

Welcoming Refugees and the Virtue of Hospitality: An Analysis of Refugee  
Resettlement through Private Sponsorship in Small-Town Eastern Ontario

by

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## **Abstract**

In the wake of the refugee crisis in Syria, national narratives of welcome propelled new trends of private sponsorship into rural communities across Canada. Through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, sponsors are responsible for supporting the transition of refugee-newcomers into Canadian society. This study offers an analysis of private sponsorship from the perspectives and experiences of those that have mobilized to welcome refugees into small-towns in Eastern Ontario. Drawing on the concept of hospitality to analyze the dynamics of private sponsorship, I examine how everyday acts of welcome are informed by feelings of compassion, but also reinforce dynamics of power that perpetuate systems of control and dependency. Through an examination of the challenges experienced by refugee-newcomers, I highlight the major flaws of the program, calling for a critical evaluation of Canada's models of resettlement to reflect the authority of migrants to act as independent agents of their own mobility.

**Keywords:** Hospitality, Private Sponsorship, Refugee Resettlement, Private Sponsors, Rural Resettlement

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## Introduction

The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) has established over the last half century a tradition of citizens welcoming refugees into their own communities. The program was created in response to the demands of civil society for provisions to be added to the Canadian Immigration Act allowing groups of individuals, social agencies and communities to participate in the efforts of international refugee protection. Through this program, private sponsors are responsible for providing systems of support that encourage the transition of refugee-newcomers into Canadian society, arguably shifting the responsibility of resettlement from the State to civil society.

In the recent events that have come to characterize the refugee crisis in Syria, national narratives of refugee welcome have propelled an important renewal of participation in the PSRP with communities engaging in private sponsorship across the country into new, and more rural areas: since 2015, individual and community-level actors from small-towns have specifically mobilized to sponsor Syrian refugees. Because the sponsorship group is responsible for providing refugee-newcomers with systems of support and access to services, the emergence of private sponsorship in rural communities provides an important opportunity to observe the processes of resettlement in a socio-geographical context that is otherwise challenging for newcomers due to limited employment opportunities, remoteness, lack of public transit, etc. This context would suggest that when resettled in rural areas, refugee-newcomers are especially dependent on the sponsor group. This initial point of inquiry introduces the main question that frames this research:

*In factoring the complexities of private sponsorship, what might we learn from the experiences of private sponsors in their efforts of welcoming refugees in rural communities, and*

*how might these specific experiences and settings indicate variances into the success of such an initiative?*

In order to narrow the scope of this question, the main research question is divided into three sub-questions:

- 1) What are the roles and responsibilities assumed by sponsors, and how do these shape their relationships with sponsored refugee-newcomers throughout the period of sponsorship?*
- 2) What challenges and opportunities are faced by refugee-newcomers participating in private sponsorship?*
- 3) What role does the rural context have in shaping the experience of sponsorship?*

This study offers an analysis of private sponsorship from the perspectives and experiences of those that have mobilized to welcome Syrian refugees into small-towns in Eastern Ontario, by bringing inquiry to the ways in which groups of citizens offer resettlement to refugees on behalf of the State. The analysis is based on original interviews with private sponsors and refugee-newcomers, conducted in several small-towns across Eastern Ontario. The first chapter provides an initial discussion on refugee resettlement as a means to contextualize private sponsorship in time and space: the role of the international refugee regime; the evolution of Canada's resettlement policy; an overview of the PSRP; trends of refugee resettlement in Ontario, Canada; and a final discussion of relevant literature outlining the experience of private sponsorship in Canada. The second chapter frames the study within a conceptual understanding of hospitality, providing a context through which to analyze the dynamics of private sponsorship. The third chapter reviews the methods, field work and limitations of the study. The fourth chapter examines the interviews

with sponsor-group participants in thematical order, and argues that sponsors shape the context in which refugee-newcomers will be welcomed and hosted, demonstrating how the PSRP, as a mechanism of hospitality, produces various relations of power, and that opportunities of welcome are shaped by those who have the power to welcome. The fifth chapter contrasts the narratives of sponsorship between sponsor-group and refugee-newcomer participants, demonstrating how the PSRP creates relationships of dependency that are exacerbated by miscommunication and post-migration precarity. The final sixth chapter reviews the highlights of the study and answers the main research questions. Through an examination of the challenges experienced by refugee-newcomers, I highlight the major flaws of the program, calling for a critical evaluation of Canada's models of resettlement to reflect the authority of migrants to act as independent agents of their own mobility.

## **Terminology**

### ***“Refugee-newcomers”***

In this study, the term “refugee-newcomers” is attributed to migrant participants that have resettled in Canada by way of private sponsorship. I chose not to refer to these participants as only “refugees” to avoid the use of concepts that categorize people based on complex and traumatic events. While refugees are generally considered to be forced migrants who have been granted protection by the international refugee regime, this designation frames refugee-subjects as passive recipients of humanitarian help (Haddad, 2004). In fact, the term “refugee” is a contested and problematic concept: it overemphasizes elements of vulnerability and institutional dependency, and assigns to individuals a stereotyped identity that conceals agency, distinctive experiences, and the sense of self (Hakli & Pauliina Kallio, 2019).

Further, as an immigration program, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program grants permanent residency upon arrival to Canada, a moment in which refugees become newcomer immigrants. At the same time, the “refugee” is a dominant constant across sponsorship-related rhetoric, used by sponsors, the media and program procedures. The term “refugee-newcomer” I employ therefore designates both the “refugee” construed by humanitarian narratives and the status of newcomer to Canada: a duality that reflects the complexity of the processes through which newcomers negotiate membership in the local and national community. The intention of this study is not to speak on behalf of migrants, but to highlight the challenges they might encounter throughout sponsorship and resettlement, in particular those that manifest between the sponsor-host and refugee-guest.

# **Chapter 1. Refugee Resettlement & Private Sponsorship: A Pragmatic History**

Refugee Resettlement is an international project spearheaded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in partnership with receiving nations and International and non-governmental organizations. The UNHCR regulates the selection and transfer of refugees into new countries, while states are responsible for receiving refugees and supporting their integration. In Canada, there are currently three models of refugee resettlement: government assisted (publicly funded and government supported), private sponsorship (privately funded and supported), and a blended private and public model of private sponsorship (funded by public and private sources, privately supported). Refugee resettlement via private sponsorship relies on forms of civic engagement where citizens welcome refugees into their own communities, making it a unique yet complex model of resettlement. Although the receiving context of private sponsorship is the main focus of this study, refugee resettlement must first be understood as an international project in order to contextualize how the experiences of migrants participating in private sponsorship are being shaped at multiple scales.

In this chapter, I provide the backdrop to the study: section 1.1 contextualizes refugee resettlement within an international framework of migration management while section 1.2 briefly illustrates the evolution of Canada's resettlement policy, and section 1.3 presents an in-depth view of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program in Canada. In order to set the stage of the research area, section 1.4 illustrates refugee resettlement in Ontario, Canada and section 1.5 reviews available research on the experience of private sponsorship for both sponsors and refugee-newcomers in Canada, with a particular focus on rural contexts.

## 1.1 International Refugee Resettlement

Resettlement is a durable, long-standing solution to provide international protection to refugees whose lives, human rights and safety are at risk. Mandated by the United Nations to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems, the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR, 2011) defines resettlement as:

The selection and transfer of refugees from a state in which they have sought protection to a third state which has agreed to admit them - as refugees - with permanent residence status. The status provided should ensure protection against *refoulement* and provides a resettled refugee and his/her family or dependents with access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals. It should also carry with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalized citizen of the resettlement country. (p.3)

Resettlement, in the above definition, is described as a mechanism that requires third-party management: First, responsibility is assumed by the UNHCR and states through the “selection and transfer” of refugees. Second, the preconditions for resettlement rely on the recognition of refugee status in a first country of asylum. Third, states are to grant refugee-newcomers citizenship-like rights and status until they may eventually naturalize. Essentially, the resettlement process is a partnership between the UNHCR and the receiving/host country that also relies on the collaboration with various partners (international organizations and NGO’s): The UNHCR first identifies and selects refugees in need of resettlement, and then states offer permanent places of residence. NGO’s and international organizations also play a role throughout the identification, pre-departure, and resettlement process (UNHCR, 2011). This definition is important because it reveals the themes of selection and control that are of interest to this study: first, the selection of refugees refers to processes and policies that facilitate the inclusion of specific individuals, and the exclusion of others: “the government holds the ability to identify those to whom hospitality is offered” (Darling, 2013, p. 1792), thus rendering resettlement as conditional hospitality. Second,

the international bodies who control the management of resettlement ultimately control and condition the opportunities of mobility. In particular, interviews conducted for this study revealed that the location of resettlement is offered to migrants, rather than negotiated: the lack of decision-making power negatively impacted the arrival of refugee-newcomers – or at least their feelings of having control over their own mobility.

Resettlement is limited to the processes of reception and settlement support, and therefore does not engage with longer-term notions of integration. To address this, the UNHCR launched a broad “Integration Initiative” (UNHCR, 2011) in the 2000’s to encourage countries to endorse and support resettlement. Under the Integration Initiative, revised in 2011, the UNHCR promotes an internationally endorsed set of principles and broad guidelines for comprehensive integration programs in countries of resettlement: resettlement programs are required to offer landed refugees with the necessary support and opportunities to facilitate their integration including coordination, cooperation, supports and investments from the host governments and host communities. This initiative encourages receiving countries to develop strategies that promote bottom-up approaches and the empowerment of citizens and communities in order to cultivate trust within the receiving community: “On the local level, communities must be prepared to welcome and support resettled refugees, and opportunities to bring newcomers and their new community members together to build relationships and identify and address issues are critical to the program’s success” (UNHCR, 2011, p. 7). This rhetoric of community-level welcome within the international migration management system arguably demonstrates that responsibility has been transferred onto local-level actors and communities, as a way to favorize the integration processes of resettled refugees. These thoughts are important to the study because they suggest that voluntary and community actors are encouraged to play a role in addressing settlement needs and fill gaps in service

provision. It is of interest, then, to uncover the ways in which local-level actors assume these roles, and the circumstances under which refugees are welcomed and supported throughout their resettlement process.

However, government direction on integration policy and integration support varies considerably between governments, policymakers and stakeholders. There is also no clear consensus on the definition of immigrant integration in either academic research nor across governments themselves. There are also differences between how a government views integration and its requirements, and how newcomers might understand what integration means. This lack of conceptual boundary reflects the subjective nature of integration as a process and creates nuance to the idea of “successful integration”, which further complicates the analysis of community-led integration programs and strategies. Nonetheless, it is recognized here that the purpose of refugee resettlement programs is to facilitate the integration of refugees within the national community, a responsibility that is assumed by local-level actors who welcome refugee migrants into their community.

## **1.2 The Creation and Evolution of Resettlement Policy in Canada**

Canada is a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol as of June 1969 (UNHCR 2015). This means that it is committed to offer resettlement programs on a regular basis and aims to provide annual resettlement quotas. But it was only until the foundation of the Immigration Act of 1976 that the first provisions of private and government assisted refugee resettlement were enacted as official policies (Macklin, et al., 2018; Labman & Pearlman, 2018). In fact, the creation of refugee resettlement programs in Canada was influenced by the Canadian

publics' growing concern over human welfare in countries ravaged by conflict, and the response of hospitality efforts by civil society (Macklin, et al., 2018).

Although the Canadian government was deeply involved in the drafting of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, it only became an official signatory in 1969 (UNHCR, 2015). The refusal to sign the Convention was based on the fear that it would impede the deportation of certain refugees that were deemed to be a threat to national security<sup>1</sup>. This indicated that the government was “reluctant to give up absolute sovereign control over its borders that the 1951 Convention requires for refugee admissions” (Labman, 2016, p. 68). So, without any formal legislation, the admission of refugees was done on an ad-hoc basis (Aiken , 2001). Nonetheless, Canada resettled many refugees<sup>2</sup> through the International Refugee Organization<sup>3</sup> after the Second World War. These admissions were ideological, strategic and selective: refugees were screened and selected for reasons of security and productivity (Labman, 2016) as mostly young, single and able-working refugees were selected (Iacovetta, 2006).

Meanwhile, the Canadian public was troubled by the consequences of the wars abroad, and many were interested in providing refuge to the displaced and persecuted. In fact, the idea of formal sponsorship was led by civil society and grew out of informal sponsorships following the First and Second World Wars. Faith-based organizations had been created between the First and Second World Wars to enable the arrival and support of persons displaced by war. For instance, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada (JIAS) were founded after the First World War to assist the immigration of persecuted Europeans to

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<sup>1</sup> In the immediate post-war era, the fear of Soviet infiltration was the primary concern: Cold War tensions barred the admission of suspected communists (Aiken, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> In the late 1940's, Canada admitted “over 100 000 refugees, followed by 37 000 refugees from Hungary in 1956 and 1957, 11 000 Czechoslovakia in 1968 and 7000 Asians from Uganda in 1972 (Labman, 2016:68).”

<sup>3</sup> The International Refugee Organization (IRO) was founded in 1946 to respond to the refugee crisis in Europe following the Second World War. It dissolved a few years later and was replaced by the UNHCR. (Feller & Klug, 2013)

Canada. During the Second World war, other faith-based organizations were created, such as the Canadian Christian Council for the Resettlement of Refugees (1946), the Approved Church Program (1953) and the National Inter-Faith Immigration Committee (1968) (Labman, 2016). The philanthropic support for these initiatives shows that engaged Canadians were concerned with the refugee crisis in Europe. By the time Canada had signed the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol in June 1969, religious groups in particular had lobbied the Canadian government for official provisions to support individuals, groups and social agencies to sponsor refugees (Macklin, et al., 2018; Labman & Pearlman, 2018).

As international treaties must first be implemented by Canadian domestic law in order to be enforceable (Labman, 2016), it took nine years to establish the Convention's provisions and procedures (Aiken, 2001). This also meant that the government had to revise its Immigration Act, which provided the opportunity for new provisions to be added (Labman, 2016). The national vice-president of JIAS, Joseph Kage, rose to this opportunity suggesting that "consideration to be given to provisions which would enable individuals or responsible voluntary social agencies to offer sponsorship or co-sponsorship in deserving cases of refugees or other immigrants in deserving cases" (Kage, 1973 in Labman 2016: 68). These were incorporated in the 1976 Immigration Act under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) alongside the Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) resettlement program.

Today, the Canadian model of resettlement has three programs: Government Assisted Resettlement, Private Sponsorship of Refugees program (PSR) and the recently created Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program. Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) are selected by Canadian visa officers on UNHCR referrals and receive government financial assistance for one year. Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) are sponsored by Canadian citizens, within certain

regulatory parameters, and receive financial and resettlement support from a sponsorship group for the first year. Private sponsorships are conducted through organizations holding master agreements with the government (Sponsorship Agreement Holders). BVOR, like GARs, are UNHCR-referred refugees but are *matched* to private sponsors. For BVORs both the government and the sponsors share the financial cost of resettlement for the first year. The BVOR program was created in 2013 as a modified version of the PSRP. In Canada, GARs are assisted by Resettlement Assistance Program Service Provider Organizations (RAP SPO), and PSR and BVORs are supported by private sponsors (IRCC, 2016).

### **1.3 The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program: A Tradition of Welcome**

The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program was created to allow Canadians to engage in international efforts of refugee protection, and to provide support to the already occurring informal sponsorships by groups such as the JIAS and MCC. When it was created in 1978, it was initially thought that private sponsorship “would be a small secondary mode of complementary resettlement” (Labman 2016: 68). However, the federal legislation was enacted just as media attention and public outrage grew over the worsening conditions of the Indochinese “boat people” in the late 1970’s (Labman, 2016). The Canadian public eagerly responded to the provisions granted by the legislation: “Private sponsorship went from the resettlement of less than 100 known refugees by the spring of 1979 to the resettlement of 34,000 privately sponsored Indochinese between 1979 and 1980” (Labman & Pearlman, 2018, p. 441). The wave of Indochinese sponsorship lead to the rise of a thriving sponsorship community across Canada: since 1978 and as of 2016, it is estimated that over 200,000 refugees have arrived by way of private sponsorship alone (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez , 2016).

Since then, refugees and the responsibilities of resettlement were brought into communities across the country in different moments of mass exodus that have come to define Canada's image as a "welcoming" country: from Hungarians to Ugandans, Chileans, and Somalis, etc. More recently, the arrival of Syrian refugees has spurred the largest response for sponsorship to date. Yet, because humanitarian narratives of welcome and hospitality are conditioned by the right to select, classify and limit hospitality, Canada's identity as a welcoming resettlement country has been shaped by of its ability to control, select and manage mobility. The example of Syria demonstrates how private sponsorship and community-led resettlement as *acts of welcome* have been politicized by national narratives and the governments' preference over Syrian refugees.

In November 2015, the newly elected Liberal government announced that Canada would resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees by February 29<sup>th</sup> 2016 under the Syrian Refugee Horizontal Initiative (IRCC, 2018), widely known under the catchphrase "Welcome Refugees" (Hynie, 2018). The quota was achieved and made possible by the efforts of multiple organizations including federal departments, provincial and municipal governments, international partners and private sponsors. In March 2016, the initiative was extended, and supplementary funding was attributed to provincial governments to support ongoing arrivals of Syrian refugees. To support the increasing demand of Canadians applying to sponsor Syrian refugees, and to expand the network of communities across Canada that are able to provide the supports and services necessary to resettle newcomers, IRCC developed the Community Partnership Settlement Plan (IRCC, 2018). Implemented in March 2016, the plan provides tools for sponsoring communities, such as a self-assessment checklist and key criteria to guide municipalities' development of their settlement plan (IRCC, 2016). To aid the processing of Syrian admissions, the government of Canada collaborated with the UNHCR in Jordan and Lebanon, and the Turkish Government to efficiently select

refugees for resettlement (IRCC, 2016): Vulnerable refugees who were a low security risk, such as women at risk and complete families, *were given priority*. The attention attributed to the Syrian conflict in 2015 spurred an outpouring of community support and donations which favored the resettlement of Syrian refugees (IRCC, 2016). In fact, Syrian refugees arriving after November 2015 are granted supplementary supports for which other refugees are not eligible, such as: waved immigration loans, shorter application processes, housing discounts, free recreational memberships and bus passes on top of large community donations (IRCC, 2016).

With this in mind, this study observes how the Syrian crisis has influenced the environment of private sponsorship across the communities of study but does not specifically exclude newcomer participation based on country of origin. This distinction is important to retain because, as will be demonstrated later in the results section, sponsorship groups questioned for this study were created to sponsor Syrian refugees specifically, and some participants were hesitant to sponsor non-Syrian refugees - thus mobilizing narratives of *deserving* and *undeserving refugees*.

### **Program Overview**

The PSR program is a formal sponsorship agreement between the sponsor group and Immigration and Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The program provides sponsors with administrative support to organize and fund the resettlement of refugees to Canada. Sponsors are responsible for providing sponsored refugees with residential and income support including housing, food, clothing and transportation. This financial requirement ranges between \$20,000 to \$30,000 depending on the family size (Chapman, 2014). The sponsors are also required to provide social, emotional and cultural support, which include help with attaining employment, learning English or French, and adjusting to life in Canada. Upon arrival, refugees receive permanent residence status so health care and child education are provided by the government. Sponsors must

also plan for unforeseen expenses, such as maternity benefits, child care, housing supplements, disability or age-specific top-ups, health related expenses, etc.

