REALIZING RESETTLEMENT: EXPERIENCES OF PRIVATE SPONSORS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN NOVA SCOTIA

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by

Inge van Buren

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.

We are all Treaty people.

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Abstract

While Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program has existed since 1976, it has seen a notable resurgence in the Canadian imaginary since 2015. Drawing on data collected through fifteen qualitative interviews with members of sponsorship groups and sponsorship service workers, this thesis explores motivations, experiences and challenges of private sponsors of Syrian refugees in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Through this research, I provide insight into the everyday and social settings of the PSR program. My findings suggest that ethical considerations, media coverage and political engagement were important motivators for sponsorship involvement. Contextualized by Canada's broader immigration policy setting, I argue that for the people I spoke to, private sponsorship was experienced as a way to meaningfully exercise their own citizenship. In recounting their sponsorship narratives, participants emphasized the significance of the social relationships with those they sponsored, while also pointing to dynamics of inequality and frustration embedded within them.

List of Abbreviations Used

BVOR: Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugee

GAR: Government Assisted Refugee

HRM: Halifax Regional Municipality

ISANS: Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia

IRCC: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

IRPA: Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

PSR: Privately Sponsored Refugee

RAP: Refugee Assistance Program

RSTP: Refugee Sponsorship Training Program

SAH: Sponsorship Agreement Holder

SPO: Service Provider Organization

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Chapter One: Introduction

> "It all started on the first Sunday of September in 2015, right after the photo of the little boy on the beach happened. I'd been aware of growing refugee issues for some months previously and had become increasingly concerned about it. But then that photo hit, and as I think it did the world, it tore my heart up. A few others stood up at the end of (church) service and said that they too felt moved. "We're Canadians, we have to do something". They suggested having a short meeting to try and figure out what we could do. Just to talk. So, I stayed for that, and said I'd like to be involved, count me in".
>
> - Rebecca, private sponsor, September 2017

On a sunny afternoon at a cafe in Halifax, Rebecca (pseudonyms used throughout) reflected on her decision to get involved as a private sponsor of a Syrian refugee family. Midway through sharing her story, she paused to take a sip of coffee, and briefly pointed out the significance of the cafe we were at- her sponsorship group held a successful fundraiser here prior to the family's arrival in Canada. "It was such an important moment for us as a group, knowing we were one step closer to making this happen," Rebecca said. I made a note to ask her for details later and settled in my seat as she continued recounting her sponsorship narrative. In the hour that ensued, as well as over the course of fourteen subsequent interviews with other sponsors and settlement service workers[1], I was given a glimpse into the remarkable and multi-faceted experiences of Canadians who have helped resettle thousands of Syrian refugees through Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program since 2015. In the form of a small case study set in Halifax, Nova Scotia, this thesis highlights their stories and perspectives.

Background

On September 2nd, 2015, photographs of the lifeless body of Kurdish-Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi made international news headlines. These images, which depicted

[1] See "Appendix A: Overview of Research Participants"

Kurdi lying on a beach near the Turkish resort city of Bodrum, represented the everyday horrors of a large-scale displacement crisis, and quickly came to symbolize the struggle of millions of Syrian people fleeing persecution from an ongoing civil war (UNHCR, 2018). Sensationalized by Western media, Alan Kurdi's death prompted a wave of humanitarian response, including widespread outcries from citizens across a number of countries demanding that governments step up their commitments of assistance. In Canada, the call to action not only materialized in the form of heightened federal refugee intake promises but echoed through civil society as well.

Against the backdrop of a federal election that replaced a government known for cultivating antipathy towards asylum seekers and refugees, Canada experienced a large-scale mobilization of ordinary citizens and permanent residents to provide support and protection for Syrians. While the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program has existed in Canada since its inclusion in the 1976 Immigration Act, it re-emerged in the imagination of many Canadians in 2015 (Macklin et al, 2018). In a compassionate civil-society initiative reminiscent of the response to the 1979-1981 Southeast Asian refugee crisis (Casasola, 2016; Woon, 2007; Beiser, 1999), Canadians across the country assembled into groups of varying sizes and compositions. Just like Rebecca, they were eager to get involved as private sponsors. This thesis seeks to understand the motivations, expectations, experiences and challenges of their sponsorship commitments.

My Project

Forty years after the resettlement of the Southeast Asian "boat people" (Woon, 2007; Beiser, 1999), ordinary Canadians continue to respond to calls to offer humanitarian support to refugees in crisis (Casasola, 2016). However, while Canadian

refugee scholars have highlighted the PSR Program's strengths and praised its successful outcomes, there exists a gap in the literature around the social relations and experiences of sponsors themselves (Krivenko, 2016; Labman, 2016; Fleras, 2015; Lanphier, 2003; Treviranus & Casasola, 2003; Simich, 2003). Given the significant number of privately sponsored Syrian refugees that have arrived in Canada since 2015, a deeper analysis of their sponsors is both warranted and propitious for advancing research and policy frameworks (Macklin et al, 2018).

Attentive to ongoing policy changes in Canada's immigration and refugee resettlement programs, my objective is to provide insight into how the private sponsorship experience fits within these broader narratives. To do this, I am interested in what compels private sponsors to expand their social and economic capital. In other words, why do people decide to sponsor? Furthermore, I ask what expectations, experiences and challenges characterize the Syrian private sponsorship experience in Nova Scotia, and how do these experiences vary across different sponsorship categories and group compositions? I am particularly interested in how groups mobilize social and economic capital, navigate points of tension and cultivate and maintain social relationships during and following the 12-month sponsorship period. Finally, I explore what sponsors' (ongoing) needs are in terms of institutional support, and whether these needs are being met. To do this, I examine the nexus[2] of sponsorship dialogue between civil society actors (sponsors and service providers) and the public sector, emphasizing the role of Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) as liaisons between these spheres.

[2] Private sponsorship depends on establishing and maintaining connections and relationships (Macklin et al, 2020). As such, a *nexus* in the context of this project is understood as a series of connections within a particular social setting. For instance, sponsor-refugee, relationships between members of a sponsorship group, sponsors-SAH etc.

My research questions are engaged through a small qualitative case study with a regional emphasis on sponsorship in Nova Scotia. While previous studies have examined sponsorship efforts in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario, academic literature has not yet adequately addressed the Nova Scotian sponsorship experience (Ginrich & Enns, 2019, Kyriakides et al, 2019; Lenard, 2019; Macklin et al, 2018; McLellan, 2004; Denton, 2003; Derwing & Mulder, 2003; Beiser, 1999; Woon, 1985;). Many Nova Scotians have organized themselves into sponsoring groups since 2015, and while some of these groups are longstanding, most have only recently emerged. Bearing in mind the nuances of local immigration policy changes, I suggest that the upsurge of private sponsorship in the province since September 2015 provides a critical juncture from which to investigate the motivation and efforts of communities to help welcome refugees.

To address my research inquiries, I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with individual members of four differently configured sponsoring groups in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), providing varied stories and experiences. Interviewing multiple members from the same groups also facilitated a deeper understanding of the social relations present within groups. In order to obtain a more robust comprehension of province-wide sponsorship concerns and experiences, I spoke to a representative of the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP) and two representatives at the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) as well, both key stakeholders in extending refugee support throughout Nova Scotia. Although my project is (mostly) limited to Halifax for feasibility reasons, speaking to a member of a rural sponsorship group and to staff at ISANS and the RSTP allowed me to map out the refugee sponsorship framework

and available services at the Provincial level as well. Hence, my research contributes as an Atlantic Canadian case study.

Overall, my findings uncover that private sponsorship relies, at its core, on establishing and navigating social relationships. In recounting their sponsorship narratives, my participants emphasized the significance of the sponsor-refugee relationship throughout their sponsorship processes, beginning from the moment of arrival and often enduring beyond the formal cessation of their sponsorship contracts. While the nexus between sponsors and their sponsored refugee families was highlighted most prominently by research participants, social relationships within sponsorship groups and with Sponsorship Agreement Holders were also critically important. Further to this, I argue that for the people I spoke to, private sponsorship was largely experienced as a way to meaningfully exercise their own citizenship. Motivated by increasing media coverage about the unfolding humanitarian crisis as a result of the Syrian civil war, as well as by the political setting in Canada leading up to the 2015 Federal election, participants imagined their sponsorship roles as a form of civic participation in which they could channel their political energy at a community level. Finally, while participants firmly underscored the rewarding and positive aspects of their sponsorship involvement, they also offered critical insight into the ongoing institutional shortcomings and bureaucratic tensions underlying Canada's Private Sponsorship Program.

Given the significance of private sponsorship in resettling thousands of Syrian refugees since late 2015, this project provides a timely stepping-stone for further research surrounding this issue. I hope that this research will be of interest to policy makers

seeking to make private sponsorship more accessible and more adept at meeting the needs of differently configured sponsoring groups.

Chapter Two: Contextualizing the Project

In this chapter, I contextualize the project and situate the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program within Canada's broader immigration policy landscape. The first section of the chapter provides a brief historical timeline of mondial refugee legislation as well as Canada's refugee protection, followed by a detailed outline of the PSR Program. Section 2.2 examines Canada's recent immigration policy changes, highlighting an increasingly neoliberal agenda focused on decentralization, securitization and self-sufficiency. In Section 2.3, I explore how Canada's private sponsorship model fits into this policy setting. The final section of the chapter, section 2.4, considers the nuances of how private sponsorship is situated relative to regional immigration policy in Nova Scotia.

2.1 Canada's Refugee Policy

Anthropologist Tanya Basok (1996) notes that the history of refugee treatment in the twentieth century has demonstrated an "internationalization" of refugee policy (p.137). Kleist (2017) and Beiser (1999) confer that while the tradition of offering sanctuary to displaced persons is strongly embedded in many spatial histories, refugees did not really become a *world* problem until after 1945. Following the Second World War, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established by the UN General Assembly to assist remaining displaced Europeans in rebuilding their lives. To this day, the mandate of this global organization is to "provide international protection and humanitarian assistance and to seek permanent solutions for all persons within its core mandate responsibilities" (UNHCR, 1950). While the agency's mandate originally applied only to refugees, it has since been expanded to cover returnees and stateless

persons as well. Since its creation in 1950, the UNHCR has played an important role in alerting states to global danger trends and explicitly recommending that governments cooperate with the so-called 'international community' by admitting refugees to their territories (Casasola, 2016; Beiser, 1999).

For years, there has been ambiguity among scholars concerning the terminology of who does or does not constitute a refugee (Kleist, 2017; Macklin, 2007, Basok, 1996). Shacknove (2019) suggests that a refugee should always be conceptualized as first and foremost a human being. One who cannot live peacefully, in safety and dignity in their home country. However, he acknowledges that a conceptualization of a refugee is not, strictly speaking, a definition, and that when concerning official refugee policy, the meaning of refugeehood is considerably more circumscribed (p.275). As defined in the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, a 'convention refugee' *legally* applies to any person who:

> Owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, 1951).

Since 1951, this has remained the legal definition used in refugee determination. However, this definition has broadened over time, and extended versions have been adopted for Africa and Latin America to protect persons that do not fall within the scope of this definition; such as those fleeing generalized violence, war or insecurity. Given that the1951 refugee convention originally restricted the granting of refugee status to persons who were affected by events occurring in Europe during World War Two, the 1967

Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees removed these geographic and temporal restrictions. Legal scholar Ekaterina Krivenko (2012) stresses that while the UNHCR technically calls on the aforementioned 'international community' to adhere to this legislation and guarantee the protection of refugees, in practice this 'community' is no more than the sum of its parts. As such, the onus of refugee protection inevitably falls on the individual states who have ratified the 1967 Geneva Protocol. As of 2015, 146 countries are party to the 1967 treaty (UNHCR, 2015).

Refugee Protection in Canada

Canada has a long tradition of resettling refugees. Although initially reluctant to give up sovereign control of its borders as required by the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol (Labman, 2016), the country eventually ratified both documents in 1969, prompting a reform of its domestic refugee policy (Casasola, 2016; Fleras, 2015). The *1976 Immigration Act* formally recognized refugees as a distinct entry class and made provisions for the establishment of a new resettlement program, including the addition of private sponsorship. The newly established *Immigration Act* articulated Canada's need "to fulfill international obligations and uphold humanitarian tradition with respect to the displaced and the persecuted" (Beiser, 1999, p.40). Several decades later, the 1976 *Act* was replaced by the 2002 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), which still constitutes the primary federal legislation regulating immigration to Canada today. Under the IRPA, federal refugee entry into Canada falls into two distinct categories: asylum and resettlement. Under the In-Canada Asylum Program, refugee protection claimants can apply directly from within Canada. These inland candidates can apply either at Canada's ports of entry, or, more commonly, at an immigration office (IRCC, 2019a). Claims are

processed by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), an independent and impartial tribunal established to determine the legitimacy of each case (Fleras, 2015; Crepeau & Nakache, 2007).

Resettlement

Alongside voluntary repatriation and local integration, resettlement is considered one of three “durable solutions” for refugees (UNHCR, 2020). Resettlement offers protection in a safe third country and provides a pathway to permanent legal status in a new home. However, due to the lack of available resettlement places, this option is typically only available to a small percentage of refugees worldwide. According to the UNHCR (2020), of the 14.4 million refugees of concern around the world, less than one per cent are submitted for resettlement. Under Canada’s resettlement stream, convention refugees are selected abroad and brought into Canada as government-assisted (GAR), privately sponsored (PSR), or blended-visa office-referred refugees (BVOR). As a member of the international community, Canada and its Visa offices work closely with the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to identify refugees eligible for resettlement. In order to qualify, a refugee must be eligible to apply, be admissible (meaning they pose no criminal, health or security risk), and be deemed capable of successful establishment and integration in Canada (IRCC, 2019b; Fleras, 2015). In addition to applicants that fall into the ‘convention refugee abroad’ class, applicants that meet the definition of ‘country of asylum class’ under the IRPA may also apply for resettlement - through private sponsorship only. These refugees still require a referral from the UNHCR, the IOM or from their sponsorship group to be considered for resettlement. Government assisted refugees (GARs), blended visa office-referred

refugees (BVORs) and privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) are automatically granted permanent resident (PR) status upon arrival and they henceforth rely on the social and financial assistance of the federal government's Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), or the provision of services from private sponsorship groups (usually for a period of twelve months). Treviranus and Casasola (2003) highlight that resettlement, against the two other durable solutions identified by the UNHCR, is comparatively resource intensive. This is true for both privately sponsored refugees and for those resettled partly, or fully by the government.

The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

Anthropologist Laura Simich (2003) argues that "against a political backdrop of uncertainty about the viability of current international tools for refugee protection and finding durable settlement solutions, many countries are re-examining national involvement in refugee resettlement" (p.153). Although a number of countries have introduced successful government-sponsored refugee resettlement programs (Hirsch, Hoang & Vogl, 2019; Kumin, 2015), the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program remains characteristically unique to Canada and has been an important vehicle for the country's refugee response strategy since its inception. The PSR program was established in 1976 to provide a legally sanctioned means for Canadians to provide personal and financial assistance to refugees. Treviranus & Casasola (2003) argue that this is remarkable first and foremost because it allows the voluntary sector to bring in refugees beyond annual government targets, as long as applicants are eligible and admissible (p.182). Not long after its inception, the PSR program was tested during the Southeast Asian refugee wave from 1979-1981, when 60,000 so-called "Boat People"

from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia arrived in Canada (Labman, 2016; Lanphier, 2003; Beiser, 1999). Of this number, 34,000 were privately sponsored, setting a precedent for subsequent sponsorship moments, such as the resettlement of Kosovar refugees in 1999 (Derwing & Mulder, 2003), and earning the program a favorable reputation.

At the time of writing, the policy framework governing private sponsorship establishes the following sponsorship categories: Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), Groups of Five, and Community Sponsors. **SAHs** are incorporated groups with ongoing sponsorship agreements with the federal government and are allotted a certain number of refugee sponsorship spots per annum. As part of these agreements, SAHs accept legal responsibility for all sponsorships that they authorize their smaller 'Constituent Groups' to sign, and act as institutional intermediaries between sponsors and the government. As of June 2021, there are 130 active SAHs in Canada; the majority being religious, ethnic, community-based, and settlement service organizations (IRCC, 2021b). In addition to province-specific SAHs, there are a number of churches and other non-profit organizations that allow constituent groups from across the country to sponsor under their agreements, often with the help of local representatives. Given their mission, size and structure, Canadian churches have historically been and continue to be predominant SAHs (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). As noted by Ginrich & Enns (2019), 75% of all currently active SAHs in Canada are connected to a religious organization.

Unlike SAHs, Groups of Five and Community Sponsors operate autonomously and report directly to the federal government. However, these groups are usually eligible to receive support and resources from local and federal settlement Service Provider Organizations (SPOs), such as the RSTP. **Groups of Five (G5)** are comprised of five or

more Canadian citizens (or PRs) that come together to initiate a sponsorship.

Community Sponsors are organizations, associations or corporations who, unlike SAHs, are not required to be incorporated under federal or provincial law. These groups are however required to be based in the community where the sponsored refugees are intended to settle.

According to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the role of a private sponsor is "to socially and financially support refugees for the entire length of the sponsorship, usually a period of 12 months starting from the family's arrival in Canada" (IRCC, 2019b). During this time, eligible sponsorship groups commit to providing refugee families with lodging, clothing, transportation and food, as well as social and emotional support. Groups typically also assist with organizing medical and dental care, as well as other settlement resources such as language classes (RSTP Sponsorship Handbook, 2019).

There are two ways for a sponsorship group to identify refugees for sponsorship. In 'named' (also known as sponsor-referred) or 'family-linked' sponsorships, sponsoring groups themselves identify the principal applicant to be sponsored. Usually these refugees have a personal connection to the sponsorship group or, as in the case of family-linked, are family of refugees that have already arrived in Canada. For groups that already have knowledge of the refugee(s) that they would like to sponsor, the Canadian Visa Office often has not yet identified the principal applicant as being in need of protection. Thus, eligibility needs to be determined by scheduling an interview with a Canadian Visa officer abroad, often resulting in long wait times before arrival.

Prospective SAH Sponsorship groups, Groups of 5 and Community Sponsors typically sponsor through the PSR model but may also sponsor through the Blended-Visa Office Referred **(BVOR)** Program, which was introduced in 2013. In the BVOR model, refugees are referred to Canada by the UNHCR and matched with a private sponsoring group through a designated website where refugee profiles are posted and frequently updated. As part of this program, the RAP and private sponsors each provide up to six months of income support on a 50/50 basis. Given that refugees sponsored through BVOR have already been referred to Canadian visa offices abroad, many arrive in Canada soon after they are matched with a group, typically within one to four months (Labman, 2016).

Syrian Refugee Admittance Numbers

During Canada's 42nd general election campaign during the fall of 2015, the plight of Syrian refugees was at the center of political debate. Public pressure was exerted onto the Conservative Harper government to increase refugee intake after concerns that the party was not doing enough to address the emerging humanitarian crisis[3]. In response, Stephen Harper promised that a re-elected Conservative government would admit 10,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2015 (Chase, 2015). Far exceeding this commitment was the Liberal Party's widely publicized "#WelcomeRefugees" initiative, which prioritized resettlement as a durable solution to the ongoing Syrian conflict and promised to admit 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2015 (IRCC, 2017). Following their 2015 election

[3] Criticism included delays in refugee arrivals due to budget constraints which resulted in the Conservative government's failure to meet its earlier commitments of taking in 1300 Syrian refugees by the end of 2014. Additionally, former immigration minister Chris Alexander (2013-2015) was criticized for a stance of indifference towards the unfolding humanitarian crisis and a systematic overreliance on private sponsors to meet resettlement targets (Levitz, 2015; Ibbitson & Clark, 2015).

win, the Liberal government led by Justin Trudeau relied heavily on help from private sponsors to meet its projected goal of resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees by an updated deadline of February 2016. Of the Syrian refugees that arrived by that date, 8954 were privately sponsored and 2224 were sponsored through the BVOR Program. In total, 73,510 Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada since November 2015 under all streams combined (IRCC, 2021). Impressively, private sponsors (including BVOR) resettled 39,070 or 53% of this total.

