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Car Consumption Among Recent Immigrants And Refugees to Rural Nova Scotia: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The problem of attracting and retaining immigrants and refugees to rural parts of Canada has recently emerged as a policy response to declining population growth outside of urban areas, with particular policy attention focused on immigration to the Atlantic Provinces. While there has been increased scholarly attention paid to the integration outcomes of recent immigrants and refugees to Canada who settle outside of major cities, the bulk of this research has focused on the settlement experiences of newcomers to smaller cities and suburban regions. Little attention has been paid to the settlement experiences of immigrants and refugees to rural parts of the country. Given the dominance of private car ownership for getting around rural Canada, this article examines how car consumption arises as a crucial component of the rural settlement process, both from the point of view of accessing services and employment, but also from the point of view of forming an affective connection to rural places. Grounded in an analysis of interviews with immigrants and refugees to North-eastern Nova Scotia, the authors develop two key findings. First, the lack of public transportation options in rural areas pushes newcomers to prioritize car ownership as a means of accessing employment and other crucial services. Second, participant narratives of car consumption reveal rural newcomers' complex affective relationship to cars that highlight the importance of vehicles to developing a sense of independence and belonging, further underlining the role that cars play in rural Canada's evolving identity as an immigration destination.

Keywords: rural immigration, privately sponsored refugees, transportation disadvantage, car consumption, Nova Scotia

1.0 Introduction

Scholars have shown that transportation can be a significant barrier for immigrant and refugee settlement and integration in North America (Bose, 2014; Farber et al., 2018; Hendricks, 2014; Klein & Smart, 2017). Given the dominance of private car ownership for getting around rural Canada (Marr, 2015), this article examines how car consumption arises as an integral component of the rural settlement process, both

from the point of view of accessing services and employment, but also from the point of view of forming an affective connection to rural places. Grounded in an analysis of interviews with immigrants and refugees to North-eastern Nova Scotia, the article builds the case that rural newcomers develop a special connection to cars. This connection emerges from and reinforces a firmly established culture of rural automobility, one that is entrenched in rural Atlantic Canada in much the same way as it is in other rural parts of the country (Armstrong, 2018; Barber, 2019). Building on Sheller's (2004) conceptualization of automotive emotions, this article explores how the affective dimension of car consumption plays out in ways that are specific to the rural immigrant and refugee settlement experience. An analysis of participants' affective and socio-economic relationships to privately-owned vehicles reveals how immigrant and refugee subjectivities are intimately implicated in the system of Atlantic automobilities that all rural dwellers must negotiate. Further, participant narratives also highlight how car consumption emerges as a means of countering power inequities embedded in Canada's immigration policies, particularly for those immigrants and refugees who enter Canada as sponsors (Kyriakides et al., 2019; Macklin et al., 2020), be they sponsored spouses or privately-sponsored refugees. Recent scholarship demonstrates that both private and family sponsorship programs produce kinship dynamics that orient the sponsor-sponsored relationship toward a relational asymmetry that can "import parentalist expectations and practices" (Macklin et al., 2020, p. 180). Participant narratives reveal how to a certain extent, access to a private vehicle can counteract this power imbalance, particularly in rural settings. First, having access to a vehicle promotes a sense of independence and provides a means for rural sponsored immigrants and refugees to express their own individuality, both economically and socially, and thus offers a means for resisting the structured power imbalances entrenched in Canada's sponsorship policies. Second, for immigrants and refugees who are new to a place, especially a place where cars play a central cultural and economic function, access to a car can be an important precondition for feeling connected to your neighbours and fellow community members and to actively find ways of participating in a new community. The article examines how car consumption among recent immigrants and refugees to Nova Scotia is therefore implicated in socio-economic practices of place formation and subsequently underlines the role that private vehicle ownership plays in rural Canada's evolving identity as an effective immigration destination.

2.0 Context: Rural Immigration in Canada

Canada has a long history of international immigration to rural areas. Historically and to the present day, these flows have been primarily connected to the need to temporarily fill perceived regional labour shortages, such as in agriculture (Sharma, 2006). Well-known examples include the recruitment of Chinese labourers between 1881 and 1885 during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railroad (Li, 1988) and the incorporation of a temporary foreign worker program in 1966 to address the labour needs of Canada's horticultural employers (Perry, 2012; Reid-Musson, 2014; Satzewich, 1991). In the past several decades, the vast majority of recent scholarship that examines international in-migration to rural areas in Canada has been focused on the experiences of migrant workers who have employer-specific work permits and temporary work visas, such as farm workers from Mexico and the Caribbean who engage with Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (Basok, 2002; Perry, 2018; Preibisch, 2010).

