We both began our research on refugee resettlement at a time when political interest in this aspect of refugee policy was relatively minimal. This quickly changed in the wake of the 2015 Canadian election, when the new Liberal government committed to resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees and promoted the use of private refugee sponsorship. Many Canadians knew little about this unique aspect of refugee policy at the time, but just a few years later about one quarter of Canadians know someone who has participated in sponsorship. The world also knows more about the Canadian program, owing to the federal government’s efforts to promote it as a model for other countries to adopt.

When we saw each other at a Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Summer Institute in May 2017, we began to talk about these changing realities and the need for a volume that would bring together a cross-disciplinary group of scholars who could enhance academic and public understanding of the program. This idea took shape with the support of a grant from the PETF’s Public Interaction Program and the partnership of the Global Migration Lab at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. Jennifer Petrela at the PETF and Randall Hansen at the Munk School both supported the initiative in its early stages.

A call for papers was distributed, abstracts were selected, and authors were invited to present at a two-day workshop in October 2018, held at the Munk School. That event, “Private Refugee Sponsorship: Concepts, Cases, and Consequences,” came together with the phenomenal support of Joseph Hawker and Olga Kesarchuk, who managed logistics and the administration of our grant. We also benefited from the assistance of two volunteer rapporteur-participants, Ian Van Haren and Enbal Singer. Through the Legal Research Institute
at the University of Manitoba, the final details of the book came together with the support and careful research of Jonathan Andrews.

Jacqueline Mason at McGill-Queen’s University Press has supported the idea of this book from the outset and worked with us throughout the process to swiftly bring it into print.

Of course, we would not have a complete book without the chapter authors. We put out an open call for papers setting out our ideas and questions on private refugee sponsorship with the hope we could gather some people to work with us. The response was outstanding; there are many great ideas and papers that we could not include in this volume but that we hope to read elsewhere. We selected authors with a range of experiences, expertise, and perspectives. In addition to writing their own papers, these authors committed to reviewing one another’s drafts in advance of our workshop, coming to Toronto to sit with us for two days to discuss themes and connections, and responding to our detailed edits and tight timelines. We feel fortunate and grateful as editors to have worked with such insightful and responsive authors, and we are proud of the community of diverse scholars that has generated this project.

As this book goes to print, we are in a much different reality than where we began. The coronavirus pandemic has grounded most international travel and closed borders. The IOM and UNHCR temporarily suspended resettlement in March 2020, and the Canadian government cancelled all imminent refugee arrivals. Sponsors in Canada are now working to support arrived refugees to navigate the uncertainty, while the future of further resettlement and private sponsorship waits in the distance. As we plan to rebuild and recover, we are confident the insights in this book will be invaluable.

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Geoffrey Cameron – Hamilton, ON