Receptions of Canada's Refugee Program

In many ways Canada's commitment to refugee protection has been positively regarded, and its resettlement model has inspired sponsorship efforts beyond its borders; such as Australia's Community Proposal Pilot Programme (launched in 2012), Argentina's Programa Siria (launched in 2014), New Zealand's Community Organization Refugee Sponsorship Category (launched in 2017), as well as European initiatives in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany and Spain (GRSI, 2019; UNHCR, 2018; Hirsch et al, 2019; Hueck, 2018; Kumin, 2015).

In 1986, Canada was awarded the Nansen Medal by the UNHCR for its exemplary work in the resettlement of the Southeast Asian"Boat People" (Labman, 2016). More recently, in response to the conflict in Syria, Canada has again been vocal about its ongoing commitment to resettling refugees. This commitment is rendered especially visible when compared against the tone set by the presidency of Donald Trump (2016). In 2017, the United States, which has long been the global leader in annual resettlement admissions, reported a 65% drop of refugee arrivals compared to 2016. This came as a result of an abrupt cut to the country's annual admission ceiling and an indefinite

suspension of Syrian nationals (Krogstad, 2019). In 2018, Canada resettled more refugees than the USA for the first time since 1980, and the UNHCR officially named Canada the most generous refugee admission country in its annual Global Trends Reports for 2018 as well as 2019 (UNHCR, 2018c, UNHCR, 2019).

As much as Canada has received praise for its welcoming stance towards refugees, Dirks (1977) underscores that its history of taking in persecuted populations has not always been exemplary. His book on Canada's refugee policy argues that while Canada's track record of resettlement has been impressive compared to other countries, its privileged position as a nation that can pick and choose its immigrants has also meant an at times less-than-generous history of refugee intake. Dobrowolsky (2017) concurs that "Canada has a long and fraught history of exclusion that ranges from women and Indigenous peoples to African, Chinese, Japanese and Immigrants and Jewish refugees (p.201). Abella and Troper's book *None Is Too Many* provides strong examples of this selectivity from 1933 until 1948. The refusal to admit Jewish refugees aboard the St. Louis during the Second World War is a painful reminder of the nation's often-restrictive and exclusionary immigration policy. Today, scholars argue there remains both political and public ambivalence regarding the question of refugees (Fleras, 2015; Hyndman, 2012; Krivenko, 2012, Simich, 2003; Basok, 1996). It seems that even the notion of 'refugeehood' itself often evokes contradictory images in the minds of Canadians. On one hand, certain refugees are characterized in public debates as suffering victims in genuine need of protection. Fleras (2015) posits that there appears to be an overwhelming amount of public and private support for these so-called "good" refugees, "legitimate victims of state oppression". The recent upsurge in Private Sponsorship applications for

the resettlement of Syrian refugees is exemplary of this. On the other hand, he suggests that there is evidence of growing wary-ness of fraudulent or "bogus" refugees, those who enter Canada for the purpose of evading longer paths to citizenship, avoiding providing proper documentation, or simply looking to take advantage of social entitlements such as health benefits and public housing. Molnar Diop's (2014) case study of Czech Roma refugee claimants highlights that these attitudes often act as a catalyst for the criminalization of potentially genuine refugees and the dissolution of public support for both resettlement and inland refugee determination.

2.2 Neoliberal Immigration Rhetoric

In order to situate the evolving realities of Canada's refugee resettlement policy, it is helpful to first examine the country's recent immigration rhetoric more generally. According to sociologist Augie Fleras (2015), the politics of immigration are contested both in Canada and abroad. The domain of immigration has rendered visible an ever-increasing global interconnectedness and has expressed social transformations generated by cross-border flows, labour migration and transnational belongings (Fleras, 2015; Barber, 2013). Alexandra Dobrowolsky (2017) argues that federal control over Canadian immigration policy began weakening in the late 1990's and throughout the early 2000's. Decentralization of immigration policy occurred when provinces signed agreements to design their own immigration processes under the Provincial Nominee Programs, shifting some of the administrative and settlement burdens away from the federal state. Since then, Canada's immigration model has undergone a significant paradigm shift that has diluted the idea of immigration as a nation-building project and emphasized its economic purpose. From 2006-2015 under the then-incumbent Conservative government, Canada

overhauled its immigration program to forge a “fast, flexible and focused” system based on economic prioritization (Fleras, 2015, p.72). The following quote summarizes a number of the targets that characterize this recent rhetoric:

> In a recent summation of the Canadian federal government’s current immigration policy objectives, neoliberal influences are all too apparent: (a) attract highly skilled immigrants; (b) expand low wage, temporary foreign worker programs; (c) diversify immigration “entry doors” and make some more flexible; (d) cut admission and settlement costs; (e) encourage settlement in less well-populated areas; (f) tighten border controls and crack down on undocumented migrants; (g) “change citizenship rules to reduce risks of undesired costs and unrealized benefits to the state”; and (h) “sell immigration to the Canadian public...through a policy rhetoric that emphasizes the hoped-for benefits of immigration while downplaying risks and disappointing outcomes” (Dobrowolsky, 2012, p.198)

As such, boosting competitiveness, commodifying immigrants, prizing economic profitability and securitizing immigration have all been identified as key markers of growing neoliberalization at the national level.

Since 2015, Canada’s Liberal government under Justin Trudeau has assumed a more centralized and socially conscious approach to immigration, exemplified through increased government spending on the family and humanitarian immigration pathways. However, Dobrowolsky (2017) contends that while there have been noteworthy shifts in both discourse and imagery under Trudeau, there is evidence of a pervading emphasis on econocentric policy. Economic growth has remained a key priority in each of IRCC’s annual Departmental Plans released since 2015. Other stated aims have related to attracting highly skilled immigrants, enhancing “integration”, “client service” and engaging in “efficient processing,” all keeping in line with increasing neoliberalization (Dobrowolsky, 2017, p.211).

Class-Differentiation, Self-Sufficiency and Human Capital

The neoliberal moment is characterized in part by dissolving constraints on global labour markets. During the past two decades, policymakers in Canada have recognized the value of (im)migrant labour in facilitating flexibility, and over time the interests of capital and labour in immigration have converged. In her work on care migration between the Philippines and Canada, Barber (2013) describes the neoliberal maneuvers of Canada's immigration reform using a "just-in-time" metaphor, which embodies the shift towards flexible and tailored immigration, aimed at getting labour power to market as efficiently as possible. This model relates historical transformations in capitalist practices to contemporary mobilities of capital and labour (p.389). As a result, neoliberalized immigration policies have produced class-differentiated, as well as gendered and racialized, cohorts of migrants. Under this system, capital-bearing migrants are increasingly privileged while others are precariously subordinated (Macklin, 2007; Goldring & Landolt, 2013). The emphasis on global competitiveness has led to stricter requirements on the type of immigrants Canada recruits, favouring those who are highly skilled, educated and/or capital-bearing, with a particular focus on those that will be self-sustaining upon arrival. This economic-utility driven direction of immigration policy was solidified in the 2002 IRPA*,* after which selection criteria became based on a "human capital" model. In this context, human capital refers to an applicant's skills, experience, and knowledge in terms of their perceived value to the country. As a result of exclusionary practices, health care program cuts and lack of access to social services, the onus has fallen on immigrants and refugees themselves to establish their footing and ensure self-sufficiency once they arrive in Canada (Dobrowolsky, 2017).

Securitization

Initiatives in advancing a demand-based immigration agenda through marketization and social cost-cutting have increased vulnerability for asylum seekers and refugees (Fleras, 2015). Social constructivist processes of securitization have converged international and state politics of asylum with politics of security. Hyndman (2012) states that both "borders and popular attitudes towards asylum seekers are increasingly fortified against unwanted intruders" (p.245). She argues that the securitization of migration has gradually emerged, beginning in the 1990's. Basok (1996) agrees that during this time Canada began revising its policy procedures with the objective of curtailing the numbers of refugee claimants allowed to stay in the country (p.142). Furthermore, the terrorist attacks that occurred in the USA on September 11th, 2001 have only advanced and legitimated border-securitizing measures. In her discussion of the "heft of citizenship", Audrey Macklin (2007) compares the securitizing narrative of irregular (refugee or stateless) migration to that of elite (economic) migrant mobility. Whereas asylum seekers are often restricted from securing citizenship in multiple ways, educated and skilled migrants are insulated from the pressures that impel others to migrate. For these migrants, "citizenship can function as a commodity" (p.358). However, for asylum seekers and refugees, policies aimed at securitizing entry are enacted in several ways. Everyday state attempts to constrain and manage these migrants have included crackdowns on improper documentation, stricter refugee determination policies, detentions, and shrinking refugee targets (Macklin, 2007).

2.3 Situating the PSR Program

Initially created as a tool to expand refugee admissions in times of crisis, the PSR Program has become a fundamental component of Canadian refugee policy. In order to situate the program relative to increasingly neoliberal imperatives underlying Canadian immigration policy, it is helpful to briefly consider how the program has been theorized in existing literature as well as trace some of its policy changes over time. In doing so, I will first bring into focus the idea of private sponsorship as a humanitarian project.

Humanitarianism

In *Humanitarian Reason*, anthropologist Didier Fassin (2012) argues that humanitarianism can be broadly defined as both "a moral category that encompasses and forms the basis of the shared world", as well as an "emotional movement towards others" (2012, p.8). He finds that 'humanitarianism reason' is employed by states to respond to crises, to enact short-term goals, and to actualize a compassionate desire to help other human beings. A complex phenomenon, humanitarianism has become a central value in contemporary global politics. As such, Fassin employs the term "humanitarian government' to conceptualize the deployment of moral principles in the political sphere (2012, p. 1). In his book, he demonstrates the inherently political nature of all humanitarian projects. Although the UNHCR affirms that the granting of asylum and recognition of refugee status is a peaceful, non-political and humanitarian act (Krivenko, 2012), Fassin would surely add that this process is, in fact, deeply politicizing. He contends that in the 'new moral economy'-which emerged in the late twentieth century-humanitarian governments are predicated on, and often help further, an "unequal relationship between the one giving aid and the one receiving it" (2012 p. 193). The

tension between a relation of domination and a relation of assistance is constitutive of all humanitarian governments and unavoidably ends up instituting inequality and perpetuating symbolic violence (p.3). This was emphasized by neoliberal conflations of economic and moral values, which forged clear economic agendas underlying many humanitarian governments, including Canada's.

Humanitarianism and the PSR Program

According to Genevieve Ritchie (2018), the architects of private sponsorship saw the PSR Program as "a new legal mechanism that would allow Canadian citizens to be directly involved in humanitarian issues. As such, private sponsorship was presented as "building upon and advancing Canada's humanitarian tradition" (p. 667). Existing literature indeed largely characterized the PSR Program as a grassroots movement embodying the Canadian spirit of humanitarianism. Shauna Labman (2016) contends that the program was "created out of the will of individual Canadians to help refugees and those in need" (2016, p. 67), often taking shape as a religious commitment through church sponsorships. Krivenko (2012) confers and situates the program in a non-political civil-society sphere distanced from the 'humanitarian reason' of the federal government. She argues that this unique legal avenue for individual sovereignty to enter the domain of international law enables the protection of insecure refugees who are increasingly marginalized by securitized neoliberal state regimes. Specifically, she discusses the principle of sponsorship as a way of "limiting and opposing the sovereign nation states and their unwillingness to fulfill their obligation of protection towards refugees" (2012, p.589).

According to Fassin (2012), the international and state rhetoric for refugee determination is quickly evolving from one of legal differentiation to one of legitimate discrimination (p.136). Amidst the tightening of legal definitions relating to the status of refugees, the benefit of private sponsorship can be enjoyed not only by refugees "stricto sensu" but also by others "whose life, corporal integrity, liberty and other human rights are in danger" (Krivenko, 2012, p.593). For example, until 2011, persons considered to be in a refugee-like situation as defined by the Geneva Convention but who had not yet left their country of origin were (in some cases) considered admissible for private sponsorship. Similarly, from 2015 until January 2017, there was a temporary exemption of refugee determination that permitted Groups of 5 and Community Sponsors to sponsor Syrian and Iraqi nationals under the PSR program without including a copy of their refugee status determination document in their application (RSTP, 2019). Thus, as Krivenko points out, the PSR Program "enlarges the circle of persons who can be assisted through resettlement beyond the traditional category of refugees" (p.594). To substantiate her claims, she draws on the idea of 'unconditional hospitality' as a way of polarizing the humanitarian projects of private sponsors versus those of states. Whereas the 'law of hospitality' governs state attempts to regulate conditions and rights linked to the admission of foreigners, the 'law of unconditionality' is predicated on the unconditional acceptance of the "Other" (p.586). She suggests that private sponsorship extends a type of unconditional hospitality as it functions by virtue of non-political, voluntary action. According to Krivenko's perspective, it would seem that the program indeed represents a shift away from the state; a "displacement of sovereignty" as it were (p.589).

'Additionality' in Question

When the PSR program was first used during the resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees between 1979 and 1981, it was designed as a way for the government to share resettlement responsibility with the private sector. The government offered a one-to-one match of resettlement spaces, committing a national GAR spot for every refugee sponsored by a private sponsoring group. According to Labman (2016) and Treviranus & Casasola (2003), the PSR Program was framed around the concept of "additionality": making resettlement available to additional refugees beyond government commitments. Later, during the 1990's, the Canadian federal government expressed concerns that additionality was being used in an unintended way: as a tool for expanded family reunification. Labman (2016) notes that the ability to specify individuals for sponsorship became understandably appealing and grew as the sponsoring community itself grew with incoming refugees. Use of the PSR Program to sponsor extended family members further heightened amidst cutbacks in the family immigration pathway, such as the cancelling of the Assisted Relative Class in 2002 (Labman, 2016).

The suspicion about disguised family reunification resulted in hostility towards sponsors, and the program experienced a notable shift of character. Consequently, the government made various attempts to constrain the PSR program, with policy and administrative changes weighing heavily on the sponsorship community. Although the goal of these constraints was to obtain better management of the program, the result was an offloading of extra responsibility and expectations onto sponsors themselves (Labman, 2016). An evaluation of Canada's resettlement programs highlights that private sponsors continue to be constrained by recent regulatory and administrative changes at the federal

level (IRCC Report, 2016). During the Syrian refugee wave post-2015, backlogs on processing of applications left many disappointed and critical of the government for leaving both refugees and sponsors in the dark about when their application would be processed (Macklin et al, 2018). While private sponsorship grants individuals the liberty to mobilize and provide support to refugees, Labman (2016) argues that the government's "hands-off" approach has been unfairly taxing on sponsors. The mounting emphasis on sponsor self-sufficiency had been anticipated by some since the 1970's, when church groups expressed suspicions that underlying intentions for the program had always been to "dump" public responsibilities onto the private sector. She asserts that "additionality can too easily devolve into a relationship of over-reliance and dependence" (Labman, 2016, p.68).

Over the years, sponsors have had to learn to do more with less. While the government has continued to corner sponsors, it also shifted more responsibility and expectation onto the sponsorship community. The introduction of the BVOR Program in 2013 exemplifies this well. While the BVOR Program entices sponsors with less financial obligation, more support and faster processing, it simultaneously constrains their ability to choose the refugees they sponsor. Additionally, the program unequally distributes all non-financial aspects of resettlement onto sponsorship groups (Labman, 2016). Thus, although the BVOR Program has been a successful tool for the resettlement of vulnerable refugees, it also represents a cost-cutting measure as it downloads responsibility for resettling government-prioritized refugees onto private actors.

Sponsorship as Active Citizenship

The characterization of private sponsorship as an altruistically motivated humanitarian endeavor offers a useful starting point for conceptualizing how the PSR Program operates vis-a-vis the humanitarian agenda of the state. However, taking into account its structure, constraints and effects, I believe that this argument on its own fails to adequately capture the PSR Program's nuanced position as a resettlement pathway. After all, Fassin (2012) reminds us that all humanitarian projects involve politicization. In her article on the political economy of Canada's refugee resettlement policy, Ritchie (2018) argues that "private sponsorship, much like refugee resettlement more broadly, must be understood as an economic as well as political project which mobilizes narratives of civic engagement" (p.665). Along this same line, Lanphier (2003) finds that sponsorship represents first and foremost an aspect of civic participation rather than of voluntary benevolence (p.255). In ongoing research on the motivations of private refugee sponsors, Macklin et al (2018) conceptualize the project of private sponsorship as a form of 'active citizenship'. That is, "an engagement in the political and civic life of the polity" (p.38). Through the PSR program, Canadian citizens and permanent residents are able to leverage their political subject position and use their strategic proximity to the state in order to advocate for social concerns that have been deprioritized as a result of neoliberal policy restructuring. Their research explores private sponsorship as a citizenship practice that not only activates sponsors as citizens but also reconfigures their own understanding and practices of what it means to be Canadian (p. 39). In that sense, the motivation for sponsoring can be delineated as a 'national' commitment in addition to a humanitarian one. Or in other words, the humanitarian impulse of sponsorship becomes

part of the Canadian civic imaginary, with the PSR Program functioning as an instrument of collective social action. Lanphier (2003) posits that the PSR Program demonstrates "a provision of social conditions to allow newcomers to find in Canadian society a hospitable locus for resuming one's life" (p.255). The role of private sponsors herein is to contribute constructively to their sponsored-family's transition from refugee to new citizen. Macklin et al (2018) point out that the sponsorship regime apprehends a refugee family as a social unit that not only socializes its own members but also itself must be socialized into Canadian society via a sponsor-led settlement and integration process that depends on the formation of personal, affective bonds.

Outcomes of the PSR Program

Over the years, the active involvement of sponsors in the resettlement processes of refugees has been positively regarded by scholars and policymakers, who have found that privately sponsored refugees are in many cases better off than their government assisted counterparts (Labman 2016; IRCC, 2016; Macklin et al, 2018; Hynie et al, 2019; Toughill, 2019a; Kaida, Stick & Hou, 2020). According to a 2016 IRCC evaluation of Canada's resettlement streams, "since 2002 PSRs tend to have higher economic performance compared to GARs. Specifically, PSRs have had higher incidence of employment, higher employment earnings and lower reliance on social assistance" (IRCC Report, July 2016). Based on a study of the Longitudinal Immigration Database, Kaida, Stick & Hou (2020) concur that PSRs are more likely to be employed and to earn more than GARs in both the short-term and long-term. Moreover, they found that GARs tend to have lower education and more limited official language skills than PSRs.

Overall, their findings suggest that PSRs achieve quicker self-sufficiency and economic independence than GARs (2020).

While the discrepancy between PSRs' and GARs' access to settlement resources contributes to the above statistics, it is also important to be mindful of the unequal distribution of refugees between the two resettlement programs. As the Syrian conflict escalated in 2015, the Canadian government actively sought to resettle the most vulnerable refugees through the GAR and BVOR programs. In their research into the early integration outcomes of Syrian refugees in six Canadian cities, Hynie et al (2019) found that Syrian GARs were, on average, displaced in a first country of asylum twice as long as PSRs, suggesting longer exposure to the psychological and physical hardships of asylum prior to being resettled (p.46). This further amplified the differences between GARs and PSRs in the Syrian cohort.