Until recently, the question of negotiating *permanent* newcomer settlement to rural areas has been less prominent in policy and therefore less examined in the literature. However, the problem of attracting and retaining immigrants and refugees to rural parts of the country has recently emerged as a policy response to declining population growth outside of urban areas, with particular attention focused on immigration to the Atlantic Provinces (Atlantic Growth Advisory Group, 2018; "Rural areas and small cities," 2016; El-Assal & Goucher, 2017; Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 2017). This includes policies, such as the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (Government of Canada, 2019), that are intended to increase international in-migration to regions with historically low levels of immigration, including the rural region of Northeastern Nova Scotia (Dinshaw, 2018), the geographical site for this research. In addition to these initiatives, rural communities, including those in Nova Scotia, have been integral to Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program ("Canada's small communities," 2015; McGregor, 2017; McNally, 2020; Ray, 2016). The success stories of Syrian refugees to the region have proliferated in the media of late, portraying rural Nova Scotia as an effective and desirable hub for private sponsorship and refugee integration (McInnis, 2020; Ziafati, 2020a, 2020b). These portrayals largely focus on how rural Nova Scotia offers immigrants and refugees unique opportunities for entrepreneurial success, in the mold of the now well-known example of *Peace by Chocolate*—the small Antigonish chocolate company that was founded by refugees from Syria—how the residents are nice and welcoming, and how Nova Scotia sponsor groups will go out of their way to reunite families. While there has been increased attention paid to the integration outcomes of recent immigrants and refugees to Canada who settle outside of major cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, the bulk of this research has focused on the settlement experiences of newcomers to second tier urban centres (Bernard, 2008; Bonifacio & Drolet, 2017), such as those in Ontario (Walton-Roberts, 2011) and British Columbia (Drolet & Teixeira, 2020). With increased immigration to rural areas, there is a need to explore how these dynamics unravel outside of Canadian cities.

Focused on the rural region of North-eastern Nova Scotia, this article offers an analysis of rural immigrants' and refugees' experiences of transportation which, as is discussed in the following section, is a key determinant of socio-economic integration.

3.0 Transportation Inequity and Atlantic Automobility

For recent immigrants and refugees, daily mobility challenges constitute a major site of struggle and can have direct and lasting impacts on integration outcomes (Bose, 2014; Farber et al., 2018; Hendricks, 2014; Lo et al., 2011; Smart, 2014; Weidinger et al., 2019). In a society that is hyper-dependent on automobile travel, having a driver's license and access to a vehicle is crucial to newcomers' economic success and getting involved in one's community (Hendricks, 2014; Reid-Musson, 2015). Scholarship in this area, which relies primarily on data gathered in the United States, has determined that racialized immigrants are at high risk of transportation inequities (Cresswell, 2006; Sheller, 2015), for example, being less likely to own a car than the general population (Klein & Smart, 2017) and more likely to rely on friends and family to get around (Blumenberg & Smart, 2014). Broadly speaking, for recent immigrants, transportation disadvantage means being less able to rely on dependable mobility tools that would otherwise facilitate their community participation in realms such as employment, education, and health care (Farber et al., 2018).

In Canada's major urban areas, this struggle is entangled with immigrants' and refugees' high rates of exposure to precarious employment, a condition that often results in long, difficult, unsafe, and expensive urban commutes (Premji, 2017). Spanning out beyond Canada's big cities, in their research with Syrian refugees in the suburban region of Durham, Ontario, Farber et al. (2018) found significant evidence to suggest that transportation precarity, such as that found in the American context, has a strong negative impact on wellbeing for recent refugees to suburban communities as it contributes to social isolation. Spanning out to an even wider geographic area, what research has been conducted on the mobility experiences among immigrants to rural regions has found that transportation is also a crucial component affecting rural settlement outcomes. Bose (2014), for example, whose research focuses on refugee resettlement in rural Vermont, found that while refugees face many challenges in rural areas with regards to learning a new language and finding employment, a lack of accessible transportation was reported as refugees' most significant barrier to success. While there is currently a dearth of similar research in the context of rural Canada, Reid-Musson's research on mobility practices among migrant farm workers in rural Ontario (2015, 2018) builds the argument that these are intimately linked to processes of racialization and citizenship. While focused on temporary migrants, her research is helpful in understanding how mobility practices intersect with rural in-migration processes. She demonstrates how having access to private transportation can decrease social isolation, thereby extending migrant workers' sense of belonging to the communities where they live and work.

