure, sociopolitical organization, production and distribution systems, and ideology of a society. A society’s pattern of vulnerability is a core element of a disaster. (3)

Discussions of vulnerabilities feature both moral and temporal dimensions. In terms of morality, a recurring theme in evacuees’ narratives is the belief that the forest fire and subsequent evacuation were avoidable, and responsible parties could and should have reduced local vulnerability to forest fires. In regards to temporality, community members situate their understandings of fire prevention in relation to past experiences with fire hazards, and make recommendations for the handling of fires in the future. Expressions of these themes are consistent among men and women, though, notably, the degree to which community members describe their dismay in relation to past experiences with forest fires varies by age: older people exclusively compare the fire in 2011 to forest fires that they had experienced in the past. In the following sections, I outline community members’ descriptions of vulnerabilities, unmet expectations, and attributions of accountability, highlighting the moral and temporal aspects of their narratives, as well as distinguishing the characteristics of Elders’ narratives from those of younger community members.

4.2.1 *“Let it Burn” and Fighting the Forest Fire*

Many community members state that the evacuation should have been prevented. Their explanations are associated with attributions of responsibility, or blame, directed either towards fellow community members or the provincial government. Notably, community members do not attribute responsibility to the federal government, despite the involvement of federal agents, including the Royal Canadian Air Force and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. This may be because community members worked with the province to coordinate the evacuation, and therefore view the provincial government as being primarily responsible for the proceedings.

Three individuals identify fellow residents as bearing some responsibility to extinguish the fire, and failing to do so. Jennifer, for example, explains,

From the moment of the fire starting on that hill in the west - southwest - of the community, that could have been prevented. That could have been protected. It was only a few kilometers away and nobody - everybody just watched it grow and it just threatened our community.

Patricia similarly states, “Not much was done to prevent anything; just evacuation. Emergency evacuation was just called for.” She suggests that the Rangers, who are members of a chapter of local part-time reservists, as well as other community members, should have fought the fire. She explains that if, “all the Rangers and the community came together, the ones that are well and able to fight the fire together, then maybe it shouldn’t like - maybe the fire could’ve been prevented to come closer and closer.”

Anna, an Elder, reiterates the idea that the evacuation was preventable. She explains, “[If] the people had taken action on their own, it wouldn’t have happened.” She contextualizes her explanation by suggesting that community members have developed a harmful degree of reliance on the provincial government, making Wollaston more vulnerable to wildfires than the community otherwise would have been. She recalls that residents “were waiting . . . [for] the provincial [government] to do something about it right away. But, like I said, if the community had taken action right away, we wouldn’t have gotten out of hand because there was still time, daylight.” She recommends that, “people in the community need to learn how to take care of each other and take action right away.” She also situates her narrative in relation to experiences that she and her husband have had with past forest fires, explaining, “If it was [a] long time ago [and the fire was] that close, people were trying to [do] something.” She reiterates her husband’s reaction to the evacuation: “My husband was saying that . . . ‘When I was young . . . I would’ve tried [to] do something right away.’” Anna restates her disapproval of the community’s reliance of the provincial government, claiming that it has, “got to the point where they [community members] depend on others to do something for them,” rather than taking on responsibility to put out the fire themselves, as they would have done in the past.

Others describe prevention in relation to the accountability of the provincial government, both in reference to failing to extinguish the fire earlier and the “Let it Burn” policy. Residents both fault this policy for an evacuation that they see as being preventable, and are angered that the way the policy was implemented created an unnecessary vulnerability.

Christopher, for example, recalls how, “We all knew that it could have been prevented too. Most of us that were looking at it and said, ‘The fire’s gonna start, pretty soon it’s gonna

[get] big – bigger. It's so close.” Christopher's narrative suggests that he views himself and fellow community members as being primarily responsible for extinguishing the fire. However, the circumstances restricted them from doing so. According to Christopher, the fire developed “during the break up ice,” and consequently, “there's no way you can get to there to [fight the fire]. You can't get there on the Ski-doo or even on a boat” because the ice obstructed boats from reaching the fire and was too thin to withstand the passage of a Ski-doo. Christopher suggests that, “the only way you could have got to it was [to] bring in a fire plane or something to take it out.” Because, according to Christopher, access to planes that can be used to fight fires is restricted to the provincial government, the province harbored the responsibility to extinguish the blaze. He explains, “It was preventable, like I said earlier. It could have been prevented from happening . . . They could have just brought in their planes and we would have never had that situation.” Specifically, he suggests that the provincial government responded to the fire too slowly, “it took too long for them to show up and then, by then, it was already grown . . . I mean it started up and it was too big to handle now for a fire plane.” Christopher concludes by offering recommendations for future evacuations, stating, “That's said and done already so hopefully sometime in the future if something like that ever happens again somebody would rather act on it than to end up with the consequences in the end.”

Like Christopher, Paul complains that the government's attempts to extinguish the fire were insufficient. He explains, “They could have got the fire out but they didn't. All they did was drop fire retardant on it and they left . . . If they stayed a little longer, maybe water bombed it or something, maybe they could have [extinguished the fire].” Both Christopher and Paul highlight their unmet expectations regarding the role of the provincial government in fighting the fire, focusing on the government's failure to act in a timely and effective manner.

Community members also suggest that the “Let it Burn” policy restricted their ability to protect the community and the surrounding land. Christopher suggests that provincial policy renders Wollaston vulnerable to the deleterious effects of the forest fire. He explains that fire fighters “can't do much if the paper [policy] says you can't. But the paper should also say that . . . [if] you're *so* close to a community, that you definitely should put out that fire.” Matthew, a former Chief, reiterates this point; “they [government officials] said, ‘Nope, it's provincial policy.’ ‘Let it Burn’ policy kicks in . . . and when that kicked in and then it burned the whole reserve [area surrounding the community]. And they still didn't touch it.” Helen similarly

states: “I hope the provincial government will do something about it now because if they didn’t have that ‘Let it Burn’ policy, that wouldn’t have happened.”

Ruth, an Elder, echoes these frustrations, as she references her past experiences with forest fires. She recalls,

I’ve been through tragedies in my life and I’ve experienced fires in the past but there used to be people that fight, fought the fires before it got worse but now why is it [that] they let it get - why is the SERM [Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management] just letting it burn?

She engages with her understanding of the community’s relationship with the government, integrating her interpretation of the province’s view of the local land. She states, “the reason why I ask these questions . . . is because I know in the past . . . I’ve seen fires but never let the fire go that far. But I noticed now [that] they don’t seem to care about our land.” Christopher, Matthew, Ruth, and Helen’s descriptions of their dissatisfaction with “Let it Burn” indicate the incongruity between community members’ perceptions of the proper way to handle the fire, and provincial policy.

In addition, Ruth’s comments in particular suggest that some believe that the provincial government places less value on “our land” than land inhabited by non-Aboriginal people. Anna makes a similar point, as she explains, “If this was a resort, like a tourist camp or something, I’m pretty sure the . . . provincial [government] . . . would take action right away.” She suggests that the limitations imposed by “Let it Burn” were inappropriate, as the province waited too long to fight the fire. She explains, “because they were doing that [fighting the fire] but it took . . . I don’t know how . . . long it took for them to start doing that.” Thus, these participants view the province’s response to the blaze as being the product of the government’s view of the value of land used by this community, versus the value of land used by non-Aboriginal groups.

4.2.2 Road out of Wollaston

Some also suggest that the government’s failure to finish building a road leading out of Wollaston left them vulnerable to hazards. Jennifer recalls that the evacuation occurred during “break up season.” She explains, “We live in the bay and there was ice all over . . . We were boxed in [and] people were asking, ‘Who’s got a boat?’ And the boat has really no use because there’s a big chunk of ice out in the open. Nowhere to run.” However, according to Jennifer, the evacuation “could have been prevented if we had all [year] road access to the world, I’ll say, like [to] other communities . . . They could have fled the community.” Matthew suggests that the

money that was spent on the evacuation would have been better spent on a road leading out of Wollaston. He explains, “Nobody’s giving us an answer [regarding] how much does it [the evacuation] cost because if it’s going to be in the millions, I said, ‘You could have built a road for that’ . . . We could have had a road here easy, with that kind of money.” Among these community members, the evacuation represents an unnecessary and expensive hardship, caused, at least in part, by the failure of the provincial government to finish building a road leading out of Wollaston.

