Why did you pay for the flight? Narratives of Syrian nationals regarding the Argentine refugee sponsorship program

¿Por qué pagaste el pasaje? Narrativas de población siria sobre el programa argentino de patrocinio de refugiados

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Abstract

Considering that refugee private sponsorship is a form of Western humanitarian action, the purpose of this paper is to contribute to discovering how those people for whom it is intended interpret it. In line with the critical conceptualization provided by Kyriakides et al (2018), this population is collectively denominated herein as "persons of self-rescue". Using the private sponsorship program set up by Argentina in 2014 as a case study, this paper examines the narratives of those who are identified as being on the receiving end of this type of action: the displaced Syrian population. This study presents the data collected by means of ethnographic fieldwork that included semi-structured interviews and participant observation in provinces in the regions of Cuyo and the Argentine Northwest in 2018 and 2019. The analysis of the narratives provided by more than 20 people who arrived in Argentina through the sponsorship program reveals two issues. The first concerns their evaluations of the experiences they had upon arrival, and how they adapted to their new environments. The second, given the originality of the program in terms of the profiles of the private and public actors who were authorized to become sponsors, revolves around their preferences in relation to private sponsorship and resettlement.

Key words: Humanitarianism, refugee sponsorship, resettlement, Syria, Argentina.

Considerando que el patrocinio privado de refugiados es una forma de acción humanitaria occidental, este artículo tiene como propósito contribuir a conocer las interpretaciones que hacen de él aquellas personas a quienes va dirigido. Adoptando la propuesta conceptual crítica de Kyriakides y colaboradores (2018), se denomina a esta población como personas de auto-rescate. Estableciendo como caso de estudio el programa de patrocinio que lanzó Argentina en 2014, se examinan las narrativas de quienes son identificados como el extremo receptor de esta forma de acción: la población desplazada desde Siria. Se presentan los datos recabados a partir de un trabajo etnográfico que incluyó entrevistas semiestructuradas y observación participante en provincias de las regiones de Cuyo y el Noroeste argentino durante los años 2018 y 2019. A partir del análisis de las narrativas de más de veinte personas arribadas a Argentina a través del Programa Siria se exponen, por un lado, las valoraciones que éstas han hecho sobre sus experiencias de llegada y adaptación y, por otro, dada la originalidad del programa en cuanto a perfiles de actores privados y públicos habilitados como patrocinadores, se exploran sus preferencias respecto al patrocinio y al reasentamiento.

Palabras clave: Humanitarismo, patrocinio de refugiados, reasentamiento, Siria, Argentina.

INTRODUCTION

I n 2014, Argentina set up its *Special humanitarian visa program for foreigners affected by the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic* (from here on, the Syria Program). This was the first (private/community[1]) refugee sponsorship program implemented in Latin America to be internationally recognized as such (Tan, 2021; Bertram, Maleki and Karsten 2020; Bond and Kwadrans, 2019; Fratzke, Kainz, Beirens, Dorst and Bolten, 2019).

This means of admission for forcibly displaced populations has been defined as the result of a collaboration between "public actors" (those representing and working for the State), who grant this population permission to enter and reside in the country (in this case, through the granting of temporary renewable residence permits), and "private actors" (people or organizations from civil society), who are responsible for receiving those forcibly displaced, providing them with their first accommodation, financial support and assistance during their processes of accessing employment/education for a pre-established period of time[2] (Hueck, 2018). According to the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), private sponsorship is a complementary pathway for the admission of refugees to third countries that seeks to provide international humanitarian protection to those who are obliged to abandon their homes (UNHCR, 2019).

However, the Argentine program has two particularities that have not been identified simultaneously in any other country that has adopted this type of scheme (Bertram et al., 2020). On the one hand, the Syria Program does not complement any state resettlement program[3] (Rovetta Cortés, 2024). On the other, owing to the various modifications that the National Migration Directorate (DNM, in Spanish) made to the regulations regarding the program (DNM 3917/2014; DNM 4499/2015; DNM 4683/2016 and DNM 1025/2019[4]), from 2016 onward, the initiative established that

[1] The adjectives 'private' and 'community' are frequently used as synonyms when alluding to refugee sponsorship (see: Hueck 2018; Bond and Kwadrans, 2019). The former is used to a greater extent in Canadian literature, while the latter is more predominant in European literature and in that of the international organisms appertaining to the United Nations (European Commission, 2018; Kumin, 2015; UNHCR, 2019 and 2022). The decision was made to employ the former in this text.
[2] The time established in the Syria Program regulations is one year.
[3] This circumstance also occurred in Slovakia (2015) and Poland (2015).
[4] What began as a humanitarian visa program for the reunification of Argentine citizens with relatives in Syria of up to the fourth degree in 2014 (DNM 3917/2014), became a humanitarian visa and private sponsorship program that incorporated the reunification of families as just another possibility in 2015. The profile of those who could become sponsors of refugees was gradually extended to include: Argentine citizens with no family ties with Syrian people, temporary or

the tasks of reception and support could be managed not only by private actors, but also by public actors. More specifically, once regulation DNM 4683/2016 came into effect, the Syria Program authorized local governments (both provincial and municipal) to become sponsors. This, therefore, enabled representatives and workers from the public sector to take on the responsibility for the arrival and protection of this population. The province of San Luis, in Cuyo, assumed this responsibility by setting up its Humanitarian Corridor at the end of that year. It is for this reason that it is possible to state that the Syria Program includes not only a private sponsorship pathway, but also what could be described as a resettlement route[5] at a sub-national level (Alfaro and Lettieri, 2017; Liguori, Pacecca and Cyment, 2018) in a country in which such a route does not exist at a national level.

