

**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF GENDERED MIGRATION TRAJECTORIES ON THE
POLITICAL INCORPORATION OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN
THE CASE OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN OF CONGOLESE ORIGIN IN CANADA**

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Marie Magdala, and to Congolese women whose voices and experiences are frequently silenced and marginalized, with the hope that this work will help bring their voices and experiences to light. *Natondi yo botondi.*

Résumé

Les études sur l'incorporation politique des femmes immigrées au Canada suggèrent qu'elles sont moins susceptibles de participer à la vie politique que les hommes immigrés et les femmes nées au Canada. De nombreuses études ont examiné les facteurs qui contribuent à leurs faibles niveaux de participation politique, mais les impacts des expériences migratoires ont reçu moins d'attention. Pour combler cette lacune, cette thèse examine les expériences d'incorporation politique des femmes de la première génération d'immigrants de la République démocratique du Congo (RDC) au Canada en tant qu'étude de cas en utilisant une approche de la migration basée sur la trajectoire et le parcours de vie pour analyser comment les trajectoires et les expériences migratoires genrées influencent la participation politique des femmes immigrées au Canada. J'utilise également l'approche 'intersectional-gender' de La Barbera (2012) pour examiner comment le genre se croise avec d'autres clivages sociaux comme la race, l'ethnicité, la classe, et le statut d'immigration pour affecter les répertoires de participation politique des femmes immigrées. Enfin, j'examine comment les femmes immigrées peuvent surmonter les obstacles imposés par la migration et les systèmes d'oppression imbriqués au Canada, en particulier par les diverses façons dont elles exercent leur action politique dans la sphère politique informelle. Je m'appuie sur des entretiens de récits de vie avec quinze femmes congolaises résidant dans la région métropolitaine canadienne d'Ottawa-Gatineau.

Les résultats révèlent que les trajectoires migratoires des participantes vers le Canada sont profondément genrées aux niveaux micro, méso et macro, et que si la plupart des participantes se sentent politiquement incorporées au Canada, certains aspects de leurs trajectoires migratoires genrées limitent leur participation à la sphère politique formelle. Il s'agit notamment des obstacles posés par les projets de migration, les types de migration, les modes d'entrée, le statut d'immigration, les expériences de migration, et les normes de genre itinérantes de la RDC. Toutefois, ces obstacles ont créé des opportunités pour une plus ample participation dans la sphère politique informelle, comme le militantisme au sein de groupes ethnoculturels et religieux, les manifestations, les conseils scolaires, les réseaux professionnels, et la signature de pétition. En outre, les résultats révèlent que les expériences de marginalisation politique et de discrimination des participants, tant dans la société canadienne que dans les communautés d'immigrants africains, en raison de leur identité d'immigrantes noires congolaises, ont augmenté leur propension à participer à des activités politiques informelles, tout comme leur statut socioéconomique de femmes immigrées de la classe moyenne. Les résultats apportent d'importantes contributions empiriques, analytiques et méthodologiques en fournissant un cadre original pour comprendre les liens entre les trajectoires migratoires genrées et l'incorporation politique des femmes immigrées, en éclairant des compréhensions plus vastes de la participation politique et en remettant en question les notions de l'apolitisme des femmes immigrées, en soulignant les impacts peu étudiés des systèmes de pouvoir imbriqués sur la participation politique, et en réfutant l'idée que l'incorporation politique est un processus d'inclusion simple et une condition de cohésion sociale.

Mots-clés: femmes immigrées; Canada; République démocratique du Congo (RDC); migration; incorporation politique; intersectionnalité

Abstract

Studies on immigrant women's political incorporation in Canada suggest that they are less likely to participate politically than immigrant men and Canadian-born women. Many studies have examined the factors that contribute to their lower levels of political participation, yet the impacts of migration experiences have received less attention. To address this gap, this dissertation examines the political incorporation experiences of first-generation immigrant women from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in Canada as a case study by employing a trajectory and life course approach to migration to analyze how gendered migration trajectories and experiences influence immigrant women's political participation in Canada. I also employ La Barbera's (2012) 'intersectional-gender' approach to examine how gender intersects with other social cleavages like race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status to affect immigrant women's repertoires of political participation. Lastly, I examine how immigrant women may overcome the obstacles imposed by migration and the interlocking systems of oppression in Canada, particularly through the various ways they exercise political agency in the informal political sphere. I draw on life stories interviews with fifteen Congolese women residing in Canada's metropolitan area of Ottawa-Gatineau.

The findings reveal that participants' migration trajectories to Canada are deeply gendered at the micro, meso, and macro levels, and while most participants felt politically incorporated in Canada, aspects of their gendered migration trajectories limited their participation in the formal political sphere. This includes barriers posed by migration projects, migration types, modes of entry, immigration status, migration experiences, and travelling gender norms from the DRC. However, these barriers generated opportunities for greater participation in the informal political sphere, such as advocacy through ethnocultural and religious groups, protests, school boards, professional networks, and petitions. Furthermore, the findings reveal that participants' experiences of political marginalization and discrimination in both Canadian society and African immigrant communities, because of their identity as Black Congolese immigrant women, increased their proclivity to participate in informal political activities, as did their socioeconomic status as middle-class immigrant women. The findings make important empirical, analytical, and methodological contributions by providing an original framework for understanding the links between gendered migration trajectories and immigrant women's political incorporation, enlightening broader understandings of political participation and challenging notions of immigrant women as apolitical, highlighting the understudied impacts of interlocking systems of power on political participation, and disproving the idea that political incorporation is a straightforward process of inclusion and a condition of social cohesiveness.

Keywords: immigrant women; Canada; Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); migration; political incorporation; intersectionality

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Chapter One: Introduction

*“What do we know about the political integration of immigrant women?
The answer is very little.”
(Bilodeau, 2016, p.951)*

General Introduction to Topic

Political participation has been viewed by scholars and political leaders as paramount to the legitimacy of any democracy, where members of society are given the opportunity to influence political decision-making in the formal political sphere and to voice their legitimate needs, interests, demands, rights, and duties (O’Neill et al., 2012). In the case of immigrants, their political participation is an important indicator of their overall incorporation into Canadian society, whether directly through their own participation as leaders, or indirectly through their selection of an elected representative or involvement in their own ethnic voluntary organizations (Black, 1987; Meinhard et al., 2011; O’Neill et al., 2012). Political participation can, for instance, allow immigrants’ concerns, needs, and interests in terms of labour rights and social services to be heard, which can influence decision-making and policy that relates to these concerns. In turn, their political incorporation carries over to their social and economic incorporation, as they are invited to influence policies to adequately address such social and economic needs (Morales & Giugni, 2011). This relationship between the political incorporation of immigrants and their social and economic incorporation in receiving societies (Siemiatycki & Saloojee, 2003) is why scholars have paid greater attention to the study of immigrants’ political participation.

Despite the increasing attention, a significant gap remains in our understanding of political incorporation in relation to immigrants in their receiving society, particularly of racialized immigrant women¹ in Canada (O’Neill et al., 2012). As per Bilodeau (2016), it is immigrant women who are less likely to participate in the political affairs of Canada in comparison to immigrant men and Canadian-born women. To identify and understand the factors that limit immigrant women’s political incorporation, scholars often examine the impacts of pre- and post-migration experiences such as pre-migration political socialization and possessions of social or political capital. Yet, in this line of study, migration is often depicted as a singular movement from one state of fixity (the country of origin) to another state of fixity (the receiving country;

¹ Hereinafter referred simply as immigrant women.

Schapendonk, 2012), overlooking the critical, non-linear, and substantial time spent in-between departure and settlement.

Migration — a complex and dynamic process that involves a series of moves, experiences, and social relations (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008) — is an ambiguous and unpredictable space where immigrants (in general) often experience insecurities, instability, exploitation, violence, or strain shaped by institutional structures (Schapendonk, 2012), social networks (Wissink et al., 2020), and individual aspirations (Grillo, 2007). Because of one's migration and the experiences of the 'in-between' spaces, immigrants can experience a transformation of identities, statuses, motivations, well-being, stability, and sense of security (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Schapendonk et al., 2020). These experiences, in turn, can have substantial impacts on their incorporation in their new country (Vasey, 2016; Wingens et al., 2011). Therefore, the aim of my qualitative research is to explore immigrant women's political incorporation by analyzing and examining the impacts of their migration experiences on their modes and levels of political participation. I seek to do so by studying migration trajectories (Schapendonk et al., 2020; Schwarz, 2020), defined in my research as dynamic and process-like journeys through time and space that spans from one's country of origin to one's final destination. Examples of migration trajectories include onward mobility, forced mobility, and contested transit mobility (Schapendonk et al., 2020). Studying migration trajectories will allow me to draw out the complex relationship between migration and political incorporation as it is explored in the context of immigrant women's political participation in Canada.

Furthermore, questions of the impacts of migration on political incorporation are perhaps more salient when we incorporate a focus on gender, a variable that is argued by both feminist and migration theorists as playing a substantial role in the migration process (Tastsoglou, 2006). Therefore, my research integrates an analysis of the role of gender (Carling, 2005; Mahieu et al., 2015), and how gender-related factors shape immigrant women's migration trajectories (journeys) and experiences. To reflect this analysis, I employ the concept of *gendered migration trajectories* to refer to migration journeys.

Finally, studies of immigrant women's political participation often limit themselves by pointing to immigrant women's lesser involvement in the formal sphere of electoral politics (Bilodeau, 2016; O'Neill et al., 2012). Indeed, immigrant women face much political constraints and challenges, particularly as one of society's most vulnerable and marginalized social groups

due to the experiences of discrimination stemming from the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Harell, 2017; O'Neill et al., 2012). However, scholars are increasingly studying how immigrant women use unconventional methods of political participation in the *informal* political sphere to overcome the barriers to entry into the formal political sphere (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Erel, 2009; Lister, 2003; Parham-Payne, 2017; Ralston, 2006). Therefore, I also explore how immigrant women may overcome the constraints and challenges presented by the experiences of migration through the various ways in which they exercise their capacity for political agency, including in the informal political sphere of ethnic and community organizations, protests, or diaspora politics (Erel, 2009; Ralston, 2006). Furthermore, I seek to uncover the extent to which social cleavages like race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status in Canada intersect to impact immigrant women's repertoires of political participation (Harell, 2017).

This thesis aims to fill these gaps in our understanding of immigrant women's political incorporation in the chapters that follow through its literature review and theoretical resources, as well as through the life stories interviews with fifteen first-generation immigrant women who originated from the Democratic Republic of Congo (the DRC or Congo), became Canadian citizens, and are currently residing in Canada's National Capital Region, the metropolitan area of Ottawa-Gatineau.

Thesis Outline

Chapter Two provides a review of research and debates regarding the political participation and incorporation of immigrants (in general) and immigrant women (in particular) using literature embedded in Western liberal democracies. This literature is divided into two strands: 1) feminist debates on citizenship and 2) empirical research in migration and political studies. I draw on this review to develop my research questions and objectives. I argue that existing literature on immigrant women's political participation pays very little attention to how migration trajectories are gendered and to the impacts of gendered migration trajectories on political incorporation. I also argue that it frequently adopts a narrow definition of political participation that refers exclusively to electoral or formal activities, thus marginalizing immigrant women's acts of citizenship; and that there remains a gap in our understanding of how social cleavages intersect to impact immigrant

women's repertoires of political activities. This chapter concludes with my research objectives, questions, hypotheses, and relevance.

Chapter Three outlines the concepts that I employ as the theoretical foundations for this thesis: gendered migration trajectories, political incorporation, and political participation. First, I engage with literature on transit migration to conceptualize an understanding of migration trajectories. I also engage with literature on the sociological life course approach to theorize the processual links between migration trajectories and political incorporation, as well as with literature on gender and migration to further theorize an understanding of migration trajectories as gendered. Second, I draw on the concept of political incorporation from political and migration studies to define political inclusion as a dynamic process in which conflict between immigrants and the native-born population is expected, as well as variations and complexities in immigrant women's political experiences. Third, the concept of political participation and its three dimensions (practices, political agency and identity, and spaces) are drawn from feminist studies to propose a more inclusive discourse and analysis of immigrant women's political participation. Lastly, I discuss La Barbera's (2012) 'intersectional-gender' approach to portray how gender, which plays a central role in immigrant women's experiences, can intersect with (or be mediated by) other social cleavages to affect the repertoires of political activities available to immigrant women. These concepts and approach, taken together, provide the framework for studying immigrant women's political participation, and most importantly, the impacts of migration on their political incorporation.

Chapter Four outlines my methodological approach, notably my qualitative research method: the life-stories interview method. I argue that the life stories method is central for reconstructing the gendered migration trajectories of immigrant women towards their current place of residency in Canada, uncovering through their personal narratives their experiences of migration as they navigated through opportunities and constraints; the factors shaping their migration experiences; and how these experiences have affected their political incorporation and capacity for political agency. The life stories method is also central for uncovering in personal narratives the diversity of types of political participation that immigrant women engage in, the process of politicization, and the impacts of intersectional power relations on their political incorporation that they may find themselves embroiled in as Congolese immigrant women in Canada. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the selection of participants, including a brief description of the Congolese

population in Canada, the reasons for selecting first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin as my case study in analyzing immigrant women's political incorporation and the Ottawa-Gatineau region as a fitting context for studying this, the participants of the research, and the sampling methods. This is followed by a discussion on the life stories interview process, the analytical strategies employed, the obstacles of my research, and the validity of research results.

Chapter Five provides a brief overview of the study's geographical regions, the DRC and Canada, to inform of the historical and present contexts in which Congolese women are situated and how they have often been positioned within these contexts. Therefore, paying close attention to Congolese women's (or, more broadly, immigrant women's) social and political experiences in each region, this chapter is divided into two sections. First, I discuss the DRC's political landscape from colonialism to its present democracy. In this section, I also review existing literature on Congolese women's general experiences with gender relations and inequalities in the DRC, as well as their levels of political participation in the DRC and in the diaspora. Second, I examine Canada's history as a White-settler colony and an immigrant-receiving society. This includes discussions of multiculturalism and anti-Black racism in Canada, systemic barriers to incorporation for racialized immigrants, and a brief description of the Ottawa-Gatineau region. In summary, this overview suggests that barriers to the incorporation and political rights of many Congolese women (and immigrant women) exist in both the DRC and Canada.

Chapter Six aims to respond to my first research question. Analyzing the gendered nature of migration trajectories is important for understanding participants' political incorporation in Canada because, according to the literature, migration *is* mediated by gender-related factors (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Espín & Dottolo, 2015; Pessar & Mahler, 2003). These factors can shape women's trajectories, experiences, and outcomes, including influencing levels of political incorporation in the receiving country. Therefore, to respond to the first research question, this chapter is divided into six sections. The first four sections present a detailed descriptive account of the participants' personal journeys from the DRC to Canada. The first section focuses on the women's upbringing in the DRC. The second section discusses the decision-making process, including the factors that led to the decision to leave the country and the decision-makers. The third section presents the interviewees' migration trajectories to transit countries (for those who settled in countries other than Canada), as well as their experiences in transit countries. The fourth section discusses participants' migration trajectories to Canada, as well as their experiences settling in Canada. The

first four sections are primarily descriptive, giving space for participants' voices to be read/heard (due to Congolese women's limited voices in Canadian research), as well as revealing the dynamic nature of participants' migration experiences, including the micro, meso, and macro factors relevant to migration experiences. This also includes gender-related factors. The fifth section of Chapter Six analyzes the results from the previous four sections, unveiling how the women's migration trajectories are explicitly and implicitly gendered, as well as how such experiences have socioeconomic impacts for their incorporation into Canadian society. These results are particularly relevant for demonstrating how participants' gendered migration trajectories could affect their political incorporation (discussed in Chapter Seven). The final section concludes the chapter with final remarks. Overall, my findings show that the interviewees' migration trajectories — an often-overlooked aspect of the migration process — are gendered, making it critical to examine the links between migration and gender, as well as the effects of this interaction on immigrant women's political incorporation.

Chapter Seven aims to provide answers to my remaining research questions. This involves examining the impacts of gendered migration trajectories on participants' political incorporation, as well as the cumulative effects of social cleavages that they find themselves embroiled in on their repertoires of political participation. This chapter also explores how the interviewees may overcome, particularly through informal and less visible means, some of the obstacles they may have faced due to their migration experiences and the interlocking systems of power or oppression in Canada. To that end, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section addresses the second research question by contextualizing and exploring my participants' various forms of political participation and incorporation in both the DRC and Canada, as well as their levels of political participation and incorporation. I use these findings to examine the women's political incorporation in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. The second section addresses the third research question by analyzing how elements of participants' gendered migration trajectories discussed in Chapter Six influenced the forms and levels of political participation identified in the first section of this chapter. I also examine how participants navigated the impacts of their migration trajectories. The third section addresses the final research question by exploring how the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status affect participants' repertoires of political participation. The final section concludes this chapter by discussing the findings in relation to the literature and my research hypotheses.

Chapter Eight concludes the study. First, I summarize my findings in relation to each research question, as well as the empirical contributions to the field of migration and political studies in understanding immigrant women's political incorporation in Canada. Second, I recall my research objectives and I discuss the analytical and methodological contributions of my research to the literature. Third, I review the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future research. Indeed, the findings of this study suggest that further research on immigrant women's political incorporation is justified and necessary. Lastly, I discuss recommendations for decision-makers.

Chapter Two: A Problematique on Immigrant Political Incorporation

Simmons (2010) defines *incorporation* as the “... process through which a social unit is included in a larger social unit as an integral part of it” (p.176). Therefore, incorporation can refer to the process of including immigrants into mainstream society, as well as to the degree to which their identities and differences are recognized (Kofman et al., 2000). When studying immigrant political behaviour, scholars often use the concept *political incorporation*, which is defined by Bloemraad (2006b) as “... the process of becoming a part of mainstream political debates, practices and decision-making... generally achieved when patterns of immigrant participation are comparable to those among the native born” (p.6). In other words, immigrant political incorporation is the process by which immigrants’ political behaviours are not suggestive of their exclusion from the formal political sphere (Morales, 2011). According to Martiniello (2006), political incorporation has four dimensions: the political rights granted to immigrants; their identification and belonging to their receiving society; their acceptance of democratic norms and values; and their political participation. To empirically evaluate immigrants’ political incorporation, Morales (2011) argues the necessity to consider their level of political participation and the ways in which they become included in their receiving society’s political processes. Therefore, the focus of my research is the fourth dimension of political incorporation: immigrants’ political participation. Broadly, political participation is defined as the “active” dimension of citizenship (Martiniello, 2006, p.84), where citizens engage in various forms of voluntary and legal activities that are directly or indirectly intended at influencing decisions and outcomes at different levels of the formal political system (Martiniello, 2006; Nguyen Long, 2016; Verba et al., 1995).

Unfortunately, until very recently, scholars have mostly overlooked the political dimension of immigrants’ incorporation in favour of the social and economic dimensions (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; Morales & Giugni, 2011; Predelli et al., 2012). Studies on immigrant political incorporation are even more limited with regard to immigrant women, who were largely invisible and absent in migration research and theorization until the late twentieth century (Lutz, 2010; Mahieu et al., 2015). Nevertheless, scholars have not entirely ignored immigrant women’s political incorporation. Since the late 1980s, scholars have increasingly acknowledged them as political actors and often questioned conventional ideas of membership, citizenship, and rights embedded in the foundations of immigrant women’s receiving countries (e.g., Erel, 2009; Roseneil, Halsaa, & Sümer, 2012). This has resulted in several studies and debates that can be divided into two

distinct bodies of literature that help explain immigrant women's political incorporation, specifically their lower levels of political participation in their receiving societies.

The first body of literature focuses on the historical exclusion of women from formal political institutions, criticizing women's "partial citizenship" (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006, p.5) — their exclusion from accessing the political rights and duties that members of the sovereign state are entitled to. This literature is often embedded in feminist debates on citizenship, which seek to determine how women's exclusion has been achieved and sustained by the very conception of citizenship and its fundamental principles and assumptions.² The second body of literature concerns itself with the migratory factors that facilitate or hinder immigrants' political incorporation in their receiving societies. This literature is often embedded in migration and political research that highlights two migratory impacts on immigrants' political participation — the pre-migration experiences and the post-migration experiences — to identify which context or experiences are most appropriate in explaining immigrants' successful political incorporation.

The following discussions will explore the leading debates and studies in both bodies of literature. While the separation of the two may suggest they are mutually exclusive, this is not the case. For instance, women's exclusion from the political dimension of citizenship can relate to their post-migration experiences. The distinction is made merely to a) highlight the exclusion of women from the politics of their receiving societies and the difficulties they face in achieving the conditions expected as citizens to benefit from political rights; and b) highlight how the experiences at different stages of migration can affect the political participation of immigrants in their new polity. Nevertheless, I will conclude this discussion by assessing the literature and addressing the gaps that will inform and guide my research on the effects of migration on immigrant women's political incorporation. I will present my research objectives, questions, and hypotheses, as well as the relevance of the research.

Citizenship and Immigrant Women's Political Marginalization

Generally, debates on political participation are integrated with a discussion of citizenship since the latter is itself associated with, or attached to, the political arena (Threlfall et al., 2012). To demonstrate, citizenship is commonly defined as a legal membership status of a *political*

² This body of literature under review will refer exclusively to citizenship within the context of Western liberal democracies like Canada, France, Britain, and Germany.

community and the rights that this status bestows on its members (Bauböck, 2006; Erel, 2009; Isin & Wood, 1999; Lister, 2003; Strasser, 2012). This is the modern definition of citizenship notably conceptualized by British sociologist T. H. Marshall in *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950), an essay that Isin and Wood (1999) refer to as the founding document of modern citizenship studies.³ According to Marshall (1950), citizenship has three dimensions of rights: the civil, the political, and the social. The political is composed of the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as either a member of a political body or as a voter. Thus, not only is citizenship defined as a legal membership status, but it also bestows *political rights* onto members of a political community. Furthermore, citizenship is defined as *political engagement* or *political practice*, promoting the capacity of members to actively participate in the political affairs of their political community (Janoski & Gran, 2002; Lister & Pia, 2008; Threlfall et al., 2012). This conception of citizenship derives from the republican approaches to citizenship (Lister & Pia, 2008).

These conceptions of citizenship are criticized by feminist scholars and activists for being exclusionary and discriminatory towards women of various social cleavages, and for placing barriers onto their political participation and their access to the political community. Women are described by McBean (2013) as the irony of their community: they are instrumental to its flourishing and survival, yet, they are entirely excluded from them, including the political arena. This phenomenon can be traced back to the very inception of the concept of citizenship in ancient Greece, argued by feminist scholars as having patriarchal and discriminatory undertones since the privileges of citizenship — such as making laws or participating in public affairs (Carr, 1991) — were only granted to a few members of society, namely free men (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006). Even when Marshall (1950) wrote his essay on citizenship, women were denied civil rights such as the right to own property or make contracts without their husbands' consent, they were denied political rights like the right to vote or stand for election, and, if they were married, they were denied social rights such as access to education and employment while living under the “cover” (or control) of their husbands (M. Lister & Pia, 2008; R. Lister, 2003, p.69). The exclusion of women has been maintained for thousands of years, moving towards favouring the citizen as a

³ Marshall's (1950) main objective was not to derive at a conception of citizenship. Instead, his objective was to analyze the compatible relationship between the two opposing principles of the equality of citizenship and the inequality of class and capitalism.

White, heterosexual, bourgeois, non-disabled man who is disembodied and abstract (Lister, 2003; Strasser, 2012; Turner, 2016).

It was not until the twentieth century that women in many Western liberal democracies began to significantly acquire the basic rights of citizenship (Isin & Wood, 1999). Women gained the right to vote after the first wave of feminist activism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After World War II and inspired by the African American civil rights movement, women fought and protested to turn abortion into a basic female civil right. In the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, women of colour, working-class women, and lesbians openly challenged White middle-class women for their narrow understanding of women's rights and raised issues related to class, race, sexuality, age, and disability. In Canada, a country that has garnered a global reputation for setting the standards in terms of women's rights (Skeet, 2017), early expressions of women's rights through suffrage and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (created in 1967) were notable in ensuring equal opportunities for all women in areas such as political rights, equal pay, maternity leave, and birth control (MacDonald, 2013).

Nevertheless, while women have gained many rights that were formerly denied to them, they continue to face barriers to fully enjoying and possessing rights equally to men, including political rights, where women remain underrepresented in formal politics (Lister & Pia, 2008). Even in Canada, where women's rights and their engagement in politics have been presented as a linear progression throughout history (Skeet, 2017), women are not participating in politics equally to men and they continue to face power dynamics (Cohen, 2016). Furthermore, many fail to consider the impact that race, class, geography, and other social cleavages has had on "disparities in enjoyment of rights" *among* women (Skeet, 2017, p.162). In Canada, for instance, not all women were granted the right to vote at the same time, and such rights were often granted based on race and colonialism (Sangster, 2018). White women of British descent in Manitoba acquired provincial franchise in 1916, whereas women in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Québec did not secure the provincial franchise until after women were granted the federal franchise in 1918 (1919, 1922, and 1940, respectively) (Sangster, 2018). When women were granted the federal franchise, federal voting restrictions were still imposed on Asian citizens and Indigenous people until 1949 and 1960, respectively, while Asian citizens continued to face voting restrictions in British Columbia until 1949. Thus, while women achieve the right to possess formal citizenship, women of various social cleavages often face limited "substantive citizenship" (Lister & Pia, 2008,

p.32) or the limited possession of political rights. Feminist scholars have identified two fundamental properties of citizenship that hinder women's political participation: a) citizenship's false universalism and b) citizenship's public-private divide.

Citizenship and its False Universalism

Part of the conception of citizenship is that it is a universal concept that bestows its rights and duties *equally* to all members of the political community (Lister & Pia, 2008), transcending particularity and differences among citizens (for instance, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, age, or disability) and their inequalities of wealth, status, and power (Young, 1989). Thus, conceptualized as a universalistic idea of equality, a few scholars have described citizenship as a neutral concept that only becomes discriminatory due to the prevailing social norms of the time (Lister & Pia, 2008). Given a more egalitarian society, the same rights and responsibilities guaranteed by citizenship would be extended to all those who have been previously marginalized and, thus, could participate as equals in the public sphere. However, when citizenship rights were formally extended to all social groups⁴ in liberal societies throughout the twentieth century, Young (1989) argues that the extension of a universal citizenship did not lead to equality for all. Instead, some groups still experienced being treated as second-class citizens, where laws and rights became biased in favour of privileged groups and perpetuated the political exclusion of individuals and groups deemed different. This is known as citizenship's false universalism, and immigrant women were particularly left excluded and marginalized by this.

Immigrant women refers to the category of women who relocate from one country and settle in another, and who are granted the right to live in their receiving country permanently by immigration authorities, often by possessing citizenship (Ralston, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2017b). However, this study also refers to the social category of women who have settled in a new country but have differences in visible, audible, and behavioural characteristics from those belonging to the dominant population (as defined by that society; Ng, 1987; Ralston, 2006). These differences include skin colour, language or accent, religion, dress, and behavioural differences in public situations. But while Canada is known as a "wealthy nation of immigrants" (Simmons, 2010, p.6), and encourages migrants who enter as permanent residents to become naturalized citizens

⁴ A social group is defined by Young (1990) as a collective of individuals that are differentiated from other groups based on particularistic identities, interests, cultural forms, practices, or way of life, and who continuously engage in conflicts with other groups to create a space for the expression of their own identity and interests (p.43).

(Ralston, 2006), immigrant women often face discrimination, isolation, exclusion, and extreme difficulty in accessing the political sphere as a result of their immigrant status (that of a foreigner), gender, race, and ethnicity (Castles & Miller, 1998; Kofman et al., 2000; Ralston, 2006). As per Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality, intersections exist between different social cleavages (or different systems of oppression) that together produce and reinforce women's social inequality. In the case of immigrant women's political participation, the social cleavages of gender, race, ethnicity, class (or socioeconomic status and resources), and immigration status often intersect to both a) create barriers to the political realm and widen participation gaps; and b) affect the repertoires of political activities that are made available to them based on their positionalities in society, such as greater participation in ethnic organizations and churches and lesser participation in contacting public officials or becoming political leaders (Brown, 2014; Harell, 2017).

Furthermore, since 'immigrant women' denotes a visible social category (Ng, 1987), migration becomes a "contending space of exclusion and inclusion" where immigrant women face barriers to exercising their political rights as citizens (Bonifacio, 2012, pp.5-6). Immigrants are commonly identified and labelled based on the visible markers of race, which serves as the basis for social exclusion and discrimination (Castles & Miller, 1998; Kofman et al., 2000). Indeed, the immigrant category in Canada has come to mean much more than a legal membership status for migrants; it has come to signify a racialized status within society that regulates unequal access to citizenship rights to protect Canadian culture, norms, and values (once established by White, European men during colonization) from visible and cultural markers of differences displayed by immigrant women (Thobani, 2000).

Moreover, immigrant women have particularistic social and cultural needs that they want to have represented in, and defended by, society's institutions, and their political participation will reflect these needs (Erel, 2009; Threlfall et al., 2012). It is reasonable to expect that immigrant women in Canada will exercise their political right to make demands according to their needs and lived experiences, understanding that they have rights as citizens (Kennedy-Macfoy, 2012; Harell, 2017). Yet, citizenship upholds static notions of culture where immigrant women's claims and practices are ignored and marginalized since they do not conform to the universal norm established by White, non-disabled, heterosexual men (Lister, 2003; Strasser, 2012). This is also exacerbated by systemic barriers such as patriarchal and racist sentiments and attitudes, as well as culturally specific gender norms and practices (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006).

As a result of these circumstances, feminist scholars have dedicated their work in extending the dimensions of citizenship, as well as expanding its scope and understanding, to be more inclusive of women's particularities, differences, and political activism. For instance, Young (1990) rejects the notion of a universal citizenship since it demands homogeneity as a requirement for political participation, with everyone having the same impartial, general point of view. For her, this would perpetuate cultural imperialism by allowing the interests, perspectives, and experiences of privileged groups to appear neutral and universal while the particular interests, perspectives and experiences of social groups like immigrant women are deemed different and pushed to the margins of society (Young, 1990). Instead of a universal citizenship, Young (1989) contends that a concept of citizenship should begin with the assumption that there *are* differences between individuals and social groups, with some being oppressed, and that society should always uphold its duties to provide the mechanisms necessary for the effective recognition, protection and participation of these individuals and groups. Thus, Young (1989) proposes a "differentiated citizenship" that realizes the inclusion of *all* groups by providing institutionalized recognition and representation to oppressed groups, allowing them to express their particularities without fear of discrimination, and providing mechanisms (such as government support for the self-organization of group members) for their effective recognition, protection, and participation (p.251, 258). Ultimately, a differentiated citizenship would encourage individuals like immigrant women to participate in political affairs.

Lister (2003), conversely, does not believe that the universal and the particular are irreconcilable. She believes that the goal for universal citizenship should not be abandoned but that one should aspire for a universalism that challenges divisions and inequalities that stem from difference. Thus, Lister (2003) proposes the concept of "differentiated universalism", which promotes a view of citizenship that particularizes the universal, or that universalizes the moral obligation for the equal inclusion and participation of all members of society regardless of their differences (p.68). In the case of immigrant women, a differentiated universalism would recognize their differences to men and to privileged groups of women by granting protective rights that render them equal to all other members of society (Lister & Pia, 2008), and would recognize their political participation (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006).

Yuval-Davis' (1999) notion of "dialogical transversal citizenship" conceptualizes a multi-layered idea of citizenship that acknowledges women's simultaneous positions in various social

groups, and that differences encompass equality (p.131). Soysal's (1994) "post-national citizenship" (p.142) and Bauböck's (2006) "transnational citizenship" (p.28) conceptualize an understanding of citizenship that is no longer dependent or attached to a (single) nation-state, including the claiming of rights, the sense of membership and belonging, and political participation. Lastly, concepts like "economic citizenship" (Le Feuvre et al., 2012, p.71), "social citizenship" (Bergman et al., 2012, p.94; Lister, 2003, p.167, 175), "political citizenship" (Lister, 2003, p.143; Threlfall et al., 2012, p.141), "intimate citizenship" (Erel, 2009, p.145; Roseneil, Crowhurst, et al., 2012, p.42 ;Yuval-Davis, 1999, p.122), and "bodily citizenship" (Outshoorn et al., 2012, p.118) are a few examples of concepts employed in feminist debates to expand the rights associated to citizenship to be inclusive of the various reasons women become politically active. The expansion of citizenship reconciles the tension between the universal and the particular, and it acknowledges women as political actors and members of society.

The Private-Public Divide

In addition to false universalism, citizenship sets out to divide the realms of the private and the public, where the qualities that individuals must possess to be considered a citizen, and thus a political actor, are found in the public sphere. According to Lister (2003), these qualities that universal citizenship embodies to construct a public status and identity reflect masculine qualities, resulting in the division of men into the public sphere and women into the private sphere. This, in turn, presumes that men are political actors while women are either passive or apolitical. To demonstrate this, Lister (2003) presents a set of dichotomous gendered qualities that are interwoven in the very foundations of citizenship. To be a political actor, one must be abstract, disembodied, impartial, independent, active, rational, heroic, strong, and able to apply dispassionate reason and standards of justice. The individual must also inhabit the realm of individual freedom. On the other hand, non-political actors are particular, embodied, emotional, dependent, passive, irrational, and weak. They are also subject to desire and passion, and they are unable to apply standards of justice. Moreover, non-political actors maintain the realm of necessity and are preoccupied with private, domestic concerns.

Consequently, citizenship is made to exclude women who occupy the roles of mother and wives as they are viewed as embodiments of the private sphere and lack the qualities of a citizen that are deemed compatible with the exercise of citizenship (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Lister, 2003). This includes immigrant women. As citizenship regimes construct their ideal-typical

citizens to possess the most material, cultural, social, or technological capital to be capable of participating in public affairs, Erel (2009) argues that immigrant women are socially constructed as undesirable citizens incapable of participating and exercising citizenship rights and responsibilities since they are viewed as lacking sufficient capital and are too dependent on their husbands. Unfortunately, immigrant women are often made dependent on men by immigration laws and by their migration type (for instance, immigrant women are overrepresented in family reunification or refugee migration flows) that force them to the private sphere (Kofman et al., 2000). Consequently, they are more likely to face difficulties in acquiring social rights (Mahieu et al., 2015), in accessing political institutions, or in being politically represented and recognized (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006).

Moreover, Young (1989) claims that the public sphere is blind to differences such as in gender, sex, ethnicity, race, class, and culture, and that all individuals who enter the public and engage in politics must do so on the same terms (i.e., they must all be the same to White, bourgeois men). Thus, the public excludes individuals, or aspects of individuals, that are viewed as different, forcing all particularities like femaleness or the foreigner status into the private sphere. As members of society who are identified as “different” for belonging primarily to racialized groups (Ng, 1987, p.269), immigrant women face greater barriers in accessing and incorporating into mainstream society and are rendered invisible, marginalized, misrecognized, and oppressed (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Erel, 2009). Thus, Lister (2003) suggests that the private and the public spheres must be rearticulated for immigrant women to be considered active citizens alongside other members, even if they hold their duties in the private sphere. For instance, there must be a deconstruction of the sexualized and racialized values and qualities associated with the public and private, eliminating such qualities associated with each sphere. This can permit the inclusion of immigrant women as political actors whose political participation may take place in, or be influenced by, the private sphere.