In order to be eligible for sponsorship, individuals must first be considered refugees under the UNHCR's mandate and have met the preconditions for resettlement (i.e. if resettlement is the most viable and durable solution for them). Once approved by the UNHCR, refugees are processed by IRCC and admitted to Canada via one of the three resettlement programs (GAR, PSR or BVOR), so long as they also qualify under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations<sup>4</sup>.

However, as part of the 2015 Syrian Refugee Initiative, Canada designated Syrian refugees as *prima facie* refugees (IRCC, 2019). This means that Syrian applicants did not have to prove their refugee status beyond their nationality, which allowed visa officers to focus their interviews on security, criminality and medical screening and to facilitate processing times (IRCC, 2019).

Once approved, the applicants are screened by overseas IRCC migration officers, then matched to Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) in Canada. Sponsors either select the refugees they will sponsor or are given the option to accept or decline pre-chosen applicants. Then, applicants

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<sup>4</sup> Within these regulations are two classes of refugees: Convention Refugee Abroad Class and the Country of Asylum Class (IRCC, 2018). **Convention Refugee Abroad** is any person who:

- is a Convention refugee outside Canada;
- is seeking resettlement in Canada;
- does not have a prospect of another durable solution, within a reasonable period of time, that is:
  - Cannot return to his or her country of nationality or habitual residence;
  - Cannot integrate in the country of refuge or the country of first asylum; and does not have another offer of resettlement from a country other than Canada.
  - Will be privately sponsored or assisted by the government or has adequate financial resources to support himself or herself and any dependents.

**Member of the Country of Asylum Class** is any person:

- who is outside his or her country of citizenship or habitual residence;
- who has been, and continues to be, seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict or who has suffered massive violations of human rights;
- for whom there is no possibility of finding an adequate solution to his or her situation within a reasonable period of time;
- and who will be privately sponsored or who has adequate financial resources to support himself or herself and any dependents.

are invited for interview at the overseas Canadian consulate. When refugees and sponsor groups are matched, they must submit an application package and supporting documentation. The application package and each of the family members are assessed, and must pass medical, security and admissibility checks. Ultimately, admissibility is granted by overseas migration officers (IRCC, 2018). Ineligible for sponsorship are individuals that are already in Canada, have been previously refused for sponsorship or who have fled persecution but are able to integrate into the country of first asylum, or can safely return home.

In order to meet the criteria for sponsorship, Canadians or permanent residents must form a sponsorship group. There are four types of groups that may submit a private sponsorship application: Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), Constituent Groups (GCs), Groups of Five (G5), and Community Sponsors (CSs). The sponsorship groups interviewed for this study belonged to Groups of Five and Constituent Groups.

SAHs are incorporated organizations that have signed a formal sponsorship agreement with IRCC (IRCC, 2018). These organizations assume overall responsibility for the management of sponsorships under their agreement. Typically, these organizations are faith-based, ethno-cultural groups or humanitarian organizations. SAHs can authorize CGs to organize a sponsorship under its agreement, so long as they are based in the sponsored refugee's expected community of resettlement. SAHs can make their own criteria for recognizing GCs and need to approve the proposed settlement plan. G5 are groups of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents who live in the expected settlement community. The group is responsible for the financial and non-financial aspects of sponsorship for its full duration and each individual contributor is assessed before the sponsorship is approved. G5s must also demonstrate that the applicants have been recognized as refugees and are responsible for the translation of the applicants' documents. CSs

are organizations, associations or corporation located in the community of expected settlement. Similar to G5, they must undergo financial and application approvals before being granted sponsorship.

**1.4 Refugee Resettlement in Ontario, Canada**

As of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2019, a total of 61,955 Syrian refugees have resettled in Canada. Of those, 28,100 have been privately sponsored, 5,320 were admitted through the BVOR program, and 28,540 are government assisted (IRCC, 2018). Because the geographical focus of this study is limited to Eastern-Ontario, an overview of resettlement statistical trends in Ontario will be presented here.

According to data released by IRCC on the admissions of refugees by Province/Territory and census metropolitan area of intended destination, the majority of refugees are resettled into cities. This data also demonstrates that more PSRs and BVORs are resettled into smaller towns than GARs who are predominantly resettled in large cities. To illustrate, Table 1 below aggregates IRCC databases on both refugee admissions (IRCC, 2019) and Syrian refugee admissions (IRCC, 2018). It shows that, in Ontario, while the majority of refugees are resettled in larger urban areas, nearly no GARs are resettled in towns of approximately 100,000 people or less (with the exception of Leamington and Sault-St Marie). In these towns, the majority of resettled refugees are PSR or BVOR, and a significant percentage of these are Syrian. For example, in Oshawa, there are no GAR, out of the 165 PSR, 95 are Syrian and out of the 35 BVOR, 20 are Syrian.

Table 1: Refugee Admissions in Ontario from 2015-2018

Municipality (Ontario)	Population	GAR	Syrian GAR	PSR	Syrian PSR	BVOR	Syrian BVOR
	<b>2016 Census</b>	Jan 2015- Jan 2019	Nov 2015- Dec 2018	Jan 2015- Jan 2019	Nov 2015- Dec 2018	Jan 2015- Jan 2019	Nov 2015- Dec 2018

Ontario	<b>13,448,494</b>	19,910	12,440	26,635	11,635	4,145	2925
Ottawa	<b>934,243</b>	6,480	1,850	2,630	1,180	3,025	405
Oshawa	<b>159,458</b>	0	0	165	95	35	20
Kingston	<b>123,798</b>	300	190	120	90	55	30
Thunder Bay	<b>107,909</b>	235	165	35	15	45	40
Sault-St-Marie	<b>73,368</b>	160	100	10	5	25	2
Brantford	<b>97,496</b>	0	0	20	10	30	25
Belleville	<b>50,716</b>	Less than 5	0	35	30	30	10
Leamington	<b>27,595</b>	235	180	15	10	80	40
Brockville	<b>21,346</b>	0	0	10	10	60	35
Collingwood	<b>21,793</b>	0	0	0	0	25	20
Pembroke	<b>13,882</b>	0	0	5	5	0	0

Data adapted from (Statistics Canada, 2016), (IRCC, 2018) and (IRCC, 2019) to demonstrate and contrast refugee admissions by geographical area, immigration category (PSR, GAR and BVOR), and country of origin (Syria vs other). The cities were selected based on population size (150,000 or less). The metropolitan area of Ottawa is represented in the table for comparison purposes.

However, to claim any statistical rationale here would be irrelevant without an evaluation of policy influence and municipal political dynamics. Perhaps it would also be useful to establish whether the data captures the exact municipal area in which refugees resettle (rather than Metropolitan agglomeration), or whether the data is attributed to the location of the Sponsorship Agreement Holders. These factors do not enter the scope of study, but provide significant interest for future research. Nonetheless, the above data reveals a contrast between GAR and PSR/BVOR resettlement (who are assisted by private sponsors) in terms of geographical location and, subsequently, their access to diverse newcomer services and networks which are more prevalent in larger cities (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018). In many small towns across Canada, PSR newcomers are sometimes no more than a dozen, perhaps even a single family. This raises many questions, like that of visibility and maybe even the loss or absence of privacy. There also seems to be an important ratio of Syrian vs. “other” refugees in towns that are significantly small. This suggests that the interest in sponsorship in small towns is recent and influenced by

media coverage and representations of the Syrian Conflict and the Canadian governments' policy incentives through the Syrian Initiative and resettlement quotas.

These speculations correspond to my own personal observations of the rise of recent sponsorship projects in rural towns across Eastern Ontario. Since 2015, I've observed many projects in communities around my hometown participate in the PSRP and I believe that the media coverage of the Syrian conflict has had an important role in this phenomenon, especially in response to the viral images of Alan Kurdi, a 3-year-old boy who drowned while escaping Syria. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to shed light onto the complexity of experiences of private sponsorship for both newcomers and sponsors in small towns.

The rural context of this study is important. It has been demonstrated that small towns can be more challenging for newcomers due to lack of access to formal and social supports. For instance, while cities tend to have large ethnic diversity, and a wide array of services for newcomers, smaller cities tend to have limited immigrant services, less employment opportunities and small ethnic diversity (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018). In fact, mainstream services in small towns are delivered by community organizations rather than immigrant settlement agencies (ibid). However, some rural communities might not even have such community organizations, in which case the sponsorship group is responsible for providing access to these services. Such was the case for the communities I studied, and in fact, an important part of my interviews was spent talking about these challenges, especially in terms of access to transportation, employment and translation.

## **1.5 Private Sponsorship, Experienced**

Most research on the PSRP is scarce and tends to compare the resettlement outcomes between PSRs and GARs (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez, 2016), providing limited understanding

on the experience of sponsorship. Often, this research includes large-scale, policy-oriented quantitative studies that measure specific outcomes of resettlement, such as: social capital (Lamba & Krahn, 2003), health and healthcare access (Tuck, et al., 2019), economic and labor-market integration (Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017), or socio-cultural integration (Yu, Ouellet, & Warmington, 2007). From this body of research are produced generalizable images of resettlement that warrant further inquiry. For context, a few of these will be explored.

In conducting comparative research between PSR and GAR Indochinese newcomers over a ten-year period, from 1981-1991, Beiser (2003) determined that PSR newcomers had integrated better (Beiser, 2003). Successful resettlement and therefore successful integration were measured by employment rates, English language fluency and health. These findings are consistent with a 2007 report on the PSRP by Citizenship and Immigration Canada<sup>5</sup> (CIC) that compares GARs to PSRs, where PSR newcomers had higher employment rates suggesting that they had also integrated better. The Syrian Initiative cohort of PSRs yields similar results. In December 2016, IRCC released a report titled “Rapid Impact Evaluation of the Syrian Refugee Initiative” (IRCC, 2016). The survey-based evaluation is a quantitative investigation comparing resettlement outcomes for both Syrian GARs and PSRs. According to this report, both Syrian GAR and PSR newcomers reported being generally happy with their life in Canada. However, PSRs were more likely to report that their immediate needs were met (IRCC, 2016). This might be explained by looking at other factors. For instance, Syrian PSRs have a higher employment rate than Syrian GARs (40% vs. 10%) and are more educated than both Syrian GARs as well as refugees who arrived between 2010-2014 (IRCC, 2016). In contrast, Syrian GARs were more likely to have lower language levels despite the fact that they were more enrolled in language classes. They also

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<sup>5</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) became Immigration and Refugee and Citizenship of Canada (IRCC) in 2016

reported having a greater difficulty in accessing employment services due to language barriers and lack of child-minding spaces. However, the complex nature of these factors of analysis, such as the difficulty of learning a new language while taking care of your children, doesn't consider the variability of individual outcomes, ultimately complicating the claim that PSRs integrate better than GARs. Nonetheless, private sponsorship tends to positively impact resettlement outcomes for PSRs (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez , 2016). The main difference between GARs and PSRs, is that PSRs receive more, daily, help to resettle than GARs. The positive resettlement outcome of PSRs is generally attributed to the efforts of sponsorship that provide important financial, economic and cultural support for newcomers. At the same time, these efforts depend on the will and investment of a few individuals and organizations (Denton, 2003; Hyndman et al., 2016). But what are the goals of sponsorship and how do these shape the resettlement process for both sponsors and newcomers?

In line with the UNHCR's requirements for resettlement programs, the goal of the PSRP is to facilitate the integration of resettled refugees within Canadian society. The goal of immigrant integration, according to IRCC, "is to encourage newcomers to contribute to Canada's economic, social, political and cultural development" (IRCC, 2016: no page number). Integration is therefore defined as a process in which newcomers become full members of Canadian society. Particularly for private sponsorship, "the role of private sponsors is to contribute constructively to that transition from refugee to citizen" (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez , 2016, p. 38). This implies that in their responsibilities of preparing for the arrival of refugees and in supporting their successful integration into Canadian society, sponsors implicitly transfer notions of what it means to be Canadian. At the same time, refugee-newcomers navigate through unique yet complicated life circumstances and challenging adaptation processes (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018) that are exacerbated

by ambiguous understandings of the PSRP and the role of their sponsors in facilitating their resettlement (Lanphier, 2003). So, what does integration under these terms actually look like? As it turns out, the reception context is complex and nuanced (Kyriakides, Bajjali, McLuhan, & Anderson, 2018) indicating that integration for PSRs isn't so straightforward. In fact, a few recent critical studies on host-refugee-community dynamics of resettlement have uncovered important insights such as the role of social relationships and connections in facilitating integration (Macklin et al., 2018; Drolet & Moorthi, 2018).

To illustrate, a study looking at the settlement experiences of Syrian PSRs and GARs in Alberta found that the roles of social connections and interactions are crucial to settlement and integration (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018). For PSR's and BVORs, the sponsor-refugee relationship creates links to the social-cultural community. For instance, sponsors provide important support and guidance in the everyday context, like help to find housing, schooling for children, and even jobs. Although helpful, this tends to create a relationship of dependency for material resources, social and cultural capital (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018). On the other hand, some PSRs reported that sponsors have provided limited support and expected them to be more independent, indicating that resettlement experiences are indeed impacted by the efforts of sponsors. The authors also found that some PSRs felt it was important to feel connected to the mainstream community while maintaining close ties to their ethnic and cultural community (such as making friends with other refugees in language classes, religious activities etc.) (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018).

Drolet & Moorthi's (2018) findings also demonstrate a link between social connections and sense of belonging, although complex. A poor sense of belonging to Canada was determined for some by feelings of being unwelcomed, of isolation and disconnect, and for others determined by the difficulty of overcoming cultural differences (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018, p. 116). Other factors

relating to refugees' lives in Syria, such as loss of adequate income, drop in standard of living, lack of recognition of their education and expertise also had an impact on their resettlement experiences (ibid). Against all of these factors, the challenge of creating social connections was a special concern because "social connections are embedded in language and culture and for the Syrian refugee population they were now often alienated from both (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018, p. 114)". Nonetheless, Drolet and Moorthi's study indicated that a higher percentage of refugee-newcomers in small towns reported a higher sense of belonging than those in cities (ibid), perhaps indicating that the above challenges may be easier to navigate depending on the receiving context. The indication that host-refugee relations influence the experiences of resettlement brings attention to the roles, responsibilities and motivations of sponsors (Macklin, et al., 2018) (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez , 2016). In fact, this study seeks to better understand the role of sponsors in shaping the experience of resettlement. But who are sponsors and why do they sponsor?

Sponsors function as groups with shared responsibilities and commitment to the resettlement efforts. There are many factors involved in the formation of a sponsorship group, including community expectations, policy obligations, media representations, and personal motivations (Kyriakides, Bajjali, McLuhan, & Anderson, 2018, p. 59). Potential factors that motivate action for sponsorship include diasporic attachments (Labman 2016), national identity (Macklin, et al., 2018), and cosmopolitanism (i.e. being a good Canadian, political commitments to immigration, human rights and international solidarity) (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez , 2016). For some, private sponsorship is rooted in the traditions of faith-based organizations, highlighting a spiritual commitment to 'welcome the stranger' (Macklin, et al., 2018). For others, hospitality is filtered through "an ethic of humanitarianism, international solidarity, or a belief that it instantiates Canadian identity" (Macklin, et al., 2018, p. 38). The motivations and capacities of individuals

and organizations to sponsor refugees are grounded in moral responsibility and feelings of solidarity and empathy, which ultimately shape the roles and expectations of sponsors in their efforts of sponsorship; a claim supported and discussed throughout the results of this study.

Furthermore, welcoming and supporting the resettlement of refugee-newcomers into a community requires significant time and resources because participation is unpaid and labour intensive. The ability to sponsor is therefore not available for everyone. Macklin et al. (2018) surveyed 503 first-time sponsors to better understand who sponsors: “Sponsors are disproportionately White, well educated, middle to upper class women over fifty. Many are retired. The formal requirements for sponsorship favor those with financial resources, and the functional requirements favor those with time and social capital” (Macklin, et al., 2018, p. 53). This dominant sponsor profile suggests that the opportunity to welcome refugees is facilitated by resources that are afforded by privilege. This is important because, as mentioned above, sponsors positively impact the resettlement of refugees through social connections and interactions that are crucial to resettlement (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018). Sponsor-group participants interviewed in this study share many of the traits identified by Macklin et al. (2018), with some variation. As will be demonstrated, the interviews provided more context into individual experiences and opinions that support but also complicate the claim that sponsors have a positive impact on the resettlement process for refugees.

Refugee resettlement through private sponsorship is a complex process that transcends international refugee protection beyond state sovereignty. On the one hand, private sponsorship is constructed and regulated by international policies and state-sanctioned efforts, and on the other, its implementation depends on voluntary engagements of individuals and organizations to fulfil international obligations of refugee protection (Krivenko, 2012). The PSRP upholds a tradition of

civilian hospitality and community-level welcome of refugees that has been shaped by different moments of international crisis. The recent and ongoing mass displacement of Syrians has remobilized national narratives of welcome and renewed nationwide engagement in private sponsorship with new trends emerging in smaller towns. The studies presented in this chapter suggest that the receiving context of private sponsorship influences the outcomes of resettlement, and that sponsors play a significant role in shaping the experiences of refugee-newcomers.

Yet, the complexity in contemplating isolated experiences of sponsorship would require a particular position of analysis through which to frame the reception of refugees. It is at this point of inquiry that the study expands on the notions of welcome and hospitality that dominate the majority of refugee related rhetoric as a way to explore refugee reception beyond statistics of resettlement: questioning the ways in which sponsors welcome refugees through the PSRP highlights various moments of encounter between the citizen and the Other, or the sponsor/community and the refugee, ultimately uncovering dynamics of power between those who welcome and those who are welcomed into a pre-habited space.

## **Chapter 2. The Virtue of Hospitality: Conceptualizing Private**

### **Sponsorship**

In order to better contemplate the complexities of community-led refugee resettlement, this study views the PSRP as a form of hospitality where the process of private sponsorship establishes the conditions and parameters of welcome, and provides a context through which to observe the multiple dynamics of encounter between host and guest, citizen and refugee, or native and Other.

The study further narrows its focus on sponsor experiences and perceptions of sponsorship, placing emphasis on the practice and actions of welcome performed by those who have the power to welcome - moments in which power positions are exercised, and contested. Arguably, the motivations of individuals and organizations to engage in private sponsorship and to take on the required responsibilities are stimulated out of moral obligations and feelings of empathy towards the human condition. Whilst ideas of “welcoming” and “extending hospitality to” refugees encompass elements of solidarity and generosity, the actual manifestations of this welcome – described by Ens (2017) as “the incorporation of the Other within a pre-habited space” (p.7)- are more complex and multi-dimensional. Specifically, within the context of refugee reception, the refugee, as the figurative “Other”, is discursively constructed as a passive victim deserving of rescue, as an infantilized object of Western hospitality and charity. Yet, in the ideas of hospitality and through the conditions of sponsorship, the “refugee Other” is welcomed and offered the right to membership; a process in which the “Other” is intended to become “Us”.