Focusing on those people for whom this program is intended, i.e., the Syrian and Palestinian populations affected by the war in Syria (2011-), these singularities provide an analytical opportunity to answer questions such as: 1) what do the people who arrived in Argentina through the Syria Program think about the initiative?; 2) what do they know about the different profiles of the sponsors?; 3) how do they evaluate the performances of the sponsors that they know?; and, 4) given the choice, what profile of sponsor they would have selected?

Few studies have analyzed the perspectives of the people who have been relocated via refugee sponsorship schemes. The exceptions to this include the works of: Good Gingrich and Enns, 2019; Kyriakides, Bajjali, Mcluhan and Anderson, 2018, and Ritchie, 2018. The objective of this paper is, therefore, to contribute to discovering the interpretations of those people for whom these new admission and reception pathways have been designed and implemented. The originality of this contribution lies in the analysis of the particularities of the Argentine private sponsorship program. The heterogeneity of the profiles of the authorized sponsors (public

permanent residents in the country (DNM 4499/2015), civil society organizations, provincial and municipal governments (DNM 4683/2016), groups comprising a minimum of three people, and legal entities registered in the National Register of Foreigners' Petitioners (Registro Nacional Único de Requirentes de Extranjeros, in Spanish) (DNM 1025/2019).

[5] The international definition of resettlement entails, among other things, that the responsibility of the receiving State should not be delegated to private actors, but should be exercised by public actors. It also requires that the displaced population is granted permanent and not temporary residence, and that they are guaranteed access to the same rights as the local population (UNHCR, 2011). In the case of San Luis, the only condition that the provincial State could not fulfill was related to the granting of permanent residency (since this power is exclusive to the national State). This situation was resolved by issuing identity cards that are exclusive to the residents of that province: the Provincial Electronic Identity Card (Cédula de Identidad Provincial Electrónica, in Spanish).

and private) makes it possible to compare narratives concerning the different experiences of reception.

The paper is based on sociological research, and is structured in five sections. The first section contains the theoretical framework and presents the main contributions made by authors critically studying humanitarian action regarding those toward whom this type of action is addressed. Particular attention is paid to the research carried out in order to study the narratives of refugees who have been admitted into Western countries through sponsorship programs. The second section provides an introduction to the methodological approach employed in this qualitative research. It details the process followed to attain and analyze the data gathered by means of ethnographic fieldwork, which included semi-structured interviews and participant observation in 2018 and 2019. The third section shows the results obtained after analyzing the narratives regarding the admission-reception processes (both experienced first hand and observed in others) provided by approximately twenty Syrian citizens who arrived in the country via the Syria Program between 2016 and 2018. In the fourth section, the aforementioned results are contrasted with those shown in previous research. Finally, it is concluded that the different sponsors' profiles are relevant for those displaced though refugee sponsorship programs, and that it may be necessary to rethink the importance currently attached to these people's perspectives, both when drawing up new initiatives for the management of displacement and adaptation processes and when evaluating current admission mechanisms.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUNDS

Humanitarianism is the term currently employed by both the UNHCR (Hyndman, 2000; Chimni, 1998) and other actors in the contemporary aid world (Bornstein and Redfield, 2011) in order to promote —on a global scale— the development of initiatives such as private sponsorship as a means to manage forced displacements. The elusive and multifaceted nature of this term is notorious (Calhour, 2008). Humanitarianism has been defined as: "*an ideology*" (Chimni, 2000, p. 3), "*an ethos*" (Wilson and Brown, 2009, p. 2), and "*a set of beliefs, practices, categories, discourses and procedures*" (De Lauri, 2016, p. 1). Respecting each of the facets of the definitions proposed by the aforementioned authors, and without intending to provide a definitive characterization, it is worth noting that, in practice and in its Western meaning (Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013), human-

itarianism entails actions whose declared purpose is to reduce the suffering of strangers who are considered worthy of those actions.

The variety of actions categorized as humanitarian (Feldman, 2011), the political, moral and emotional impulses that guide them (Suski, 2009), and the type of suffering that these actions attempt to alleviate (Bornstein and Redfield, 2011) have been the object of numerous debates in studies on humanitarianism. In this paper, the main interest lies in specifically exploring the perspectives of those who are considered to be meritorious of Western humanitarian actions. Interpreting private sponsorship as a form of Western humanitarian action, the narratives of the recipients of the Argentine refugee sponsorship program are taken as a case study. In addition, a review is carried out of the work of those who have examined what could be defined as the receiving end of the asymmetric relationship that emerges between those who choose to intervene (or provide something) and those who are selected to receive it.

It is relevant to note that the origins of Western humanitarian action lie in the Judeo-Christian tradition and that, unlike other forms of humanitarianism based on other religions, it does not establish *a priori* differences between those who are, or are not, deserving of relief from their suffering. This does not imply, however, that Western humanitarian actions are not selective and that the characteristics of those who are suffering, i.e., their origin, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender/sex, age, etc., are not important (Brauman, 2009), but rather that these conditions are, in principle, not as exclusive as they might be in other traditions of compassion, such as the Islamic *zakat* (Benthall, 2011) or the Indian *dän* (Bornstein, 2011).[6]

According to Julia Pacitto and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013), one of the limitations of Western humanitarian action is that it is addressed exclusively to strangers, to "*people with whom* [we] *share no apparent social connections or moral obligations*" (Wilson and Brown, 2009: 1). For them, this, together with the Western conceptual appropriation of the term, denies the possibility of conceptualizing as humanitarian those expressions of compassion that, based on feelings of belonging and proximity, are made towards those who we know or recognize as members of our communities.