For example, Vromen (2003) argues that women often draw on their social identities as women and mothers to justify their claims to citizenship rights based on research conducted in Australia and Canada. Individuals do not cease to be women or mothers once they enter the public sphere, thus they use the skills learned and practiced as a woman and a mother to engage in political participation and influence change in both the public and private spheres. Kondo (2012) also notes in her study of immigrant women in the United States that women’s political activism is often

motivated by the need to improve conditions for their families and communities, a form of political participation known as “activist mothering” (p.115). Therefore, the private and the public spheres are often interconnected, and the qualities that often distinguish each must be rearticulated to recognize immigrant women as political actors.

The Achievements of Feminist Debates

Feminist scholars have achieved to illustrate how women in general have been excluded from being defined as political actors through citizenship discourses. Moreover, by conceptualizing new understandings of citizenship, they have demonstrated not only how the concept can be inclusive of women, but also how it remains significant in exploring broadened terms of inclusion (Wotherspoon, 2018). Nevertheless, what sets immigrant women apart from other women is that they must cross borders and settle into a new society that often embraces a different culture and worldview, and that is often hostile to racialized foreigners (Bonifacio, 2012; Ralston, 2006), presenting additional challenges to how they become politically incorporated in society. Feminist scholars do not often focus their discussions on the effects of migration on immigrant women’s ability to become politically incorporated, aside from their scholarly interests in how marginalized immigrants are reconceptualizing and transgressing the limits of citizenship through their political acts and practices. This is often explored in studies of migrant women (and men), those who do not possess citizenship and yet who challenge the boundaries and meanings of the term by engaging in political activism or seeking political representation in their receiving society (see Adbi, 2006; Hsiung & Nichol, 2010; Koopmans et al., 2005; Soysal, 1994). In this case, the effects of migration are often viewed by scholars in terms of migrants’ limited access to formal political institutions due to their status as foreigners and outsiders (Bauböck, 2006; Fennema & Tillie, 2001).

There are a few scholars and researchers, such as Dobrowolsky and Tastsoglou (2006) and Erel (2009), who discuss at length the link between women, migration, and citizenship practices. For instance, Erel (2009) explains that migration to Britain and Germany has constructed an ethnicized “Other”, where immigrant women from Turkey are often perceived as passive, oppressed by men, and embracing backward traditions (p.2). Being positioned differently in terms of race and ethnicity, these women experience differential access to resources and are prevented from emerging as political actors in their new society. Therefore, migration denies immigrant women the capacity to become political actors because they enter a new society that constructs

their differences as “the Other Other of Europeanness” (in terms of gender and race or ethnicity) (Erel, 2009, p.23).

Dobrowolsky and Tastsoglou (2006) also acknowledge that immigrant women are distinguished from the general population of women by their “Otherness”, which includes ethnicity and entry status (as independent or dependent migrants), and this distinction plays a role in immigrant women’s access to citizenship rights (p.18). However, they also argue that migration is a complex and multidimensional process (involving the micro, meso, and macro levels) where there are dynamics such as power relations that women can experience that may have an impact on their social, economic, political, and cultural settlement in their new society. To this end, how migration is experienced can impact immigrant women’s citizenship practices and their sense of belonging in society. However, more research is needed to identify how experiences like power relations a) play out during migration and b) create conditions that hinder or facilitate immigrant women’s political participation and incorporation. More research is also needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape the relationship between migration and political incorporation.

Moreover, Erel (2009) stresses how institutional laws and regulations, such as immigration legislation and recruitment, are gendered and play a role in limiting the opportunities for immigrant women, particularly since these laws and regulations categorize women into dependent roles that restrict their access to political resources. Wotherspoon (2018) highlights in an editorial piece on migration that the experience of citizenship and inclusion will depend on the conditions of entry (open versus restrictive), the explicit and implicit immigration criteria, and the restrictions associated with various migrant categories (e.g., guest workers, refugees, or other irregular migrants; p.157). However, more research is required to understand how gendered laws and regulations affect immigrant women’s political incorporation. Other gender-related factors during migration may also influence political incorporation, yet studies on these are limited. To this end, another group of scholars has sought to understand in greater depth the migratory factors that limit immigrants’ political participation (both men and women) and the extent to which they are politically incorporated (Piper, 2006).

The Relations between Migration and Political Participation

Empirical studies have been conducted in the field of migration and political studies with the goal of explaining how experiences related to migration can constrain or facilitate immigrants' political incorporation and their opportunities for political participation. According to these studies, the political participation of immigrants can be mediated by two broad factors: the effects of pre-migration experiences and of post-migration experiences. Conventionally, migration is understood and defined as the movement of individuals over some distance from one place of usual residency (e.g., the country of origin or homeland) to another place of residency (e.g., the receiving society or the country of settlement; Kok, 1999). While migration is not new, what has changed in recent years is the number and scale of migrants, with the number of international migrants worldwide increasing from 221 million in 2000 to over 272 million (or 3.5 percent of the world's population) in 2019 as a result of political, economic, and social phenomena such as civil wars and human rights abuses, ethnic violence, extreme poverty, climate change, and accelerated globalization (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; International Organization for Migration, 2019). This growing scale of migration has led scholars like Castles and Miller (1998, p.3) and Schapendonk (2012, p.28) to declare that we are now living in the "age of migration." In addition to migration's growing scale, it has become a complex phenomenon for both nation-states and immigrants. One complexity is the challenge that governments have in politically incorporating their immigrants (Bauböck, 2006). The following is an overview of empirically based scholarly works focused on pre- and post-migration experiences, as well as how they contribute to our understanding of the relations between migration and political incorporation.

Pre-Migration Experiences and Political Participation

The first body of research under consideration analyzes the effects of pre-migration experiences on immigrants' political incorporation in their receiving countries (e.g., Bilodeau, 2008; Bilodeau, 2016; Black, 1987; Jones-Correa, 1998; Wals, 2011). Bilodeau (2008) contends that scholars have made few attempts to comprehensively assess the impacts of immigrants' pre-migration political experiences. Existing studies that pay attention to this, on the other hand, highlight some important variables influencing immigrants' political incorporation. For instance, scholars have drawn attention to transferability (Black, 1987), imported political socialization or pre-migration socialization (Jones-Correa, 1998; Wals, 2011), repressive regimes (Bilodeau,

2008), and experiences with gender inequalities (Bilodeau, 2016).⁵ Overall, it is believed that immigrants do not enter their receiving societies as political blank slates, but that their pre-migration experiences with politics may shape their political involvement in their new society (Wals, 2011). As White (2017) explains, immigrants' earliest political experiences take place in another context that may be quite different from that of their receiving country, thus, it is necessary to study how immigrants' political experiences in their country of origin may create political differences between themselves and the native population.

To this end, Black's (1987) research on immigrants' political inclusion in Canada begins by asking the following question: "[w]hat is the relationship between immigrants' past political experiences and their subsequent involvement in the life of their new polity?" (p.731). Central to his research is the idea of 'transferability' and whether immigrants can quickly integrate into the Canadian political context by transferring their previous political skills and aptitude for politics.⁶ To study this, Black (1987) utilizes five indicators of involvement in Canada: partisanship (affiliation with political parties), interest in Canadian politics, participation in communal activity, contact with politicians, and knowledge of Canadian politics. Based on the comparisons to past involvement, Black (1987) found that transferability does occur among immigrants, even among those from political contexts that differ from that of Canada. While there is a lot to learn in their new society, immigrants draw upon the skills and lessons they learned in the past to facilitate their understanding of, and incorporation into, Canadian politics. Moreover, already possessing political skills from their country of origin is important in terms of ethnic politics, where immigrants can transfer their skills to create and lead ethnic organizations, and ultimately incorporate ethnic-related needs and concerns at the centre of political debates in Canada. However, Black (1987) found that these results depended on whether immigrants were politically interested in politics in their country of origin or whether they determined political involvement as an important factor of becoming fully incorporated into Canadian society.

Wals (2011) also seeks to understand the relationship between immigrants' pre-migration experiences and their post-migration political engagement by uncovering whether immigrants' political attitudes and behaviours remain the same as they cross borders. Thus, 'imported

⁵ These will be further reviewed in the subsequent discussion.

⁶ Black (1987) is also interested in studying recent migrants and whether they can experience transference soon after arrival in Canada. Thus, his research includes both immigrants and migrants having lived in Canada five years or less.

socialization' is key to Wals' (2011) research, and how immigrants' pre-migration political socialization — in terms of the political views, trust, and behaviours they were socialized to adopt in their country of origin — is linked to their views and behaviours in their receiving society. By studying the vote intention of first-generation Mexican immigrants in the United States, Wals (2011) found that their attitudes about, and their attachment to Mexican politics, correspond to their views and actions in the United States. That is, if the respondents had trust in the Mexican government, they also had trust in the American government. If they had an attachment to a Mexican political party, this increased their likelihood of participating in the United States' elections. Therefore, as with skills and aptitude, pre-migration political attitudes and behaviours travel with immigrants to their new political context.

The preceding studies demonstrate that pre-migration experiences influence the likelihood of political engagement in a new country, particularly for those who displayed political attitudes, skills, and behaviours in their country of origin. However, a significant issue with studies of immigrants' pre-migration political experiences is their focus on electoral or formal politics, while often discounting non-electoral political participation (Burt, 2000). In her study of the impacts of ethnicity⁷ on the political participation of Asian and Mexican Americans, Lien (1994) defines participation as primarily formal and electoral, such as voting, partisanship, campaign contributions, and contacting officials and the media, though she acknowledges the non-electoral participation of group-related community work. Even Black (1987) and Wals (2011) consider voting in elections as the most meaningful measure of participation. According to Burt (2002), early studies of participation that took place primarily in the United States were based on a narrow definition of the political, referring to the formal political sphere like voting in national elections. This precedence of studying voting patterns is partially due to the popularity of survey research in the social sciences, where researchers focused on events that could be easily measured (for instance, the frequency and direction of voting; Burt, 2002). This is true for Black (1987) and Wals' (2011) studies, with the former using a 1983 Toronto-area survey with the addition of face-to-face interviewing techniques, and the latter using the Mexican Values Survey (MVS 2003). Lien (1994) also draws on the 1984 California statewide survey, in addition to telephone interviews.

⁷ Ethnicity is defined by Wals (2011) as a pre-migration factor.

In addition to methodological influences, Burt (2002) claims that studies were inspired by Woodward and Roper's 1950 report, which proposed five channels of political participation: voting, interest group activity, personal communications with legislators, party activity, and habitual political discussion. Because this report went unchallenged by researchers, political participation in research became limited to electoral activities. As per Verba et al. (1987), limiting the concept of political participation to voting also limits its understanding to one form of participation among many. Further, Morales (2011) contends that early understandings of political participation that are limited to voting, particularly in studies of immigrant political participation, falsely assume that electoral participation and non-participation patterns reflect the degree of political incorporation achieved by immigrant groups. For immigrants, voting may not be the most common form of political participation in the same way that it may be for the native population, thus, it becomes inadequate to focus solely on the electoral dimension of participation. Moreover, Verba et al. (1987) argue that political participation can occur not only during election season but also in between election periods for concerns that are not necessarily related to elections but rather to individuals' needs and concerns. Therefore, limiting political participation to electoral participation is insufficient in the study of immigrant political behaviour.

Furthermore, early studies on immigrants' pre-migration political experiences have neglected a gendered approach that sheds light on why immigrant women face greater barriers to political incorporation than immigrant men, including within the Canadian context (Bilodeau, 2016). This is due, in part, to women being ignored in migration research (Erel, 2009; Harzig, 2001; Lutz, 2010); the view that immigrant women (and men) were politically passive or apolitical (Erel, 2009; Lister, 2003; Martiniello, 2006); and the inaccuracy of viewing immigrants and their political incorporation as homogenous (Erel, 2009; Martiniello, 2006). To respond to some of these gaps in the literature, Bilodeau (2008, 2016) focuses his studies on both the non-electoral political participation of immigrants and immigrant women's political participation in Canada.

In his earlier study, Bilodeau (2008) suggests that having previously lived in a repressive regime can discourage immigrants from participating in protest politics (which are often repressed in such countries). Protest politics in his study include signing petitions, joining boycotts, or demonstrating publicly. Thus, while Black's (1987) study found no difference in voting patterns between immigrants from diverse political contexts and the native population, Bilodeau's (2008) research suggests that immigrants from repressive political regimes abstain from protest politics

more than others. In fact, Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001) conclude that coming from a repressive regime has little influence on voting patterns among immigrants in the United States since voting is done anonymously, whereas protest politics is done publicly, often to express discontent with the government. Thus, Bilodeau (2008) sheds light on two things. First, immigrants' pre-migration experiences of political repression are enduring and persistent, with previous socialization influencing their willingness to voice their political opinions through protest activities in the receiving country. Second, immigrants' pre-migration experiences will have varying impacts on the type of political participation. That is, while their experiences may not necessarily impact their participation in electoral politics, they may in terms of unconventional politics that did not adhere to their native country's political norms.

In his study of immigrant women's political participation in Canada, Bilodeau (2016) seeks to highlight the impact of pre-migration experiences of gender inequalities on their participation in five Canadian Election Studies (post-election surveys) and their tendency to provide non-responses to questions in the surveys. Not only does Bilodeau (2016) consider the experiences of immigrant women from their country of origin that may affect their political participation in Canada, but he also considers these women's propensity and "quality" of participation in political surveys as an alternative and unconventional form of political participation (p.953). Overall, Bilodeau (2016) observed that the greater the gender disparities experienced by immigrant women in their countries of origin, the more difficult it was to retain these women to participate in the post-election surveys. Even when they agreed to participate in the Canadian Election Studies, their tendency to answer all political questions decreased as gender inequalities in the countries of origin increased. According to Bilodeau (2016), immigrant women from countries where gender inequalities prevail appear to be more reluctant to express their political feelings since it may have been perceived as inappropriate for them to acquire knowledge or interest in their home country's politics, encouraging them to remain silent, even if they may hold political opinions.

Jones-Correa (1998) earlier argued that immigrant women draw on their pre-migration experiences and socialization in politics to provide the blueprints for their political participation in their receiving country. Consequently, if immigrant women were socialized to not engage politically in their country of origin, their experience can serve as a model for their participation in Canada (Bilodeau, 2008). However, Bilodeau (2008) alludes that the reverse could also be true, where immigrant women who experienced gender inequalities and oppression may want to enjoy

their new-found political freedom. Moreover, for those who had the chance to mobilize politically in their country of origin, their willingness or ability to participate politically may not translate to Canada. For instance, Ralston (2006) argues that immigrant women can enter different environments in Canada that in turn influence the degree of their political participation, such as living in a rural town versus a metropolitan area that provides more, or less, opportunities for political participation.

The studies above have illustrated that immigrants' pre-migration political experiences can affect their post-migration political experiences, and that ignoring this would result in explanations of immigrant political participation that are incomplete (Wals, 2011). However, a second group of scholars argue that studying pre-migration experiences alone are not enough to analyze and explain for immigrants' level of political participation. According to Oliveira and Carvalhais (2017), a background of political experiences does little in incorporating immigrants into politics unless there are opportunities and political resources available in the receiving country.

Post-Migration Experiences and Political Participation

Whereas studies on pre-migration experiences often identify predictors of immigrants' political participation based on prior experiences, studies on post-migration factors often favour explanations based on structural approaches that link political participation to structures of opportunities and constraints in the receiving country (Morales & Pilati, 2011). According to Morales and Giugni (2011), European scholarship has developed a large body of work that is specifically concerned with post-migration experiences, which they divide into three categories. First, European scholarship has traditionally studied immigrants' political participation in relation to their post-migration individual characteristics, such as civic resources (time, money, civic skills). A second more recent development in European scholarship has stressed the importance of group-level resources in explaining why certain ethnic groups are more successfully incorporated into the political sphere. Third, European scholarship has borrowed from an existing theoretical framework known as *political opportunity theory* to account for the differences in immigrants' political incorporation across political settings (Morales & Giugni, 2011). Overall, European scholarship has inspired numerous studies in Western liberal democracies on post-migration determinants of immigrant political incorporation, shedding light on three broad factors: immigrants' individual characteristics (the role of human capital), their embeddedness in social

networks (the role of social capital), and the political opportunity structures of their new country (the role of political capital).

The Role of Human Capital. Giugni and Morales (2011) contend that the study of political participation has traditionally focused on individual-level factors, where political participation is influenced by individual pre-dispositions, attitudes, and personal resources. Scholars refer to this as human capital, which, according to Diehl and Blohm (2001), includes time, money, civic skills, political interest, and personal belief in one's own political efficiency that impact political participation. These resources are often mediated by one's socioeconomic status and social networks (Brady et al., 1995; Diehl & Blohm, 2001). Moreover, these resources can be acquired and developed in non-political spaces such as the workplace, schools, organizations, or religious institutions (Brady et al., 1995). Scholars who correlate individual-level resources to immigrants' political participation argue that if immigrants lack the personal traits and resources required to participate, their opportunity to become politically incorporated is limited. Part of this relates to the number of years immigrants have spent in their receiving society.

For instance, Adman and Strömblad's (2018) study of immigrants in Sweden and their political knowledge (as an aspect of political incorporation) generally found that immigrants reported increases in their political knowledge over time. After about thirty years in Sweden, immigrants achieved comparable levels of political knowledge as the native-born population. The increase in political knowledge was attributed to improved language skills and gained education. Furthermore, White (2017) found that immigrants from repressive regimes demonstrated evidence of political learning in Canada due to political resocialization in the early years of arrival. Thus, the above research studies suggest that immigrants are more likely to politically incorporate if they are exposed to the politics of their receiving country for a longer period and are re-socialized early in their settlement to acquire relevant skills and resources to participate (Rooij, 2012). Yet, Rooij (2012) underlines how immigrants are more likely to possess lower levels of education, employment, income, and job security, socioeconomic factors that have been posited by scholars as equipping individuals with the necessary civic skills to first understand politics, and then become politically engaged. Indeed, lower levels of political participation among certain groups of immigrants are often attributed to socioeconomic status and resources. For example, in Li's (2020) study of immigrant women's civic engagement (participation such as voting habits, signing petitions, membership in political and local organizations, and participation in religious groups)

and wellbeing in Canada, socioeconomic factors such as higher levels of education, employment in the paid labour force, and employment in a high-paying job (traits often associated with upper- and middle-classes) were shown to significantly facilitate civic participation for immigrant women as they help immigrant women integrate into society and develop the skills, motivation, and knowledge that are important to participate.

Giugni and Morales (2011) also identify gender as influencing political participation, where women are less inclined to be actively engaged in politics. Gender, according to O'Neill (2006), plays an important role in relation to human capital acquisition in the Canadian context, since gender differences can determine one's socioeconomic status such as the levels of educational attainment, income, and occupational status, all of which affect political participation. For immigrant women, this is in part due to the gender norms embedded in immigration laws (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Morokvasic-Müller, 2014; O'Neill et al., 2012). For instance, the immigration policy in Canada employs a points system that evaluates all applications based on education, language skills, work experience, and the ability to work in the Canadian labour market (Banting, 2010; Kazemipur, 2014; O'Neill et al., 2012). However, it is often the male head of the family that meets these criteria under the economic class, with many migrant women entering the country under the family class, either as spouses or dependents of the male family member who entered the country prior (O'Neill et al., 2012; Simmons, 2010). By assuming that immigrant women are 'dependents' or by classifying them in terms of their relationship to men (such as a spouse or daughter), Boyd and Grieco (2003) contend that immigrant women are automatically placed in a family role. As a result, their opportunities for political participation are constrained in comparison to those of native-born women since they are less likely to be employed or are more likely to be recruited for jobs that resembles their position in the household such as a domestic worker (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Morokvasic-Müller, 2014; O'Neill et al., 2012).

Moreover, immigrant women may not have the time, energy, or resources to pursue a higher education or a better paying job due to their roles as mothers and wives, constraining the opportunities of achieving greater political participation in Canada (O'Neill et al., 2012). However, even when women possess relatively the same skillset and knowledge as men, their ability to translate these skills into political participation will differ because of barriers due to gender norms. Men in Canada, for instance, will more often participate in formal political activities such as running for office, whereas women will more often participate in informal political activities and

in political activities that reflect their position as primary consumers and purchasers in the household due to gender norms (O'Neill, 2006). Thus, gender plays a role in determining the opportunities and resources that allow women to participate.

Nevertheless, not all recognizable characteristics and resources have an impact on immigrants' political participation. For example, Giugni and Morales (2011) conclude that discrimination has a mixed effect on immigrants. To illustrate, Bilodeau's (2017) study of racialized foreign-born and native-born people living in the province of Québec found that perceived discrimination was associated with weaker political engagement in mainstream politics like voting in Québec elections, however, perceived discrimination was also associated with higher political engagement in non-electoral political activities like boycotting and signing a petition. Comparably, Madibbo (2007a, 2007b) found that Black Francophone immigrants living in Anglophone regions in Canada like Toronto, Ontario encountered racism, injustices, and institutional barriers, as well as racism and power inequities within White Francophone communities. Yet, rather than discouraging this community from participating politically, Black Francophones' experiences of discrimination served as a catalyst for them to build stronger communities and identify strategies of resistance to remove barriers, contest racism and power inequities, bring about institutional change, and gain economic and political rights. These strategies included non-electoral activities like creating political and social organizations, advocating for Black youth rights, and forging coalitions with other Black communities.

Furthermore, a lower socioeconomic status and a lack of resources does not necessarily equate to the lack of political engagement. According to both Diehl and Blohm (2001) and O'Neill (2006), immigrants' social networks and ethnic organizations play an important role in increasing their members' levels of political participation through collective mobilization and the skills they acquire in the positions they occupy in the group. For instance, organizations like the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada (established in 1986) would compensate for those immigrants who did not have sufficient resources, or the education expected to increase their levels of political participation, by providing the necessary political resources and the encouragement to mobilize (O'Neill et al., 2012). Lastly, resources are expected to enhance political participation insofar as immigrants are willing and able to participate (Rooij, 2012).

The Role of Social Capital. Social networks are defined by Massey et al. (1993) as a set of interpersonal ties that connect migrants to those who are settled through kinship, friendship, and

shared origins. However, social networks can include other ties outside the immediate circle of family and friends (Schapendonk, 2012). Regardless, what makes these ties important to immigrants is that they shape their subsequent incorporation by providing relevant resources and information, as well as establishing access to social, economic, political, and human capital that facilitates their incorporation. In the context of political incorporation, social networks are thought to increase the levels of immigrant political participation by generating social capital. Nguyen Long (2016) defines social capital as “the value entrenched in [...] relationships” that transform into necessary and relevant resources that an individual obtains to pursue individual or collective interests (p.820). Thus, social capital can enhance one’s ability to take political action.

Nguyen Long (2016) identifies three ways in which social capital can facilitate this: a) it provides immigrants with politically relevant knowledge, b) it promotes norms for political participation, and c) it establishes and maintains relationships that improve participation. Yet, these depend on the type of social ties. In Nguyen Long’s (2016) study, she found that bridging ties rather than bonding ties provided immigrants with the resources and connections necessary to facilitate voting, political organization, and protest. According to Teorell (2003), when there are weak ties in a social network, it enhances immigrants’ political participation because these ties increase the likelihood of being connected to multiple people with different social backgrounds, resulting in a wider scope of information that is being received, including politically relevant information. This is often known as bridging social capital or ties. Examples of bridging ties activities among Canadians include taking part in religious organizations, recreational groups, or volunteerism (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2009). In contrast, Teorell (2003) explains that the tighter the bond in a social network (such as with friends or kin), the lesser the information immigrants will receive as they bond with individuals who are very similar to themselves. This type of bond is known as bonding social capital or ties. Examples of bonding ties activities among Canadians include talking to friends and neighbours (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2009). Therefore, what makes an individual more prone to take political action is not primarily the tightly knit, bonding networks of friendship and kin, but being connected to large and loosely tied networks as it increases the potential of receiving more political information and resources.

Bevelander and Pendakur’s (2009) study also found that social networks had a greater impact on immigrants’ political participation than ‘minority status’. One of their research goals was to determine the degree to which differences in voting probabilities were a product of

immigrant status as compared to a set of social capital attributes. Exploring the differences between the Canadian-born majority population, Canadian-born minority population, and immigrants with Canadian citizenship, Bevelander and Pendakur (2009) found that social capital attributes had a much greater impact on voting behaviour than minority status (i.e., ethnic origin, immigrant status, and language), which the latter appeared to not affect voting patterns. If this is the case, immigrants who rely on social networks may be less engaged politically, not because of their minority status, but because their social ties may not encourage or recruit them into politics. To illustrate further, Morales and Pilati's (2011) research found that immigrants in ethnic organizations who experienced ethnically segregated patterns of social interaction were less active in political affairs. This was particularly true for ethnically intimate social networks. Yet, Morales and Pilati (2011) also found that ethnic organizations that were politically active in promoting the interests and concerns of immigrants (such as ethnic advocacy organizations) enhanced immigrants' political interest in the politics of both their receiving society and their country of origin. Thus, when social networks encourage political participation, immigrants are far more likely to engage politically.

In the case of immigrant women, gender can influence the formation of social networks and how these networks, in turn, impact political participation. According to Lowndes (2000), taking gender into consideration is important for two reasons. First, men and women will have different types of social networks and social capital, and second, how their social networks link to patterns of political participation will differ. Moore (1990) explains that women often have more ties to family and kin in comparison to men. Having children at home can limit their opportunity to create bridging ties, and by retaining responsibility for much of the household work and childcare, even when they are employed, women's opportunities to form bridging ties are constrained. However, in Gidengil and Stolle's (2009) study of immigrant women's political participation in two of Canada's largest metropolitan areas (Toronto and Montréal), they found that immigrant women do not always conform to expectations. For instance, bridging ties were not more useful in enhancing immigrant women's political participation. Instead, when it came to unconventional political participation like protest politics or learning about Canadian politics, bonding ties with close friends proved more useful in comparison to weak ties with acquaintances, neighbours, and co-workers (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009). Only when immigrant women are connected to individuals with relevant resources and political knowledge does bridging ties enhance political participation. Thus, it is the resources embedded in social networks and the

access to these resources that proves more instrumental than bridging or bonding ties. Overall, the impact of social ties for immigrants in general will depend on the type of activity, whether that activity promotes political participation, and whether these ties provide access to resources that are relevant to political participation.

The Role of Political Capital. According to Cinalli and Giugni (2011), immigrants' political behaviour is too often explained with little or no reference to the macro level. Yet, the political context in which they settle is important since it alone may promote higher levels of political participation among immigrants (Morales & Pilati, 2011). While political opportunity structures were first theorized in the context of social movements' mobilization and outcomes, it was recently adopted by migration scholars to help explore immigrants' political participation (Oliveira & Carvalhais, 2017; Statham, 1999). Within the latter, the approach argues that immigrants' participation is shaped by constraints and opportunities of the political system that define the possibilities of becoming politically active. This includes the laws that assign different statuses and rights to social groups, the government institutions that may or may not represent immigrants, and public discourses that are inclusive or rejecting of particular collective identities (Cinalli & Giugni, 2011; Koopmans et al., 2005; Morales & Giugni, 2011). Consequently, three themes can be identified from the literature on the ways in which the political context can influence immigrants' political participation, as discussed below: a) it can constrain their opportunities, b) it can influence perceptions on opportunities for political involvement, and c) it can influence how immigrants become politically engaged.

Focusing on minority groups and their collective action, Statham (1999) identifies two ways in which the political context constrains one's opportunity for political participation. The first relates to status of citizenship rights. That is, minorities who are granted full citizenship rights will have greater opportunities of accessing the political system and be granted greater legitimacy in the public sphere compared to those who are denied access to citizenship rights. As illustrated in the previous section, feminist scholars have demonstrated how immigrant women are denied access to substantive citizenship rights, hindering their opportunities of participating politically. The second way in which the political context constrains opportunities relates to the cultural obligations on the part of the immigrant that the state imposes to access citizenship rights (Statham, 1999). Namely, a state's incorporation strategy and immigrants' ability to incorporate can dictate whether they are granted full citizenship rights. To illustrate, studies outline three broad citizenship

regimes regarding ‘cultural differences’ that a nation-state generally adopts, which influences how immigrants incorporate (Freeman, 2004; Statham, 1999). First, the differential exclusion model associated with regimes such as Germany’s and Austria’s prevent immigrants from permanently settling in their receiving society since they are required to fully assimilate and convert to the dominant national culture. Second, the multicultural model associated with the United States and Canada takes a pluralist approach to settlement, in which the state recognizes the right of the minority to retain a degree of ethnic or religious distinction as part of being fully incorporated. Third, the assimilation model associated with France and Britain embodies some elements of exclusion and some elements of accommodation.

Translating these into opportunities, Statham (1999) explains that immigrants who meet the nation-state’s criteria in terms of cultural difference, find it easier to access citizenship rights and participate politically. Yet, those who face cultural assimilation also face greater exclusion from accessing citizenship rights as they often do not conform to the dominant culture; otherwise, they are forced to use unconventional forms of politics, like religious or ethnic organizations, to advocate for greater access to citizenship rights. Thus, macro structures like citizenship regimes and integration policies can determine who in society will become political actors. Yet, opportunity structures are multidimensional. As Soehl (2013) argues, the legal and discursive context at both the national and local levels can shape immigrants’ political incorporation, and both levels can be contradictory and shifting, affecting the degree of participation.

Moreover, researchers like Giugni and Morariu (2007) and Oliveira and Carvalhais (2017) seek to understand the relationship between macro structures and immigrants’ perceptions on opportunities in influencing political participation. Giugni and Morariu (2007) compare both structural and perceived opportunities for political participation in Geneva for Italians and Kosovars. While both cultural groups faced very similar structural political opportunities, they had different perceptions of these opportunities based on their experiences in society, where the Kosovars had more negative views towards the Swiss government in terms of respecting cultural difference and providing access to citizenship.⁸ On the other hand, Oliveira and Carvalhais’ (2017) study on Portugal concludes that macro structures such as party systems, the citizenship regime, and the degree of access to political rights work together with immigrants’ perceptions on

⁸ Giugni and Morariu (2007) found only limited support of the impact of perceived opportunities on the political participation of immigrants, though this may be due to the study’s limitations and its preliminary results.

opportunities to influence their political participation. For instance, the authors found that political parties placed no restrictions on who can be admitted as a new member based on nationality. Therefore, even immigrants had the opportunity to become new members. Yet, when citizenship regimes are restrictive, when there is a lack of immigrant lobbying, when society distrusts politicians, and when immigrants cannot speak the language or face economic obstacles, it triggers a perception that there are obstacles to immigrants' political participation. Therefore, the political opportunity structure may create opportunities or constraints for political participation, yet Oliveira and Carvalhais (2017) also acknowledge that these are only meaningful when they are perceived by individuals. If immigrants believe that there is an opportunity to engage, they are more likely to do so in comparison to those who perceive obstacles to that goal. As a result, structure and agency are connected, where the political context interacts with how individuals perceive this context as relating to real opportunities for political involvement (Oliveira & Carvalhais, 2017).

Lastly, political opportunity structures can affect how immigrants engage politically in their receiving society (Diehl & Blohm, 2001). For instance, political opportunities can influence the incentives and opportunities for immigrants to promote group formation based on shared identities and to mobilize around issues that are relevant to their ethnic group. Statham's (1999) study identifies four types of political participation by immigrants: "conventional" forms such as public statements and press conferences; "demonstrative" forms such as peaceful demonstrations and vigils; "confrontational" forms such as protests, strikes, hunger strikes, and boycotts; and "violent" forms such as illegal acts that cause harm or damage to people or property (p.612). According to Statham (1999), immigrant groups whose identities were recognized by the British government as being legitimate had greater access to conventional forms of participation than those who were not recognized.⁹ For instance, immigrants of African Caribbean background used conventional forms of political participation such as public statements as they were recognized by the British government, in contrast to Muslims who used more confrontational forms of political participation and Asians who used more violent acts. However, Ralston's (2006) study on South Asian women in Canada and Australia illustrates how the constraints of the political opportunity

⁹ This is explained by Statham (1999) as the British government's recognition of the collective identity that minority groups adopt to organize themselves and make claims to rights. This includes national origin, ethnicity, religion, or common status. If the British government does not recognize the identity as being legitimate, their political opportunity is constrained, and the group must rely on alternative means of participation, if willing.

structure can translate into successful political participation through unconventional forms and along ethnically based interests. For instance, the women relied on membership in advocacy-oriented community organizations to affirm their right as citizens to belong to the political community. In such organizations, they can translate awareness and articulate concerns about racist and sexist discrimination into active resistance, legislation, policies, programs, and actions that transform unequal and unjust structures in society (Ralston, 2006).

However, the most significant impact of the political opportunity structure is its influence on immigrants' cross-border political participation, or transnational political participation (Chaudhary & Moss, 2016). Oftentimes, transnationalism is identified as a pattern of immigrant incorporation (see FitzGerald, 2015; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Simmons, 2010), involving the sense of home and belonging that develops in more than one context, particularly in both one's country of origin and one's receiving society.¹⁰ That is, while immigrants incorporate into their receiving society, they remain involved in their country of origin, ultimately creating transnational social fields.¹¹ The same can be said for immigrants' political incorporation and participation. For instance, in his study on the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Toronto, Canada, Ashutosh (2013) observed how the diaspora protested the escalated violence in Sri Lanka in 2008 and 2009 and how they demanded recognition of the oppression of Tamils and of the legitimacy of Tamil Eelam (a separate state and homeland for Sri Lankan Tamils). According to Ashutosh (2013), these protests in Toronto are illustrative of how long-distance nationalism became a form of political participation by the diaspora, while simultaneously establishing their political incorporation in Canada. Yet, as per Chaudhary and Moss (2016), there are limited studies on how the political opportunity structure in the receiving country can influence political participation aimed towards the country of origin. According to Koopmans et al. (2005), in most cases when immigrants engage in the politics of their country of origin, it is a response to Western countries' exclusive institutions, such as citizenship, which constrain political opportunities in the receiving country. Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo (2005) also find that immigrants engage in transnational

¹⁰ Basch et al. (1994) proposed the now classical definition of transnationalism as "... the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (p.8).

¹¹ Transnational social fields can also be defined as transnational social spaces or transnational communities (Pitkänen, 2012), where immigrants maintain economic, political, and social networks that span across several nation-states, and define membership in these communities based on a shared identity (Al-Ali & Khoser, 2003).

participation when they encounter greater discrimination in the receiving country, thus directing their political participation towards their country of origin.