This research on transport precarity and how it potentially contributes to the socio-economic integration outcomes among new immigrants should be examined in the broader analytical context of automobility (Urry, 2004). The term, coined by John Urry (2004), is defined as a global system of automotive dominance that includes cars, drivers, and road infrastructure. Scholars of automobility highlight the intimate relationship that has developed between cars and people—a relationship that within 'car cultures' is central to identity formation and socialization (Miller, 2001). Mimi Sheller's (2004) work, in particular, underlines how car consumption is not just about economic choices and outcomes, but rather is "as much about aesthetic, emotional and sensory responses to driving, as well as patterns of kinship, sociability, habitation and work" (p. 222). Car use is thus bound up with people's negotiation of personal and social identity, plays a part in the development of social networks and contributes to our sense of place in such a way that supports the formation of regional and national identities (Edensor, 2004). In Atlantic Canada, the site of this research, the concepts of mobility and automobility carry a lot of cultural potencies. Like people in other parts of the country, Atlantic Canadians depend on private vehicles to get around. According to Statistics Canada, the region's adults spend an average of 1 hour daily in a car, either as a driver or as a passenger (Statistics Canada, 2015). In Nova Scotia, while there is some movement in the direction of developing a more robust public transportation network (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013), private vehicles remain the primary means of transportation, with 644,285 road motor vehicles registered in 2019, in a province with a population of 980,000 (Statistics Canada, 2021).

While there is limited research in the area, it can be inferred that rural Nova Scotia suffers from transportation disadvantage in similar ways to other rural parts of Canada, which are equally dependent on private vehicular travel (Marr, 2015). This situation overlaps with a culture of mobility that for decades has been punctuated by

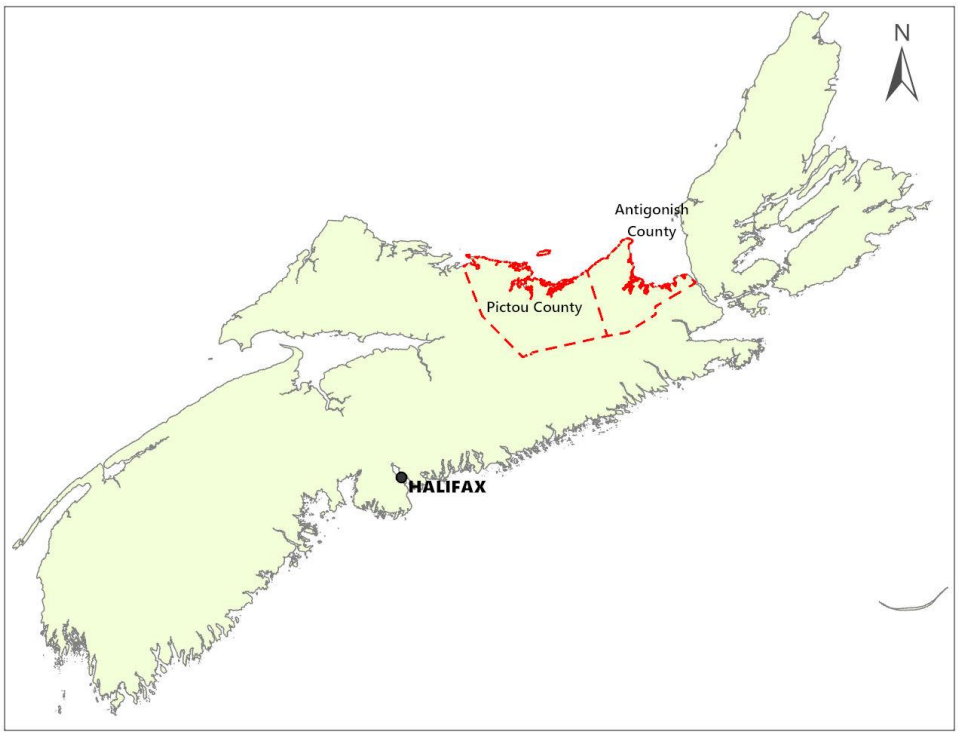
anxieties about the social impacts of out-migration, especially as it concerns rural youth (Corbett, 2007; Foster & Main, 2018; Harling Stalker & Phyne, 2014). Cars have featured prominently in the region's narratives of out-migration, emphasising "automotive escape" as a key motif infusing the Maritime coming of age story (Armstrong, 2018, p. 44). Atlantic Canadian identities may thus be characterized as embedded in a culture of both mobility and automobility. Rural Atlantic identities, in particular, have been shown to be "influenced and constituted in automobility" (Barber, 2019, p. 255). For example, in his research of pick-up truck consumption in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, Barber (2019) builds the case that rural Atlantic identities are formulated and performed through vehicle ownership and usage.