While the initial wave of Syrian PSR sponsorships from 2015 to 2017 included many visa-office referrals (particularly by first-time sponsors), the majority of Syrian PSR arrivals were, and continue to be, named sponsorships. As the Syrian conflict has become increasingly protracted, private sponsorship has offered a favourable pathway for residents of Syrian origin as well as previously sponsored refugees to bring their relatives to Canada. Colloquially known as "the echo effect", many sponsorship groups and former-refugees have expressed interest in sponsoring family members left behind (Hynie et al, 2019). Even Alan Kurdi, the boy on the beach, had a Canadian aunt who had repeatedly (albeit unsuccessfully) attempted to sponsor Kurdi's family to come to Canada (Macklin et al, 2018). Hynie et al identify the existing Syrian community in Canada prior to 2015 as highly educated and religiously diverse. They contend that sponsored relatives

are likely to share these attributes and that the presence of already existing social networks tends to positively influence their settlement outcomes (2019, p.46).

As I have outlined in this section, there has been a shifting trend in how the PSR program has been used and imagined over time, with the concept of additionally being called into question as federal refugee commitments are increasingly shifted onto sponsors. Overall, I argue that many of these changes fall in line with broader neoliberal policy changes in Canada's immigration program. While the government continues to constrain the family-reunification functionality of the PSR program through administrative and bureaucratic cutbacks, it simultaneously prizes the high human capital and economic outcomes of resettled PSRs. In that sense, it seems that even Canada's humanitarian system continues to systematically favour economic and "high-skill" migrants.

PSR 2.4: Immigration and Private Sponsorship in Nova Scotia

In the previous section of this chapter, I have situated private sponsorship within a broader context by contextualizing the motivations of sponsors and examining changes to the PSR program over time. However, I have not yet addressed the nuances of how private sponsorship fits within particular spatial policy settings. Given my project's emphasis on understanding the Nova Scotian sponsorship experience, this final section offers a brief analysis of how the PSR Program is situated relative to recent regional immigration shifts in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada more broadly.

Immigration in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia has experienced a substantial upsurge to its immigration flows during the last decade. This is largely the result of immigration being increasingly viewed as a

potential solution for chronic challenges of an aging population and shrinking labour market (Toughill, 2019b; Akbari, 2018). As part of the "Atlantic Growth Strategy" (introduced in July 2016), which officially lists immigration as one of five pillars for accelerating regional economic growth and aims at the long-term integration of newcomers, Atlantic Canadian provinces have set ambitious targets for their respective Provincial Nominee Programs. Additionally, since 2017 they have collaborated on the newly introduced Atlantic Immigration Pilot, an employer-driven program for skilled workers and recent graduates (IRCC, 2019c).

Despite improvements in attracting newcomers as a result of these strategies, at the time of conducting this research policymakers continued to be confronted with persisting challenges of retaining recent immigrants (Toughill, 2019, Akbari, 2018; Tatsoglou, Dobrowolsky, Cottrell, 2015; Akbari & Madale, 2005). Existing literature suggests a number of reasons for this trend: According to Baldachino (2012), low retention may be partly attributable to Atlantic Canada being known for an exclusionary "come-from-away" attitude towards newcomers, which has resulted in everyday practices of social exclusion and discrimination in the region. Alternatively, Dobrowolsky (2013) argues that as a result of economic prioritization, immigrant integration services in the region have become ambiguously framed and unevenly supported. She finds that neoliberal principles of self-sufficiency have been increasingly taken for granted by policy makers, leaving migrants in Nova Scotia with little social and cultural support. In their book, *The Warmth of the Welcome: Is Atlantic Canada a Home Away From Home for Immigrants?,* Tastsoglou, Dobrowolsky, and Cottrell (2015) argue that although attitudes towards newcomers are changing, Atlantic Canada is, in many instances, still

not particularly welcoming. They underscore the importance of rethinking regional policies to promote a more welcoming environment in both structural and institutional dimensions. Finally, Akbari (2018) and Sano (2017) find that many immigrants who come to Canada continue to gravitate towards more traditional destinations in larger provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec) where there are more diversified ethnic and immigrant communities and labour markets that offer wider opportunities.

Refugee Retention

While the immigrant retention rate in Nova Scotia has increased in recent years, it continues to fall short of retention rates in provinces outside of Atlantic Canada (Akbari, 2018). The decision to come to the province often does not equate the decision to stay long-term. Interestingly, refugees comprise the one category of immigrants with notably higher retention rates in the region than others. As Kelly Toughill (2019) puts it: “it’s hard for the Atlantic provinces to hold onto newcomers- unless they arrived as refugees” (Toughill, 2019a). In a report prepared for the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, Akbari (2018) finds that of the threefold increase of immigrants who arrived in Nova Scotia between 2005 and 2017, refugees were the most likely to stay in the province, followed by family class immigrants and economic immigrants in the PNP and Skilled worker categories. Data collected for the Public Policy Forum’s Atlantic Revitalization Project concurs that privately sponsored refugees in New Brunswick, PEI and Nova Scotia stayed in the region at a higher rate than economic immigrants nominated by provinces to become permanent residents (Toughill, 2019a). Understanding that higher rate is important when taking into account the number of refugee arrivals since 2015.

The Nova Scotian response to the Syrian refugee crisis has been remarkable. In the first year following the 2015 Federal Election, 1235 Syrian refugees arrived in Nova Scotia. Of this number, 165 were privately sponsored and 250 were BVORs. The Immigration Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) states that there were 120 sponsoring groups active across approximately 30 communities during 2016, a significant number considering the province's small and largely rural population (ISANS, 2016). For comparison, in 2014 only 270 refugees arrived in the province across all streams combined (StatsCan, 2016)- an annual total that was consistent with preceding years. From 2015 until June 2021, the province has resettled a total of 3880 refugees, demonstrating a momentum of refugee resettlement in the province reaching far beyond the initial wave of Syrian newcomers (IRCC, 2021). Of this total, 1090 were privately sponsored and 605 sponsored through the BVOR Program.

Toughill (2019a) outlines several theories as to why privately sponsored refugees tend to have higher retention rates than other categories of newcomers to the Atlantic provinces. One of these is that PSRs have the advantage of their sponsorship groups, a dedicated group of Canadians helping them to integrate into their new communities. Additionally, they may settle more deeply into their initial Canadian homes because of access to settlement resources that are unavailable to other immigrants. Finally, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, private sponsorship provides a pathway to extended family reunification (Toughill, 2019c). As such, it allows for recently resettled refugees to bring over their also-displaced relatives. Given that privately sponsorship is reliant on community involvement and fundraising, this system typically requires that refugee families remain in the communities where they landed.

While it is too early to tell what long-term retention rates will look like for the Syrian PSR cohort that arrived in Nova Scotia post-2015, emerging trends in the literature suggest that when compared to other immigrant categories, these refugees are more likely to develop roots in the province than their government- sponsored counterparts (Toughill, 2019; Akbari, 2018). Given recent data on the positive and economically favourable settlement outcomes of privately sponsored refugees (Labman 2016; IRCC, 2016; Macklin et al, 2018; Hynie et al, 2019; Toughill, 2019a; Kaida, Stick & Hou, 2020), it is important to consider how private sponsors themselves fit into this process. Given sponsors' multifaceted roles of providing guidance and financial, social, and personal support to refugee newcomers over the course of their first year in the province, I believe increased scholarly attention to their motivations and experiences is critical. By understanding the contributions that sponsors make to the settlement outcomes of refugees, policymakers may find valuable insights in terms of understanding and strengthening newcomer retention in the province. Bringing my own data into focus, the following chapters of this thesis will make a contribution to this gap in the literature by examining the sponsorship experiences of several differently configured sponsorship groups in Nova Scotia.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter covers my methodology, breaking down how I conducted my research using qualitative case-study interviews, and why. I address the rationale for using a semi-structured approach to conduct my interviews and explain how I identified and recruited participants. Following a brief consideration of the ethics involved in conducting this research and a short discussion of the analysis process, the chapter concludes with an overview of interview participants and an outline of subsequent chapters.

3.1 Research Design

To address my research questions and engage with the experiences of private sponsors of Syrian refugees, I conducted a series of qualitative interviews between September 2017 and December 2018. Interviews took place over the phone and in-person in the HRM at a location of my participants' choosing. In total I conducted 15 individual interviews: 12 with private sponsors of four different sponsorship groups, one with a representative of the RSTP and two with sponsorship coordinators at ISANS. The interviews ranged in length from 35 minutes to just under two hours, depending on the level of detail provided and the range of topics discussed beyond the prompted interview questions.

Case Study

By focusing this project on the experiences of private sponsors of Syrian refugees in Nova Scotia, this research can be characterized as a small case study. According to John Creswell (2013), qualitative case studies allow researchers to "develop an in-depth understanding of a social issue by using a specific case as an illustration" (p.97). He suggests that the process of conducting case study research begins with the identification

of a case- a bounded system that can be described within certain parameters and studied within a real-life, contemporary context or setting. In this study, research parameters are limited to the community of private sponsors of Syrian refugees within Nova Scotia. The province's response to the recent Syrian refugee crisis makes it a compelling spatiotemporal locus for conducting research on private sponsors. After identifying parameters, the following phase of case study research involves a detailed process of data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2013, p.97). As such, I set out to explore the experiences of members of differently-configured sponsorship groups as well as several other stakeholders involved in facilitating private sponsorship in the province.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To capture the voices of participants in my study, I adopted a semi-structured interview approach, which Bouma, Ling and Wilkinson (2012) refer to as "a semi-directed conversation" (p.286). This allowed me to approach interviews with specific (open-ended) questions in mind while providing flexibility to adjust the course of questioning based on additional topics emerging from responses. Initial questions focused on how and why participants became involved in private sponsorship, how they experienced sponsoring day-to-day, how they prepared for the conclusion of the sponsorship, and how they characterized their relationship to their sponsored family as well as their SAH (Appendix B). Prior to each interview, I obtained oral consent from my participants and provided them with an information sheet containing a description of the study as well as my contact details and contact details of my supervisor. The interviews were held in a location of my participants' choosing, usually at a local coffee shop or in

their home. As a result of me being out of town for a portion of the data-collection phase of my research, several interviews took place over the phone.

Recruitment

Recruitment for this study was completed in two phases. Due to time and logistical constraints, all participants except one were recruited in the Halifax Regional Municipality. While most sponsoring efforts in Nova Scotia are based in the HRM, groups are also active in other parts of the province, including the South Shore, South Western Nova Scotia, Annapolis County, Colchester County, Cumberland County, the North Shore, Cape Breton and the Eastern Shore (Refugees Belong, 2016). According to a map of communities welcoming Syrian refugees, there were approximately 30 communities across the province that hosted Syrian refugees admitted under the PSR and BVOR programs (IRCC, 2016). Both the social motivations for sponsorship as well as the practicalities of sponsoring are likely to vary based on the groups' geographical location (Haugan,2019). Attentive to this, I acknowledge that my research focusing mainly on HRM-based sponsoring groups may not be representative of the experiences of sponsoring efforts in other regions.

Before conducting the interviews, I established parameters for whom I wanted to speak to. Prospective participants for the first phase were private sponsors of Syrian refugees who were either in the process of sponsoring a Syrian family at the time of the interview or had concluded their sponsorship within a year of the date that the interview took place. To obtain varied insights into sponsors' experiences, I set out to examine several different group constellations. Given that family-linked sponsorships are an integral part of the PSR Program, my aim was to speak to at least one group who had

self-identified their sponsored Syrian family. This criterion also included named-sponsorships that were identified vis-a-vis a group's SAH. Cognizant of the fact that in 2016 and 2017 many first-time sponsors in Nova Scotia signed sponsorship contracts for Syrian families that were previously unknown to them (IRCC, 2020a), I wanted to include representation from BVOR groups to add a layer of comparison in my analysis. Additionally, my goal was to interview members of at least one church-based group, as religious organizations are historically prominent in provincial sponsoring efforts and make up three out of the province's five SAHs (IRCC 2021b; Refugees Belong, 2016). Finally, I aimed to speak to a rural-based sponsorship group as well as a Group of 5.

Interview participants were recruited using a snowball-sampling framework. Bouma et al. (2012) describe snowball sampling as an initial group of participants who then provide the researcher with further contact information of prospective participants that they know. Once recruited, these participants then provide further names. To begin, I established contact with two members of HRM-based private sponsoring groups who agreed to pass along my contact information to other members in their groups. Subsequently, one of these other members put me in touch with a third sponsoring group, who I agreed to my interview request via email. Several months after my initial interviews took place, I was connected to a member of a fourth sponsorship group via a contact in my personal network.

After this final interview took place, I had spoken to sponsors from all of the group configurations listed above except for a Group of 5; meaning that all of my participants' groups had all been signed to a SAH. Due to time constraints, I did not continue to look for further sponsors to participate in my research. However, I was put

into contact with a trainer from the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP) who agreed to speak to me about her experiences working with G5's in the province. The RSTP offers support and programming to sponsorship groups and settlement organizations across the country, including SAHs and their constituent groups, as well as G5's and Community Sponsors. Through this brief interview, I gained a deeper understanding of these sponsorship categories despite not speaking to any of these sponsors themselves.

In addition to conducting interviews with sponsoring groups, my project also sought to include the experiences of *Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia* (ISANS) staff, whose work has been critical to Nova Scotia's resettlement of Syrian refugees. As a SAH, ISANS works closely with communities with 32 community sponsoring groups across the province, many of which assembled only during the recent Syrian refugee crisis (ISANS Annual Report, 2016a). The organization offers orientation programming and administrative support for these groups, in addition to serving as a broader institutional hub for the province's newcomer community and providing expertise and settlement support to the other SAHs and their constituent groups.

ISANS' dynamic position in Nova Scotia's refugee resettlement sector makes it an important consideration in my study. To recruit participants for this secondary interview component of my research, I reached out to the ISANS' Sponsorship Coordinator using contact information provided by my supervisors, Dr. Pauline Gardiner Barber and Howard Ramos. In total, I conducted two interviews with Sponsorship Coordinators at ISANS, both of whom had worked at the organization post-2015. These interviews also followed a semi-structured format, with questions focusing on ISANS'

facilitation of support for sponsoring groups and refugee families, ISANS' history as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder and proximity to the government, as well as perceptions of the PSR program in the province more broadly (Appendix C).

3.2 A note on Ethics

My project was approved as a minimal risk study by the Dalhousie Research Ethics Board, meaning the risk of harm incurred by my participants was not greater than risks they may experience in their everyday lives (Panel on Research Ethics, 2018). However, given that my interview questions centered around participants' sponsorship experiences with recently-arrived Syrian refugees, my data concerns a vulnerable population that did not consent to being identified in this research. As Cresswell (2013) notes, researchers "must be sensitive to vulnerable populations, imbalanced power relations and placing participants at risk" (p.56). During the course of the interviews I did not ask interviewees to disclose personal information about the refugee families they sponsored. However, participants often responded to questions with personal anecdotes that included these details nonetheless. To ensure anonymity of both my participants and their sponsored families, pseudonyms were used for all interviews conducted for this project. Furthermore, I refrained from using information that could identify which sponsorship groups I interviewed. All information that could lead to discovery of a particular group's name or identity was altered or omitted in this final thesis. This includes personal details about individual members, the exact location of the group and any identifying details relating to the families that were sponsored.

Given the study design of interviewing multiple members of the same sponsorship groups, it was feasible that participants might feel uncomfortable describing possible

tensions with other group members or with other stakeholders in the sponsorship process (such as ISANS staff). To mitigate this risk, I reiterated that all questions in the interview were optional and that they could request to stop the interview at any point.

When conducting my interviews with ISANS and RSTP staff, I explicitly asked these participants for consent in disclosing their role within the organization they work for, which could possibly be used to identify them. Due to the nature of my project and the intention to share my findings with ISANS, all three participants agreed to this. As with the interviews with sponsors, names and personal data were anonymized and pseudonyms were assigned. All participants in the study consented to me using direct quotes in this written thesis, given they did not provide any identifying information. All quotes are connected to the pseudonyms of the people who have said them, and their real identities are not attached to any quoted material.

3.3 Data Analysis

As John Creswell (2013) states in *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, "the process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process- they are interrelated and often occur simultaneously in a research project" (p. 182). This quotation succinctly captures how I experienced the research process for this study: a continuous back and forth of data collection, analysis and writing.

After completing and transcribing the first round of interviews, I began organizing my data based on key themes and topics that emerged. Following this process, I took an unanticipated hiatus from working on this project due to external circumstances in my personal life. Data collection resumed nearly a year later and was completed in December 2018. After conducting and transcribing the remainder of my interviews, I began a

secondary process of analysis which consisted of drafting a chronological overview detailing how my participants experienced their involvement in private sponsorship. To do this, I mapped out a timeline of important moments in their sponsorship journeys; beginning with pre-sponsorship and concluding with post-sponsorship reflections. This process created the blueprint for my chapter outlines and allowed me to carefully situate key themes identified in my data within a broader context of sponsorship experiences. Meanwhile, in the process of reading and re-reading my transcriptions, I extracted quotes I found to be relevant and pertaining to a particular theme or topic. In my experience, the writing process often felt like a secondary form of analysis, as it allowed me to critically engage with my data and make sense of previously identified themes within the context of a structured and cohesive whole.

3.4 Research Participants

The chart on the following page (Table 1) provides an overview of the study participants and some key information about their sponsorship groups. In total, I interviewed 12 sponsors who represented 4 different groups. I also spoke to a regional trainer at the RSTP 2 sponsorship coordinators at ISANS. Overall, I found that the demographics of my participants were comparable to those of participants in Macklin et Al's (2018) study of private sponsors of Syrian refugees which was completed in 2017. Of the 530 respondents who completed their survey, many self-identified as "highly educated, older women of European Ancestry" (p.45). Of the participants in my study, 13 were female and two were male. All of my participants were (visibly) of European ancestry, and nine self-identified as post-secondary educated. Four of my participants described themselves as retired. The religious identity of my participants was not

homogenous; four of my participants identified as Christian, one as Catholic, and the rest did not mention a religious affiliation during the course of the interviews. While the distribution of participants in terms of gender and class is noteworthy, as is the racial homogeneity of participants, it is beyond the scope of my project to offer a nuanced consideration of how these dimensions influence sponsorship motivations and/or experiences. Future research should further unpack and explore the class, gender and racialized aspects underlying private sponsorship.

Table 1: Overview of Research Participants

Participants: Sponsors						
Pseudonym	**Church Affiliated Group**	**ISANS Constituent Group**	**Family Linked Sponsorship**	**BVOR Sponsor ship**	**HRM Based Group**	**Rural NS Group**
Megan		✓		✓	✓	
Ruth		✓		✓	✓	
Debbie		✓		✓	✓	
Christine		✓		✓	✓	
Julie		✓		✓	✓	
Laura		✓		✓	✓	

<table>
<tr><td>Patricia</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Michael</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Jessica</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Dan</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Rebecca</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Wendy</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">Participants: Sponsorship Settlement Workers</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ellen</td><td colspan="6">Sponsorship Coordinator at ISANS</td></tr>
<tr><td>Kate</td><td colspan="6">Sponsorship Coordinator at ISANS</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lisa</td><td colspan="6">Regional trainer at the RSTP</td></tr>
</table>

Table 1: Overview of Research Participants

3.5 Summary and Outline of Following Chapters

In addition to reviewing academic literature on refugee migration and sponsorship, this project is concerned with unpacking the lived experiences and stories of private sponsors of Syrian refugees in Nova Scotia. Thus, to answer the research questions I set out in the introduction of this thesis, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with sponsors and sponsorship workers. The following chapters of this thesis,

chapters 4, 5 and 6, comprise the analysis of my data and are divided based on key themes that emerged from my interviews. As mentioned in section 3.3 of this chapter, participants typically shared their experiences with me by means of a chronological recounting of their sponsorship journeys; beginning with their initial decisions to get involved in sponsorship and concluding with reflections on their (dis)continued involvement in sponsorship and /or relationship to their sponsored families following the formal cessation of the sponsorship contract.