Thus, community members expected fire and evacuation prevention and express disappointment that they were forced to undergo the challenges of the evacuation. They identify specific vulnerabilities including the “Let it Burn” policy, overreliance on the provincial government, and the lack of a road leading out of Wollaston as contributing to the potential for disaster. Blame directed towards fellow community members, or to the provincial and federal governments, emphasize community members’ moral perceptions regarding the proper ways that responsible parties should have behaved. These perceptions are based, at least in part, on experiences with previous fires.

4.3 Organization during the Evacuation

Many community members state that the evacuation from Wollaston to Prince Albert and Saskatoon was chaotic and disorganized. Their narratives highlight the incongruities between their expectations regarding coordination, personal agency, and notifications regarding evacuation plans, and their experiences. Most suggest that the responsibility for these aspects of the evacuation lies with ‘the organizers,’ a generalized term used to refer to those often unspecified individuals or groups (e.g., the provincial government, the Chief and Council) that they view as being responsible for coordinating the response to the fire and evacuation, whether or not they observed these individuals acting in this role at the time. Discussions regarding the coordination of social services within the evacuation centers are varied, focusing on met as well as unmet expectations, as well as gratitude and culpability. In the following sections, I begin by examining themes relating to evacuees’ departure from Wollaston, followed by an examination of issues relating to time spent in the evacuation centers in Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

4.3.1 Chaos during the Evacuation

Research regarding experiences of chaos during disasters is limited. As Doughty (1999) concludes, “Aside from their sensational aspects, the human conditions that result from calamity

receive little continuing attention despite the fact that it is exactly these conditions that actually define the disaster” (235). The sort of narrative analysis that I engage in is common in medical anthropology (i.e., Mattingly 2000, 2010; Pollock 2000), though largely absent from disaster anthropology. This is likely due, at least in part, to the methodological complications inherent to disaster research. As Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (2002) point out, “Disasters rarely conform to personal, academic, or funding agency schedules” (13). In addition, “Researchers rarely enjoy the flexibility necessary . . . to undertake long-term research on a rapid-onset disaster” (13). Instead, many researchers approach disasters using a historical (i.e., García-Acosta 2002; Sheets 1999) or political-ecology approach (i.e., Bolin and Stanford 1999; Dyer 2002), as these frameworks allow for a greater focus on secondary sources, rather than on interviews. As such, researchers using these frameworks are not as restricted logistically, as those conducting narrative analysis.

Despite these challenges, Gregory Button’s (2010) book, *Disaster Culture: Knowledge and Uncertainty in the Wake of Human and Environmental Catastrophe*, has proved to be informative, particularly in regards to developing understandings of the ways that the “information vacuum” (11) and lack of control affect evacuation experiences. In his publication, Button outlines seven ethnographic case studies, including the 2010 BP oil spill, Hurricane Katrina, and 9/11, among others. Button suggests that credible information is often unavailable during and following disasters. This absence “can create individual and community-wide stress and result in a lack of effective coordination between responding organizations (11). In addition, he suggests that this lack of information facilitates discourses of blame and responsibility, as these are used as coping strategies and ways of making sense of victims’ experiences. Button (2009) also suggests that disaster victims’ “perceived loss of control becomes a central issue in the social construction of the events” (266). This loss of control is heightened “by the perception of sociocultural disorganization, or social chaos, that follows these events” (266). Wollaston evacuees’ narratives are consistent with Button’s findings, as they highlight the ways that inadequate coordination, lack of information, and lack of control contributed to a pervasive sense of chaos throughout the evacuation.

4.3.1.1 Poor Coordination

One of the most common complaints that community members express is that the evacuation was chaotic, contrary to an expectation that it would be executed in a well-ordered

and systematic fashion. Discussions relating to lack of organization focus on a general sense of confusion and disorder, the separation of children from their parents, and inappropriate sequencing of evacuees. Community members suggest that organizers' failures to evacuate Wollaston in an orderly manner made them vulnerable to the problems that arose during the evacuation. They focus on this sense of disarray in their descriptions of the journey from Wollaston to Saskatoon and Prince Albert, concentrating on recollections of their time spent waiting in the gymnasium at the local high school. Steven, for instance, describes the scene in the gymnasium as, "chaos . . . That's the best way to describe it, chaos." Helen expresses her disappointment in the organizers' handling of the confusion in the gymnasium: "I thought . . . [it] was [going to be] all organized and everybody was going to be [organized], but then it wasn't like that." Paul similarly explains, "I mean the evacuation wasn't all that - it was very chaotic. Nothing was in place for . . . that massive evacuation and there was a lot of chaos going on." Paul faults the organizers, and offers recommendations for future evacuations. He explains,

Those people up there, up in the office there, [need] to get a better system going and then people wouldn't have to go through what we went through . . . If it was more organized, it probably would have made people feel a little better. But it wasn't, you know? So I wasn't too happy with that.

As described in chapter three, a key factor that narrators identify as having contributed to this sense of disarray pertains to complaints about the sequencing of evacuees. Many community members assert that the organizers were wrong to separate children from their parents, and to evacuate their own families from Wollaston before other families. This Dene sensibility regarding the centrality of family is ethnographically supported (i.e., Goulet 1998, Sharp 1979, Smith 1981, Van Stone 1963), and contrasts with the circumstances of the evacuation. Christopher engages with this understanding, explaining, "That's the one mixed up thing that maybe should be addressed sometime, if it ever does happen again. Trying to keep the families together." Anna expresses a similar sentiment, asking, "Why would you say kids have to go now, when their parents are not . . . with them?" Jeffrey elaborates,

The way the evacuation was taking place was: 'Okay, this mother and her two babies are going to go on this plane.' 'Well, what about my other kids?' 'What about my ten-year-old kid that's over here?' 'What about my fifteen-year-old that's over there?' 'Don't worry, he'll be taken care of!' So they're flown to Prince Albert but their kids are flown to Saskatoon! For what? No supervision, nothing! I mean, that's asking for a disaster if they do that again.

By failing to consider the importance of family in community members' social lives, the organizers rendered community members vulnerable to significant distress. Community members expected that the organizers would account for the importance that most locals place on family roles and family unity, and were disappointed when they found that these values were not taken into consideration by organizers.

Another problem associated with evacuation sequencing relates to perceptions of favoritism and organizers' failure to prioritize vulnerable groups. Helen, for example, recalls being brought from the high school gymnasium to one of the airport terminals in Wollaston and finding that, "the person that was working at the terminal, they had their families out first." She suggests that, although favoritism is not remarkable in general, the context of emergency evacuation warrants distinct expectations. She explains, "I guess it's like that everywhere but then I didn't like it, especially in an emergency basis." Diane also recalls similar chaos in the airport terminal in Wollaston:

By that time I got there, it was - it didn't matter - first come first served. People were just cutting each others off, it didn't matter what age you were, people were at the airport in that little terminal . . . There was people outside and inside there, just trying to, whatever can make it through, they just . . . want on the plane. It didn't matter, just go.

According to Anna, a consequence of the chaos of the evacuation was that the Elders waited in Points North for longer than they should have. She explains that they, "should've been gone long time ago . . . down there South, somewhere, but they were still there." She states, "People that was organizing it should know . . . who should go and who was there longer, you know, instead of people, 'I wanna get on, I wanna get on.' You know, just pushing themselves, you know. Older people, to me, like [were] helpless." According to Anna and other community members, Elders warrant special considerations, both because of their status in the community, and because of health concerns. In failing to consider this aspect of community sociality, the organizers rendered the Elders vulnerable to the challenges that Anna describes.

Thus, a recurring theme in the narratives described in this section is community members' disappointment with the organizers' failure to execute an evacuation that was orderly and considerate of the physical and social factors that contributed to the challenges of the evacuation, as described in chapters two and three. In particular, they express concerns for

Elders, and concerns that the evacuation was not executed in a way that was fair to all community members.