A further restriction of Western humanitarian action is related to the roles assigned to the social actors who carry out those actions. On the one hand, there are humanitarians, or saviors, and on the other, those who suf-

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[6] The Islamic *zakat* is a social and religious obligation exercised by and directed toward Muslims (Benthall, 2011). The *dän* is a type of donation made in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, which is directed toward strangers who are considered to be pure, without expecting anything in return from them (Bornstein, 2011).

fer, or victims. This distinction is particularly evident in studies concerning refugees (Moulin, 2012; Bergtora Sandvik, 2009; Malkki, 2007), and leads to refugees being represented as absolute victims, defenseless, vulnerable, speechless and passive beings. They are those who receive (or should receive) humanitarian action undertaken by others, with humility and in a non-critical manner, whether this action takes the form of immediate assistance or lasting protection (Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyed, 2013). In this respect, it has been highlighted that one of the few ways in which refugees can reciprocate their saviors is by sharing their stories of suffering (Fassin, 2011). This type of exposure has, together with demonstrations of gratitude (Moulin, 2012) and of deference (Bergtora Sandvik, 2009), often been used to distinguish "genuine" or "authentic" refugees from those who are not (Garcea, 2016). Demonstrations of autonomy, agency or entitlement claims are, according to Western humanitarian logic, suspicious (McCallum, 2012) and denote a lack of worthiness.

The few occasions on which the voices of people in need of international protection are heard have principally been linked to those organizational instances in which they must express their defenselessness and vulnerability, and appear convincing to their interlocutors (Bergtora Sandvik, 2009). The dynamics governing these procedures have, together with deferment and limitation regarding the contents accepted, been criticized by various researchers. For example, Stephanie McCallum (2012), questions the distinction between the narratives authorized by those who are considered to be professionals on refugee issues (such as, for instance, public servants or representatives of international organisms) and the subjective and 'doubtful' narratives of those seeking international protection. Jennifer Hyndman, meanwhile, describes the practice of relegating these latter narratives as a sort of semiotic violence, "*a representational practice that purports to speak for others but at the same time effaces their voices*" (2000: xxii). In the same line, when studying resettlement procedures, Will Jones and Alexander Teytelboym (2017) criticized and denounced the fact that no records regarding the priorities of people in need of international protection have been established as regards the places where they wish to be resettled. Furthermore, upon examining refugee sponsorship programs, both Doreen Indra (1993) and Laura Simich (2003) stressed the small amount of attention that has been paid to the perspectives of refugees participating in sponsorship programs, both in the field of refugee policies and in academia.

In this respect, it is necessary to highlight the fact that specialized literature has tended to refer to refugees participating in sponsorship programs as "sponsored refugees". This conceptualization is explained by Patti Tamara Lenard as follows:

> The term 'sponsored' has been adopted for refugees who are admitted under schemes that permit private citizens more direct involvement in their support. These 'privately sponsored' refugees are identified by citizens in the host state, who then submit an application outlining the support (financial and emotional) that their sponsoring group is able to provide. These applications are submitted to the central government, which adjudicates the cases. (2016, p. 301-2).

This definition, which predominates in both the academic and the gray literature on refugee sponsorship, evidences the hegemonic reading of this phenomenon. The active role in any sponsorship program is on the side of the sponsors and the receiving State, as selectors and facilitators of the displacement and subsequent settlement. Refugees are passive receivers of these actions.

One conceptual proposal that challenges this notion is that of Christopher Kyriakides, Lubna Bajjali, Arthur Mcluhan and Karen Anderson (2018), who introduced the term "persons of self-rescue" to refer to "sponsored refugees". Their intention upon coining this concept was to emphasize the aspirations, actions and experiences, at both their origin and destination, of those people who are displaced by means of this pathway of admission. From their point of view, "*the identities and behaviours of refugees are affected, but not defined, by conflict and war*" (Kyriakides *et al.*, 2018, p. 61). Moreover, in the framework of private sponsorship programs, displaced people are not merely receivers of humanitarian action performed by others, but are rather active social actors, capable of exercising their agency, both during their displacements and during the processes of adaptation to their new environment.

Furthermore, given the fact that very few academic studies collect and analyze the narratives of persons of self-rescue (although some that do are those of Good Gingrich and Enns, 2019, and Ritchie, 2018), it is hardly surprising that their voices have been practically absent during the evaluation of sponsorship programs, and when comparing these programs with public resettlement programs. The dominant tendency in both Canadian literature, a country in which sponsorship schemes and resettlement programs have coexisted since the 1970s, and European literature, a continent on which resettlement programs have existed for decades and where seve-

ral sponsorship initiatives have appeared in the last ten years (European Commission, 2018), has been to maintain that refugee sponsorship is a commendable scheme (Fratzke *et al*., 2019; Kumin, 2015; Yahyaoui Krivenko, 2012) and is better than resettlement (Hyndman, Payne and Jiménez, 2017; Meurrens, 2015). All of this is based on economic indicators, such as the difference between the level of salaries of those that participate in resettlement programs and those who take part in refugee sponsorship schemes (Bond and Kwadrans, 2019; Lenard, 2016), without considering other sociocultural indicators of adaptation (Good Gingrich and Enns, 2019), taking into account the displaced people's sociodemographic differences before their arrival (Hynie *et al*., 2019) or incorporating their own views on the matter.

Two studies that included the narratives of refugees arriving in Canada gave research participants the option of saying whether they would have preferred to be received through a refugee sponsorship program or a resettlement program (Molloy and Simeon, 2015; Indra, 1993). In both cases, the results indicated that, given the choice, refugees would have chosen to participate in the resettlement program. The independence that having a monthly subsidy gave them, together with the chance of not being economically dependent on their sponsors, along with the difficulty involved in understanding the bonds with, the demands and/or provisions (money, accommodation and objects) made by these sponsor, led them to state that they preferred resettlement to sponsorship.