As such, the analysis chapters of this thesis follow a similar structure, commencing in **Chapter 4** with an overview of the surge in sponsorship momentum in Nova Scotia as of 2015. After contextualizing this surge by briefly outlining prior sponsorship efforts in the province, this chapter illustrates sponsors' decidedly politically-driven sponsorship motivations. Lastly, I provide insight into sponsorship processes of fundraising, committee management, mitigating expectations and navigating early setbacks.

Following an analysis of this initial sponsorship period, **Chapter 5** explores the complex social relations embedded in the sponsorship experiences of my participants. Beginning with the significance of arrivals of Syrian families at the airport and concluding with ways in which groups approached the transitional period known as "month 13", this chapter situates structurally unequal conditions of exchange within the refugee-sponsor relationship through a theoretical lens of reciprocity.

Finally, sponsors' post-sponsorship reflections are addressed in **Chapter 6**. While most sponsors regarded their participation in the PSR program as a firmly positive

experience, this chapter simultaneously highlights a narrative of frustration towards continued institutional shortcomings underlying Canadian refugee sponsorship policy.

My conclusion, **Chapter 7,** summarizes research findings and provides an overview of the project. In closing, I argue the importance of continued scholarly investigation into the experiences of private refugee sponsors.

Chapter 4: Motivations, Momentum & Managing Expectations

> "I remember coming into work the day after the picture of Alan Kurdi. Oh my god, it was incredible. The phone started to ring and ring and ring. It was unbelievable. We stopped counting, but I think we clocked like 600 phone calls in those first few days. It just started right away".
>
> - Ellen, sponsorship coordinator at ISANS, December 2018

Ellen and Kate, the two ISANS settlement workers with whom I spoke, reminded me during our interviews that the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program has existed since 1979. While there has been an enormous new outpouring of support for refugees across all of Nova Scotia since 2015, it is critical to remember that the province has been actively sponsoring refugees for decades. As such, there exists a bedrock of experienced groups of sponsors and sponsorship settlement workers that have been doing sponsorship work for a long time, many of which continue to sponsor today. As Ellen put it, "in order to understand our recent sponsorship wave, people need to know about them as well".

To contextualize the private sponsorship surge that occurred in the province in late 2015, this chapter begins with a brief outline, as told by ISANS sponsorship coordinators (interview participants Ellen and Kate), of the bureaucratic and policy changes in provincial sponsorship efforts leading up to the moment that Alan Kurdi made headlines. The remainder of this chapter seeks to answer the following question: what motivates individuals to sponsor and what happens following that decision? Based on my interview data, I suggest that the impetus to become involved in the PSR Program was largely a political response to media representations of the Syrian humanitarian crisis as well to policy considerations surrounding the 2015 Canadian Federal election. Legitimated by Justin Trudeau's widely publicized pro-immigration policy goals, private refugee sponsorship rapidly permeated into the Canadian civic imaginary in 2015.

Following this analysis of sponsorship motivations, the final section of this chapter outlines several pre-arrival sponsorship experiences: fundraising, committee-formation, managing expectations about the sponsored family, and delays in arrival times.

4.1 Sponsorship in Nova Scotia leading up to 2015

Kate, sponsorship coordinator at the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), explained that early Sponsorship Agreement Holders in Nova Scotia were the *Archdiocese of Halifax*, the *Anglican Diocese of Nova Scotia* (and PEI) and the *United Church of Canada*, the latter being a national SAH whose local representatives have played an active role in provincial sponsorship over the years. Ellen, another sponsorship coordinator at ISANS, said that "since the 1970's, sponsorship numbers have been very low on average, but these groups have been consistently working at it for many years". Prior to 2015, "probably 90% of the work they did was completely family-linked, and I'd say this was true for most of the SAHs in Canada" (Ellen).

For many years, settlement agencies and sponsoring communities worked separately and with little collaboration. However, in 2008, training began with church-based SAH representatives to bring these two spheres of settlement together. By looking at sponsorship work that had previously been done in Manitoba, ISANS (formerly the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association) mapped out recommendations and drafted a large-scale sponsorship plan for Nova Scotia (Ellen, interview participant). This included working together with churches who had a long sponsorship history, applying to become a certified SAH as a settlement agency, and training community members willing to step up to the challenge.

ISANS received its official SAH certification in 2011 (ISANS, 2020). Ellen remembered that the organization was initially allotted 10 refugee "spots" (in contrast to the 30-40 annual spots allotted to churches). However, these spots were 'uncapped'- meaning they couldn't be used for family-linked refugees. She noted that this was highly frustrating for the novel SAH, as the organization was motivated to help support various African ethnocultural groups who were trying to bring their family members to Nova Scotia. According to Ellen, "things were very hard in the beginning. We had no funded positions, we had so few spots to do anything with. But we kept moving forward, trying to grow it, trying to expand it." In addition to caps in refugee allotments, ISANS, as well as other provincial SAHs, became increasingly confronted by federal budget cuts and other bureaucratic sponsorship constraints. Ellen explained that the previous Conservative government (2006-2015) made it very challenging to do sponsorship. "There were so many budget cuts and program changes, and I remember at one-point thinking that we just have to survive Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, 2008-2013) to get through this period of time", she said.

Constrained by a structural lack of funding from the federal government, SAHs across Nova Scotia learned to become resourceful and rely on each other for support. Kate reflected:

> We worked together a lot as a community with the other (church) SAHs. And I think we were in the strong position that we were when 2015 hit because the SAHs knew each other and had established that relationship. It wasn't the first time we'd met, so when Alan Kurdi hit, there was a unanimous sense of 'Ok let's do this' across the province. There was a high amount of trust (Kate, sponsorship coordinator at ISANS).

Despite a persisting lack of sponsorship infrastructure and funding in the province, settlement workers provided an array of resources to sponsorship groups when the surge

of applications hit following the photos of Alan Kurdi in 2015. For example, Ellen remembered writing a PSR how-to guide at four in the morning and distributing it to SAHs across the province. In addition to this, ISANS and the churches began consolidating and distributing online resources, planning information sessions, and organizing settlement workshops and Q&A sessions for sponsorship groups. While SAHs across Nova Scotia had a strong foundation of sponsorship knowledge, many of the groups that formed were first time sponsors who knew little about the history of the program. Lisa, regional trainer at the RSTP, referred to the 2015 surge as a "new generation of sponsors stepping up". Despite receiving a temporary funding increase from October 2015 to March 2016, Ellen and Kate highlighted that day-to-day sponsorship work at ISANS remained almost exclusively in the hands of volunteers. Ellen recalled texting her colleague the day after the photos of Alan Kurdi were published, saying "be prepared to come every single day. We're not getting paid for it, but just clear your schedule". From that moment, it was unprecedented how fast Syrian families started arriving; "those first months we worked 24/7, from 5 in the morning until 10 at night, just trying to respond to the volume" she said.

This section has provided a brief introduction to the Nova Scotia's private refugee sponsorship climate prior to 2015, focusing on the multifaceted efforts of SAHs to establish a robust provincial sponsorship network. As noted at the end of the section, both Ellen and Kate pinpoint the beginning of Nova Scotia's recent sponsorship surge to September 4th, 2015- the date that the images of Alan Kurdi were published. The following section of this chapter further hones into this moment in time, highlighting that for sponsors, the photographs of Kurdi were indeed of key significance in motivating

their sponsorship participation. However, I argue that the humanitarian impulse to sponsor was not only motivated by these harrowing images, but also by a precarious and shifting political context in Canada at the time.

4.2 Examining Sponsorship Motivations

Each interview that I conducted for this project commenced with the open-ended question “how did you get involved in private sponsorship?”. In response to this initial prompt, one of my interviewees, Debbie, explained that her sponsorship group had formed spontaneously following an ISANS event that was put on at Dalhousie in September 2015. “Thinking back, it was right after the little boy washed up on the beach”, she said. “I remember that my husband and I had been talking about getting involved before that, but Alan Kurdi was sort of the catalyst for actually mobilizing” (Debbie). Wendy, another interviewee, responded similarly to this question, stating that “a picture says a thousand words. When I saw the photos of Alan Kurdi in the news, I immediately knew that I had to get involved”.

In an article published in the *Visual Anthropology Review*, Carmen Ortiz (2013) suggests that “it is commonly accepted that exposure to media coverage of calamities and extreme suffering brought about by catastrophes and disasters of all kinds is one of the factors most decisively shaping our worldviews and our conceptions of present-day reality” (2013, p. 58). Throughout her analysis of the 2001 World Trade Centre attacks and the 2004 Madrid train bombings, Ortiz argues that photographs capturing these calamitous events served a socially significant purpose due to the myriad of narratives and discourses they unleashed. Given that the images of Alan Kurdi played a key role in shaping global (Western) conceptions of the humanitarian crisis in 2015, this perspective

is useful for making sense of the reason that Alan Kurdi's photographs motivated participants' decisions to sponsor.

According to Adler-Nissen, Anderson and Hansen (2020), the photographs of Kurdi are particularly powerful because of their capacity to "shift the epistemic terrain of the migration discourse from numbers and statistics to an identifiable human with a face, a body and a life story" (2020, p.76). Sohlberg, Esaiasson and Martinsson (2018) add to this that these images were also unique in that they portrayed and identified a single victim (p.277). Furthermore, the fact of Kurdi being a child rather than an adult helped amplify public opinion by invoking a range of emotions including sympathy, grief, pity, shame and compassion (p.279). As a result, support for the refugee cause intensified and public discourse surrounding the Syrian human crisis became increasingly laden with emotion. The images of Kurdi legitimized a range of foreign policy responses, including Justin Trudeau's promise to accept 25,000 Syrian by the end of 2015. As Adler-Nissen et al (2020) point out, Kurdi's death caused recrimination so strong that it helped elect an idealistic, refugee-friendly Canadian Prime Minister (p.93).

Sohlberg et al (2018) argue that feelings of compassion evoked by the images of Kurdi can be described as "automatically activated moral emotion that compels people to help or alleviate the suffering of others" (p.277). This characterization of compassion is reminiscent of the notion of 'unconditional hospitality' described by Ekaterina Krivenko in her research on private sponsorship. In her 2012 article, she situates sponsors as actors motivated not by the agenda of the State, but by an intrinsic and humanitarian impulse to "help those in need" (p. 598). Based on my interview data, it is evident that the role that Alan Kurdi played in inspiring my participants to become involved in sponsorship can be

attributed to this in part. However, as I will highlight in the following subsection, for many of my participants the motivation to sponsor and the impetus of the Kurdi photographs was more nuanced, and often intrinsically political.

The Role of the 2015 Election

As for Debbie and Wendy, the photographs of Alan Kurdi played an important role in Julie (interview participant)'s decision to become involved in private sponsorship. However, for her, Kurdi was not so much an isolated call-to-action as a catalyst for channeling her political energy into something productive. To elaborate on this, she said:

> After that photo, and with the election happening, that played into it a lot. And I think there was this feeling of just wanting to establish that we were going to make something happen, and that it was part of electing Justin Trudeau, and this overall feeling of hope, and that Canadians could make a difference. There really was that feeling. You know, Harper was talking about bans and Canadian values and whatever else, barbaric cultural practices, and things that were so "othering" of refugees, and anyone who was Muslim (Julie, private sponsor).

In this quote, Julie cited policies proposed by the previous Conservative government led by prime minister Stephen Harper (2006-2015) that were widely perceived as antagonistic to Muslim-Canadians (Gravelle, 2018, p.650). This included the highly publicized Niqab issue- in which the government announced a plan to entrench in law the controversial ban on face coverings at Canadian citizenship ceremonies- as well as the government's proposed 'barbaric cultural practices' hotline, while would allow members of the public to report suspected cases of forced marriage and other so-called 'anti-Canadian' values. Jessica, a participant who had become involved in private sponsorship through her church, shared a similar feeling of anxiety towards these policies proposed by the Conservative government:

> For me, it was definitely the threat that Harper was going to win another term. I was really disturbed by pretty much all of the policies of the Conservative party of

> Canada, but especially by the anti-Muslim hate rhetoric that was being spewed during the campaign. And at the same time, we were seeing this refugee crisis of thousands of Syrians leaving the Middle East to go to Europe and then, I had no idea that Canada had this sponsorship program. Once we found out that there was a way to channel our political energy into something in our community, it seemed pretty attractive (Jessica, private sponsor).

Both of these responses elucidate strong political motivations underlying participants' decisions to sponsor. For Julie and Jessica, private sponsorship represented a rejection of this ideology and a commitment to a different understanding of Canadian values. As such, the rhetoric of the Conservative Party at the time of the 2015 Election was sharply juxtaposed by the Liberal Party's commitment to resettling refugees. "On one hand we had Harper and his policies. And then we had Trudeau who was saying all these wonderful things", said Jessica. "So, I think that all played into my decision, to see this contrast of how things could also be done". She added that "it was amazing to see how the whole country responded".

In his September 2016 address to the United Nations General Assembly, newly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau proudly exclaimed that "in recent months, Canadians have opened their arms and their hearts to families fleeing ongoing conflict in Syria. And from the moment they arrived, those refugees were welcomed—not as burdens, but as neighbours and friends. As new Canadians. That effort brought Canadians together. In an almost unprecedented fashion, the government worked with the business community, engaged citizens and civil society to help the newcomers adapt to their new country" (Government of Canada, 2016). His address ended with the affirming statement: "We're Canadians, and we're here to help". As Macklin et al (2018) point out, this statement implies that what it means to be a "good citizen" of Canada is linked inextricably to helping others, specifically those in need of refuge (p.38). In unpacking

participants' motivations for becoming involved in private sponsorship, the theme of civic participation is rendered particularly visible, falling in line with Macklin et al's delineation of sponsorship as a form of "active citizenship" (2018). For Laura, sponsorship was an affirmation of her Canadian identity. "As I found out more about private sponsorship, I started feeling really proud of our country again. We're the only ones doing it, we're a model for the rest of the world in how to welcome refugees", she said. Debbie, another participant, echoed a similar sentiment, explaining that as she learned more about the politics of Canada being the sole private sponsoring nation (at the time), she became incredibly proud of that.

As Lanphier (2003) posits, public involvement in refugee issues represents an important type of civic participation (p.248). From the above quotes, we can indeed conceptualize private sponsorship as a citizenship practice that affirms the way that participants see themselves as Canadian citizens. To further examine how the humanitarian impulse underlying the PSR program has been ingrained into the Canadian civic imaginary, it is helpful to consider Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006), in which he defines a nation as an "imagined political community" (p.6). Anderson contends that the nation is imagined "because members will never know their fellow members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p.6). Conceiving 'the nation' as a horizontal community of shared ideas and ideology, private sponsorship can be theorized as a nation-building project as it legitimizes the imagined community of Canada as a place that is welcoming of refugees. In other words, there is a national commitment motivating citizens to sponsor. As another interviewee, Dan, explained during our interview, "it was really affirming and moving for

me to see private citizens stepping up across the country". He subsequently highlighted that the PSR program allowed him to support a national commitment of resettling refugees at the community-level. When describing his motivation to sponsor, he said "I think you're part of something bigger, and moving towards bigger goals, but it's more manageable if that makes sense. Like, I can't solve the refugee crisis in the world, but I can help with this one thing. It's tangible". For Dan, sponsorship participation thus facilitated a way to support the federal commitments to refugee resettlement in his own community.

A Brief Note on Church-based Sponsorship Motivations

Prior to conducting my research, I had expected religiosity to be an ostensible factor motivating the sponsorship participation of interviewees from the church-based sponsorship groups (Dan, Michael, Jessica, Rebecca and Wendy). After all, churches have long advocated for more generous admission and assistance plans for refugees (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003), and have remained highly active sponsors in recent years. Many of the sponsorship groups in existence since the inception of the PSR program have had a religious affiliation. In Ginrich and Enns' (2019) case study of Mennonite Central Committee sponsorship groups, some participants explicitly drew on formulations of Mennonite theology to explain their motivations to sponsor. However, others articulated that their involvement in sponsorship was not tied directly to faith at all (2019, p.15).

For the church-based sponsors I interviewed, religious affiliation was not mentioned as an overt reason for sponsoring, but rather expressed as having a more tacit and pragmatic influence on their sponsorship decision. For instance, being a member of the church incentivized Rebecca's decision to sponsor because the church provided a pre-

existing network and sponsorship community. According to Ginrich & Enns, "many churches have designated funds for refugee support in the form of mission budgets, benevolence funds, or even a designated budget line specifically for refugee resettlement needs" (2019, p.15). As such, the congregation provides a financial and social safety net for sponsors. For Rebecca, this made getting involved in sponsorship seem less daunting. At the time of joining, her own church was undergoing construction which meant that she was attending service at a nearby church instead. She said, "the last Sunday service before going back to my own church, right after the little boy on the beach happened, several people stood up at the end of service suggesting we take action." Rebecca had been growing aware of refugee issues for some months previous and had been becoming increasingly concerned about it. After seeing the photo at the end of service, she decided that she'd like to be involved. It is important to mention that while Rebecca's sponsorship group was church-affiliated, the group welcomed and encouraged participation from other community members as well. In speaking to Dan about this, he explained that "sponsoring was such a community effort. I'd say most of the people in our core group go to church, and I don't think it's irrelevant that we identify ourselves as Christians. But there are also people in our sponsorship community that are atheists, and there certainly wasn't a desire to convert anyone, or the refugee family for that matter".

In line with findings from Maclin et al's (2018) ongoing research on private sponsorship, this section has argued that for the people I spoke to, private sponsorship was largely experienced as a way to meaningfully exercise their own citizenship. Motivated by increasing media coverage about the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Syria, particularly the photographs of toddler Alan Kurdi, as well as by the political setting in

Canada leading up to the 2015 Federal election, participants imagined their sponsorship roles as a form of civic participation in which they could channel their political energy at a community level. Following an examination of their initial decisions to sponsor, this chapter henceforth explores several practical challenges that participants encountered early in their sponsorship processes. Specifically, I will address how sponsors approached fundraising efforts, organized themselves internally, mitigated intra-group tensions, and managed expectations about refugee arrival times.

4.3 A surge of Momentum: Mobilizing and Managing Expectations

Recalling his church-based sponsorship group's first meeting, Michael (interview participant) remembered "drawing an incredible crowd....65 or 70 people showed up. Too many honestly, to the point that it was unmanageable". Rebecca, a member of the same sponsorship group as Michael, added that "a lot of people initially said, "yeah yeah yeah, we're interested" and they were. They had ideas and came to meetings. However, the meetings got smaller each time. "When it was actual go-time, it was like 'who's gonna sign up and do this? Who's gonna lead? Who's gonna set up the apartment?" (Rebecca). Eventually, there was a small group of people left. As Michael put it, cultural forces caused some church members to melt away and others to step in.

Early Sponsorship Experiences

Following their initial decisions to form or join a private sponsorship group, private sponsors often experience a multitude of practical barriers relating to, among others; group formation, internal organization, fundraising, accommodation, expectations related to arrival times, language barriers, and availability of both material and service-based resources (Macklin et al, 2020). Although each of these practical issues merits its

own attention, this section will briefly highlight four pre-arrival sponsorship experiences and challenges that were particularly underscored by the participants of this case study: **fundraising**, **group organization**, **intra-group tensions**, and **uncertainty around refugee arrival times**.