Evaluating Scholarship in Migration and Political Studies

Migration scholars have done exceptional work over the years of identifying the relevant determinants of immigrants' political participation in both their country of origin and their receiving society. Altogether, research can broadly be divided into two bodies of literature: the pre-migration and the post-migration determinants of political incorporation. However, more research is required to better understand the associations between the pre-migration and post-migration experiences in impacting immigrants' political incorporation, as illustrated in Landolt et al.'s (2011) study on Latin Americans in Canada. This study highlights in part Latin Americans' political incorporation as being affected by both pre-migration and post-migration factors, which include immigrants' agency, their pre-migration political context, their political socialization in Canada, and the effects of macro structures such as state policies and funding.

Moreover, a few of the authors (e.g., Diehl & Blohm, 2001; Morales & Pilati, 2011; Oliveira & Carvalhais, 2017) acknowledge that studies that isolate the impact of individual characteristics, social networks, and the political opportunity structure are inconsistent with reality and dismiss how each dimension might be interrelated in influencing and shaping immigrants' political participation. Lastly, existing studies do not consider how migration itself affects political incorporation. It is evident that the experiences before and after can affect political participation in complex ways. However, migration in these studies is not analyzed as a variable affecting political participation. Instead, it is viewed as a rupture in one's life as immigrants must cross territorial, cultural, or social boundaries; enter new relationships in new spaces; and experience a new culture (Ralston, 2006; Tastsoglou, 2006). And it is the experiences before and thereafter that interest scholars. Yet, it is less common to find research explaining how the mobility phase, both as a complex experience and process, relates to and affect political incorporation.

A Unique Approach to the Study of Immigrant Women's Political Incorporation

Migration is too often depicted as a singular movement from one state of fixity to another state of fixity (Schapendonk, 2012). Yet, Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008) contends that this approach to migration overlooks the critical time spent in-between departure and settlement — the mobility phase — that can impact the entire migration and incorporation process. According to

Wals (2011), immigrants' sense of identity in their receiving society is profoundly influenced by the experiences of crossing one or multiple borders. For instance, if their migration experience is full of uncertainties and vulnerabilities, this will add to their insecurities and hinder how well they settle in their receiving societies. Thus, the experiences undergone by immigrants during mobility can have effects on their political incorporation, either by facilitating or hindering their ability to politically participate in their new society. Wachter et al.'s (2016) study on Congolese refugee women and their resettlement in the United States identifies how women's experiences during the migration process presented challenges in their social and economic incorporation. More specifically, they found that the women's migration experiences of trauma, violence, insecurity, isolation, and hardships intersected with their post-migration experiences to exacerbate the challenges they faced in the United States as they try to incorporate into the new society, leaving them feeling stressed and unsettled. Their study, thus, reveals that the experiences during migration can intersect with other stages of migration to have a direct impact on incorporation processes and outcomes. Therefore, I believe it is important to pay attention to the significance of migration in affecting immigrant women's political incorporation.

To accomplish this, I will employ a trajectory perspective to migration (Ho, 2011; Schapendonk et al., 2020; Schwarz, 2020) by studying migration trajectories, which will be informed by migration literature on transit migration (e.g., Collyer, 2007; Collyer et al., 2014; Ho, 2011; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Schapendonk, 2012; Schapendonk et al., 2020; Schwarz, 2020), the sociological life course perspective (e.g., Carling, 2005; Edmonston, 2013; George, 2009; Wingens et al., 2011), and the gender perspective of migration (e.g., Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Espín & Dottolo, 2015; Lutz, 2010; Timmerman et al., 2015). In my research, migration trajectories are understood as a dynamic process spanning from one's country of origin to one's final destination, defined as a trek or journey embedded with experiences and micro, meso and macro constraints or enablement. I have chosen to adopt a trajectory approach to migration to focus attention on the mobility or journey itself and gain insight into the experiences of immigrant women on these journeys from their country of origin to their final destination as they navigate through opportunities or constraints presented during and after migration (Ho, 2011; Schapendonk et al., 2020; Schwarz, 2020). Thus, a trajectory approach will a) place migration at the centre of my research, and b) define and analyze the links between migration and political incorporation.

Moreover, in studies of immigrants' political behaviour, scholars often employ the concept of *political integration* as an attempt to signify that the political inclusion of immigrants is a two-way process involving both the native-born population and immigrants (Morokvasic-Müller, 2014). This implies that both groups make the necessary efforts to converge (FitzGerald, 2015), diminish conflicts (Latcheva & Herzog-Punzenberger, 2011), and facilitate cohesion between the two (Bauböck, 2006). However, by employing the concept, scholars assume that the political inclusion of immigrants does not entail power relations (Anthias & Pajnik, 2014), and they suggest that immigrants must follow the political rules and standards set by the dominant group to be integrated (Kazemipur, 2014; Young, 1990). However, the concept of *political incorporation* is conceptualized as a dynamic process in which immigrants can shift from being less to more politically engaged (and vice versa; Kazemipur, 2014; Morales, 2011), their inclusion can manifest in various forms and with various actors (Bloemraad, 2006b; Portes et al., 2009), and they can experience conflict in their attempts for inclusion (Bloemraad, 2006b; Plotke, 1999). Therefore, to explore the political inclusion of immigrant women, I will engage with the concept of political incorporation to illustrate the complexity and variation in immigrant women's experiences and definition of political inclusion.¹²

Furthermore, since my study concerns the political incorporation of immigrant women, it is important to consider migration as deeply gendered (Bonifacio, 2012; Timmerman et al., 2015). Ever since scholars noted that women account for almost half of all international migrants, studies on gender and migration have proliferated (Bonifacio, 2012). Initial research revealed that gender and gender relations (the relations between men and women as defined by society or culture) can explain the differences between male and female migration outcomes (Timmerman et al., 2015). Willis and Yeoh (2000), for instance, acknowledged that immigrant men and women participate in political activities differently since immigrant women face differential and unequal power relations as compared to men throughout the migration process. Jones-Correa (1998) demonstrated this in his study on the political participation of Latin American immigrants in New York, where he observed that men and women engage in divergent political strategies. To illustrate, immigrant Latinas were more inclined to direct their political engagement towards their receiving society because of women's social contact with government institutions such as welfare services and

¹² Note that throughout this document, I purposely employ the concept 'political incorporation' in lieu of 'political integration' to reflect this reality. This is further elaborated in Chapter Three.

formal political institutions as mothers and homemakers. However, due to the declining status and class positions faced by immigrant men following migration (whether perceived or real), immigrant Latinos preferred to engage with the politics of their country of origin through their participation in immigrant organizations. By joining immigrant organizations, immigrant men could regain and retain the social standing they once held in their home country.

While these findings do not directly speak to power relations during migration, Jones-Correa's (1998) study demonstrates the need for a gender approach, since men and women would face disparities in incorporation patterns and modes of political participation. Yet, research on political incorporation has largely ignored how power dynamics or gender norms during migration might affect incorporation patterns. On the one hand, feminist scholars critically acknowledge the role of gender in their analyses of political participation, as evident in the debates discussed in the first section. Yet, most neglect to analyze the link between migration and political incorporation and the influence of gender on migration experiences. On the other hand, migration scholars are too quick to neglect the ways in which migration experiences are gendered, and they marginalize the concerns of immigrant women in terms of political incorporation and participation by focusing on immigrants as a homogenous social group (Bonifacio, 2012; Kofman et al., 2000). This can be said of many of the research discussed above, which contradicts assertions that the field of migration has increasingly accepted that gender is a fundamental organizing principle of society and essential in migration debates (e.g., Mahieu et al., 2015). Thus, I conceptualize migration trajectories from a gendered perspective.

A final gap in the literature of immigrant political incorporation is the narrow definition of political participation that refers to formal activities like voting (e.g., Bevelander & Pendakur, 2009; Black, 1987; Wals, 2001), political knowledge of formal governmental politics (e.g., Adman & Strömblad, 2018; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; White, 2017), and association with political parties (e.g., Oliveira & Carvalhais, 2017). As per Erel (2009), the narrow framework in the context of immigrant women limits their options for engaging with formal political institutions, especially since they are frequently marginalized from these institutions, often a result of the systems of oppression stemming from the intersections of their gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status, which also impact their repertoires of political activities (Harell, 2017). Thus, the repercussions of a narrow understanding of political participation are that women are identified as less politically engaged than other members of society and less interested in fulfilling their

potential as political citizens (Burt, 2002; Erel, 2009; M. Lister & Pia, 2008; R. Lister, 2003; O'Neill et al., 2012).

However, feminist theorists have made it a political mission to showcase how women are political actors by conceptualizing new understandings of citizenship and political practice that are a) inclusive of women and b) that recognize the multiple forms of political participation that are not restricted to formal politics, as well as the multiple spaces in which these practices can occur. Therefore, in addition to their critique and expansion of the concept of citizenship, feminist scholars have sought to reconceptualize women's political participation via empirical and theoretical research. Part of this involved arguing against research on participation grounded in the positivist tradition, in which measurement equates to understanding (Burt, 2002). According to Lister (2003), political scientists and theorists tend to equate the level of women's political representation in formal politics with their level of political participation. That is, because women occupy fewer roles in formal politics, they are assumed to be politically passive. However, Burt (2002) argues that low levels of formal political participation should not equate to this.

Subsequently, feminist scholars redefined women's political participation to include *informal political participation* (Erel, 2009; Lister, 2003), defined as "... public acts that seek to influence formal institutions..." often conducted in the personal, domestic, and ordinary spheres of life where women are traditionally disempowered (Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017, p.155). Martiniello (2006) refers to informal political participation as unconventional forms of political participation, and Isin and Nielson (2008) refer to it as acts of citizenship, or the ability of individuals to act like citizens, where they establish themselves as citizens or as those to whom the right to have rights is owed. Examples include (but are not limited to) community-based and ethnic-based advocacy organizations, protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, hunger strikes, boycotts, grassroots social movements, and signing petitions (Erel, 2009; Kennedy-Macfoy, 2012; Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017; Lister, 2003; Martiniello, 2006; Ralston, 2006). According to Lister (2003), informal political participation is not marginal or unequal to formal participation. Instead, it is a more egalitarian, less hierarchical, and more participatory alternative to formal politics that can generate similar outcomes in, and influence on, formal political institutions. However, given the setting of this study, it will be critical to analyze how social cleavages such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status intersect to impact immigrant women's repertoires of

political activities (Brown, 2014; Harell, 2017), which may perhaps intersect with the impacts of migration. This analysis will entail adopting an intersectional perspective.

To summarize, existing and relevant research have overlooked four critical features of immigrant women's political incorporation. First, they reinforce the notion that political options are framed and determined by either one's country of origin or one's receiving society. Second, they have an overly narrow view of political inclusion. Third, they overlook migration processes as deeply gendered. Lastly, they study political participation within formal structures, overlooking informal channels of participation that can shed light on the range of political activities available to immigrant women. This latter point also highlights the importance of analyzing the potential impacts of social cleavages on the repertoires of political activities, given that being an immigrant woman implies membership to a visible social category that is marginalizing. Thus, my research emerges from the need to address these gaps in the literature to gain a greater understanding of immigrant women's political incorporation in Canada. This will be done by examining the experiences of first-generation immigrant women from the DRC.

Research Objectives, Questions, Hypotheses, and Relevance

Objectives of the Research

Based on the knowledge gap highlighted above, the main objective of my research is to conduct a qualitative study aimed to explore and understand the links between migration and political incorporation. More specifically, the objectives of this research are:

1. To develop an original analytical approach by studying the links between migration and political incorporation that combines a trajectory and life course approach to migration with a gendered analysis of migration trajectories.
2. To explore the diverse modes of political participation in which immigrant women engage, as well as the extent to which gendered migration trajectories affect their political participation and incorporation, as studied through the experiences of immigrant women of Congolese origin in the Canadian context.¹³

¹³ The purpose is not to analyze political participation versus non-participation in the context of migration, but to explain for more or less participation, as Rooij (2012) argues that there is always some level or form of political participation (whether intentional or not). Moreover, as per Lister (1997), political participation is like a continuum; rather than an all or nothing phenomenon, "it can fluctuate during the individual's life-course" (p.36).

3. To analyze the impacts of the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status on immigrant women's repertoires of political participation.
4. To contribute to both feminist and migration debates concerning the political inclusion of immigrant women by illustrating the ways in which political incorporation is redefined and contested through their informal political practices and conscious decision-making.

Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the following questions will guide my study:

1. How are the migration trajectories of first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin gendered?
2. What forms does political participation of first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin in Canada take, and how can the modes and traits of their political participation contribute to understanding their process of political incorporation?
3. How do gendered migration trajectories affect the political participation and incorporation of first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin in Canada? How do the women, in turn, overcome the barriers imposed by their migration experiences and incorporate politically in Canadian society?
4. In what ways does immigrant women's identity as Black Congolese immigrant women in Canada impact their repertoires of political activities?

Hypotheses of the Research

Based on the literature review, and the theoretical framework elaborated in the following chapter, I expect to find that:

Hypothesis 1: Participants' migration trajectories will be gendered, embedded with gender-related factors at the micro, meso, and macro levels that will impact their migration experiences and political incorporation in Canada. Thus, while each woman's migration trajectories will be unique, they will all encounter gendered experiences that will shape their journeys to Canada.

Hypothesis 2: Participants will engage in informal political activities more frequently than formal political activities, which will increase their sense of political incorporation.

Hypothesis 3: Participants' gendered migration trajectories will create certain obstacles to their political incorporation in Canada, as their experiences at different stages of migration may compound the challenges these women will confront upon settlement. Some, on the other hand, will use their migration experiences to promote political participation. It is also anticipated that

participants will generally overcome the barriers imposed by their migration experiences by defining their own sense of political agency and belonging through informal political activities like ethnic or community mobilization, diaspora politics, and protests.

Hypothesis 4: Regardless of their level of political incorporation, Congolese women's political participation will be impacted to some extent by instances of marginalization and discrimination due to social cleavages that they find themselves embroiled in.

Relevance of the Research

My research has both theoretical and empirical relevance and significance. Theoretically, my research advances knowledge on the processual links between migration and political incorporation. Further, my research deconstructs conventional understandings of migration, political incorporation, and political participation. Moreover, this study underscores the importance of doing an intersectional analysis of political participation to determine how identity dimensions in a given setting influence political participation. Lastly, my research investigates how immigrant women may redefine political participation and challenge conventional understandings of political incorporation through their informal political practices. Empirically, my findings will demonstrate how immigrant women are agents of their own political incorporation through the various activities they perform beyond the formal political sphere. Further, the empirical relevance of my research lies in the originality of the case study (first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin) and providing knowledge on this understudied population in the Canadian context.¹⁴

¹⁴ The choice in immigrant women of Congolese origin is further discussed in the methodologies section.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Resources

“The journey, as lived experience, metaphor, concept or construct has not been the object of systematic study. Therefore, we have limited conceptual apparatus to explore and analyze the significance of such journeys.”
(Schwarz, 2020, p.218)

In this chapter, I combine theoretical insights from literature on transit migration, the sociological life course approach, citizenship, political studies, and feminist studies to define and (re)conceptualize three key concepts that I employ as the theoretical foundations for this research project. These three concepts are *migration trajectories* (specifically gendered migration trajectories), *political incorporation*, and *political participation*. In what follows, I will discuss each theoretical concept in detail, drawing attention to their implications for the study of migration and political incorporation. This chapter is divided into five main sections. In the first section, I begin with a discussion of traditional perspectives on migration, followed by a discussion of how the concept of ‘migration trajectories’ has emerged in transit migration studies as a critique to traditional perspectives of migration that reduce the mobility experiences of immigrants to unproblematic, linear routes and flows. As well, I discuss the trajectory approach to migration through the sociological life course approach and a gendered perspective to develop a conceptualization of migration trajectories that will guide my study. In the second section, I propose that the concept of ‘political incorporation’ appropriately depicts immigrant women’s political inclusion in Canada as a dynamic process characterized by conflict between them and the native-born population, as well as the variations and complexities in their political behaviour. This is achieved by first exploring the definitions of two other concepts, *assimilation* and *integration*, both of which are commonly applied to immigrants’ political experience (Plotke, 1999). This is followed by a definition of political incorporation, which is intended to guide the analysis of immigrant women’s political inclusion in this study.

In the third section, I examine feminist approaches to political participation in both theoretical and empirical studies as they relate to the subject of my research. Altogether, scholars reconceptualize a notion of political participation that is inclusive of a large variety of informal or unconventional activities that challenge traditional and conventional modes of participation such as voting; that involves all individuals (both citizens and non-citizens, immigrants and non-immigrants) and their political agency; and that take place in various social and political contexts beyond the formal political arena, including the “hidden spaces” where women are often

disempowered (Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017, p.155). Insights from feminist literature on women's political participation will serve to clarify how I approach the concept in my research. In the fourth section, I use La Barbera's (2012) intersectional-gender approach to show how gender, which is pivotal to immigrant women's experiences, intersects with (or is mediated by) other social cleavages to affect the repertoires of political activities available to immigrant women. This discussion is supported by empirical studies that illustrate how the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status affect whether and how racialized women access political activities, the types of political activities they engage in, and the relevant resources for political participation. Given the scarcity of research on the subject, I propose the need to examine this among participants, as well as how such experiences may intersect with the impacts of their gendered migration trajectories. In the final section, I conclude the chapter.

My objective here is that the unique approach that I aspire to take in my research of immigrant women's political incorporation will contribute to existing knowledge and research in both the field of migration and political studies.

Migration Trajectories

The concept of migration trajectories is one of three concepts that serves as the theoretical foundations of my research. Along with scholars like Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008), Ho (2011) and Schapendonk (2012), I contend that the critical time spent during migration has an impact on the incorporation process of immigrant women. Therefore, I dedicate this section to define and reconceptualize the concept in a way that stresses the mobility of migrants as a critical stage in the migration process.

The Traditional Perspectives of Migration

Piché and Dutreuilh's (2013) article on foundational texts in migration studies highlights Alan B. Simmons' (1987) pioneering text on migration, "Explaining migration: Theory at the crossroads", which identifies three major dimensions that define migration: a change in residence, a shift in employment, and a shift in social relations. Yet, change in residence has remained overtime the main criterion used by scholars to define migration. To illustrate, while research in the field of migration is multifaceted, scholarship by migration scholars, historians, sociologists, and political scientists have traditionally and broadly perceived and defined migration as the movement of people from one stable place of residency to another (Amit & Olwig, 2011; Harzig,

2001; Mallett & Hagen-Zanker, 2018; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schwarz, 2020). This definition has been practical in defining the movement of individuals; however, it conveys the idea that migration is a simple, linear, one-directional, and a permanent process and transition with an obscure (and irrelevant or absent) in-between phase between two fixed and stable locations (Harzig, 2001; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). Or as stated by Mallett and Hagen-Zanker (2018), migration has become “an abstract transition from A to B” (p.341). The linear logic of migration and the absence of the in-between phase in scholarly research is in part a consequence of improved travels post-Second World War, when travel became quicker and less expensive (Collyer et al., 2014). Prior, journeys were longer and more complex, with the certainty that something could occur along the way that would force a change of plans. The linear and abstract logic of migration is also in part a consequence of researchers focusing largely on the factors that mobilize the recruitment of migrants, the factors that compel migrants to relocate to a new country, and the factors that affect migrants’ incorporation after they arrive in their receiving countries. These approaches to migration are known by Bean and Brown (2015) as “theories of international migration” and “theories of immigrant integration” (pp.69, 74).

Theories of international migration seek to understand what motivates people to migrate to a new country. These can be divided into micro, meso, and macro levels of analyses: micro-individual approaches, network theories, and macro-structural approaches. According to Piché and Dutreuilh (2013), micro-individual approaches are one of the first approaches in migration studies that focus on individual decision-making often by identifying the pull or push factors for migrating (Simmons, 2010). As per Kazemipur (2014), for migration to occur, there could be forces that either push migrants out of their countries or pull them towards a new one. Push factors may include the undesirable conditions in the country of origin such as severe economic recession, famine, war, environmental degradation, persecution, gender inequalities, and separation from family. A pull-driven situation is one in which migrants believe that something better than what they are living and experiencing awaits them in another country, such as higher standards of living and better educational and employment opportunities. A similar approach brought forward by Larry Sjaastad in 1962 is the neoclassical economics approach of the rational individual and the calculation of the costs and benefits (monetary or non-monetary) of migration (Massey et al., 1993; Piché & Dutreuilh, 2013).

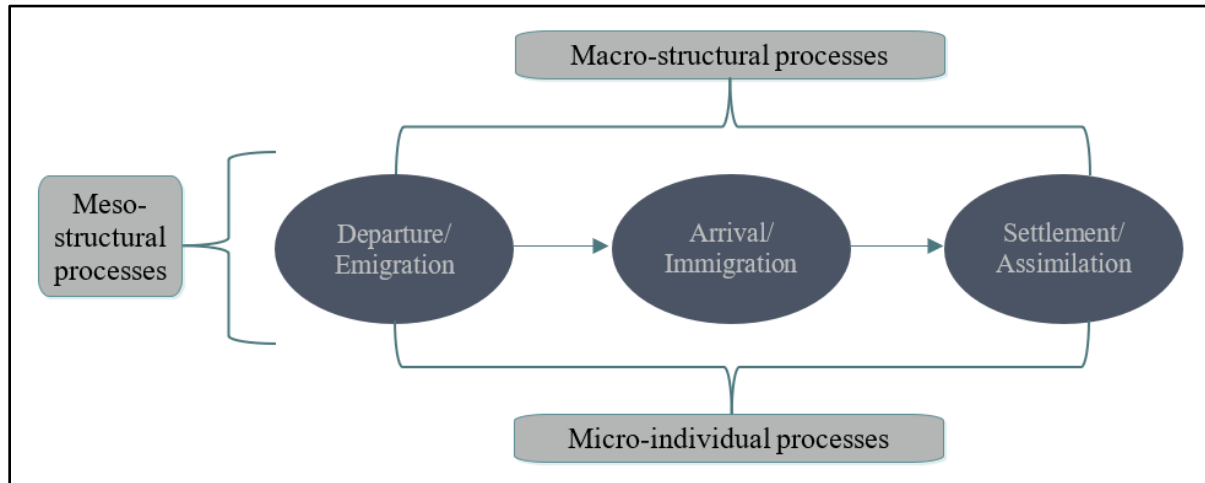
Network theories are defined by Bean and Brown (2015) as perspectives that analyze how connections among social actors might affect migration decisions. A prominent theory proposed by economists Oded Stark and David E. Bloom is the household survival strategy (Piché & Dutreuilh, 2013), which developed into the “new economics of migration” perspective (Massey et al., 1998, p.21). This perspective challenges the neoclassical economics theory by viewing migration as a household decision rather than a rational decision, with the goal of maximizing family earnings and minimizing the risk of financial constraints on the family (Massey et al., 1998). That is, families will send members to labour markets abroad to generate capital, remit earnings, and improve the family income and socioeconomic status within the community (Bean & Brown, 2015; Massey et al., 1998). Therefore, the household is willing to send off family members to gain access to new income sources (Harzig, 2001). However, the decision to send off family members abroad may also be influenced by past migrants who have successfully entered foreign labour markets (Massey et al., 1998).

Lastly, Piché and Dutreuilh (2013) explain that macro-structural approaches attempt to understand the experiences and motivations of migrants from a global context. According to Massey et al. (1993), the macro-level neoclassical economics is said to be one of the oldest and well-known theories of macro-structural approaches. The perspective identifies wage and employment disparities between countries as driving migration, disparities generated by geographic imbalances in labour supply and demand (Bean & Brown, 2015; Massey et al., 1998). Thus, migrants move from low-wage or labour-surplus countries (capital-poor) to high-wage or labour scarce countries (capital-rich). Segmented labour market theory is an alternative approach that views the main cause of migration as the demand for migrant labour in capital-rich countries (Massey et al., 1998). Classified under this perspective is dual labour market theory, where firms and their employees are segmented into either the primary sector (consisting of larger, better-established firms that provide capital-intensive and better-paying jobs) or the secondary sector (consisting of lower-paid and labour-intensive jobs to meet seasonal demands in the economy; Bean & Brown, 2015; Massey et al., 1993). Since the low wages, unstable conditions, and the lack of mobility in the secondary sector make it difficult to attract native workers — who are drawn into the primary sector — employers will turn to migrants who are more willing to fulfill these positions (Massey et al., 1998).

Theories of immigrant integration seek to explain migrants' various integration processes and outcomes once they settle in their receiving country, often starting with the classic assimilation perspective that envisions a "straight-line" convergence between migrants and the native-born population over time, where migrants show greater similarities with the dominant population in terms of norms, values, behaviours, and characteristics (Bean & Brown, 2015, p.74). In addition to assimilation, the literature on immigrant integration often identify five other common patterns of integration among new migrants (Bean & Brown, 2015; FitzGerald, 2015; Hou et al., 2016; Simmons, 2010): *segmented assimilation*, which refers to the assimilation of migrants and their offspring into different segments or parts of society that are often defined by ethnocultural background and class; *transnationalism*, which involves a sense of home and belonging in different spheres of life, including in more than one country; *dissimilation*, which emphasizes a rupture between migrants and those left behind in their countries of origin; *separation*, where migrants have a strong attachment to their country of origin and cultural identity but little attachment to their receiving country; and *marginalization*, where migrants no longer actively participate in either the receiving society or their country of origin.

The foregoing perspectives assist to shed light on the fact that migration studies largely focus on factors (from either the country of origin or the receiving country) that mobilize or compel migrants to migrate, as well as the integration patterns of migrants in their receiving society. Nevertheless, this focus has come to depict migration as a straightforward movement, where individuals leave their country of origin for a particular reason, and experience processes of settlement mainly in their receiving country. In addition, Schwarz (2020) contends that the logic of migration is state-centred, with traditional research interests often focused on the experiences of migrants within two particular countries: their country of origin and their receiving country. This state-centred approach to migration has created what Levitt et al. (2003) coin the "emigration-immigration-assimilation paradigm" (p.571), as reconstructed and illustrated in Figure 1, where scholars favour migration research on immigrants' experiences in the country of origin and in the receiving country to the exclusion of the experiences in the in-between phase that gives its name to the process itself: migration.

The Conventional Order of Migration Processes Presumed by Traditional Migration Theories



To illustrate this paradigm, the theories of international migration define economic, social, political, or cultural factors in either the country of origin or the receiving country as mobilizing or compelling migrants to relocate to a new country. In terms of the theories of immigrant integration, migrants' integration is often theorized as depending on their attachment to their receiving country, or in the case of transnationalism, their attachment to both their receiving and home country. Thus, a consequence of these traditional perspectives is that migration is approached through the dichotomous lens of sending/receiving countries, departure/arrival, or emigration/immigration (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008), where the experiences of immigrants in the sending and receiving sides of migration are considered vital features of the migration equation (Harzig, 2001), while their experiences during the act of migration remain largely ignored (Schapendonk, 2012; Schwarz, 2020).

Consequently, what is necessary is an approach that gives careful theoretical and methodological considerations to the experiences of migrants during the act of migration. Fortunately, one of the most interesting developments in migration studies has been the growing awareness that migration is not a straightforward movement, as depicted in Figure 1, or that the act of migration is not defined by empty spaces or dead time while crossing one border to another. As Schapendonk (2012) argues, migration is much more than a beginning and an end; the dynamics of migration trajectories are just as important if not more, where every migration journey is made up of different circumstances, networks, and decision-making that renders each migration and settlement experiences different. Since the 1990s, migration scholars have attempted to challenge

traditional views of migration, primarily by introducing the concept of ‘transnationalism’ and the idea that immigrants have transnational positionalities in which migration does not end with a permanent settlement in one country and a detachment from another (Hugo, 2014; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). However, it is through studies on transit migration where scholars have begun to shift their interests away from the home and receiving country, to migrants’ experiences during the act of migration by analyzing and understanding their migration trajectories.

Transit Migration Research and Migration Trajectories

While Collyer et al. (2014) date the term ‘transit migration’ to the migration of refugees out of German-occupied Europe during the Second World War, Collyer et al. (2012) and Düvell (2012) trace the concept’s popularity in European politics and migration studies to the 1990s, when it was used in response to changing migration patterns to Europe from countries that were not former colonies or guest-worker sending countries. The concept was also employed as a response to increasing restrictions on legal migration and intensifying border controls during this period. These events produced irregular migration, where migrants were travelling more frequently to transit states (or temporary countries) on the peripheries of the European Union (EU). This was to bypass the growing migration restrictions and border controls to reach their final destination in EU countries (Collyer et al., 2012; Düvell, 2012). Therefore, according to Düvell (2012), transit migration transformed into a strategic response for migrants, now defined as “... the situation between emigration and settlement that is characterized by indefinite migrant stay, legal or illegal, and may or may not develop into further migration depending on a series of structural and individual factors” (p.4). Moreover, due to transit migration, a new category of migrants emerged: transit migrants, or individuals who enter a new country to reside for a short period of time to escape all forms of border control in the hopes of entering their final destination (Collyer, 2007; Düvell, 2012; Schapendonk, 2012).

The desire of scholars to transcend traditional approaches to migration arose as a result of the growing phenomenon of transit migration, with a shift in interests toward studies on migrants’ migration practices in transit, as well as their decision-making during the act of migration (Schwarz, 2020). Particularly in recent years where migration to Europe has become complex, poor, lengthy, and dangerous (Collyer, 2007; Schapendonk, 2012; Schwarz, 2020), scholars have become interested in debunking the understanding of migration as “an unproblematic transition from one place of origin to a place of destination” (Collyer, 2007, p.668), calling attention to the

experiences of migration and the spatiality of the journey, particularly with regard to irregular migrants like asylum seekers (Düvell, 2012).¹⁵ For instance, Collyer (2007) studies undocumented migrants in Morocco migrating to Europe and the importance of social networks in structuring their experiences and facilitating onward migration. In another study, Wissink et al. (2020) investigate the role of social networks in transit migration as enabling or constraining the ability to migrate to the EU following the experience of a critical event.¹⁶ Schapendonk (2012) studies the migration of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa who are transiting through Morocco and Turkey awaiting to enter the EU. Schapendonk (2012) is particularly interested in the turbulence of transit migration and the (un)expected events that might either impede or facilitate one's journey to the EU. In a similar study, Schapendonk and Steel (2014) study the experiences of (im)mobility and the transformation of mobility in the case of Sudanese and Nigerian migrants en route to the EU, revealing unexpected opportunities, changing aspirations, multiple destinations, frictions, and uncertainty in transit spaces.

The findings of such studies have challenged the abstract view of migration as a clearly structured and simple process with distinct phases of emigration, immigration, and assimilation, an understanding of migration imposed by scholars and politicians rather than one that accurately reflects migrants' experiences (Collyer et al., 2014). However, Collyer et al. (2012) criticize the concept of 'transit migration' and its use as Eurocentric, presuming that Europe is the preferred destination for all migrants within proximity. Schapendonk et al. (2020) also critique transit migration debates for replicating a linear approach to migration by focusing on a single in-between phase of the migration process (e.g., migrants travelling from their country of origin to Morocco and then to their final destination). Despite these critiques, research on transit migration has largely shown that migration is ambiguous and unpredictable by studying the "where" and "how" of journeys (Mallett & Hagen-Zanker, 2018, p.341). In response to new opportunities or constraints during migration, migrants may experience changing destinations multiple times (Düvell, 2012) or indefinite (un)predictable stays in transit countries (Schapendonk, 2012). For instance, transit

¹⁵ While studies on transit migration often analyze the experiences of irregular or undocumented migrants in the European context, Düvell (2012) contends that it is not irregular migration that defines transit migration, but the experiences of the journey and how migrants respond to the opportunities or constraints during migration. All migrants are subjected to the (un)certainities of migration.

¹⁶ Wissink et al. (2020) define critical events as the occurrence of "... pivotal moments potentially fostering a change in or secure a continuation of an ongoing process, because of new opportunities or constraints they bring forward" (p.283).

countries may become final destinations, and final destinations may become temporary stops for new destinations (Collyer, 2007; Schapendonk, 2012; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). According to Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008), developments in migration are dependent on a series of structural, interpersonal, and individual factors. For example, immigration policies, political regimes, border controls, social networks, resource mobilization, perceptions, motivations, decision-making, and emotions can structure migrants' experiences in transit spaces (Collyer, 2007; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Schapendonk, 2012; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014).

Studies on transit migration also reveal the transformative effects of migration on individuals. For instance, Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008) discovers that migrants experience uncertainty and vulnerability in temporary settlements, including human suffering and violations to human rights. This is particularly the case for asylum seekers and refugees. Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008) also finds that migrants have a sense of insecurity and instability in temporary settlements because of the inability to rebuild their lives completely and permanently. Schapendonk and Steel's (2014) study also illustrates migrants' growing frustration as mobility regimes prolong their migration, enforce immobility, or force them into restless mobility. In Mallett and Hagen-Zanker's (2018) study, refugees and asylum seekers are subjected to violence, exploitation, and the lack of provision of life that affect not only their mobility, but their well-being and motivations. As these experiences place strain on individuals, it often affects whether they choose to continue with their migration (Mallett & Hagen-Zanker, 2018). Thus, studies on transit migration provide valuable insights into experiences in the in-between spaces.

With the rise of transit migration studies, a subject-oriented approach known as the "trajectory approach" emerged, which prioritizes migrants' perspectives and experiences of migration and (im)mobility as points of analysis (Schapendonk et al., 2020, p.212; Schwarz, 2020, p.218), as well as the analysis of "migration trajectories" (Schapendonk et al., 2020, p.212).

The Trajectory Approach to Migration. Both Schapendonk et al. (2020) and Schwarz (2020) define the trajectory approach as a methodological tool for analyzing and understanding migration and the experiences, practices, and politics of mobility. This is done by moving beyond geographically bounded notions of migration and uncovering the processes behind migration by following migrants on their journey. In other words, the trajectory approach implies a methodological approach that follows migrants through time, spaces, and places to gain better insights into their experiences and practices as they unfold, and eventually of how migrants

overcome barriers and uncertainties along the journey to their final destination. As a point of departure, the trajectory approach considers migration as an important phase that shapes both migrants and societies (Schwarz, 2020). It also allows scholars to gain insight into migrants' changing plans and destinations at different moments in time (Schapendonk et al., 2020; Schwarz, 2020), and of the narratives associated with each phase of the journey (Schwarz, 2020). Second, the trajectory approach prioritizes migration experiences. For instance, the approach pays attention to the different facilitators of migration (Schapendonk, 2012; Schapendonk et al., 2020); the intersections between migrants' actions and subjectivities, and the political contexts, policy discourses, hostilities, and social networks they encounter along the journey (Ho, 2011; Schwarz, 2020); how migrants manoeuvre and negotiate through barriers (Ho, 2011; Schapendonk et al., 2020; Schwarz, 2020); and how identities, statuses and subjectivities change in the context of migration and overtime (Ho, 2011; Schwarz, 2020).