4.3.1.2 Lack of Information

In discussing their expectations for the evacuation, some community members compare their difficulties obtaining accurate information to those of refugees being evacuated from war zones. This is due, in part, to the Royal Canadian Air Force's engagement in the evacuation process, as military helicopters were used to evacuate residents when the smoke surrounding the local airstrip became too thick for planes to fly. In addition, 'Hercules' military planes were used to transport some community members from Points North to Saskatoon and Prince Albert. As Heather describes, "It was like, like being in the movies, like in a war. Like because they have those army guys running around and . . . they had that big Hercules."

In this section, I highlight narrators' references to the refugee analogy in regards to lack of information, and then focus more generally on expectations regarding communication, specifically in relation to recollections of waiting to evacuate from Wollaston. Many complain that the organizers failed to tell them when they would be leaving Wollaston and Points North, and where they would be going. Helen, for example, compares her experience of "uncertainty" due to lack of information with the confusion that she attributes to refugee experiences. She explains, "It's just that uncertainty, it's just like . . . [the organizers thought that] it doesn't matter . . . We don't need to inform them." This ambiguity "reminded me of those war zones . . . like, overseas." Heather similarly recalls, "thinking that it was just like a war zone here. The only way I got information was through Facebook." By comparing their experiences to the extreme conditions that they associate with the plights of non-combatants living in combat zones, community members highlight the gravity of the distress that they experienced.

For many community members, experiences of chaos relating to lack of information began in the local high school gymnasium. Helen describes expecting that the local organizers would take on a stronger leadership role while evacuees waited in the gym. She recalls, "We got [to] the school and then they say, 'So where are we going?' and everybody is like, 'I don't know' and I said, 'Who do you talk to here?' and they were like, 'I don't know.'" Diane recalls walking into the gym and finding that,

They [evacuees] were just sitting there staring at each other wondering . . . what's going on because nobody knew. Like everybody had questions and nobody had

answers . . . It wasn't coordinated right . . . Like you ask someone [what was going on and they replied], 'Oh ask this person,' like giving us the runaround.

Michelle also recollects, "waiting for information, like . . . what time we're leaving and which plane we're going to take. But instead, they didn't say anything. They told us just to wait and the kids were just all over the place . . . It was just a big chaos."

A similar sense of disorder and lack of communication characterizes descriptions of the time that community members spent waiting in the airport terminal in Wollaston. Helen explains, "We went to the terminal buildings and I said, 'So who do we talk to?'" but no one was able to give Helen an answer. Paul discusses local organizers' failure to inform community members of their plans: "I asked somebody over here [in Wollaston] something and 'I don't know' . . . 'Cause nobody knew what was happening." In the future, "they need a better system in place for something like that, evacuation."

One community member, Carol, also recalls receiving insufficient information regarding the evacuation while she was working at a mine outside of Wollaston: "The only way I found out [about the evacuation] was . . . [through people at the mine,] they like to talk. And radio, MBC [Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation] radio . . . That's how I found out." Carol expected more communication, and expresses dissatisfaction with the amount that she received, describing it as, "Not helpful. It wasn't helpful. Not enough information of what was going on." She expresses her discontent, explaining, "It should have been that way [more information] instead of just hearing this and that."

Thus, the challenges of the evacuation are understood, at least in part, as the result of organizers' failures to meet evacuees' needs by providing adequate information in the high school gymnasium and at the local airport terminal. Carol describes her experience as being uniquely challenging because she was unable to communicate with her parents, who were caring for her daughter at the time. Because descriptions regarding lack of communication and family roles are addressed in detail in the previous chapter, they are not explored in depth in this section. However, it is relevant to note that expectations and designations of responsibility regarding family separation are similar to the other expectations and attributions described in this section, in that community members express their unmet expectations temporally, as they make recommendations for future evacuations. They also express their expectations morally, as they describe their understandings of the proper way to organize communications during evacuations.

In addition, some community members refer to an understanding of the refugee experience as a point of comparison in telling their narratives.

4.3.1.3 Lack of Control

The evacuees depended on the organizers to develop a safe and well-ordered evacuation, and were disappointed to find that their experiences did not align with this expectation. However, they also recall disappointments relating to their ability to retain some degree of agency, or control, throughout the evacuation. The presence of these seemingly contradictory expectations suggests that evacuees wanted the organizers to manage an orderly evacuation for the community, while allowing for individuals to decide how and to what extent they would participate in these proceedings. In this section, I describe complaints regarding agency, beginning with recollections of being informed that an evacuation would be underway, and extending through to descriptions of waiting in Points North. I highlight a narrative that engages with the refugee analogy described in the previous section, as it is reflective of the sorts of “vibrant . . . metaphor[s]” that Hoffman (2007:113) suggests characterize disaster narratives.

One of the issues that community members raise relates to their inability to decide whether or not to evacuate from Wollaston. According to Paul, “Somebody came knocking on the door and they said, ‘You have to leave now,’ which was already ten o’clock at night and I wasn’t quite happy with that.” Paul’s account of his displeasure indicates that he expected some degree of agency in the decision to evacuate. He recalls how an organizer, “come in here and he says, ‘You have to go.’ Literally, ‘You have to go.’ Didn’t give me a choice whether I wanted to stay or not.” Matthew similarly protests the way that community members were informed that they would have to evacuate. He explains, “Some of them were arrested, or were threatened to be arrested if they don’t leave the house . . . RCMP went door to door . . . and some of them were dragged, pretty much physically moved out of the house.” He describes the proceedings as, “Very unnecessary. I didn’t think that was appropriate.”

Recalling her youth, Helen compares the lack of individual agency during the evacuation to her time spent in a residential school. She explains, “I’ve heard cases where . . . they had people where the government just came in and took them, just like there is in residential school - that uncertainty and no control, no nothing.” By referencing residential schooling, Helen links her narrative to a broader narrative in Canada, which is one that recognizes residential schooling as misguided and immoral (Miller 1996). In drawing such an analogy, she introduces a moral

dimension to her narrative, as well as indicating the severity of the distress that the evacuation caused her. She recalls, “Even being there all those years, it wasn’t as bad [as the evacuation] because there I was a kid . . . Here, as an adult, with my own kids [I] couldn’t have control . . . That’s where I didn’t like it.” It is possible that, in addition to residential schooling, some residents draw on a shared history of forced separation that likely occurred during the tuberculosis epidemic of the first half of the twentieth century. However, no confirmatory data are available, as there was no local health center in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the community began developing, and the practice of separating individuals from their families and communities for tuberculosis treatments ended shortly thereafter (Plamondon and Daudelin 2012; Waldram et al. 2006).

Residents that describe issues of control in the high school gymnasium and the airport terminal in Wollaston largely focus on the separation of community members from family members. As described in chapter three, many of the evacuation narratives include descriptions of a sense of dismay attributed to this separation, as well as an expectation that local organizers would account for existing family roles. They designate responsibility to the organizers for inadequately considering these roles.

After being told that they had to evacuate, and then waiting in the high school gymnasium in Wollaston, many community members were brought to Points North, where they remained for extended periods of time. Heather, for example, describes how she and her daughter, “waited in Points North probably like thirty hours.” Some waited on a damaged Hercules plane for an extended period of time because of a collision between the plane’s wing and the airport terminal. Jennifer recalls her sister’s description of her experience waiting on the aircraft until a second Hercules became available: “Engines are going; they’re breathing the toxic fumes. They said it was so bad. My sister was so frustrated and they couldn’t do anything.” Jennifer engages with the refugee analogy to describe her sister’s lack of control while waiting in the plane. She explains, “They’re all strapped into the seats, like refugees. Like they’re told to do this and that and don’t do nothing, don’t say nothing.” Diane similarly recalls, “We were stuck there for, I don’t know how long . . . They had kids sitting . . . on the floor like half asleep.” Diane was concerned for the safety of children waiting in the plane. She recalls that there were, “Two aisles and like four rows of seats, like you have to face each other and there’s kids right in the middle. We were all cramped in that . . . one big plane, but supposed to be two

plane-fulls.” She reiterates her reaction to being told to remain in the Hercules: “I didn’t wanna go in there because I said, ‘How come there’s no room?’ They said, ‘Just squeeze in there.’ . . . What if we were to crash or something? . . . Those kids are like, [wearing] no seatbelts, like sitting in the middle of the aisle.” Jennifer and Diane’s descriptions of the inadequate conditions that some community members were subjected to indicate that their expectation for a safe and well-coordinated evacuation were not met.