Recent immigrants and refugees to Atlantic Canada, particularly those who move to rural areas, must find a way to negotiate their integration into the region's culture of automobility. From a practical perspective, this means that in order to access essential needs such as language instruction, employment, and health care, new immigrants and refugees to the region's rural areas must find a means of accessing private transportation. Inevitably, this means overcoming some barriers to first acquiring a driver's license, and then a car. For example, the language barrier can pose a problem for immigrants and refugees when taking both the written test and the driver's exam, as well as not having access to financial credit to help with the purchase of a vehicle, which is a major expense. Thinking through the affective dimensions of automobility, gaining access to private transportation may also be crucially implicated in newcomers developing a connection to place and a sense of belonging to a community where privately-owned vehicles dominate the cultural landscape.

4.0 Methods

The findings reported in this article are derived from a Social Science and Humanities Research Council-funded project that explores the settlement experiences of immigrants and refugees to the rural region of North-eastern Nova Scotia. The project, which is a partnership between St. Francis Xavier University and the Antigonish-Guysborough Immigrant Support Program, aims to understand how to better support an increasing number of immigrants and refugees to rural Canada. The project received research ethics board approval from St. Francis Xavier University, and all participants have been provided with pseudonyms. Given the demographic profile of recent immigrants and refugees to the region, the sample included participants who entered Canada through a range of programs, including business programs, sponsored spouses and parents, privately-sponsored refugees, skilled workers and their spouses, and the Nova Scotia Provincial Nominee Program. Participants arrived in Canada from a range of countries, including Brazil, the Congo, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Russia, Syria, and Thailand. Fieldwork, which took place in 2019, focused on interviewing participants currently living in either Antigonish County or Pictou County in the North-eastern-most corner of the province's mainland (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Study Area Location*



Source: Authors.

Recruitment was supported by the community partner in Antigonish County and a YMCA-supported immigrant settlement agency in Pictou County. Exploratory in nature, our goal was to interview a small sample of participants from each location. Recruitment involved sending out email invitations through organizational list-serves and distributing flyers to English as a Foreign Language classes. A total of 15 interviews were conducted. The principal investigator (lead author) conducted all interviews with the support of the research assistant (second author). Grounded in an in-depth personal narrative-style approach to qualitative research (Maynes et al., 2008), each participant took part in one interview that focused on gathering a contextual understanding of each interviewee's story of moving to the region. In

order to collect the unique narratives of each participant, interviews were structured in such a way that prioritized respondents' individual representation of the settlement process. Interviews began with participants creating a 'life-map', a participatory method that involved interviewees creating a visual diagram of their migration stories on flip chart paper. The life-maps provided a means to graphically organize the semi-structured interviews that followed (Worth, 2011). In the end, participants discussed a broad range of topics related to their stories of rural settlement. During the initial stages of data analysis, it became evident that participants placed a lot of emphasis on the need to own a car. This theme was particularly salient for those participants who had come to Canada as sponsors, either as sponsored spouses or as privately-sponsored refugees. For this paper, we are focusing on a subset of seven participants who highlights car consumption as a crucial component of their settlement experience.

