



Migration Research Unit

ÒWelcome to CanadaÓ: Hospitality, Inclusion and Diversity in Private  
Refugee Sponsorship

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## 1. Introduction

The 1976 Immigration Act, called into force in 1978, marked the beginning of the private sponsorship system in Canada. According to section 6 of the Act, any group of Canadian citizens or permanent residents may sponsor the admission of any Convention refugee or any other permitted class of migrant (Government of Canada, 1976). Private sponsorship was first put into action by the Canadian public to assist the government in resettling nearly 60,000 Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees to Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Hydmet al., 2017). Over the past few decades, community groups and private citizens have sponsored thousands of refugees to resettle in Canada. During the election campaign in the fall of 2015, Trudeau's Liberal government emphasized a strong commitment to opening Canada's doors and resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees. This commitment was honoured within several months of the Liberals taking office and was with widespread support across the country. The resettlement initiative was supported by the federal government as a means of strengthening and continuing Canada's humanitarian tradition and history of inclusion and diversity. According to information provided by the Government of Canada, between the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2015 and the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2017 more than 40,000 Syrian refugees were resettled in Canada.

Refugees are primarily resettled in Canada through three broad streams of assistance and sponsorship, consisting of the Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR), Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugee (BVOR), and Privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR) programs (Government of Canada, 2017a). The GAR program resettles refugees who are entirely funded by the Government of Canada and supported by NGOs in partnership with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. BVOR support is partially funded by the Government of Canada, while the remainder of the funds and all social and logistical support are provided by private sponsors. Finally, the PSR program is self-funded and supported by individual Canadians and, as with the other two programs, support is provided for the duration of one full year. Of the 40,000 Syrians who arrived in Canada from late 2015 to early 2017, more than 14,000 were sponsored privately and a further 4,000 were supported through the BVOR program (Government of Canada, 2017b).

Within the PSR program, applicants for refugee sponsorship are classified into two separate categories. Convention refugees officially recognized as such by UNHCR are those who are outside their home country and cannot return due to a well-founded fear of persecution





In the context of the recent large scale resettlement effort, this dissertation

## 2. Literature Review

This dissertation draws on a body of critical academic literature on cosmopolitanism, hospitality, and responsibility.

al., 2002; Spivak, 2012). Martha Nussbaum has gone back to the concept's Kantian roots to employ the notion of cosmopolitanism as a tool to achieve a world based on equality and respect (1994, 1997). However, David Harvey is critical of the way that cosmopolitanism is implicated in Kantian racist geographical imagination and implicit Eurocentrism (2009). In response to concerns about the capacity for cosmopolitanism to address the realities of living

that does not desire inclusion or welcome (2009).

## 2.2. Multiculturalism and Diversity in Canada


In an order to begin a project of analyzing hospitality as a process of destabilizing interiors, which Bulley argues for, it is first necessary to explore what constitutes Canadian national identity (2017). Since Confederation 150 years ago, the history of Canada has been fraught with debates about what it means to be Canadian. In 1971 multiculturalism became the official policy of Canada and a mechanism for distinguishing the Canadian national mosaic against the melting pot policy of its neighbour to the south (Fortier, 2008; Wayland, 1997). Since the late 1970s, multiculturalism has been expanded from a policy of promoting cultural diversity to a recognition of multiculturalism as a fundamental element of Canadian identity (Wayland, 1997). Within the literature there have been critiques of multiculturalism, including various debates about the fall of multiculturalism and the realities of living in a post-multicultural world (Kymlicka, 2010; Vertovec, 2010). Multiculturalism has been blamed for creating ethnic segregation, parallel lives, and the failure of integration (Fortier, 2008; Vertovec, 2010). Kymlicka argues that rather than do away entirely with multiculturalism, there needs to be greater attention paid to establishing the conditions for implementing a multicultural

3.



follow up questions were used to gain a full picture of each sponsorship experience (see Appendix 1 and 2)

Table 1. Interviews with Sponsors

Name*	Date of Interview	Period of Sponsorship	Type of Sponsorship	Country of Origin	Location of Interview
Sheila	27.06.2017	October 2016 Ongoing	G5	Canada	Toronto
Skylar	28.06.2017	September 2016 Ongoing	SAH/CG	USA	Toronto
Marcie	06.07.2017	July 2016 July 2017	SAH/CG	Canada	Toronto
Theresa	07.07.2017	February 2016 February 2017	SAH/CG/BVOR	Canada	Toronto
Sandra	10.07.2017	September 2016 Ongoing	SAH/CG	Canada	Toronto
Birgitte	11.07.2017	June 2016 Ongoing	SAH/CG/BVOR	Denmark	London, ON
Mia	11.07.2017	June 2016 Ongoing	SAH/CG/BVOR		





concern among the newcomers that were still in their initial year of sponsorship as they were receiving ongoing assistance from their sponsors. The ethical concerns raised by winter newcomers will be discussed in further detail below. However, to make one final point about

consent for their answers to be used in this research project and confirming that all information provided would remain anonymous (see Appendix 3)

### 3.4 Data Analysis

As the research showed, each sponsorship experience was different, both between and within sponsorship groups. However, several common themes, challenges, and highlights emerged. Both sets of data taken from archival research and interview transcripts, were carefully read, coded and analysed to reveal commonalities between experiences, as well as between experiences and the official discourse.