Another stage of the evacuation that hindered evacuees’ agency relates to the journey from Saskatoon and Prince Albert, back to Wollaston. Some express disappointment in the organizers, specifically the Rangers, for looking through the evacuees’ luggage for alcohol more than once while community members were returning to Wollaston. These individuals suggest that the multiple searches were excessive and inappropriate. Diane recalls, “I didn’t like people . . . [searching] your stuff when you get in the bus. That’s bad - that’s good enough . . . and then they come . . . back here [and] they still do the same thing, like they searched here too.” Diane expresses resentment towards the organizers because, “they should’ve known that they were searched already. And I’m sure people want to get home when they got back instead of waiting for their bags at the airport here.” Although Matthew remained in Wollaston during the evacuation, he recalls fellow community members’ reactions to having their bags searched. He explains, “A lot of them were upset . . . when they get home because they [had] been searched for booze in Saskatoon or PA when they were leaving and they got searched again and people were getting very angry about that.” Matthew emphasizes the discomfort that community members express in regards to being searched more than once by labeling the searches as ‘harassment.’ He explains, “They were being harassed for all that stuff and it’s embarrassing for all these people.” These narratives imply that community members view bag searches as an unpleasant but tolerable response to the challenge of alcohol abuse in the community. Problems associated with alcohol abuse in northern Dene communities have been well documented (e.g., Goulet 1998), and local prohibition and bag searches represent local responses to these problems. However, according to the community members, searches that are poorly coordinated or excessive are disruptive to well-being, and cause tensions between those that are being searched and those conducting the searches.

Thus, many of the challenges that community members describe experiencing during the evacuation are expressed through recollections of unmet expectations, situated both morally and

temporally. Community members expected an evacuation that would be coordinated and well organized, and convey disappointment that their experiences contradicted with this expectation. In addition, community members describe expecting to remain informed about where and when they would be evacuating from Wollaston, and suggest that local organizers are accountable for failing to maintain this line of communication. Finally, residents express discontent relating to the restrictions that the organizers placed on community members' agency. Some also engage with an analogy of residents as refugees, and the community as a war zone. This analogy serves to emphasize the extreme nature of the circumstances.

4.3.2 Social Services

After the evacuees arrived in Prince Albert and Saskatoon, most were brought to one of the evacuation centers, which were set up by the Red Cross in several recreation centers. Community members that were unable to stay in the recreation centers because of health concerns were brought to hotels. In regards to organization during this period of the evacuation, many community members identify the Red Cross as being primarily responsible for coordinating the distribution of basic resources, including food and access to laundry facilities. Most express gratitude for the Red Cross's aid, describing their expectations as being met by the organization. Aside from the conditions in the evacuation centers, evacuees recollect the challenges that were faced by vulnerable groups, including Elders and mothers relying on social assistance. In this section, I describe community members' met and unmet expectations regarding their stay in the evacuation centers, as well as those regarding vulnerable groups' access to specialized resources. Corresponding attributions of accountability, and temporal and moral aspects of their descriptions are also highlighted.

4.3.2.1 Red Cross

Evacuees' narratives suggest that their expectations regarding the Red Cross' work was limited to satisfying basic needs, such as food and shelter. Because these expectations were met, evacuees do not identify the Red Cross as accountable for the challenges of the evacuation. According to Catherine, "They did enough. They gave - as long as they gave us shelter and food, that's pretty much all that matters." As a result, evacuees express gratitude for the Red Cross' efforts. Jennifer, for example, describes being, "very grateful that Red Cross were there to help with people in situations like this." Catherine also recalls being, "pretty much appreciative to them for helping us" and "just thankful for them to be like that." Christopher commends the

Red Cross' work, stating, "Red Cross did a good job too, helping out." He explains, "It was well taken care of . . . Once they got there, people were pretty much taken care of in terms of food and shelter." Steven similarly recalls, "Once we got there, they got everything for us. Like food, shelter, water, access to laundry, [and] cigarettes too."

For some, the Red Cross's work highlights local organizers' shortcomings in handling the organization of the evacuation. Diane, for example, explains, "The Red Cross people were right on. I think they did a good job, better than the people here." Paul also engages with this comparison, recalling, "Once we got to Saskatoon, like, I suppose it was better . . . They had everything in place and were waiting for us, so that part was okay." Just one community member, Ruth, suggests that the Red Cross' aid was insufficient, as she states that, "it wasn't enough." However, Ruth does not suggest that the Red Cross is responsible for these circumstances, as she explains, "I realize that, you know, you can't accommodate everybody at once. And I saw the difficulties that Red Cross had. They do their best to do what they can to help us." Thus, for the most part, residents express gratitude and use the Red Cross as a point of reference in critiquing local organizers.

4.3.2.2 Activities in the Evacuation Centers

Aside from concerns relating to vulnerable groups, unmet expectations regarding evacuees' time spent in the evacuation centers are largely related to the lack of planned activities. Heather was evacuated to Prince Albert, and compares the activities that were accessible there to those that she believes were offered in Saskatoon. She explains, "After hearing about Saskatoon, we didn't get much in PA . . . Saskatoon had everything for kids. You know, they kept them busy . . . In PA, they did nothing." She cites the absence of any local government as contributing to this situation, explaining, "We had no Chief and Council then at time to give people some help."

Paul also complains of the absence of activities available to community members. He compares the 2011 evacuation to previous experiences with similar situations:

I'm from [another community] . . . and in [that community] . . . they have a system in place, especially for people that are being evacuated . . . down south. They take care of their people good over there . . . people that are evacuated. They have things happening for them; games, movies, the zoo, whatever, you know. [They] keep people occupied.

This contrasts with Paul's evacuation experience, as he explains, "It wasn't like that in both places [Saskatoon and Prince Albert]. People were pretty much just sitting around every day

waiting for news, when they was going to go home.” Paul does not directly attribute responsibility to the Red Cross or local organizers specifically, but the ‘organizers’ in general.

4.3.2.3 Vulnerable Groups

4.3.2.3.1 Elders

Three community members criticize the absence of specialized resources available to Elders throughout the evacuation, and identify the Red Cross, Chief and Council, or the ‘organizers’ as having been responsible for delivering these services. Catherine’s narrative, involving her grandmother being relocated while Catherine was shopping for supplies, is introduced in chapter three. She recalls being disappointed to find that her grandmother’s caregiver did not join her grandmother because the caregiver “had to take care of her mom because . . . she needed help too.” Catherine attempted to remedy the situation by asking Red Cross workers if she could share a hotel room with her grandmother, and was dismayed to find that her request would not be accommodated. She describes her idea of a more appropriate response to these circumstances, stating, “They should have sent me with her.”

Patricia also recalls unmet expectations regarding Elders, particularly in regards to the organizers’ failure to ensure equal access to resources. She explains, “It was not fair for some Elders, like in the same condition – can’t take care of themselves – [not] to be registered in the hotel with a niece or someone to take care of him or her.” Patricia offers an example of this imbalance, explaining, “My grandma . . . got covered to stay at a hotel but my grandpa didn’t . . . And then there’s other Elders that were stuck at SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, one of the evacuation centers].” Patricia suggests that local organizers conveyed favouritism in their organization of accommodations for the Elders. She explains, “I look at it like, kind of like favouritism because [one of the organizers] . . . was in charge of most of everything, as usual.” Patricia suggests that this method was unjust, recommending that, “Maybe all the Elders should’ve been brought together and taken care of together at one time. Because they could talk and they’re the same age and then they share stories and what not . . . It was just kind of tragic. An emergency, like, it wasn’t organized.” Anna also describes concerns for Elders, suggesting that community members do not adequately care for them. She explains, “It seems like my community, some people don’t . . . care about elderly ‘cause I seen elderlies there that shouldn’t have been left there. Nobody to take care of [them], everybody was kind of doing this and that.”