To employ a trajectory approach, scholars often adopt 'migration trajectories' as their analytical focus (Schapendonk, 2012). While the concept has recently gained traction in the field of migration, there is no common definition, where scholars often use the concept synonymously to migration flows, migration projects, and migration routes. In some studies, migration trajectories are referred to as migration flows. Wissink et al. (2020) define migration flows as the movement of large numbers of people between the same countries, for instance, between Mexico and the United States. Simmons (2010) defines migration trajectories as the historical forces that generate migration flows from one country to another. For instance, the historical forces in place between various African and European countries are the colonial ties that link the countries together, such as Belgium and the DRC. Migration flows have also been defined as migration trends or patterns, like by Edmonston (2016), who highlights that the migration flow to Canada has averaged around 120,000 migrants per year since 1851, with a few peak periods. Yet, even when migration flows are defined as trends, these trends are still characterized by the movement of people from the same frequent countries. For instance, Edmonston (2016) highlights that migration flows to Canada were historically and predominantly from European countries. Thus, when migration trajectories are defined as migration flows, it emphasizes the intentional and historically defined geographical destination of a large population moving from one country to another. However, Schapendonk (2012) and Wissink et al. (2020) argue that the concept of migration flows represents a linear and Western-oriented idea of migration, suggesting that

migrants encounter little resistance or a pre-defined and stable trajectory when they move from one country to another, though the experiences of many migrants have proven otherwise.

In other studies, migration trajectories are referred synonymously to migration projects. Grillo (2007) defines trajectories as migration projects, or narratives or options in which migrants choose their own variables for wanting to migrate to another country (e.g., economic, political, or social variables), and they weigh these variables based on their own desirability and perception of the world, and sometimes based on the experiences of past migrants. Migration projects are also defined as the aspirations that compel individuals to relocate to a new country, though migrants can experience shifts in their aspirations over time that can change the course of their migration trajectory. According to Grillo (2007), some migrants will have a clear project for how they will get to their final destination, whilst others will be shifting through various options, uncertain of what is best for them as circumstances change. To illustrate, Schapendonk (2012) interviewed a Congolese migrant in Morocco who explained that his migration project was oriented towards Europe. Yet, without papers or a proper education, he changed his migration project and decided to settle in Morocco, where he believed he played a much bigger role than he had ever imagined and founded a Congolese migrant organization to sensitize the Moroccan society of the presence of African migrants. Nevertheless, studies that define migration trajectories as migration projects often limit the study of migration to immigration status, visa types, or migration categories, and how the nature of one's migration project (i.e., immigration status or visa type) can affect migrants' settlement and incorporation in their receiving society, such as influencing the type of work migrants can perform or the rights they are entitled to (Koser, 2007).

Still, perhaps the most common concept that is used synonymously to migration trajectories is migration routes that stresses the geographical paths of foreign populations that direct migrants to a certain destination (Vasey, 2016). To illustrate, Schapendonk (2012) identifies several migration routes from Sub-Saharan Africa towards the EU that were forged by geographical, political, economic, and colonial relations: the Atlantic route from the West African coast to the Canary Islands, the trans-Saharan route from West Africa to Morocco (for a final destination to Spain), the central Mediterranean pathway through Libya or Tunisia to reach European islands like Malta or Lampedusa, and through Turkey. According to Vasey (2016), migration scholars have long been interested in migration routes; yet the concept of migration routes is also linear and depicts one-directional movements, overlooking where migrants originate and the transit countries

where some are forced to stay until they can find passage to their final destination (if possible). Moreover, Schapendonk (2012) argues that the concept provides little insight pertaining to the dynamics of one's migration.

Consequently, when scholars employ a trajectory approach, migration trajectories are best understood as open-ended and process-like journeys that are shaped by migrants' decisions and actions in response to the opportunities or constraints they encounter or experience throughout their migration (Gladkova & Mazzucato, 2017; Grillo, 2007; Schapendonk, 2012; Schapendonk et al., 2020, p.212). Examples of migration trajectories include (but are not limited to) onward mobility, forced mobility, contested transit mobility, and return mobility (Schapendonk et al., 2020). Such journeys can be multiple and in various directions depending on experiences and decisions (Schapendonk et al., 2020). Moreover, migrants' experiences are deeply embedded in, and affected by, micro, meso and macro factors, which in turn influence the outcomes of trajectories. These include institutional structures such as tougher border security (Wissink et al., 2020) or migration regimes (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014); social networks such as interpersonal ties to other migrants or the native-born population (Awumbila et al., 2017); and individual sociopsychological processes such as personal aspirations, motivations, emotions, decisions, and actions (Grillo, 2007; Mahieu et al., 2015). Because of one's trajectories, they can have substantial impacts on what migrants can do once they arrive at their destination (Schapendonk, 2012; Vasey, 2016; Wingens et al., 2011). Migration trajectories also have transformative effects on individuals, where the move across time and space affects and changes identities and statuses, aspirations, and perspectives (Schapendonk et al., 2020). Therefore, when studying migration trajectories, the individual migrant is not the unit of analysis, but the trajectories and embedded experiences that affect both the trajectory and the migrant (Schapendonk, 2012). However, the perspectives and the first-hand accounts of migrants are critical to understanding and analyzing trajectories and the experiences that shape the trajectories.

Thus far, the trajectory approach has largely been developed and employed within migration studies (Schwarz, 2020). Yet, my objective is to expand its use and employ it in the study of immigrant women's political incorporation. The benefits of using migration trajectories as my unit of analysis (as defined and approached in transit migration studies) is the necessity to reconstruct immigrant women's migration histories toward their current place of residency (Schwarz, 2020). By reconstructing and analyzing their migration trajectories, I will gain insight

into the migration experiences as immigrant women navigated through opportunities and constraints, as well as the micro, meso and macro factors that relate to migration experiences and shape or influence political incorporation.

The Sociological Life Course Approach and Migration Trajectories

It is important for my research to define how migration trajectories link to political incorporation in the receiving country. I have touched on the surface of how the experiences of migration can affect settlement processes, for instance, through the transformation of subjectivities and identities. Yet, I will delve deeper in this section in how migration trajectories link to political incorporation by adopting the principles of the sociological life course approach. Adopting this approach will also contribute to my conceptualization of migration trajectories. Over the last few decades, the sociological life course approach has become an important perspective in the social sciences, particularly in analyzing the dynamic relationship between structure and agency and overcoming the micro-macro problem in social research (Wingens et al., 2011). Being inherently multidisciplinary, the approach has been successfully applied to sociological, demographic, psychological, and economic studies (Edmonston, 2013). Yet, its use in migration research is still very limited, particularly when studying immigrant settlement and incorporation (de Valk et al., 2011). Despite this limitation, the life course approach provides the theoretical orientation to explore the processual links between migration and incorporation.

To analyze the link between migration trajectories and political incorporation in the context of the life course approach, it is important to highlight the two ways that social scientists view the approach. As per Wingens et al. (2011), the life course approach can be viewed as an “object-view” or as a “paradigm-view” (p.4). The object-view of the life course approach is when the life course is the primary subject matter of research, a sequence of age-related patterns and status passages embedded in social institutions as well as history. The paradigm-view of the life course begins with a theoretical orientation, in which a set of assumptions, principles, and concepts are utilized to examine the life course (Wingens et al., 2011). In my study, I will use the latter view to examine the relationship between migration trajectories and political incorporation through the principles, assumptions, and concepts highlighted in the life course approach (de Valk et al., 2001). According to Edmonston (2013), the life course approach often examines individual life histories to understand how earlier life events can influence or affect later life decisions and events. Such events include childbearing, marriage, and retirement. To specify, the approach does not focus on

a particular event or point in time, but views a lifelong process, from birth to death, where an individual's life course is guided by the decisions they make throughout their lives. Thus, people's lives are influenced by earlier events and decisions. To characterize the life course, the concept of 'trajectories' is often employed (George, 2009). Different from the definition established in transit migration research, Wingens et al. (2011) and Edmonston (2013) define trajectories as the sum of a sequence of interconnected life events in one's life course. That is, an individual can experience educational, occupational, and familial trajectories embedded with a sequence of life events that shape the trajectories. As per Wingens et al. (2011), this concept can also be applied to migration.

Migration is a process defined by a sequence of interconnected life events or experiences, and as a trajectory, migration can influence and be interconnected to other trajectories such as incorporation processes, in which migrants go through a series of life events or experiences that connect to the dynamic experiences of incorporation in their receiving country (Wingens et al., 2011). Migration is also defined as a turning point in one's life, or a life event that is momentous enough to change the course of other trajectories (Wingens et al., 2011; Edmonston, 2013). Therefore, the sociological life course approach provides a more dynamic approach to the study of migration trajectories, where I am not simply analyzing migration as a particular moment in one's life (Ryan, 2008), a moment that is often divided from the incorporation phase (the condition after migration; Mahieu et al., 2015). Instead, the sociological life course approach provides the theoretical assumptions to approach migration trajectories and political incorporation as processes that are interconnected, where I must identify the conditions and turning points, or the experiences and trajectories that unfold during one's migration that influence the political incorporation of immigrant women, either by creating conditions of opportunities or of constraints. This is comparable to taking a "migration life course" (Mahieu et al., 2015, p.18), with a particular attention to the experiences and the transformation of self that unfold during migration trajectories and their consequences on the political incorporation of immigrant women.

A Gendered Perspective of Migration Trajectories

Because my research focuses on the political incorporation of immigrant women, it is imperative that I consider how migration trajectories and experiences are deeply gendered, and how gender relations operating during migration can fundamentally influence the outcomes of women's migration and settlement (Carling, 2005).

In one of the earliest works on international migration in the 1880s, “Laws of Migration”, German-born cartographer Ernst Georg Ravenstein noted that women made up a greater portion of migrants than men (Gabaccia, 2015; Pessar & Mahler, 2003). However, women remained largely invisible and absent in migration research and theorization until the twentieth century when scholars often studied them as passive migrants who followed their male counterparts (Lutz, 2010; Mahieu et al., 2015). Women were sometimes labelled as “victims” or involuntary migrants because scholars viewed them as being forced to leave behind their country of origin to follow their male counterparts (Lutz, 2010, p.1648; Sharpe, 2001). Moreover, scholars often defined migrants as primarily male, using phrases like “migrants and their families” to refer to male migrants and their wives or children who followed them (Boyd & Grieco, 2003, para.3). As a result of women’s perceived passivity, the need to adequately study their unique migration experiences were often ignored. By the 1980s, academic studies on migration had begun to recognize migrant women and the wide range of challenges related to their migration (Piper, 2008). This renewed interest in migrant women was connected to at least two phenomena. The first phenomenon was the establishment of Women’s Studies in the 1980s in many Western societies and the impact of feminist scholarship and movements (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Lutz, 2010; Wright, 1995). Women’s Studies vowed to make women visible in migration processes and patterns, to explore how women contributed to various migration movements, and to investigate the differences in migration experiences between male and female migrants. The second phenomenon was Castles and Miller’s declaration in 1993 of the “feminization of migration” as a feature of the age of migration, in which women statistically outnumbered men as migrants (Lutz, 2010, p.1651).

Despite advances in migration research, studies on migrant women did not result in significant changes in research as women were merely added to existing approaches and assumed to behave similarly to men, have the same reasons for migrating, and have the same relationships to societal structures (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Kofman et al., 2000; Timmerman et al., 2015). Scholars like Mahieu et al. (2015, p.11) and Timmerman et al. (2015, p.1) refer to this as the “add women, mix and stir” (AWMS) perspective, in which gender is treated as a static variable rather than an integral aspect of the migration process, and the assumptions, theories, and methods underlying existing research on male migrants are never questioned when employed to studies on women. As per Espín and Dottolo (2015), when data on migrant women are given, a gender analysis of the significance of these data are absent, and the gendered processes that underpin such

data results are ignored. Nonetheless, the AWMS perspective inspired the development of a gendered perspective in migration research, which treats gender as a dynamic and changeable social construct that fundamentally and structurally shapes the entire migration process, its trajectories, and the experiences that differ for men and women (Timmerman et al., 2015). From a gendered perspective, Espín and Dottolo (2015) acknowledge migration as a gendered process in which gender roles and relations shape migration processes and outcomes differently for women than for men, as gender becomes an organizing structure of power relations that generates and perpetuates such differences. Thus, when studying immigrant women's migration trajectories, it is imperative to employ a gender-sensitive approach (Carling, 2005; Timmerman et al., 2015).

Consolidating Gender and Migration. According to Carling (2005), the concept of gender was first introduced to the social sciences to emphasize the difference between socially and biologically determined sex. Bonifacio et al. (2012) define gender as a social construct of roles, behaviours, and values that are assigned to women and men, and that intersect with other identities such as race, ethnicity, or class. Further, gender is defined as "... a matrix of identities, behaviours, and power relations that are constructed by the culture of a society in accordance with sex¹⁷" (Boyd & Grieco, 2003, para.8). Gender is thus a socially constructed definition of masculinity and femininity that is context-dependent, with its contents (the ideals, expectations, behaviours, and expressions of masculinity and femininity) varying between societies (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Mahieu et al., 2015). As a social construct, gender is embedded in social practices and institutions, which, according to Bonifacio et al. (2012), ultimately produce a system of unequal power relations between women and men. As Timmerman et al. (2015) contend, it is this system of unequal power relations embedded in society (at the micro, meso and macro levels) that explains for the different experiences of migration and incorporation between women and men. Because gender relations are oppressive structures and migration is mediated through these structures (Wingens et al., 2011), Carling (2005) argues that migration may be an oppressive experience for migrant women. Thus, migration is much more than the resettlement of migrants to a new country, and it is important that I examine how gendered experiences impact trajectories and incorporation.

In the literature, scholars discuss the multiple ways in which gender relations affect migration. Women confront differentiated forms of discrimination and racism than men throughout their migration trajectories because of their gender and ethnic minority status (Carling,

¹⁷ The feminine or masculine sex.

2005). Simultaneously, trajectories are encoded with gender differences that establish particular trajectories and outcomes for women (Pessar & Mahler, 2003). For instance, Boyd and Grieco (2003) argue that patriarchy, which gives men preferential access to resources available in society, affects women's ability to migrate, the timing of that migration, their final destination, and how well they incorporate in their new society. Women and men also have different social networks, which give different information and might convey ideas about gender roles, resulting in divergent migration trajectories and experiences (Lutz, 2010; Mahieu et al., 2015; Schrover & Yeo, 2010). Moreover, the rights and entitlements that result from specific trajectories and modes of entry (e.g., entry as temporary or permanent residents, family reunifying migrants, or irregular migrants) are also gendered and shape how migrants incorporate into their new societies (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). To illustrate, women are overrepresented as family and refugee migrants (Harzig, 2001; Lutz, 2010). Their entry status as 'dependents' of other family members, as well as undocumented or irregular migrants, may affect their ability to obtain residency and economic, political, and social rights, thus hindering their settlement. Overall, Mahieu et al. (2015) contend that gender relations influence migration trajectories at the micro, meso and macro levels. For instance, at the micro level, gender relations can influence the personal decisions and motivations throughout the migration process. At the meso level, social networks differ for both men and women, contributing to differences in migration experiences and trajectories. Lastly, at the macro level, power relations and gender biases in laws and regulations can have an impact on migrants and their trajectories.

Migration, on the other hand, can also have an impact on gender relations (Carling, 2005; Timmerman et al., 2015), where migration experiences can improve, modify, transform, deteriorate, or reinforce gender relations (Tastsoglou et al., 2005). For instance, women's migration can be a means of escaping power relations and dependence on husbands, or it can be a means of gaining new rights and autonomy (Carling, 2005; Matos, 2016; Tastsoglou et al., 2005). Migration may also be regarded as a means of escaping oppressive structures in which immigrant women from repressive regimes live, experiences that men rooted in patriarchal societies may not have (Kofman et al., 2000). As Willis and Yeoh (2000) explain, it is through migration that women can escape from the constraints of patriarchy, especially in the household, and gain more autonomy in a society that provides women with greater decision-making power and the ability to renegotiate gender roles. This also provides women with the opportunity to improve their status and incorporation. However, migration trajectories can also perpetuate gender inequality (Carling,

2005; Tastsoglou et al., 2005; Willis & Yeoh, 2000). For instance, while migration may provide women the opportunity to escape from the constraints of patriarchy, this patriarchy can be re-established upon settlement (Carling, 2005). According to Carling (2005), migration does not simply erode patriarchy or power relations; rather, the effects may be different in the short and long term. Such experiences will vary depending on the temporal and spatial context, as well as the women's living situations. According to Willis and Yeoh (2000), the processes of gaining greater autonomy and an improved status are not inherent within migration; instead, women must renegotiate patriarchal relations both during and after the process.

Consequently, it is important to recognize that migration trajectories are always gendered (Espín & Dottolo, 2015), with gender relations manifesting throughout the entire migration process and affecting settlement outcomes (Mahieu et al., 2015; Schrover & Yeo, 2010). Therefore, I will adopt a gendered perspective, or a gender-sensitive migration approach, that begins with the idea that migration trajectories are a deeply gendered process, where gender norms and relations shape trajectories (at the micro, meso and macro levels) and personal experiences (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Carling, 2005). These experiences, in turn, may play an important role in how immigrant women politically incorporate in Canada. To reflect a gendered perspective in my research, I will refer to migration trajectories as 'gendered migration trajectories'.

Conceptualizing Gendered Migration Trajectories

Using the theoretical assumptions and definitions established by transit migration research, the sociological life course approach, and the gendered perspective, I conceptualize migration trajectories as follows:

Migration trajectories — identified in the mobility phase of migration — are open, dynamic, and process-like journeys or treks through time and space that migrants embark on from their country of origin to their receiving country where they may choose to settle permanently. While trajectories often have an end point (i.e., settling in the receiving country), they are an open, dynamic process as they are constantly evolving; they are shaped by migrants' decisions and actions in response to macro-structural, social, and micro-individual elements; and they are turning points connected to other phases in migration (e.g., political incorporation) and momentous enough to shape the outcomes of these phases. Moreover, migration trajectories are gendered, with women enacting and

experiencing mobility differently than men due to gender-related factors that are deeply embedded in social structures and institutions throughout migration trajectories.

The conceptualization of migration trajectories, or gendered migration trajectories, provided above will guide my research on the impacts of migration on political incorporation.

Political Incorporation versus Assimilation versus Integration

While the political dimension of immigrants' incorporation has been largely overlooked in theoretical and empirical research until recently, Morales (2011) argues that there is even less discussion around the concepts we employ when studying the political inclusion of immigrants. The decision to use the concept *political incorporation* in my research is a deliberate decision and one based on the need to conceptualize the political inclusion of immigrants as a dynamic process that involves conflicts and barriers (Morales, 2011; Plotke, 1999; Simmons, 2010). However, Morales (2011) argues that scholars rarely provide a clear definition of political incorporation, how it is measured, and how it is identified. Thus, to explain my choice in the use of the term, I begin this discussion by exploring the definitions of two other concepts, *assimilation* and *integration*, which are also generally applied to immigrants' political experience (Plotke, 1999).

First introduced by Robert Park and the Chicago School in the 1920s (Bean & Brown, 2015; Brettell & Hollifield, 2015), assimilation implies a "straight-line" convergence, where immigrants must adapt to certain means, mechanisms, and policies to become more similar to the dominant group over time in norms, values, behaviours, and characteristics (Bean & Brown, 2015, p.75; Massey et al., 1998, p.3). In doing so, immigrants are required to abandon all cultural differences and identities to fully enter civil life (Alexander, 2001). If immigrants fail to do so or present an "insufficient assimilation," they become denied the full rights enjoyed by the dominant group (Fortier, 2012, p.32). Therefore, political assimilation requires that immigrants conform to the values and norms of mainstream society and assimilate into mainstream institutions, including civic associations (Morales, 2011). In the past, it was generally assumed that immigrants would eventually assimilate as they spent more time in their new society. However, many scholars have criticized the assimilation approach. According to Young (1990), assimilation denies the reality or the desirability of cultural differences and social groups, particularly among those who promote a politics of difference and who are attached to specific traditions, practices, language, and other culturally specific forms that are critical to their social existence. Even if immigrants are politically

marginalized or oppressed, it is rare that they fully abandon their culture and identities. Moreover, Plotke (1999) argues that political assimilation implies that there is little conflict and disagreement between immigrants and the native-born population, and that immigrants are willing to abandon previously held political values from their country of origin to gain access to the political system. But as Morales (2011) contends, immigrants do not need to exhibit the same patterns of political behaviours as the native-born population to be considered successful in entering political life.

The term *integration* is often viewed by scholars as a better alternative to political assimilation, though scholars like FitzGerald (2015) employ both concepts synonymously, referring to the union or convergence between immigrants and the native-born population over time, where immigrants show greater similarities with the native-born population. Yet even when scholars attempt to make a distinction between the two concepts, it is often not that clear. To illustrate, Morokvasic-Müller (2014) defines integration as the process through which people become functioning members of society, which involves multiple actors and multiple forms of participation that is maintained over time. Morokvasic-Müller (2014) also defines integration as a two-way process involving society's institutions and the dominant population on the one hand, and immigrants on the other. According to Bauböck (2006), integration is a process of inclusion and a condition of social cohesiveness. In terms of political integration, Bauböck (2006) defines it as an aspect of structural integration, referring to immigrants' access to political status, rights, opportunities, and representation, and an equalization of these conditions between the native-born and immigrant populations. Moreover, Bauböck (2006) defines political integration as the activities and participation of immigrants, in which they accept the laws, institutional framework and political values that integrate them into the political system.

While both authors define integration as the equal political inclusion of both immigrant and native-born populations, political integration is once again referred to as a condition of social cohesion between immigrants and the native-born population, in contrast to Plotke's (1999) analysis that political entry involves conflict. Latcheva and Herzog-Punzenberger (2011) further explain that integration suggests a clear and gradual adaptation of immigrants to society that often portrays such integration as an unproblematic process rather than a process that can entail changes in direction. Anthias and Pajnik (2014) also contend that integration does not consider how different power hierarchies may intersect. Lastly, by suggesting that immigrants must accept the laws and political values that make up a political system, it implies that the native-born population

sets the rules and standards that immigrants must obey and follow to be integrated (Kazemipur, 2014; Young, 1990), a notion similar to assimilation (Morales, 2011).

The term *incorporation* has been employed by scholars as an alternative to integration, though the two concepts are also often used synonymously. According to Morales (2011), there is often no considerable distinctions between the two concepts; rather, it comes down to the author's linguistic preference, with political incorporation more commonly used in North American literature and political integration more commonly used in European literature. Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the two concepts that diverges the understanding of incorporation from that of assimilation and integration. Contrary to political integration, Morales (2011) explains that political incorporation is often employed to signify a dynamic process of inclusion into the political system. Similarly, Bloemraad (2006b) defines political incorporation as the process of getting involved in mainstream political debates, practices, and decision-making. Elsewhere, Bloemraad (2006b) defines political incorporation as the process through which immigrants can gain formal and substantive citizenship on par with the native-born population. During this dynamic process, both Plotke (1999) and Bloemraad (2006b) argue that conflict can arise in the process of incorporation, particularly when the state and the native-born population play a significant role in affecting immigrants' understanding of their legitimate political standing in the country. Overtime, this can result in immigrants shifting from being less politically involved and included to being more politically involved and included, and vice versa (Morales, 2001). Further, Alexander (2001) argues that incorporation is a means of achieving diversity, although Plotke (2011) contends that this diversity can lead to conflict between immigrants and the native-born population.

Therefore, to adequately portray the experiences of immigrant women's political inclusion in their receiving society, I chose the concept of political incorporation, which signifies a dynamic process of political inclusion, where participants may shift from being less to more politically engaged, and vice versa (Kazemipur, 2014; Morales, 2011); their inclusion can be expressed in different ways with different actors involved (Bloemraad, 2006b; Portes et al., 2009); and they may experience conflict in their attempts for inclusion (Bloemraad, 2006b; Plotke, 1999).

To assess the dynamic process of immigrant women's political inclusion, I consider the multiple ways in which they relate to the political system, referred to as *political participation*. Morales (2011) claims that assessing the degree to which immigrants are politically participating in society is a measure of one's political incorporation in society. Morales (2011) argues:

[Immigrants] are politically [incorporated] whenever their political attitudes and behaviours are not indicative of their outright exclusion from the policy process, and this can be empirically evaluated by taking into consideration the multiple forms through which [they] can become included in political life. (pp.40-41)

Therefore, an important factor when examining immigrant women's political incorporation is to identify the various ways in which they exercise their political agency and participate in society's political processes (either formal or informal). Discussions in the subsequent section will expand on what it means to participate politically to measure and define one's political incorporation (that is, whether they are marginalized from or incorporated within society's political processes). Nevertheless, in keeping with Rooij (2012), the purpose of this research is not to analyze or explain political participation versus non-participation in order to analyze one's political incorporation. Instead, I seek to explain how gendered migration trajectories can explain for more or less political participation among immigrant women, and how these trajectories influence their political incorporation. Thus, the following section seeks to develop a theoretically meaningful and empirically grounded definition of political participation for the purposes of this research.

Immigrant Women's Political Participation

For many centuries, political participation has been an important concept for democratic theorists, and more recently for political scientists and philosophers seeking to understand citizenship and its practices (Burt, 2002). According to Lister and Pia (2008), political participation is often defined from a top-down perspective, involving activities that influence or challenge policies and decision-making in the formal political sphere. Political participation, for example, is defined by Verba et al. (1987) as activities or actions that influence governmental decision-making, such as influencing decisions specific to one's needs or concerns or the selection of government officials. In a later work, Verba et al. (1995) provide the now classical definition of political participation as voluntary activities with "... the intent or effect of influencing government action — either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies" (p.38). O'Neill et al. (2012) refer to political participation as both an "indirect mechanism for change", where individuals are given the opportunity to elect a representative to represent their needs, interests, and concerns, and a "direct mechanism", where individuals voice their own needs and interests and bring change to their

community (p.185). Therefore, from a top-down approach, citizens engage in activities that influence decision-making processes within what Smith (2002) refers to as a system of elected representatives. This understanding of political participation is dependent on the nature of the concept of “the political” (Lister & Pia, 2008, p.81). From a positivist perspective, Lister and Pia (2008) explain that the political is concrete and quantifiable, made up of public state officials within the bounds of the public sphere. Therefore, political participation is any activity that takes place in the public and aims to influence that sphere and its rules, laws, or policies. Generally, voting is viewed as an important political activity from a positivist and top-down approach since individuals can altogether influence political decisions and outcomes through elections, and voting is easily quantifiable (Burt, 2002; Lister & Pia, 2008).

However, Lister and Pia (2008) argue that defining political participation has never been straightforward, particularly since there has been a change in the nature of political participation over the years. For instance, citizens are becoming disengaged with formal politics and are more engaged with informal political activities such as protests. As Norris (2002) states (quoted by Lister & Pia [2008]): “Political Participation is evolving in terms of the ‘who’ (the agencies or collective organizations), ‘what’ (the repertoires of actions commonly used for political expression) and ‘where’ (the targets that participants seek to influence)” (p.4). In addition to the changing nature of political participation, Lister and Pia (2008) explain that the conception of political participation has also changed over the years to broaden the narrow understanding brought forward by the top-down and positivist perspectives. Martiniello (2006), for instance, defines political participation as the various ways and activities whereby individuals take part in the political community, as well as the various means and mechanisms through which they express their interests and needs and influence government officials’ decisions. Martiniello (2006) broadens the definition of political participation to include individuals’ capacities to voice their interests and effect change in their communities through a variety of ways. Moreover, critical realists criticize the idea of ‘the political’ as a political arena that only occurs in the public sphere since it marginalizes the political agency of those who do not have access to this sphere (Lister & Pia, 2008). Instead, critical realists call for a definition of political participation that signifies governance, where all actors (particularly those who are caught in power relations) can engage in both governmental (formal) and non-governmental (informal) activities, as well as beyond the

political sphere, to gain access to the same rights as others and effect change in their communities. This is particularly the position argued by many feminist scholars (Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017).

The Feminist Approach to Political Participation

By accepting the idea that immigrant women always have some degree of political participation, feminist scholarship has paid closer attention to how these women have challenged citizenship and the concept of political participation, calling for a more inclusive discourse and analysis of women's political participation (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006). As the active or practical dimension of citizenship (Martiniello, 2006), feminist and political scholars have criticized and reconceptualized the concept of political participation to include unconventional political practices and spaces performed by marginalized individuals who are legal members of a society but are excluded from formal political institutions, and whose political agency has gone unrecognized by mainstream society. As previously discussed, citizenship has created boundaries between those who are viewed as members of society (and therefore entitled to rights and duties) and those who are not (and who do not merit the same rights; Bauböck, 2006). According to Erel (2009), such boundaries are defined and negotiated within ethnicized and gendered power relations and hierarchies, inherently marginalizing racialized women from citizenship rights and duties, particularly in the form of political rights and duties. These boundaries have also been advanced by citizenship's false universalism and its division of the public-private spheres. Therefore, when scholars reconceptualize the concept of political participation, they begin by adopting a concept of citizenship as a "political status" (Bauböck, 2006, p.16) and seek to uncover: who is a political actor, what is considered political participation, and what is considered a political space. This has resulted in feminist scholars identifying three dimensions in immigrant women's political participation that contribute to broadened understandings of the concept: practices, political agency and identity, and spaces.

Political Participation as Informal Practices. When feminist scholars empirically analyze immigrant women's engagement with formal political institutions, they discover that women tend to engage in unconventional forms of political practices through which claims to rights are voiced, needs and interests are heard, and actions produce societal changes. Martiniello (2006) describes conventional political participation as taking place within a previously structured political institution (such as voting), whereas unconventional political participation takes place beyond a structured political institution and into local, national, or transnational political spaces

(such as protesting, ethnic advocacy organizations). Unconventional political participation is also occasionally used interchangeably with *informal political participation*, defined in Chapter Two as public acts that aim to impact formal institutions and are often carried out in the personal, domestic, and ordinary spheres of life (Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017). Examples of informal political participation include (but are not limited to) advocacy through community-based and ethnic-based organizations, protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, hunger strikes, boycotts, grassroots social movements, and signing petitions (Erel, 2009; Kennedy-Macfoy, 2012; Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017; R. Lister, 2003; M. Lister & Pia, 2008; Martiniello, 2006; Ralston, 2006).

For example, through community-based organizations and networks, immigrant women in Erel's (2009) study were able to participate in policy-making debates and political change in the context of their social and political commitment. That is, these women were able to articulate their interests and needs to policymakers, and influence laws and policies that would have a direct impact on their lives. Pinar is an example of one of these women. As a 34-year-old social worker involved in a migrant women's centre, she found a way to utilize her position as a social worker to engage politically in women's issues like domestic violence, by initiating campaigns at the centre and imposing legal changes (Erel, 2009). In her study of South Asian women's political participation (or practices of citizenship) in Canada and Australia, Ralston (2006) discovers that through membership in advocacy-oriented community organizations, women can actively combat racist and sexist discrimination and implement legislation, policies, and programs that transform unequal societal structures and relations. Lewicki and O'Toole (2017) explore Muslim women's political engagement in the United Kingdom against violent practices like female genital mutilation, such as renegotiating unjust practices within their communities through the production of a film; the use of art and drama as forms of expression; and the use of an online petition that received nearly a quarter of a million signatures for social and legal changes.

Informal politics is used in these examples to bridge the gap between immigrant women and the formal political institutions from which they are often excluded (Erel, 2009). This not only demonstrates the importance of informal political participation as a mechanism for claiming rights and changing policies, but it also exemplifies the various ways in which immigrant women often choose to construct their own notions of 'the political' and demonstrate their political agency (Erel, 2009; Ralston, 2006). In addition, Bloemraad (2006a) argues that informal associations formed by women are important channels for generating a sense of belonging, as well as obtaining important

information and support that facilitates their political incorporation, empowerment, and privilege. Immigrant women's political participation can thus be made visible by exploring unconventional or informal political activities and how they are "performing" vibrant and authentic citizenship practices (Nyers, 2006, p.37). Further, both Lister (2003) and Erel (2009) argue that broadening the notion of political participation to include informal political activities shifts the focus away from defining politics based on the conditions of the formal political sphere, which is dominated by men, and toward a more inclusive political sphere that leads to women's visibility in political processes. Lastly, Erel (2009) argues that acknowledging informal activities as political participation expands the options available to immigrant women for engaging with the formal political system and asserting a claim to political agency.

Political Participation as Political Agency and Identity. An important dimension of political participation observed in feminist research is the exercise of political agency, or, as Lister (2003) claims, the empowerment of women exhibited through the practice of citizenship. Scholars studying immigrants' informal political participation view them as conscious actors who are aware of the situations they find themselves in; who resist being labelled as outsiders and undeserving of the same rights and recognition as others; and who assert the right to belong and participate in society (Erel, 2009; Isin & Nielson, 2008). In Ralston's (2006) study, for instance, the immigrant women of South Asian origin in Canada and Australia (re)constructed a sense of agency through their participation in voluntary organizations. They exerted agency by acting intentionally, resisting being labelled as outsiders, asserting the right to belong to their receiving society, and claiming their marginality as a site of political activism. Moreover, Janoski and Gran (2002) argue that by engaging in practices that exercise political agency, such practices can also produce identity politics, in which marginalized members organize around shared identities and interests, and band together to make claims to rights and recognition.

According to Erel (2009), the term "identity politics" is often employed to refer to marginalized groups who organize together to voice their concerns and interests (p.164). Erel (2009) warns that referring to immigrant women's political participation as identity politics should not assume a homogeneity of personal and collective identities. Rather, Rasmussen and Brown (2002) approach identity politics as a shared movement to expand the political sphere and meaning of political practices. Using Erel's (2006) study on the gendered and ethnicized citizenship of highly educated and skilled migrant women in Britain and Germany, participant Birgül

implemented various anti-racist campaigns after experiencing institutional and interpersonal racism. Part of this was to construct a new space for immigrant women who were marginalized from the political sphere to band together based on shared interests and concerns and gain political agency in the process. Therefore, political agency and identity are important dimensions of political participation since the practices that women perform to express their purposes, concerns, needs, and interest empower them through a process of self-development in a political system that marginalizes their voices (Lister, 2003). Women are also presented the opportunity to reconstruct their identities by identifying themselves with a particular community or movement (Ralston, 2006).

Political Participation in Unconventional Political Spaces. Lastly, when feminist scholars study the political participation of immigrant women, they observe the performance of participation that cut across social sites, particularly for those who feel a sense of belonging in multiple spaces and communities (Denis, 2006). According to Turner (2016), marginal and unconventional spaces provide individuals with the raw materials (i.e., their experiences) needed to construct their political agency and transform into political agents who contest the established boundaries of the public sphere, normalized ways of belonging, and inequitable distribution of rights. For instance, scholars have examined how the personal and the domestic or private spheres become sites for political contestation and struggle for women, where “the personal [becomes] political” (Predelli et al., 2012, p.190). This is evident in studies of foreign domestic workers who engage in political activism to change the conditions of their work in the private sphere, rendering private issues into a public political struggle and conflict (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006).