The narratives of 22 people who arrived in Argentina through the Syria Program are presented in the following section. This is done with the purpose of, on the one hand, examining their evaluations of their own experiences of arrival and adaptation and, on the other, exploring their preferences with regard to sponsorship and resettlement, given the originality of the Argentine program as regards the profiles of the private and public actors authorized to become sponsors.

METHODOLOGY

The data presented herein were collected between August 2018 and May 2019 in provinces in the regions of Cuyo and the Argentine Northwest (NOA),[7] two of the regions in which most sponsorship applications were made.[8]

This material is part of sociological research (in progress) regarding the implementation of the Argentine refugee sponsorship program in two inland regions of the country. It comprised ethnographic fieldwork that included, on the one hand, semi-structured interviews and, on the other, participant observation in political and social events related to the program and/or its participants. The latter involved accompanying them during the completion of procedures before institutions such as the DNM or the Syrian Honorary Consulate in Tucumán.

The fieldwork in these territories entailed interactions with practically a hundred people and the carrying out of more than 50 interviews with the sponsors, persons of self-rescue, public servants, representatives of non-governmental organizations and international organisms involved, along with other key informants (a consul and a member of a religious order who participated in the selection of Syrian citizens in the country of origin).

All the sponsors in these regions were Argentine citizens (both with and without family ties or prior relationships with those being sponsored), and a single provincial government.[9] On this occasion, the decision was made to consider only the narratives of the Syrian people who had no ties with their sponsors prior to their participation in the program, be they citizens or representatives of the administration of a province. That is to say, the narratives of those people who came to the country via family ties or pre-existing relationships have not been analyzed, because it was considered that family reunification does not, in the broad sense, fit the Western definition of humanitarianism.

Contact with the research participants was established using the snowball technique, which began by making contact with a sponsor who did not

[7] The fieldwork took place in Salta, Tucumán (NOA) and San Luis (Cuyo). The interactions that occurred in these territories were with people who had resided or resided at that time in the provinces of Córdoba (Córdoba), Mendoza, San Luis (Cuyo), Santiago del Estero, Salta or Tucumán (NOA).
[8] According to the 2019 statistics regarding the Syria Program, 44 per cent of applications for sponsorship were presented in NOA and Cuyo.
[9] No other people (e.g. temporary or permanent residents) or entity authorized to do so (e.g. religious congregation, non-governmental organization, university) sponsored Syrian individuals in these territories.

previously know the family he had welcomed. In this respect, it is necessary to point out that, according to the regulation regarding the Syria Program in force at the moment of carrying out the fieldwork (DNM 4683/2016), it was not necessary for the citizens who wished to become sponsors to be part of a group. However, many of them established communication with other sponsors, and not only talked to those who lived in the same locality or province, but also maintained links and/or exchanged information regarding their receiving experiences with sponsors and representatives of non-governmental organizations from other provinces in the country. Something similar occurred among the Syrians: they interacted personally or by telephone with other people of the same origin located in other places, in their case, not only in Argentina, but also in North American, European and Asian countries.

Of the total of 25 persons of self-rescue interviewed, 22 had no family ties with their sponsors. There were 13 men and 9 women, all over 16 years of age.[10] The interviews were of a semi-structured nature and were carried out in person. They took place in the homes of the interviewees or in public places (cafeterias), depending on their preferences. With regard to the language employed, the interviews were carried out in Spanish, English, Spanish/Arabic and English/Arabic. In the last two cases, a person of self-rescue served as an interpreter[11]. The majority of the interviews supposed an interaction among three or four people owing to this linguistic circumstance. Only a minority were carried out without the presence of anyone other than the interviewee and the interviewer. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and three hours.

The 'script' used in the interviews contained questions concerning: the interviewees' experiences in Syria; their processes of participating in the program; their displacements; their adaptation processes (educative, work-related, linguistic…) after arriving; their ties with their sponsors; their opinions of the program, and their plans for the future. They were also given the opportunity to discuss any other topics that they considered relevant.

In this respect, it is necessary to point out that, upon interacting with the first persons of self-rescue, it was noted that, in addition to narrating their

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[10] The decision not to interview those under 16 years of age was made owing to, on the one hand, the language barriers (which meant that the legal tutors were not always able to understand and supervise the dialogue) and, on the other, the fear of provoking and being unable to contain traumatic memories of childhoods during war.

[11] Always someone with whom the interviewee had a close tie (a family member or a friend). On these occasions, the interpreters received a gift of a value of between 10 and 15 dollars as a means of thanking them for their collaboration.

own experiences of arriving in Argentina, they also made comparisons with the experiences of other people from Syria who had been welcomed by sponsors with other profiles. Those who had been received by citizens with whom they had no ties prior to participating in the Syria Program frequently mentioned those who had been received by the Humanitarian Corridor set up by the province of San Luis. The opposite also occurred – those who had obtained the protection of the province of San Luis spoke about what they knew about people who had been taken in by Argentine citizens. Given the recurrence of these references, and following the approach proposed within grounded theory in its constructivist version (Charmaz, 2000) of incorporating what was unforeseen into the analysis, these narratives of a comparative nature were taken into account each time they were noted, not only during the interviews themselves, but also during the interactions that took place during the sessions of participant observation.