In the following chapter, I first draw on the concept of Orientalism to expand on the process of Othering manifested through welcoming and hospitality in order to situate the study within broader narratives of refugee reception. Second, I define the interconnected dimensions of hospitality as they relate to the PSRP that frame my analysis of community-led sponsorship.

## 2.1 Orientalism and the Refugee-Other

Expanding on the dynamics of encounter between host and guest, citizen and refugee, or native and Other first requires an understanding of the processes in which these binaries are constructed. Much of this understanding has been attributed to Edward Said who theorized on the socio-discursive power of representation by analyzing Western society's cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism.

In his famous work of *Orientalism* (1979), Said frames Orientalism as a discourse “comprised of misrepresentation, generalizations, and stereotypes conferred upon the non-Western world” (Aarssen, 2017, p. 2) that uncovers the ways through which Western (European) culture has come to produce the Orient as a fabricated place of contrast to the West. In Said's analysis, the West essentializes the Orient as static and undeveloped, thereby fabricating a view of Orientals and Oriental culture that can be studied, depicted, and reproduced in order to establish imperial domination. The idea that Western society is developed, rational, flexible and superior, is implicit in this fabrication. Said further highlights the relationship between knowledge and geography, or “imaginative geography” (1979, p. 54) as rooted in arbitrary distinctions of place and time, defining boundaries of Otherness tied to social, ethnic and cultural elements: “they” versus “us” and “our land” versus “barbarian-land”. “They” become barbarians, foreigners, terrorists and, generally, the abnormal. Said argues that this representation of meaning and value of space as “ours” does not require the Other to acknowledge the distinction, it is therefore not a falsification, rather a comparison to the familiar.

In a post-colonial, globalized context, the legacy of Orientalism has been shaped by the continuous investment in the production of Orientalist knowledge (Said, 1981), particularly revitalized following the events of 9/11. Orientalist discourse continues to rely on a “conceptual

binary” (Aarssen, 2017, p. 3) that distinguishes Arab culture as inferior and Western culture as superior, and has been shaped by pivotal moments in Arab-American relations. In fact, the representations of Western media play a significant role in the dissemination of Orientalist discourses by employing negative and caricatured representations of Muslims and Islam (Said, 1981), which has encouraged fear and hostility surrounding Muslims (Aarssen, 2017).

Consequently, Western media representations play the same, critical role in framing both public perception and political discussions about refugees (Aarssen, 2017). Drawing on the concept of Orientalism, Kyriakides et al. (2018) argue that Orientalist scripts of refuge, as “a set of political and media-validated scripts” (p.60), shape Western ideas of the refugee, particularly in relation to the cultural construction of the war induced “refugee crisis” in the Middle-East. According to Haynes, Devereux & Breen (2006), refugees are often portrayed in negative ways in regard to policy about the acceptance of refugees to delegitimize the system of asylum: economic threats, social deviants, illegal aliens, and a threat to national integrity. These representations are used to frame refugees as the Other; a threatening dissonant figure that lacks agency and the skills to contribute to the national polity. In contrast, depictions and images in which refugees become the symbol of human suffering are used to generate emotional and compassionate responses and the willingness to act (Slovic, 2007) that subsequently inform and construct the narratives of refugee welcome. The portrayal as helpless victims frame refugees as the “deserving” Other who must be saved from “There”. Ultimately, the ‘Other’ is not static. The global circulation of images of 3-year old Alan Kurdi is one such example of how processes of Othering are constantly in the making, as Kurdi became the symbol of the Syrian crisis, and participated in the constitution of the Syrian refugees as worthy of saving despite his attachment to Islam.

Kyriakides et al. (2018) further complicate the process of Othering in the context of reception by bringing to focus how refugees themselves navigate their “refugeeness”, a “contested condition of existence in which the figure of the refugee is constructed by policy practices and media representations” (2018, p. 60). In observing the interactive dynamic between private sponsors and sponsored refugees, they discover that the representations of passivity and infantilization are “negotiated” as part of the resettlement experience (p.60). Ultimately, reception contexts and sponsor-refugee relationships are complex and nuanced; refugee-newcomers assert their pre-conflict identities in the contestation of refugee identity, while sponsors have the ability to recognize this agency, and reconstruct their perceptions of the Refugee-Other.

Central to my application of hospitality is the understanding that hospitality is relational, spatialized and temporal, as is the process of sponsorship. In the following sections I expand on how these dimensions inform my analysis.

## **2.2 Relational**

Hospitality first requires an act of welcome which symbolizes the process through which a “spatialized relationship” (Bell, 2010, p. 240) is created between the host who is at home and the guest who arrives from elsewhere. From a classical understanding of hospitality, this represents an asymmetrical relationship where one gives and the other receives, until the stranger leaves or is included. This sense of hospitality is conditional (Derrida, 2000); the guest that is invited is expected to conform to the terms established by the host.

In the context of refugee reception, relations of hospitality refer to relations between the migrant and the sovereign state who dictates the selection and retention of migrants through legal formalities (Rosello, 2001), and to the encounter between ‘natives’ and ‘newcomers’ (Bell, 2010) within a receiving society. The PSRP, constructed and regulated by national policies and state-

sanctioned efforts, indirectly incorporates both of these relations of hospitality. The program allows for and depends on the voluntary engagement of individuals and organizations to welcome refugees into their home community: This implies that sponsor-groups extend hospitality to refugees on behalf of the state within certain regulatory parameters, and also on behalf of an established group identity. Here, the *spatialized relationship* between host and guest relates to the process of resettlement, where the state and communities extend hospitality to refugees by offering them a new home and citizenship – with conditions of conformity. In the sponsor-refugee dynamic, sponsors assume responsibility and care of refugee-newcomers over a defined period of time whilst refugee-newcomers are expected to conform to their requirements. These relations are therefore relations of power, “where the host assumes a position of dominance through social, economic, political and cultural resources afforded by citizenship” (Kyriakides et al., 2018: p. 6).

Moreover, in debates on compassion and care, the concept of charity has been critiqued in how it produces asymmetrical relations between the compassionate self and the receiving other who is pitied and passive (Askins, 2015). Similarly, the notions of welcome and hospitality that entrench the majority of refugee-related rhetoric and public imagery create compassionate narratives who tend to portray refugees as passive victims needing to be rescued (Canas, 2017). Kyriakides et al. (2018) further argue that:

The performative expectations of refuge construct refugees as involuntary, non-willful objects shaped and moved by forces of conflict: “refugees” must fit the “victim” role in order to gain entry, and act so as to retain host acceptance. In the cultural script of refuge, refugees are victims who “deserve” rescue; receiving societies are saviors who provide it. (p.60)

These portrayals of refugees are important within the sponsor-refugee power dynamic because they shape the sponsor’s expectations of conformity: hospitality is contingent on well-behaving (passive) and deserving (needing rescue) refugees.

In contrast, the conditionality of hospitality suggests that hospitality can be withdrawn or regulated by those who have the power to welcome should they feel like the conditions of welcome are being challenged. For instance, although individuals have agency and the ability to demand authority over their lives, the conditions of sponsorship might impede on the liberty to do so. Specific examples of this were revealed in my interviews with refugee-newcomers, where participants expressed frustration over the inability to communicate with sponsors over matters concerning their daily life, such as preferences over English language training or banking and internet services. Sponsors ultimately hold financial power and the ability to assert dominance over such decisions, offering refugee-newcomers very little negotiating power.

This study seeks to uncover the different processes of welcome through the perspectives of those who welcome, as a way to make sense of the relations between sponsors and refugees, or ‘natives’ and ‘newcomers’, and how these relations evolve throughout private sponsorship. Relationships are very complex, and it is important to consider the different ways they may be constructed, and how they unfold through time.

### **2.3 Spatial**

In the context of refugee resettlement, hospitality takes place across different scales: international (e.g. refugee camps and migration management), national (e.g. immigration policies, border politics, intake quotas), and the personal or domestic (e.g. interaction, integration). As a community-led resettlement scheme, the PSRP primarily operates at the personal and domestic scale because it enables groups of individuals to welcome refugees into their community. The community, defined as both the locality in which a group of individuals have proceeded with the private sponsorship of refugees, and its interacting population, is an important element of the

receiving context. The community is the space within which everyday interactions between citizen and refugee-newcomers occur, including the social connections accessed through the efforts of sponsors that ultimately shape the experience of resettlement.

The scales of hospitality are interconnected, meaning that moments of welcome between the sponsor-host and the refugee-guest occur in different places through different mediums throughout the sponsorship time-frame. For instance, initial contact between sponsors and refugees often takes place over email and video-messaging applications like Skype and WhatsApp before the sponsorship agreement is established, marking the invitation to sponsorship and the formation of a guest-host relationship. Once in Canada, refugee-newcomers are greeted at the airport by a group of volunteers, initiating the first act of welcome: a physical welcome into the country, and a symbolic welcome to sponsorship. This is followed by the offer of a new home, an introduction into the community and to its members, as well as an introduction to the expectations and formalities of citizenship (documentation, appointments, etc.). Afterwards, the encounters between sponsor-host and refugee-guest occur in the daily happenings of life: on the street, at home, over the phone, at appointments, in the car, etc. Each of these spaces are inherently complex, and many things happen in between those steps. These spaces of encounter and interaction are where different moments of welcome are produced: spaces that differentiate the *welcomer* from the *welcomed*, *us* from *other*, and consequently, *here* from *there*. However, welcome is not one-dimensional because of the different ways people relate to and in places, and to each other, thus recognizing that: “hospitality does not just take place in space, it produces certain spaces as more or less welcoming, and more or less hospitable” (Lynch, Molz, McIntosh, Lugosi, & Lashley, 2011, p. 15). For instance, if we consider welcome as a ritualized moment of encounter, “perceived

moments of welcome can contain equal moments of fear and discrimination or respect and acceptance” (Ens, 2017, p. 7).

This study is primarily concerned with the unfolding of private sponsorship at the local level, placing emphasis on the spaces of encounter and interaction between sponsor and refugee, once refugees have immigrated to Canada (thus referring to them as refugee-newcomers). This study is also explicitly situated within a rural context, providing the opportunity to reflect on the experiences of sponsorship in small towns, and how these might differ from large urban areas.

## **2.4 Temporal**

Time is an important theme in the analysis of private sponsorship because at some point the gift of hospitality is expected to end. Sponsorship is therefore a temporal process: it has a beginning and an end, it has direction and objectives that must be met prior to the end of the 12-month term. The pressure for newcomers to “integrate”, or specifically, become financially independent, learn English, learn to drive, participate in the community, etc., is fueled by time limits and felt by both the sponsors and newcomers. Additionally, as many sponsors revealed to me, the application and selection processes are very time consuming and labor intensive, with processing delays and uncertain arrival times often impacting the efforts of sponsor groups. Time also reflects how relations between sponsors and refugee-newcomers change throughout the process of sponsorship. For example, newcomers assert more autonomy once they have learned enough English or have their own means of transportation.

The notion of hospitality also suggests that for a period of time, refugee-newcomers are not fully at home because they are receiving the gift of welcome from their sponsor host, who have the responsibility of looking after them until the end of the program. In reality, refugee-newcomers

receive permanent residency upon arrival onto Canadian soil – and are technically *at home* – yet there is a 12-month period where the conditions of sponsorship and its fiduciary entitlements enforce dependency on sponsors. Throughout this study I pay specific attention to this dynamic of hospitality, and how it might impact relations between sponsors and refugee-newcomers throughout the 12-month sponsorship term.

## **2.5 The Everyday of Sponsorship**

The above dimensions of time, space and relations interconnect in the everyday occurrence of sponsorship, yet very few stories of refugee resettlement characterize these ordinary encounters. The challenges in looking at the spatialities of encounter between hosts and strangers include, as argued by Berg & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2018), “recognizing the realities of, and potential for, refugees, migrants, and hosts (whether citizens or refugees/migrants themselves) both “being with” and “and being together” (p.4)”. This means moving away from generalized ideas about the host-guest relationship as static and hierarchal, to everyday relations that change and flow across time and across different spaces of encounter (Askins, 2015). This entails observing how relationships evolve and are developed based on commonalities, but also of dissimilarities and potentials for/of disagreement (Askins, 2015). Most importantly, these host-guest relationships are relations of care and compassion, and of mutual support. As argues Askins (2015), “highlighting issues of interdependency between individuals demands that we pay critical attention to making visible hidden connections between care and power” (p.472).

The analysis of this research is therefore focused on uncovering some of these dynamics. For example, how do, if at all, sponsors mitigate feelings of *unwelcome*? Are newcomers considered “at home” before the 12-month period? Or is there a moment when they become

integrated within the national family? Through their responsibilities of sponsorship, what roles do sponsors ascribe *to themselves* in order to help refugee-newcomers better integrate – or *become* members of their community?

## **2.6 The Limits of Hospitality**

Because the act of welcome is conditioned by the selection of who should receive the gift of welcome, the limits of hospitality are defined around the recognition of the legitimate refugee, thereby creating discourse around who deserves to be granted resettlement (Bauder, 2008). In fact, humanitarian narratives of refugee welcome and hospitality are shaped in a way that facilitates the inclusion of specific individuals, and the exclusion of others. As Darling (2014) argues, “such language is always conditioned by the right to select, classify, and limit hospitality” (Darling, 2014, p. 163).

This study was conducted in a moment of focus on the Syrian refugee crisis, when the demand of sponsorship for Syrian refugees had reached numbers of historical proportions. Although the study had not been designed to observe the sponsorship of Syrian refugees in particular, the demonstrated preference for Syrian refugees suggests that the institutionalized power to welcome has shaped positions of control through selection of specific refugees, further demonstrating that spaces of welcome are limited to those who have been invited.

### **Chapter 3. Methodology & Limits of Study**

This study seeks to better understand refugee resettlement by way of private sponsorship in small towns within Eastern Ontario by capturing participant experiences of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSR). The analysis draws on academic writing and original interviews including multiple in-person interviews and a focus group discussion. Three types of informants were interviewed: six sponsor-group members who occupied a role on the executive committee of a private sponsorship group (such as chairs, co-chairs and treasurers), six English as a Second Language (ESL) volunteers (who coordinated English language training for refugee-newcomers throughout the sponsorship period), and six refugee-newcomers. In total, eighteen people have participated in the study.

Ethical approval to conduct this study was granted by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board (CUREB). The research protocol was designed to protect the identity of participants: all interview material including recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected hard drive. The names of participants including the towns in which they live were left out of the transcripts so that participants cannot be identified in the published work. Details on confidentiality, consent and rights to withdraw from the study were discussed during recruitment and again prior to commencing interviews. Participants were asked to sign a consent form outlining these terms prior to commencing interviews. Refugee-newcomer participants were provided with a consent form translated into Arabic to ensure informed consent and proper understanding of the terms of confidentiality as well as the purpose of their participation in the study. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee, and generally lasted an hour to an hour and a half. Copies of the interview guides are attached in Appendix 1. With the exception of the focus group discussion, all interviews were transcribed and processed through the qualitative software

NVIVO using thematical analysis, where the content is coded into themes. Themes emerge out of occurrence and of significance to the study, and are then used to structure the analysis. For example, sponsor-group participants often spoke of the importance of managing finances and the challenges they experienced in providing refugee-newcomers with monthly allowances. All interview passages that referenced finances were coded then gathered into a separate folder, creating an inclusive view of this theme thus facilitating its write-up and cross-reference with other themes.

### **3.1 Fieldwork**

The fieldwork was conducted between Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 across five communities in Eastern Ontario with populations between 3,000 and 7,000 people. All participating sponsorship groups had been created after November 2015 with the goal to sponsor Syrian refugees, and all sponsor participants were first-time sponsors. Although this was not expected, it was foreseeable: in Chapter 2 I highlighted recent trends of refugee sponsorship in small towns across Ontario. I speculated that the increase of rural sponsorship corresponds to the 2015 Syrian Initiative, which was later confirmed in my interviews. Nonetheless, IRCC has not collected information of refugee admission into the specific communities I visited, perhaps because they are too small, fall under different category (“other”), or are considered part of the nearest metropolitan city. Hence, fieldwork was conducted in an “unmarked” area of sponsorship. As will be discussed later, the novelty of private sponsorship in these communities further speaks to the ways in which the Syrian crisis renewed the narratives of welcome within Canadian society, in turn generating nationwide community-led humanitarian responses.

Throughout the 8-month period during which interviews were collected, a lot of time was spent building relationships of trust with sponsor and refugee-newcomer participants. Recognizing that sponsors and refugee-newcomers receive a lot of interview requests from various media, I felt it was important that participants understood my intentions before meeting me for an interview. For instance, throughout the study I had arranged many informal phone calls and meetings with interested sponsor-group volunteers to introduce myself and my research, and to get to know them and their involvement in the sponsorship before inviting them for an interview. This also allowed participants to identify and connect me to people involved in various capacities of sponsorship. From back-and-forth emails, to multiple coffee dates and home visits, the time spent connecting with sponsors was important to the study because it allowed me to better get to know the people behind the stories and their timelines, to become familiar with the places of sponsorship, and to better understand the dynamics of sponsor-groups.

As I started expanding my research network, I was invited to a social gathering organized by a sponsor group in appreciation of their volunteers and three refugee-newcomer families. The gathering occurred before I had interviewed anyone from this community, and my participation was meant to give me the opportunity to introduce myself and recruit interview participants. More importantly, I had been invited to share a moment in which sponsors and newcomers celebrated their community of sponsorship and newfound friendships; volunteers told me about their most cherished moments and I was introduced to refugee-newcomer adults and to some of their children who told me with great excitement about their school and new friends (referring both to other children from school and volunteers who babysit them). I later interviewed the three refugee-newcomer couples I met at this gathering, and it is possible that they felt more compelled to accept my request because we had already met.

Though these informal moments are not further discussed in the study, they were essential to the research process because they provided me with some background to the stories of sponsorship, community and friendship. At the same time, the opportunity to observe sponsors, volunteers and refugee-newcomers interact with each other in one place, for me, put emphasis on uncovering the complex relational aspect of sponsorship: though the gathering revealed many positive and beautiful experiences of sponsorship, what wasn't being shown or told?

### **Recruitment**

The research was methodologically designed to reach as many small-town sponsorship networks as possible while maintaining participant confidentiality. A snowballing strategy was used to recruit participants and build the research network in multiple communities. Snowballing uses referrals as the main approach for networking within a community, where a first subject will be asked to refer the researcher to others, and so on. I used personal connections to be first introduced to sponsor group members, then built a set of contacts through their referrals. Accessing new communities was easy because sponsorship committees in small towns tend to help each other and remain in close contact.

Participants were contacted through e-mail or by phone and invited to participate in the study. With the objective of being as transparent as possible, I first explained that the goal of the study is to better understand the process of the PSRP, in order to identify points of strength and weakness of rural refugee resettlement. In disclosing my specific interest to gather personal experiences and anecdotes, I explained that participation is confidential and that participants may withdraw at any time.