Fundraising

The four sponsorship groups that I interviewed for this project each had different strategies in place for raising the economic capital required to make their sponsorships a reality. Fundraising efforts varied largely based on group composition and structure, group size, time available, and group location. For instance, Megan, Ruth, Debbie and Christine's group did not do any official fundraising and relied solely on donations to fund their sponsorship. The requirement for membership of their sponsorship group was as follows: members were expected to donate $500 if they were joining as a single participant, and $1000 if joining with a partner. In addition to the contributions of members themselves, the group collected external donations as well - primarily through members' personal social networks. Christine said, "we were very lucky in that we didn't have to do any fundraising. We got the money very quickly. For instance, we had people in the group who went to people in their office and in the end, we got a whole bunch of fairly substantial donations from others who weren't in our group". Cognizant of the group's privileged position in terms of financial capacity, she added "I recognize that we had it quite easy in terms of fundraising and that we collected all the funds internally. It was amazing to see other HRM groups really involving the community in their fundraising efforts, I was very moved by that".

One such group that employed a community-based fundraising model was Michael, Jessica, Dan and Rebecca's sponsorship group. Michael explained that their church chose to partner with another church and together recruit a number of local businesses as fundraising partners. These businesses, ranging from neighborhood cafés to retail stores, couldn't be directly involved in the sponsorship but were willing to help fundraise by donating a percentage of their profits, or to provide fundraising space for initiatives such as bake sales. In the following quote, Michael outlines the success of their sponsorship group's fundraising strategy, attributing it to the group's strong organizational structure and community-centered approach:

> There was a lot of organization and self-consciousness that came from the church groups being organized. But our group was interesting in that it wasn't solely a church group. We raised $2000 or $3000 thousand dollars on a single fundraiser, because they gave us a percentage of whatever was sold on coffees on a Saturday and took extra donations for us. Through this system, we more than exceeded our fundraising targets. Even after abandoning the blended program (BVOR), we got there in like a month. It was incredible. It took no time. It was a perfect storm timewise, with the election having just happened, and a lot of goodwill towards the Trudeau government, there was just a generosity that was happening that we were able to use to this family's benefit. So there was no problem hitting the targets. and we actually still have money left over (Michael, private sponsor).

Similarly to Michael's group, Wendy's church-based sponsorship group also took steps to involve the wider community in their fundraising process. However, as a rural sponsorship group based on Nova Scotia's South Shore, Wendy explained that their fundraising efforts were simultaneously an opportunity for raising awareness about refugee issues in a place where it wasn't uncommon for residents to be uncomfortable with the idea of newcomers. In her article on the resettlement and integration of Syrian refugees in smaller and rural Canadian communities, Stacey Haugan (2019) suggests that rural (defined in her article as non-metropolitan, sparsely populated spaces) sponsorship

groups often take deliberate steps to inform and involve their wider community in their sponsorship process (p.57). During our interview, Wendy explained that her group regularly visited local farmers markets, organized car washes, attended local arts and culture festivals as well as a number of other events to increase community engagement. She said:

> We want people to be comfortable with the idea. We've encountered a little bit of anti-refugee sentiment out on the South Shore, and it's kind of an unfortunate mindset that some people have. So we're focusing a lot on getting out in the community as much as possible and normalizing the idea and just making people comfortable. Once they're here, they're not refugees anymore but they're now Canadians. They belong here (Wendy, private sponsor).

As Haugan (2019) underscores in her article, "rural challenges in private sponsorship efforts have led communities to develop their own creative solutions", such as organizing community- centered fundraising events to address concerns about anti-refugee sentiment. She argues that these creative solutions emphasize how profoundly "rural communities use their social capital to address rural challenges" (p.60). Although Wendy pointed out the relative difficulty of her group's fundraising process compared to other (non-rural) groups, she found that their efforts ultimately resulted in increased community support and more welcoming attitudes towards their sponsored Syrian family and subsequent refugees arriving in the area.

Organizing into Committees

In addition to meeting the financial obligations required for sponsorship, private sponsorship groups must adhere to a number of settlement responsibilities prior to the arrival of refugee families. Lisa, sponsorship trainer at the RSTP, explained that these duties include submitting completed application documents, maintaining contact with refugee applicants, updating IRCC on any changes in the conditions of the sponsorship

group, and providing a detailed settlement plan to IRCC. As defined on the RSTP website, the settlement plan is an outline of group members' responsibilities to support the newcomers during the sponsorship. The goal of the plan is to "provide a framework for working through the many details of who will do what, when, how, with what resources and where those resources will come from" (RSTP, 2021).

While exact divisions of labour naturally vary per group, all interviewees outlined similar processes of committee-formation that occurred following their sponsorship group's initial meetings. These so-called committees, ranging in size from one to approximately ten people, were assigned specific roles within the sponsorship group based on a range of settlement support categories such as medical, documentation, social, and housing. Participants in this study emphasized that the various committees had different degrees of importance throughout the sponsorship period and that committee make-up was often fluid. For instance, Patricia explained that for her group, the medical committee was the only subgroup that was active from pre-arrival of the family all the way to the end of their sponsorship. Contrarily, the documentation committee was of key importance at the beginning of the sponsorship period, particularly pre-arrival and to assist with scheduling appointments in the first few weeks but dissolved shortly after. Following the documentation committee's dissolution, several members transitioned to other committees and some henceforth assumed a more passive role as sponsors.

In terms of structure, groups committees usually reported to one or more sponsorship chairperson(s). Michael, co-chair/coordinator, likened his group's organizational structure to a military hierarchy. He explained:

> We (himself and the co-coordinator) were sort of the routers of it...we were the chairs of the whole group. and our job was to basically project manage, so make

> sure that people and committees were doing the things they were supposed to be doing. It was like a military hierarchy in that our job was to maintain the strategy, and then we would hand down to the sort-of lieutenants of the committees to make sure that they were making sure that things were being done (Michael, private sponsor).

Dan, a member of the same group, conceptualized their group's organizational structure rather as a set of concentric circles sharing a common center. As such, the outer circle represented big donors as well as smaller congregant donors through the church. The second circle was mid-size and small donors who also wanted to be involved in a more tangible way. Finally, Dan said that "the inner circle consisted of people who donated very little but poured themselves into it". At the core was the executive; the committee chairs and organizational routers.

Laura, a participant who had, in addition to her group's most recent sponsorship, been previously involved in various other local sponsorships prior to 2015, explained the importance of creating a self-sustaining organizational structure within her sponsorship group. She said "we have designated marketing, communications, outreach, and logistics teams, so that hopefully it can just go in a circle. As old members leave, which has happened a lot, new members can join and easily pick things up".

Mitigating Intra-Group Tensions

Given the lack of existing scholarly research on the intra-group dynamics in private sponsorship, a question of interest in this study was when and how private sponsors mitigated points of tension within their group. When inquiring about this topic during my interviews, several participants involved in BVOR sponsorships pointed out a challenging conversation that had unfolded during their refugee-matching process.

Specifically, they articulated that tensions had arisen around the notion of the "ideal refugee family" for their group.

To contextualize, the BVOR Program is a cost-sharing model that matches refugees identified for resettlement by the UNHCR due to a specific vulnerability (such as high medical needs) with private sponsorship groups. Following a thorough screening process, profiles of these refugee families are uploaded to IRCC's matching database and frequently updated (RSTP, 2021b). Contrary to the PSR Program's family-linked principle, the BVOR program does not require private groups to themselves identify the refugees they wish to sponsor. Furthermore, BVOR refugees are essentially "travel-ready", meaning that they typically arrive in Canada within one to four months (Labman & Pearlman, 2018, p.441). Therefore, the BVOR program presented an attractive option for many first-time sponsors during the post-2015 sponsorship surge. As interviewee Megan put it, "since we were doing this whole thing for the first time, the BVOR setup was ideal for getting acquainted with sponsorship and getting a family over here quickly".

While the BVOR program (incepted in 2013) was met with skepticism and reluctance during its first two years of operation, IRCC increased national BVOR targets to 3000 per annum mid-2016, and later to 5000 (Labman & Pearlman, 2018, p. 442). While BVOR refugee profiles are typically available for up to three months, Syrian refugee profiles were fast-tracked and online for two weeks only. During this window, interested groups could submit a request and reserve their case for up to three days. As Labman & Pearlman (2018) note, "over this three-day period more details are provided, and sponsors must decide whether or not to proceed with the matched family" (p.443).

However, backlogs and bureaucratic delays in determining eligible families for BVOR resettlement meant that in reality, refugee profiles were scarce and typically matched to a sponsorship group within only 24 hours.

Given the high demand for BVOR sponsorships, several interview participants in this study described “hitting the refresh button” on the refugee profile matching website for weeks or months to no avail. During this time, discussions arose regarding expectations of the refugee family and in some cases these conversations led to a point of contention between group members. For example, Megan remembered that one individual in her group firmly stated that he did not want to sponsor the family they were assigned, but instead insisted on a “regular family” with children. She said, “I couldn’t believe it. Most of us just said no, this is what we’re getting. The situation came up in an email, and it was such a strongly worded email that we were all in shock. That was really one of the biggest disagreements and required a good amount of reflection to resolve”. To mitigate the issue, Megan described organizing an ad-hoc meeting with the entire committee of chairpersons and consolidating a “group-stance” on expectations in terms of family composition. Ultimately, her group ended up sponsoring the first family they were matched with, and “all members were incredibly grateful that we could provide them a new home”, she said.

In their article on the links between refugee sponsorship and family sponsorship, Macklin et al (2020) suggest that the private sponsorship (and BVOR) model is largely organized based on “structural parentalism”, a “repertoire of formal and tacit requirements that mobilize private actors to undertake roles of guidance and support, while simultaneously leveraging affective bonds associated with kinship” (2020, p. 194).

While the authors stress that the analogy between kinship and sponsorship does not solely rely on sponsors' imaginations, considering this notion of parentalist expectations can be useful for unpacking sponsors' desire to resettle a refugee family *with* children. As such, parents socialize their children into the norms and practices of the world around them. Parallel to this type of socialization, sponsors are expected to assist refugee newcomers into an unfamiliar society. Ruth, another participant from a BVOR group, spoke candidly about her own hopes regarding the composition of her group's sponsored family. She said:

> We knew that of course we'd be taking whatever family came, but I think personally we were maybe all hoping for different things. I for one, as an educator, was certainly hoping for a family with children so that I could teach them about Canada and life here. When that didn't happen, it was a bit of a disappointment (Ruth, private sponsor).

In the above quote, Ruth expresses filial expectations of her group's sponsorship, analogizing sponsorship to parenting. However, she further explained that her desire to sponsor a family with children was also driven in part by increasing media stories of other refugee families (with children) arriving across the country: "it was so inspiring to see these families arriving all over Canada, and sponsors stepping up". Indeed, Macklin et al (2020) underscore that the vast majority of Syrian refugees resettled in Canada post-2015 arrived in Canada as family units containing at least one parent and one child, and that "the dominance of the traditional family form among the population of resettled refugees may have heightened the prominence of familial tropes and expectations" (p. 190).

Uncertain Arrival Times

As described in the previous section, BVOR arrival times are typically brief compared to those of named-sponsorships. However, Labman and Pearlman (2018) underscore that the BVOR Program began experiencing a notable delay in arrivals beginning in mid-2016. After clearing a backlogged list of UNHCR referrals that had already been in place prior to 2015 (and included many non-Syrian refugees), IRCC became confronted with increased administrative setbacks and insufficient resources to meet both BVOR and PSR sponsorship processing demands - including cases where applications had already been successfully submitted and/or visas issued. The authors contend that this resulted in sponsors expressing frustrations about the matching model being sporadic and inconsistent as they waited for approved profiles to be released from the Matching Centre (Labman & Pearlman, 2018, p.445).

Ellen, sponsorship coordinator at ISANS, described witnessing numerous BVOR and PSR groups in the HRM become increasingly discouraged after mobilizing and arranging housing, social support, and finances only to find themselves waiting for refugees to arrive, or waiting for eligible families to sponsor. She said:

> A lot of groups found it very challenging to be caught in limbo waiting, after they put in their sponsorship application, and then they're matched with a family....and then they might be waiting for months- or even years. For us (ISANS), the challenge was trying to keep the group interested, and keep the number of available volunteers there, because you know that there's still the possibility of the family arriving at any time. So trying to keep prepared, and keep interest level high, but it's really demoralizing. We see that all the time. I'd say that that is hands-down the biggest pre-arrival challenge (Ellen, sponsorship coordinator at ISANS).

Based on the interview data collected during this research, delays in refugee arrivals resulted in 1) a demoralizing effect on group motivation and 2) precarious financial

situations in terms of housing and the overall sponsorship budget. The former led to Michael's group feeling hopeless about their application being matched to a refugee family. He recalled hitting refresh buttons on the BVOR profile-matching website every day and night for two months straight, yet never hearing back from any family the group applied for. Eventually, the group contacted ISANS and made the decision to abandon their BVOR application in favour of sponsoring through the PSR Program instead. He said "ISANS was fantastic...they had a list of named sponsorships and matched us with a GAR family who was among the first Syrians brought into Canada, the first in Nova Scotia. They had a family-linked bid to bring over more extended family members, so from that point we had a defined pathway". While the standard protocol for named-sponsorships to arrive in Canada is approximately two years, many families arrived faster during this time. Having raised enough funds through their community-based fundraisers to make the switch from BVOR to PSR, the group narrowly escaped a more structural sponsorship burnout. However, cognizant of the luck that was involved in being able to switch gears, he said "we realize there were many groups who waited many months, or even years for their families to arrive. That takes a toll on you as a group, and as individuals".

For Debbie's group, a delay in their refugee family's arrival presented a more pragmatic difficulty; uncertainty about housing for the family. "Things were getting tricky because Southwest properties[4] had arranged for an apartment for our group through a personal connection", she said. After holding the apartment for several months, the group started getting worried as the family still hadn't arrived. "You know, you hear

[4] Southwest Properties is a real estate firm located in Halifax

these horror stories of apartments sitting empty for a year, and some people even had houses that they ended up giving up" said Debbie. As arrivals began to slow down and delays began to increase, anxieties around housing grew. In the end, the group's matched refugee family arrived in January 2016, after several months of the apartment sitting empty.

The final section of this first analysis chapter has outlined four sponsorship experiences that participants encountered pre-arrival of their sponsored Syrian families: fundraising, organizing into committees, mitigating intra-group challenges and managing uncertainties around bureaucratic setbacks and delays in arrival times. Attentive to the nuances of different group constellations, such as urban vs rural groups and BVOR vs PSR, this section has demonstrated how sponsors navigated practical, bureaucratic, and interpersonal challenges at the beginning of their sponsorships. In the following chapter of this thesis, I turn my attention forward towards the moment that groups' sponsored refugees arrived in Canada. Following a brief consideration of the significance of their arrival itself, chapter 5 hones in on the meaningful social relationships underpinning interviewees' sponsorship experiences.

Chapter 5: The Sponsor-Refugee Relationship from Month 1 to 12 and Beyond

> "Towards Month 13, we asked the family if they wanted to stay in touch with us after the end of the sponsorship. They couldn't even comprehend the question".
>
> - Laura, private sponsor, August 2018

This chapter explores the nuanced sponsor-refugee nexus as experienced by the participants of this study. While much of the existing literature on private sponsorship has focused on legal and bureaucratic frameworks of the PSR Program, few studies have turned their attention to the micro-level social relationships at the heart of sponsorship. This chapter makes a small contribution to this literature by examining how sponsors navigated their roles in relation to their sponsored families throughout their 12-month sponsorship period and into what is known as "month 13"[5]. The first section explores the meaningful ways in which sponsors experienced the arrival of their sponsored families at the Halifax airport, and subsequently highlights several initial sponsorship challenges. In the following section of this chapter, I employ theoretical concepts of gift-exchange and reciprocity to situate structurally unequal conditions of exchange underlying the sponsor-sponsored relationship. Subsequently, I suggest that it may be possible to conceptualize the necessity of reciprocity embedded in these social relationships as a way for refugees to become active agents in their own resettlement. The final section of this chapter, section 5.3, highlights how sponsors navigated the transitionary period into month 13 and considers ways in which this transition marked a shift in their sponsor-sponsored social relationships.

[5] "Month 13" marks the first month following the formal cessation of a sponsorship contract, in which refugees are expected to be, in some sense, self-sufficient. (Lenard, 2019, p.66)

5.1 Airport Arrivals & Initial Challenges

Findings from this study highlight that the arrival of PSR families' in Canada was often a defining sponsorship moment. For sponsors, the so-called 'airport greet' marked the beginning of the official 12-month sponsorship period, and for many, a welcome transition out of a precarious period of pre-arrival uncertainty. As such, interviewee Debbie remembered having to prepare for arrival very quickly after receiving confirmation that their matched family would be coming. "After waiting without news for several months, the arrival itself was much quicker than we thought, they came in the middle of winter", she said. Once the family's visas were approved, they landed at Halifax Stanfield International Airport within three days.

In their research on the benefits of pre-arrival sponsor-sponsored interactions, Kyriakides, McLuhan, Anderson, Bajjali and Elgendy (2019) found that many sponsors and refugee families engaged in regular pre-arrival contact via social media and digital applications such as Whatsapp and Skype. The authors argue that this co-created digital sphere, which they conceptualize as a "third space of refugee reception", often contributed to a reduction of sponsorship uncertainty as well as to positive relationship building through the early establishment of mutual trust (2019, p.25).

To my surprise, when I inquired about pre-arrival interaction with their sponsored families, all research participants in this study recalled having little-to-no digital contact beforehand. Thus, contrary to participants in Kyriakides et al's research, the airport greets served as their first point of contact. In the case of interviewee Laura's BVOR group, the refugee family itself was not even aware that they would be privately sponsored. "We sent a lot of people to the airport and then the family had no idea we would be there, they

thought they were a GAR family" she explained, adding that there was a lack of information provided by IRCC to both sides. After being matched with the family, her group received a form containing incorrect and missing information about the family members' ages and names, as well as their background in Syria. According to Laura, "that was really hard for the group to get used to, because in other forms of sponsorship within PSR, you can sometimes get a lot of info. But we were doing a BVOR, so we weren't doing a named-sponsorship like many others. And we were talking to some of those other groups and they had all these pages of information" (Laura). The provision of incorrect and insufficient information from IRCC and Canadian overseas Visa offices to both sponsors and their sponsored family resulted in difficulty establishing mutual expectations and trust in the early phase of sponsorship. As Laura put it, "it made everything more difficult to navigate at first".

While Jessica's 'named' PSR sponsorship group had received considerably more information regarding the background and composition of their sponsored family than Laura's group, pre-arrival contact with the family was primarily facilitated indirectly by their Canada-based extended family who had previously been sponsored through the GAR Program. Therefore, these sponsors also did not develop a co-created digital third space of refugee reception. In fact, the group did not even receive any photos of the family beforehand, which, according to Jessica, made the airport greet "even more special and exciting".

In addition to the role that the airport arrival played in developing the sponsor-sponsored relationship, the event was also meaningful to participants on a personal and intra-group level. For example, Jessica excitedly exclaimed that many members of her

group had driven out to the airport. “There were probably 30 of us there, it was fantastic!” she remembered, adding that “it was just so wonderful, everyone was kissing and hugging. It was a pretty amazing experience right from the beginning”. Furthermore, in Patricia’s experience, the airport greet was a key event for delineating the hands-on members of her sponsorship group from those who are only peripherally involved. “Peripheral members and donors didn’t show up at the airport, and that was really crucial as it turns out”, she said. The event allowed actively involved members to immediately establish a connection with the refugee family without overwhelming the family with an even larger group of sponsors and donors.