In contrast, three of the Elders are less critical of their treatment. Ruth recalls an issue relating to not being able to sleep in the evacuation center. She remembers how, “The beds were low. I can’t sleep on a bed that’s too low [and] I didn’t sleep that [first] night because I couldn’t lie down. I couldn’t sleep on it because that bed was hard.” She describes the organizers’ response to her complaint regarding the uncomfortable cots: “I told them what the situation was. I couldn’t . . . sleep because of my . . . concerns so they put me up in a hotel room. And so there I slept. I slept good.” William, another Elder, commends the organizers, explaining, “When they took me to Saskatoon at one of the evacuation [centers] where they took us, [I had] no problems, no worries whatsoever. They took care of me [in] Saskatoon.” Richard, also an Elder, compares his perception to those of other community members, describing, “Other people are not happy, but I was happy . . . I was taken care of.” Interestingly, these findings are similar to those of Adams et al. (2011), who conducted a qualitative study focusing on the ways that elderly residents of New Orleans coped in the year following Hurricane Katrina. They found that elderly evacuees experienced a disproportionate amount of hardship and suffering during the storm due, for example, to age-related vulnerabilities to illness and lack of access to health services. However, these participants also portrayed a psychological resilience that was absent from Adams et al.’s interviews with younger evacuees. Adams et al. suggest that one explanation for this resilience is that “the elderly who survived were able to approach the disaster with a long view, comparing its impacts to those of other traumatic events in their lives.” (264). Given that Ruth recalls past “tragedies” in her evacuation narrative, Adams et al.’s hypothesis may also explain this aspect of Wollaston evacuees’ narratives. Focused interviews with the Elders would be required in order to confirm this theory.

According to Becker, (1999) within narratives, “events are defined . . . in terms of the contribution they make to the unfolding of the story” (27). As described in the previous chapters, many of the evacuation narratives engage with descriptions of challenges that the narrator, or other community members, experienced during the evacuation. These difficulties are used to emplot narratives that focus on challenging evacuation experiences. It is possible, then, that the non-Elders focus on the difficulties that they assume Elders experienced as a way to contribute to their ‘challenging evacuation’ narrative. The Elders narratives are not emplotted using challenging aspects of the evacuation, and appear to be more charitable than others in regards to the efforts of organizers.

4.3.2.3.2 Mothers Receiving Social Assistance Payments

Another group that community members identify as vulnerable during the evacuation is composed of mothers receiving social assistance payments. Some suggest that these evacuees' situations warranted specialized attention, and they describe unmet expectations in relation to their understandings of these mothers' needs. According to Helen, for example, the organizers should have taken into account the mothers' financial circumstances. She explains, "A lot of them [were] with little babies and . . . [they had] no snacks for them . . . for the first three days. And then after the third day, then they had like little healthy snacks. And [more] stuff . . . would have helped." She continues, explaining that it would have been helpful "if they had financial aid as soon as they were in Points North or even if they were given food or something and it [the evacuation] wasn't like that." Catherine, a mother who uses social assistance, recalls being given a hotel room (because of health concerns relating to her pregnancy) and meal slips for the hotel restaurant. However, she found that the meal slips did not sufficiently cover the cost of food for her and her son. She explains, "The meal slip thingy wasn't good, the slips they were giving for meals, 'cause there was me and my son [but] they only gave me one. So we had to split that ten dollars in the morning . . . with my son."

Carol, another mother who describes receiving social assistance payments, explains, "When you have no money, what can you do? Nothing." She recalls how, "We were trying to get more money off Welfare [the social assistance administrators] and then the Welfare administrators were saying that, 'We can't do anything about it.'" She expresses her frustrations morally, explaining, "And then here, our community, we're in needs for things and here they didn't even – [it's] just like [they said], 'You're on your own,' just like that. And I didn't like it." Carol suggests that the Chief and Council shouldered some responsibility to help her, and engages this discussion to speak more generally about problems relating to the Chief and Council. She explains, "The Chief and Councilors here, they don't even think about that [anyone] but themselves."

4.4 Treatment from Host Communities

As described in chapter two, some evacuees recall challenges relating to interactions (or lack thereof) with members of host communities in Points North, Prince Albert and Saskatoon.

Their narratives highlight their expectations for unprejudiced interactions with members of host communities, and unbiased media representations. Responsibility is attributed to members of the host communities, including the individuals with whom community members interacted, and the media. Some also identify with the refugee metaphor in describing this aspect of the evacuation.

4.4.1 Interactions with the Host Community in Points North

Many community members fault the host community in Points North for the difficult conditions that they endured there. Christopher, for example, recalls that evacuees “had no place to sleep. And you walk into the terminal and you see people all over the place, scattered and most of them were looking for a . . . comfortable place to sleep but all they’re actually looking for was a space . . . [It was] very crowded.” Diane similarly recalls, “At Points North we had to stay there ‘til, I don’t know, couple of hours. [There was] no food. It was just packed in there, kids laying all over.” Robert also recollects, “Just a lot people were crowded and most of the people, they said, ‘I’m hungry.’ . . . We had to stay there all night, the whole day, and the next day too.” Community members anticipated donations of food and other supplies, including coffee and bottled water in Points North. Matthew recalls, “A very sad thing was that my kids went across [to Points North] and they stayed across and they weren’t fed.” He continues, “They stayed all night, sleeping outside on a floor and in vehicles . . . and they wouldn’t give them anything. Nobody would feed them. And Points North didn’t feed them, where the mines [are] and nobody fed them.”

Paul similarly recalls his time in Points North, explaining, “[There was] nothing, [they] didn’t feed the people . . . People were drinking straight water.” Heather also recounts her disappointment that community members did not receive aide in Points North. Her description is based on recollections that fellow community members shared regarding their time in Points North, as she evacuated from Wollaston with her grandson before the organizers began to use Points North as a stopover. She describes, “I guess when they were at Points North . . . nobody took [care] of them, nobody fed them, nobody brought out water. Nothing like that.” Finally, Diane describes being unable to care for her daughter and the other girl that she was supervising because of the lack of food in Points North. She explains, “That little girl I was with and my daughter were hungry and I couldn’t do nothing ‘cause there’s no food there.” She describes her disappointment with the host community, explaining, “They wouldn’t open that . . . concession [stand], or whatever, where they sell pop and chips.” She reiterates some evacuees’ responses to

the failure to accommodate them: “They were asked nicely, ‘Can you open that because these kids are hungry? I [will] just buy chips or whatever.’ They’d be making money because . . . that little building [airport] was packed with people from here who were hungry. But they wouldn’t open nothing for us.” Christopher recalls, “From what I hear from the services that . . . people were trying to get, they were . . . not too cooperative with them. They were more like a nuisance than a refugee. That’s the Points North side.” Helen similarly compares community members’ experiences to refugees’ experiences, likening the evacuation to “all these places, like overseas . . . in those war zones . . . Just like no place to go. Where you are homeless because you were told to evacuate and then you get treated like that, they don’t [give] no food, no nothing.”

These evacuees’ understanding of the term ‘refugee’ contrasts with those of many Hurricane Katrina evacuees. According to Adeline Masquelier (2006), many Katrina evacuees and commentators condemn the term because they understand it as relating “to foreigners: people who, because they live in impoverished, war-torn, or undemocratic states, become the victims of famine, violence, and persecution and are forced to seek asylum in other countries. And when they do, they become a ‘problem’ for asylum states” (738). According to Masquelier, “the *refugee* label essentially obfuscated the identity of the rightful native that displaced New Orleanians struggled to hard to hang on to” (738). It “took away their citizenship, and by implication, their right to be part of the national order of things” (737). Wollaston evacuees do not appear to associate the refugee label with citizenship in this manner. Instead, they identify with the term, drawing on it to indicate the direness of the circumstances, and as a way to suggest that the conditions that they endured warranted as much help as would have been given to refugees of war.