The content analysis of the narratives was carried out through the use of a two-cycle coding process[12] (Saldaña, 2009), using CAQDAS software. The results of this analysis of the responses provided by the persons of self-rescue with regard to, on the one hand, the link established with their sponsors and, on the other, a question raised by many: that concerning what sponsors they would have preferred, are shown below.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The research participants arrived in the country from Syria (18) and Lebanon (four) between 2016 and 2018. The majority of them (18) became aware of the existence of the Syria Program and participated in it owing to the mediation of a member of an Argentine religious order who acted on their behalf before the Argentinean consulate in Damascus. In 20 cases, the research participants arrived in the country after waiting for the favorable resolution of their case, which each of them had presented to the Argentine and international authorities (INTERPOL and other security agencies). This wait lasted for a period of between eight months and two years. In the (two) remaining cases, the people entered the country autonomously with tourist visas, and requested aid with the help of ecclesiastical representatives in the City of Buenos Aires. They were taken from there to the San Luis Humanitarian Corridor.

With regard to the sponsors' profiles, half of the people interviewed (11) were initially welcomed into the country by Argentine citizens who

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[12] Elemental and affective methods were used in the first cycle. Focused coding was used in the second.

had acted after being moved by the humanitarian crisis in Syria that the mass media showed. The other half were received in San Luis, the only province that implemented a specific initiative, a Humanitarian Corridor, with which to receive and support refugees.[13] In the jargon of the Syria Program, the former are denominated as "callers", while the latter fall into the category of "requesting organizations"[14], and the people who arrived from Syria are described as "beneficiaries".

Some extracts from interviews with the persons of self-rescue are provided below in order to reveal parts of their narratives regarding their reception processes. Those received by "callers" are shown first.

> [Nightwings[15]]. We spoke [before traveling], but little, because she [the caller] had already been in contact with the Father [the aforementioned member of the religious order], she knew all the latest details and only said: "Hello. How are you? Is everything alright?", so (…). Up to now, we all get on very well together. We're like a family. We live in the same house and spend every day together… So yes, my first impression of [names of the two callers] was that they were so calm, and that impression has continued.[16]

Nightwings arrived in a locality in NOA with his family, and a married couple received them into their home. Upon asking about the family's ties with this couple, he commented that it had begun with the exchange of messages via WhatsApp a couple of months before the displacement, with the help of virtual translators. This type of communication before displacement between sponsors and persons of self-rescue is what Christopher Kyriakides, Arthur McLuhan, Karen Anderson and Lubna Bajjaliy Noheir Elgendy denominate as "digital thirdspace of refugee reception"(2019, p. 25). They consider, based on their study results, that this may reduce uncertainties and stereotypes by tempering expectations and inspiring con-

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[13] In this regard, the Legislature of San Luis sanctioned Law No. I-0964-2017.
[14] This denomination is shared with other (collective) sponsors, such as religious congregations, universities, companies, non-governmental organizations…
[15] An emancipating pseudonymization strategy has been employed in this study (Rovetta Cortés, 2022). This consists of combining real names with pseudonyms according to the negotiations and agreements reached with the research participants after informing them of their right to anonymity. As a consequence of this, and in order to increase the internal and external confidentiality of the study (Tolich, 2004), an effort has been made to avoid making disaggregated references to sociodemographic characteristics (such as age, city of origin or exact moment of arrival) and, with the exception of the case of San Luis (for obvious reasons), stating the province of residence upon arrival.
[16] The transcriptions of the interviews were written in Spanish, and slight modifications were made to them in order to facilitate the understanding of the narratives. These basically consisted of: adjusting the verbal tenses (since many of these persons of self-rescue continued to speak in the present tense when referring to past experiences and helped clarify their meaning with the use of words such as "before"), and the incorporation or correction of some prepositions.

fidence in both parties. Coding through the use of elemental and affective methods made it possible to distinguish the following circumstance in the case of Nightwings and another four people interviewed who were received by callers: the exchange of greetings and information prior to the journey and the subsequent reception were perceived as being satisfactory. The emotional and evaluative codes made it possible to identify the use of auspicious adjectives (reference was made to the callers' kindness, predisposition and generosity) to describe the reception processes, and the emotional and material implication of those who had received them was valued in a favorable light.

The situation of the other six participants in the study who were taken in by Argentine citizens was somewhat different.

> [Alfredo] I was already in touch with my Argentine caller when I arrived, and he told me, when you come, there will be a school to teach you the language, and I don't know, with a teacher. And when I came, my caller didn't help me at all. I came here, and he left me in their house [in a house in which another recently-arrived Syrian family with whom Alfredo had no previous relationship had been accommodated], and he left. Yes, [and after] he sent a WhatsApp asking, do you need anything? And I said, yes. I said, for example, I need such and such a thing. Ok, I'll see, and then he didn't call back or do the thing that I needed.

Alfredo's narrative shows that there was a difference between the digital reception and the real reception. This difference was not the result of the fact that the information exchanged was considered irrelevant, but rather that, according to Alfredo, the information was false. His narrative made it possible to see that upon his arrival, not only was he not offered the possibility of taking a course in the Spanish language, but also, his caller did not provide him with appropriate accommodation. He was taken from the airport to a house that another caller had provided for another Syrian family with whom he had had no previous contact, and when, some time later, he got in touch with the caller in order to state his needs, communication was cut off and these needs were once again neglected.

When simultaneously employing the initial, structural and *in vivo* codings, the narratives of both Alfredo and the other five people in similar circumstances made it clear that the difficulties encountered were related to the following: the inadequate nature of the accommodation provided, the non-fulfillment of the compromise to cover maintenance during their first year in the country, and a series of interpersonal conflicts. Like Alfredo, all of these people stated that they had been obliged to seek work for

themselves without speaking the language well, find free online tutorials in order to learn Spanish and, eventually, move to another province in the country in order to improve their socioeconomic situation. The third of these was done: (a) in five cases, with the help of other persons of self-rescue (who hosted them in their houses, and accompanied them in their search for employment and during their legal procedures), and (b) in one case, with the help of the DNM authorities (this situation is described below). Analysis by means of affective methods made it possible to discover that, when describing these arrival processes and the search for better circumstances, the predominant emotions were negative (principally, frustration and annoyance), while the *versus* coding showed that they were constantly comparing their situations with those of others who had recently arrived.