Challenges encountered during the recruitment phase resulted in less participants than anticipated, likely due to time constraints, lack of interest and busy schedules. Recruitment was

particularity challenging for refugee-newcomer participants who were usually very busy, uncomfortable speaking English and already bombarded with media interview requests. Contact with refugee-newcomers was made through sponsor-group participants who agreed to support the research by encouraging refugee-newcomers to participate. However, the power relationship between sponsor and newcomers could have resulted in bias, where refugee-newcomers only agreed to participate because it was asked of them. These concerns were mitigated by insisting that participation is voluntary and by providing newcomer participants with a translated consent form.

### **3.2 Participants and Interviews**

Sponsor-group informants have participated in the sponsorship of one or multiple families in their community, for any amount of time. The length of their participation in the sponsorship process was recorded but did not serve as exclusion criteria. Initially, I sought to interview members of a sponsorship Executive Committee, particularly chairs, co-chairs and treasurers. However, the participant group expanded to incorporate English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor volunteers: as my interviews progressed I realized that executive committee members are very high-level in the sponsorship process, and that many do not assist refugee-newcomers in everyday moments. I learned that ESL volunteers spend a lot of time with refugee-newcomers indicating that their experiences could reveal more insight into private sponsorship, in particular the ways in which ESL courses are designed to introduce newcomers to the norms and values of Canadian society. In addition to six interviews with sponsor-group members, I individually interviewed three ESL volunteers and held a focus group discussion with three other ESL volunteers. Demographically, all sponsor-group and ESL volunteer participants were white, middle class individuals. Most were retired, and predominantly women.

Refugee-newcomer informants are privately-sponsored refugees (PSRs) that have been resettled to a small-town in Eastern Ontario. At the time of study, all refugee-newcomer participants had completed the sponsorship program for over a year, and up to three. In recruiting refugee-newcomers for participation, priority was given over individuals that were no longer being sponsored, however the length of time did not serve as exclusion criteria. The reason for prioritizing newcomers that had completed sponsorship is threefold: First, I wanted to avoid the use of a translator for financial and interpretive reasons. I speculated that after the 12-month sponsorship period participants might have learned enough conversational English for our discussion, which would eliminate my concerns of translation. However, the language barrier was too difficult to overcome and significantly impacted the usability of interviews in the analysis. Second, I wanted to know about the overall experience of private sponsorship through time, inquiring on different phases and what factors were more challenging than others. Third, I thought perhaps newcomers in the active process of sponsorship would have felt more pressure to participate or have censored their responses in fear of insulting their sponsors, thus providing an inaccurate account of their experiences. In total, I separately interviewed three married couples, for a total of six people. All refugee-newcomer participants are Syrian refugees.

### **Interviews with Sponsor-Group and ESL Participants**

Sponsor-group participants were asked a sequence of semi-structured and open-ended questions that are thematically organized to reflect different phases of private sponsorship, including: motivations for engaging in sponsorship; sponsor-group preparations and task delegation, and the 12-month term of sponsorship. ESL volunteers, who are responsible for providing language training to refugee-newcomers, were asked about personal motivations, lesson planning, lesson content. The focus group carried an open discussion while prompting for the same

themes as the ESL interviews, allowing participants to discuss amongst themselves. This discussion served to complement the in-person ESL volunteer interviews and was recorded but not transcribed.

### **Interviews with Newcomer Couples**

Refugee-newcomer participants were asked a series of structured and open-ended questions that were designed to capture the experiences of participants as privately sponsored individuals. The questions were organized around the following themes: feelings towards rural community, challenges and opportunities of private sponsorship, and adjustment to life in Canada. All interviews were conducted in the homes of participants. When recruiting volunteers for this participant group, I requested that each individual be interviewed separately, but this had not been understood so couples were interviewed together. In the end, this format was beneficial to participants because one person was always more comfortable in English than the other, allowing couples to help each other better understand and answer questions.

### **3.3 Limitations of the Study**

As previously mentioned, two of the three interviews with refugee-newcomer couples are of limited use to the study due to a significant language barrier. In fact, the difficulty for me to communicate with participants impacted the outcome of interviews, subsequently restricting the depth of information that contribute to overall findings. For instance, despite being received with enthusiasm and kindness, I felt a sense of unease at the inability to properly explain or rephrase questions that had not been understood, causing me to drop questions or avoid asking for

clarifications. This challenge would have been better mediated with the use of a translator. Ultimately, the study and its findings predominantly focus on sponsor-group and ESL perspectives, whereas interviews with refugee-newcomers were used to complement and complicate certain themes. This significantly limits the inclusion of refugee-newcomer voices in the study, offering a particularly narrow view of the experience of sponsorship for privately sponsored individuals.

The study is also an interpretation of (subjective/selected/formulated) opinions and experiences from a variety of different people across several rural communities over a specific amount of time: the findings are therefore context specific and may not be transposable or consistent with resettlement experiences in other small-town communities. Equally, while the process of private sponsorship can be described as something tangible, its events are experienced differently by different people. Nonetheless, individual insights and experiences of private sponsorship in small towns are important because they contribute to our understanding of refugee hospitality, and to larger policy debates and decisions on private sponsorship.

### **Researcher Bias**

There are many ways in which I, the researcher, may have been biased throughout the research process. To start, the communities I visited are situated in a geographical area that is well known to me: my childhood home is located within this area, where my parents currently live and where my father owns a business. My father has also contributed to local efforts of sponsorship by providing the sponsor-group with an affordable rental property, and by employing a member of the refugee-newcomer family. It may be probable that my recruitment efforts were simplified given his influence within the sponsorship community. In fact, my father connected me to my first sponsor-group participant by introducing them to my study and providing them with my e-mail

address. To diminish the possibility that my connection to my father would further influence participation in the study, I conducted the remaining of my recruitment through participant referrals and prioritized participation from other communities.

Although the motivations behind the location of the research are inspired by my own observations of recent trends of the PSR in small towns within Eastern Ontario, this area is also quite familiar to me. Therefore, I am not only able to expand on the broader implications of the PSR trends in Canada, but also easily navigate a large span of different communities which is both practical and accessible to me. This familiarity of location may have an impact on objectivity and reactivity in the sense where researchers living or working in close proximity to the research area may be more likely to accept a particular imagined history or reality. In order to diminish this impact, I have had to continually evaluate my own bias by considering in close detail the assumptions I am making towards things that are familiar to me. For instance, during interviews I asked specific questions on individual experiences in order to materialize the realities of participants, and by highlighting their voices with direct quotations throughout the analysis.

Finally, despite a researchers' attempts to mitigate personal bias throughout the study, absolute objectivity in research is naturally impossible. It is of importance then to consider that the initial impetus to conduct this study stems from personal critical reflections of the PSRP that ultimately influenced my focus of inquiry. In seeking more understanding of the PSRP and the dynamics of hospitality within these small towns, the study that I conducted sought to shed light on what I thought were interesting, important and relevant factors of refugee resettlement.

## **Chapter 4. Welcoming Refugees: Experiences of Private Sponsorship in Eastern Ontario**

As a reminder, the purpose of the study is to capture the complexity of refugee resettlement through private sponsorship by interrogating participants on their experience of the PSRP within a particular rural geographical context. Focusing on the receiving context of private sponsorship, the field work was designed to collect individual experiences of sponsorship across rural Eastern Ontario. I set out to meet with sponsor-volunteers and refugee-newcomers to better understand and contrast different experiences of small-town refugee sponsorship. Throughout my encounters, I paid particular attention to how sponsors described various acts of welcome, and how sponsor-newcomer relationships evolve throughout the sponsorship process. The interviews collected for this study each reveal unique and emotive accounts of hope and dedication, of worry and frustration, and of friendship and community that suggest engaging in private sponsorship is complex not only through its application but through the responsibility to oversee the successful resettlement and integration of refugee-newcomers. This chapter elaborates on the main themes that emerged in my interviews with sponsor-group participants and ESL volunteers: Section 4.1 reviews the pre-arrival phase of sponsorship, while section 4.2 looks at the post-arrival phase. In the subsequent chapter, I contrast and compare interviews between sponsors and refugee-newcomers as a way to contrast perspectives and further analyze the sponsor-sponsored relationship.

### **The Prelude**

By the time I conducted my field work, between the Fall of 2018 and Spring 2019, all participating sponsor-groups had successfully seen the resettlement of at least one refugee-newcomer family. Depending on available resources and organisational effort, some sponsor-

groups had resettled more than one family, and up to four. All sponsor-groups represented in this study had sponsored Syrian refugees, with the exception of one group who sponsored a Congolese family as well as a Syrian family. The participating sponsor-groups had formed Constituent Groups (CG) with different churches acting as their Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH), with the exception of one group that formed a Group of 5 (G5). The types of sponsorship carried out by these groups were either BVOR or fully private, depending on various opportunities that arose during the application and fundraising phases.

A common trait between sponsor-group participants was the motivation to sponsor Syrian refugees as a result of the (ongoing) refugee crisis of 2015, and the subsequent push from the Canadian government to encourage private sponsorship. In fact, many sponsor-group participants talked about the widely circulated images of the “boy on the beach”, Alan Kurdi, as the initial impetus for sponsorship in their communities. For example: “it started two and a half years ago, after the television images of the boy on the beach. And that created a bit of a local stir, we thought, what can we do to help?” (S01). And, “in September 2015, we could see this drama unfold across the world. And I thought [that] we should be doing something, I [didn’t] see anything happening yet in (town). So, we spoke to our parish priest who was totally on our side.” (S03) Consequently, all sponsor groups in this study had been created between 2015 and early 2016, and none of these communities had previously sponsored refugees. This reflects and confirms the speculation presented in Chapter 1 that the interest in private sponsorship in small towns is recent and influenced by both media representations of the Syrian conflict and the Canadian governments’ response through the Syrian Initiative and resettlement quotas. Actually, the novelty of private sponsorship in these rural areas led to inter-community collaboration between sponsorship groups: People from different communities would contact each other for advice about the sponsorship

process, to organize informational workshops, and to learn from and support each other in a number of ways. This collaboration turned out to be a vital tool for sponsor-groups and refugee-newcomers who live and operate within a rural setting, as will be discussed throughout this chapter.

Furthermore, many sponsor-groups hold affiliations with various religious organisations, in particular churches of Christian denominations who occupied active roles in overseeing resettlement projects. In fact, religious organizations play an important role in the private sponsorship of refugees in Canada because as charitable organizations, they are eligible to act as Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs). Churches acting as SAHs usually come with knowledgeable staff and volunteers who help to lessen the administrative burden for newly created sponsorship groups who are often overwhelmed by the lengthy application process. For instance: “Our SAH literally walked us through everything thank goodness because wow, a ton of paperwork” (S04). At the same time, the humanitarian nature of private sponsorship entices faith-driven individuals and members of congregation to contribute to the sponsorship efforts of their church by volunteering and acquiring donations, resulting in a particularly faith-driven roster of volunteers. Consequently, and in rural towns especially, the support and network of faith-based organizations have served as catalyst of sponsorship, unifying people of different faiths within the community through dialogue and engagement. For participant S01, a volunteer who self-identified as atheist and had recently moved to a small-town after retiring, the presence and influence of the Church in community-led resettlement came as a surprise: “I was surprised at the active role that congregations and the Church has in a small community, I wasn’t expecting that.” (S01)

However, despite common goals of private sponsorship and the collaboration between faith and non-faith-based actors, some community members did not share the same ideas of which refugees *should* be sponsored. The study was conducted at a time when Syrian refugees were

considered the most deserving, and the sponsor-groups interviewed had specifically mobilized to welcome people from Syria. Because Syria is largely Muslim, sponsors had organized to accommodate specific religious and cultural needs, such as acquiring halal foods, that are rarely accessible in Christian-dominated small-town communities. According to participant S06, some members of the Christian community had challenged the welcoming of Muslim refugees: “some of the churches, in my perspective, were a little special in terms of “oh its really good to sponsor refugees, but do you have to have Muslims? Can’t you find a Christian family?” That’s been a small-town culture.” (S06) However, sponsors don’t actually get to choose the religious background of the refugees they will sponsor. When prompted to expand on his idea of “small-town culture” in this context, participant S06 alluded to the Christian community’s need for renewal, indicating that the preference to welcome Christian over Muslim people was self-serving: “You’ll see in small towns the Christian churches are in decline and the congregation can’t support them, so they’d like us to bring in ship loads of Christians who can get jobs and help pay for the church (laughs).” (S06) This statement, although a personal reflection and not representative of the entire Christian community, insinuates that the processes in which refugees are considered to be the worthiest of welcome is nothing short of complex: while the church plays an active role in the resettlement of refugees, individual actors carry their views and ideals differently. This brings to focus how the “Other” may be constructed and/or welcomed in certain spaces within a community, a notion that I continue to develop in the second part of this chapter.

Naturally, the outcomes of sponsorship vary significantly depending on individual factors, such as the ability for sponsors to overcome common challenges of rural sponsorship like navigating the application and selection processes, communicating with newcomers (including availability of translators), finding appropriate and affordable housing, transportation, proximity

to appropriate goods and services, and job availability for newcomers with limited to no English proficiency. Other factors, such as managing finances and encouraging newcomers to learn English and attain financial self-sufficiency were of equal importance to the success of sponsorship, and these represented long-term challenges that persisted well after the one-year sponsorship term. Most importantly, however, these challenges manifested differently for each newcomer family, depending on individual attributes, ability to learn English quickly and to communicate their needs and desires to volunteers. As one sponsor-group participant noted: “it’s un-predictable, one family to the next.” (S06) Therefore, the inconsistent outcomes of private sponsorship warrant caution in research, and the experiences and opinions of participants should be taken with discretion. The overall findings of this study thus provide a narrow view into how a handful of people have experienced and perceived experiences of private sponsorship, yet their stories reveal important considerations for future research.

#### **4.1 Preparing for Private Sponsorship: It Takes a Village**

As previously mentioned, all sponsorship committees must establish an Executive Committee comprised of chairs, co-chairs, treasurers and leaders of sub-committees to oversee the overall functions of the sponsorship and the coordination of volunteers. Sub-committees are established to divide the tasks of sponsorship, such as education, transportation, finances, communications and cultural/social activities. In my interviews, I asked sponsor-group members and ESL volunteers to describe the process of establishing their sponsor-group and preparation for the arrival of their sponsored families. All interviewees talked about the operational aspects of private sponsorship and how their groups had organized to manage tasks such as fundraising efforts and challenges, finding housing, recruiting sub-committees, finding doctors and dentists,

seeking out translators, organizing language courses, etc. The majority of this work was made possible through task delegation, but given the particularities and challenges of small-towns, inviting the community at large to participate was crucial to ensure that the needs of sponsorship could be met. The following describes how, throughout the different steps of preparing for private sponsorship, groups of people and institutions collectively create opportunities of welcome within their community.

### **Establishing a Sponsorship Project: Responsibility of the Community**

Establishing a sponsorship project, particularly in small towns, requires an impressive amount of work, fundraising and public support. At the very start of sponsorship, sponsor-groups held meetings with the general public that were used to recruit volunteers and to organize fundraising campaigns. Some groups also communicated with the public through online newsletters and social media. Sponsor-group participants very often spoke of the positive responses and the overwhelming support they received from people wanting to help and donate items. “It was a cause that everybody could get behind and support. And because there were so many people involved, the support was manageable for everyone” (S01). Many sponsors also made use of their personal connections to the advantage of the sponsorship efforts, in particular when addressing challenges or seeking specific services. For example, “most of us had connections that we used extensively to find places for them to live. Like those who are most appropriate to approach a landlord type of thing, we went there” (S02).

The reoccurring focus by participants on the importance of public support in the success of their sponsorship efforts further suggests that individual actors perpetuate a sense of responsibility within themselves and within their communities: when invited to participate in the efforts of

private sponsorship, interested individuals became invested in the lives of people they have never met, asserting the need to engage and interact with the ideas of welcoming or helping refugees.

Moreover, in seeking support from their community, sponsor-groups engage with and reproduce humanitarian narratives of refugee welcome. For instance, public meetings were also used as a way to prepare the community for the arrival of Syrian refugees, and to counter any negative feedback some people might have. For a case in point, participant S06 mentioned having to respond to someone say “you’re not going to bring in those Syrians, are you?” (S06) Indeed, most groups expected some resistance from members in their community, something they attributed to the rural context. Both participants S06 and S01 highlighted this: “I mean it’s a rural community, they tend to be a little more conservative, and they tend to be a little more insular.” (S01) And: “A little bit of racist rural criticism, that’s pretty common.” (S06) Participant S01 further explained that her sponsor-group did some research on the political situation in Syria to raise awareness of the conditions under which people become refugees, so the community would be more welcoming to the idea of refugees and more supportive of the sponsorship efforts:

We spoke of some of the conditions under which they had to flee to make people realize that being a refugee is not something that one chooses, and to try to get people to understand that they are leaving their home, their culture, their country, their extended family. Everything they know, their whole network is uprooted to come to something totally new; That’s not something to take lightly. Things have to be pretty grim before you give that up. It’s not a question of “I think I can earn more money in this country, and then I can always pop back and visit mom and dad and sisters and brothers, and have them over, that’s not what being a refugee is. (S01)

This way of presenting refugees as passive victims in need of rescue, whether intentional or not, introduced the intention of sponsorship as an act of charity and of welcome, while the narrative depicting refugees as helpless and harmless people served to reassure the public and to calm any possible skepticism.

Reflecting on the importance of community support in the efforts of sponsorship draws attention to the underlying dynamics of hospitality that unfold in the context of small-town communities preparing to collectively welcome refugees. In particular, the relations between sponsor-groups, volunteers and the public reveal some of these dynamics. For sponsors, keeping the public involved and informed was an important aspect throughout the entire sponsorship process, because people that had become personally and financially invested wanted to be updated on its progress. In fact, sponsor-group participants often expressed a sense of accountability towards their donors and the general public, and big efforts were made to provide regular public updates. Moreover, many participants highlighted that keeping the public informed was especially difficult throughout the application process, particularly because they had no idea when the sponsored refugee family was to arrive. For example, “the tricky part is that you had no hard arrival date and you had to rev the people up but keep them involved not knowing if [the family] was going to come next week, or in 6 months or a year. So that was a difficult part to manage.” (S01) Many sponsor-groups experienced the same issue, implying that the concerns over the progress of private sponsorship, and indirectly over the provision of hospitality, belong to different groups within the receiving community: the duty of accountability and the expectation to be informed both belong to those who have the power to welcome. Refugees, as the eventual beneficiaries of sponsorship, are conceived as passive yet illusionary subjects caught in misery and waiting until their arrival that marks the receipt of the gift of hospitality. Consequently, the host-guest relationship begins to form in those initial moments of sponsorship: sponsors, volunteers and residents, through the PSRP, set the parameters of welcome within their community, ultimately increasing the visibility of refugee-newcomers as the guest/Other within that community.