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rest of Canada, particularly the mostly different programs in Quebec, have been excluded. As discussed above, the perspectives of newcomers were not captured in this research due to ethical concerns. The research is also limited by the small sample size. While private

to cross these borders. The objectives of the "discretionary" resettlement program are to



#### 4.1.2 National Discourse

Beyond, or rather, other than, the openings made possible at the physical borders of the Canadian nation state, the national discourse of welcome and inclusion provides possibility of hospitality. At all levels of government and across civil society, there was a public rhetoric of Canada as a welcoming, hospitable, and inclusive country. This sentiment was shared by prominent world leaders such as Antonio Guterres, previously the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and now serving as the Secretary General of the United Nations. He wrote an article shortly before the Syrian resettlement initiative began calling on Canada to continue its proud record of opening their arms to those seeking a new beginning (The Globe and Mail, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015). Appeals to Canada's identity as a country of welcome also came from the Ontario premier, Kathleen Wynne, and the previous Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, John McCallum (The Globe and Mail, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015). An image of Canada as a welcoming and inclusive place was projected both globally and within Canada, which served as a rhetoric of unconditional hospitality with which to greet all newcomers. A similar message of Canadian national hospitality was articulated by many of the sponsors interviewed. Skylar expressed that as an American and a new Canadian citizen she

around the world share (quoted in The Global and Mail 11 December 2015). While the message was meant as one of welcome, Trudeau placed conditions upon the essence of what it means to be Canadian in the form of universal values. Values, as a technology of regulation, serve to welcome some, while excluding others (Brown, 2008). There is also an implicit message that people will be required to change if they don't adhere to Canadian values, a message echoed by some sponsors as shown in the sections below.

Private sponsorship also has the ability and power to unsettle the constitutive elements of Canadian identity through hospitality. Brown, in an article for The Globe and Mail described private sponsorship and resettlement in Canada as a civic project that asks: Can you be Canadian? Should people not qualify? How much do refugees have to behave like other Canadians? And what does being Canadian mean any more, anyway? (The Globe and Mail, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2017). The promise of hospitality rests in the possibility of engagement, mutual transformation and the creation of a space where host could become guest and guest could become host (Dike, 2002). Sponsorship could provide a means of questioning and changing identities to overcome difference. The Canadian playwright, Michael Healey, spoke about his own sponsorship experience and the Canadian imperative (or)-7 (e)4 (,)ad (ove)2 (r)-7 (c)4 (om)-2





was met with the equal imperative for naming and identifying in order to make hospitality effective. However, the process of identification had the potential to impose exclusionary and harmful conditions, such as proving worth and vulnerability.

## 4.2 Spaces of Hospitality

### 4.2.1 Engagement and Connection

The space of private sponsorship exists as an embodied, grounded, and place-based that disrupts the binaries of local and global (Massey, 2009). Sponsorship provides space for connection and engagement between sponsors and newcomers but also with the wider community and nation. It also provides a space where Canadian residents and citizens can engage on a deeper and more personal level with the lives of people around the world. Sponsorship referred to the process of extending engagement beyond the sponsorship group as the "ripple effect" (Interview with Theresa July 2017). The spaces of engagement were lived at the dining room table, the ice rink, the cottages in northern Ontario, ski chalets, and in the

connection that my family was important and they wanted to share, to feed us” (Interview with Skylar, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017). Over the course of their shared meals, Skylar and the newcomer family took on different roles in relation to each other as a process of engagement and negotiation that has continued throughout the period of sponsorship.