For instance, Hsiung and Nichol (2010) analyzed Canada’s Live-In Caregiver Program and foreign domestic workers’ claim to citizenship rights. The program, which was implemented in 1992 by the Canadian government to regulate the employment of foreign domestic workers, gave no assurances to migrant women that they would be able to obtain permanent residency or citizenship rights (especially in the form of legal rights) once they settled as domestic workers. According to Hsiung and Nichol (2010), foreign domestic workers were employed in the private sphere as caregivers under this exploitative program that admitted them into the country, not to eventually become members of the community, but for their “cheap and expendable” labour (pp.767, 769). As a result of this program, foreign domestic workers were isolated from the public, barred from political membership, and ultimately denied access to basic rights and protections as

they remained confined to the private sphere. Yet, with support from domestic advocacy groups, the foreign domestic workers in this study entered the public sphere through their lobbying efforts and used their experiences in the private sphere as an object of political (citizenship) struggle to change the program's requirements and live-in conditions (Hsiung & Nichol, 2010).

In other cases, immigrant women will use private issues as a reason for political contestation. Roseneil, Crowhurst, et al. (2012) examine intimate life as a space of struggle, where women reclaim control over their bodies, feelings, and relationships, and where they contest the privileges of male and heterosexual interests and needs in both intimate life and in society's laws and policies that regulate their private lives. Outshoorn et al. (2012) analyze the female body as a site of contestation, where women contest the laws and policies that diminish their autonomy over their own body. This includes laws and policies related to abortion and prostitution.

The home is usually seen as a site beyond the reach of government intervention since the private sphere is typically defined by personal and intimate family decision-making processes (England, 2017). Nonetheless, based on the few studies discussed above, it is evident that a government's practices, policies, and regulations have a direct impact on the daily lives of immigrant women. Therefore, the boundaries between the private sphere of the home and the public sphere are becoming increasingly blurred as the "politics of home" emerge from women's political demands for better homelife conditions or greater rights in the private sphere (England, 2017, p.380). Yet, there are certain limitations on what aspects of one's personal life can be constituted as a form of political action. As per Rasmussen and Brown (2002), identifying political participation everywhere and in many forms risk rendering the concept meaningless or trivial. Thus, borrowing from the theoretical assumptions of Isin and Nielson's (2008) "acts of citizenship" (p.2), to be considered a form of political participation, such acts or political activities generated from the home must have the intention of transforming or disrupting society in some way, even if such results are not reached. That is, political participation must be motivated by the desire to effect change in one's community (or home), participate in decision-making processes, or gain access to rights and duties. Thus, simply expressing political discontent with friends and family members is insufficient to be considered a form of political participation.

Pechkova's (2009) study of Muslim women in Uzbekistan illustrates the ways in which the home can be studied as an important space for political activism. For instance, while the women used their homes for religious observances, they also created a safe space to criticize the Uzbek

government. These private discussions in the home, combined with their religious experiences as born-again and devout Muslims in Uzbekistan, subsequently translated into political protests and public meetings against the country's president's decision-making processes (Pechkova, 2009). Therefore, what began as criticisms expressed during religious observances within the home extended to the women's community through protests and public meetings, transforming the home into a safe space for politics as well as a critical site for studying the materialization of political participation.

The concept of home can also be extended beyond the private sphere. Sharma (2006) argues that national borders have created the idea of a home, where a nation-state like Canada is not only a territorial space within which people live but also an ideological space of belonging for some (such as native-born Canadians) and exclusion for 'Others' (such as immigrants). In other words, a nation-state is synonymous to "the family and the circle of close friends" where the territory is the home and those defined as family members and close friends exhibit similar traits and characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, and culture (Sharma, 2006, p.7). Consequently, racialized immigrants (who are cast as outsiders) are often excluded from claiming the rights and entitlements that come with being a member of the nation-state, as well as from participating in civil society and defining what is common good. As a result, scholars examine how immigrant women engage in de-territorialized practices of citizenship that challenge the exclusively nation-based idea of membership and political participation (Lister & Pia, 2008). This includes transnational political activism, in which immigrant women focus their political efforts toward their country of origin or when women from various social contexts band together for a common cause. For instance, in Kennedy-Macfoy's (2012) study, immigrant women in organizations like the Foreign Women's Group in Norway or the Organization of Women of Asian and African descent in the United Kingdom engage in transnational political activism to empower migrant women throughout Western Europe by focusing on women's entitlement to rights. They form solidarity and a community across borders, and they mobilize networks to create change, support other migrants, and showcase the specificity of their experiences, both in their receiving societies and in their country of origin. As these women advocate for the equal rights of migrant women through transnational social spaces, they are simultaneously articulating new forms of membership and belonging that blur the boundaries between political states (Bauböck, 2006; Brekke, 2013).

In Lewicki and O'Toole's (2017) study, women in Steering Group were concerned with Muslim women's involvement and participation in both civic and religious decision-making spaces, highlighting issues such as the lack of representation of women on mosque committees and as mosques leaders, unsuitable conditions for women's prayers in mosques, and the need for more inclusivity of women in decision-making. For example, women from Steering Group organized events with more inclusivity, engaged in transnational struggles for the inclusivity of women in mosques in both the United States and the United Kingdom, and organized regular prayers, all to contest and transform established Islamic practices that were exclusive. What is unique about this case is that the women's political participation not only reflects engagement that cuts across conventional sites of political activism, which are often tied to nation-states, but that it also expresses itself in the religious spaces where the women inhabit and struggle for inclusivity and belonging. Thus, in line with Turner's (2016) earlier contention, political participation can occur in unconventional spaces where immigrant women can construct their political subjectivity and transform into political agents based on their lived experiences, as well as in communities where they are embedded and seek belonging. In other words, where immigrant women choose to participate politically will depend on their lived experiences and circumstances.

To summarize, immigrant women can choose to participate politically in a variety of spaces and sites, and by (re)claiming marginal spaces, they engage in a form of "politics of belonging": where immigrant women may be marginalized from the nation-state and its formal political sphere, they seek alternative ways of contesting community boundaries by creating new spaces and new means of inclusion, or by articulating a sense of belonging within the very community that excludes them (Yuval-Davis, 2006a, p.204). Therefore, defining political participation should recognize unconventional and informal sites where women can exercise political agency, sometimes within the context of their social commitments.

Conceptualizing Political Participation

As a result of immigrant women's political activities, feminist scholars have transformed understandings of political participation as an open concept (Lister & Pia, 2008). That is, political participation can entail both formal and informal activities, which can take place in various social sites and spaces, so long as immigrant women feel capable of exercising their political agency, voicing their needs and concerns, and implementing change in society. This includes political activities that affect the decision-making processes made by government officials in relation to

one's personal or collective needs, interests, and concerns (Abu-Laban, 2002). The objective of feminist scholars is to illustrate that an examination of political participation is not limited to formal political processes but can also be generated in multiple sites and through unconventional political activities that are not necessarily political in the formal sense, but where immigrant women feel the most productive in affecting change and influencing their community's political processes. According to Morales (2011), and as previously stated, we can consider immigrant women to be politically incorporated in their receiving society if they are able to engage in alternative forms of political activities that allow them to influence change or gain access to rights and decision-making processes. Therefore, as an open concept, immigrant women are presented the opportunity to define their own patterns of political participation; how they choose to express their needs, concerns, and interests; and how they choose to relate to their community's political processes and achieve political incorporation (Martiniello, 2006; Morales, 2011).

I adopt the following notion of political participation based on prior studies by feminist scholars:

The active dimension of citizenship and the exercise of political agency that any individual within society can perform to (re)claim and (re)articulate rights, create shifts in the political order, and transform societal and community laws based on personal or collective needs through various transformative activities and sites of contestation chosen according to the personal experiences and circumstances of individuals.

This notion of political participation will therefore help situate the forms of political participation that immigrant women in my research enacted, based on their narratives from their time in the DRC and now in Canada. Thus, even if the women's narratives about their experiences or involvement do not reflect the political in the formal sense, the definition above will assist me in situating instances of political agency. These may highlight new forms of politics and agency such as within the household or based on the women's roles as mothers. Furthermore, this broad definition of political participation will provide the women the opportunity to define for themselves what it means to be politically incorporated, regardless of whether this incorporation has been achieved (Abu-Laban, 2002; Morales, 2011). This will also enable me to think through some of my own assumptions of who and what is political, and where to find expressions of political participation.

I do not aim to define political participation as a sense of belonging to assess immigrant women's political incorporation, as Morales (2011) does. According to Erel (2009), immigrant women do not always seek validation or recognition as citizens through incorporation; rather, they attempt to construct alternative understandings of belonging by creating new spaces of belonging with other immigrants or racialized groups. Therefore, in my research, political incorporation is dependent not on one's sense of belonging, but on immigrant women's capacity to mobilize politically (Morales, 2011), and gendered migration trajectories are regarded as a factor facilitating or hindering political participation.

An Intersectional Approach to Political Incorporation

As feminist scholars strive to explore and highlight dynamic forms of immigrant women's political participation, they also consider how gender mutually intersects with other social cleavages to affect their repertoires of political activities. Based on the discussions in the previous section, it is apparent that immigrant women's political participation is mediated by gender norms, expectations, and opportunities of political agency. However, both Carling (2005) and Matos (2016) contend that gender is also mediated by other socially constructed identities such as ethnicity and race. In the case of immigrant women, I discussed in Chapter Two how they are politically marginalized because they are often defined as outsiders based on interlocking systems of oppression that create barriers to relevant resources and social networks (Brown, 2014; Harell, 2017). Yet, the convergence of social cleavages like gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status also influences greater participation in informal and unconventional political activities such as ethnic mobilization or politics based on shared experiences. Thus, political participation can be shaped and influenced by more than one social cleavage. Harell (2017) also contends that some barriers to participation are not always rooted in gender but in other forms of discrimination or prejudice such as racialization, as shown in the case of racialized groups that display lower shares of voting regardless of gender.

Therefore, many scholars like Anthias (2012) argue that gender cannot be studied alone when trying to understand gendered practices like immigrant women's political participation. Instead, scholars advocate that an analysis of gendered practices should incorporate intersectionality, studying how multiple aspects of identity are "co-constructed" (Juteau, 2016, p.144) or "mutually constitutive" (Anthias, 2012, p.4; Juteau, 2010, p.69) to create conditions of

domination, hierarchies, and inequalities (Brown, 2014). Put simply, socially constructed identities or social cleavages do not exist independently from each other; they all intersect and reciprocate to produce unique oppressive experiences for women who are members of such cleavages (Parham-Payne, 2017).

Though Crenshaw (1989) coined the term ‘intersectionality’, many of its ideas were rooted in Black and other racialized women’s political struggles in the United States from the 1960s to the early 1980s to combat the multiple systems of power that impacted them, such as racism, sexism, colonialism, militarism, and capitalist exploitation (Collins & Bilge, 2016). These activists recognized that “... the oppression they faced could not be solved by race-only, or class-only or gender-only or sexuality-only...” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p.54). Elements of intersectionality can also be traced back to Black feminist activist and abolitionist Sojourner Truth’s 1851 speech, “Ain’t I a Woman?”, in which she challenges existing assumptions and standards of what it means to be a woman while protesting her invisibility and exclusion as a woman within feminism because she identified as Black (Collins, 1990; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Black feminist scholars like Davis (1983) and hooks (1984) have also criticized the universal concept of a woman. Davis (1983) reveals Black women’s experiences of oppression from slavery to the suffrage movement were mutually shaped by race, gender, and class. hooks (1984) criticized contemporary feminist thought for focusing solely on gender as the main determinant of women’s oppression and failing to understand or consider the interconnectedness of social cleavages like gender, race, and class in creating unique oppressive experiences for Black women. hooks (1984) asserts that social cleavages are intimately linked to “... create a diversity of experience that determines the extent to which sexism will be an oppressive force in the lives of individual women” (p.5).

Inspired by Black activists and critical thinkers, Crenshaw (1989) addresses in her essay the subtle ways in which Black women were left oppressed and marginalized by anti-discrimination laws in the United States because they were discriminated against both as women and as Blacks. In essence, Crenshaw (1989) critiqued the treatment of race and gender as mutually exclusive (or incompatible) categories of experiences since this perspective limited the experiences of discrimination to those who were privileged members of the in-group (i.e., White women or Black men) and marginalized the experiences of those who were “multiply-burdened” due to intersecting social cleavages (i.e., Black women; Crenshaw, 1989, p.140). Crenshaw’s (1989) essay, as well as the writings and activism of other Black feminists before her, have been pivotal

in conceptualizing a framework in which multiple social cleavages are complexly interconnected to create interlocking systems of oppression and privilege. In other words, viewing oppressions like racism or sexism in isolation would be unrealistic since no form of discrimination exists in isolation; there are intersections between different forms of discrimination that collectively create and reinforce women's social inequalities and how they experience such inequalities (La Barbera, 2012). Crenshaw (1989), for example, asserts that because of their intersectional identity, Black women have unique experiences of discrimination compared to the larger classes of women and Blacks, and Collins (1990) notes that while all Black women experience racism, class differences among Black women shape how racism is experienced.

Adopting an intersectional approach, then, racialized immigrant women will experience different forms of oppression as compared to those belonging to society's dominant social group due to social cleavages like race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status that operate differently for both groups (Juteau, 2010). In the context of my research, I will focus on the role of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status as important cleavages shaping participants' political participation in Canada. I acknowledge that my choices are provisional and incomplete of all social cleavages and identities (Carbado et al., 2013). According to Smooth (2013), intersectionality does not define which social cleavages should be theorized or how many should be included for analysis. Still, gender, race, ethnicity, and immigration status are important to consider when studying immigrant women's political experiences, women who are often labelled as 'ethnic minorities', individuals who come from a different country, often speak a different language, follow different cultural practices and traditions, and are visibly different in physical appearance (Castles & Miller, 1998; Ralston, 2006). As a result, they are placed in subordinated positions. Class is also an important factor to consider when studying Black immigrant women's experiences; Black feminists like Collins (1990) have argued that Black women's experiences of discrimination and inequalities are often determined by "the simultaneity of race, class, and gender oppression" (p.16). The Combahee River Collective (2014) of Black feminists has also advocated the significance of understanding Black women's economic position and its impact on the oppressions they all face, contending that it is frequently impossible to "separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives [Black women's] they are most often experienced simultaneously" (p.274). For instance, Black women are generally poorer and less likely to be employed (The Combahee River Collective, 2014), experiences further seen as entrenched in the legacies of

colonialism and slavery (Davis, 1983). Therefore, the position of immigrant women is often defined by race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status (Castles & Miller, 1998; Kofman et al., 2000).

Ethnicity is defined as a sense of belonging to, or self-identification with, a social group based on shared origins, history, culture (including language, religion, and customs), values, and experiences (Castles & Miller, 1998). Ethnicity may promote identification with a specific group; nevertheless, visible markers of ethnicity, such as language, culture, and behaviour, may also be used as grounds for boundary drawing between dominant social groups and immigrants classified as ‘ethnic minorities’ (Castles & Miller, 1998).

The process of racialization is often invoked to define an “us” versus “them”, where those who are stigmatized and oppressed based on race face challenges accessing opportunities and resources (Erel et al., 2016, p.1343). Race is the social categorization of people that traces back to centuries of slavery, colonialism, genocide, and segregation, and in many societies, including postcolonial settler societies like Canada and post-colonized countries like the DRC, dominant groups use race to justify dominance, subjugation, and violence against other groups of people deemed inferior (Castles & Miller, 1998; Garneau & Giraudo-Baujeu, 2018). As a result, racialized groups share a history, social context, and distinctive experiences of discrimination and violence, as well as self-identification and solidarity. Race is widely defined as the categorization of people based on phenotypical or cultural markers such as skin colour, features, hair texture, culture, and other factors assumed to represent phenotypical differences (Castles & Miller, 1998). Racism is therefore described as “... the process whereby social groups categorize other groups as different or inferior, on the basis of phenotypical or cultural markers” (Castles & Miller, 1998, p.32). However, Garneau and Giraudo-Baujeu (2018) contend that biological distinctions do not define or establish races, but rather ‘races’ as social categories have become naturalized through discriminatory behaviours. That is, particular human features like skin colour are attributed social meanings based on sociohistorical contexts and processes and employed to justify racist ideologies and discrimination against people regarded as inferior, undesirable, or worthless, though other socially constructed markers of difference such as culture or worship have also been regarded and established as the basis of racist attitudes.

By and large, race can refer to visible markers employed by dominant groups as signs or indicators that prompt and justify racism or discriminatory attitudes directed towards less powerful

groups; it can also signify a social position in relation to power dynamics and a subjective experience (Garneau & Giraudo-Baujeu, 2018). Race and racism, then, are relational and context-dependent realities that often change or are experienced differently by social groups depending on settings, historical contexts, specific power relationships, and the interests of the dominant group (Garneau & Giraudo-Baujeu, 2018; Juteau, 2010).

Race, racism, and the process of racialization have long existed in Canada since the colonialization of Indigenous nations by both Britain and France and the enslavement of African people, ideologies that served as justification for the establishment of a White Euro-Canadian nation (Thobani, 2000). This can be observed by simply looking at Canada's immigration policies. For instance, racialization was perpetuated by Canada's immigration policies that once defined categories of immigrants based on preferred races. Furthermore, despite growing diversity through immigration from non-European countries and the adoption of multiculturalism as an official policy (Wu et al., 2012), the label 'immigrant' perpetuates racialization through a racialized and non-membership status, restricting one's access to citizenship rights (Thobani, 2000). Thus, despite possessing citizenship like other members, racialization has assisted in marginalizing immigrants and affecting their incorporation into mainstream society (Thobani, 2000; Wu et al., 2012). In turn, racialization has driven immigrants to rely on other methods of political participation from the margins of society (Parham-Payne, 2017). Therefore, greater research is needed to highlight how race, ethnicity, and immigration status may intersect with gender to impact immigrant women's political participation (Brown, 2014).

Because my case study concerns the political experiences of Congolese women in Canada, it is critical to recognize and examine the impacts of a distinct type of racism: anti-Black racism. Mullings et al. (2016), citing the African Canadian Legal Clinic, define anti-Black racism in Canada as follows:

[P]rejudice, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement. Anti-black racism in Canada is often subtle and is generally not accompanied by overt racial slurs or explicitly prohibitive legislation. However, it is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies and practices, such that anti-black racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger white society. Canadian anti-black racism in its contemporary form

continues the historical practices of racial segregation, economic disadvantage and social division. (p.23)

According to Creese (2019) and Maynard (2017), Blackness in Canada is historically and socially constructed, established by Europeans during colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade to legitimate the superiority of White Europeans and the inferiority of Black people. However, anti-Black racism has persisted in Canada since the abolition of slavery in 1834, as evidenced today by African Canadians' current experiences of discrimination and marginalization, such as a lack of opportunities, lower socioeconomic status, higher unemployment rates, barriers to housing and education, discrimination in accessing positions in the public sector, overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, and being more likely to face state-sanctioned violence (Maynard, 2017; Mullings et al., 2016). People whose bodies are read as Black are often not fully seen as human beings (e.g., they are seen as animalistic, hypersexual, dangerous, criminals, unintelligent, or commodities) and are subjected to various forms of (subtle) racial subordination, neglect, negative stereotypes, and violence (Maynard, 2017). This is due to racial stereotypes linked with Blackness that shape others' behaviours, actions, and attitudes toward African Canadians, whether consciously or unconsciously (Mullings et al., 2016). As per Creese (2019), African Canadians are presumed to identify as Black and are imagined and treated as such; thus, ideas about Blackness have influenced how African Canadians are treated in public spaces like schools, workplaces, and interactions with state institutions, exposing them to unique and profound experiences that other social groups do not necessarily share.

Blackness and anti-Black racism are also overtly gendered, with Black women experiencing distinct forms of systemic discrimination and devaluation (Creese, 2019; Maynard, 2017). Queer Black feminist Bailey (2021) coined the term "misogynoir" in 2008 to describe the experiences of anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women face: "the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization" (p.1). For instance, Black women in Canada face higher levels of poverty, hostility, and oppression in their efforts to parent and make a living, devaluation and exploitation of their labour, housing insecurity, increased vulnerability to gender-based violence, and negative stereotypes such as being sexual deviants, 'welfare queens', and negligent mothers (Maynard, 2017). Therefore, it is important to

trace the role of anti-Black racism or misogynoir (or the social construction of Black womanhood) in Black immigrant women's narratives and experiences of racism and gender discrimination.

Lastly, class is defined in this study not by the women's income levels, since this would have been difficult to determine without a more thorough analysis, but by their access to various socioeconomic resources, such as higher education and paid employment, which are said to play an essential role in explaining women's political participation (Harell, 2017). Education and employment can increase one's opportunities of acquiring the civic skills and knowledge required to participate politically (Verba et al., 1995). According to Harell (2017), studies have found that the process of immigration often results in women acquiring status and access to resources, whilst men often lose socioeconomic status. As Black women tend to have lower educational attainment and employment rates, it is necessary to include class (socioeconomic resources) in the analysis of participants' political incorporation and repertoires of political participation.

Overall, using an intersectional approach will help build a better understanding of how gender intersects with other social cleavages of difference to affect immigrant women's political participation, as well as how such experiences may intersect with the effects of their gendered migration trajectories. I shall employ La Barbera's (2012) intersectional-gender approach. Based on this approach, despite the centrality of gender in the analysis of immigrant women's experiences, it is still a transversal or interdependent category that intersects with other social cleavages. To illustrate, while all women face disadvantages that affect their political participation because of gender norms and inequalities, social cleavages like race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status may introduce differentiated structural and institutional disadvantages for immigrant women compared to native-born women, further limiting their political participation (Brown, 2014). Employing La Barbera's (2012) approach does not imply a hierarchy of oppression, with gender discrimination at the front (hooks, 1984). It also does not entail an additive approach in which gender is analyzed and understood in isolation from other social cleavages (Bowleg, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006b). As hooks (1984) contends, all forms of oppression are linked and reinforced by similar institutional and social structures. As such, the intersectional-gender approach mainly acknowledges that gender oppression is a form of domination that all immigrant women face in some way, and that their experiences cannot be understood without recognizing its consequences. However, when studying Congolese women's political

incorporation, it is also important to recognize that gender is interdependent and mutually constitutive of other social cleavages.

Concluding Remarks on Theoretical Resources

In this section, I introduced three theoretical concepts that form the basis of my research, which I bring together to create a framework for investigating the links between migration and political incorporation. By using the concept of gendered migration trajectories as the predominant theoretical resource, my research intends to capture, first and foremost, the gendered experiences and trajectories of those who migrate from their country of origin to their receiving society, and how these experiences are preserved across time and space to affect political incorporation. Here, I draw on transit migration literature, the sociological life course approach, and scholarship on gender and migration. I use the concept of political incorporation to adequately reflect the experiences of immigrant women's political inclusion as a complex process that involves the possibilities of conflict and barriers. I also use feminist conceptions of political participation to assess the dynamic nature of immigrant women's political activities and political incorporation. Lastly, I draw on the intersectional-gender approach to determine how gender, race, ethnicity, class (socioeconomic resources), and immigration status intersect to create barriers to certain political activities.

In addition to creating a framework for examining the subject under study, I intend to consider and highlight the subjectivity and agency of the women involved in the research and how they overcame the barriers they faced. My methodological approach is described in the following chapter where I provide more details on my data collection and analysis, including how I aim to capture the different elements of my theoretical framework and the women's subjectivities through the empirical work.

Chapter Four: Methodological Approach

“As Alastair Thomson (1998) points out ‘we compose our memories to make sense of our past and present lives’”
(Ryan, 2008, p.122)

“This is an epistemological and methodological intervention, making a case for a close engagement of life-stories as a useful method for accessing self-presentations and subjugated knowledges...”
(Erel, 2009, p.194)

To answer my research objectives and questions outlined in Chapter Two in conjunction with my theoretical framework established in Chapter Three, I will adopt a qualitative approach involving the use of the life-stories interview method as my primary data collection technique. Yet I will also rely on the analysis of secondary sources and the use of broad census data to provide additional and supportive information. By and large, my methodology will be influenced by a feminist perspective in which the research and its methods are rooted in women’s lived experiences and subjugated knowledges, which can be uncovered through an analysis of their experiential accounts (Maynard, 2004; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). This chapter begins with a discussion of my research methods and data collection techniques, as well as justifications for the use of the qualitative research method of life-stories interviews as one of the most appropriate methods for studying immigrant women’s migration experiences and political incorporation. I then discuss the sample selection process, including a brief description of the Congolese population in Canada and the Ottawa-Gatineau region, the reasons for choosing first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin as my case study of immigrant women’s political incorporation, the Ottawa-Gatineau region as a fitting context for studying this, and the research participants themselves. This is followed by a review of the life-stories interview process, the analytical strategies used, the obstacles encountered during my research, and the validity of research results.

Methods and Techniques for Data Collection

Influenced by Mahieu et al.’s (2015) use of quantitative data to analyze and compare female to male migration patterns to Belgium, I use broad census data from Statistics Canada to shed light on the historical patterns of female migration from the DRC to Canada, particularly from the 1990s. This was a significant period when emigration rates to Canada increased in conjunction with the Congo wars, described by Huening (2009) as international wars fought within the DRC between 1996 to 1997 (the first Congo war) and 1998 to 2003 (the second Congo war,

the Great African War, or Africa's World War).¹⁸ Survey-based data collection and the use of census data dominate research on immigrant political participation in Canada and other Western democracies (e.g., Bilodeau, 2008; Black, 1987; O'Neill et al., 2012; Wals, 2011; White, 2017). However, quantitative data alone does not provide clarity and insight into the complexities of political incorporation and, most importantly for this research, of the effects of migration and interlocking systems of oppression. Therefore, quantitative data is simply used for context, providing broader patterns of immigrant women from the DRC (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012).

In terms of qualitative methods and data, I began my research by analyzing a variety of secondary sources, or previously established publications that were related to my research (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012), as a point of departure to familiarize myself with immigrant women of Congolese origin in both Canada and the DRC, their experiences in both their country of origin and their receiving society, and their migration histories. This has included the review of data collected by scholars, organizations (such as MONUSCO),¹⁹ analysts, journalists, and government agencies. Secondary source data is also used to reinforce and supplement the data collected during interviews (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). The literature review provided in Chapter Two is an example of secondary sources reviewed in this study. Overall, secondary sources serve to supplement and support the information gathered through my primary research method — the life-stories interview method — while also providing insight into the women's life stories and experiences.

The Life-Stories Interview Method

In Chapter Three, I developed a theoretical framework that guides my methodology. To summarize, my theoretical framework primarily adopts a trajectory approach to define migration trajectories and a subject-oriented approach to capture the gendered experiences of migration and how such experiences impact immigrant women's political incorporation. Therefore, to reflect my theoretical framework, my methodological approach also incorporates a subject-oriented approach. To study migration trajectories, scholars often employ a long-term and long-distance methodological design coined the "trajectory ethnography" (Schwarz, 2020, p.218). According to Schwarz (2020), a trajectory ethnography is the reconstruction of migrants' migration trajectories and histories to their current place of settlement (which are often not their final destination) as they

¹⁸ Further discussions and details of these conflicts will be provided in Chapter Five.

¹⁹ MONUSCO is a French acronym for *Mission de l'organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en RD Congo*, a United Nations peacekeeping mission in the DRC since July 1st, 2010.

occur, including the discontinuous and unpredictable treks, and their experiences with migration regimes. This reconstruction is done based on in-depth interviews with migrants and by essentially following migrants along the journey and arranging follow-up visits in different places and at different times of their trajectories (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schwarz, 2020). To illustrate, Schapendonk (2012) utilizes a trajectory ethnography, collecting much of his data through in-depth interviews with Sub-Saharan Africans en route to the EU. Collecting migrants' biographies required the researcher to travel to Morocco and Turkey. Generally, a trajectory ethnography includes informal conversations, in-depth interviews, and observations (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014), with the aim of gaining greater insights into (un)predictable migration trajectories and experiences *as* they unfold through time and space (Schapendonk et al., 2020; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schwarz, 2020).

While a trajectory ethnography is beneficial in trajectory research, my study does not seek to physically follow migrants as the long-term methodology is time-consuming and expensive, particularly for an academic project that is limited in both aspects (Schwarz, 2020). Further, my research examines the effects of migration on the political incorporation of immigrant women, those who have settled 'permanently' in Canadian society. Therefore, my research takes place in the receiving society as opposed to the actual journey. Nevertheless, Schwarz (2020) argues that migration trajectories can be reconstructed through interviews without having to travel alongside migrants. Therefore, to place migration at the centre of my research, and to grasp an understanding of the experiences of migration and their effects on immigrant women's political incorporation, I opt for a life-stories interview method, made popular in migration research (Willis & Yeoh, 2000), and viewed by feminist scholars as a more appropriate method when seeking to understand a social phenomenon through the perspective of research participants (Maynard, 2004). Furthermore, given that one of the objectives of this research is to acquire a better understanding of how gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status intersect to inform immigrant women's political participation, the life-stories interview method is the most effective in capturing this.

The life story is characterized by participants speaking of their life as a whole, its most important events (in relation to the research), how participants experience these events, and of the opportunities and constraints that they encounter and navigate through (Atkinson, 1998, 2004; Erel, 2009; Miller, 2000). More precisely, the life story is:

... the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived as completely and honestly as possible, what that person remembers of it, and what he or she wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another... (Atkinson, 2004, p.566)²⁰

Therefore, the life story is a qualitative research method used to conduct an in-depth analysis of a participant's life, how they make sense of the experiences they confront, and how an aspect of their life connects to another (Atkinson, 2004; Erel, 2009). And through their narrative, it renders "... the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear" (Atkinson, 1998, p.7).

Rationale for Using the Life-Stories Interview Method

There are three clear advantages to using the life-stories interview method. First, rather than restricting research to a particular moment in one's life, the life-stories interview method is advantageous for a long-term perspective (Ryan, 2008), which seeks, for instance, to analyze how gendered migration trajectories and experiences can influence immigrant women's political incorporation in the receiving society. When I adopted the principles and assumptions of the life course approach in Chapter Three, gendered migration trajectories were theorized as a process defined by a sequence of dynamic experiences, as well as a trajectory where the experiences of migration are interconnected to the experiences of incorporation (Wingens et al., 2011). Therefore, to understand the links between migration and political incorporation, I need to adopt a research method that not only considers a single moment in time (Edmonston, 2013), such as migration or political incorporation, but that seeks to uncover how one's migration had unfolded to create the conditions of opportunities or constraints for political incorporation in the receiving country.

Second, the life-stories interview method allows the researcher to collect plenty of rich data (Atkinson, 2004; Ryan & Webster, 2008). For my research, the interview method will serve to reconstruct migration trajectories and provide in-depth knowledge on a) the micro, meso, and macro factors that relate to migration experiences (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008); b) participants' decision-making at each phase of the trajectory (Schwarz, 2020); c) how gender plays an essential role in shaping migration trajectories and experiences (Espín & Dottolo, 2015; Timmerman et al., 2015); d) the transformative effects of migration on participants' subjectivities

²⁰ To illustrate, Erel (2009) explained to participants that she was interested in learning about their life stories pertaining to themes of migration, growing up, education, work, family, and activities. However, Erel (2009) also encouraged participants to speak on subjects or themes they believed were important but were left out of discussion.

and identities (Schapendonk et al., 2020); e) the impacts of gendered migration trajectories on political incorporation (Wingens et al., 2011); and f) the participants' capacity for political agency (Erel, 2009). The life-stories interview method can also provide in-depth knowledge on the various types of political participation in which participants engage, as well as the process of politicization and the impacts of intersectional power relations on their political incorporation as racialized immigrant women in their receiving country (Brown, 2014; Harell, 2017).

Third, the life-stories interview method gives marginalized and underrepresented groups, such as racialized immigrant women, a voice to speak of and define their entire migration and settlement experiences, providing an authentic perspective of their migration and political incorporation experiences that could not be understood or made available without their knowledges (Baaz & Stern, 2008; Erel, 2009; Schapendonk, 2012; Threlfall et al., 2012). Life stories are also important for challenging specific assumptions made by me, the researcher, as well as for shedding light on hidden knowledges and experiences that scholars have yet to theorize or have overlooked (Baaz & Stern, 2008; Erel, 2009). Thus, as Atkinson (2004) declares a need for us to hear the life stories of the underrepresented, the life stories in this research contribute to the ever-growing need to include the voices and knowledges of racialized women of African descent in literature and academia, hopefully creating a shift in the direction of how and what knowledge is being produced, as well as challenging traditional discourses on migration and political incorporation (Ryan & Webster, 2008; Shabbar, 2015). To illustrate, participants in this study were asked the following question: *How would you define political participation?* Joanna replied:

Je pense que la participation politique c'est, en gros, on va dire que c'est toute implication, dans tout ce qui a lien avec ses droits ou les lois dans la société. C'est comme ça que je le définirais, parce que déjà commencer à, par exemple, faire partie d'un conseil d'un quartier, déjà, tu s'intéresses aux choses, on va dire, de ton environnement proche, de ton quartier.²¹

The above narrative demonstrates how the open-ended structure of the life-stories interview method enabled Joanna to provide her own interpretation of political participation based on her or others' experiences (political participation as informal participation in district councils) that may not conform to conventional knowledge, thereby adding an alternative discourse (Shabbar, 2015).

²¹ Translation: "I think that political participation is, basically, we'll say that it's any involvement, in anything that has to do with one's rights or the laws in society. That's how I would define it, because already starting to, for example, be part of a district council, already, you are interested in the things, we will say, of your close environment, of your district."

Method of Data Collection

To collect life stories, I adopt Erel's (2009) in-depth interview technique based on an open-ended, semi-structured interview guide. In an open-ended interview process, the researcher poses questions that allow participants to share and elaborate on their life experiences based on the questions being asked (Erel; 2009; Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). The open-ended interview process also allows participants to raise questions back to the researcher, where information is being transferred in both directions (Schapendonk, 2012). For instance, when recounting her experiences with racism when losing a job opportunity to a Canadian woman, Joanna asked me, "... alors pour vous, je ne sais pas, est-ce que c'est pas un peu normal? Est-ce que ce n'est pas un peu normal?"²² This demonstrates that in an open-ended interview process, the researcher is never fully in control of the direction of the interview (Atkinson, 1998). In semi-structured interviews, the researcher establishes an interview guide based on relevant research themes to guide the general direction of the conversation, but semi-structured interviews also provide participants the opportunity to guide part of the conversation by asking their own questions or bringing up topics that have not been addressed (Kvale, 2007; Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). Therefore, even when I pose standardized questions, the semi-structured interviews ensure that the participants' position, knowledge, and/or experiences are not limited (Fine, 1994). Previous research on the migration and settlement experiences of Congolese migrant women also found that open-ended, semi-structured interviews were effective in exploring perceptions and experiences (see Saksena & McMorrow, 2020; Wachter et al., 2016).

As per Atkinson (2004), I intended to conduct two interviews with participants, each lasting about 2 hours. However, due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic during the data collection phase, only two participants were able to meet this request for two interviews, while others found it difficult to schedule two lengthy interviews during the peak of the pandemic. Still, I found that only one interview was needed, on average, with some follow-up discussions or informal conversations (either during a virtual meeting, phone call or over email) to clarify some key points raised in the initial interviews. The interviews lasted between 1.5 hours to 4 hours.

²² Translation: "... so for you, I don't know, isn't that a little normal? Isn't it a bit normal?"