## **Creating Opportunities of Welcome**

According to interview participants, some of the greatest challenges of private sponsorship occur throughout the application process, as sponsors navigate the complex application procedures and program requirements implemented by IRCC. The obstacles that arise during this phase typically complicate the start of sponsorship, such as processing and screening delays, failure to obtain required documents, or difficulty in identifying refugees to sponsor. Despite common challenges, all sponsor-groups in this study had eventually welcomed a refugee family thanks to persistent and collective efforts; their experiences in applying for sponsorship and acquiring an agreement with the government reveal how the provision of hospitality is negotiated between government and sponsor hosts, and yet, that opportunities of welcome are shaped by individual and community-level actors in their efforts to gain sponsorship approval.

The Executive Committee is responsible for overseeing the application process, which varies between types of sponsorship. The choice of type of sponsorship varied from one group to another, between reasons like financial resources, availability of volunteer workforce, affiliation to religious organizations, and opportunity. Some sponsor-groups articulated preference over BVOR sponsorship, whilst others had committed to fully private sponsorship by working independently as Groups of 5 (G5) and others with Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs). In general, for BVOR sponsorships, the pre-selection of candidates by IRCC facilitated the application process thus making it an attractive option to many sponsor-groups. However, applying for BVOR eventually became too difficult because there were so many applications across Canada that IRCC could not keep up with the demand. As S06 explains, this forced many sponsor-groups to seek fully private sponsorship instead:

[IRCC] would release a list of potential refugee opportunities on a weekly basis; it was like a bidding war! For a couple of months, we were coming up with nothing. We decided maybe

we should also try for full sponsorship, and we eventually identified a family who were from Syria and in Lebanon. (S06)

In contrast, applying for fully private sponsorship requires a lot of work because each application corresponds to an eligible refugee candidate, who is then processed through security screening protocol. In fact, sponsor-group participants generally described the application for fully private sponsorship as tedious, frustrating and labor intensive, often overwhelming the coordination efforts of the sponsorship committee. As one participant explained, “two of our families were BVORs, so we went through the lottery to get those. The other two are fully private sponsorships and the work involved in applying for those families was huge. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of hours!” (S01) In addition, waiting for an application to be approved could take months, with no certainty of when the refugee family would be arriving. These concerns are especially important because, as mentioned in the above section, sponsors are held accountable by their donors and other members of the community who anticipate the arrival of their refugee *investments*. For participant S02, this uncertainty was frustrating and costly: “we were approved in December, and we were led to believe that they would be coming fairly quickly so we rented an apartment in February. Well they didn’t get here until the 10th of July.” In this particular case, the application’s approval signaled the start of sponsorship, thus allowing the sponsor-group to set their welcome in motion. However, the inability to accurately anticipate and control the arrival of the refugee family brings to focus the relational aspect of hospitality where power positions dictate how the practice and actions of welcome are performed. Therefore, the relations of hospitality, in the context of the PSRP, also include power positions between the sovereign state who holds ultimate authority over resettlement, and the sponsor-group who performs the practice of welcome in a regulated capacity on behalf of the state.

While the opportunity of sponsorship is strictly regulated by the state, local and community-level actors are driven by the goal of welcoming refugees. Interviews suggested that sponsor-groups and SAHs in neighboring small-town communities collaborate with each other to counter the difficulties that arise in the initial phases of sponsorship. In fact, participants explained how the challenges and obstacles that arise during the application process were often resolved through collaboration and information sharing between different sponsor-groups and SAHs in neighbouring villages. This is of particular interest to the study because it further suggests that welcoming refugees through private sponsorship relies on community-led efforts. For instance, the previous problem described by participant S02, where a lease for an apartment was signed upon application approval, had been shared amongst sponsor-groups of neighbouring communities. In fact, many participants belonging to different groups explained that this particular instance had informed their respective planning and housing preparations by, for example, officialising rental agreements once refugee-newcomers were in transit.

Moreover, charitable organizations acting as SAHs, particularly faith-based organisations, contributed to the efforts of sponsor-groups who had difficulty with applying for fully private sponsorship. In general, these organisations simplify the application process for fully private sponsorship because their international branches and networks between Canada, Lebanon, Jordan or Turkey, are useful for identifying potential candidates abroad. For instance, “we worked with some church groups they [local church] were in contact with in Lebanon, and started the sponsorship process because we had pretty much given up on the BVOR.” (S06) However, SAHs are restricted on the number of refugees they may sponsor over a given period of time. When a given organisation ran out of quota, they would collaborate with other SAHs who still had quota to help sponsor-groups resettle refugees, particularly when seeking to resettle family members of

refugee-newcomers already under sponsorship. For example, participant S03 explained how two churches within her community collaborated to resettle a relative family: “The Anglican church here in town wanted to bring in a family that was related to our family but they had to come through the Catholic Arch Dioceses in order to get the quota because they [Anglican] did not have the quota.” This collaboration demonstrates how community actors create opportunities of welcome by working around the restrictions and challenges of the PSRP.

The experience of navigating and overcoming various obstacles throughout the application process with very little communication or updates from IRCC offices shows, on the one hand, that the large influx of applications for Syrian sponsorship had overwhelmed the bureaucratic system thereby delaying its efficiency. On the other hand, it suggests that in applying for private sponsorship, sponsor-groups and SAHs are expected to absorb the work involved in the selection of individuals that may be granted resettlement without the authority or ability to actually do so. Obviously, the State is responsible for implementing and regulating immigration laws, standards and programs. And, in its authority over its own borders, the State governs who may or may not be granted legitimate entry, ultimately dictating its conditions of hospitality. What the PSRP allows for, then, is an opportunity for civil society to be invested in the responsibility of resettlement in a controlled capacity, revealing yet another facet in the provision of hospitality: sponsors extend hospitality to refugees on behalf of the State and also on behalf of a community, and the application for sponsorship represents a moment of negotiation between the sponsor host and the government host on the decision to resettle which individuals, and under what conditions. Correspondingly, an approved application represents the moment that resettlement has been formally granted, and symbolically, the moment where groups of dedicated individuals have created an opportunity of welcome within their community.

## **Anticipating Needs and Making a Home**

In interviews with sponsor-group participants, an important topic of conversation surrounding the preparations for sponsorship included learning what to expect throughout the sponsorship year and anticipating the needs of refugee-newcomers prior to their arrival. These moments of preparation and anticipation represent moments in which various acts of welcome are performed by sponsors who work to acquire relevant information that inform their actions and strategies to best support the transition of refugee-newcomers into their new home.

Through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP), IRCC provides standardized learning tools such as the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP) and online material to help better manage the outcomes of sponsorship. Many other resources are offered by settlement agencies, non-profit organizations and SAH organizations who provide workshops, webinars and support to sponsor-groups and volunteers. Most interview participants I spoke with had participated in training programs or workshops and had found them helpful, while some had not found them very useful. As participant S01 explained, “I think for all of us it was something entirely new but by participating in the RSTP workshops, I think we had a pretty good idea of what to expect, but at the same time we were looking at working with people that are new to this country and coming to a small town.” This participant highlights the uncertainty of what to expect and how to cater to the needs of people who are “new” not only to Canada, but to rural Canada.

In fact, although the above resources are available to sponsor-groups to help them organize their preparations, most information provided hold an urban bias thus offering very few strategies and solutions for people living in small-towns which are far away from relevant resources, such as newcomer services, public transit, or social and cultural networks. As a result, sponsor-groups in small-towns must find innovative ways to address the shortcomings of rural sponsorship, and must

anticipate this access throughout the sponsorship period, or until refugee-newcomers become self-sufficient (i.e. have a drivers' licence and vehicle). On the other hand, refugee-newcomers are fully dependant on sponsors to access urban areas where these resources are available, bringing to light issues of dependency. To counter these challenges, participants explained that a few sponsorship committees had organized their own tailored workshops for local volunteers and neighboring sponsor-groups by inviting speakers to give talks about various aspects of sponsorship. These speakers included staff of settlement agencies, non-profit organizations, volunteers with cultural experience (i.e. that had once lived in the Middle East) and even citizens that had immigrated to Canada as refugees. These local, area-specific workshops were experience-focused and served to help sponsors better manage the demands and preparations of rural sponsorship.

Nonetheless, participants often highlighted the difficulty in anticipating specific individual needs and what kinds of support the eventual refugee-newcomers might require once arrived to ensure a smooth transition into rural Canadian society. This was difficult in part because very little was known to the sponsor-group about the family they would be sponsoring until the very last minute. Anticipating what newcomer families might need without knowing details about the family, such as how many they would be, how old the children are, if they had any specific medical needs or what kind of qualifications the parents had to set them up with jobs meant that certain things had to be left to last minute.

However, some sponsor-groups were able to communicate with their sponsored families before they arrived in Canada, usually by Skype or WhatsApp. Phone calls were organized as a means of introduction and relied on the help of translators. Some groups had more back-and-forth communication with their sponsored family than others, and some none at all. The pre-arrival contact was important for asking about specific requirements of the family, and reassuring them

before they made the trip to an unknown place. For example, participant S01 mentioned that in their pre-arrival phone calls her group had sensed some hostility and uncertainty from the family they were about to sponsor. It took the translator the better part of an hour to reassure the family on the other end:

At first, they thought we were human traffickers. But once they realized sort of who we were and that this telephone call was “hi we’re here to help you and we’re going to welcome you to come to Canada”, then you could hear a huge sigh of relief. They were concerned in the beginning. But wasn’t until the Arab speaker had translated for us what had happened and who they thought we were at the beginning, that we kind of understood... because its outside of our experience. (S01)

The mistrust exhibited by refugees over the phone reveals, as will be discussed in later sections, that the conditions of the private sponsorship program are not often well understood by refugees abroad. The above refugee couple had the opportunity to speak with their sponsors through an Arabic translator prior to moving to Canada, allowing them to feel more at ease with their resettlement, and for the sponsors to obtain specific information. While these phone calls were instrumental in alleviating doubts and acquiring important information, they represent moments in which acts of welcome are manifested through introduction, acknowledging the start of the sponsor-sponsored relationship.

Another important step in the pre-arrival phase of sponsorship includes preparing the home in which refugee-newcomers would live. For many sponsor-groups, this was a difficult task for pragmatic reasons, yet a significant amount of care was revealed in participant responses when referring to making refugee-newcomers feel *at home*. “We had to get a house and that was the most difficult part in the beginning. We got it all furnished and got all kinds of clothing, you know it was winter so all kinds of boots and hats and things. And food! Arabic food.” (S03) Indeed, a common issue for sponsor-groups in small towns was the availability of appropriate and affordable housing for refugee-newcomer families. The sponsor-group needed to know the arrival date of the

family in order to sign a lease, to then find a big enough house or apartment within their budget, all within a short amount of time. Most furnishings and clothing were donated by members of the community, and volunteers had to choose which ones they would give to the family. Some groups had learned from other sponsorship groups how to better manage donations, so as to avoid an overload of items. For instance, participant S04 mentioned that asking the public for specific items to be delivered once the rental unit had been confirmed avoided the issue of storing and filtering through many donated items. This group had also decided to wait until the newcomer-family arrived before finding them clothing so they can choose themselves:

We had learned from (town) and (other town), when asking for donations, to put it out to the public because both communities ended up having to store all this stuff that people were dumping off. So, we made a list of needed items and sent it out to our main e-mail list and had people give that way. So, we just got one of everything. And it was funny because everything ended up matching. It didn't look like a thrift store house, everything looked put-together. And we also decided not to take any clothing, we wanted to let them deal with that. (S04)

Preparing a home for newcomers to Canada also meant that sponsors wanted to educate themselves about Syrian culture, in order to appropriately furnish their homes and kitchens. In fact, food was a recurring topic of conversation in interviews, mostly because participants recognized within themselves the relationship between food and feelings of comfort and of home. For example, Participant S05, who had lived in the Middle East for several years, insisted on acquiring culturally appropriate items to make the family feel more at home: "We went to some Middle East stores to buy Arabic coffee, the little coffee makers, the little cups, the special ingredients, the huge sacks of rice and vermicelli, all the things that are unique or common in their food. To make them feel a little more at home." This example suggests that certain elements of hospitality take place at the domestic scale, where sponsors choose to learn what elements of

*home* might be for Syrian folk in order to better welcome and provide for their sponsored Syrian refugees.

In this first section of analysis of sponsor-group participant interviews, I have focused on the preliminary phases of sponsorship in which groups of people collaborate to welcome refugees into small-town communities. The above examples are useful for contextualizing some of the ways in which initial acts of welcome are performed out of care and moral responsibility, indicating the start or formation of particular relationships and dependencies between the sponsor-host and the refugee-guest: in preparation for sponsorship and in anticipation of the arrival of sponsored refugees, sponsors shape the context in which refugee-newcomers will be welcomed and hosted. It is during this preparation phase that refugee-newcomers, even before their arrival (or understanding of sponsorship), are assigned the role of guest/Other and receivers of kindness and charity. These acts, such as preparing a home for strangers, replicate care-giver/care-receiver dynamics where the activity of caring for strangers is rooted in ambiguous notions of what refugees are, need or want. As argued earlier, sponsors perpetuate within themselves a sense of moral responsibility to welcome refugees: care is a motive for private sponsorship that might, as will be discussed in the following sections, solicit an expected sense of gratitude and submissive behaviour from refugee-newcomers.

I have further highlighted how the PSRP, as a mechanism of hospitality, produces various relations of power, and that opportunities of welcome are shaped by those who have the power to welcome. As such, sponsors only hold the power to welcome so long as it has been granted by the State, who in doing so, offloads onto groups of civilians its responsibilities of resettlement: sponsors are responsible for the wellbeing and integration of refugee-newcomers. The small-town context further complicates this dynamic as sponsorship requires the involvement of a large

volunteer workforce and public fundraising campaigns for which narratives of refugee welcome and generosity are reproduced to shape the context of welcome. This suggests that even before their arrival, refugees are granted welcome into the community by those who control the project of hospitality and generosity thus increasing their position as passive, anticipated guests. In the next section, I will elaborate on the experiences of sponsors once refugee-newcomers have arrived, demonstrating new yet similar contexts in which to observe the complex relationships of hospitality.

## **4.2 The Period of Sponsorship**

By the time the families would arrive in Canada, everything had been planned and scheduled for the sponsorship year. A home had been furnished, English classes had been prepared, schools notified for registration, budgets planned, potential jobs identified, transportation sorted, etc. Sponsors expect that within the sponsorship year, newcomers would learn English, find employment and become financially self-sufficient, as those are the core objectives of the PSRP. However, the attainment of these goals is reliant on many factors and obstacles that may not have been anticipated during the pre-arrival planning phase. In my interviews, I asked participants to share their thoughts and experiences of sponsorship as it unfolds through the 12-month period and to elaborate on any challenges their group had encountered, in particular how these were addressed.

In the following sections, several themes reveal a certain merging between hospitality and social control. It is important to recognize the emphasis on sponsor-group participant perceptions and interpretations of refugee-newcomer experiences, thus leaving out the voices of those who can legitimize their own experiences. In fact, the focus on sponsor perspectives of sponsorship allows

to analyze how the sponsor, as a position of power, who speaks and acts on behalf of newcomers, views and justifies this position.

### **First Arrival & Expectations**

The period immediately after the arrival of refugee families was often the most complicated due to communication barriers and different expectations on sponsorship. Communication, and lack thereof, is an important reoccurring theme throughout my interviews. One of the more obvious challenges with communication was manifested through language barriers. In the communities I visited, there were very few Arabic speaking volunteer translators, making it difficult for sponsors and newcomers to communicate because they relied on the availability of local translators. This was especially difficult in the first few months after the arrival of the families, when many important appointments took place to apply for official documents and identification, set up bank and Internet accounts, visit with doctors and dentists, register children at school, etc. For the most part, refugee-newcomers had very little idea of what was going on, or very little they could say.

In addition to communication barriers, participants spoke of many misunderstandings at the beginning of sponsorship that signal major failures of the PSRP. Upon arrival, it was often unclear to refugee-newcomers what private sponsorship was, where they would live, and what role the sponsorship committee had in their resettlement. It sometimes took several months for refugee-newcomers to understand who these volunteers were and why they were helping. Some participants speculated that this had to do with the pre-departure application processes abroad when refugees are selected for resettlement. For example, participant S03 explains that the family her group sponsored had arrived to Canada with false expectations of what would be provided to them as part of their resettlement:

The word on the street in Lebanon is that refugees when they got to Canada are paid 1000\$ per person per month to be in Canada. Of course, all false, but that was the expectation that

our family came with. So, we had to dissuade them. We had to gently get them to understand, that no, we would support them for a year fully, but after that, they had to work. (S03)

Participant S01 also explained that the family her group sponsored did not actually know what was included and what wasn't. "They were told "as soon as you'll come to Canada you'll have free housing, free absolutely everything" ...you just did not know what their expectations were." (S01)

Participant S04 further emphasized the struggle of misinformed expectations:

I'm not sure that we explained the whole sponsorship process well enough to them. I'm talking about managing their expectations right, because this was a very difficult point. I mistakenly thought that they were briefed in Lebanon but I'm thinking that they weren't. I don't know it seemed perfectly clear to me. We were to sponsor them for a year and we would do everything we could to get them on their feet and then after that they were on their own, but somehow their expectations were higher than that. (S04)

The above concerns were shared by many other sponsor group participants, indicating perhaps that there is a lack of proper communication abroad. What is certain, some refugees coming to Canada through the PSRP are not fully aware of the sponsorship details and process. As argued before, the reality that sponsored families were not well informed on the terms of sponsorship prior to their departure for Canada represents a major failure of the program because it raises questions about consent and invasive resettlement. Moreover, many of the sponsored families, upon arriving, expressed some resistance to sponsorship in particular to living in a small town. Although all families have grown attached to and have stayed in their original community of resettlement, at first, most wanted to leave. Some wanted to be closer to family members in other cities, and others wanted to be closer to Arabic speaking diasporic communities. Below, participant S02 explains that their second family wanted to be closer to relatives in Toronto and did not understand why they were being held back:

Our second family, when they arrived, they thought they were going to Toronto because they have extended family there. And the first several months were challenging because they didn't know, they couldn't understand first who we were and why we were involved. And they were getting pressure from their family in Toronto saying they should move there. But that evolved and they love it here in (town), it's been the right decision for them. He's working, the kids are doing well, there's a new baby. But those first few months were difficult. (S02)

In saying that staying in their town of sponsorship was “the right decision for them”, this participant is referring to perceived advantages of private sponsorship and the amount of help and support sponsored families receive from the sponsor-group. However, this perception highlights the assumption made by the participant that the family in Toronto would not have provided the same support, an assumption that asserts control over the refugee-newcomer families mobility and independence. In fact, it is possible and allowed for refugee-newcomers to move once resettled for sponsorship, yet the decision to stay was heavily influenced by the sponsor group who, as seen in the previous section, felt accountable to its community and donors.