5.0 Presentation of Findings

Findings are organized into two sections. In the first section, we discuss how a lack of public transportation options in rural Nova Scotia pushes immigrants and refugees toward prioritizing car ownership as a means of accessing employment and crucial services such as language instruction and health care. In the second section, we explore the layers of affective experience associated with car consumption among sponsored immigrants and refugees in rural Nova Scotia. This section is organized according to two main themes that evolved from the interviews. First, having access to a privately-owned vehicle offers a sense of independence from sponsors, be it spouses or sponsorship groups. Second, car consumption provides newcomers with an increased sense of belonging to place and a stronger affective connection to each other. All in all, everyday practices associated with owning and using a car indicate that vehicular consumption is implicated in rural Canada's evolving identity as an important immigrant destination.

5.1 Prioritizing Car Ownership

For many of the participants interviewed, car ownership was prioritized over other investments, including home ownership. In the words of Laura, a recent privately-sponsored refugee from Southern Africa who was studying for her Nova Scotia driver's license at the time of our interview, "the first plan for me is a car, the first is a car. The second one is the house." Like other residents of rural communities, recent immigrants and refugees to rural Nova Scotia who do not have access to private transportation are at a disadvantage in terms of finding employment, accessing essential services such as grocery shopping and English as a Second Language instruction, and other everyday leisure pursuits. For Carlos, who came to rural Nova Scotia as a skilled worker from Central America, it took several months after arrival to obtain his driver's license and subsequently to purchase a car. During this time, he had to budget $400 weekly for a taxi service to take him back and forth to his job at a meat production facility in a rural area outside of the town where he was living. Similarly, Sophia, a Brazilian immigrant who came to Canada as a skilled worker and Miguel, who accompanied Sophia as her spouse, had recently settled in a small Nova Scotia village directly from Rio de Janeiro. They were each commuting to their restaurant jobs in a nearby town at the time of our interview and talked about the necessity of owning a car as there is no public transportation where they live. This was a situation to which they had to adjust as they were not accustomed to driving when they lived in Brazil. As Miguel stated: "[In Rio] we used to go by subway, [but here] you don't have. Everything is made by car. In our village we don't even have bus. Only car." Sophia added:

> We need a car. For now, it works fine because our working hours are different. So, I work from Wednesday to Friday from seven to three. And he works from four to eight. So, it's just the exact time for me to finish here and drive home and then he can go to work. In the future maybe if we change jobs, we will need to buy another one.

In the interests of accentuating the barriers to car ownership, Miguel added:

> It was an adventure to buy a car. We had to pay cash because we couldn't get credit anywhere. So, this is something that I don't think is well-developed for immigrants. You don't have like a financing plan for someone who has just arrived.

Angelica, a Thai immigrant who came to rural Nova Scotia as a sponsored spouse did not have a driver's license for several years after arriving in the province. Angelica spent a lot of our interview discussing how for the first few years after arrival not having access to a car resulted in acute social isolation, loneliness, and an increased dependence on her husband. She said: "Like you stuck at home all day wait for your husband to come home from work you know, and take you out to do grocery shopping or go see your friend."

For some participants, access to a vehicle meant having increased access to an urban centre, in this case, Halifax, the provincial capital. Having easy access to the city meant that participants were able to access services and essential needs that would otherwise be unavailable in a rural area, such as ethnic groceries, family members who live in the city, or specialized medical care. For example, Hafsa and Omar, a young couple who came to rural Nova Scotia as privately-sponsored refugees from Syria, discussed the need to regularly visit a medical specialist in Halifax for their son Zafir, who requires routine care for a chronic condition. They had purchased a car, but only Omar had a license. At the time of the interview, Hafsa was thinking about obtaining her driver's license even though she had been involved in a car accident not long after arriving in Canada. She said:

> We are thinking about that because I need. Sometimes Zafir has appointment or has a problem, and I want to take him to hospital fast. If he has bleeding we give him a needle at home. If he's o.k. that's good. If not, we want to go to Halifax.

For the participants of this study, access to a driver's license and to a vehicle were both considered prerequisites to building a decent quality of life in rural Nova Scotia. Access to a car and the capacity to drive can increase newcomers' sense of belonging to a community by improving access to participation related to employment, community events, social services, leisure pursuits, and so on (Reid-Musson, 2015).