Just two of the participants suggest that residents of Points North did as much as could be expected of them, given the sudden and unforeseen nature of the displacement. Jennifer explains, “Points North weren’t prepared for emergencies such as that, so they couldn’t - they did the best that they could and they were overwhelmed. People were getting dropped off by planes minute by minute.” Christopher similarly describes, “That’s pretty hard to feed that many people when you’re not ready for it . . . It was just a sudden thing for everybody.”

4.4.2 Interactions with the Host Communities in Saskatoon and Prince Albert

For the most part, community members' descriptions of their interactions with members of host communities in Prince Albert and Saskatoon focus on exchanges with staff at hotels. Some suggest that the hotel staff members were discriminatory towards the evacuees because the evacuees are Aboriginal. Three community members describe issues relating to prejudice. One is Helen, who explains, "the way that we were treated there [by the hotel staff], I didn't like it . . . Especially the security." She explains,

We stayed there six days and out of those six days twice the security came into the room without knocking or nothing [like] that. The first time that happened we were there about three days and I said, 'How come you guys walked in?' They said, 'Oh! We heard there was a party here.' That's what they said. And I said, 'Just because we are Indians, it doesn't mean everybody stays drunk.'

Helen tried to complain about the security guards' behavior by addressing the hotel management: "I went to the front and I asked, 'Who I can talk to about making that complaint?' And nothing. They said, 'Oh, you got to wait. Are you one of the people . . . that was evacuated?' And then they just kind of avoided me."

Catherine also recalls her discomfort with the hotel workers' behaviors. She describes the workers' responses to her attempt to use one meal slip for both her and her son. She recalls, "The workers at the hotel, Quality Inn, were getting mad because of that . . . You could see it on their faces when they [we] said we were evacuated." Steven also describes an interaction with one of the hotel workers in Prince Albert, "It's just for that one lady, I don't know, maybe it's just, what do you call it? Prejudiced." He explains,

It's just the way she talked to people, [was] like . . . rude. I just told [her] straight, 'What's your problem?' . . . 'Cause I wouldn't just sit there and take it . . . She just turned red. Turned red and walked away just because I confronted her. Nobody was saying anything . . . It was just that . . . It was just her action and the way she talked to people. [They are] prejudiced . . . It's not our fault [that we were evacuated].

Two community members also describe problems relating to miscommunications with host communities, especially in regards to youth. Their discussions suggest that they expected that the host community members would have considered that the evacuees were unfamiliar with the city, and that many are not fluent in English. Anna, for example, suggests that the police in Saskatoon failed to consider the circumstances of the evacuation when they arrested a young man for carrying a knife. She explains, "What really surprises me was [that that] one kid . . . was

charged for carrying a weapon . . . and I'm not surprised [that he had a weapon]." She suggests that he was carrying the knife because he was afraid of gang violence in Saskatoon, explaining, "It's like I said, they had never been in there [Saskatoon] . . . and they're . . . scared and [he] said [that] he needs something . . . to protect himself . . . I believe in him." She recalls rumors of gang members from Saskatoon intimidating teenaged evacuees, explaining, "What they were saying [is] that there's some gangs starting . . . to move in, like, from the city . . . Maybe that was why he [had a weapon]." Anna's description of this young man's case suggests that she thought that the police should have recognized that evacuees were coming from an isolated reserve to a city, and were justifiable in their responses to the perceived threat of gang violence.

Jeffrey similarly recalls issues that developed in and around the evacuation centers, wherein police or other authorities told the young people not to do certain things, and the youths failed to respond accordingly. He explains,

You have kids over there that don't . . . understand rules [in English]. They don't understand what they're being told sometimes because . . . some of these kids, they have a hard time understanding English . . . And some guy comes up to them, 'Hey, you guys can't be doing that!' And they just look [at him], and they're saying, 'What is he saying to me? I don't understand him.' So they keep doing what they're doing!

According to Helen, "about forty percent [of residents] don't speak English, and . . . a lot of them don't understand it." Thus, these participants suggest that youths from Wollaston reacted to the evacuation in a manner that made sense, given the circumstances. The host communities failed to consider that the evacuees are culturally distinct, unfamiliar with their surroundings, and face communication barriers.

4.4.3 Media Representation

One recurring theme in the participants' narratives relates to the media's representations of youths' behaviors. In particular, they suggest that the media focused too heavily on stories of public intoxication and related disturbances. Some of the headlines regarding the evacuation include "Forest fire evacuees keeping Saskatoon police busy" (Postmedia News 2011), "Arrests made at wildfire evacuation centre in Saskatoon" (Kirton 2011a), and "Wildfire evacuation centres to receive more security: Language barrier creates tensions" (Kirton 2011b). Several evacuees highlight improper televised representations of community members in their discussions of this theme. These are not freely available for public viewing, and therefore cannot be included in my analysis. An unduly negative representation of Aboriginal peoples is

consistent, however, with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's (1996b) findings, as the commission identified a "promulgation of negative stereotypes" (581), which serve to "block out complexity of context and diversity of personality and perspective" (581). Evacuees reiterate this perspective, suggesting that media outlets' representations of the community were overly simplistic and failed to recognize the nuances of the circumstances. Their discussions of youth drinking are presented as a sort of reaction to these representations, and an opportunity to protect Wollaston's reputation by providing context. They ask rhetorically, 'What do you expect?' This comment typically follows an explanation of the circumstances of the evacuation, and a comparison between the characteristics that they attribute to the host communities with those that they attribute to Wollaston. They suggest that youth alcohol abuse should not have been presented by the media as indicative of "another bunch of drunken Indians," to quote Helen, but rather as the consequence of their sudden displacement from an isolated northern reserve to an unfamiliar city, combined with the fracturing of families, which left many without the traditional behavioral controls invoked by parents and Elders.

Some suggest that news outlets should have considered that Wollaston is a 'dry reserve,' meaning that alcohol is banned from most of the community. Patricia, for example, recalls being informed of the alcohol use and media coverage while she was staying with relatives in La Ronge. She explains, "After the whole evacuation was happening and there was a whole bunch of people in Saskatoon and they're texting me and they're texting me and they're telling me, 'We're on the news!' and, 'The news is saying this!'" Patricia explains, "It's just like, what do you expect? They're from . . . dry reserves and they're back in Saskatoon, and Saskatoon is not so dry!" Jennifer expresses a similar sentiment, as she explains that the evacuation began with "a lot of excitement." According to Jennifer, "they have no access to anything [alcohol]" in Wollaston. During the displacement, "they were just dropped off and they just took off like a wildfire . . . It's unfortunate that we hit the headlines again, but coming from a small community you can't expect . . . people to behave . . . any different."

Helen describes a similar reaction to the media representation, explaining, "The other thing I didn't like . . . [was] the way they publicized [the community] in the media and . . . all the drinking and all the partying and stuff." She suggests that news outlets should have considered that alcohol is banned from most of Wollaston. She too states, "What do you expect? That [is] something that they don't have access to here and . . . then you take somebody and you just put

their whole life in a little tote bag and you expect them to be okay.” She suggests that the media’s responses to the evacuation were inappropriate, as they are derived from prejudiced understandings of Aboriginal peoples. She elaborates:

They just didn’t see that part [i.e. community members coming from a dry reserve, the suddenness of the evacuation]. That’s what I think, they just said, ‘Oh, just another bunch of drunken Indians’ . . . The media made it look like that . . . I don’t think they even consider that . . . they took them and then put their whole life in a . . . bag and just kind of displaced them and then you expect them to just blend in with everybody else. It doesn’t work that way. And that’s what I didn’t like about what they did at the media.

Matthew recalls how the evacuation process led to a concentration of young people in Saskatoon, resulting in “chaos over there.” Christopher suggests that the displacement was “a shock for a lot of those people too. Most of them had never been south, especially the kids [have] never been down south in their life.” Matthew explains, “A lot of the kids didn’t . . . [have] never been down south before. Grew up all their lives and when they got south and [there was] that many kids in one city? [They’ve been] in the bush for so long, you know, what do you expect?” Ruth also attributes the alcohol abuse to young community members’ unfamiliarity with Saskatoon and Prince Albert. She explains, “These are reserve boys [that] we’re talking about, who were not used to the city. I was worried because in the city they don’t know where to go . . . There’s liquor stores there, there’s bars there. It’s different.”