The above challenges and miscommunications have many implications. To start, refugee newcomers had not understood the concept of private sponsorship, and that, essentially, a group of strangers would be in command of many important aspects of their everyday lives over a 12-month period. In fact, all sponsor-group participants spoke of the first few months of sponsorship as being the most challenging because they had to explain the terms of sponsorship to the newcomer families, with very limited ability to communicate. This led to some tension and frustration on both sides. On the one hand, sponsor-group volunteers worked very hard to bring over the family, and were doing so out of generosity and care. The commitment of sponsorship was not only an act of charity, it was an act of solidarity and of welcome. On the other hand, refugee-newcomers were arriving in a country they did not know very well, in an isolated town away from their relatives, away from anything that is culturally relevant to them, with very limited or no ability to communicate with others at all, and with very little understanding of the PSRP or what was expected of them. In some regards, sponsorship was experienced as a loss of independence. Tensions manifested when newcomers did not understand what was expected of

them, when they could not make their own decisions or have full control over the resources that were meant for them. As participant S03 explains below, this tension was felt by both sides:

I know they are totally grateful and we are totally grateful that they made it, that they are here, they are safe, they are away from the bombs and the gunfire. But there is still that tension you know? Could we have done more? I don't know, I can't think of anything that we could have done that would have made it better for them. (S03)

In fact, sponsor-group participants often spoke of their efforts to make refugee-newcomers feel supported to the best of their ability and convenience. Despite this (provisional) effort, the assumption that refugees should be happy with whatever is given to them further speaks to the point made in the previous chapter that with care comes an expected sense of gratitude that could eventually create tension within the sponsor-sponsored dynamic should it not be reciprocated.

### **In Managing Finances**

*"I don't think they realize, like no we really don't have the money... we need to pay attention to what you're doing."* – Participant S04

Because the sponsor group had fundraised a specific amount of money, everything had to be budgeted so that the funds would last the year. This also meant that the sponsors had the ability to make sure the budget was respected, by imposing how and when the money would be spent. When I asked participants to describe the ways finances were organized and money distributed, all of them described a system in which the sponsor group would hold onto the majority of the funds, and release some of it periodically, a system suggested by the official program guide. Participant S04 gave me a good example: *"So, we sort of gave them a paycheck. Our treasurer came up with the budget, and we had it translated into Arabic. We did not have access to their account, but there was stuff that we had to do once in a while so I would try and peek."* In reality, handing out a monthly allowance while enforcing a strict budget only gives the illusion of financial

self-sufficiency. Although newcomers had their own bank accounts and paid their own bills, the sponsor-group asserted financial control. That is why this participant felt the need to “peek” into their accounts, to ensure that the budget was being respected. According to some of sponsor-group interviewees, newcomers often resisted or complained of their financial situation. The excerpt below shows how participant S04 responded when the family her group was sponsoring spoke up against the tight budget they were given:

Two-and-half months in, and we were trying so hard to help them manage this money that we had for the year, so it meant being on a pretty tight budget. And they resisted that. And you know what, in retrospect, that shows that they had the courage and the convictions that they wanted to do it themselves. They said “we are adults, we don’t need you to tell us how to manage the money” and we said “well we’re just trying to help you because the money will run out”. And I’m not sure we explained that well enough in the beginning. But at this particular point was a very emotional discussion. They said “we feel badly because when our children ask for toys and things, we can’t afford to give them those toys.” And I said, that’s the reality, we all have to live in our budget. And that didn’t go well. (S04)

This way of responding denies the individual’s assertion of responsibility as an adult and parent capable of managing the money they are entitled to. It also demonstrates that the sponsor-group viewed the money as their own, and that consequently, the budget was their own to manage. The claim on money further legitimizes the control that the sponsor-group asserted over finances and the consequent invasion of privacy into the lives of non-consenting individuals.

When conflicts arose regarding finances, sponsor-group volunteers sometimes did not agree amongst each other. Consider, for example, the following passage where participant S06 brings to light the connection between care and power while reflecting on a 6-month budgeting conflict his group had over providing adequate internet and phone services to their family:

S06: It was a learning experience. You really have to put yourself in their shoes and figure out what it is you are lacking, what they’re lacking and what they need and what their solution would be, not your solution. That was difficult.

Julie: Would you ever ask them?

S06: We tried many times and part of the problem was language. Google translate would help, but they had to teach us how to use it. (S06)

Here, increasing the efficiency and the cost of Internet was heavily contested by some volunteers who did not understand its significance to their sponsored family, and by doing so were acting on behalf of the family while disregarding their requests in order to better manage the money. Once the need was better understood, the family received the Internet services they needed but only after several months of frustration. This sort of executive decision-making was common for things that involved money, because the sponsor group was in control of finances.

### **Language Training**

As mentioned in previous sections, the issues of language and communication play significant roles in the sponsorship process. In fact, learning English is a critical focus of the PSRP; the faster newcomers are able to pick it up, the easier they can communicate on their own, and the better chance they have at attaining financial independence. All sponsor groups have to provide or deliver English language training to newcomer adults throughout the sponsorship term. A single sub-committee is often responsible for organizing English language training. Sponsor groups can either register newcomers in part-time or full-time ESL courses at any recognized language training facility, or provide the courses themselves. Many non-profit organizations and newcomer services provide free English courses to newcomers through the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada program (LINC). LINC is a free language-training program for newcomers to Canada funded by IRCC that is offered in person or online. However, the sponsor-group participants I interviewed found that these were often full or not accessible due to distance. In fact, a common issue in rural communities is the proximity to language teaching facilities, as these are mostly found in larger cities. The cost of daily child care if applicable and of daily transport to and from the city were of significant concern for the sponsor groups. As a result, most groups had

opted for a blended approach, where they would send newcomer adults to courses a few times a week, and complement their education with at-home or in-community tutoring sessions held by volunteer ESL teachers. A few other sponsor-groups with multiple sponsored families within a same community had organized to provide full-time language courses themselves, with the help of their volunteer ESL teachers.

Early in my field work, in my interviews with sponsor-group participants, I recognized the significant concern participants had about communication barriers and English language training. The general concern for sponsors was that the newcomers were not learning English as fast as they had hoped. Not all volunteers agreed that their English committee provided strong enough language training, whilst others thought it was a cultural issue. For example, participant S05, who volunteered as an ESL teacher, thought that the standard in Canada was too *foreign* and *rigid* for them to pick up English at the expected rate. “For all four (sponsored families) the concept of learning in a Canadian context is very rigid and foreign. So, they didn’t take to homework or focus on the lesson they learned or review it afterward. In addition to ESL in the mornings we even had volunteer coaches to go in the afternoon to provide extra support.” Participant S04 thought newcomers did not learn English fast enough because they had not put in enough effort, or were not paying enough attention. This participant told me her group had given the sponsored family an old tv. She thought that it shouldn’t have been an option for them to have tv because with Netflix and Internet-based applications, “they watch too much Arabic tv” and are therefore not paying attention to learning English. She continued to explain that “usually a lot of immigrants say that is how they learn [English], from watching tv [in English]. My mom was one of them.” So, this participant’s understanding of how immigrants *should* learn English was taught to her, and she projected these expectations onto the sponsored family. Some refugee-newcomers resisted the

English tutoring offered by the volunteer ESL teachers. For instance, the following individuals had obtained higher education in Syria and had insisted on going to a recognized college and learning within a classroom setting. As participant S06 explained:

They were really feeling isolated because it was one on one, no school to go to. And they were also concerned that they weren't getting any professional certification. They started insisting to go to (college) and the volunteer teachers were getting upset because they felt if they keep working with them, they would get the level they needed, and how are we going to get them to (city) every day to go to school? And it reached a stage where we did facilitate them in looking at options where there were ESL courses for refugees and Syrian refugees. The family eventually said "we're not having any more tutoring, we don't want it". And the volunteer teachers were not pleased. Then it took another month to get the husband into (college). He got to the point where he was saying "you can't come into my house", he got kind of really nasty. But once we got him there into class, with other people in the same circumstances his language learning was quite rapid. (S06)

The newcomer couple in this example acted in defiance of their sponsors, as a way to get what they believed was the most appropriate method of learning English. It is also possible that their frustration was directed at the conditions of sponsorship, and that by refusing the tutoring and refusing entry into their home, they asserted control over their lives. On the other hand, ESL volunteers were upset when the couple rejected their efforts because they had put in a lot of work into their lessons and planning. This example further complicates the argument that hospitality creates positions of power: Hospitality (English courses, in this case) is offered by sponsors with expected gratitude and obedience (conditions of hospitality), and when or if newcomers oppose, refuse or criticize these offerings they are considered ungrateful or too difficult, when in reality they are adults capable of making decisions about their own lives.

Unsurprisingly, some newcomer individuals learned English faster than others no matter the delivery. However, the expectation for newcomers to attain a significant level of fluency was not reflected by the quality of English learning that was provided by sponsors. More importantly, courses and classes were generalized and not particularly tailored to individual needs. For instance, participant S03 talked about how a woman became frustrated when she had attained a higher level

than her classmates. “There was frustration from his wife because she took to English like nothing, like fish to water. She was at such a higher level than the rest. And the other couple, they never did their homework. The woman didn’t participate, she was very shy.” This sponsor group had combined ESL classes for two different sponsored couples in the same community. The couples were about the same age, but they had individual needs that were perhaps overlooked in these tutoring sessions.

Meanwhile, newcomer children enrolled in school who were interacting with other English-speaking children rapidly became fluent in English. Most sponsor-group participants revealed to me that often within just a few months the eldest children would have a significant level of English, and their parents quickly relied on them for translation. According to participant S05, relying on children for translation was problematic:

It’s a common experience. It’s their children who interpret for them and it’s the children that succeed. But the problem with this, we didn’t have the large community to draw on for translators and we didn’t have solid ESL in my opinion. The children are starting to be used as interpreters. (S05)

This reliance on children for translation and interpretation meant that the sponsor-group was not able to provide adequate services, as instead the children inherit the role out of convenience. In a way, this challenges the host-guest relations where refugee-newcomers are able to provide for themselves access to information and freedom to communicate through their children. Of course, this reverses certain family dynamics, and further inquiry into the role of children in the resettlement of migrants, particularly of sponsored refugees, would be of great interest to uncover how these instances challenge or impact hospitality dynamics.

Conscious of the importance of English language training in the sponsorship process for both newcomers and sponsors alike, I became curious to know how ESL volunteers planned their

lessons, and what kind of examples were being used. Because I had discovered that newcomer adults spend the most time with their ESL volunteer teachers than with any other sponsor volunteer, I was also interested in learning what kind of concerns or questions newcomers had throughout the sponsorship year, and if they would voice these to their ESL teachers. For this reason, I interviewed two ESL volunteers, and organized a focus group discussion with four other participants. The focus group discussion with volunteer ESL teachers aimed to better understand the organization of language training. All ESL interview participants were volunteer teachers in the same community, and they had worked together to organize and deliver language training to newcomer adults. This particular group had decided to enroll the newcomer adults to part-time ESL classes in the nearest city, and complement their education with at-home tutoring sessions.

In my interviews with ESL volunteers, I learned that English tutoring classes are based on the LINC curriculum, and are tailored at the teachers' discretion. There are no formal requirements for volunteers to become ESL teachers, and no training is provided other than curriculum. However, most ESL volunteers are retired teachers and they often include their own materials or teaching strategies into their lessons. For example, participant ESL01 explains:

We ended up using a curriculum that had been used elsewhere and dividing it up amongst ourselves, you didn't have to do it in a particular order. I had my own materials, I would take the lesson and wind it up after what was going on in the community or the season or holiday to make it more relevant. What I ended up doing was teaching survival English, you know, sort of what you need to get along. (ESL01)

The teachers in this ESL group had divided the lessons amongst themselves, and at the end of every session would report back to the others to let them know what had been covered. The lessons from the LINC curriculum had examples and topics that would be useful to Newcomers to Canada. For example, participant ESL01 explained that the lessons were "set up in a way that it would introduce you to everything, from getting your driver's license, to going to the grocery store, to holidays...I remember talking about the Santa Clause parade." As demonstrates this last example,

lessons were used as a way to introduce newcomers to Canadian society. I picked up on this, and further questioned my ESL interviewees. Speaking of adapting her lessons to make them *relevant*, participant ESL01 told me that “it was kind of a sneaky way of getting our values out there too in case they weren’t quite clear about that.” When I asked her to give me examples, she told me: “I emphasized the fact that it was a privilege to be in Canada (laughs) and I would push sort of my agenda that everybody is equal because I think quite often in these...the men certainly have the power in those families.” In speaking of *those* families, she was talking about Muslim families, and I found it interesting that she took it upon herself to educate her students on what she believed were core Canadian values. She continued to analyze her students’ behaviors and dynamic as a way to justify her authority over what would be appropriate subject matter for an English lesson. For instance, she emphasized the importance of gender equality within Canadian society, and what would be expected of them *here*: “although the wife was well educated I think it was the husband’s word that seemed to count an awful lot. I would sort of talk about gender issues (laughs) and get them into the conversation. Sort of like, this might feel awkward to you but that’s what is expected here.” This example may be an isolated one. Not all other ESL volunteers I spoke to felt the need to intervene so drastically. For example, participant ESL02 mentioned simply observing her students’ reactions when topics became culturally sensitive:

Topics ranged from camping in Canada, to how was Ramadan supported and who observes Ramadan (in Canada). They treated it with such humor until the Ramadan topic and that became interesting. I didn’t enter into conversation with them about it but there was certainly some frowning and some head shaking. The topic was so marvelous, it was about someone who was making the food, someone who was Muslim but was not supporting Ramadan, and the people who were supporting it would show up at the end of the day to pick up their food. (ESL02)

At other times, ESL teachers would try to make their lessons relevant to their students by helping them understand more basic things, like holidays, small talk and the weather, grocery store items, or things that would be useful to them. A few teachers mentioned that their

newcomer students were particularly interested in things involving money. For example, participant S01 would bring in flyers from the grocery store or Canadian Tire because they would want to compare prices: “There was definitely an emphasis on where their money was going and how they were spending it.” It seems as though the efforts of teaching English to newcomers was to ensure that they would be able to find and maintain employment after the sponsorship term, and to facilitate their integration into a small town.

### **Spaces of Welcome**

In chapter 2, I highlighted that the limits of hospitality are delineated by who is considered to be deserving or undeserving of welcome, suggesting that the narratives of refugee welcome have portrayed Syrian refugees as the *most* deserving. However, the following example suggests that the delineation of these limits is complex, particularly in small towns where certain spaces can be more or less welcoming according to various criteria of compatibility such as ethnicity or religious affiliation. This might also suggest that some factors that determine how well refugee-newcomers gain independence from their sponsorship depend on already existing spaces of affinity or compatibility, such as language or religious compatibility. However, there is a careful distinction between extending hospitality to a *deserving* refugee (selecting who should be welcomed) and the spaces that favor their transition/integration, or the social and cultural factors that may alienate them from dominant groups.

As previously mentioned, all refugees that the sponsor-groups in this study had sponsored were families from Syria, except for a single Congolese family. Although this allowed for very little comparison on the experience of sponsorship based on country of origin, the singular example provides insight into the complexity of the processes of welcome, particularly in a rural context where certain spaces can be more welcoming than others.

The preference over sponsoring Syrian refugees is indeed represented in this study: out of the five sponsor-groups I interviewed, only one group had sponsored a non-Syrian family. As explains participant S06 this was due to processing issues rather than choice: “we thought our second Syrian family would arrive after six months but nothing happened. Turns out there had been no immigration done in Beirut. By this point we had a big donation from the church and had all the money but no family.” According to S06, when the potential Syrian family got interviewed by Canadian officials in Beirut, their refugee status got revoked because the father was going back and forth to Syria to earn money thereby disqualifying them from the program. This further demonstrates how the international refugee regime occupies and controls the mobility of those who may be legitimately granted protection. Nonetheless, the pressure from donors waiting for a refugee family to arrive led the sponsor-group to accept for private sponsorship a Congolese family who were living in South Africa.

This group had sponsored two families in total: an Arabic speaking Syrian Muslim family, and an English and French speaking Christian Congolese family. According to co-sponsor participants S01 and S06, who were interviewed separately, these families had very different experiences and needs of sponsorship. In fact, their interview responses were primarily focused on the Syrian family because the sponsor-group had been much more involved in their resettlement than with the Congolese family. In an effort to contrast the experience of sponsorship between families, I asked each participant to specifically expand on the experiences of the Congolese family. According to these participants, the sponsorship process was a lot “easier” for them because, as Christians who spoke English, the family was readily self-sufficient upon arrival:

First of all, there is no language issue, which made life a whole lot easier and they were able to strike out on their own. Also, they came from a Christian background so they were absorbed into a local congregation which gave them a second level of support for inclusiveness, which was very handy. (S01)

This response is important for two reasons. First, it highlights the correlation between language and dependency: refugee-newcomers who are unable to communicate are completely reliant on their sponsors to navigate all aspects of their resettlement. Second, it suggests that compatible religious encounters produce positive and inclusive spaces for newcomers: being welcomed into the local congregation had offered levels of support outside of the sponsor-group. Participant S06 further confirmed this point: “the second (Congolese) family are real bible thumpers so they’ll fit in really well.” (S06) The idea that the Congolese family, as committed Christians, would have no difficulty “fitting in” the community further highlights how certain affinities facilitate social inclusion. Both of these points suggest that the sponsor-group exerted less control over the sponsorship of the Congolese refugee-newcomers because they were able to make decisions and social connections on their own.

For participant S06, the Congolese family was “easier” (than the Syrian family) due to factors related to race and language:

This second family is easier because there are no language barriers, and they stand out more because they are very Black. They lived in South Africa in a very racially charged area so they’re used to it. This area (town of sponsorship) is growing fast so it’s becoming more inclusive. And that’s helping. (S06)

Admittedly, it is unclear to me how “standing out more” for being “very Black” and being “used to living in a racially charged area” would make the process of sponsorship “easier” for the Congolese family. This seems to insinuate that, as Black migrants previously subjected to racial violence, their resettlement was “easier” because the town’s social environment was “becoming more inclusive” (for Black people?), and because their language capabilities gave them more independence. This statement is problematic and complex, mostly because it was delivered by a white man on behalf of Black migrants and his perception of their experiences of discrimination, perhaps as a way to normalize forms of racial violence in South Africa and in Canada. At the time

of interview, this statement had eluded my attention, and more clarifications would have been helpful to properly analyze its intentions. Nonetheless, I believe his point was made in contrast to the experience of the Syrian family who required more support from the sponsor-group because they spoke no English and, as religious and ethnic minorities, were perceived as more vulnerable or isolated, and therefore more dependent on the sponsor-group.

In reflecting on the process of Othering discussed in Chapter 2, these examples demonstrate how the construction of the “deserving refugee” is not a static process as is it always in the making. Essentially, within the cultural construction of refugee reception, the “deserving refugee” is ascribed characteristics of vulnerability, passivity and infantilization based on their differences to the host-group. The above example, wherein sponsor-group participants infantilize the Syrian but recognize the agency and knowing of the Congolese, confirms the claim made by Kyriakides et al. (2018) that representations of the Refugee-Other must be negotiated as part of the resettlement experience. Despite receiving refugee status and being eligible for private sponsorship, the Congolese did not require much *saving* because they were not *as different*. This forced sponsors to recognize the Congolese’s ability and authority to act for themselves, a process in which the representation of the Refugee-Other had been renegotiated, thereby weakening the power dynamics of sponsorship. Sponsor-groups that had mobilized to welcome Syrian refugees had produced their own ideas of what these Refugees will look like and need from the sponsor group: Arab, Muslim, non-English speaking, etc. These ideas form *in relation* to the sponsor identity, which is informed by the legitimate ability to act or to “save”. Furthermore, these examples demonstrate how “deserving refugees” might be classified as such *in relation* to those who are deemed as “underserving”, or “less-deserving” within the context of resettlement. This moment of inquiry provides the potential for future research.