5.2 Participants' Affective Relationship to Driving

While participants discussed the practicalities of car ownership and its importance to living in a rural area, interview analysis revealed an emotional connection to driving that ran deeper than participants' basic needs for getting around. In keeping with recent scholarly observations on car use (Edensor, 2004; Gilroy, 2001; Sheller, 2004; Sheller & Urry, 2006), participants' discussions of car consumption suggest that the desire to drive and access to private transportation are implicated in a broader political and socio-cultural context that shapes new immigrants' and refugees' affective relations toward their sponsors, the local community, and to each other. Participants' emotional responses to car ownership both emerge from and reinforce the 'system of automobility' that permeates rural life (Sheller, 2004; Urry,

2004). Newcomers' affective relationship to automobiles is particularly resonant within Atlantic Canada, where a culture of (auto)mobility is noted to be a particularly salient socio-economic fact of life (Armstrong, 2018; Barber, 2019; Corbett, 2007; Neil & Neis, 2020). Participants' emotional response to driving is also implicated in the interpersonal dynamics that inevitably emerge from how Canada's refugee and spousal sponsorship programs are structured (Gaucher, 2018; Kyriakides et al., 2019; Kyriakides et al., 2020; Macklin et al., 2020). The feelings that are generated around new immigrants' and refugees' relation to cars and driving expose an undercurrent affective economy of automobility that accompanies the economic and social integration of newcomers to rural regions. This subsection examines the emotional nuances surrounding participants' discussions of car use and ownership.

5.2.1 Feeling Independent. The primary affect related to car consumption derived from the interviews was how participants expressed feelings of independence in relation to vehicle use, indicating that for these participants driving may extend the pleasures of freedom and mobility associated with their move to Canada. For those participants who had been sponsored, this desire for independence was associated with a need to diminish feelings of dependency and gratitude directed toward their sponsors, whether a spouse or a sponsor group. Laura expressed how she felt a responsibility to her sponsor group for helping her to come to Canada and felt very grateful toward them for helping and her two sons to settle in rural Nova Scotia. She said:

> [They help me] for everything, to bring me here, like the [plane] ticket. They find a house for me and everything in the house, and the food. They are paying rent until now. They are doing everything. If I need something I can tell them.

However, she felt that getting a driver's license and buying a car would help her to become more autonomous and less reliant on her sponsor group for her and her sons' daily needs. Stating the language barrier as an obstacle to getting her driver's licence, at the time of our interview, she had failed the written test twice and was studying for the test a third time. She associated her eventual success with getting a driver's license as a step toward relieving her sponsor group of their responsibilities to support her and her family, a need that she felt to be of paramount importance. She said: "there are so many people waiting for me to pass the test. Myself I am praying. If I pass I'll call them, 'come and fetch me here, I'm done!' because I need to make them happy." She explained how once she passed the written test she would ask members of her sponsor group to coach her on the driving portion of the test and to teach her how to buy a car. On this, she said:

> I need to buy the car. They teach me because I say, 'nuh-uh', I don't want to call someone to come and help me. I want to get in my car and go. Because me I'm independent for a long time. I wake up, I sleep. I know tomorrow I have two, three appointments I need to go. I need to go to work.

For Laura, driving and car ownership were intertwined with both the need to feel independent in a new country and her feelings of gratitude toward her sponsor group

for the opportunity to settle in a new home. These were expressed as the desire to release her sponsor group of what she perceived as the burden to accommodate her and her family's daily mobility needs.

For her part, Angelica talked about how her quality of life increased substantially when she obtained a driver's license and bought her own car, as she was able to gain independence from her husband, get a job as a personal support worker and to more easily maintain friendships outside of the home. She said: "Now I got wheels. I can go wherever I want and I can come for my English class, I can go catch up with friends. I can go to work." Similarly, Aksana, a Russian immigrant who also came to rural Nova Scotia as a sponsored spouse, discussed how she had come from a big city in Russia and, as such, was accustomed to relying on public transportation. When she came to Nova Scotia she got her driver's license but never felt comfortable as a driver and relied on her husband for getting around. After the birth of her second child, however, she felt like she had to start driving. She said:

> [For the first few years] we walked everywhere and then going to the beach or to the cottage, it was my husband. And then when the second child was born and I applied to work, you have to drive [the kids] to activities. So, it's just – you have to.