Some suggest that the media focused on inappropriate aspects of the evacuation. Christopher, for example, describes,

I guess everybody thought was kind of, they kind of picture the drinking side more than the safe side of what people were actually, the majority of the people were actually in safe hands than the ones that didn’t take care of themselves so much I think. They got on the booze and things got out of hand for a little while but it got under control because there were some, including myself I guess, I volunteered as a security.

He concludes, “The bottom line, I guess, is . . . it got under control in a little while.” Thomas portrays a similar perspective, explaining,

The media. I do not like the media because the way the media is, they made Wollaston look really bad and they tried to assume it’s the alcohol or what not . . . They even asked me that question, like, ‘Do you think it’s all because of the alcohol?’ Right there he burned me . . . There’s sixteen hundred people in Wollaston and then it only took one hundred of them to make Wollaston to look bad, like it’s a bad place. It’s not really a bad place . . . They focus on the negative things of the evacuation except for the positive things . . . I do not like the media at all . . . They just focus on

the bad things that was going on. I never got to see the videos personally but from what I hear people were saying there was intoxicated people getting interviewed. And I just, I seriously didn't like that at all.

Clearly, residents view the media's representation of the evacuees as being inappropriate, overly simplistic, and unsympathetic to the context of the evacuation.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Wollaston evacuees' narratives emphasize unmet expectations regarding forest fire and evacuation prevention, organization throughout the evacuation, and treatment from host communities. Community members attribute responsibility regarding unmet expectations to the provincial and federal governments, evacuation organizers, and host communities, much more so than towards each other. The chaos and disruption that they experienced is evaluated against a moral backdrop, in which they suggest that community members were seen as unable to take responsibility for their actions, as nuisances, and as "drunken Indians," not as deserving of compassion and support during a difficult time than others may have been. These perceptions speak, in part, to the huge cultural gulf that they were expected to traverse when they were brought south.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Community members' narratives highlight the various ways that well-being was disrupted during the 2011 forest fire and emergency evacuation. Like Heil's (2009) participants, residents of Wollaston Lake reveal a strongly social dimension to their understandings of well-being, rooted in historically Dene local sensibilities. This sociality is evidenced throughout discussions of both the fire and displacement. In regards to the fire, residents' narratives focus largely on concerns for the safety and well-being of fellow community members, rather than concerns for the self or property. These concerns are often expressed in terms of frustrations relating to inability to carry out culturally prescribed roles, such as fire fighting. In discussing these role-related acute disruptions, as well as disruptions (i.e., the fire) to the community more generally, community members engaged our discussions as a means to talk about ongoing disruptions (i.e., joblessness, stereotyping) to well-being in Wollaston, and the ways that these ongoing disruptions influence local vulnerability to the challenges of the fire and evacuation. In doing so, some of the acute disruptions that are correlated with the fire and displacement are placed in the context of chronic disruptions to the social and cultural fabric in the community.

Disruptions to roles within the family are identified as being particularly stress-inducing. The prevalence of this theme indicates the significance of family life in Wollaston, as well as the discrepancies between the values that they associate with the family and family roles, and their abilities to enact the behaviors that they attribute to these roles during the displacement. The roles of mother, father, adult child and guardian are most commonly focused upon in the narratives.

In regards to mothers' narratives, the most distressing aspect of the evacuation was their separation from, and inability to communicate with, their children. The consequence of these circumstances, which is the inability to protect and maintain their children's well-being, also produced distress. The mothers recall responding to these challenges by trying to mitigate the disruption, for example, by refusing the initial separation. When the organizers denied the mothers' requests to keep their families together, most mothers reluctantly accepted the circumstances. Those that were separated from their children recall attempting to communicate with them by telephone, and those that were successful in doing so recall their distress as having been alleviated. The mothers that were not able to communicate with their children attempted to gather information regarding their children's whereabouts. Eventually, all of the mothers were

able locate and reunite with their children, thereby remedying this disruption and contributing to a marked alleviation of distress.

Among fathers, most disruptions concern their inability to protect their family's home and provide for their children during the evacuation, as well as their inability to communicate with their children due to separation. Most of these men recall responding to this disruption by volunteering to help fellow community members, for example, by volunteering as security guards in the evacuation centers. Fathers' narratives are more varied than those of the mothers, as some identify more closely with other roles within the family (i.e. adult child, guardian), than that of father.

Like the mothers and fathers, adult children recall concerns for their family members' well-being. These individuals responded to these challenges in diverse ways, for example by enlisting the help of the Red Cross, attempting to reunite with their family members, and/or trying to communicate with them by telephone. When they were successful, their distress was alleviated.

The fourth family-related role that is highlighted in the narratives is that of guardian. These community members are individuals that took on care-giving roles for children that were separated from their parents during the evacuation. Their actions offer an example of the sort of communal support that is valued among community members. In addition, these participants emphasize the widely held belief that the separation of community members from their families is detrimental to well-being, as it runs contrary to conventional roles within the family.

Discussions of forest fire and evacuation prevention emphasize community members' identifications of, and expectations regarding, community vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities are varied, including, for example, the "Let it Burn" provincial forest fire policy, methods of firefighting, and the lack of consistent road access to Wollaston. Some identify particular parties as being responsible for these circumstances, and attribute blame accordingly. While some evacuees fault fellow community members for failing to respond to the threat of fire through firefighting, most find the provincial government responsible for failing to extinguish the fire before it became a threat.

In addition to problems relating to the fire, community members focus on the ways that the organization of the evacuation failed to meet their expectations. For the most part, responsibility for satisfying these expectations is attributed to "the organizers," although some

attribute accountability to specific parties. Narratives regarding this aspect of the evacuation focus largely on problems relating to the transportation of community members from Wollaston to Prince Albert and Saskatoon. Residents describe expecting a more orderly evacuation, one that considered the varied needs of community members, and they find the organizers accountable for failing to meet these expectations.

Community members also identify the lack of information that they were given, specifically in regards to where they were being sent and when they would be going there, as problematic. In addition, they suggest that they expected some degree of agency in the evacuation proceedings, and find the organizers responsible for failing to achieve this. Some also engage an analogy of the evacuees as refugees, highlighting their lack of control at this time.

Regarding their stays in the evacuation centers, community members identify a number of organizational shortcomings, including the absence of activities available to children, and the lack of specialized resources for Elders and mothers receiving social assistance payments. However, recollections of the work of the Red Cross are more favorable, suggesting that expectations regarding the role of the Red Cross were met.

In addition to expectations concerning the fire and displacement, community members recall unmet expectations regarding interactions with host communities. They recollect anticipating help, specifically through donations of food and bottled water, from the locals at Points North. Evacuees recall being disappointed to find that no such donations would be made. In addition, some describe poor treatment from the hotel workers in Prince Albert and Saskatoon, as well as disappointment in the media's representations of the evacuation. They suggest that the media failed to consider any of the complexities or nuances of the situation, including, for example, that evacuees are coming from a dry reserve.

Two major themes link each of these chapters. The first is the relationship between community members' discussions of the problems of the evacuation, and those relating to community life more generally. As I outline in chapter two, our conversations represented an opportunity for residents to discuss both acute and chronic disruptions to community life, and the relationship between the two. Chronic disruptions exist within and outside of the context of the disaster (i.e., joblessness). Within the context of a disaster, chronic disruptions sometimes contribute to patterns of vulnerability, increasing the challenges of the disaster. Acute disruptions sometimes build on these vulnerabilities (i.e., mothers receiving social assistance

payments being unable to purchase snacks), and sometimes do not (i.e., family separation). Acute disruptions are sometimes used as idioms of disruption, linking the forest fire and the evacuation to ongoing disruptions. According to Becker (1999), narratives are used to communicate the issues that are most significant to the narrator. Community members were limited by the context of the interviews, as my stated purpose and questions focused on the evacuation and associated acute disruptions. It is likely that narrators engaged idioms of chronic disruption in order to focus on the issues that are most important to them, while connecting with my interests. This conclusion is consistent with Riessman's (2000) finding that, within her research, the participant and investigator work "together as narrator and audience, [to] shape the performance of the story, including the events, plot, and characters allowed onstage (142). My role in the interviews undoubtedly contributed to the co-creation of narratives that fit both my own, as well as my participants', understandings of the significance of the topics that we addressed. These understandings, in turn, influenced how, and how much, these issues were discussed during our conversations.