In the case of the people who were sponsored by the province of San Luis, the descriptive, initial, emotion and evaluation codings made it possible to identify a greater similitude among the narratives regarding the reception process. Although none of the people involved had established communication with the team responsible for the Humanitarian Corridor before leaving their country of origin, all of their evaluations of the reception process were highly favorable.

> [Interviewer] And with regard to, for example, the Humanitarian Corridor… what do you think of this initiative? Do you think that it is a good initiative? Do you think that it could be improved in any way…?
> [Johnny] It's very, very good. Up to now it's still the best in Argentina, because you get a house; you don't pay anything; you also get a bus pass, you have enough to be free; you have [name of health insurance]; you have everything, do you see? The children are at school, and now I'm at university. Oh…, and well, almost everyone, the majority has a job, and I don't know what else we could want. (…) They [the Humanitarian Corridor team] do everything, do you see? A job, a house, assistance… they couldn't possibly do any more, anything else we will have to do ourselves.

Johnny stated that upon arriving in San Luis, he and his family found all that they needed in order to begin to rebuild their lives: accommodation, health insurance, help with maintenance via a subsidy, a subsidized card for public transport, and support as regards enrolling in educational centers or searching for employment. This fragment summarizes what was stated by the other ten people interviewed, and by all those with whom I spoke during the sessions of participant observation.[17] The only element

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[17] Fifty people were received within the framework of the San Luis Humanitarian Corridor between 2016 and 2019.

that, from the evaluation coding, was identified as negative by three young persons of self-rescue, was the fact that their accommodation was a long way from the city center, and this made it difficult for them to meet local people of the same age with whom they could form friendships and practice the Spanish they were learning in class.

With regard to the narratives concerning the sponsor profile that they would have preferred, it should be noted that this topic emerged as an initiative of the research participants. A frequency coding made it possible to identify allusions to this topic in eight interviews with people received by callers and three people who were taken in via the San Luis Humanitarian Corridor. This also occurred during casual conversations held in the sessions of participant observation (in which the researcher did not intervene with any direct questions on the matter) with all of the research participants who had been welcomed by callers, and with three more people received in the province of San Luis. Upon carrying out the focused coding in the second coding cycle, it was noted that the positive evaluations made about the San Luis Humanitarian Corridor and the great frequency of their occurrence evidenced the enormous popularity of this initiative among the Syrian population that had arrived to Argentina in recent years. All the persons of self-rescue contacted who had been received by callers had information regarding the San Luis initiative and considered that it was relevant to share it. However, only half the Syrian people residing in San Luis mentioned knowing something about other experiences related to being received by sponsors.

In this respect, it is necessary to point out that it was during a combined reexamination of the emotion, evaluation and *versus* codings that it was possible to verify the differences between those who were received by callers and those who were received by San Luis. The narratives of those who had arrived via the Humanitarian Corridor contained simultaneous allusions to favorable emotions and evaluations, and these were not accompanied by comparisons with such frequency. These comparisons *did*, however, occur in the case of those who had been received by callers, since the mixture of subjective experiences (positive and negative) went hand in hand with evaluations and contrasts. This can be illustrated with an extract from a group interview in which two people sponsored by callers discussed what they knew about the Humanitarian Corridor:

[Fernanda] What is better there? Not only does the government pay them a subsidy, but the group with the government [the Humanitarian Corridor team] finds work for the families (…)

[José] They work…

[José speaks in Arabic and Fernanda translates] with an employment insurance.

[Fernanda] And that's perfect. There, for example, they have plans for families. They get 18,000 [pesos] a month [in the form of a subsidy], for example, and when they find a job, they still get half that amount, for example, [and they get half] from the government and the other half from their job. And they have schools, too...

[José] School for grown ups

[Fernanda] A school for adults, to learn the language.

[Interviewer, going back to something that José had said earlier] Ah, for the language, too … So they don't just have "four things", but five: they have work, insurance, schools for children, schools for adults and accommodation.

[José] and bus, card for the bus.

[Interviewer] Six!

[Fernanda] (…) That's it! No more. And there's also somewhere for basketball.

[Interviewer] Ah, they've got a court?

[Fernanda] Yes, a basketball court. The children can play until night. It's a very well protected area. Even sport is safe.

Fernanda and José, a married couple who speak about their callers with respect and affection, cannot avoid describing and evaluating their situation without contrasting it with that of the Syrians who arrived in San Luis. In this dialogue between the couple and the interviewer, they first mention the advantages of having a subsidy and a job, and then go on to mention the importance of having access to insurance and to obligatory linguistic education. They end by mentioning how they envy subventioned mobility, security and the possibility of having space for recreation. At a previous moment in the interview, José had stated that before coming to the country he was told that, upon his arrival, he would be given "four things": a job, a house, a school for his children and medical insurance, and he complained that he had only actually received two of those things: a house and a school for his children. A double coding (emotion and *versus*) made it possible to identify that, because he was frustrated by this situation, José could not stop thinking about the difference that being sponsored by San Luis would have supposed for his family and himself. This was evident not only during the interview, but also in subsequent encounters.