Selection of Samples: Sampling Methods and Participants

Scholars like Carling (2005) criticize studies that treat women and men as separate, arguing that studies of female migration must incorporate an analysis of men's experiences to fully grasp a comprehensive understanding of gender and the differences in their experiences. However, my research is not strictly concerned with analyzing gender, and it does not aim to study how the experiences of women differ from that of men. Instead, I recognize in this study that gender-related factors throughout migration can shape experiences and trajectories, and thus adopt a broader perspective of gender. Moreover, due to the limited timing of my research, I chose only to select female participants for my research as I sought to contribute to current, but limited, research on immigrant women and their migration and political experiences (Mahieu et al., 2015).

As previously stated, the participants I selected for my research are first-generation immigrant women in Canada of Congolese descent from the DRC. I chose to centre my research on these women for several reasons. First, many Congolese women are raised in an environment that attempts to instill in women to follow and internalize traditional gender norms, such as being responsible for the survival of the household as caregivers while men remain "heads of the households", norms which often place women in subservient positions (Lusey et al., 2018, pp.2-3). In a patriarchal society like the DRC, women are often valued as representatives of the family and keepers of their home, yet Fiske and Shackel (2015) contend that when women enter the public sphere, they are only seen through their gender roles of daughter, mother, or wife. According to this viewpoint, women's political voices and rights are often ignored in the public sphere since they are perceived to have no other status beyond that attached to the household. Thus, I chose to centre my research on immigrant women of Congolese origin as a result of their exposure to a culture of gender inequalities (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016; Freedman, 2015). I also chose this demographic to discover if Congolese women's migration trajectories were a means of escaping or resisting oppressive structures and achieving more political autonomy in a society like Canada's that grants women greater political power and opportunities (Carling, 2005; Kofman et al., 2000; Matos, 2016; Tastsoglou et al., 2005; Willis & Yeoh, 2000). Second, Congolese women have been reported to endure trauma, insecurities, isolation, and hardships during their migration from the repressive political regime of Congo and its culture of gender inequalities, which have created barriers to their incorporation in their new country (Wachter et al., 2016). Thus, I sought to determine how such possible migration experiences would impact the political incorporation of

immigrant women in Canada who originate and migrate from a politically repressive and gender-unequal society, such as the women from the DRC.

Third, first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin are understudied in the Canadian context. Many studies that analyze Congolese women's political incorporation have been conducted in the DRC or European countries like Belgium (e.g., Freedman, 2015; Godin & Chideka, 2010; Garbin & Godin, 2013). Yet, due to the political instabilities and the lack of economic opportunities in the DRC, women are increasingly migrating out of Congo to settle in Western countries, including Canada (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016). Since the 1990s, Canada has become a common destination for Congolese women beyond European destinations, with trends coinciding with the Congo wars of the late 1990s and the early 2000s that have created political, social, and economic instabilities for women in the DRC. As of 2016, Canada has been home to 25,655 individuals from the DRC, with women accounting for 52 percent (or 13,435) of this population (Statistics Canada, 2017e). Their permanent settlement in Canada is also expressed in the rise in the number of Congolese immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship during the years of civil wars in the DRC, as illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Number of Canadian Citizens from the DRC by Immigration Period

Country of Birth	Immigration Period		
	1981 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2010
Congo, Democratic Republic of	640	5,230	9,170

Note. Adapted from *2016 Census of Population*, Statistics Canada, 2017, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016184. Copyright 2017 by Statistics Canada.

Furthermore, as Canada received approximately 1.2 million new immigrants who permanently settled between 2011 and 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017c), the DRC ranked among the highest source countries from the African region with 7,400 recent immigrants, of whom 52 percent (3,835) were women (Statistics Canada, 2017f). While this may present to be small in numbers, it nevertheless contrasts with the 1980s when Canada received merely 745 recent immigrants from the DRC of whom only 42 percent (315) were women (Statistics Canada, 2018). And according to Flahaux and Schoumaker (2016), Congolese migrants returning to the DRC have been on the decline, encouraging greater outflows of Congolese women seeking to reunite with their families

abroad and settle permanently in their new destination. Thus, with greater numbers of Congolese women migrating to Canada, it becomes imperative to understand how their migration may be affecting their political incorporation in this country.

Fourth, Congolese women provide an excellent case study for gaining a better understanding of the process of politicization and how intersectional power relations may impact immigrant women's political incorporation, as they may find themselves embroiled in such power relations due to their identity as Black Congolese immigrant women in Canada. In other words, we may learn through their narratives how gender, class, race, ethnicity, and immigration status intersect to impact both their repertoires of political participation and their political incorporation. Fifth, I chose to study immigrant women of Congolese origin residing in Canada's National Capital Region, the metropolitan area of Ottawa-Gatineau, for its accessibility as I attend the University of Ottawa, and for its bilingualism (French and English), large immigrant population (5th in all of Canada with 255,800 immigrants), and its proximity to political platforms and resources (Statistics Canada, 2017c). Ottawa-Gatineau is also the location of one of the largest Congolese communities in Canada, with roughly 6,005 individuals who identify as Congolese, of whom 54 percent (3,215) are women (Statistics Canada, 2018). The DRC also ranked the highest in the Ottawa-Gatineau region as a source country for recent immigrants from Africa (Statistics Canada, 2018). Lastly, as a second-generation Congolese woman, or a Canadian-born woman whose parents were born in the DRC, I aspired to share Congolese women's stories and experiences comparable to those shared by my mother and that I observed when growing up.

Based on the choices above, participants for the study must have been a) first-generation immigrants, born and raised in the DRC, though they may have migrated to other countries before making Canada their final destination; b) Canadian citizens; and c) living in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. Being politically incorporated in Canada was not a criterion for participation as I invited a diversity of political experiences to shed light on the theoretical assumptions of the research.

Selection of Participants

After receiving ethics approval from the University of Ottawa's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity in September 2019 (see Appendix A for the certificate of ethics approval), I began recruiting participants using both purposeful sampling and snowball sampling (Miller, 2000; Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). In the Ottawa-Gatineau region, I already established a connection with the Congolese community through my participation in religious and social activities organized by

church leaders within the community since September 2016. I also established a connection through my participation as a guest speaker in a forum organized by a few members of the community in November 2018 that examined the subject of women's leadership within the Congolese community. Based on my connections, I used the purposeful criterion to deliberately contact individuals that were already known to me and who I believed could provide important information for the objectives and theoretical assumptions of my research while representing the various migratory and political experiences (Maxwell, 1999; Miller, 2000). I then used the snowball sampling method to locate additional participants (Miller, 2000; Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). The participants that I interviewed through my purposeful sampling and informants within the broader Congolese community in the Ottawa-Gatineau region shared the research flyer (which contained information of the research project and my contact information) with individuals they believed would be interested and qualified for the research.²³ I also distributed my research flyer with known community organizations in the Ottawa-Gatineau region that Congolese women are frequently a part of, such as the *Communauté Congolaise du Canada Ottawa-Gatineau* and the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*, to share with members and help recruit participants. In turn, the potential participants contacted me, confirmed their interest in participating in the project, and were then selected for an interview. The interviews took place between December 2019 and December 2020. At the start of the data collection phase, interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient location, such as the University of Ottawa or the participant's home. Yet, when COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March 2020, interviews were conducted via Zoom (a video conferencing software and platform) or phone calls.

When recruiting participants, I discovered, like Erel (2009), that having previous contact with an individual placed greater constraint on my ability to conduct the interview with that individual since their familiarity with me gave them the option to postpone the interview, and in two cases, interviews were postponed until the data collection phase was complete. Difficulties included securing the right time and place to conduct the interview and delays in responding to my request for interviews. Whereas participants with whom I had no previous contact were far more willing to schedule interviews and to agree to participate in the research, possibly because of the

²³ Among the informants were individuals I already knew, those who learned about my research and contacted me, and community leaders who were interested in the research. While these informants did not meet the research criteria, they offered to assist in the recruitment of participants who did meet these criteria.

formal relationship we were developing in the context of the research. I also encountered two other challenges in recruiting participants. First, the COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges to the research, where interviews were halted for four months after the start of the data collection phase since it became difficult to make (and maintain) connections with potential participants without face-to-face interactions, and I had to adapt the interview process, which some individuals were not comfortable with (i.e., moving interviews to an online platform, navigating busy schedules). The second challenge was related to the subject of my research: migration. The subject itself worries certain Congolese women who are concerned that the government will learn about their illicit migration experiences through my research (for instance, the illegal migration techniques to circumvent passage restrictions or resolve visa obstacles) and do not want to put themselves in jeopardy, even with the assurance of anonymity or the ability to omit any details they were not comfortable sharing. In response to these challenges, it became increasingly necessary for me to rely on informants whom prospective participants would trust when recruited for my study and, thus, more willing to contact me.

The final important factor that I considered in the selection of my sample was the size of the sample population. For my research, I chose to conduct a case study with $N = 15$ participants to allow for the time and space to engage in-depth with each life stories rather than conducting representative research of the entire Congolese community (in the Ottawa-Gatineau community or across Canada) or of the immigrant women population in Canada (Erel, 2009; Ryan & Webster, 2008). According to Kvale (2007), the number of interviews used in studies is often around $N = 15 \pm 10$ where the point of knowledge saturation is often reached, or when further interviews no longer yield significant knowledge or information. The intentions of my research are not to generalize the experiences of the women involved, to uncover the frequency with which particular experiences occur among immigrant women of the Congolese community, or for my research to be representative of the entire immigrant or Congolese community (Erel, 2009; Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). Instead, I seek only to engage with the complexities and subjectivities in each of the life stories, which does not require many participants (Erel, 2009). Furthermore, while additional interviews would have been welcome if they had been available, as previously discussed, the COVID-19 pandemic presented obstacles to the recruitment and retention of participants. For example, locating and connecting with Congolese women was more difficult, and response rates were lower due to potential participants' decreased capacity to participate in interviews during

lockdowns, as well as them experiencing heightened vulnerabilities, challenges, and uncertainties. Without face-to-face interactions, it was also difficult to establish trust with the persons I came into contact. Nevertheless, data quality and knowledge saturation were achieved with the final sample, as I was able to identify trends in participants' narratives and which yielded valuable and relevant information to respond to my research questions and objectives.

Sociodemographic Data of Participants

Table 2 below presents the sociodemographic information of the fifteen participants, illustrating diversity such as in age group, province of birth in the DRC, years in Canada, landed immigration status, employment status, marital status, and rated migration experience. I chose not to present the women's biographies to respect the wishes of participants who preferred to remain anonymous in the research by minimizing as much as possible any potentially identifying information such as year or city of birth, year of arrival to Canada, current employment, education information, and named social or political organizations. To protect anonymity, the names I use for each participant are pseudonyms that either they chose, or I assigned, during the transcription phase to anonymize the data.^{24, 25}

The participants were either residents of Ottawa ($n = 10$) or Gatineau ($n = 5$), ranged in age from 20 to 69 years, and originated from different provinces in the DRC, namely Kinshasa ($n = 9$), Kongo Central ($n = 2$), Haut-Katanga ($n = 1$), Ituri ($n = 1$), Kwilu ($n = 1$), and Lualaba ($n = 1$). Furthermore, participants had been in Canada for at least five years; many had entered Canada as spouses or dependents under the family class ($n = 7$); and most had been Canadian citizens for at least a year. Most participants held a bachelor's ($n = 7$), master's ($n = 2$), or doctorate degree ($n = 1$) as their highest level of education and were employed full-time in their area of specialization (e.g., public health, engineering, and psychotherapy). Many had children ($n = 9$) and were either separated from their spouses ($n = 2$), single ($n = 5$), or married/in a common-law relationship ($n = 7$). When asked about their overall migration experience, just under half of those interviewed said it was positive ($n = 7$), followed by a neutral rating ($n = 6$) and a negative rating ($n = 2$). The participants rated this based on their subjective feelings about their migration experiences. A

²⁴ Some participants elected not to choose their own pseudonym, while those who did not initially choose a name during the interviews were given the option to change the name that I assigned when the initial transcripts were shared.

²⁵ The use of pseudonyms may not adequately guarantee anonymity (Clark-Kazak, 2011), given the small Congolese population in Ottawa-Gatineau. Participants were informed in the consent form of the possibility of being identified through certain identifiers (such as one's position in the community or involvement in activities within the community) and were given the option to refrain from sharing such data if they wished to remain completely anonymous.

positive rating indicated overall pleasant and optimistic attitudes, perceptions, opinions, and emotions about their migration experiences and outcomes; a negative rating indicated overall unpleasant and apprehensive attitudes, perceptions, opinions, and emotions about their migration experiences and outcomes; and a neutral rating indicated no strong favourable or unfavourable sentiments or outlooks about their migration experiences, or being unsure how to feel about or perceive their overall experiences (complexity in their sentiments or outlooks).

Two participants in the sample had not yet acquired Canadian citizenship at the time of the study. This decision was made for two reasons. First, both participants were in the final stages of obtaining citizenship (submission of application and citizenship test) and had resided in Canada for at least five years (surpassing the number of years needed to be eligible for citizenship). Second, since the COVID-19 pandemic made recruitment difficult, the two participants' experiences, both in terms of migration and political participation, reflected those of the Canadian citizens in the sample and shed light on additional experiences that I considered necessary to explore.

Table 2*Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants*

Participants^a	Age Group	Province of Birth in DRC	Years in Canada	Landed Immigration Status	Years with Canadian Citizenship	Highest Level of Education	Employment Status	Marital Status	Children	Rated Migration Experiences
Amina	50 to 59	Kongo Central	30 to 34	Family Class	15 to 19	College	Contract	Separated	Yes	Neutral
Bethanie	20 to 29	Kinshasa	5 to 9	Refugee Class	Not Applicable	High School	Student	Single	No	Negative
Dalia	40 to 49	Lualaba	10 to 14	Refugee Class	0 to 4	Bachelor's	Full-Time	Single	Yes	Negative
Francine	40 to 49	Kwilu	20 to 24	Refugee Class	15 to 19	Master's	Entrepreneur	Separated	Yes	Positive
Idara	40 to 39	Kinshasa	10 to 14	Economic Class	0 to 4	Doctorate	Full-Time	Common-Law	Yes	Positive
Jamille	50 to 59	Kinshasa	25 to 29	Visitor Visa	20 to 24	Bachelor's	Full-Time	Married	Yes	Neutral
Joanna	30 to 39	Kinshasa	5 to 9	Student Visa	Not Applicable	Bachelor's	Full-Time	Married	Yes	Neutral
Keisha	20 to 29	Ituri	10 to 14	Refugee Class	5 to 9	High School	Student	Single	No	Neutral
Keren	40 to 49	Kinshasa	5 to 9	Family Class	0 to 4	Master's	Full-Time	Married	Yes	Positive
Lehana	20 to 29	Kinshasa	10 to 14	Family Class	10 to 14	Bachelor's	Full-Time	Single	No	Positive
Michelle	20 to 29	Kinshasa	15 to 19	Refugee Class	10 to 14	Bachelor's	Full-Time	Single	No	Neutral
Rosalie	30 to 39	Kinshasa	15 to 19	Family Class	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Neutral
Samora	60 to 69	Kongo Central	5 to 9	Family Class	0 to 4	High School	Contract	Married	No	Positive
Valérie	30 to 39	Kinshasa	10 to 14	Family Class	10 to 14	Bachelor's	Full-Time	Married	Yes	Positive
Yolande	40 to 49	Haut-Katanga	20 to 24	Family Class	15 to 19	Bachelor's	Full-Time	Married	Yes	Positive

^a = the names provided for participants are pseudonyms.

Table 3 highlights the reasons why participants decided to live in Ottawa or Gatineau. Only four participants chose to settle in a different city other than the Ottawa-Gatineau region when they first landed in Canada. Dalia and Francine both settled in the Niagara region (Ontario) and Montréal, Québec, respectively, since these regions were the nearest to the border they crossed. Joanna settled in Moncton, New Brunswick for six years to study at the University of Moncton. Lastly, Amina spent a year in Toronto, Ontario since her husband was settled there. Nonetheless, the four participants eventually relocated to Ottawa or Gatineau, citing reasons similar to the other participants, such as the region's bilingualism and multiculturalism, pleasant and family-oriented atmosphere, educational programs, and vast opportunities. Reuniting with family members such as spouses and extended family was another factor.

Table 3

Participants' Reasons to Settle in Ottawa or Gatineau and Examples

Reasons for Settlement	Examples
Bilingualism and Multiculturalism	A seamless transition; the ability to find employment in French; the ability for children to undergo French immersion; the opportunity to learn English in a Francophone environment; the inclusion of immigrants
Pleasant Atmosphere	A peaceful and quiet environment; a smaller city compared to Toronto or Montréal; the ideal city; a place to feel at ease and at home; friendly neighbours; tranquility
Family-oriented Atmosphere	A good environment to raise children; available resources to raise a family
Educational Programs	Specific programs only offered at the universities in the region; to pursue studies in the capital region
Vast Opportunities	Many employment opportunities offered in French; government employment; opportunities for women
Family Reunification	Rejoining spouse; residing closer to extended family members and in-laws; reuniting with sibling

The Interview Process

As discussed earlier, the interviews were based on an open-ended, semi-structured interview guide, with the interviews lasting between 1.5 hours to 4 hours. I began each meeting by introducing myself (or reintroducing myself to those that were already known to me) and provided

an overview of my research. Afterwards, once the participants and I discussed and reviewed the consent form — that highlighted the benefits and risks of the research, the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality, and how the data will be used (see Appendix B to view the consent form in both English and French) — I obtained their full and informed consent to participate along with their consent to be audiotaped during the interview. It was also reassured to the participants that they were in a safe space, that they were not required to share any information that they wished to keep to themselves and that they were not required to answer any questions if they felt stressed or uncomfortable. Since most of the interviews were conducted via video conferencing or phone calls, four participants, who were unable to sign a digital copy of the consent form or did not have the means to print and scan their form, provided verbal consent prior to their interview. Only three participants declined to have their interviews audiotaped. In these cases, I took detailed notes of the interviews.

Once consent was established, I began each interview by asking the women about their sociodemographic profile to create a summary of the demographic characteristics of my participants, as presented in Table 2 above (for details of the sociodemographic questionnaire in English and French, see Appendix C). Next, I asked the women to speak freely of their migration stories, starting with their experiences in the DRC and how their migration had unfolded to where they finalized their settlement in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. After the telling of their stories, I asked the women to provide more details concerning five themes that were previously determined based on the theoretical foundations of this research: the women's experiences before leaving the DRC; their motivations for leaving the DRC; their journey to Canada; the processes by which they settled in Canadian society; and the various activities in which they participated. I gave a brief explanation of each theme prior to asking my questions and allowed the women to speak on important experiences or topics that were not raised by my questions or probes. As per Riessman (1993), I asked five to seven broad questions concerning each theme and complemented the broad questions with probe questions when the participants struggled to elaborate or respond to the initial questions. Examples of questions included: *Describe to me your upbringing in the DRC*; *Tell me the story behind your decision to leave the DRC*; and *What was it like arriving and settling into Canada*? See Appendix D to view the thematic interview guide (English and French). To supplement the recording of the interviews, notes were also taken to record, for instance, the participant's reactions and behaviours, and incidents during the interview that may be significant

for the research, such as moments of pause while reflecting on a question. To conclude the interviews, I asked participants if they had any final thoughts or questions they wished to raise and that were not discussed during the interview, allowing room for the women to speak on other topics they deemed significant to their migration and political experiences.

The Analysis of Data

I used a qualitative data analysis to understand, explain, describe, and interpret my data. This included the use of memos to write my analytic thoughts concerning my data, and a concept map to look for patterns, relationships, and new concepts in the data (Maxwell, 1999). However, I began my analysis by transcribing the interviews verbatim, or transferring my data from oral language to written language (Kvale, 2007). To facilitate the transcription, I recorded my interviews through audiotaping, note-taking (detailed, concrete, and chronological as possible) and remembering.²⁶ Next, I analyzed the transcripts for relevant data and themes by using both “contextualizing” and “categorizing” analytical strategies (Maxwell, 1999, p.143).

Contextualizing strategies attempt to understand the data into a coherent whole (Maxwell, 1999), and for my research, this involved a narrative analysis. According to Polkinghorne (1995), a narrative analysis is to organize the data collected from the interviews (the events, encounters, actions, and experiences) into a coherent plot or story that “unites and gives meaning to the data” while responding to the research objectives (p.15). Thus, rather than separating the data into themes and categories, they are converted into a storied narrative that both reflects the data and provides coherence and meaning to the data (Polkinghorne, 1995). In turn, the storied narrative (as the research outcome) provides an explanation that responds to the research questions. Through a narrative analysis, the women’s life stories can be compared to uncover both the differences and commonalities of their narratives (Dwyer & emerald, 2017; Mertova & Webster, 2020). This includes the differences and commonalities of the women’s experiences, perceptions, processes, decisions, key events, and contexts (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012).

As an analytical tool, there are various techniques to conducting a narrative analysis since there are no set guidelines and it often depends on the discretion and preference of the researcher based on their research (Dwyer & emerald, 2017; Riessman, 1993). For instance, researchers may

²⁶ Though there are limitations to remembrance, it was useful to reinforce notes taken during the interview of key moments (both in terms of verbal and behavioural data) (Kvale, 2007).

begin their analysis by using a storyboard that structures the narratives and that describes pertinent events and characters (Mertova & Webster, 2020), or by first determining the structure of the narrative and why the story was told in that particular manner (the underlying meanings of the narratives; Riessman, 1993). In terms of the actual narrative, researchers may choose to determine the who (character), what (act), where (location), when (time), how (agency), and why (purpose) of the story (Riessman, 1993, p.19). Polkinghorne (1995) suggests including descriptions of the context in which events took place; a description of the main character and their responses to events as well as their actions, habits, decisions, understandings, plans, motivations, emotions, and interests; and a description of other characters that were significant to the main character. Other propositions from Polkinghorne (1995) include a coherent narrative that provides a meaningful explanation of the main character's decisions and actions; a narrative with a beginning, middle and end where the data is synthesized chronologically; data that is significant to the research outcome; and how datasets are connected to influence the main character's actions, decisions, and responses. By doing so, the researcher can provide an explanation that responds to the research questions and objectives. I conducted my narrative analysis using this latter approach. After creating a transcript of my interviews, I rewrote each participant's unstructured interview data into a coherent and chronological narrative of the women's lived experiences from the DRC (beginning), to their migration and settlement (or layover/stayover) in transit countries (middle), and finally to Canada (end), focusing on the content of narratives related to their experiences, decision-making, actions, obstacles, resiliency, and emotions to better understand each participant's personal experiences in relation to gendered migration trajectories and political incorporation. This also allowed me to better identify the common themes across the narratives to respond to my research questions.

Categorizing strategies are thematic analyses of the data, and one of its main approaches is the use of coding to identify and compare data that corresponds to different themes (Maxwell, 1999). Polkinghorne (1995) labels this as a paradigmatic analysis of stories where the researcher identifies common and relational themes and concepts among the stories collected by either locating such themes and concepts within the data that were previously established by the literature or theory, or by locating such themes and concepts inductively. After a narrative analysis of each interview, I thoroughly re-read through each transcript and first coded my data into categories based on the themes and concepts that relate to my research (i.e., the academic literature and theoretical resources; deductive coding). Five categories were established for Chapter Six: (1)

Upbringing in the DRC, (2) Departure from the DRC, (3) Migration Trajectories and Experiences, (4) Settlement in Transit Countries, and (5) Settlement in Canada. Ten categories were established for Chapter Seven: (1) Definitions of Political Participation (2) Perceived Levels of Political Incorporation, (3) Impacts of Migration, (4) Impacts of Social Cleavages, (5) Political Experiences in the DRC, (6) Social Experiences in the DRC, (7) Political Experiences in Transit Countries, (8) Social Experiences in Transit Countries, (9) Political Experiences in Canada, and (10) Social Experiences in Canada. Second, within each category, I grouped codes that related to the same concepts or topics that emerged during the interviews (inductively coded), revealing any themes or patterns pertaining to participants' various migration and political experiences. Thus, the purpose of coding was to classify and synthesize the data into a format that facilitated the understanding of the women's complex narratives and, in turn, reproduced the women's unique experiences into general knowledge and themes to better understand their experiences as they relate to the research questions and objectives (Polkinghorne, 1995; Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). The computer program NVivo was used to facilitate data analysis by constructing code lists, coding texts, and analyzing the coded text (Gibbs, 2007).

All-in-all, contextualizing the life stories helped me better understand each narrative in detail (the content more pertinent to the research) and facilitated the coding of the life stories by making similarities and differences between each narrative more pronounced. Categorizing the data, on the other hand, assisted me in highlighting emerging themes across the women's narratives, and in responding to my research questions.

Expected Obstacles and the Validity of Research Results

A major obstacle that I expected to encounter in my research was my positionality as a researcher and how this could affect the construction of knowledge, my interactions with the participants, and ultimately the results of my research (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012; Willis & Yeoh, 2000). Sánchez-Ayala (2012) defines positionality as the impacts of researchers' position in society and the institutions to which they belong on how they grasp the social world and perceive research participants. Consequently, as a researcher, I can impose my own perspectives throughout the research, prioritizing certain data and thereby shaping the results of my research. Moreover, Maynard (2004) and Sánchez-Ayala (2012) argue that the possible power and structural inequalities between the researcher and the participant can influence the interviews and its end

results based on whether the participant treats me with acceptance and trust, or rejection and mistrust. According to Ryan and Webster (2008), participants can also shape their narratives according to their assumptions and expectations of me as the researcher. Therefore, simply being a woman studying women is not sufficient to establish rapport, to minimize the power relations between me and participants, or to promote shared understandings with participants (Maynard, 2004). Therefore, to overcome the obstacles of positionality and establish acceptance and trust, I was first required to engage in self-reflexivity throughout the research process (Maxwell, 1999; Maynard, 2004; Sánchez-Ayala, 2012; Vives, 2012), a central principle in feminist methodology (Maynard, 2004).

Self-reflexivity has two aspects. First, self-reflexivity requires that researchers reflect on their biases and social situatedness, particularly how such biases and context can influence how the researcher analyzes data and, ultimately, the research in its entirety (Maynard, 2004; Sánchez-Ayala, 2012; Vives, 2012). I attended to this aspect of self-reflexivity by sharing the interview transcripts with respective participants and asking them to review my interpretations of the data to ensure that their stories and perspectives were well-reflected, accurate and achieved in my research (Dwyer & emerald, 2017; Riessman, 1993). This process is known as “member checking” (Dwyer & emerald, 2017, p.8). And by doing so, my impact on the data based on my own biases, understandings and social situatedness were minimized, and in a few cases, as argued by Dwyer and emerald (2017), participants provided greater details on certain points than they initially discussed during the interview. For example, since my interview with Rosalie was not audiotaped, I had to take notes during our conversation. I shared my interview notes with Rosalie to ensure I accurately captured her life stories, and she replied with revisions to my notes that better reflected her perspectives and experiences. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, member checking had to be done virtually, and not all participants responded to my request for revisions, feedback, or changes.

Second, self-reflexivity requires that researchers reflect on how their identity can influence their interactions with participants (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012), and how their identity can combine with the participants’ identities and interests (Vives, 2012). Part of this involves developing a good rapport with participants (mutual respect and reciprocity) by informing them about the objectives of the research, responding to their questions or concerns, and being honest and sensitive (Maynard, 2004, p.379). These were some of the steps I took, especially with participants I had

never met before. To foster mutual respect and reciprocity, I had phone conversations²⁷ with participants prior to the interview to introduce myself, explain my role as the researcher, inform of the objectives of my research and my interest in the subject, and answer or address any questions or reservations they had, mostly about anonymity and what the data would be used for. When participants agreed to participate in the study, I worked with their schedules when deciding on a day and time for the interview (and for some, a convenient location). During the interviews, I reiterated the study objectives and addressed any remaining reservations about the research. I also obtained informed consent emphasizing the women's voluntary participation (at any point, they may choose to end the interview or have their stories excluded from the research). Those who agreed to have their interview recorded were told of how the recordings would be used and assured their anonymity and confidentiality. To make participants feel more at ease, I reminded them that we were simply having a conversation and that they should not feel reluctant to be open and honest. While compensation was not given to participants for their involvement and time commitment, to those I was able to interview in person (aside from home interviews), I offered tea, coffee or water and some light refreshments to provide comfort during interviews. I told those I interviewed via video conference that they did not have to keep their cameras on during the recorded session to feel more at ease. I also observed that starting the interviews with sociodemographic questions and having participants recount their entire migration experience was a successful ice breaker.

According to Shabbar (2015), the life-stories method itself builds and facilitates good rapport and trust as participants can share in their emotions and feel a sense of comfort through a nonjudgmental process of storytelling. In response, I engaged in active listening and discussions with participants to showcase my interest in their life stories. In addition to this, having the same background or similar identities with the participants was beneficial for having a better understanding of their experiences and for building acceptance, trust, and good rapport, where interviews were as honest and thorough as possible (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). Like Nagar (1998) and Erel (2009), my position as a young woman of Congolese origin — who could communicate with participants in French, English, or Lingala, and who is familiar with the cultural, social, religious, tribal, and gender-based dynamics in the Congolese community — was critical and valuable in establishing trust with participants and generating in-depth stories based on empathy and shared

²⁷ I called prospective participants once they contacted me (often by email or text message) to learn more about the research and the eligibility criteria to participate.

understanding (Sánchez-Ayala, 2012). For instance, sharing some of my personal experiences as a second-generation immigrant woman of Congolese origin and of my mother's experiences as a first-generation immigrant woman helped to establish a trusting relationship as well as mutual respect between myself and some of the participants, since I could demonstrate some connection to, and understanding of, the stories being told (Shabbar, 2015). Thus, my lack of migration experiences or lived experiences in the DRC did not come into question or present to be an obstacle during the interviews. Further, in line with Shabbar (2015), sharing some of my and my mother's experiences allowed some of the participants to validate their stories and recognize that such stories are relatable and understandable to others. Lastly, giving the women the option of speaking in French or English (or both, with some reference to Lingala) also helped to build trust and a good rapport by allowing them to share their stories in the language of their choice (Erel, 2009).

Nevertheless, being a "community insider" did have some drawbacks since I was expected at times to be familiar with every experience told by the women because I did relate to some of their experiences (Shabbar, 2015, p.33). For instance, when Jamille was asked if she was involved in political activism through her love of theatre, she stated that her husband did not want her to get involved. Yet, she did not expand on her point, as though there was a shared awareness of how her political interests may be viewed unfavourably from the perspective of "un homme africain"²⁸ (Jamille). Instead of assuming the meanings attached to this story based on my own assumptions, I was required to ask follow-up questions, such as *What are the reasons for this?* for Jamille to clarify. This occurred with other participants and the need for follow-ups like *Please expand on that point* or *How did you feel in that particular instance?* to clarify on the experiences left to my own interpretation.

Another obstacle I expected to encounter was the threat to the validity of my results, particularly since my research involves describing and interpreting interviews rather than the use of any tests or statistical measures. Similar to what has been discussed above, imposing my own perspective when analyzing interviews poses a major threat to validity (Maxwell, 1999). To solve this problem, Maxwell (1999) suggests avoiding direct, close-ended, or single-response, questions that do not give the participants the opportunity to elaborate on their responses and perspectives. I also asked follow-up questions after the interviews when information was not clearly understood in the initial interview (Maxwell, 1999).

²⁸ Translation: "an African man."

A final obstacle to my qualitative study was the threat to the reliability of my data and results, particularly of the trustworthiness of the research findings (Kvale, 2007). For instance, when collecting life stories, Ryan (2008) argues that this could raise questions about how the past is remembered and reconstructed. In Smith and Thomas' (2003) study on the remembrance of migration histories, they separated migration histories into two parts to facilitate remembrance: a long-term history and a short-term history. They also suggested connecting migration histories to significant life events to improve memories. For myself, when the participants discussed a life event, I would sometimes ask them for the year and location (the context) to help them resituate themselves in that particular event. Yet, according to Shabbar (2015), the remembrance of life stories should not be of main concern or one that correlates to trustworthiness or a "generalizable objective truth" (p.29). Riessman (1993) also argues that life stories are not meant to be accurate or exact. Instead, Atkinson (2004) and Ryan (2008) argue that what matters is how the participants construct and describe their life stories in a way that feels comfortable, gives meaning to, and makes sense of their experiences, shedding light on common or different themes between individuals. Further, the emphasis is not so much on the events or occurrences themselves that are told within the stories, but the "... effects, consequences, meanings and interpretations of those events for the person who lives them", focusing thus on the lived experiences and not on the accuracy of events (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p.30).

Chapter Five: An Overview of the Empirical Focus of this Research

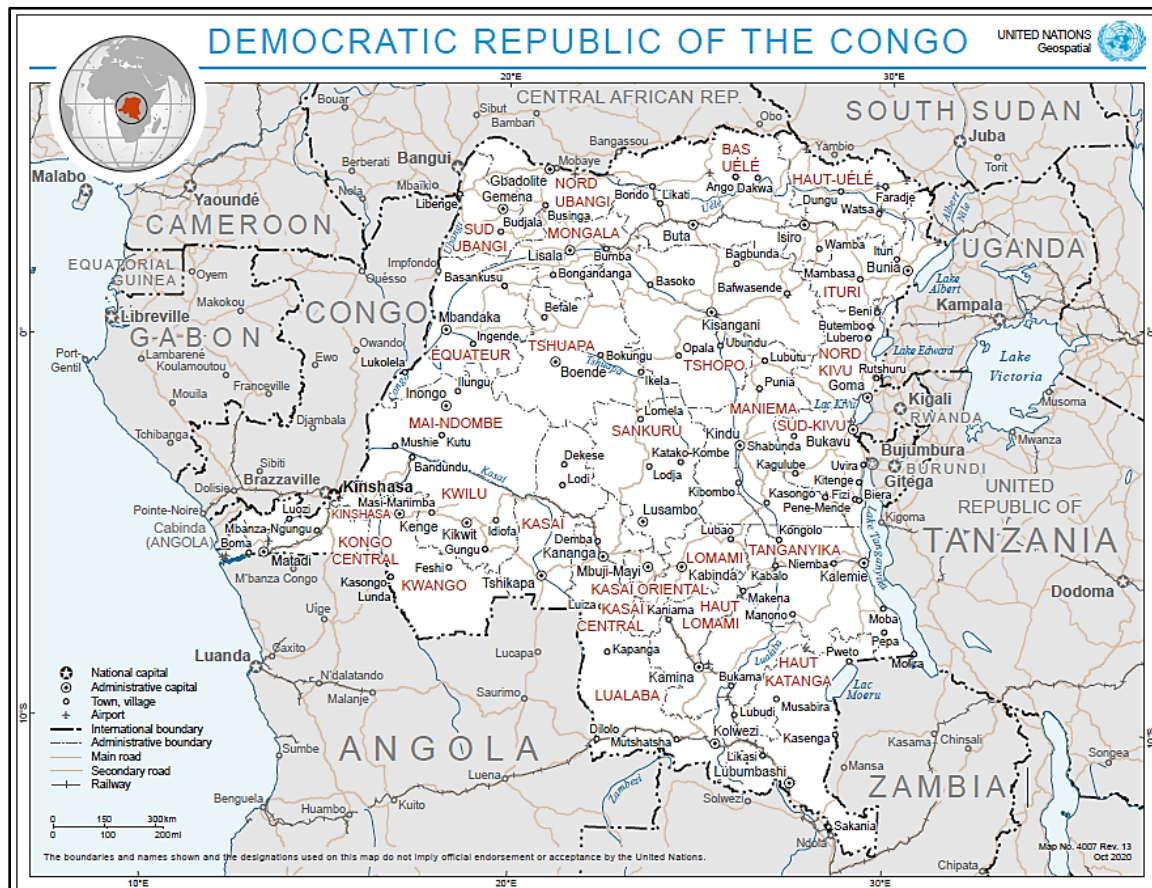
In this chapter, I introduce the geographical regions where participants were born, raised, and resided for many years. The discussions are not comprehensive, but they provide insight into the context in which my research was conducted and of the broader experiences of Congolese women. The first section of this chapter begins with a brief overview of the DRC's political landscape from colonialism to its present democracy. I also use existing literature on Congolese women to discuss their general experiences with gender inequalities and power relations in the DRC, as well as their levels of political participation in both the DRC and the diaspora. The purpose of this section is to describe the observed marginalization and oppression of Congolese women after the start of colonialism, as well as the social, economic, and political barriers they encounter. Though the DRC has become a democracy, Congolese women continue to face patriarchy, gender inequalities, and lower levels of political participation due to cultural norms, political discourse, and laws. Yet, this section also highlights Congolese women's resiliency as they increasingly participate in decision-making processes, contribute to the DRC's development, and strive for greater equalities through diverse political movements. Therefore, contextualizing Congolese women's experiences in the DRC sheds light on the challenges and opportunities they once faced while living under a repressive political regime and a culture of gender inequality, which can offer insights on how participants may incorporate politically in Canada.