Rebecca told me during our interview that next to childbirth, her sponsored family’s arrival in Halifax was the single most moving event of her life. “Just seeing them arrive was indescribable,” she reflected. In addition to the sponsorship group, extended family who had previously arrived through the GAR Program were also present and viewing them come through the doors and running to embrace their family had brought Rebecca to tears. “They hadn’t seen each other in so long. It was amazing. And then everyone loaded into my van, and they're all speaking Arabic and sharing and laughing, and I just remember thinking oh my god, they're here. We've done it" she said. Following several disappointing bureaucratic setbacks during the application process, as well as months of waiting and uncertainty, Rebecca felt that she could finally shift her focus to what she had been motivated to do for months- welcome a Syrian refugee family to Canada. She explained that memories of the day at the airport still brought her to tears occasionally. “It was indescribable, and it still is when I think about it”. In an attempt to articulate the personal and emotional significance of the airport greet, Rebecca drew

parallels to the irreversibility of parenthood. “When you have your own child” she said, “you have that life-altering feeling of wow, I'll never be the same.” On the drive home from the airport, she felt as though a similar innate change had occurred. “From that moment, I also knew my life would never be the same. It would be better”.

Initial Sponsorship Challenges

Following the arrival of sponsored Syrian families in Nova Scotia, participants encountered a number of logistical challenges in the early phase of sponsorship. For instance, Michael remembered struggling to secure Arabic language support for a Syrian family member who was in need of acute medical care: “we had a (GAR-sponsored) extended family member helping out a lot with initial translations, but due to privacy they were never involved in translating medical information” he said. To navigate this initial sponsorship period, the group relied on ISANS for support. Given the family’s high medical priority, they worked together with ISANS volunteers to provide the family with an Arabic speaking doctor. “After we got the help from ISANS, it relieved an immense amount of initial stress for the family- and for us”, said Michael. “They were incredibly helpful and completely recognized the urgency we were in to find a doctor who they’d feel comfortable with”. While this is just one example, several interviewees recalled ISANS offering invaluable support in navigating many practical aspects of sponsorship.

In the initial period of Megan’s sponsorship, her group experienced a challenging situation related to housing. Shortly after the family’s arrival, during a visit with them, the group discovered that their apartment had bed bugs. Megan explained that the Syrian family did not alert them to the issue, perhaps feeling uncomfortable doing so as they had not yet established a deep level of rapport with their sponsors. “We were all horrified but

addressed the issue as quickly as possible and then it was all supposed to be fine", she said. However, several weeks later, during another visit with the family, the bed bugs were still present. "She (a Syrian family member) lifted up the mattress and was just shyly and quietly pointing them out. I don't know what would've happened if I hadn't gone there that day, how long they would've not said anything. It was heartbreaking to see", Megan explained. Furthermore, beyond the practical difficulties of dealing with bed bugs, it was challenging for the sponsors to establish a relationship of trust with the family, which Megan believed was the reason that they hadn't spoken up about the bed bugs. "Once we had developed that connection later on in the sponsorship, things fell into place and the family could open up to us more easily", she said. During the first weeks, her group felt as though the family didn't want their sponsors thinking they were complaining, which caused them (sponsors) to feel both sad and frustrated at times.

According to Dan, an early sponsorship challenge that took place in his group was a misjudgment of the Syrian family's needs upon arrival in Halifax. "There was one thing that, looking back now, we really overlooked", he said. "We had all of the focus on housing needs and cutlery and what kind of furniture and clothes they needed, that we completely lost sight of the fact that they just needed SIM cards for their phones. They needed the internet, in order to be able to contact their extended family, which was really big. Stupidly, we thought installing their internet could wait until they were settled" (Dan). Despite coming from a war-torn country, Dan explained that his group regrettably lost sight of the fact that the family was very cosmopolitan, and "not coming from the stone-age". Before the war in Syria broke out, they had full access to cell phones, iPads, computers and other technology. Even when they were in an encampment in Jordan, it

had been very inexpensive to remain in communication with their family. Dan explained that this initial misjudgment prompted conversations within his sponsorship group around cultural essentialism and led members to reflect on the fact that some of their pre-arrival work had been based on static and one-dimensional preconceptions about refugees.

In the examples outlined above, both Jessica and Dan implicitly point to structurally unequal donor/recipient dynamics embedded within their sponsorships. This dynamic, which will be further unpacked in the following section of this chapter, inherently casts sponsors into a dominant role of providing (financial, social and personal) support, whereas it positions sponsored families as beneficiaries. As such, inequality is at the core of the contractual obligations underlying the PSR Program. In his research on Southeast Asian and Tamil refugees who arrived in Canada during the late 1979-1981, Morton Beiser (2015) argues that this form of inequity can cause a sense of discomfort among refugees, as they cannot contribute linearly to their own resettlement (2015, p.83). Furthermore, his research finds that well-intentioned actions by sponsor often proved insensitive to refugees' situations. In his article about the pros and cons of the private sponsorship scheme, one of the criticisms that Lanphier (2003) puts forth is the "ambiguity of refugees' roles vis-à-vis the sponsor" (p.243). During the Southeast Asian resettlement wave, a number of refugees experienced difficulties understanding their relationship with sponsors. Unaccustomed to the idea that strangers (sponsors) would be willing to voluntarily support them, many felt deeply confused about their indebtedness. In extending this idea to Jessica's story about the bed bugs, it is imaginable that the family perhaps felt uncomfortable speaking up about the issue as they were still navigating the asymmetrical nature of the sponsorship scheme.

The following section of this chapter further explores the nuances of the sponsor-sponsorship relationship by examining how research participants situated inequality between themselves and the refugees they sponsored. Specifically, I examine how participants described the propensity of some sponsors to enhance their own status through social media exposure of their sponsored Syrian families. To help situate the conditions of exchange underlying the asymmetrical sponsor-sponsored relationship, I begin with a brief outline of the theoretical concept of gift-exchange and the principle of reciprocity.

5.2 Unpacking the Sponsor-Refugee relationship

In his acclaimed essay, *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss (1954 [1990]) draws on the interactionist notion of gift-giving as a total economic system wherein reciprocity is a key principle. Although his work analyzes the economic practices of several so-called 'archaic' societies (in Melanesia, Polynesia, and Papua New Guinea), his ideas can be used in an enduring way. Throughout his essay, Mauss traces social meanings of generosity, as well obligations to give and receive. In his analysis, he elucidates the contractual nature of gift-giving and he rejects the concept of "pure" or "free" gifts": those given without necessity of reciprocation. Rather, he suggests that all gifts entail underlying moral intentions and that seemingly pure donations symbolically engage the recipient in a cycle of obligation. Mauss carefully illustrates the intricate moral balance inherent to gift exchange, explaining that the recipient inevitably "puts himself in a position of dependence vis-à-vis the donor" (p.76). In other words, the unreciprocated gift renders the person who has accepted it inferior (p.65). Fassin (2012) builds on this idea of gift-giving, stating that that "the apparently disinterested gift assumes a counter

gift in the form of an obligation linking the receiver to the benefactor—for example, the obligation on the receivers to tell their story, and always to show their gratitude" (p.3).

If private sponsorship is fundamentally an act of exchange, perhaps what motivates actors, in part, is the opportunity to use sponsorship to transfer economic capital into symbolic capital. According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977), symbolic capital can be described as culturally valuable resources available to individuals on the basis of honour, prestige or recognition (p.178). Bourdieu sees symbolic capital as a critical source of power and asserts that symbolic capital is often ultimately convertible back into economic capital. He urges that although gift exchanges may appear as symmetrical personal relations devoid of power and domination, they covertly operate as a form of "symbolic violence," which can be defined as an inconspicuous form of violence, domination or exclusion in everyday social relationships (Topper, 2001). Thus, it is important to keep in mind that humanitarian projects, including private sponsorship, inherently cultivate relationships of structural inequality by enacting symbolic violence.

Literature on gift-exchange provides a useful perspective for characterizing the relationships between sponsors and refugees. While my research findings do not suggest that participants' motivations for sponsoring were based on an explicit desire to enact symbolic violence, structural inequalities revealed themselves in more implicit ways. As Fassin contends, asymmetrical relationships of compassion are indeed not always overtly visible, but always structurally benefit the donor by virtue of unequal conditions of exchange (2012, p.3). In analyzing my research data, attitudes towards online exposure of sponsored Syrian families highlighted covert expectations of reciprocity at play within the sponsor-sponsored relationship.

Pre-arrival, all private sponsorship groups involved in this study had strategized, to some degree, their group's approach to social media coverage of the sponsorship. This included plans to share updates on various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, as well as on their sponsorship group's website, church website, ISANS' website etc. Regardless of sponsors' preferred online platforms, none of my participants intended to share content about the family without their consent. "The last thing we wanted was to simply put them on display", said Ruth, explaining that her group had communicated actively with the family to define their boundaries. Fearful of exploiting the families' privacy, they asked for approval before sharing updates on social media. "Occasionally we'd run something past them (the sponsored family) and they made it clear that they didn't want that posted. So we had to respect that" said Ruth. "As we got further into the sponsorship, they trusted us in the small group, and had met some people in the larger group that they didn't feel as comfortable with, hence why they didn't want everything shared on social media" (Ruth). Mindful of the family's preferences regarding social media, Ruth and other sponsors exercised caution when sharing group updates about the family online, as well as in their personal social networks.

Although the sponsors I spoke to generally described their experiences with sharing online updates about the family as a considerate and consensual process, three participants reflected on an uncomfortable situation that had occurred within their group midway through the sponsorship. In short, actively involved group members received a number of agitated sentiments from peripheral donors about a lack of updates being shared online. According to Dan, "there were some people, whether they donated money, or said that they were gonna be involved and then really weren't, who started grumbling

that there weren't more online interactions. They felt entitled to be part of it and also see this family on display". In this way, it can be argued that these donors had entered into sponsorship expecting to receive a public acknowledgement of their involvement, which can be conceptualized as a form of symbolic capital. As Rebecca put it, people were expecting a "social media 'show and tell' of their good deeds". In the following quote, Michael further expands on this frustration, describing the self-indulgent assumptions some sponsors held regarding updates about the family:

> We had people coming up to us asking for what was essentially a "funder update", because people's interaction with donating money nowadays is very not-for-profit, very philanthropic, they're used to receiving annual email updates on the outcomes of their good deeds. We had one donor who donated several grand, and we often got calls from them asking for a social media update on how things are going. And it's like "Man I don't have time to update you, I have to help the family! This is not my job". It's a double-edged sword. Their donations gave us a community capacity moving forward, and a network that we were able to draw from. But it also created this uncomfortable expectation of recognition that was really hard to cope with at times (Michael, private sponsor).

The above example captures an implicit assumption of reciprocity wherein sponsorship participation is inextricably tied to transferring economic capital into a visible form of symbolic capital. Conscious of the power asymmetry that existed between his group and the Syrian family, Dan articulated that it was difficult to mitigate this type of patronizing behaviour from sponsors.

5.3 "They taught us so much": Rethinking Reciprocity

Despite the inequalities inherent to sponsored-sponsored constructs, it is important not to undermine the positive effects of sponsorship. For one, the PSR Program has historically resulted in strong interpersonal bonds between newcomers and Canadians; cultivating friendships that long outlast the twelve-month sponsorship period (see more in following section). Findings of this study indeed suggest a highly favourable

disposition of sponsors towards both their sponsored families and their sponsorships more broadly. Additionally, private sponsorship has reinforced solidarity and social cohesion, providing evidence of Canadians' continued commitments to multiculturalism.

In his discussion of the assets of the PSR program, Lanphier (2003) suggests that despite the presence of structurally embedded asymmetric power dynamics, sponsorship can be conceptualized in a way that provides refugees with increased agency and political voice. He acknowledges that refugees frequently indicate "that their aspirations include being able and willing to assist in the resettlement of their kin and compatriots" (2003, p.254). Furthermore, in *Making Refuge*, anthropologist Catherine Besterman (2016) argues that refugees involved in her research insisted on their own involvement in virtually every step of resettlement (2016, p.96). Her ethnography tells the powerful resettlement story of Somali Bantu refugees in Lewiston, Maine, and is primarily concerned with the question of what happens when dependent objects of humanitarian charity become neighbours with rights (p.30). In her analysis, she emphasizes the role of networks in "making refuge", stating that the onus of assisting refugees in America inevitably falls on the local communities where resettlement takes place. Much of her ethnography is concerned with theorizing processes of integration, which are transformative for both host-communities and refugees. According to Besterman, successful integration is the result of negotiated co-residence through shared arenas of care, solidarity and mutuality (p.31). Following a similar narrative, Lanphier posits that private sponsors in Canada might well consider themselves more as partners, engaged in a reciprocal process of community building with those they sponsor. (2003, p.255).

In recounting their sponsorship experiences, participants in this study highlighted various examples of both knowledge-sharing and role reversal within their relationships with refugee families. Sponsors highlighted that refugees were active agents in their own resettlement and played a significant role in disrupting sponsors' understandings of their own communities. For example, Christine recalled being invited to a Kurdish festival by her sponsored family:

> We went with our family to the Kurdish festival, which I didn't quite understand in the beginning. But I always felt as if there were some reasons why our family were not eager to or as receptive to blending in with other people who spoke Arabic or were Syrian. We always saw there was a gap there. So when they invited us to the Kurdish festival, which I didn't know existed in Halifax, we were like "ok! We'll go with you", so we went. Totally different environment, they loved it. It was very welcoming, you could tell they knew people there and they were interacting a lot with others and so on. But if you met someone in their building or something that was also Syrian, they might not interact as well. But then I guess it makes sense to not always want to talk to someone just because they speak your language. We learned so much from that experience, I'm very thankful (Christine, private sponsor).

Following this event, Christine and several other sponsors began advocating for an increase in Kurdish-inclusive spaces around the community. "It's not just that they have to adapt to us, it goes both ways. They taught us so much", she said. Another participant, Jessica, shared a similar sentiment regarding the inclusivity of both their, as well as their sponsored family's, cultural practices. She explained that on Thanksgiving Day, her mother had driven all around Halifax trying to find out if Turkey is halal. After asking around, googling, and asking some more, the group eventually decided to prepare chicken for Thanksgiving to ensure that the meal would be halal. Reflecting on this experience, she said "it's not like you come to Canada, and you're expected to eat in some "Canadian" way and do something that's 'Canadian'". While the group was excited to introduce the family to their traditional Thanksgiving script, they did not want to put

them into a position of compromising their own cultural practices. “We as Canadians are used to accommodating cultures and people, and languages from around the world”, she stated firmly.

This story carefully exemplifies the nuanced ways in which refugees play roles in influencing and transforming the host-communities where they resettle. Further, it elucidates how private sponsors navigate and challenge their designated sponsorship script of ‘welcoming refugees’. As such, sponsorship allowed them to redefine the meaning of their own citizenship. Ultimately, my research data suggests that for participants, the sponsor-sponsored relationship was a critical arena for realizing that resettlement is a continuous process of cultural negotiation and transformation. Hyndman et al (2021) indeed contend that “refugee newcomers become *part* of the communities in which they stay”. As Christine put it, “there might be a new halal section in your grocery store now. And you might know that there's an app for the call to prayer. You learn all kinds of new things. Eventually, Syrian aspects of culture will become part of Halifax culture”. In this way, perhaps the sponsor-sponsored relationship, unique amongst resettlement pathways, can find ways to subvert some of the inequalities inherent to sponsorship through shared arenas of trust and knowledge exchange. Hence, if we reconsider the conditions of exchange that underlie private sponsorship configurations, I suggest that it is possible to conceptualize the necessity of reciprocity in these social relationships as a way for refugees to become more active agents in their own resettlement. I argue that not only refugees and sponsors can benefit from these unique spheres of trust, respect, and affect, but also the communities in which sponsorships take place.

5.4 Towards "Month 13": Shifting Roles and Responsibilities

Towards the end of private sponsorships, both sponsors and (former) refugees are tasked with preparing for the transitional period known as "month 13". Patti Lenard (2019) conceptualizes month 13 as an informal sponsorship construct that demarcates the "first month in which refugees are expected, in some sense, to be able to fend for themselves in Canadian society" (p.66). Discussions around month 13 loom large for both sponsors and refugees, often leading to anxieties several months prior to formal cessations of sponsorships. One of my participants, Michael, remembered opening up dialogue about month 13 at approximately month 11. Several members of his group attended a month 13-themed information session hosted by ISANS, and subsequently began strategizing the conversation about month 13. Topics discussed during the information session focused primarily on income support assistance and employment. Although participants strongly characterized their sponsored families as resilient people capable of taking care of themselves, uncertainty about their futures was a consistent theme throughout my interview data. "The thing about Nova Scotia is the job issue," said Christine when discussing her sponsorship's transition into month 13[6]. "It's so hard for people to find jobs here anyway, so that doesn't make it easier for newcomers who are also trying to enter the labour market" she continued, pointing out Nova Scotia's alarming outmigration rates in recent years. Similarly, Ruth said "I still have worries about where the family will go from here, but it' kind of a natural thing about being so

[6] As data collection for this project took place in 2017 and 2018, it is important to recognize changes to Nova Scotia's labour market that have occurred since then. As a result of an aging population as well due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, various industries (such as construction and healthcare) have reported increasing labour shortages due to a shrinking workforce. Immigration, though often in precarious forms, has been flagged an important factor in helping fill these labour market gaps (Nourpanah, 2020; Wentzell, 2021)

involved in their lives for the duration of the sponsorship”. Patricia agreed, expressing anxieties during our interview about their family’s dependence on social assistance once the sponsorship concluded. She felt as though the inability for the family to become financially independent as of month 13 was partially a shortcoming of her work as a sponsor. This was highlighted by statements such as “we could have done more”. However, it is critical to remember that, as Lenard asserts, settlement into Canadian society, and the labour market in particular, is gradual; and failure to achieve it by month 13 does not mean that the sponsorship has failed (2019, p.65).

Support vs (economic) Self-sufficiency

When considering Canada and Nova Scotia’s broader immigration rhetoric, which structurally prioritizes ways that migrants contribute to the Canadian economy, the emphasis on economic characterizations of self-sufficiency is not so strange. After all, the “Atlantic Growth Strategy” explicitly lists immigration as one of the pillars for accelerating economic growth in the Maritimes (IRCC, 2019c) through employer-backed programs such as the Atlantic Immigration Pilot.

The strong implication of the PSR Program is, for both refugees and sponsors, that as of month 13 refugees should be financially self-sufficient or on the road to self-sufficiency (Lenard, 2019). In the case of sponsorship, Macklin et al contend that self-sufficiency is explicitly tied to productive citizenship and contributing membership in Canadian society (2020, p. 187)). As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, a 2016 IRCC evaluation of Canada's resettlement streams indeed praises the PSR Program for its favourable economic outcomes. As such, PSRs had higher incidences of employment,

higher employment earnings and lower reliance on social assistance than their GAR counterparts (IRCC Report, July 2016).

As month 13 draws nearer, sponsors often experience tensions between providing support and encouraging the family to become financially self-sufficient (Lenard, 2019). Lenard's research suggests that even as sponsors understood that their job was to provide information, many reported uncertainties and sometimes tension in describing "how and when to intervene where refugees deliberated options and made choices that to sponsors appeared financially irresponsible" (2019, p.70). In my data, interviewee Michael pointed out a difficult conversation with the family about buying a car. Towards the end of his sponsorship, the sponsored family had approached their sponsors with the intention to allocate funds towards purchasing a car. Considering the family's precarious financial situation (only one member had secured employment), the group strongly advised against it. For Michael, the event marked a difficult moment of wanting to provide guidance and support without undermining the family's own decision-making. Furthermore, the purchase of a car called into question what does or does not support independence.