This does not imply that he, Fernanda or other research participants did not express their recognition of and gratitude toward their sponsors. In fact, the structural, initial and focused coding all made it possible to see that, independently of having or not having experienced situations of conflict or

disagreement with the callers, ten of the 11 interviewees in this situation were grateful for the efforts that the callers had made in order to receive them: from paying for their flights to accompanying them in the processes of ensuring that their children were inserted into the education system, initially providing them with accommodation, (in some cases) helping them to find Spanish classes and/or (also in some cases) contributing to their maintenance costs. Despite this, none of these people could avoid noting the differences between their experiences upon arriving in Argentina and those of the people who had gone to San Luis, and they deemed it necessary to state their conviction that if they had been taken in by that organization, they would have had more facilities for themselves and their families as regards aspects such as: access to employment, decent accommodation, education and more comprehensive health coverage.[18]

Finally, it is necessary to mention that during the second cycle of analysis, upon reviewing the catalogued extracts according to the *versus* coding, the emblematic case of George was identified. George arrived in the country thanks to the intervention of a caller, and after a series of differences with her, moved to San Luis province with his family, where they were admitted into the Humanitarian Corridor. In his own words:

> [George] Before, I lived in Córdoba for three months, with a person, with a caller.
> [Interviewer] Ah!
> [George] A caller, yes. But she no money, she didn't have a good place to live. Very difficult. She had no money for learning, for the school…
> [Majd, friend and temporary interpreter] She just helped them as a caller [by paying for the flight], but when they arrived there, they had no money, and she had no money either, she had no house, nowhere for them to sleep … she had nothing for them!
> [George] Very difficult. We lived rough, in the countryside…
> [Majd] Before they came, she said to them: I'm going to help you with the language.
> [George] … and with the children! And to find a job! But when we went there, she had nothing. Nothing. I asked her: Why did you pay for the flight? In my heart I wanted to help you, she said. But this isn't help. This is another war. It's another war. So I asked a lot of people, what can I do? I wanted to go back to Syria, I wanted to go back, but I couldn't … And after, what did I do? I spoke to the Head of Immigration: I want to go back to Syria. Please help me. I have nowhere to live. He asked around a lot, in Tucumán, in Mendoza, here are

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[18] The health system in Argentina is organized into three subsystems: public, private and subsidized (by health insurances known as *obra social*). (For more details, see Yufra at Alonso, forthcoming).

there... And then he spoke to Señora Liliana [the name of the person in charge of the Corridor] (…) and she helped us to come here. Better here. Here there is life.

George's words regarding his experiences are a summary of many of the frustrations (highlighted by means of affective methods) that a significant part of the Syrian population interviewed who had been taken in by callers expressed as regards the difficulties that they had experienced upon arriving in the country: difficulties learning the language, finding employment and maintaining themselves. Unlike five of them, who relied on their contact with other persons of self-rescue to move to another place, where they managed to move forward, George applied to the DNM to return to Syria and thanks to this, managed to get himself and his family to the Humanitarian Corridor. And according to him, this meant moving from war to life.

No similar case has been found in the opposite direction: there was no person of self-rescue who, after arriving in San Luis, requested a transfer to another province or who stated that if they could, they would have preferred to have been sponsored by a caller or by an organization set up for that purpose.

Discussion

As shown in the theoretical section, Western humanitarian action tends to be described from the perspective of those who provide it, i.e., those who decide to act in order to eradicate or reduce the suffering of others. Refugee sponsorship, as a mechanism of admission for forcibly displaced populations on the basis of humanitarian logic, is no exception. As pointed out previously, the hegemonic name designated to people who relocate through this scheme is "sponsored", which implies that the agency is elsewhere: being exercised by the sponsors and the receiving State. The same linguistic tendency can be noted in the Syria Program: those who sponsor are those who "call", while the people who arrive, the "beneficiaries", are the recipients of this action from others. However, upon interpreting and examining some of the experiences of the latter, it is necessary to wonder: are they really beneficiaries? And of what, exactly?

Following the conceptual proposal of Christopher Kyriakides et al (2018), and refusing, as Genevieve Ritchie (2018), Luann Good Gingrich and Thea Enns (2019) have already done, the idea that the agency is exclusively on the side of the sponsors and the receiving State in this asymmet-

rical relationship that surrounds refugee sponsorship, it can be noted that there is no passiveness, speechlessness or defenselessness in the case of the Syrian people who have arrived in Argentina.

When asked about their participation in the Syria Program, the vast majority of the Syrian people interviewed never ceased to express their gratitude toward those who decided to intervene in order to facilitate their arrival in Argentina, but were also capable of clearly expressing their opinions and criticism of their sponsors' roles and of stating their preferences regarding the alternative means of reception that they know of. In this respect, and given the particular nature of the Argentine program, whose means of reception include not only private sponsorship in the strictest sense of the term, but also resettlement on a sub-national scale, it is possible to state that, given the choice, the persons of self-rescue would have preferred resettlement on a sub-national scale rather than private sponsorship by Argentine citizens.

Their opinion is based on the differences identified when comparing their own firsthand experiences with those of others and, in the case of George, the experience of having been taken in by a private sponsor and then becoming part of resettlement program in the province of San Luis.

With regard to the differences perceived, these concern areas that are essential for any displaced person: access to employment, accommodation, non-mandatory education, language courses, material support, and the type of health care to which they are entitled.

It is, nevertheless, necessary to mention that not all the persons of self-rescue who were received by Argentine citizens with whom they had no ties prior to participating in the program suffered lacks in all of the aforementioned areas. Half of the people in these circumstances had decent accommodation, received support to enroll their children in school and got financial assistance with which to pay for certain expenses and Spanish classes.

Upon examining previous studies carried out in Canada with respect to private sponsorship and resettlement in which the displaced people were given the opportunity to describe their experiences, it is possible to find various significant similarities. Both Doreen Indra (1993) when interacting with the Indochinese population that arrived in Canada in the 1970s, and Michael Molloy and James Simeon (2015), when examining the reports written by the team created to manage the admission of more than 60,000 refugees in the 1980s, reported a predilection for resettlement. According to the latter two authors, the evidence indicated that:

the monthly allowance the government-assisted [or resettled] refugees recei-ved from the government and the independence (and privacy) it brought was highly valued and envied by the sponsored refugees (Molloy and Simeon, 2015, p. 6).