These participants' accounts of car use accentuate the importance of automobiles for living a fulfilling life in rural Canada. They also bring to the forefront the structured hierarchies of Canadian immigration policy, their attendant emotional dynamics, and how the latter are highly associated with navigating and maintaining personal relationships marked by an asymmetric balance of power, particularly for sponsored immigrants and refugees (Macklin et al., 2020). In addition to providing access to services and employment, driving offers newcomers, and sponsored immigrants and refugees, in particular, a path toward asserting their independence, and thereby a means toward countering some of the structured power imbalances embedded in institutional immigration policies (Kyriakides et al., 2019; Macklin et al., 2020). Specifically, the fact that participants discussed car ownership primarily in terms of independence, particularly from reliance on their sponsors, underlines the tensions around autonomy, dependence, and power inequities that are built into Canada's sponsorship programs and the various "entanglements of affect" that surround these (Macklin et al., 2020, p. 180). For study participants, getting behind the wheel in rural Nova Scotia was talked about as a way to define their interpersonal relationships on their own terms and thus as a means of taking control of their own socio-economic integration.

5.2.2 Driving to Belong. Participants' discussions of car use also reveal how engaging with rural Canada's culture of automobility intensified the experience of belonging to a new place. Yusuf, who came to Canada with his family as a privately-sponsored refugee from Syria, related his experience of driving and car ownership to the process of socio-cultural integration. He had worked as a mechanic in Syria, and so he already felt a particular affinity to automobiles prior to arrival, thus underlining how car use is implicated in cultural and transnational patterns that can influence new immigrants' and refugees' settlement experiences. Unlike some of the participants discussed above, Yusuf did not have a history of using public transportation in his home country, but rather discussed his comfort behind the wheel. He said: "I like to drive car in Syria. I understand everything for mechanic

and I fix my car alone, no go for mechanic. I change oil, change brake, and everything." His first job in Canada was as a car mechanic. Even though he quit this job because of a workplace injury, he continued to offer this service for free to fellow refugees from Syria. As with many of the participants interviewed, for Yusuf, the car played a central role in building a connection to place. For example, when he first obtained his driver's license he rented a car with a friend and embarked on a cross-provincial road trip to Toronto to explore the possibility of settling his family in a bigger city. He also discussed how he bought a local fishing license and would drive his friends and family to well-known fishing holes around North-eastern Nova Scotia to fish trout, bass, and mackerel and discussed going on road trips to Cape Breton with his family in the autumn to see the leaves changing colours.

Central to developing a sense of belonging, for those participants who discussed the importance of owning a car, helping other newcomers to the region navigate the settlement process emerged as an important theme. From these accounts, it can be inferred that driving and particularly having access to private transportation were experienced as important prerequisites to feeling connected to others and to actively contributing to their communities. Angelica, for example, discussed how she relied on her English as an Additional Language teacher to pick her up to attend English classes and other social gatherings before she had a driver's license, and how after she bought her own car, she took on this responsibility for another young woman immigrant among her classmates. She said:

> She just move here and her family did not have a car… I just offer her if she want to go to grocery shopping, or want to stop somewhere, or she want to come to the class if I am available I can pick her up. I appreciate because my teacher, she used to offer me a drive before when I went to her class. And so, I want to give back.

For his part, Yusuf's settlement process seemed to almost completely revolve around driving. In addition to fixing vehicles, as mentioned above, he discussed how he used his car as a means of facilitating fellow Syrians' integration. He talked about regularly offering driving lessons to recent Syrian arrivals for free and how he would often make the over 4-hour return drive to Halifax to buy ethnically appropriate food for fellow Syrians and even help with airport pickups in the city for new privately-sponsored arrivals. He said:

> A new family here I help like go for grocery. I buy bread like Lebanon bread in Halifax. Maybe I go for Halifax and they need some meat, halal lamb, and chicken because very expensive in Sobey's [the local grocery store]. In Walmart in Halifax it's half price. Yeah, and new family coming I go to airport for bringing here.