## **Transition to Independence**

According to interviewees, the end of the 12-month sponsorship term represented two main issues. First, the termination of sponsorship meant the end of financial support. As of the thirteenth month, newcomer families had to provide for themselves, and so they had to have a regular income. Second, the sponsor-sponsored relationship officially ended, meaning that remaining relationships between sponsor and newcomer transitioned to that of neighbors, friends or members of a community.

For all sponsored families in the communities I visited, the transition out of sponsorship was mostly successful, although some families financially struggled more than others. In all cases, volunteers would continue to provide support when the families asked. One group even had enough money left over after the 12-month sponsorship term, and continued to financially support them well into the second year. Nonetheless, the transition was experienced differently depending on the level of independence attained; newcomers who acquired a higher level of English and had a steady income were thought to have integrated better. For example, participant S02 explains that for two of the families in her community, the financial severance from the sponsorship groups was a non-issue because both of them had stable incomes. These families have kept in contact with some volunteers: “Well I think it was a pretty smooth transition because a lot of the connections carried on. There wasn’t a “we are finished with you”. A few volunteers move on, but they (sponsored families) still rely on volunteers for advice and various things. Like we’ve been talking about setting long term goals; they indicate that they want to buy a house, well that’s a challenge for everybody at that age.” Another participant explained how, after the year of sponsorship, she realized that she might have done too much for the sponsored family: “I am pretty well the day to day contact with them for just about everything. The last couple of months I’ve been trying to just

you know, text me if you have a problem, and I'll check to see how to deal with it. But, I'm not going to come over and deal with it. I was doing too much of that." For this participant, it was also important for her to take distance from the family so that they could learn to solve issues on their own, and so that she wouldn't have to be so involved.

Most importantly, the end of sponsorship marked the end of hospitality. There no longer existed any formal obligations, allowing for relationships to develop or dissolve naturally. As shared sponsor-group participant S03:

We have been very close to our family, and so at the end, when our money was gone, I said: 'ok we are not going to leave you alone, you can get government assistance until you get on your feet, and we'll be here for you', and she said 'yes, now we're just friends, just friends'. As opposed to sort of you know, we were mentors before trying to get them established. But (woman's) words were "just friends". (S03)

This woman's clarification emphasizes the end of sponsorship, and of hospitality, shifting the dynamic of their relationship to that of equals, and of friendship. The fact that S03 was surprised by this suggests that the role she had assumed as "mentor" was not received as such, indicating perhaps the level of power within the sponsor-sponsored dynamic is more ambiguous than it is obvious.

In this second section of analysis of sponsor-group participant interviews, I have focused on the post-arrival phase of sponsorship during which sponsors provide resettlement support to refugee-newcomers over a 12-month period. I have demonstrated throughout the section that the PSRP grants sponsors control over the lives of newcomers in a number of ways, for instance, by acting and speaking on behalf of them, regulating and monitoring their finances, and imposing their place of residence. This theme of social control reflects how the PSRP as a mechanism of hospitality creates a system of dependency: refugee-newcomers are forced to rely on their sponsors in order to receive the resources that are allocated to their resettlement. In this system the relations of hospitality are embodied by uneven positions of power, where opportunities of welcome are

shaped by acts of generosity and compassion for which the guest is expected to uphold a sense of satisfaction and complaisance.

At the same time, sponsors are volunteers who dedicate an enormous amount of their time and resources in welcoming a refugee family into their community; they have genuine intentions and truly want the families to succeed. However there seems to be a disconnect between the perspectives of sponsors on their role and actions in sponsorship, and my interpretation of dependency and social control perpetuated by sponsorship. In the next chapter, I contrast and compare interviews between sponsors and refugee-newcomers as a way to analyze the sponsor-sponsored relationship, in order to further demonstrate the ways in which systems of control and dependency are exacerbated through the PSRP.

## **Chapter 5. Between Control and Compassion**

The interviews conducted for this study also provide the opportunity to reflect on the narratives of sponsorship as well the attitudes, interpretations and description of events of participants. In this section I expand on my observations and interpretations by contrasting the ways in which sponsor group participants spoke *about* and *on behalf* of refugee-newcomers to the stories of refugee-newcomers themselves. Doing so not only serves to uncover the connections between care and power within the sponsor-sponsored relationship, it reflects on how sponsors describe their welcome versus how it is received. This analysis takes place in three moments: section 5.1 illustrates common elements from the interviews for both participant groups, from how sponsor-group participants perceived the experience of sponsored refugees to the ways in which refugee-newcomers described their own experiences. Section 5.2 analyses the use of affective language in interviews to characterize sponsor-sponsored relationships and section 5.3 expands on

a specific interview with 2 refugee-newcomer participants as a way to illustrate the complex relationship between control and compassion present in relations of hospitality.

## 5.1 Conflicting Storylines

Sponsor-group and ESL volunteer participants I interviewed were well acquainted with the refugee-newcomer families, and interacted with them almost daily; many sponsors remained in contact with them post-sponsorship, some even qualified their relationships as friendship. This closeness meant that sponsor-group participants readily referenced events and conversations they had had with certain refugee-newcomer individuals as a way to provide examples of the *refugee* perspective in responding to my questions. This further indicates that sponsors had interpreted and selected information to share with me, most of which follows a similar story line. The following excerpts provide some big-picture ideas that represent a common sponsor-group narrative:

- “Both our families were very ambitious, so no matter where they landed, they were going to work to get better, partially for themselves, but mostly for their kids.” (S01)
- “I think (the parents) create that change for their children, to say we are going to live in Canada and we are going to take this country as it is, this is a new life for us and we are just so fortunate. That is the feeling I got.” (ESL 02)
- “Our first family arrived in -30 and 60cm of snow, it’s quite a transition for them and they do need a lot of support and they need to have that closer group that they can really trust.” (S02)
- “And once he got a job, he’s been working well and they seem quite content here.” (S03)
- “Three months after our family arrived, I sat with a translator and with the mother of the family, and I said, “would you like to move to (city)?” and she said “no, we want to stay here where people care about us”. So, they’re still here. That was very touching that she felt that the family was embraced, cared for and welcomed and everything.” (S04)

Each of these are positive interpretations, and they reflect reoccurring themes in the sponsor narrative: description of the refugee-newcomers as brave and ambitious people who need support and people to trust to help them adapt and transition; finding happiness after overcoming many challenges; expressions of care and welcome within the small-town community; and feelings of pride and gratitude over the efforts of sponsorship. The overall, generalized ideas of sponsorship are very positive: they portray beautiful stories of friendship and of supportive communities

coming together to welcome families that have lost their home to conflict. I believe these ideas and feelings are genuine, and my intention is not to discredit them; these are the stories that give the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program its purpose. Rather, I posit that these portrayals expose how local actors have been governed by means of responsibility and morality, offering relatively static ideas about the experiences of resettlement: the opportunity to welcome relies on well-behaving, loyal and grateful refugees who are in need of rescue.

The challenge in comparing how sponsors interpreted the experiences of newcomers to how newcomers themselves described their experience is the limitation imposed by language: my interviews with refugee-newcomers did not provide as much depth into their experience as did my interviews with sponsors and volunteers. Refugee-newcomer participants might not have been able to fully express their ideas and feelings to me, and often did not understand my questions. This concern presents potential for future research where in-depth interviews conducted in the language of the participants would offer more depth to our understanding of refugee-newcomer experiences of sponsorship, revealing more complex dynamics of control and agency. Nonetheless, the stories collected for this study share common experiences, feelings and frustrations that are important to highlight. The following collection of quotations best represent their stories:

- When I come here I don't understand, I don't speak English, I don't have anything. But my group make for us house, big house. And somebody help me for doctors, for bank, for card, anything for government. And make me happy and I understand now because I speak a little bit English! (N06)
- When you move anything hard for you, and if you don't speak you don't understand what's going on. They gave us papers and told us we had to do this and that but I just look at them and like, what are you saying? (N05)
- Before I don't like it, I say no I don't want to stay here, I don't have nothing, no friends, no family, no cousin, just my group. But every day they come visit me. What do you need? Do you need to go shopping? Do you need to go to family doctor? Now I'm fine. (N01)
- After when I started working, I said no this house is too small I want a bigger house with a backyard so my kids can play outside, and I don't like this car because it's caused

me lots of problems, I want to sell and buy another car. Well that's my own decision, that's my own money. I'm free now. (N05)

Despite the language barrier, the stories collected in my interviews with refugee-newcomer participants reveal strong emotions that range from fear, confusion and frustration, to loneliness, bewilderment and gratitude. Most importantly, the above collection of quotes vividly contrasts with sponsor interpretations of refugee-newcomer experiences of sponsorship. For example, where sponsors have described positive moments of welcome, newcomers have expressed fear and confusion throughout their arrival and introduction to sponsorship. Where sponsors have portrayed sponsorship as an act of service and generosity, refugee-newcomers have felt gratitude to the detriment of their independence. In particular, incorporating the voice of refugee-newcomers into this analysis highlights the role of human agency: people are active participants in the formation of their lives, responding to various influences in the events that characterize their trajectories and transitions. The storylines above ultimately underline the complexity of generalizing the experience of migrants who become the beneficiaries of private sponsorship.

### **Paths of Fear and Uncertainty**

For the refugee-newcomer participants I interviewed, the move to Ontario was generally marked by fear, uncertainty and confusion. As mentioned in previous sections, the conditions and details of sponsorship were not very well articulated and understood to refugee folk abroad: prior to moving to Canada, some did not understand where they were being resettled, nor did they know much about the format of sponsorship. This highlights the intense insecurity and uncertainty refugee-newcomers feel when they arrive as they are driven hours outside the city in which they landed. Some sponsor-groups participants had talked about meeting with their sponsored family over Skype to introduce themselves and reassure them before their arrival, however newcomer

participants did not seem to have had this prior contact. Consider, for example, the conversation I had with participants N05 and N06:

(N05) When we came here we didn't know where we are going. We took airplane from Lebanon to Jordan. There a woman she said you guys are going to (city). OK but where is it? She said don't ask me I don't know. When we got to (city) a Canadian lady that speaks English told us we are going to (city) tomorrow morning at 5am. And I said why, just tell me something. And she said no, that's not my job. Your airplane will leave at 5 in the morning you have to be there one hour before!

(N06) I was scared for my kids.

(N05) It was very complicated for us.

Julie: Your kids were with you?

(N05): Yes, we had 3 kids! The oldest was 6 and the youngest not even 1 yet. For 2-3 days it was just like a scary movie; take this plane then this one and somebody will meet you. We just had to follow these people. Go this way okay, don't ask just go.

This example is both shocking and traumatic, and it might not be an isolated one. Further inquiry into the trajectory of migrants to Canada through the PSRP is critical to identify and potentially address current flaws in the programs' delivery that could decrease the occurrence of such experiences.

In theory, the arrival in Canada marks the beginning of sponsorship: refugee-newcomers are met by their sponsors who welcome them into their community and into their new home. Yet, interviews with newcomer participants reveal that the initial moments of sponsorship are not always experienced as such. In fact, this was defined as a complicated time, marked by confusion and frustration. Newcomers are met by strangers and brought to a rural community: the long drive from the airport, various appointments and visits with people they can't understand despite sometimes having access to a translator. Eventually though, their fear and uncertainty turn to surprise and gratitude as they start to understand that sponsors are there to support them, and are offering them a home. But this is a gradual process that on average took 2-3 months because it required them to build relationships and to learn English. The extent to which sponsor-groups

support and provide for newcomers forces them into a system of dependency: without money, the home, the daily support of volunteers, life in Canada would be difficult, and certainly so in a rural town. On the one hand, participants expressed immense gratitude for the help and support provided by the sponsors, especially for the opportunities it ultimately provided their children. On the other hand, the control and lack of autonomy was deeply frustrating and limiting. This further suggests that the PSRP creates relationships of dependency that are exacerbated by miscommunication and post-migration precarity.

In the following section, I expand on sponsor-dominant language that make visible uneven power dynamics between sponsor-hosts and sponsored-guests, further illustrating the merging between hospitality and social control in private sponsorship.

## **5.2 Understanding the Sponsor-Sponsored Relationship**

A main point of inquiry of this study is understanding how the roles and responsibilities assumed by sponsors might shape the sponsor-sponsored relationship. While conducting interviews, I observed the reoccurring use of affective language, particularly amongst sponsor-group participants, that characterizes the sponsor-sponsored relationship into figurative roles. I suggest that this language contains substantial semantic content that further unveil power differentials between sponsors and refugee-newcomers.

### **“Our Refugees”**

The unanimous use of possessive pronouns such as “our refugees” and “our family” to refer to refugee-newcomers and to differentiate them between different communities (*our refugees* vs. *their refugees*) suggests that sponsor-groups form a collective identity for which the idea of ownership is made possible. The sponsor-group, as a collective whole, thus assume (consciously

or not) ownership of the sponsorship efforts: it's their time, their efforts, their responsibility, their project, and consequently, their refugees. These attitudes disclose the sponsor-groups' power over so many aspects of resettlement, like the allocation of financial resources and scheduling of appointments even though decisions are meant to be made in the best interest of refugee-newcomers. In contrast, refugee-newcomers also sometimes referred to the sponsors as "my sponsors", but the linguistic correlation isn't as strong because the use of other designations, such as "they", "the people" and "the sponsor" were more prominent. Noting here that it took some time for refugee-newcomers to understand who the sponsor group was and why they were there to help them in those capacities.

The above refers back to the conceptual idea that power differentials within the host-guest relationship apply to the sponsor-sponsored dynamic, where sponsors assume authority over the resources of sponsorship and its decision-making processes. However, as was also previously discussed, the host-guest relationship between sponsors and refugees are relations of care: sponsorship efforts are guided by compassion and desire to help refugee-newcomers start a new life. When talking about *their* sponsored families, most participants spoke with a lot of emotion and admiration, often describing them as lovely, brave, amazing, generous and beautiful people. In their words, worries and stories it was apparent that sponsors deeply cared for their families, and that participating in the sponsorship in some capacity had been a profound and inspiring experience. In contrast, refugee-newcomers also expressed affection towards their sponsors and volunteers, yet they mostly emphasized on feelings of admiration and gratitude. Sponsors and volunteers were incessantly described as attentive, helpful and resourceful. For example: "All the people very nice here. When I need help, they help me. Anybody." (N02)

### **“They’re Like My Children”**

The relationship between sponsor-sponsored individuals was very often figuratively compared by sponsor-group participants to a parent-child relationship. For example, participant S02 expressed feelings of maternal love towards the refugee-newcomer couple: “I love them both, they’re like my children. I’m the age of their mothers, and I can’t believe I’m old enough to have Syrian grandchildren”. Participant S06, who was in charge of managing the financial accounts, related his role as a sponsor to his role as a parent: “I have children about their age, my son is 37 and the husband is 34, the wife is 32 same age as my daughter so I kind of felt more like a parent but without the family bond.” Another participant mentioned that volunteers develop strong grandparent-like attachments to newcomer children: “We’re a bit older and their children are sort of substitute grand-children (laughs), and they (refugee-newcomers) look at it that way. And some of our volunteers think like that too” (S03). The expression of a parental bond was especially relevant for sponsor-group participants, whereas refugee-newcomer participants mostly expressed gratitude towards their sponsors. With the exception of one refugee-newcomer participant, however, who compared her sponsors to her parents: “Wonderful people. Better than our parents. My parents, when I grew up and get married this enough. But (sponsor group), for one year they always beside me. “How are you, what do you need?” Always. Not anybody told me for 5 years in Lebanon “are you ok?”.” (N03) For this individual, the support she received from her sponsors was very important in helping her family establish themselves into a new community, a kind of care they had not previously received. It is important to note that here she is referencing to help she has received in context of the home and raising her five children. While in Lebanon her husband was working and often away from home, leaving her and her children in an isolated and precarious living situation. The help her family now receives from the sponsor-group includes

financial stability and job prospects for her husband, but also daily help with groceries, medical appointments, activities for her children, driving lessons for herself, opportunities for socialization, etc. Further inquiry into gendered experiences of resettlement through private sponsorship would be useful to better uncover the role sponsors play in the *re-making* of home and family for refugee-newcomers, which might help to better understand the portrayal of a parental relationship between sponsor and sponsored.

On the one hand, this imagined link to family is important, and points to the existence of interdependent relationships of care, trust and support: “I think for the families it’s the security of having people close supporting them... some of them they say “you’re our family now” so there is a strong feeling there” (S03). On the other hand, the parent-child relation produces a power inequality between sponsor and sponsored individuals, one that is present between a parent and their child. The sponsor’s figurative role as the provider infantilizes the refugee: their relationship is bound by authority. The sponsor not only provides the goods afforded by the contract of sponsorship, they take on the parental role of preparing (or “raising”) refugee-newcomers for life in Canada – much like our parents do before we leave their home. Refugee-newcomers, much like dependent children, are subjected to the rules of their sponsors. My conversation with participants N05 and N06 touch on this exactly: “the first year we can’t say no. To anything we say yes, no problem. It’s hard for me because I want to do my own stuff.” (N05) In the next section, I expand on this particular conversation in order to better illustrate newcomer experiences and thoughts on sponsorship.

### 5.3 Insights from Refugee-Newcomer Participants

Out of the 6 refugee-newcomers I spoke to, participants N05 and N06 spoke the most English and had been in Canada the longest. They have been out of sponsorship for 3 years, are financially independent and claim to enjoy living in their small-town. Their interview was valuable because they critically reflected on their experiences of sponsorship and on their relationship with the sponsor group, emphasizing the challenges and frustrations of sponsorship, particularly in the beginning when they were not able to speak English. This testimony further allows the study to deepen its analysis of sponsor-group perspectives on newcomer experiences of sponsorship.

One of the first things participant N05 mentioned was how learning English allowed them more independence: “When we start speaking English, we start to be more independent to go shopping, to walk to hospital or get kids to the hospital.” (N05) They continued to explain that in the beginning everything was hard, and that the sponsor group helped them get organized and get used to the culture. I asked them if they felt like the sponsors were making decisions for them, to which they replied:

N05: Yeah. When we first coming, yes.

N06: They make everything good for us.

N05: Yes, but that should be our decision not them.