In the words of Indra: "in retrospect, most privately sponsored and gov-ernment-assisted individuals would have preferred government assistance, had they to do things over again" (1993, p. 246-7). Both statements co-incide with the results of the research reported herein, particularly with regard to the need to avoid the situation of being dependent on sponsors.

One difference, however, is that related to the difficulty involved in un-derstanding the "sponsor-sponsored" relationship owing to linguistic-cul-tural differences. The problem in the research carried out in Argentina does not lie so much in the lack of understanding of the link between the persons of self-rescue and their callers, but rather upon perceiving that the latter were not fulfilling what had been agreed previously, during the digital re-ception phase. In this respect, and going back to the dichotomy between humanitarian assistance and humanitarian protection (in which the former is focused on alleviating immediate suffering and the latter on eradicating it over a prolonged period of time) (Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyed, 2013), it would appear that, upon not meeting previously agreed commitments, the sponsorship program may no longer be considered an international hu-manitarian protection mechanism, and that rather than helping, it might have made the situation in which the displaced people found themselves more complicated. This is illustrated by the words spoken by George that were chosen for the title of this paper, which concern the question ad-dressed to his caller regarding why she had paid for flights for himself and his family when she had no other resources with which to facilitate their adaptation upon arrival. This could be interpreted not only as interpersonal questioning, but also as questioning the foundations of this type of Western humanitarian action.

Finally, to return once more to Julia Pacitto and Elena Fiddian-Qas-miyed (2013), it is necessary to stress that, despite the fact that Western humanitarianism places refugees in the position of passive victims and it does not recognize the actions carried out to alleviate the suffering of peo-ple that we know or that form part of the groups to which we belong as be-ing humanitarian, the analysis of the narratives provided by the persons of self-rescue who were admitted into Argentina via the Syria Program makes it possible to see that these people not only helped or "rescued" them-selves, but that they also helped others. Recalling how, when five research

participants found themselves in precarious situations in terms of accommodation and employment, others assisted them in their inter-provincial relocations (offering them housing and initial support), it is relevant to wonder whether, by broadening the Western meaning of humanitarianism and adapting the term employed by Christopher Kyriakides *et al.* (2018), it would not be appropriate to speak, not only of persons of self-rescue, but also of persons of communal or collective-rescue.

CONCLUSION

Taking the Syrian Program as a case study, this paper has focused on the receiving end of the asymmetrical relationship that is established in any Western humanitarian action. The narratives provided by Syrian people who arrived in Argentina within the framework of what has been recognized as the first refugee sponsorship scheme set up in Latin America have been analyzed in order to discover the experiences, opinions and preferences of those for whom this admission pathway was created and implemented. Focusing attention on narratives of this nature is still an infrequent analytical decision in both the policy sphere and the academic literature on private sponsorship. In both spaces, the perspective of the representatives of the States that enable and monitor this admission mechanism, and that of those who become sponsors, continues to be prioritized. One indication of this is the language employed in these initiatives. In Argentina, for example, those who sponsor are denominated as "callers" or "requesting organizations", while those who arrive are called "beneficiaries". The agency is one-sided.

In response to this unilateralism, and using the wide variety of people and organizations that the Syria Program authorized as sponsors as an analytical opportunity, this paper presents the opinions, the experiences, and the knowledge and evaluations that the people who arrived in the country have as regards the various profiles of the sponsors and the program. Given that the callers in the regions in which the study took place were Argentine citizens, and that the only requesting organization was a provincial government, this examination has made it possible to contrast persons of self-rescue's preferences in terms of not only private sponsorship, but also resettlement, and it is clear that there is a predilection for the latter. Given the choice, they would have preferred to be taken in by San Luis province.

In order to provide a longitudinal approach to the study, a new phase of the fieldwork is currently being conducted (2023-2024). The intention behind carrying out this new phase is to continue exploring the narratives

of persons of self-rescue (and possibly of communal or collective-rescue) regarding their processes of adaptation to their destination country during the Covid-19 pandemic and after.

Furthermore, given that new refugee sponsorship programs have emerged in the country,[19] it is hoped that new research examining their rationale, motivations, evolution and implications will appear, taking into account, if possible, the narratives of those to whom they are addressed. This is because including them might not only contribute to improving the current admission mechanisms, but could also lead to the creation of new proposals regarding the management of arrival and adaptation processes.

Finally, it is to be hoped that this type of initiatives will be examined from a critical socio-juridical perspective. The contributions that could be made to this subject by this field of studies could, by means of reflecting on International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, considerably enrich the socio-anthropological discussions on humanitarianism.

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[19] This is a sponsorship program for environmental migrants from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean (DNM 891/2022) and a pilot program denominated as *Growing Funding and Solutions for Refugees* (GROW) that enables donors from the Argentine UNHCR foundation to become "*mentors*" (note the term used) of refugees and give them "*social and financial support*" (ACNUR, 2022, p. 2).

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Es Licenciada en Sociología por la Universidad de Salamanca y Doctora en Ciencias Sociales por la Universidad de Padua. Además, tiene un Máster en Estudios Migratorios por la Universidad de Granada y un Magister en Cooperación al Desarrollo por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Actualmente trabaja como investigadora para el Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas en el Instituto Superior de Estudios Sociales (ISES, CONICET-UNT). Sus investigaciones giran en torno al vínculo entre las políticas migratorias y las trayectorias migrantes. Ha publicado trabajos sobre políticas y migraciones de retorno, programas de patrocinio de refugiados, metodología cualitativa y acerca del nexo entre ésta última y la ética en investigación social.
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