In the second section of this chapter, I examine Canada's history as a White-settler colony and an immigrant-receiving society, as well as how these factors influence immigrants' incorporation and sense of belonging. I draw on existing literature on Canada and Canadian immigrants to present a summary of the country's colonial history, immigration history, and multiculturalism; the systemic barriers to incorporation for racialized immigrants; and the Ottawa-Gatineau region and its landscape. The purpose of this section is to bring attention to the barriers to political incorporation and political rights that immigrant women experience, notwithstanding Canada's multiculturalism policy and history as a country that welcomes immigrants. Systemic racism (including anti-Black racism and misogynoir), discrimination, intolerance, and marginalization are pervasive in Canadian civil society and have impacted immigrant women's political incorporation. Therefore, while migration may be a means of escaping oppressive structures in one context (Kofman et al., 2000), understanding the Canadian context can shed light on some of the barriers that participants may face after settlement.

The Political Landscape of the Democratic Republic of Congo

Figure 2

Map of the Democratic Republic of Congo



Note. Reprinted from *Democratic Republic of the Congo*, by the United Nations Geospatial, 2020, <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/democratic-republic-congo-2>. Copyright 2020 by the United Nations. Reprinted with permission.

From Colonialism to Democracy: A Plague of Violence and Inequality

The Democratic Republic of Congo (the DRC, formerly known as the Congo Free State and Zaïre) has 2.3 million square kilometres of land (Hesselbein, 2007), despite only having roughly 84 million inhabitants in 2018 (United Nations Population Fund, 2018). The DRC is home to an abundance of some of the most valuable natural resources such as copper, gold, and diamonds (Hesselbein, 2007). It is also home to over 350 ethnic groups — the Mongo, Luba, Kongo, and Mangbetu-Azande ethnic groups account for roughly 45 percent of the population — and more than 700 local languages and dialects spoken throughout the country (Hesselbein, 2007; Karbo & Mutisi, 2012). Yet, because of its abundance of resources, its vast number of ethnic groups, and

its people's grievances, the DRC is a country that has long struggled for democracy, enduring many decades of wars, crises (political, economic, cultural, and social), and the breakdown of statehood (Hesselbein, 2007; Sadie, 2010; Sriram et al., 2017).

The DRC was formerly colonized by Henry Morton Stanley in 1885 for the King of Belgium, Léopold II, and was established as the Congo Free State (Clark-Kazak, 2011; Sriram et al., 2017). During this time, the colonialization of the Congo was defined by the exploitation of natural resources, political instability, and tensions between indigenous ethnic groups. The colonial period was also defined by brutality, where millions of Congolese people were harmed, killed, or died of malnutrition as they were compelled into forced labour by Léopold II to produce rubber (Freedman, 2015). In 1908, when Léopold II relinquished ownership of the Congo to the Belgium government, the Belgian colonial administration was also mostly interested in profiting from the extraction of natural resources, spending too little in the growth and development of the country and in assisting the Congolese people.

Eventually, the Congo achieved independence from Belgium on June 30, 1960, after anti-colonial and national sentiments arose in the 1950s, with Patrice Lumumba elected as Congo's first Prime Minister and Joseph Kasavubu as the country's first President (Clark-Kazak, 2011; Karbo & Mutisi, 2012; Sriram et al., 2017). Yet, as the Congolese population celebrated liberation and welcomed democracy, this was short lived. The colonial years had laid the foundations for turmoil and conflict throughout Congo's independence years. Once independence was achieved, relatively few people were eligible to take over the administration; Patrice Lumumba was assassinated in October of 1961; and on November 24, 1965, Joseph Kasavubu was ousted as president in a military coup led by Joseph-Désiré Mobutu²⁹ (and backed by Western allies), who would become the next President of the Congo (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016; Freedman, 2015; Karbo & Mutisi, 2012; Sriram et al., 2017). President Joseph Mobutu eventually renamed the country 'Zaire' during the process of *Zairianization* that established the monopolization of foreign-owned assets and public goods (Clark-Kazak, 2011, p.28; Huening, 2009, p.130; Sriram et al., 2017, p.134), and the process of *authenticité* that rejected foreign ideologies in favour of traditional African values and institutions (Wilson, 1982, p.160). During both processes, Zaire was defined by corruption and President Joseph Mobutu became a dictator, creating a One Party system, ruling

²⁹ President Joseph Mobutu would later change his name to *Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Banga*, meaning: the all-powerful warrior who goes from conquest to conquest leaving fire in his wake (Huening, 2009, p.130).

for more than 30 years as he amassed a billion-dollar fortune by smuggling natural resources for himself and private shareholders, and monopolizing goods while in power (Clark-Kazak, 2011; Maclean & Burke, 2016; Sadie, 2010; Sriram et al., 2017). President Joseph Mobutu's dictatorship also led to many conflicts, particularly in the 1990s.

For instance, in 1991, riots opposing President Joseph Mobutu's regime took place in the capital, Kinshasa (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016). Further, during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, more than 1.2 million refugees fled to Zaïre including members of Hutu militias who initiated cross-border attacks, provoking the Rwandan armed force to attack refugee camps on Congolese territory. As a result of the political instability, an alliance between Rwanda and Uganda backed an armed campaign against President Joseph Mobutu, resulting in the First Congo War that began in 1996 (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016; Huening, 2009). In May 1997, President Joseph Mobutu's dictatorship came to an end and Laurent Désiré Kabila, who led the armed campaign, became the next President, ending the First Congo War and later resulting in the country being renamed to its current name, the Democratic Republic of Congo (Sriram et al., 2017). Shortly after establishing Laurent Désiré Kabila as the president, a rebellion to overthrow him began in 1998, which launched the Second Congo War as old allies to the president — Rwandese and Ugandan troops — occupied and attacked the eastern parts of the DRC and backed Congolese rebel groups to carry out proxy wars to control natural resources and territory (Clark-Kazak, 2011; Huening, 2009; Sriram et al., 2017). In turn, President Laurent Désiré Kabila sought the support from several countries including Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. During this period, the DRC experienced internal and external violence, factional conflicts, changing alliances, ethnic rivalries, and millions of refugees attempting to flee the political turmoil (Huening, 2009; Saksena & McMorrow, 2020). President Laurent Désiré Kabila was also assassinated in January 2001, which resulted in a new government led by his son, Joseph Kabila, who became the head of the state until he was formally elected as President in 2006 (Hesselbein, 2007; Sriram et al., 2017). The political and civil turmoil would not come to an end until 2003 when foreign actors left the DRC and a peace agreement was established (Huening, 2009; Sriram et al., 2017).

The legacies of colonialism and the Congo wars have had a great impact on Congolese society and its people. During the wars, it is estimated that 5 million people died due to widespread corruption, conflicts and wars, violence, and human rights violations like malnutrition (Hesselbein, 2007; Huening, 2009; Sriram et al., 2017; Wachter & Gulbas, 2018). While this number would

define these conflicts as the deadliest since World War II, the Congo wars received very little international and media attention (Huening, 2009). Furthermore, the DRC has become underdeveloped with rapid economic decline, high rates of poverty, and its people have been confronted with unequal access and distribution of resources like education, health, and social well-being (Engel & Olsen, 2005; Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016; Lusey et al., 2018). And despite the wars' official end in 2003, peace treaties, and a new government, the eastern parts of the DRC — largely in Ituri, North and South Kivu — continue to experience violence until this day (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016; Huening, 2009; Sadie, 2010; Sriram et al., 2017). By 2016, it was estimated that 2 million people were displaced from the DRC, with many residing in neighbouring countries (Wachter & Gulbas, 2018). The DRC was also recently marked by irregular elections. In November 2011, President Joseph Kabila won another term, and though the results of the election were disputed, he remained in power (Sriram et al., 2017). In December 2016, President Joseph Kabila continued to rule unconstitutionally after his term in office came to an end by delaying the presidential election until 2018 (Sriram et al., 2017; “The undemocratic Republic of Congo”, 2018). While this led to protests in the capital Kinshasa, many people were arbitrarily arrested and killed for protesting their government (Human Rights Watch, 2018; “The undemocratic Republic of Congo”, 2018). Further, the election in December 2018 was marked by irregularity as Felix Tshisekedi won the election under suspicion that the results were switched in his favour, while Joseph Kabila was able to maintain control over many facets of the government through his position as a senator for life (Litanga, 2019).

Altogether, the DRC's history can be categorized into seven broad political transitional periods, as shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4*The DRC's Political Transitional Periods since Colonialism*

Year of Transition	Political Period
1885	The DRC formally colonized by Henry Morton Stanley for King Léopold II
1908	The DRC relinquished by Léopold II and established as a Belgian colony
1960	The DRC's independence from Belgium and Joseph Kasavubu's Presidency
1965	Joseph Mobutu's military coup and Presidency (the Mobutu Era)
1997	Ousting of Mobutu and Laurent Kabila's Presidency (Kabila <i>le père</i> Era) ^a
2001	Kabila's assassination, and Joseph Kabila as Head of State and subsequently President (Kabila <i>le fils</i> Era) ^b
2019	Departure of Joseph Kabila as President and Felix Tshisekedi's Presidency

^a = Translates to Kabila "the father" Era

^b = Translates to Kabila "the son" Era

The conflicts and political irregularities have had brutal consequences for civilians, suffering from social inequalities, exploitation, corruption, deprivation, abuse, violence, and human rights violations. And the victims of such events have primarily been women who represent about half of the Congolese population and the refugee populations fleeing to Western countries like Canada (Flahaux & Schoumaker 2016; Hesselbein, 2007; Saksena & McMorro, 2020).

Gender Relations and Inequalities in the DRC

Stories of violence, inequalities, and exploitation shared by countless women in the DRC have been recounted in many ways since the colonization of the country (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011). Out of colonialism and the many decades of strife and conflict, Congolese women have suffered disproportionately from poverty, malnutrition, and low education, as well as gender inequalities such as high rates of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated and facilitated at all levels of society (Freedman, 2015; Puechguirbal, 2003; Sadie, 2010). Further, despite the 2006 DRC Constitution stipulating that all citizens are equal before the law, regardless of gender, women's social and political positionings in society have not reflected such laws under the constitution (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011). As a result, the DRC has been dubbed "the worst place in the world for women" (Freedman, 2015, p.1). Yet, this recurring story of

women in the DRC has not always been the case. There are various accounts of women and queens ruling the kingdoms of Congo prior to colonialism (Freedman, 2015). Women were also believed to have a certain level of economic independence through agricultural work since they had access to and control over farming, agricultural production, and the right to discard any surplus they produced (Freedman, 2015; Wilson, 1982). Further, women were able to inherit land or pass onto others land rights and other property assets. Thus, women had rights and status since they had a source of income and were economically stable, situating themselves as an economic benefit for both their families and communities.

Nevertheless, colonialism had imposed new gender norms (in terms of gender roles and relations) and transformed both women's roles and status to fulfill King Léopold II and Belgium's profitable objectives (Freedman, 2015). To illustrate, during colonialism, female farming was abolished as it supposedly made men lazy, leading to forced labour assigned to both women and men based on gendered responsibilities, such as men being forced into cash-crop cultivation while women were forced to work for colonial authorities in supportive roles (Bouwer, 2010; Freedman, 2015; Wilson, 1982). Furthermore, women's personal, domestic, and sexual lives were controlled; rape by colonial authorities was common; the family was redefined into the nuclear model, where men were the heads of the household and women were educated to fulfill domestic duties in their roles as wives and mothers; women lacked political power; and women were no longer viewed as economic assets as they no longer produced an income (Bouwer, 2010; Freedman, 2015).

The Congo's independence did not lead to considerable progression in terms of women's rights and gender equality. Instead, women's legal rights after independence were shaped by the colonial era and Belgian legal codes (Wilson, 1982). In one instance, due to the colonial educational system, the number of educated women at the time of independence was low. While male literacy in the DRC was among the highest in the African region, there were no female Congolese students attending universities or other post-secondary institutions, or even among those who graduated from secondary school (Yates, 1982). Furthermore, out of 2 million Congolese girls between the ages of 5 to 19, less than nine percent were attending a formal school. As a result, Congolese women had limited career options available to them in the subsequent years after independence, affecting their incorporation into the labour force. Moreover, President Joseph Mobutu's *authenticité* further established Belgian legal codes; at least in terms of gender, *authenticité* accepted Belgian views that the Congo's precolonial agricultural structure was

“shameful and backward,” and that women had no authentic economic or political roles during precolonial Congo (Wilson, 1982, p.161). Therefore, *authenticité* reinforced the country’s transformation into a patriarchal Zairian society in which men provided for their families and were elevated as heads of the household, while women fulfilled their roles as mothers, teachers, and housekeepers firmly under the authority of their husbands, resulting in power inequalities between women and men. Women were also deprived of rights and status: beyond the household, they occupied roles that reflected their gendered responsibilities in the household such as teacher, nurse, or seamstress; they had no economic or political autonomy and held no property rights; and they needed to obtain their husbands’ permission to work, obtain a passport, and have a bank account (Wilson, 1982).

The years of the Congo wars did not alleviate gendered inequalities, and in some cases, both women and men supported many of the gender norms that have persisted from the colonial era (Lusey et al., 2018). This is despite conventions and political reforms towards protecting women’s fundamental rights and ensuring greater equality such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) or the legislative changes to the family and labour codes (Freedman, 2015). According to Lusey et al. (2018), the DRC is ranked 144th out of 148 countries of the Gender Equality Index as women continue to face insecurities and difficulties. In terms of education, women have a literacy rate of 66.5 percent whereas men have a literacy rate of 88.5 percent (UNESCO, 2020). Within the household, many women continue to live under the authority of their husbands as caregivers of the household, possessing little control over the family’s financial resources and often not being guaranteed property rights through their marriage (Freedman, 2015; Lusey et al., 2018). And within society, their inclusion is often dictated by what women represent within the household (their role as mother, daughter, or wife) rather than as an equal citizen (Fiske & Shackel, 2015).

Furthermore, the conflicts within the DRC have also enabled widespread assaults and sexual violence perpetrated against women. The very question of women’s rights and freedom in the DRC has been primarily related to the widespread sexual violence committed against them, often by armed groups such as rebels, militias, and even branches of the Congolese army (Garbin & Godin, 2013). Used as a weapon of war (Maedl, 2011), sexual violence has become indiscriminate, destroying women’s physical well-being and worthiness (Sadie, 2010). And when a woman is raped, she is also often rejected by her family and community for her inability to do

heavy work or bear children, and generally, men do not want to engage in any relationship with a raped woman (Maedl, 2011). In 2006, the DRC reported 27,000 rape cases and the severity of these attacks led officials to record the “destruction of the vagina” as an official war injury (Thomas & Tiessen, 2010, p.484). Recently, it was projected that roughly 1,150 rapes occur in the DRC per day (Fiske & Shackel, 2015).

Lastly, the colonial era has also impacted women politically. While under Congolese law women are defined to enjoy full political rights, the circumstances are very different; women have little political recognition and they face barriers to participation in the processes of change for themselves, their families, and their communities (Freedman, 2015; Puechguirbal, 2003; Sadie, 2010). In addition, the *Family Code* of 1987 has placed barriers to women’s political autonomy and full political participation within society.

Congolese Women’s Political Participation

The DRC’s 2006 Constitution (which has been amended in 2011) stipulates that both women and men are to participate equally in political decision-making processes (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011). In October 2013, President Joseph Kabila gave a speech that recognized women’s underrepresentation in politics and encouraged women to become more politically active and change their repeated political marginalization (Freedman, 2015). However, in 2015, there were only six women amongst the thirty-seven Ministers and Vice-Ministers appointed to government. For many decades, there have been minimal actions undertaken by political leaders to promote women’s political participation and representation in the DRC, largely due to what has been highlighted in the previous section as women’s traditional statuses, or what Freedman (2015) coins “the culture of inequality”, where gender norms regarding masculinity and femininity have become widespread and entrenched within society since colonialism to govern women’s “correct” behaviours and activities (p.110). This includes defining politics as a masculine activity in the DRC, in which men embark and women do not.

While the Congolese population possessed no rights to political participation during the colonial era, soon after independence, women did gradually become involved in political decision-making processes and participated in the development of the DRC (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011). President Joseph Mobutu even appointed Sophie Kanza as the first Congolese woman in a ministerial post. Nevertheless, the history and the culture of inequality has meant that women have always trailed behind men in terms of political decision-making and representation

in the DRC, a gap which has been reinforced by several legislations and institutions (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011). For instance, in the early years of independence, there were no laws written into the constitution that assured women's rights would be equivalent to those enjoyed by men. Furthermore, through the *Family Code*, women are placed in a state of political inferiority. As stipulated in article 444, a wife must obey her husband, and in article 448, a woman must obtain her husband's permission to make any legal acts or decisions for which she has to present herself in person, such as voting (Sadie, 2010, pp.41-42). Indeed, men would oppose their wives' participation in politics for fear they would become unfaithful with the men with whom they worked (Freedman, 2015).

Additionally, the public sphere itself has limited women's political participation and representation; due to the culture of inequality, the political sphere is perceived by both men and women as an arena of "lies, calumnies, poisoning" where women do not often possess the necessary qualities to adapt to such environment (Freedman, 2015, p.111). The women interviewed by Freedman (2015) also expressed the opinion that women were less talented than men in politics, despite running a campaign themselves. Lastly, the culture of inequality has been reinforced in part by the Catholic Church. With approximately 50 percent of religious affiliation in the DRC, the Catholic Church has been a predominant moral authority that has regulated and maintained a hierarchy in family values and the inferiority of women in the family by supporting, for instance, the sexual division of labour in the household (Sadie, 2010). Consequently, it is believed that women's participation in politics would disturb family values and the household hierarchy. The Church's stance thus contributes to women's political marginalization.

Despite barriers in legislations and institutions, Congolese women have been defending their rights, participating in decision-making processes, and playing important roles in peace-building initiatives (Freedman, 2015). For instance, Freedman (2015) discusses how, during the struggle for independence, women adapted to their gendered roles and acted as spies to entice and gain access to adversaries while others organized dances and songs to celebrate victories. After independence, Pauline Opango, the wife of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, and other women protested their husbands against the impact of shifting political conditions on their personal lives, as well as demanding justice within the family household (Bouwer, 2010). Many women's organizations that were feminist, nationalist and inter-ethnic also thrived after independence and engaged in demonstrations for various reasons (Wilson, 1982). The incorporation of women into

decision-making processes really progressed in the 1990s, during the Congo wars, when women became active in civic engagements, the media, and non-governmental organizations to promote women's rights, their participation in political parties, their political empowerment, and gender equality (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011). Organizations like *Femmes Afrique Solidarité* and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), together with regional and international women's organizations, organized marches and wrote memoranda to bring attention to the conflicts in the DRC and advocate for women's political rights (Sadie, 2010). Other regional organizations and programs established to improve women's political and social positions, as well as protect women from conflict and violence in the DRC, include *Caucus de Femme*, *Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise* (CAFCO), Dynamics of Political Women in the Democratic Congo (DYNAFEP), the National Programme for the Promotion of Congolese Women (PNPFC), *Synergie des femmes*, and *Commission provinciale de lutte contre les violence sexuelle* (Sadie, 2010; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011). Thus, while there may be low representation of women in government, many women act as political activists, organizing for the social, economic, cultural, and political equality of all women, as well as the ability to exercise their rights as equal citizens.

According to Bilodeau (2016), immigrant women from gender unequal societies are more reluctant to engage politically in their receiving country. Yet, many Congolese women are politically involved in the diaspora. For instance, in the autumn and winter of 2011/2012, Garbin and Godin (2013) observed many Congolese women protesting the government of President Joseph Kabila in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, France, Belgium, Germany, Holland, and many other countries. They organized public demonstrations and picketed in front of Congolese embassies or iconic sites of power such as the Stock Exchange in London or the White House in Washington, DC. In doing so, the women in the diaspora engaged in "transversal feminist politics" by building solidarities with women transnationally (Garbin & Godin, 2013, p.123). There have also been several women's organizations in Belgium organized by Congolese women activists, despite some challenges in building transnational connections and contributing to the peace processes in the DRC (Garbin & Godin, 2013). Such organizations have been able to support women in the DRC through mobilization and resources, including the organization *Action des femmes pour le développement* (AFEDE) that raises awareness of the sexual violence and discrimination perpetrated against women in the DRC, and the *Forum interrégional des femmes*

congolaises (FIREFEC) that presses for women's social, economic, and political equality in the DRC (Godin & Chideka, 2010).

Therefore, by centring this research on immigrant women of Congolese origin, I intend to shed light on the experiences of immigrant women in Canada originating from a repressive political regime and from a culture of gender inequality, to challenge scholarly findings that assert that women with such backgrounds face the greatest constraints to their political incorporation in Canada. Particularly for immigrant women from repressive regimes, the migration experiences may be a means of escaping discrimination and oppressive structures (Kofman et al., 2000), and thus, may facilitate greater political incorporation in Canada.

Canada as a Traditionally Immigrant-Receiving and Multicultural Society

When compared to other western contemporary migration systems, Canada is viewed as a unique case in terms of its comparatively successful incorporation of immigrants, which is often attributed to its status of a traditionally immigrant-receiving society and of a multicultural country (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Kazemipur, 2014; Simmons, 2010). Apart from Indigenous peoples, who comprised 4.9 percent of its total population in 2016, Canada is primarily composed of immigrants and descendants of immigrants (Simmons, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2017a). In some instances, the ancestors of native-born Canadians were migrants who arrived centuries ago, such as the French settlers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century or the 40,000 United Empire Loyalists from the United States who came after the American Revolution when Canada was under British colonial governance (Edmonston, 2016; Simmons, 2010). Canada is also a country that welcomes vast numbers of migrants per year and is widely celebrated as a “wealthy nation of immigrants” (Simmons, 2010, p.6). In the past few decades alone, Canada welcomed, on average, 250,000 permanent migrants per year, and this number has gradually risen in recent years. To illustrate, Canada welcomed 284,490 permanent migrants in 2017 as compared to the 257,905 it received in 2012 (Martel & D'Aoust, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2019). And with a reported population of just over 35 million in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017f), 21.9 percent were foreign-born,³⁰ defining Canada as a country with one of the highest proportions of immigrants residing within its territory (Edmonston, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2017c). Further, Canada is one of the world's most culturally rich nations with numerous ethnic groups having been established through

³⁰ Those who were landed or permanent immigrants residing in Canada.

Canada's long history of immigration (Banting, 2012; Banting & Kymlicka, 2010). With each wave of immigration from diverse sources, migrants have contributed to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the population, transforming Canada into a multicultural society (Triadafilopoulos, 2012). As of 2016, the Canadian government reported over 250 ethnic groups residing in the country (Statistics Canada, 2017c).³¹

Nevertheless, Canada is a nation with a long and complicated history of immigrant settlement. It was once considered a country of emigration (particularly for passage to the United States) and the simplified vision of Canada as a welcoming society to migrants from diverse sources is one that is not substantiated by its history of exclusion and discrimination (Simmons, 2010; Triadafilopoulos, 2012). This history has had impacts on the incorporation of racialized immigrants.³²

Prior to the establishment of the country, Indigenous peoples were the first to settle on territories that are now known as Canada, yet when Europeans began their mass migration to the nation in the 1600s, they began to colonize the Indigenous peoples and eventually established a "White-settler colony" that, overtime, overlooked the existence of indigenous communities and racialized immigrants (Galabuzi, 2006, p.1). Establishing a White-settler colony was central to the process of imagining Canada as a White immigrant nation with Europeans as the first settlers "to build in Canada an 'overseas extension' or replica of British society" in terms of institutions, culture, and values (Stasiulis & Jhappan, 1995, p.97). This was achieved through the conquest, genocide, displacement, and segregation of Indigenous peoples; the enslavement of both Indigenous and African peoples even after slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1832;³³ the control of Indigenous land and resources; the implementation of assimilationist policies; and the perpetration of violence (Galabuzi, 2006; Joseph, 2018). And because of this campaign for a White-settler colony, immigration was largely limited to French and British settlers who would compete for powers over the territory while furthering a colonial, nationalist project (Stasiulis & Jhappan, 1995; Triadafilopoulos, 2012).

³¹ According to Statistics Canada (2017c), this includes the various ethnic origins associated with Indigenous peoples and the European groups that first settled in Canada.

³² I will later discuss immigrant incorporation in Canada; I dedicate this brief discussion to the history of Canadian immigration.

³³ Africans have been residing in Canada since 1628 but have consistently been marginalized, racialized, and labelled "unassimilable" by Canadian authorities (Taylor et al., 2007, p.159).

Simultaneously, Canada was not considered a country for immigrants as it was viewed as a wilderness: farming conditions were bleak, disease and hunger persisted, and Indigenous peoples were, understandably at times, very hostile to European settlers (Simmons, 2010). When Canada became a British colony after the French surrendered to the British in 1760, immigration levels remained low and stagnant (Banting, 2012; Triadafilopoulos, 2012). It was not until the Loyalists settled in Canada — then known as British North America — that the nation received its first wave of mass immigration of over 40,000 migrants (Triadafilopoulos, 2012). Canada's next wave of immigrants from 1830 to 1850 were British subjects contributing to the nation's growing urbanization and industrialization, which resulted in a population increase from 250,000 in 1790 to 1.6 million in 1845 (Edmonston, 2016; Triadafilopoulos, 2012). And as immigration numbers increased, the source country of immigrants also became more diverse. For instance, Chinese migrants were recruited and employed to help build the Canadian Pacific Railway; Southern and Eastern Europeans were also hired to work in mines and forestry. With the arrival of migrants from diverse source countries, Canada experienced peaks of immigration in the 1900s, 1910s, and 1950s due to the nation's economic growth that necessitated the arrival of migrants from new source countries to meet labour demands (Edmonston, 2016; Triadafilopoulos, 2012).

However, Canada also experienced sharp declines in immigration rates in the 1890s, late 1910s, 1930s, and early 1940s due to high emigration rates of the French Catholics and Irish migrants in the early years, high emigration rates during the Great Depression, and the restrictions placed on the arrival and settlement of non-preferred migrants from particular countries during World War I and World War II (Edmonston, 2016; Triadafilopoulos, 2012). Non-preferred migrants included non-British and non-White individuals from China, India, Eastern Europe, and Africa who were deemed “undesirable” and belonging to “unsuitable races,” incapable of assimilating into British culture (British speech, dress, and way of life), and deemed political and cultural threats to the nation (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Simmons, 2010; Triadafilopoulos, 2012, p.31). Thus, to ensure that Canada was meeting both its labour demands and nation-building obligations of expansion while maintaining the status of a “white man's country,” immigration was restricted to those who could assimilate and become citizens; that is, migrants from Western European countries (Triadafilopoulos, 2012, p.36). To illustrate, in 1871, migrants from the British Isles accounted for 83.6 percent of the foreign-born population or approximately 500,000 migrants (Statistics Canada, 2016). Others arrived from the United States (10.9 percent), Germany (4.1

percent) and France (0.5 percent). By 1961, nearly 95 percent of the population was of European descent (Galabuzi, 2006).

The restrictions placed on immigration were formally established in the first Immigration Act of 1869, after the Canadian Federation was formed in 1867. They reinforced the construction of a White European nation in Canada, favouring the immigration of farmers and agricultural labourers from Great Britain, the United States, and northern Europe who were predominantly White and viewed as suitable immigrants (Simmons, 2010; Triadafilopoulos, 2012). This was the start of “White Canada” immigration policies that would entail: restricting migrants belonging to particular ethnic groups from entering Canada over the course of many decades through a series of acts, such as the ban on immigration of Blacks in 1911; the head taxes on Chinese migrants; the Act of Direct Passage that prevented migration from India; the restriction on the immigration of those identifying as Jewish; and the deportation of non-European (and some European) migrants that were viewed as threats to employment opportunities, political stability, and to Canada’s culture and national values (Simmons, 2010, p.55). Stemming from Canada’s restrictive immigration policies were also limitations placed on who could become a Canadian citizen, a status which was primarily restricted to British subjects while denying other migrants from incorporating into Canada society (Triadafilopoulos, 2012). Thus, during these decades, Canada was not perceived as an immigrant-receiving country.

The decades that followed World War II were, however, characterized by a shift in Canada’s migration system. In the 1940s, the removal of discriminatory citizenship laws began to foster a sense of shared citizenship among Canada’s culturally diverse population and enabled a relatively easy path to citizenship for non-White immigrants that would help ensure their incorporation into Canadian society (Triadafilopoulos, 2012). By the 1960s, mass immigration was re-established, and Canadian immigration laws were being challenged and altered to provide non-discriminatory entry and economic opportunities to skilled migrants regardless of their national origin, producing a new wave of migrants from non-European sources (Edmonston, 2016; Simmons, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2016). One notable change to Canadian immigration laws was the end to White Canada immigration policies in 1962 that privileged the entry of British, French, American and other European migrants (Simmons, 2010). A second notable change was the 1967 points system that replaced the systemic preference for European migrants and evaluated equally — regardless of national origin — all economic immigration applications based on education,

language skills, work experience, and the ability to work in the Canadian labour market (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Kazemipur, 2014). As a result of these policy changes, the number of migrants from non-European countries increased. In 1971, 61.6 percent of all migrants settling in Canada were from Europe, yet by 2016, 61.8 percent of new migrants to Canada were from Asia, 13.4 percent were from Africa, and only 11.6 percent were from Europe (Statistics Canada, 2017c). These policy changes also resulted in a rapid increase in the number of newcomers arriving to Canada; in 1974, Canada received 218,465 new migrants, a significant increase from 1972 when the country received merely 122,006 (Triadafilopoulos, 2012).

A third notable change to Canada's immigration policies was the official declaration of Canada as being a multicultural nation, with the adoption of the multiculturalism policy by the federal government in 1971, which became a symbol for celebrating and recognizing ethnic diversity as part of the Canadian national identity and encouraged migrants to retain and express their ethnic identities while institutions accommodated for diversity (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Simmons, 2010; Wright & Bloemraad, 2012). Although Canada's multiculturalism aimed at successfully incorporating the multiple cultures within Canadian society, the policy itself stemmed from the bilingual framework of the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission of the 1960s that recognized both the French and the English populations residing in Canada (Bloemraad, 2012; Leung, 2011). Yet, with the introduction of the points system that accepted immigrants irrespective of their race or country of origin, immigrants (neither identifying as French nor English) were subsequently incorporated into a Canadian multicultural society, shifting the Commission's policies towards embracing and recognizing cultural diversity. The multiculturalism policy also promoted the full participation of immigrants and encouraged them to interact with other cultural groups and gain knowledge in at least one of Canada's official languages (English and/or French; Banting, 2012; Laxer, 2013). And in promoting the successful incorporation of immigrants, multiculturalism established a pathway by which newcomers could be welcomed into the nation (Bloemraad, 2012).³⁴ It is worth noting that Québec, Canada's only officially French-speaking province, has not embraced Canada's multiculturalism; instead, the province has adopted interculturalism, which recognizes pluralism or cultural diversity within an established national

³⁴ Different versions of the multiculturalism policy have been adopted since its initial adoption in 1971, from celebrating cultural diversity based on cultural sensitivity in the 1970s, to accommodating the needs of ethnic groups based on equity in the 1980s, to promoting nation-building based on inclusion in the context of participation and citizenship (Leung, 2011, p.22).

cultural framework based on the French language (Laxer, 2013). Thus, regardless of cultural differences, integration is achieved when immigrants and the Québécois majority population share a common culture within public society through the French language.

A final notable change to Canada's immigration policies was the mass inclusion of refugees from various source countries in the 1976 Immigration Act (Simmons, 2010). Accepting large numbers of refugees per year played a role in shaping Canada's immigration peaks and its culturally diverse population. From the 1970s onwards, Canada would receive thousands of refugees from countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, the Caribbean, Hong Kong, China, India, and the Philippines (Statistics Canada, 2016). By 2016, 11.6 percent of recent immigrants to Canada (or 140,515) were refugees (Statistics Canada, 2017c).

Canada's immigration laws have been praised for playing a part in building a more dynamic and inclusive society. Not only has Canada experienced a peak in immigration, but its population has also become increasingly diversified in terms of race and ethnicity. In 1981, only 4.7 percent of the total population identified themselves as members of a 'visible minority' population;³⁵ this number rose to 22.3 percent of the total population in 2016 due to Canada's mass migration of ethnically diverse migrants (Statistics Canada, 2017c). Whether Canada's mass immigration and multicultural society has contributed to immigrants' incorporation has also been analyzed and debated extensively.