For study participants, having access to private transportation provoked feelings of belonging and community that were central to the experience of negotiating their integration into an automobile-centric society. In rural Nova Scotia, privately-owned vehicles operate as a kind of physical interface between recent arrivals and their new surroundings. Participants' discussions of driving for leisure, in particular, place the

car within broader symbolic struggles surrounding new immigrants' and refugees' evolving affective connections toward rural communities. Driving and car consumption are also involved in the production of practices that facilitate communal place formation among recent arrivals (Ehrkamp, 2005), such as using the automobile as a means to building connections to more established ethnic communities in the city. Seen through Massey's (1994) insight that the identity of a particular place is formed from fluctuating social relations, newcomers' embrace of Atlantic Canada's culture of automobility is highly implicated in the region's developing identity as a migrant destination.

6.0 Conclusion

This research, which aims to increase understanding among policy-makers and settlement agencies as to the challenges of newcomer integration in the context of rural Nova Scotia, underlines how the region's culture of automobility is deeply implicated in immigrants' and refugees' settlement experiences. With notable exceptions (Bose, 2014; Reid-Musson, 2015), this is an aspect of the rural newcomer experience that is largely overlooked in immigration scholarship and settlement discourse. Elsewhere, particularly in the context of the United States (Hendricks, 2014; Klein & Smart, 2017) and urban/suburban regions of Canada (Farber et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2011; Premji, 2017), transportation inequities have been identified as crucial components of the newcomer experience. Transportation disadvantage is a pervasive issue in rural Canada (Marr, 2015), and it should come as no surprise that a lack of public transit infrastructure outside of urban areas would shape the socio-economic integration of immigrants and refugees in rural regions. Immigrant and refugee narratives from rural Nova Scotia demonstrate how automobility must be considered when developing programs and services meant to facilitate newcomers' settlement. Simply put, access to a car is a prerequisite to building a decent quality of life in rural regions of the province. Without easy access to a private vehicle, new immigrants and refugees are at a disadvantage in terms of accessing settlement services such as language instruction, as well as employment and health care services.

In addition to the practicalities of car ownership with regards to daily mobility struggles, culturally, rural automobilities have been shown to contribute to individual and regional identity formation in rural areas, particularly in Atlantic Canada (Armstrong, 2018; Barber, 2019). Participant narratives reveal how the cultural and affective dimensions that surround Atlantic Canadians' relationship to automobiles emerge as particularly relevant to the settlement experience and to shaping newcomers' sense of belonging to a rural place. Building on Mimi Sheller's work in relation to contemporary society's emotional connection to automobiles (Sheller, 2004), the findings suggest that participants' affective relationship to driving is made evident in two specific ways. First, having a driver's license and buying a car are perceived as essential to gaining a sense of independence. In its ability to offer a means of shaping one's own mobility practices in a new place, having a car may be understood as extending the excitement associated with the experience of international migration. More specifically, participants equated having a car with freedom from dependency. This is particularly the case for those participants who entered Canada through a sponsorship program, either as a privately-sponsored refugee or as a sponsored spouse. Importantly, both programs have shown to support an asymmetric power imbalance with regards to sponsor-sponsored relationships (Macklin et al., 2020). Participants from these programs

discussed how access to a private vehicle offered a life more autonomous from sponsors, and thus provided a means to counter some of the relational power inequities embedded in these immigration policies. Second, car consumption featured heavily in participants' accounts of engaging with the community, particularly with regards to building a community of fellow newcomers. Participants with cars prioritized helping those who did not own a car and discussed how they would pick up their friends to attend English classes, teach others how to drive, and drive to the city to access ethnically specific foods to share with others. The car is therefore implicated in both the development of a collective sense of belonging to rural Nova Scotia and also in the production of mobility practices that in effect help to develop the region's own identity as a welcoming place for immigrants and refugees.

Our discussion has underlined the importance of vehicular ownership to newcomer integration in rural Nova Scotia. This is an exploratory study and focuses on only one rural region in the province, albeit one that is experiencing relatively high levels of international in-migration. As immigration to rural areas increases, further research will be required in order to develop a more fulsome analysis of the relationship between automobility and rural immigration. For example, relatively speaking, the two counties investigated in this study are densely populated in comparison to other parts of the Maritimes and of Canada more generally. Questions remain with regards to immigrants' and refugees' access and relationship to private vehicles in more remote rural areas, such as, for example, Nova Scotia's Guysborough County or the Acadian Peninsula of Northern New Brunswick. Additionally, we recommend that a longitudinal study be undertaken to understand how car ownership may impact immigrant retention to rural areas long-term.

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