> Our group laid down expectations early on in the sponsorship. We told them "there are certain things you have to do, like learn English and get a job", but beyond that, we didn't want to interfere where we weren't needed. The finances were an interesting thing on that front. We were paying them monthly amounts, but we didn't want to micromanage their accounts because that's really toxic and builds a crutch-dependency. In the end, you can only do your best to give them the tools to succeed, but the decision making lies in their hands. If they think buying a car is best, that's up to them (Michael, private sponsor).

As Maclin et al (2018) contend, the PSR Program imagines refugee families as a social unit that is socialized into Canadian society via a sponsor-led integration process based on personal relationships. The above quote provides a snapshot of how this settlement process is navigated by sponsors. Interestingly, Dan ultimately reflected on the car-

purchasing dilemma through a lens of the family's newly attained Canadian identity. Despite having a different opinion about how they should spend their money, he explained that the group respected the family's right to make their own decisions. "They're, you know, Canadians now. It's up to them. We just want to help them be successful".

Shifting the Sponsor-Sponsored Relationship

When asking my participants how they experienced the transition from sponsorship into month 13, participants frequently commented on the fluidity of interpersonal relationships with their sponsored family. My data suggests that the end of the sponsorship represented a shift from a relationship based on legal and financial dependency to one that was more informal and affect-driven. Some sponsors anticipated that contact with the family would diminish over time, but most expected to maintain regular contact for the foreseeable future. "I don't foresee a time when we don't see them at all", said Rebecca. Along a similar line, Michael explained that his group would without a doubt stay in contact with the family "because it's a long game. We could've just pumped and dumped, but we had a conversation where we discussed how we were legally obligated for 12 months but morally obligated for the rest of this, so let's make sure this is not a cut and run experience".

"They Immediately Felt Like Family"

Several sponsors invoked kinship metaphors to describe how their relationships with their sponsored families had evolved throughout the duration of sponsorship and into the post-sponsorship period. This is in line with findings from Macklin et al's (2020) research on the commonality between private sponsorship and family sponsorship. In

their study, kinship analogies surfaced both tacitly and explicitly in sponsors' accounts of their relationships with sponsored refugees (p.178). In my data, kinship tropes indeed revealed themselves in subtle ways, such as in sponsors referring to refugee families as "our family". However, in discussions about navigating month 13, sponsors also likened the Syrians they sponsored to 'family' more explicitly. The following quotes highlight some of these familial comparisons:

> Before month 13, we told them "you've come to feel like family. But we want to give you whatever space that you want and need. If you guys want to continue having this social, but not really financial, relationship, we are more than happy with that. But it's up to you". At that point, one of the (Syrian) family members said something to the effect of "no, you are our family, and if you leave us now, we're going back to the Middle East". So they're as attached to us as we are to them (Dan, private sponsor).

> I think it went as well as it could have gone, and we now have all of these new people in our extended family. And not just the Syrian family, but the people in our sponsorship group too. I don't think I expected to get this attached (Julie, private sponsor).

> They immediately felt like family (Megan, private sponsor).

> Our family are such welcoming, family-oriented, caring, polite people. Just so welcoming. The bond that we've formed with them is so wonderful, they are so special and dear to me (Jessica, private sponsor).

As argued by Macklin et al, "family as a metaphor carries a lot of freight" and "however broadly or narrowly defined, deeply matters to people" (p.183). Therefore, sponsors' designation of the relationship to those they sponsored as *familial* inherently characterizes it as profound. Furthermore, family as a metaphor suggests longevity of the relationship, which is particularly interesting when juxtaposed against the fixed timespan of sponsors' official sponsorship obligations. Since the majority of my participants were first-time sponsors, the personal relationships experienced with refugee families was novel to them. This is useful for contextualizing the kinship analogies in their

experiences, as they were understandably partial towards the families they sponsored. After all, what sets the PSR Program apart from Canada's government-facilitated GAR Program is the affective bonds embedded in the sponsor-sponsored relationship. Contrary to the formal labour performed by settlement workers, private sponsors are expected to care more about the family they sponsor than other refugees (Macklin et al, 2020, p.184). Hence, using family-like terminology to refer to those they sponsor is arguably a natural way of highlighting the emotional intensity of the private sponsorship context.

Emotional Reciprocity

Earlier in this chapter, I referred to Jessica's story about finding a halal turkey for Thanksgiving. At the end of our interview, Jessica returned to the story of the Thanksgiving meal to share a few final thoughts. Reminiscing on how her actual family and "her" Syrian family had come together that day, she said, "it was a beautiful and loving day". Specifically, what made it so special was that towards the end of their visit, a member from the refugee family had told the group "anything you ever need, you've got to ask us. This highlights an interesting dynamic of *emotional reciprocity* within the sponsors-sponsored relationship. I suggest that the necessity of reciprocity inherent to sponsor-sponsored relationships can be reimagined through arenas of emotional and intimate arenas of knowledge sharing unique to the PSR Program.

This chapter concludes with two interview excerpts that provide poignant examples of emotional reciprocity within the sponsorship experiences of my participants:

> During the sponsorship, I found out that I have cancer. Please feel free to include this if you like. I had to go in for surgery, then had chemo and it was quite a long process. But it was interesting...so we went from me being the medical committee person helping them, to them being-once I told them- some of my biggest supporters. The caring and support that came from them was amazing. It was this total role reversal. The mum would sit with prayer beads and pray. She came over

> once with water in a bottle that she had blessed, or had prayed over, so I was to drink and wash with this holy water. I felt so nurtured and cared for by them, and it was really wonderful. And how do you tell your sponsored family that you're really sick? That was hard (Rebecca, private sponsor).

> They actually came to visit us...my husband is quite ill at the moment, feel free to include this bit if you want. But they came all the way from their place, all of them, with a huge bag. They know he likes rice pudding, so they came with 3 huge bags of rice pudding. He eats that more than anything. I said, you know, his appetite is really poor, but he's eating the rice pudding. So we had a toast, it was thanksgiving, so we all thanked each other. It was very special. Since then, I've had multiple texts from them asking "do you need anything?". It's incredible (Ruth, private sponsor).

The above quotes, which I received explicit permission to include in this thesis, carefully highlight two instances during which interview participants were profoundly touched by the emotional intensity of their relationship to their sponsored family. Considering the asymmetrical dynamics inherent to the sponsor/sponsored (or donor/recipient relationship), these quotes suggest that in some ways, this constellation was decidedly disrupted following these events. In experiencing personal hardships, these sponsors realized that they were able to turn to their sponsored families for support- demonstrating a role reversal of sorts. In highlighting sponsors' conceptualization of sponsorship as fluid process of cultural negotiation and transformation, they provide a fitting conclusion to this chapter. Furthermore, beyond exemplifying the deeply affective bonds cultivated through the PSR Program, these quotes provide an account of how sponsored refugees resist and subvert traditional refugee scripts of passivity and helplessness by employing emotional reciprocity.

Chapter 6: Post Sponsorship: Continuing the Conversation

> "I know my life has been enriched. I feel like Halifax has been enriched because of the Syrian families and other refugees that have come. I was really excited in the beginning, and I'd still like to be involved, but the experience of trying to do it a second time has been quite discouraging, so I'm not sure".
>
> - Jessica, private sponsor, August 2017

Looking beyond the formal 12-month sponsorship period, this final analysis chapter examines participants' post-sponsorship reflections, as well as reflections on the PSR Program more broadly. While this chapter highlights a number of challenges and frustrations embedded in the sponsorship experiences of my interviewees, it is important to situate these difficulties relative to their overall positive attitudes towards sponsorship (Macklin et al, 2020). As such, the first section of this chapter outlines the predominantly favourable dispositions of sponsors. In addition to conceptualizing sponsorship as a personally transformative experience, I highlight the ways that sponsors positively regarded the social relations fostered with their sponsored families, their church and their SAH. Throughout their post-sponsorship reflections, a number of participants described a continued interest in sponsorship involvement. The second section of this chapter explores this so-called "echo effect", situating secondary sponsorships as both a pragmatic and meaningful pathway to resettle relatives of (former) refugees already in Canada. In the final section of this chapter, I turn my attention towards a number of challenges and constraints experienced by the sponsors and settlement workers with whom I spoke. Despite their favourable dispositions towards private sponsorship as a whole, this section shares valuable insights into the institutional shortcomings underlying Canadian refugee sponsorship policy.

6.1 Post-Sponsorship Reflections

Overall, participants in this study provided overwhelmingly positive evaluations of their sponsorship experiences. Sponsors frequently recounted how meaningful, rewarding and personally transformative their sponsorships were, such as evident in the following interview excerpt:

> It's been such a rich experience. One with our family, we've become so close to them. But also the reward of being able to do something useful. It's incredibly wonderful for someone to be privileged and be able to do that for Canada. And also with the group. I mean, we had the best group. Some of us have become good friends, it's been really nice. We all got along really well, which made a big difference. Everything just worked (Christine, private sponsor).

In the above quotation, which is strongly representative of my participants' post-sponsorship reflections as a whole, Christine situates her positive bias about private sponsorship in multiple ways. Firstly, she acknowledges the meaningful relationship established with her sponsored family. In line with findings presented in the previous chapter of this thesis, she suggests an emotionally significant bond through use of kin-like language. Secondly, Christine positions her favourable disposition in relation to her own civic engagement. For her, the PSR Program functioned as a tangible way to exercise her own citizenship (Macklin et al, 2018). Finally, she attributes her positive experience in part to social relationships cultivated with other members of her sponsorship group.

Interviewees frequently shared the personal and emotional satisfaction they derived from their sponsorship experience. "It made me so happy that I could help, it gave me a nice warm feeling", said Julie. Furthermore, for Dan, sponsorship clarified some aspects of basic human needs that he had not previously considered. "Looking back on what you thought they would need when getting here, and then realizing that what

they actually need is just security and friendship and support was really critical for me", he explained. In his reflection, he situated his role as a sponsor in terms of "providing a guide during resettlement". As such, he saw refugees as resilient in the face of significant trauma and change, and highly capable of looking after themselves. Reflecting on the PSR Program more broadly, he concluded that "private sponsorship facilitates a support system to equip them for Canadian society, and in the end that was the core thing for us".

A Strong Provincial Sponsorship Network

The sponsors whom I spoke to were largely positive about Nova Scotia's sponsorship efforts since 2015. "I think the response in the region especially has been amazing", said Ruth, adding that "after Alan Kurdi, a lot of people mobilized quickly to provide the support they could". Participants highlighted that the successful resettlement of Syrian refugees in the province was largely attributable to the work of their Sponsorship Agreement Holders. As Rebecca put it, "I was incredibly impressed by the information and workshops we received from our SAH, and by how quickly they gathered materials and put them online and communicated things with our sponsorship group". In particular, ISANS was frequently referenced by sponsors as an invaluable resource in navigating their sponsorship journeys. As both a SAH and a SPO, ISANS occupies a dynamic position in Nova Scotia's resettlement sector. "They were so great!" exclaimed Debbie excitedly during our interview. She told me about friends in Ontario who also sponsored families, explaining that none of them had as much help from institutional bodies as her group received from ISANS. "They have SAHs, but nobody has anything as dynamic as ISANS", she said. While sponsors spoke highly about the resources provided by ISANS throughout their sponsorships, they also pointed to the high

pressure exerted on ISANS staff. “I think we were all kind of looking to ISANS for everything, and they were exhausted”, said Christine. “They didn’t have time to do any more than they were doing, and IRCC didn’t make it any easier for them”. The following sections of this chapter will take a closer look at instances of sponsorship fatigue as experienced by settlement workers and sponsors.

“Action is the church now”

Several participants also reflected positively on their sponsorship experience in relation to their church membership. “I think that action is the church now” said Michael during our interview. He explained that as a result of becoming involved in refugee sponsorship, his local congregation had undergone a notable transformation from an institution of passive altruistic intent to an advocate for community involvement. To that effect, refugee sponsorship was a strong reminder for individual members involved in the church that they could contribute to a “good cause” in a different, and more tangible way than by simply making a donation. According to Dan, “it was affirming for a lot of people, and not just for the church, but for a lot of the people in it. Like "we've still got muscle". He highlighted the importance in realizing that the congregation could reach out to local businesses and support community interests outside of its own walls. “That was an important realization, because everything was so "churchy" before that. The mission's in the work, not in the branding” said Dan.

6.2 Situating the “Echo effect”: A Shift in Sponsorship Demand

During my interview with Dan, he suggested that “every sponsorship group starts out thinking that wow, this is a unique situation, we’ve gotta get everybody involved, and then we can make this happen. Then you learn that all these families have other families

that they want to bring, and that every sponsorship group is doing the same thing". Another participant, Julie, felt similarly and shared an account of how this played out in her own sponsorship group:

> The family, right at month 13, was finding out that finally this related family that we were sponsoring was scheduled to arrive! So they were very very excited, and then they had these other friends who were coming right afterwards as well, and that was everyone. They were only waiting on this one relative and on their friends, and they both arrived within 15 months of their own sponsorship. There's usually a lot of different people that you wanna bring, and have come into the community, and it was ideal that it worked out like this" (Julie, private sponsor).

One of the central principles of private sponsorship is that sponsors can name specific refugees for resettlement in Canada. As discussed in chapter 2, private sponsorship thus offers a favourable pathway for residents of Syrian origin as well as former-refugees to bring their relatives to Canada. This interest in sponsoring family members left behind is known colloquially as the "echo-effect" (Hynie et al, 2019). Kate, sponsorship coordinator at ISANS, explained that following the initial Syrian surge in Nova Scotia in 2015, there had been an enduring interest in sponsorship. "People all across the country were finding out, and it had really created an "echo-effect" of named sponsorships", she said. In this way, the PSR Program has entered the Canadians imagination as an alternative immigration pathway to family reunification.

According to Macklin et al (2020), "the relationships engendered by private sponsorship transpire within a policy framework that, in significant respects, mimics the more established family class sponsorship regime governing family reunification in Canadian immigration law" (p.188). However, contrary to Canada's formal family class sponsorship program, which requires a high income and strict financial obligations from the principal applicant, the PSR Program allows former-refugees to draw on a pre-

established social and financial network to facilitate the resettlement of their relatives. While these secondary sponsorships are often made possible through renewed support from original sponsorship groups or SAHs (Hynie et al, 2019), Lisa, regional trainer for the RSTP, highlighted that the so-called echo effect has also seen many new sponsorship groups forming independently as Community Sponsors or G5s. She suggested that the constellation of sponsorship in Canada is changing as this effect is taking shape. Reminiscent of changes to the PSR Program during the 1990's, the Syrian echo-effect has again marked a shift in private sponsorship demand towards family reunification (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003).

In contextualizing the shift of Syrian private sponsorship away from first-time (often BVOR) sponsors towards sponsoring families of those already resettled in Canada, Kate drew parallels to the sponsorship movement of Vietnamese, Laos and Cambodian refugees in the late 1970's. "I've looked at that sponsorship wave and there was a five-year arc there", she said. Similarly to 2015, there was a remarkable surge of interest in the beginning. "The first wave of sponsors was sort of mainstream Canadians, followed by a second wave of sponsors who were also Canadians plus some Vietnamese who had come" (Kate). She likened this to the family-linked sponsorships that emerged in the post-2015 period, often aimed at resettling extended families of GAR-sponsored refugees. "Finally, the third wave was former Vietnamese refugees sponsoring their families, which is what we're starting to see now" she said.

Sponsorship Fatigue

In line with findings from Macklin et al's preliminary study on private sponsors, my data shows that sponsors were asked to consider additional family members for future

sponsorship (Macklin et al, 2018). Several of my interview participants explicitly expressed an interest in continued sponsorship involvement. For them, sponsorship represented a long-term project that "does not end with the end with bringing one family over" (Michael). However, in preparing for secondary sponsorships, they also recounted experiences of sponsorship fatigue and bureaucratic setbacks, resulting in a loss of momentum.

Wendy, who had become involved in sponsorship to resettle additional members of her congregation's first sponsored Syrian family, highlighted that the high amount of work involved in sponsoring deterred many of her original group members from subsequent involvement. "It was a stressful time", she said, adding that "for a while it was a fulltime job". As the initial core group lost momentum, new sponsors stepped in to fill their spots. "It takes so much work", Wendy reflected, saying that she completely understood "that a lot of the original sponsors felt a bit burned out and didn't want to become actively involved again".

Following the conclusion of Rebecca, Dan, Michael and Jessica's sponsorship, the group identified and applied to sponsor several extended family members who were living in an encampment in Jordan. Like Wendy, they noted that many of their core members had faded away as a result of sponsorship fatigue. Thus, to facilitate the sponsorship, they partnered with another local community group. "We had money left over and went to them and 'look we don't have the manpower right now, but we do have the logistical know-how of how to do this. We have a small amount of money that we can kick in... if you guys do the heavy lifting on the talent front, and do the fundraising, we have the perfect family'", Michael explained. According to Dan, the sponsorship initially

went well, and several months after submitting their application the group received an email that the family were invited to an interview with a Canadian Visa Officer. This Visa Office interview is usually the final step before resettlement (RSTP, 2020). However, shortly before the interview was scheduled to take place, the family was abruptly deported back to Syria from Jordan, putting an end to the group's sponsorship application. "It was a really awful and heartbreaking period" reflected Dan. Rebecca refracted the experience through feelings of loss, both in terms of her sponsorship motivation as well as for her personally. "I lost all momentum", she reflected. "I was really involved. I poured a lot of my energy into that. It was this year, so it's still quite fresh. It was awful. It was as intense, but in a horrible way, as when the first family arrived". Jessica shared a similar feeling of discouragement following the failed sponsorship, saying that it prompted her to step back from active involvement. "Now my work is more in advocacy, trying to convince policy makers to bring more refugees into Canada. I've sent a number of emails on that front", she said.

6.3 Shortcomings of the PSR Program

In addition to highlighting participants' positive feelings towards private sponsorship, equally significant are the challenges, demands, and constraints that they experienced. As the story told above demonstrates, feelings of frustration and disappointment at times permeated sponsorship experiences just as strongly as feelings of joy and satisfaction. Throughout my interview data, both sponsors and settlement workers shared a number of frustrations in relation to their sponsorship work. The final section of this thesis shares their insights on the continued institutional shortcomings underlying Canadian refugee sponsorship policy.

Challenges of Rural Sponsorship

Kate, sponsorship coordinator at ISANS, outlined several prominent settlement challenges that rural sponsors often need to navigate. “Usually the hardest part for sponsors is when people are sponsoring rurally, because there's so much more dependency created as a result of transportation systems”, she said. Furthermore, she noted that rural refugees are typically more susceptible to loneliness and feelings of isolation. “For refugees, there's so much baggage that it's hard to unpack for them, and to adjust to a new way of life. Especially in a rural setting, they're more isolated”. Finally, rural communities often have less consistent access to English language training than is available in the HRM, resulting in increased difficulty accessing the labour market compared to their urban-sponsored counterparts. According to Kate, “classes aren't always available, they're not as frequent, they're often further away, and not always full-time. So there's so many added stresses that need to be reconciled on both sides of the sponsorship”.