The above example suggests that N06 wanted to make sure I knew that sponsors were very helpful, while N05 thought that regardless of their good intentions, sponsors made decisions that do not belong to them, indicating that the roles assumed by sponsors are imposed. I asked them to expand on these feelings. Participant N05 was especially frustrated in matters concerning money because there was no proper communication or translation at the banking appointments: “I asked the guy to say what’s the good for me and he told me ok this thing and I don’t know what it is. And it’s so

hard especially for the money.” (N05) Decisions were made in front of them, on behalf of them, over things they did not understand. Rather than making sure they understood why credit cards are necessary and then letting them decide for themselves if they wanted one, sponsors imposed them. They otherwise felt pushed around: “Like when you have one that don’t speak (volunteer), he’s not listening, he’s like go this way, no, no this other way, go left, go right, like a kid.” This comment, of feeling “like a kid”, reflects the point made in the previous section that sponsors perpetuate an authoritative dynamic with refugee-newcomers, not only through language but through their actions. It was only until newcomers spoke sufficient English that they were able to act independently and make informed decisions about their accounts:

Many things I changed when I started speaking English, like when I’m more and more comfortable to talk to people and to explain (myself), I changed everything. Like all the details. I was paying 25\$ and I can just pay 9\$ well, why am I using this? Why I pay 2\$ when I can get this by e-mail free? I went there (bank) and I said listen I don’t like this what are the options there, I don’t like that what are the options there? (N05)

I then asked them if, like other newcomer participants, the sponsors still helped them, 3 years after their sponsorship. N06 simply responded with “we have friends”, indicating a change in how they relate to people in their community.

Evidently, this newcomer couple denounced the lack of independence under sponsorship and had the linguistic ability to express significantly more frustration than other refugee-newcomer participants. It is also possible that the other participants did not share similar thoughts, or maybe they felt compelled to portray positive ideas of sponsorship because, for example, they still relied on their sponsors for support. Further critical inquiry on the extent to which refugee-newcomers feel manipulated or dependant throughout the sponsorship period is crucial for uncovering correlations to mental health and/or feelings towards the receiving community as racialized migrants. Nonetheless, my interview with participants N05 and N06 was important for

highlighting certain issues of control that shape the experience of sponsorship for refugee-newcomers.

In this second chapter of analysis I have compared the narratives of sponsor-group and refugee-newcomer participants as a way to uncover how sponsorship influences relationships and different experiences. This chapter also intended to give precedence to newcomer voices despite the language barrier and difficulty of interview. The results of these comparisons are complex.

On the one hand, hospitality creates a dynamic of power where sponsors, who have created an opportunity of welcome, have authority and ownership over the sponsorship project. Given the work that it demands, sponsors adopt attitudes of contempt towards various elements of sponsorship with the assumption that refugees would be satisfied, and grateful, with whatever is given to them. Conflicts arise when newcomers contest the efforts and decisions made on behalf of them, further demonstrating how power is unevenly distributed.

On the other hand, newcomer stories of fear and uncertainty at the start of sponsorship and of frustration and loss of independence throughout the sponsorship period have not only highlighted the flaws of the PSRP, they have shown how newcomers contest or even reject the authority of sponsors despite their dependency, friendships and gratitude.

## **Chapter 6. Welcoming Refugees and the Virtue of Hospitality**

Ultimately, this study has demonstrated that community-led private sponsorship provides many opportunities for refugees resettling in Canada, but that the process itself is complex. While the goal of private sponsorship is to facilitate the integration of refugee-newcomers into Canadian society, I have argued that the PSRP perpetuates a system of control and dominance onto refugee migrants. This final analysis chapter will begin in section 6.1 by answering the three research questions, followed by a discussion on hospitality in section 6.2.

### **6.1 Answering the Research Questions:**

**In factoring the complexities of private sponsorship, what might we learn from the experiences of sponsor-group participants in their efforts of welcoming refugees in rural communities, and how might these specific experiences and settings indicate variances into the success of such an initiative?**

In order to address the main thesis, the following sub-questions served to guide the study in capturing various insights and complexities of private sponsorship in rural communities across Eastern Ontario.

*A) What are the roles and responsibilities assumed by sponsors, and how do these shape their relationships with sponsored refugee-newcomers throughout sponsorship?*

This study has demonstrated the many ways in which sponsors assume the role of facilitators of resettlement. Because private sponsorship is a contract between the Canadian State and the sponsoring entity, sponsors are contractually responsible to provide refugee-newcomers with everything they need to transition into Canadian society, over a 12-month period: from

providing financial and housing support, to translation and English training, documentation support, access to medical care, education and transportation needs. These logistical and functional responsibilities require a large volunteer workforce to distribute the daily tasks of sponsorship, especially in small towns where access to resettlement support and availability of resources are limited. This self-responsibilization, or the transfer of responsibility from the state to communities and individuals who take an active role in resettlement, I have argued, creates a sentiment of ownership over the project of sponsorship thereby legitimizing the sponsor-groups decision-making power. This sustains a power imbalance between sponsors and refugee-newcomers, that is often contested by newcomers who resent the loss of autonomy.

In addition, sponsors are responsible for ensuring that refugee-newcomers are doing well and become self-sufficient over a 12-month period. These responsibilities are more subjective and require sponsors to establish good relationships with sponsored refugees, so that they may monitor their progress and assist them when necessary. At the same time, sponsors are motivated out of moral responsibility, meaning that they want to offer refugees safety and new opportunities: sponsors actively adopt the responsibility to create opportunities of welcome within their community in order to offer refugees a *better life*. Furthermore, the ideas that inform sponsors on what a *better life* would look like for refugees are based in relation to romanticized portrayals of the refugee as this far-away, helpless figure waiting to be rescued, whose incompatible norms and culture require re-formatting and support upon arrival in Canada. In assuming the responsibility to sponsor refugees, individuals adopt the role to mentor, to provide and to care. For example, when it came to topics related to life in Canada, sponsors and ESL volunteers sought to help newcomers better understand things that might be foreign to them and in doing so taught them about the way *things are done here*. These ideas of “Canadianess” were based on individual and group ideas of

how things are and should be done, which are in turn shaped by the economic, social, educational and geographical contexts of the sponsors. This ultimately suggests that sponsors pass on ideas that are shaped by their own social contexts in the small towns and rural communities in which they live.

As providers of housing, employment support, monthly allowances, and educational support, the role of sponsors also infantilizes newcomers. Participants often alluded to this idea that the sponsor-group provides *their* newcomer families with the tools to become self-sufficient, justifying control over different aspects, particularly financial resources, to ensure the conditions of sponsorship were respected. These conditions created relationships of power, dependency and care between sponsor and sponsored: within this dynamic oscillates a delicate balance between control and compassion. Sponsors assert control of sponsorship, making decisions on behalf of refugee-newcomers and controlling their resources. At the same time, sponsors are concerned with the wellbeing and progress of their sponsored family, often justifying their control as a necessary good.

The role of human agency is important to consider here, as it was demonstrated that refugee-newcomer individuals often resist the authority of sponsors, especially once they are better able to communicate and understand English. This suggests that the sponsor-sponsored relationship is not totally bound by control and that care is conditional as long as refugee-newcomers meet the expectations of sponsors. In fact, the relational aspect of private sponsorship confronts the Self to the Other, revealing complex processes in which the experiences and actions of participants shape the social conditions of refugee reception.

***B) What challenges and opportunities are faced by newcomers throughout the sponsorship?***

As was previously mentioned, interviews with refugee-newcomers individuals did not provide thorough and comparable results due to a language barrier between myself and participants. However, these interviews were instrumental for uncovering that newcomers experience a considerable amount of confusion, fear and uncertainty in the first moments of sponsorship, suggesting that there is a lack of communication prior to their departure, and that the international management of resettlement does not properly include refugees in their decision-making processes. It is unclear to what extent refugees are aware of the conditions of sponsorship, as both sponsor group and refugee-newcomer participants expressed having different expectations.

In general, however, refugee-newcomers are very grateful to their sponsorship group, as they had been supported throughout their resettlement. This gratitude was expressed in particular while newcomers adjust to life in Canada: they were grateful for financial support, education opportunities, free child care while in school learning English, and for a support system in general. Refugee-newcomers recognized that the support of sponsorship is not offered to all individuals in their same category of immigration, yet participants also attributed sponsorship as an important loss of autonomy. Being resettled in a small town with no ability to communicate is very isolating for newcomers, who thus depend on the sponsor-group for communication and transportation. Dependency on sponsors and loss of autonomy seem to have been tolerated because the support received was too important.

***C) What role does the rural context have in shaping the experience of sponsorship?***

This question was meant to assess how the receiving context of resettlement might shape the experience of sponsorship. In general, small towns offer very little potential for employment

due to lack of diversity of industry, smaller economic growth, limited services, issues related to isolation and distance making it difficult for people to access goods and services without transportation, lack of cultural and religious diversity, etc. For newcomers who do not speak the language, have no means of transportation, are visibly culturally different than the dominant group and have different dietary standards, life in a small-town would be extremely challenging.

This study has demonstrated that the sponsor-group allowed refugee-newcomers to navigate and overcome those major challenges. In fact, sponsors organize themselves to identify and address these issues prior to the arrival of refugee families – a task that involves collaborating with the larger community. I have argued that the importance of public support in the success of sponsorship efforts demonstrates that individual and community level actors perpetuate a sense of responsibility within themselves and their communities: members of the community become invested in the lives of people they have never met. This decreases the distance between newcomers and the receiving community. In other words, community-led resettlement increases the visibility of newcomers as the Other, making them the subjects of welcome and receivers of generosity. In a small town where people typically know each other, this brings to light many privacy concerns of sponsorship. First, upon their arrival, refugee-newcomers are known to most of the community: people know where they will live, their names, where they come from. People will talk about them, see them in public, and perhaps want to approach them. Second, sponsors will display the lives of refugee-newcomers to their advantage, often without their consent to update donors and the public on the progress of sponsorship by posting on social media or circulating e-mails. This undoubtedly adds pressure on the newcomer family, and perpetuates a sense of otherness rather than inclusivity.

## 6.2 Sponsorship as a Mechanism of Hospitality

This study has viewed the PSRP as a mechanism of hospitality where the process of private sponsorship establishes the conditions and parameters of welcome, and provides a context through which to observe the multiple dynamics of encounter between host and guest, citizen and refugee, or native and Other. In factoring the dimensions of hospitality, I have demonstrated in various ways that sponsorship in small towns not only creates a system of control and dependency through financial control and access to mobility, but also that the right to belong in the community has been shaped by those who have the power to welcome.

*Relational.* Because this study was primarily concerned with lived experiences of private sponsorship, the relational aspect of hospitality has occupied an important place in the collection and analysis of results. The sponsor-host, who creates opportunities of welcome and extends hospitality to refugees occupies a position of power and authority, whereas the refugee-guest is invited to resettle under the conditions established by the host. This was especially obvious in interviews with refugee-newcomers who denounced the ability to make decisions for themselves, bringing to focus how refugees themselves must navigate their “refugeeness” as part of the resettlement experience. In fact, under private sponsorship, positions of power are decision-making positions. This confirms and adds to the claims made in the conceptual framework, relating in particular to arguments made by Kyriakides et al. (2018) that sponsors “assume a position of dominance through social, economic, political and cultural resources afforded by citizenship” (p. 6). In this sense, because sponsors welcome refugees on behalf of the State, they assert dominance over the resettlement process, and have the responsibility to do so. This position of dominance is asserted and further validated by the Western ideas and construction of the Refugee-Other, in relation to the identity of saviours that sponsors ascribe to themselves.

Relations of hospitality are also shaped by feelings of care and compassion: in preparing a home for refugees and in the everyday acts of supporting their resettlement, sponsors form affective relationships with newcomers. People typically engage in private sponsorship because they care about the cause and want to help. Refugee-newcomers on the other hand, are expected to conform to the requirements of sponsorship that are often difficult to contest due to the various forms of dependency that sponsorship creates. Because the process of Othering is always in the making, it is only in the construction, and reconstruction of the Refugee-Other that these relationships are (re)negotiated.

*Spatial.* As this study was primarily concerned with the unfolding of sponsorship at the local level, emphasis was placed on community-level encounters and interactions where different moments of welcome are produced: spaces that differentiate the *welcomer* from the *welcomed*, *us* from the *other*, and consequently, *here* from *there*. In small towns in particular, the community occupies an important role in creating opportunities of welcome. However, I argued that welcome is not one-dimensional because of the different ways people relate to and in places, and to each other: and certain spaces of encounter within the community are more welcoming than others based on various criteria of affinity. For instance, while the Congolese refugee-newcomers had been welcomed and supported by the members of the local church congregation, the limited ability for Syrian refugee-newcomers to interact with the community perpetuated relations of dependency with their sponsors.

*Temporal.* Hospitality is temporal, meaning that the gift of hospitality has a start and an end. I had suggested that for a period of time, refugee-newcomers are not fully at home because they are receiving the gift of welcome from their sponsor host, who have the responsibility of looking after them until the end of the program. In reality, refugee-newcomers receive permanent

residency upon arrival onto Canadian soil – and are technically *at home* – yet there is a 12-month period where the conditions of sponsorship and its fiduciary entitlements enforce dependency on sponsors. During this 12-month period, newcomers are pressured to “integrate”, or specifically, become financially independent and able to speak English. The end of the 12-month sponsorship term thus marks the end of the gift of hospitality: the moment in which power relations dissolve as newcomers regain control over their lives, no longer perceived as guests of Canadian generosity but rather as members of the national and local community... A moment that carries within its memory a sequence of events defined through time, space and emotion.

### **The Virtue of Hospitality**

The title of this study frames hospitality as a virtue, and its meaning has a purpose. Virtue is moral excellence, a foundation of principle and good moral being or conduct. In this sense, the virtue of hospitality demonstrates high moral standards, valued as promoting collective and individual greatness. Offering hospitality to refugees through the PSRP therefore represents a particular moral excellence displayed through acts of welcome, generosity and care. In fact, the motivations and capacities of individuals and organizations to sponsor refugees are grounded in moral responsibility and feelings of empathy towards the human condition. For some, private sponsorship is rooted in the traditions of faith-based organizations, highlighting a spiritual commitment to welcome the “stranger”.

At the same time, the opportunity for Canadian citizens to resettle refugees within their own community also represents opportunities for citizens to welcome, or “rescue”, refugees based on ideals of moral conduct that ultimately shape the roles and expectations of sponsors: with the offer of hospitality comes an expected sense of gratitude and conformity. These acts of welcome and generosity are, in fact, conditional: the process of sponsorship is deliberately formulated to

condition newcomers to conform “here”. Welcome is therefore offered so long as newcomers learn to speak the language, integrate financially, participate in social life and pass tests that would allow them to eventually become citizens.

The title is therefore meant to reflect the duality of hospitality that has been suggested throughout this study: while sponsors and welcoming communities position their acts of welcome in morality as right human conduct, the relations of hospitality established through private sponsorship produce power imbalances that legitimize forms of control and dependence onto newcomers who technically have the right to exist in Canada as independent residents. The analysis of this is twofold: first, hospitality may be offered, and/or limited, in a context that is perceived as self-serving. Second, private sponsorship is about power imbalances, privilege and the premise that refugees need “saving”, and that they should be grateful for their saviors. This may not even be a conscious behavior, but there is an erasure of humanity that is harmful.

## Conclusion

This study sought to uncover the different processes of welcome through the perspectives of those who welcome, as a way to make sense of the relations between sponsors and refugees, or ‘natives’ and ‘newcomers’, and how these relations evolve throughout private sponsorship.

The motivations and opportunity to welcome Syrian refugees into small-town communities were greatly influenced by the images of conflict and displacement diffused the media and the push from the Canadian government to encourage private sponsorship. Individual and community-led responses to resettlement are grounded by moral responsibility, humanitarian action and the desire to contribute to Canadian efforts of international refugee protection. Volunteers who enter into a sponsorship contract with the Canadian government are accountable for the wellbeing of sponsored refugees for a period of 12-months. This transfers the responsibility of resettlement from the state to civilians, who in turn are given the power to welcome. Ultimately, the privatization of resettlement allows sponsors to welcome refugees on behalf of the State, but also on behalf of themselves: sponsors enforce authority over the sponsorship and the resources allocated to refugee-newcomers creating moments in which power positions are exercised. In factoring the dimensions of hospitality, I have further demonstrated that private sponsorship in small towns not only creates a system of control and dependency through financial control and access to mobility, but also that the right to belong in the community has been shaped by those who have the power to welcome.

This study has also identified several potential topics for future research, including: the role of children migrants in the resettlement of sponsored refugees; understanding the gendered experiences of private sponsorship to uncover the role sponsors play in the *re-making* of home and family for refugee-newcomers; the trajectory of migrants to Canada through the PSRP to identify

and address major flaws in the program, particularly in the selection and pre-departure phases; the extent to which refugee-newcomers feel manipulated or dependant throughout the sponsorship period is crucial for uncovering correlations to mental health and/or feelings towards the receiving community.

This study and its findings contribute to important conversations on immigration, refugee protection and, more generally, to the way we may be able to recognize the roles we occupy in various dynamics of power and privilege. It is important to recognize and dismantle how the PSRP, as an immigration program, perpetuates a system of control and dependency on refugee migrants as new residents to Canada. My analysis of this is threefold. First, it supports the claim that I have made throughout the study that the PSRP creates relations of control between sponsor-host and sponsored-guest: the limits of hospitality are crafted by a group of Canadians who collectively influence and condition the resettlement of refugee migrants into Canadian society until they are “ready”. Second, it makes visible the contrast between sponsor perspectives of sponsorship and newcomer lived experiences: sponsors create the conditions of welcome out of compassion and moral responsibility that rely on assumptions of passive, grateful refugees who are waiting to be rescued, whilst refugee-newcomers are independent free-thinking agents that are in control of their lives until their mobility and financial independence become compromised by a resettlement program led by groups of well-meaning civilians. This study further demonstrated that refugee-newcomer participants, in contrasting the narratives of sponsors, can provide their own narratives instead of having sponsors represent their experience. Third, this study asserts that the processes of resettlement and integration through which the Refugee-Other is welcomed by private sponsorship is in reality much more complex than a process of incorporating the “Other”, because

the “Other” is not a static being; the experiences of resettlement are dynamic and nuanced, informed and shaped by the ability of individuals to enact agency and assert their own identity.

However, at the risk of over-simplifying meaningful individual experiences, opportunities and relationships that build throughout private sponsorship, it is important to consider that control is an ambiguous dimension of hospitality that operates alongside compassion. In fact, the core elements of sponsorship manifest in everyday moments: building and maintaining relationships, dealing with the unplanned, resolving conflict and learning from mistakes. Many important acts of care and welcome are performed in the small daily details of sponsorship that should not be overlooked: stories of friendship, community, safety and transformative experiences flood the narratives of participants. For refugee-newcomers, despite the fear and uncertainty lived in their trajectory to Canada and in the beginning of sponsorship, the support of a sponsor-group was instrumental throughout their resettlement. Many newcomer participants spoke highly of their friends and community, feeling grateful for the opportunity they had been given, despite the lack of autonomy imposed by sponsors.

My final thoughts engage a critical and ethical perspective: The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program perpetuates a system of dominance and dependence, not of friendship, over refugee migrants who, for a whole year, are forced to obey Canadians. It is an invasive immigration program that creates intense insecurity and precarity. Despite its current success rate and potential, radical changes to the program are required because the feelings of fear, loss of independence and control far outweigh feelings of gratitude and friendship. In light of these conclusions, a critical re-evaluation of Canada’s models of resettlement is needed to reflect and respect the authority of migrants to act as independent agents of their own mobility and resettlement.

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