The second major theme of this research is that of well-being. According to Mathews and Izquierdo (2009), well-being is an ideal state, conceptualized uniquely by each individual, within their cultural and societal context. This open-ended notion of well-being is particularly useful in disaster studies because it facilitates a focus on the full range of impacts experienced by those affected by the disaster. In this case, these include reactions to the fire and displacement, acute and chronic disruptions, vulnerabilities, and the historical and ethnographic context of the evacuation.

According to the 2013 Fall Report of the Auditor General of Canada,

The safety and well-being of First Nations communities on reserve are being adversely affected in significant ways because of their vulnerability to emergencies and to the cumulative effects of these emergency events.

This research is consistent with the Auditor General's findings, and offers a case study, indicating some of the deleterious effects of the current fire and evacuation protocols on Wollaston. However, future research is needed to contextualize these community members' experiences within those of northern evacuees more generally. In doing so, one may identify the incongruities between organizers' goals during evacuations, and expectations within different communities. For example, among Wollaston community members, family unity is clearly

central to individual well-being. If the organizers had made family unity a goal of the evacuation, I suspect that the displacement would not have elicited the same degree of distress that is indicated in the evacuation narratives. In order to establish these sorts of connections, future research should focus on the experiences of residents of other northern communities, as well as on developing an understanding of organizers' perspectives. In particular, this research should emphasize notions of risk and vulnerability, as these are likely to be central in informing organizers' disaster response plans. Future research should also examine the historical and ethnographic contexts of these communities, as they are indicative of community members' priorities.

Some recommendations for ways of reducing distress during future evacuations include:

1. Families should be kept together. When this is not possible, communication among family members should be prioritized. If communication cannot be facilitated, community members should be given information regarding the locations of their family members. This would minimize distress, especially among mothers.
2. Community members should be involved in protecting their community (i.e., through firefighting) and each other, whenever possible. This would help to reduce distress caused by role disruption.
3. All community members, and particularly those relying on social assistance, should have access to basic provisions, especially food services, access to clean water, diapers, and laundry services throughout the duration of the evacuation.
4. Community members should be evacuated to a familiar, Dene-speaking community, whenever possible. This would reduce stress relating to communication problems.
5. An evacuation plan, including a clear outline of the decision-making hierarchy, should be developed locally and disseminated to community members. This way, distress relating to lack of information would be reduced.
6. The special status of Elders in the community should be recognized, and these individuals should be prioritized throughout the evacuation.
7. On-going consultation between the provincial government and the community is essential. In doing so, the parties will be able to develop plans that adequately provide for the needs of the community, thus reducing community members' vulnerability to similarly stressful future situation.

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Appendix

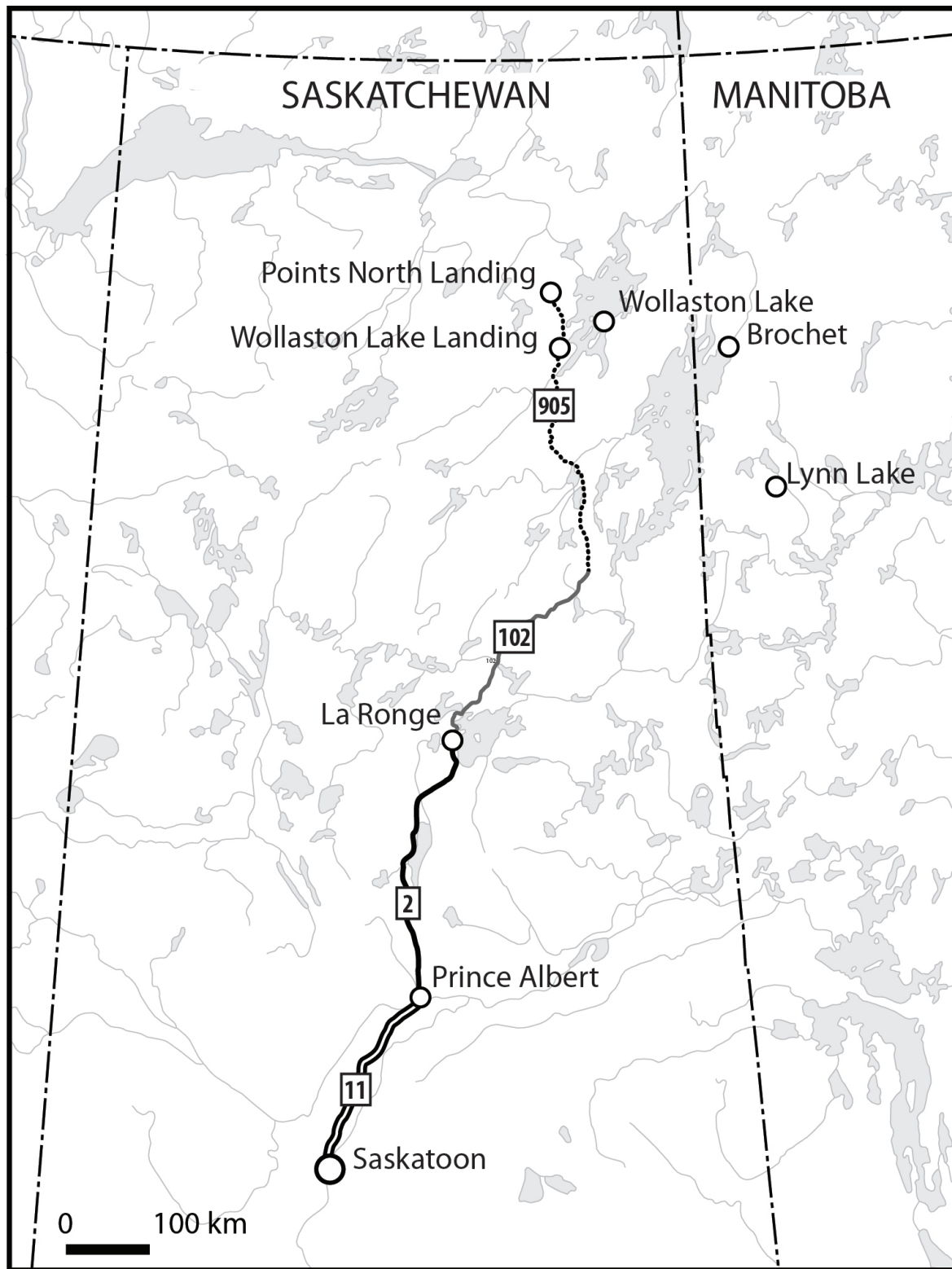


Figure 1.1 Map of Saskatchewan and relevant communities in Manitoba (Hackett, unpublished map).



Figure 1.2 Clouds of smoke filling the sky behind the buildings in Wollaston (Clipping 2011).



Figure 1.3 Roughly thirty adults and children lining up in front of two small airport terminals in Wollaston, waiting to evacuate (Clipping 2011).



Figure 1.4 About twenty children and adults walking in a line onto a Hercules aircraft in Points North, guided by three workers (Kraus 2011a).



Figure 1.5 About twenty-five evacuees walking away from a Hercules aircraft that had landed in Saskatoon, being aided by a representative from the Red Cross (Kraus 2011b).



Figure 1.6 A gymnasium full of roughly twenty-five cots lined up beside each other. A blanket and a pillow sits on top of each cot and four workers can be seen setting up more cots (Waldner 2011).



Figure 1.7 About twenty-five children and young adults sitting in small groups along the walls of a gymnasium talking to each other and playing games (Clipping 2011).