While most participants looked back favourably on their sponsorships, Wendy indeed highlighted a number of challenges specific to her experience as a rural sponsor on Nova Scotia’s South Shore. She reflected on the fact that her sponsorship group dealt with “a lot of red tape in organizing things like language school and logistical issues.” She further commented that “transportation in rural Nova Scotia is a big freaking deal...you basically need a car to get anywhere. And having a car is not necessarily accessible for everybody. So organizing drives for them was difficult”. Ultimately, Wendy contended that despite the many logistical challenges and frustrations of resettlement in a rural area, “there has also been so much joy and open hearts and homes.

We've worked hard to create a welcoming environment". As a result of a smaller population and distance from the HRM, her community experienced enhanced social capital (Bourdieu,1977), which, as Haugan (2019) reminds us, is an important resource for the successful resettlement of refugees.

Institutional Shortcomings

The PSR Program occupies a curious space between relying on state assistance on one hand and being dependent on neoliberal conceptions of civil responsibility on the other. While private sponsorship grants individuals the liberty to mobilize and provide support to refugees, Labman (2016) reminds us that this construct is simultaneously taxing on sponsors. As such, it shifts resettlement responsibilities away from the state and onto private actors. As argued in chapter 2 of this thesis, over the years sponsors have had to learn to do more with less. To support this idea, participants in this study shared an overall sentiment that despite the "incredible amount of goodwill in Nova Scotia" (Kate), the province was both *structurally underequipped* and *institutionally undersupported* for the Syrian sponsorship surge in 2015. In reflecting on this, Ellen (sponsorship coordinator at ISANS) told me that sponsors, refugees, and settlement workers have all been confronted with challenging sponsorship burnouts since 2015. She said "I have worked with groups through some of the most difficult scenarios. Maybe there's been trauma, maybe domestic violence. We've accompanied groups through some really tricky things. And there was always some burnout in those scenarios", she said. However, she posited that "without a doubt, the worst burnout scenarios were caused by a lack of information, a lack of funding, by the lack of SAHs being consulted by IRCC, by people being completely left hanging and not receiving support".

Ellen situated provincial sponsorship burnouts largely within a context of frustrations towards the Canadian federal government. Her role at ISANS, an institutional intermediary between sponsorship groups and the government (Macklin et al, 2018), provided her with nuanced insight into the transmission of knowledge, information and support between these public and private spheres. In reflecting on this, she suggested that IRCC did not fulfil its promises in extending support to the province during the Syrian refugee surge. For example, despite agreements to accommodate SAHs as sponsorship liaisons, ISANS received only a meager increase in government funding from October 2015 to March 2016. Given this lack of extra funding, staff burnout manifested itself across the organization.

> When they started putting refugees on a plane with 24 hours' notice, I had to check my emails at 10, 11pm at night during the Christmas holidays to make sure that there wasn't an arrival the next morning! The Catholic Church got an arrival on Boxing Day, and so Christmas Day, I'm trying to help support them. It was unbelievable. I remember calling IRCC, and them saying 'oh no, we've got 24-hour staffing right now to move these people as quickly as possible'. But then I was like 'well that great, but my staffing hasn't changed! It's still just me getting paid 7 hours a day but having to work 24 hours'. I just feel like the burnout from staff and volunteers could've been really reduced had there been a different way of being talked to or responded to or consulted in some way" (Ellen, sponsorship coordinator at ISANS).

Ellen's frustration was contextualized by a lack of institutional support provided to provincial resettlement stakeholders. She pointed out that SAHs across the province felt that limits in allocations and refugee caps were often implemented in a cumbersome and non-transparent manner (Hyndman et al, 2017). Additionally, Ellen and Kate both expressed frustrations around the notion of government "number playing". As Labman (2019) points out, "the initial Liberal election promise stood out on its recommitment to GARs, making promises for government resettlement instead of promises for private

sponsors" (p.75). However, by the end of 2015, with the realities of screening and processing refugees setting in, the revised plan relied heavily on private sponsors to meet its projected goal of resettling 25,000 by February 2016. In the end, 11,178 of this number arrived as PSRs and BVORs. "In some ways, it really feels as though the government took all the credit', said Ellen. "But we (SAHs and sponsors) carried so much of the burden, especially considering that there was no advance warning or communication". As such, they were often left to fend for themselves regarding communication about refugee processing times and applications statuses. "IRCC did not provide meaningful consultation on these issues", she said. In particular, ISANS frequently received missing or incorrect information from Canada's overseas Visa Offices. In the following interview excerpt, Ellen reflected on a specific experience in which sponsorship was inhibited by a series of bureaucratic setbacks:

> One group (BVOR) sponsored a family, waited 7 or 8 months, then family was pulled...they didn't pass their security. They should've never been put on the BVOR list before some of those checks had been done, but anyways. It was a busy time, mistakes happen. But anyways, the family got matched with this group, they waited 8 months.... nothing. Family got cancelled. So, they matched with a second family...waited 5 or 6 more months, and then the family got resettled elsewhere and wasn't gonna be coming either. So now we're at the third family, and again they wait, and they wait, and then they come, and their flight gets cancelled. It just went on and on and on. It was really painful because this was such a well-organized group. They had done everything right---and then just nothing. So, I was thinking, this is the kind of group that will do this consistently, maybe for 10, 15, or 20 years. But I feel now, after what they've been through, that yeah, it's pretty unlikely that they're gonna wanna do this again (Ellen, sponsorship coordinator at ISANS).

Looking beyond the 2015 sponsorship surge, participants expressed concerns that as of 2017 and 2018, when the interviews for this project took place, the PSR Program remained structurally unequipped to handle the aftermath of Canada's increased sponsorship interest. Specifically, interviewees directed their frustrations largely towards

Justin Trudeau’s liberal government. The same government that had so strongly motivated their involvement in private sponsorship had not adequately facilitated the ability to sponsor the “echo effect” of its own Syrian commitments following 2015. Furthermore, participants suggested that the PSR Program had been ambiguously framed by policymakers. While public discourse had largely praised its successful outcomes, the program continued to be faced with a lack of infrastructure and resettlement capacity. The following five participant quotations carefully exemplify these critiques:

> It's hard to sustain momentum. You can have all the money, everything ready to go...but you have to wait for those channels, and all of that bureaucracy. The infrastructure is here in terms of volunteers, but I feel like that trickle isn't working. We're a big country, we can handle this. Now I know there's lots of people that don't feel that way, but I believe that bringing newcomers to our country does it good. – Rebecca, private sponsor

> The problem in Canada policy-wise has been that there isn't enough supply to meet the demand, like there are more sponsorship groups. And there's so much backlog, and you still need that government involvement. You're not gonna outsource security checks, you're not gonna outsource health checks. – Jessica, private sponsor

> I feel frustrated with the Trudeau government. They got elected on this wave of goodwill and got all of this going and just went ‘ok we're done’. After decreasing annual PSR spots post-2017, the government went back to ‘situation normal’, which was Harper’s setup and extremely clawed back from what it had been. I feel that Trudeau owes it to Canada and to himself to follow up on his initial goodwill. Like if you really mean it, don't keep it down to a trickle. You opened it up, now do the work. – Laura, private sponsor

> The liberals really have to step up to the plate again, because so many liberal supporters are in this mess with them. – Christine, private sponsor

> I'm not really sure where the government is going with this. The immigration numbers, they're saying they're gonna bring 20,000 PSRs by 2020 and I'm just like ‘but there's still no staffing, there's no funding’. So I'm not really sure where we're going as a SAH. – Ellen, sponsorship coordinator at ISANS

These excerpts uncover important insights into several shortcomings of the PSR Program as experienced by those involved in it. In particular, they highlight concerns and

frustrations regarding caps on refugee admissions that the Canadian government imposed shortly after the initial Syrian sponsorship wave in 2015. Unable to keep up with the surge in sponsorship demand amidst increasing structural issues of backlogs and bureaucratic delays, IRCC announced "anemic targets for 2017" (Hyndman et al, 2017). As part of this cap on admissions, ISANS' allocation of sponsorship spots was reduced to only 79. Beyond calling for increased funding and structural support, participants voiced that these limits on the number of admissible PSRs should be reconsidered. As Hyndman et al (2017) argue "policies should aim to harness and sustain the interest and engagement of Canadians in refugee sponsorship, not undermine them" (2017, p.3). Sponsors who took part in this study unanimously agreed that it is critical that the government fulfil its responsibility to adequately support the interests of civil society in refugee resettlement.

In closing this chapter, I recognize that participants' critiques of the PSR Program must be contextualized within a particular moment in time. As such, sponsors' frustrations specifically addressed the liberal government's inability to manage the aftermath of the Syrian resettlement surge. Since then, barring the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Canadian government has adjusted its immigration targets to resettling 59,000 privately sponsored refugees between 2019 and 2021 (IRCC, 2021c). Furthermore, IRCC recently announced plans to considerably expand its Afghan resettlement program with help from private sponsors (IRCC, 2021d). Thus, it is important to acknowledge that both Canada's political climate, as well as its immigration flows have shifted since the time of my research. Nevertheless, I believe that the perspectives and experiences shared by sponsors of the post-2015 Syrian refugee surge provide insight of enduring value to future sponsorship moments in Canada.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Contextualized by ongoing policy changes in Canada's immigration and refugee resettlement programs, this small case study provides insight into how private sponsorship fits within these broader narratives. Through fifteen qualitative interviews with sponsors and sponsorship settlement workers, I examined what motivations, experiences and challenges characterized the Syrian private sponsorship experience in Nova Scotia.

My thesis began in chapter two with a brief historical timeline of global refugee legislation and Canada's refugee protection policy, followed by a detailed outline of the PSR Program. This chapter contextualized my project and situated the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program within Canada's broader immigration policy landscape. In doing so, I also considered the nuances of how private sponsorship is positioned relative to regional immigration policy in Nova Scotia. Chapter three outlined my research methodology, which set out to explore the experiences of members of differently-configured sponsorship groups as well as several other stakeholders involved in facilitating private sponsorship in the province. Chapters four, five and six comprised my analysis and highlighted key research findings. In these chapters, I shared participants' insights and experiences through a chronological account of their sponsorship journeys.

Overall, I suggest that the impetus to become involved in the PSR Program was largely a response to media representations of the Syrian humanitarian crisis as well to the political setting in Canada leading up to the 2015 Federal election. For the people I spoke to, private sponsorship was often experienced as a way to meaningfully exercise

their own citizenship. Furthermore, my data demonstrates that private sponsorship fundamentally relies on establishing and navigating social relationships. My data emphasized the significance of the sponsor-refugee relationship throughout the sponsorship process, beginning from the moment of arrival and often enduring beyond the formal conclusion of sponsorship and into month 13. Despite powerful reflections on the rewarding, positive and transformative aspects of their sponsorship involvement, participants also highlighted challenges and inequalities embedded in their experiences. Finally, they shared important insights into the institutional shortcomings and bureaucratic tensions underlying Canada's Private Sponsorship Program.

Future Research and Policy Recommendations

As this project focused on developing an understanding of sponsors' perspectives and experiences, it is important to underscore that I did not speak to Syrian (former) refugees themselves. This is a substantive limitation of this research, and future studies on this topic should address (former) refugees' own interpretations of their experiences both prior to, during and post-sponsorship. Considering the research questions of this project, (former) refugees' perspectives would add invaluable comparative insight into how sponsor-refugee relationships develop and evolve prior to, during and following sponsorship. Additionally, their experiences would undoubtedly strengthen policy recommendations for improving the PSR Program. Moreover, while this project has highlighted inequalities embedded in the social relationships cultivated through the PSR Program, further research needs to be conducted to address ongoing forms of structural inequality and social exclusion that pervade in the everyday lives of refugee newcomers following their sponsorships. As argued by Ginrich and Enns (2019), subjective

exclusion functions over time, and "even sustained sponsor-sponsored relationships of some sponsorships cannot shield the ways in which communities and institutions function to keep people marginalized" (p.19). As the everyday lives of former refugees continue into month 13 and beyond, institutional barriers such as the systematic devaluation of their education, knowledge and expertise are ever present.

In Nova Scotia, at the time the research was conducted, these structural constraints were amplified by a shrinking local labour market, which made the notional destination of private sponsorship as achieving economic self-suffiency a difficult project, even in the long term. However, more recently, the conditions in the provincial political economy that prevailed during the time of this research have again shifted, partly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since conducting the interviews for this research, the labour market situation in the province has largely been reversed, with various industries (ie: construction, healthcare, tourism) now reporting significant labour shortages (Nourpanah, 2020; Wentzell, 2021). According to a report released late 2020 by the Public Policy Forum as part of its 'Immigration and Atlantic Revitalization Project' (2020), "employers in Atlantic Canada are currently experiencing structural labour and skills shortages due to the interplay of a demographic factors (ie: an aging population) and new productivity boosting technologies" (PPF, 2020). Additionally, COVID-19 has constrained the movement and entry of immigrant newcomers who would otherwise be able to fill some of those gaps.

In addition to a shrinking labour market, the province has also seen a reversing trend in immigrant outmigration, with newcomers (particularly refugees) increasingly favouring Nova Scotia as a secondary settlement destination in Canada (Nourpanah &

Barber, 2021). A 2020 survey of immigrants in NS revealed that the top 3 factors considered by immigrants while immigrating to the province are: employment opportunities, quality of life, and safe communities (Akbari, 2020). Nevertheless, despite reversing trends in outmigration, Nova Scotia is currently facing a protracted housing crisis that has created a barrier to securing immigrant retention (Murphy,2021). In particular, with affordable housing becoming increasingly scarce or lost to for-profit developers and financiers, refugee families have been disproportially affected as they often rely on low incomes or social assistance (Campbell, 2021; Murphy,2021).

Given the Nova Scotia's recent labour market shifts, rapid development growth, as well its current housing crisis, future research would do well to consider the long-term outcomes of privately sponsored refugees in the province. As argued by Labman (2016), "critical research is needed that goes beyond case studies, includes comparative analysis that looks across space and time to understand how and why private sponsorship often positively affects integration over the longer term". However, in doing so, I urge policy makers and scholars to consider not only the favourable economic contributions that these migrants and their families make to Canadian society and to the local communities in which they settle, but cultural, social and emotional contributions as well.

Since conducting interviews for this project in 2017 and 2018, a number of new scholarly works have been published about the PSR Program. For instance, *Refuge's* "Special Issue on Private Sponsorship in Canada" (Reynolds & Clark Kazak, 2019) focuses specifically on lessons learned from sponsorship efforts and offers suggestions for future policy and programming related to private sponsorship. Furthermore, as the literature on the topic is growing, an increasing number of studies have examined the

social relations and experiences of sponsors themselves (ie: Hyndman et al, 2021). Another example of this is the recently published book entitled *Strangers to Neighbors: Refugee Sponsorship in Context* (2020), which examines a variety of sponsorship experiences through a multitude of social, political and legal analytic lenses. I hope that my project makes a small contribution to this growing literature by offering a glimpse of how private sponsorship of Syrian refugees was experienced by sponsors in Nova Scotia. Though small in scope, my goal is to provide a stepping stone for further scholarly investigation on this topic.

Beyond the need for additional academic research about private sponsorship of refugees, my project brings into focus several policy recommendations. As neoliberal policy changes in Canada's immigration rhetoric have continued to constrain the PSR Program, I urge policymakers to consider the strengths of this model. Specifically, they should consider the meaningful ways that private sponsorship contributes positively to Nova Scotia. While the focus of local immigration policy has largely been on attracting immigrants that are considered economically desirable, research shows that economic immigrants have had lower retention rates than those arriving as sponsored refugees (Toughill, 2019a). With a vision that seeks to be "a welcoming province that sees greater numbers of immigrants and newcomers each year and recognizes the important contributions they make" (Nova Scotia Business Plan 2021-2022), policymakers would do well to take the knowledge, skills and unique social relationships of privately sponsored refugees into account (Toughill, 2019a). I suggest that future policy updates to the PSR Program should include greater involvement of refugees in shaping their own

resettlement, as well as the reconceptualization of private sponsorship as a partnership between refugee newcomers and Canadians.

Finally, in realizing its mission to “attract, integrate and retain immigrants and newcomers" (Nova Scotia Business Plan 2021-2022), Nova Scotia should not turn a blind eye to the role of private sponsors and SAHs in this puzzle. As such, they represent a community of motivated and politically engaged citizens that support the province’s goal of helping transition newcomers from refugees to Canadians. Given sponsors’ multifaceted roles of providing financial, social, and personal support to refugee newcomers over the course of their first year in the province, they occupy a unique position in shaping newcomer’s networks and social relations. I argue that increased resources and more consultative policy development are critical for sponsors and settlement organizations to effectively provide the support they do.

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Appendix A: Overview of Research Participants

Participants: Sponsors						
Pseudonym	**Church Affiliated Group**	**ISANS Constituent Group**	**Family Linked Sponsorship**	**BVOR Sponsor ship**	**HRM Based Group**	**Rural NS Group**
Megan		✓		✓	✓	
Ruth		✓		✓	✓	
Debbie		✓		✓	✓	
Christine		✓		✓	✓	
Julie		✓		✓	✓	
Laura		✓		✓	✓	
Patricia		✓		✓	✓	
Michael	✓		✓		✓	
Jessica	✓		✓		✓	
Dan	✓		✓		✓	

<table>
<tr><td>Rebecca</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Wendy</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">Participants: Sponsorship Settlement Workers</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ellen</td><td colspan="6">Sponsorship Coordinator at ISANS</td></tr>
<tr><td>Kate</td><td colspan="6">Sponsorship Coordinator at ISANS</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lisa</td><td colspan="6">Regional trainer at the RSTP</td></tr>
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Appendix B: Interview Guide for Sponsors

My interviews will be semi-structured; using open-ended questions and prompts as needed.

1. How did you get involved in private sponsorship?
   - What was it like assembling the group?
   - What difficulties did you face?

2. What sorts of things had to be done before the family arrived?
   - How did you go about fundraising and how did you hit your targets?
   - How did you get in touch with the family?

3. Can you tell me about how tasks were assigned among members of the group?
   - Who did what?
   - How often did/does the group meet?
   - What was your own role as a sponsor?
   - Tell me about the day-to-day experiences of sponsorship

4. Can you describe the relationship between your group and the family?
   - How was it initially?
   - How did the relationship develop over the 12 months?

5. Tell me about what it was like concluding the sponsorship. What are things like now?
   - How is the family doing?
   - Do you feel like the transition (from month 12 to 'month 13') was successful/positive?
   - How much contact do you have now? Who initiates this contact?
   - Do you think that contact with the family will continue in the future?

6. How is your groups affiliated with ISANS or other organizations?
   - What sort of events (put on by ISANS) did your family/sponsorship group partake in?
   - How about you personally? Did you have contact with ISANS staff?
     - For what reasons?
     - How often?

7. How do you feel your membership affected the sponsorship process?

8. Can you tell me about any tensions or difficulties at any point of the sponsorship experience?
   - Were there any tensions within your group?
   - Or between the group and the family?
   - How did you mitigate/ handle these tensions?

9. What are your perceptions of government support mechanisms for private sponsorship?

10. How do you think being involved in private sponsorship has impacted the members of your group?

11. How has being involved in private sponsorship impacted you personally?

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Sponsorship Settlement Workers

Interviews will be semi-structured; using open-ended questions and prompts as needed.

1. Can you tell me about your role at ISANS/ RSTP?

2. In what ways is your position related to private sponsorship?

3. Can you describe, in detail, ISANS' role as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder?
- What does this entail?
- What does ISANS' history as a SAH look like?
- How many "constituent groups" are currently operating under this agreement?

4. What is your overall perception of Nova Scotia's response to the Syrian refugee crisis over the last two years?

5. How, if at all, has being involved in facilitating private sponsorship impacted your perceptions of Canada's PSR Program?