Engagement can happen beyond the everyday encounters between sponsor and newcomer. Some of the sponsors expressed that they felt more tuned in to what was happening in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, depending on the journey of the sponsored newcomers and of the experiences of other newcomers in Canada. Because of the personal connections they had made (Interview with Stephen<sup>16</sup> July 2017; Interview with Theresa<sup>17</sup> July 2017) Tuning in, paying attention, and engaging was

understanding of the world. Theresa and her group, in their evaluation for their SAH, expressed that they felt the experience had made [them] better people and better Canadians (Interview with Theresa, 7 July 2017). Sponsorship included a process of self-reflection on one's own preconceptions of the world. It also provided a space to reflect and talk about the journeys that sponsors and their families had made to Canada. Theresa felt that there was potential for private sponsorship to continue in Canada and work in other contexts if people approach it with a willingness to learn and be transformed themselves and be okay with uncertainty (7<sup>th</sup> July 2017). Sponsorship provided the potential to open up spaces of hospitality where sponsors and newcomers could take on the role of guest and host, undergo transformation and engage with each and the wider communities on a deep and meaningful level. However, process of engagement didn't always lead to positive transformation or meaningful connection. Nearly every sponsor interviewed pointed to moments, interactions and conversations of contestation, discomfort, and anger.

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July 2017). In the context of this research, each moment of contestation and disagreement can

were extremely selective about the apartment they wanted to live in, which caused frustration among the sponsors over the amount of time and effort they were required to put in to find them a suitable place to live. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the newcomer family was living in a house normally occupied by two of the sponsors. While they were travelling for the majority of the time the newcomers lived there, they had to stay with various friends until the newcomer family found an apartment of their own. These points of contestation were imbued with issues of sovereignty over space and the ability to make choices for oneself. While negotiation and contestation could extend the space of hospitality as compromises were found ~~at~~ the engagement between newcomers and sponsors ~~continued~~, expectation of gratitude had the potential to close the door to hospitality.

#### 4.2.3 Power and Gratitude

The individual experiences of sponsors ~~from~~ the perspective of sponsors ~~include~~ to a process that can be engaging, enriching, meaningful, and transformative while simultaneously difficult, frustrating, and uncomfortable. Each sponsorship group negotiated these moments in different ways but there were also times when sponsors ~~and~~ the space of hospitality were closed entirely. Marcie's experience of sponsorship was particularly illustrative of the ways that sponsorship can become harmful and uncomfortable for both sponsors and newcomers (Interview 6<sup>th</sup> July 2017). The sponsor ~~group~~ was formed in a community close to the downtown of Toronto with the majority of sponsors joining as a result of a connection to the local school. Local enthusiasm and a surplus of donations meant that the group was able to split into two sponsor ~~ships~~ and facilitate the resettlement of two families to the ~~area~~ member of the initial group, Marcie helped sponsor the family that was supposed to arrive first but when the second group ~~came~~ much quicker, she helped set up their apartment and assisted them in a number of different ways. When the first group finally arrived months later, the majority of sponsors were on summer holidays so the initial work of resettlement fell to Marcie and a few others who were still in Toronto. The composition of ~~family~~ was unusual as they were all adult children, one with a spouse, and their mother. Unbeknownst to the sponsors, the daughter-in-law was pregnant and had family that was already settled in northern Toronto near the church that they belonged to. The ~~new~~comers arrived with a number of expectations about the welcome that would be extended to them, including ~~the~~ understanding that they would be provided with a credit card for them to buy a car, formal attire for an ~~upcoming~~ family occasion, and a drive every weekend to their family up north. They also insisted on finding

accommodate their family and the local religious community, despite the sponsors'.

difficult position. As Theresa said, "how free can people really feel at this early stage to be critical when they're supposed to be grateful?" That whole dynamic around being grateful is so nauseating but it's real (Interview on 7 July 2017).

## Conclusion

Private refugee sponsorship opens up thresholds and spaces of hospitality between newcomers and sponsors in Canada. While hospitality cannot be fixed as a singular experience or relationship, sponsorship provided flashes and moments of hospitality where the double imperative of unconditionality and naming could exist simultaneously. Through federal immigration policies, government initiatives, and national discourse, the Canadian nation state excluded the very possibilities for hospitality it claimed to open up. As research has shown, experiences of private sponsorship involved processes of engagement, connection, mutual respect and reciprocal hospitality. However, sovereignty and the imbalance of power relations posed a constant threat to the promise of hospitality. Private sponsorship provides an opportunity for individual Canadians to engage with others, rework the meaning of what it means to be Canadian, and extend welcome. However, the possibilities for harm within the space of hospitality demand further attention to regulating, mitigating and controlling the power imbalances within individual relationships. The hospitality of private sponsorship has enormous potential to continue, both within Canada and on a global scale, yet there must be room for the kind of contestation and negotiation that leads to engagement, rather than closure.

This dissertation provides



particularly relevant given the convergence of Syrian resettlement with the recent influx of refugees entering from the United States (The Guardian, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2017.) As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, the potential to expand the program of private refugee sponsorship to other countries around the globe demands further interrogation of the individual relationship between sponsors and newcomers. While this dissertation has provided a small window into these relationships, it is necessary to examine them across a wider scale and from

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