Immigrant Incorporation in the Context of Mass Immigration and Multiculturalism

In the context of Canada's mass immigration and multicultural landscape, many studies have evaluated whether immigrants feel welcomed into Canadian society and whether they participate quickly and effectively in Canadian institutions upon arrival. Hou et al.'s (2016) research, for instance, illustrates that immigrants do have a strong sense of belonging to Canada and often, they are able to engage actively with their receiving society while retaining a strong attachment to their ethnocultural heritage. In other words, they participate more in Canadian society when they can express both their ethnic identity and the Canadian national identity. This

³⁵ In Canada, racialized groups are often referred to as *visible minorities*, who are defined under Canada's Employment Equity Act as "... persons, other than [Indigenous] peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Statistics Canada, 2017c). This includes individuals identifying as South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, and Japanese. However, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2005) prefers the terms *racialized person* or *racialized groups* over 'visible minority' since they convey race as a social construct rather than a description based on perceived biological features, do not group individuals into a single category, or treat "White" as the norm and comparison group (p.12).

has also made the political process more inclusive for immigrants (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010). According to Bloemraad's (2006b) comparative study of immigrants' political incorporation in both Canada and the United States, Canada's multiculturalism policies have facilitated and increased the political participation and incorporation among Canadian immigrants in comparison to American immigrants, as the policies create a welcoming environment for immigrants; facilitate the election of immigrant community leaders into public office; promote naturalization; and deliver government resources³⁶ to immigrant communities to develop more organizations, promote community leaders, and subsequently create more opportunities for political participation and leadership within these communities and Canadian civil society. Thus, as Canadian policies and practices continue to promote the incorporation of immigrants and a culturally diverse society, immigrants become an integral part of the nation-state, feel a sense of belonging, and are encouraged to mobilize and participate politically (even on the basis of group-based identities; Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Wright & Bloemraad, 2012). Native-born Canadians with a strong sense of national identity have, in turn, embraced mass immigration and the incorporation of immigrants (Banting, 2012).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of Canada's multiculturalism policies is not widely recognized by immigrants as discrimination and racial hierarchies remain prevalent within Canadian society (Galabuzi, 2006). Federal and provincial governments are being criticized for using multiculturalism to appear welcoming and compassionate without seeking concrete steps to address the issues of racial discrimination that racialized immigrants continue to experience, and for using the policies and discourses of multiculturalism to conceal ongoing power relations within Canadian civil society (Bannerji, 2000; Bloemraad, 2012; Thobani, 2000). Specifically, multicultural policies and discourses conceal widespread anti-Black racism and misogynoir in Canadian society; while multiculturalism is praised for its ability to accommodate diversity, Black Canadians continue to be among the poorest demographics, and they continue to endure discrimination in accessing paid employment, housing, education, and high earnings (Maynard, 2017). Multiculturalism has also contributed to Black Canadians' persistent invisibility in society by obscuring the history of slavery and failing to address their ongoing subjugation,

³⁶ Funding for immigrant incorporation has been a responsibility that is shared by both the federal and provincial governments of Canada as each jurisdiction is given a level of autonomy on the issue (Banting, 2012; Laxer, 2013). For instance, Ontario, a province that receives the highest proportion of immigrants, has implemented its own Multiculturalism Policy that governs the incorporation of immigrants within the province (Laxer, 2013).

marginalization, and inequity. Thus, racism and racial hierarchies in society are paradoxically reinforced and institutionalized by Canada's multiculturalism policies as they present to the world a homogenous Canadian national identity with a multicultural society while evading the conflicts and power relations created by differences, inequalities, and the systemic acceptance of anti-Black racism within society. And because multiculturalism's policies and discourses appear welcoming and compassionate to diversity, this has led Canadians to believe that they are tolerant and accommodating to differences.

Furthermore, multiculturalism policies are criticized for simply embracing the participation of immigrants based on conditions set by those in power (Winter, 2015). As it is stemming from a bicultural and bilingual framework, multiculturalism is said to preserve a Canadian national identity that is centred on White French or English identities while other cultures and racialized identities are simply integrated into this broader national identity that determines to what extent they should be tolerated or accommodated by the White population (Bannerji, 2000; Joseph, 2018; Thobani, 2000). Thus, race is still used as an instrument to define who belongs in civil society, as evidenced by the usage of the terms "visible minority" or "women of colour" to describe and identify those who are not White and considered inferior (Bannerji, 2000, p.40). Moreover, by promoting diversity, Canada's multiculturalism policies aim to foster social cohesion among groups within society by allowing immigrants to retain and express their ethnic identities (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Saloojee, 2005; Simmons, 2010; Wright & Bloemraad, 2012). Indeed, immigrants do have a strong sense of belonging in Canada and are able to retain their cultural identities and build ethnic communities (Hou et al., 2016; Kazemipur, 2014). Nevertheless, because multiculturalism policies prioritize ethnic identity over participation in mainstream politics and have reduced political issues such as racial and gender discrimination to cultural and private matters, ethnic communities have faced systemic barriers to decision-making processes — as reflected by the few racialized elected officials at all levels of government — and from organizing politically (Armony et al., 2004; Bannerji, 2000; Saloojee, 2005). Thus, the "romantic ideal of multiculturalism" (Armony et al., 2004, p.22) has perpetuated unequal power relations in Canada, as well as the exclusion of racialized immigrants from the formal political sphere.

Québec's interculturalism is not exempt to these shortcomings. For instance, because of the focus placed on a common and Francophone public culture, intercultural discourses have effectively relegated ethnicity and cultural identities to the private sphere, like multiculturalism,

making identity politics an invalid ground for political mobilization (Laxer, 2013). Furthermore, while religious and racialized women have been used to promote integrationist agendas in Québec, the supposed neutrality of the province's intercultural discourses have rendered these women "invisibilized" in political debates and decision-making processes that favour some groups (those who personify the province's cultural norms) over others (for instance, Bill 60 Charter of Values), perpetuating stereotypes and discrimination (Dobrowolsky, 2017, p.528).

Sadly, racism and racial hierarchies have been at the heart of Canada's development. I briefly discussed earlier examples of racism and anti-Black racism expressed through Canada's various institutions, laws, and policies such as the political project to develop Canada as a White-settler colony that resulted in the colonization and subordination of the Indigenous peoples, the slavery of Indigenous and African peoples, the denial of rights to many racialized immigrants, and the attempt to conceal the diversity of Canada's population through marginalization and suppression. Further, immigration laws and policies legally defined non-preferred or undesirable migrants to justify who were worthy of immigrating to Canada, of receiving public services, and of becoming citizens, altogether creating racial inferiority within Canadian civil society (Joseph, 2018). This has worked to advance the positions of the White population while establishing European culture and values as dominant. This has erased the existence of Indigenous communities, subjugated Black Canadians, labelled immigrants as invaders, and identified those who are undeserving of public resources or those to be excluded from Canadian civil society. These examples of racism during the early developments of the country are just a few that have paved the way for, and legitimized, modern racial hierarchies that have defined what it means to "be Canadian" (namely White, heterosexual, and male) and what it means to be "not-Canadian," thus privileging the inclusion of certain groups to the detriment of others (Sharma, 2006, p.27). The legacies of racism are expressed in various ways today such as in the lower levels of economic incorporation among Black and other racialized immigrants, the gaps found in their representation in Canadian politics, the silencing and marginalization of their voices across various institutions (political, educational, legal, civic, social and economic institutions), and the negative attitudes towards them that persist among native-born Canadians (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Berry, 2013; Joseph, 2018; Maynard, 2017). The legacies of racism are also expressed in immigrants' sense of belonging, where immigrants of African origin have expressed higher levels of discrimination than other ethnic groups in society (Berry, 2013).

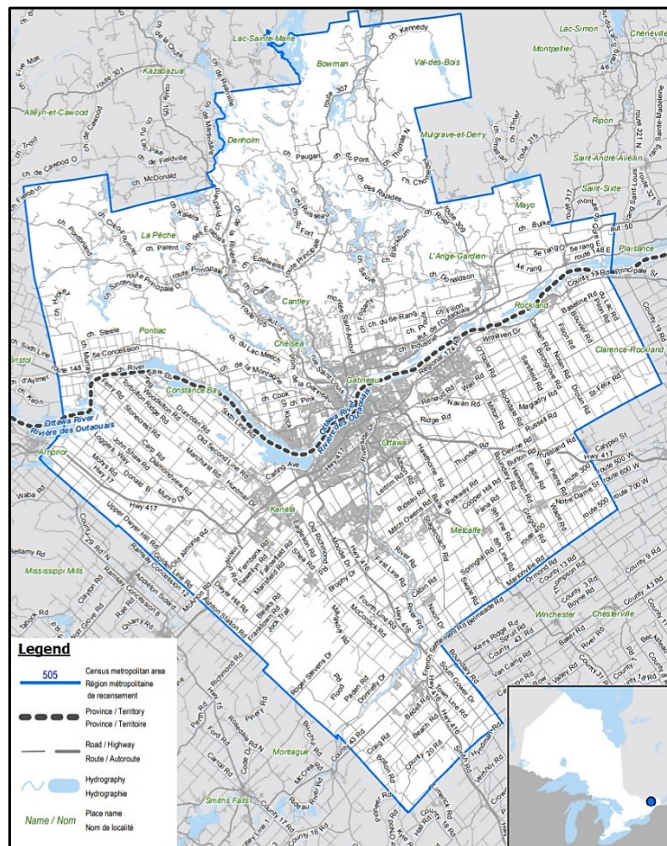
Altogether, such experiences are affecting the incorporation of immigrants in Canadian society, including immigrant women's political incorporation. While immigrant women have been organizing, such as through ethnocultural and grassroots organizations, to challenge and rectify the circumstances of their oppression and the discrimination they experience (Stasiulis & Jhappan, 1995), research has shown that they are still less likely than immigrant men and Canadian-born women to participate in a variety of political activities, they know less about Canadian politics, and they are less familiar with government services and benefits (Bilodeau, 2016; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009). Evidently, Canada's mass immigration, multiculturalism policies, and ethnic diversity may not adequately serve to ensure immigrant women's political incorporation or as a means of gaining more political autonomy and opportunities but may constitute more obstacles to their incorporation in the face of systemic racism, discrimination, intolerance, and marginalization that are still prevalent in Canada.

Canada's National Capital Region

The Ottawa-Gatineau region, also known as Canada's National Capital Region, is situated on an interprovincial border that separates the provinces of Ontario (Ottawa) and Québec (Gatineau; Veronis, 2015), as shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

Map of the Ottawa-Gatineau Census Metropolitan Region



Note. Adapted from *Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census*, Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/geo/maps-cartes/pdf/S0503/2016S0503505.pdf>. Copyright 2016 by Statistics Canada. Reproduced on an “as is” basis with the permission of Statistics Canada.

The border is a relatively minor barrier to residents’ daily movements; rather, there is considerable movement across the border for employment, post-secondary education, leisure, and recreational purposes (Veronis, 2015). There are also numerous bridges that connect the two cities on either side of the Ottawa River and integrated public transit systems that encourage the mobility of residents (Gilbert & Brosseau, 2011; Veronis, 2013). Every day in 2016, nearly 72,000 people crossed the interprovincial bridges between Ottawa and Gatineau, illustrating the substantial migration that occurs between the two regions (City of Ottawa, 2019). According to Veronis (2013), this free mobility of residents between Ottawa and Gatineau has contributed to immigrants’ economic, social, and cultural incorporation.

The Ottawa-Gatineau region is also bilingual, where most Francophones reside in Gatineau and the eastern parts of Ottawa (such as Vanier and Or  ans), facilitating their incorporation

(Gilbert & Brosseau, 2011). And as a bilingual region that welcomes a large proportion of Francophone immigrants (those whose first official language spoken is French; Barber, 2014), Ottawa-Gatineau has become home to one of Canada’s largest Congolese communities with 6,005 individuals, of whom 54 percent (3,215) are women (Statistics Canada, 2018). Like broader Canadian immigration patterns, immigration to the Ottawa-Gatineau region from the DRC coincides with the years of Congo’s civil wars, where women, on average, make up just over half the population, as illustrated in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Recent Immigrants from the DRC in Ottawa-Gatineau by Immigration Period

<i>Immigration Period</i>	<i>Total Number of Women</i>	<i>Total Number of Men</i>
Before 1980	55	40
1980 to 1990	20	40
1991 to 2000	525	495
2001 to 2010	1,205	780
2011 to 2016	615	465

Note. Adapted from *2016 Census of Population*, Statistics Canada, 2018, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016203. Copyright 2018 by Statistics Canada.

Despite the frequent movement of people across the interprovincial border, residents in the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau are restricted from accessing public services and resources based on their place of residency (Veronis, 2013). For instance, residents have restricted access to public forms of health care (i.e., covered by OHIP in Ontario and RAMQ in Québec)³⁷ and public education based on the province in which they live, or restricted access to affordable housing based on the city in which they live. Thus, the interprovincial border can serve as a “mechanism of exclusion,” limiting immigrants’ access to services and, ultimately, creating a barrier to their social and economic incorporation, particularly when there are differences in government structures and practices that impact service allocation (Veronis, 2013, p.258). And while political differences exist across the border (Veronis, 2015), little is known about the political incorporation of

³⁷ OHIP is an abbreviation for the Ontario Health Insurance Plan, a health care plan for Ontario residents. RAMQ is an abbreviation for the *Régie de l’assurance maladie du Québec*, a public health and drug insurance plan for Québec residents.

immigrants (in general) and of immigrant women of Congolese descent (in particular) in the Ottawa-Gatineau region, despite the region being the country's political centre. There is some information available regarding Congolese immigrant women's economic and social incorporation in Ontario and Québec. For example, Namululi et al.'s (2018) study adopts an intersectional approach to analyze Congolese immigrant women's complex labour market experiences in both provinces (specifically in Sudbury, Toronto, Ottawa, and Montréal), discovering that the women experienced systemic barriers to employment due to the intersections of gender and race that created settings of inequality, prejudice, and discrimination. But despite the intolerance and racism, the women remained resilient. Comparably, there is relatively little information about Congolese immigrant women's political incorporation in the Ottawa-Gatineau region (or Ontario and Québec), and my hope is that this thesis not only contributes to filling this gap, but also inspires future research on this topic.

Chapter Six: Congolese Women's Gendered Migration Trajectories

The voyage to Canada influenced it [my settlement] deeply. And I think that's what makes me keep going, is that, you know, the fact that it took so much effort, so much strife to come here, I need to make sure it's worthwhile... building that social life, working hard, going to school, getting that job that I want, making that money and supporting myself, supporting my family... definitely coming to Canada, the voyage coming here, had a huge influence on me because that was a huge sacrifice.

(Bethanie, Life Stories Interview)

Migration trajectories are meaningful for immigrant women, as highlighted by Bethanie's quote. In this research, I argue that the experiences during migrants' journeys to their receiving country can have profound impacts on their settlement. However, to provide insights into this argument, I must first address the first research question: *How are the migration trajectories of first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin gendered?* Therefore, the intent of this chapter is to holistically shed light on the participants' gendered migration trajectories by drawing on their stories and journeys from their lives prior to migration to their lives after settlement in Canada. As discussed in Chapter Three, taking a trajectory approach to migration studies entails following migrants through time, spaces, and places to gain deeper insights into their experiences and practices as they unfold, and eventually of how migrants overcome obstacles and uncertainties along the journey to their final destination (Schapendonk et al. 2020; Schwarz, 2020). Although I was unable to accompany the participants on their journey (and this was not the study's objective), I used the life-stories method to reconstruct the women's migration to adopt a gendered perspective (or gender-sensitive migration approach) and uncover ways in which their migration trajectories and experiences are profoundly gendered.

Based on the literature, looking into the gendered nature of migration trajectories would be important for understanding participants' political incorporation in Canada because migration *is* gendered and mediated by gender-related factors throughout the entire migration process (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Espín & Dottolo, 2015; Pessar & Mahler, 2003). These factors — encoded in trajectories — can, however, establish particular trajectories, experiences, and outcomes for women (Mahieu et al., 2015; Schrover & Yeo, 2010; Tastsoglou et al., 2005), including influencing levels of political incorporation in the receiving country. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the women's migration trajectories will be gendered, embedded with gender-related factors at the micro, meso and macro levels that will impact not just their migration experiences, but also their political incorporation in Canada.

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first section presents the women's experiences growing up in the DRC, including the context of their upbringing, their positive and negative experiences of living in the DRC, and experiences with gender norms and inequalities. The purpose of this section is to provide insight into the moments, events, or circumstances that led to participants' departure from the DRC. The second section details what prompted the decision to leave the DRC, who made the decision, and the reasons for settling in Canada directly from the DRC or in a 'transit country', that is, one or more destinations prior to Canada. Thus, this section will illustrate the motivations for leaving the DRC and settling in Canada or other destinations. The notion is that the reasons for departing and the decision to leave can have implications on interviewees' migration trajectories. The third section focuses on the migration trajectories and experiences of those who first migrated to and settled in other countries other than Canada, while the fourth section details the journey to Canada of all participants in this study. Given that this research argues that the experiences during migrants' journeys to their receiving countries can have profound impacts on their settlement, the third and fourth sections are imperative to reveal the dynamic nature of their migration trajectories and any potential gender-related factors at play.

The first four sections are primarily descriptive in nature to reveal the dynamic nature of participants' migration experiences, including the opportunities, constraints, decision-making processes, aspirations, multiple destinations, various encounters, and social relations (the micro, meso, and macro factors relevant to migration experiences) that emerge in the places and spaces of the women's trajectories. This also includes gender norms and perceptions, power relations, negotiation of gender relations, and the adaptation of subjectivities and identities. These sections are also primarily descriptive to provide space in this dissertation for participants' voices to be heard, as there is an ever-growing need in Canadian and general academic research to include Congolese women's voices and subjugated knowledges. This is a decision taken in accordance with feminist approaches, which aim to first convey the life stories of those who are underrepresented in literature and academia when examining their experiential accounts (Atkinson, 2004; Maynard, 2004). As such, considering the results in the first four sections, the fifth section is where I analyze the women's narratives for instances of gender-related factors at the micro, meso, and macro levels, as well as how such factors have rendered their migration trajectories from the DRC to Canada gendered. By employing the trajectory and sociological life course approaches, I also consider how gendered migration trajectories impact participants'

socioeconomic incorporation in Canada. My results demonstrate that gendered migration trajectories have implications for immigrant women's socioeconomic incorporation and inform the ways in which participants' gendered migration trajectories can impact their political incorporation, this last point to be explored in Chapter Seven. The final section concludes the chapter.

The following is a detailed account of the women's personal experiences, albeit the interviews themselves were much richer than the moments I extracted. To preserve the women's voices and meanings behind the quotes in the following accounts, I do not translate the French interviews in the body of the text. Instead, I provide footnotes with the most accurate translations of the women's narratives. It is also worth noting that presenting the women's life experiences according to the first four themes or sections does not suggest a linear migration trajectory or that each stage is mutually exclusive. Instead, I present the narratives in such a way that their journeys can be understood, and their experiences can be compared, however, the women's narrative of their migration experiences will highlight the complex nature of their migration, whether these trajectories led directly to Canada or to various transit countries before their 'final' settlement in Canada. Figure 4 below is a reproduced visual representation of the participants' migration trajectories from the DRC to Canada, and it is along these that the dynamic experiences and nuanced relations (or encounters) at the heart of this research take place.

Figure 4

Visual Representation of Participant's Migration Trajectories from the DRC to Canada



Note. Adapted from Google My Maps. Copyright 2021 by Google.

Upbringing in the DRC

In telling their life stories, participants outlined the moments and events leading up to their departure from the DRC, including the context at the time of their upbringing as well as their positive and negative experiences of living in the DRC.

The Challenges of Growing Up in the DRC

Overall Instability. Conflict and civil unrest were common in the DRC, as discussed earlier in this research, for instance President Mobutu's military coup in 1965, the Congo Wars, and violence in the eastern parts of the DRC led by rebel groups. Growing up, participants in this study were directly impacted by the decades of war and persistent instability, which culminated for several in the decision to leave the country. Apart from one, all participants discussed the social, economic, and political challenges of growing up in the DRC. Idara discussed the DRC's social instability, lack of social support, and uncertainty regarding when things will worsen both socially and economically: "Il suffit que vous soyez malade au Congo, c'est fini. Vous commencez à vendre des choses, à vendre, parce qu'il n'y a aucun filet social."³⁸ Idara felt this impact firsthand when her father was diagnosed with cancer. Economically, she explained, the family's situation had changed rapidly due to his illness, and the social security they previously had no longer existed. Dalia spoke specifically of the country's poor sanitation and lack of maintenance of certain infrastructures:

Personnellement, j'ai eu la fièvre jaune. J'ai eu la malaria, donc on tombe facilement malade parce que l'environnement n'est pas très sain. Et puis, comment dire là, l'entretien des habitats, des routes, et tout ça, c'est aussi des conditions qui sont un peu difficiles à gérer. C'est vraiment difficile à vivre dans certains coins du pays.³⁹

Rosalie discussed the difficulties of living in the DRC in terms of accessibility, cleanliness, and proper infrastructure as compared to living conditions in Western countries. She noted that in the DRC, even basic developments like clean premises, clean toilets, and lockers in schools were lacking. Jamille shared her frustrations with the country's economic insecurity:

³⁸ Translation: "All it takes is for you to get sick in the Congo, it's over. You start selling things, selling, because there's no social net."

³⁹ Translation: "Personally, I had yellow fever. I had malaria, so you get sick easily because the environment is not very healthy. And then, how to say the, the upkeep of homes, of the roads, and all that, it's also conditions that are a little difficult to manage. It's really difficult to live in some parts of the country."

Le Congo est un pays très riche. Tout le monde a le droit à bénéficier de cette richesse. Ce n'est pas juste [dans] un pays si riche comme le Congo qu'il y ait des enfants qui meurent de faim. Une terre fertile. Pourquoi? Parce qu'il y a des gouvernements qui sont égoïstes, qui prennent l'argent pour lui [eux].⁴⁰

Keren, too, characterized the DRC as a country with great poverty and suffering, and Rosalie stated that although people claimed the DRC was a wealthy nation (presumably for its minerals), this wealth seemed to be for a small group of people rather than for all citizens, since poverty impacted a great portion of the population. Joanna believed that the people of Congo had to make many compromises because of the country's economic insecurity and corruption:

Si je peux mentir pour avoir quelque chose, si en ce moment-là, ça aide, ben c'est ce que je vais faire. Là, je parle de la mentalité d'un congolais moyen. Si j'avais l'opportunité, et puis ça me prend peut-être, on va dire, [de] falsifier certains documents, mais c'est ça que je vais faire.⁴¹

The women's narratives above are consistent with previous findings and reports that the DRC has become underdeveloped, with high rates of poverty stemming from decades of civil unrest. According to the international poverty index in 2018, approximately 73 percent of the Congolese population (or 60 million people) lived on less than \$1.90 a day (World Bank, 2021). The deterioration of the DRC's economic position has resulted in a noticeable shift in migration patterns, for example, a higher proportion of women emigrating from the country (Beauchemin et al., 2018). Participants' socioeconomic vulnerability play a role in their migration decision, as will be discussed later.

Tribalism and Ethnic Conflict. A few participants spoke of the tribalism or ethnic conflict and discrimination they endured as members of specific tribes or regions. The DRC's history of political conflict has affected relationships between the different ethnic groups that exist within the country. For example, there have been interethnic rivalries during the country's independence (for instance, between the Luba ethnic group from Kasai and the Katangans, or mainly Lunda and Bayeke ethnic groups) and a politicization of ethnic groups during the Mobutu era, which led to

⁴⁰ Translation: "Congo is a very rich country. Everyone has the right to benefit from this wealth. It's not just a country as rich as the Congo that there are children dying of hunger. A fertile land. Why is it so? Because there are governments that are selfish, who take the money for themselves."

⁴¹ Translation: "If I can lie to get something, if it helps, then that's what I'll do. I'm talking about the mentality of an average Congolese. If I had the opportunity, and then it takes me maybe, let's say, to falsify some documents, but that's what I'm going to do."

the discrimination and expulsions of certain groups like the Luba from Kasai (Karbo & Mutisi, 2012). Dalia discussed having to flee Kolwezi (the capital city of Lualaba Province) for Mbuji-Mayi (the capital city of Kasai-Oriental) in search of safety due to interethnic rivalries that forced Kasaians to leave the province. Yolande also spoke about her experiences with tribalism in the city of Lubumbashi:

And being from the Kasai province, opportunity was closing for us. You know, we were insulted, mistreated [...] you have to be careful because you have to know, even in school, you know, we had some teachers who were from Katanga Province who decided to become mean to some students, right. And you could feel eyes on you if you were from that province.

Instabilities During Transitional Political Periods. Participants shared memories of the political, economic, and social instabilities that were specific to the political era in which they grew up — the Mobutu era (1965 to 1997), the Kabila “*le père*” era (1997 to 2001), and the Kabila “*le fils*” era (2001 to 2019) — and the fear they experienced during each transition period from one political era to the next.

A prominent topic of discussion among participants who grew up during the Mobutu era was the constraints imposed on their freedoms. For instance, Idara discussed how people were terrified of President Joseph Mobutu. Even in their own homes, “Les gens, ils ont eu peur d’en parler.”⁴² Jamille confirmed this as well, stating: “Bon, c’était la dictature. Donc, on ne devait rien dire. On tolère, on ne tolère pas, mais on [ne] dit rien.”⁴³ Jamille’s father was also a politician during Joseph Mobutu’s presidency, and although he did not agree with the country’s policies, he had no choice but to remain silent since criticizing the government or speaking out against the president would have put him in danger. In fact, her father was nearly poisoned three times as the government perceived him as a political threat. Keren, who lived in Belgium for a few years, was incredibly frustrated with the lack of freedom of speech under President Joseph Mobutu’s One Party system, which prevented people from expressing themselves politically or opposing certain principles: “C’est surtout frustrant parce que tu connais autre chose aussi, tu as vécu autre chose.

⁴² Translation: “People, they were afraid to talk about him.”

⁴³ Translation: “Well, it was a dictatorship. So, we had to say nothing. We tolerate, we don’t tolerate, but we say nothing.”

Donc tu peux comparer.”⁴⁴ Yolande also provided an example from when she was in grade ten of the consequences of speaking out against Joseph Mobutu’s government. At the time of the incident, the president decided he would allow the creation of several political parties, shifting (to some extent) towards a ‘democratic’ system:

So, I remember there was a woman, a journalist from Belgium who came and was asking questions. And two of my team— of my classmates who were the naughtiest boys [*laughs*] went to that place where Mobutu had come, it’s called the *Bâtiment du 30 juin*.⁴⁵ And they went there, and they were interviewed. So, one of them who was in a new party, the opposition party, decided to open up his mouth and talk. He disappeared for three days. Nobody knew where he was.

It turned out the student was arrested. Luckily, the boy’s father was well-connected and able to free his son from prison.

Some of the participants also discussed being forced to partake in certain rituals like saluting the country’s flag and singing patriotic songs. Keren stated, “On connaît toutes ces chansons patriotiques par cœur. Ça fait partie de notre enfance. Bon, à ce moment-là, moi, je trouvais ça un peu folklorique aussi.”⁴⁶ On the one hand, Keren felt these rituals were beneficial for civic education as citizens, but on the other hand, she found herself in a controlled environment with limits to her civil liberties due to the dictatorship. Yolande also spoke about the negative aspects of President Joseph Mobutu’s *Zairianization* movement, such as being forbidden to use her French surname (a birth name she was given after her grandmother) and being forced to adopt ‘Africanized’ names, as well as being forced to wear certain styles of clothing. Women, Yolande explained, were required to wear the *pagne* while men were required to wear the *abacost* (*à bas le costume*).⁴⁷ Despite the restrictions, Rosalie explained that the feeling of injustice during this era manifested in the demand for justice. She provided, as an example, students mobilizing in the 1990s against the military who were committing widespread looting in the country’s eastern DRC. The existence of valuable natural resources in the region has resulted in many conflicts and

⁴⁴ Translation: “It’s especially frustrating because you know something else too, you’ve experienced something else. So, you can compare.”

⁴⁵ Translation: “The Building of June 30th”.

⁴⁶ Translation: “We know all those patriotic songs by heart. It’s part of our childhood. Well, at that time, I thought it was a bit folkloric too.”

⁴⁷ *Pagne* is both a textile used to make clothing as well as a type of Congolese dress or skirt for women, while *abacost* is the name of the traditional suit worn during Mobutu’s era, a shortening of the French expression “à bas le costume”, which translates to “down with the suit” (western suit).

violence by political, military, and business elites, as well as rebel groups, for control and exploitation of these resources (Karbo & Mutisi, 2012). And while the human rights violations stemming from these conflicts resulted in national and international mobilization movements and peace treaties, conflict and insecurities persisted. For instance, during the student mobilization, Rosalie described how people were unable to leave their homes, food was rationed, and it was difficult to have a normal social life due to violence and death on the streets.

For those who grew up in the Kabila “*le père*” era, a prominent topic of discussion among participants was the violence and pervasive fear that followed the ousting of President Joseph Mobutu. Idara, for instance, spoke of the violence that erupted during the coup d’état in which Laurent-Désiré Kabila seized the city of Kinshasa and took power:

Quand les rebelles sont venus, ont fait partir Mobutu, c’était très violent. On habitait dans un quartier qui n’est pas très loin de l’un des grands camps militaires. Je me rappelle du jour où ils sont entrés dans la ville. Il y avait pendant la nuit des coups de feu incroyables. C’était, c’était — bon. Il n’y avait pas eu de victimes dans le quartier, mais vu qu’on était à côté du camp, on pouvait entendre ces bruits-là. C’était bien sûr effrayant.⁴⁸

According to Idara, the country was always in a state of insecurity during this period, and she was in constant fear of what might happen while attending university at the time: “Est-ce qu’on reviendra demain? Est-ce qu’on va même finir la journée?”⁴⁹ Even finding food in Kinshasa became difficult; she remembered her mother risking her life to go out and find food, amid the shootings, to provide for her younger brothers. Bethanie spoke of being born during the coup d’état, describing her mother’s labour and delivery as follows:

... Kinshasa specifically was going to go through the coup d’état. You know, my mom is about to give birth. There’s no electricity in the city. There’s no water in the city. So, she has to now travel to the [University of Kinshasa] campus. Thankfully, the campus still had functioning electricity, but for her it was rough because I was stuck by the umbilical cord. And so, to her, she’s always thinking, ‘Imagine we just didn’t even have a hospital to go to, what would have happened?’ And for her, I think that triggered her.

⁴⁸ Translation: “When the rebels came and removed Mobutu, it was very violent. We lived in a neighbourhood that was not very far from one of the big military camps. I remember the day they entered the city. There was incredible gunfire during the night. It was, it was— well. There were no casualties in the neighbourhood, but being next to the camp, you could hear those sounds. It was of course scary.”

⁴⁹ Translation: “Are we going to come back tomorrow? Are we even going to finish the day?”

When Bethanie was older, she was also witness to some of the poor living conditions that resulted from the coup d'état:

... some of my family members lived in the neighbourhoods where they had their house, but then they were surrounded by shacks. So, sometimes, especially at my dad's sister's house, like we'd go to a house, you know, everything is good, we're good. We're eating good. We have everything. But then you get out of the neighbourhood and then you see people have like their shacks and stuff like that, and then you see their living conditions.

During Laurent-Désiré Kabila's presidency, social instability was also evident, with Joanna asserting, "les richesses du Congo sont inégalement réparties."⁵⁰ She explained that in everyday life, the more well-established acquaintances someone had, whether in government or business, they had a powerful network with the potential of thriving socially. And the fewer of these acquaintances someone had, the more they faced social and economic instabilities. Joanna also explained how opportunities were always uncertain during this period. For instance, because someone had completed their studies did not guarantee that they would find a good job.

Like the political atmosphere during the Kabila "*le père*" era, the Kabila "*le fils*" era was marred by violence, insecurities, and fear that followed the assassination of President Laurent-Désiré Kabila. Lehana indicated that she was very young at the time of this assassination but recalled the greater insecurities that were exemplified by her parents' installing an electric gate on their compound to deter any rebels. Idara, who was also present in the DRC during the assassination was herself confronted by rebels:

Donc, cette période comme ça là où on trouvait la souffrance, quand vous n'avez pas accès aux choses, vous n'êtes pas calme, vous avez du mal à dormir, vous avez peur. Est-ce que quelqu'un va venir entrer dans la salle? Parce que c'est arrivé à l'entrée, des rebelles qui viennent nous attaquer à la maison, tout ça, donc [*pause*] ça nous a arrivé une fois. Les militaires sont venus frapper à la porte, mais ils n'ont rien fait. Mais, cette période, oui. Cette période de transition entre la politique, ce sont des mauvaises périodes, et bien sûr, les souvenirs personnels, les décès des personnes chères...⁵¹

⁵⁰ Translation: "Congo's wealth is unevenly distributed."

⁵¹ Translation: "So, that period like that where you would find suffering, when you don't have access to things, you're not calm, you have trouble sleeping, you're afraid. Will someone come into the room? Because it happened at the entrance, rebels coming to attack us at home, all that, so [*pause*] it happened to us once. The rebels came knocking on the door, but they didn't do anything. But, that period, yes. That period of political transition, those were bad times, and of course, the personal memories, the deaths of loved ones..."

Keisha's uncle was among the casualties during the political unrest of this era. He was killed in his own home by rebels.

The experiences shared in the context of this research serve as a reminder of how conflict, violence, instability, and poverty in the DRC have carried over (or endured) from one political era to the next, driven in part by the country's colonial history (Wachter et al., 2015). The narratives above also show how being confronted with these ongoing events and circumstances caused participants to experience fear, trauma, death, disruption in their life, and an inability to access resources, resulting in precarious living conditions. Nevertheless, having grown up in the DRC during three political eras, Idara characterized the years preceding Laurent-Désiré Kabila's presidency — specifically the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s — as the best years in the DRC, when things were good and calm, including in the East:

... bien sûr qu'il y avait la dictature de Mobutu, mais, c'était une période quand même, je dirais d'un point de vue social, politique, tout ça, c'était quand même assez, c'était stable. Il n'y avait pas cette insécurité, d'avoir peur d'aller quelque part et de se faire arrêter par quelqu'un. Il y avait, donc, pour moi, c'est l'époque où toute la famille, toute la famille est là. Vous êtes en famille, où il y a moins de stress au niveau même de la famille. Parce qu'après, les choses changent, il y a des décès qui arrivent. Il y a beaucoup de choses.⁵²

Yolande also spoke of the good that occurred during Mobutu's reign:

There were people who were poor, but most people had food on their table. You don't see many kids wandering around not going to school. You know, they went to, if their parents could afford it, they went to the public schools and, you know, at least they were schooled that way. But now even public school is out of reach for people.

A few participants, such as Amina and Michelle, indicated that they were either too young to be cognisant of the political and social situation in the DRC or were not exposed to the country's realities by their parents, leading them to characterize their upbringing as relatively calm and plentiful.

⁵² Translation: "... of course there was Mobutu's dictatorship, but it was a period, I would say, from a social, political point of view, all that, it was still quite, it was stable. There wasn't this insecurity, of being afraid to go somewhere and to get arrested by someone. There was, so, for me, it's a time when the whole family, the whole family is there. You're with your family, where there's less stress on the family side. Because after, things change, there are deaths that occur. There are many things."

Losing Loved Ones. One other challenge growing up in the DRC that participants discussed was losing a loved one to illness. Joanna's father passed away when she was ten years old. She described feeling orphaned from a father who was the sole provider of the family (her mother did not work), and how his passing led to many difficulties:

De manquer à manger, de ne pas savoir si on allait finir l'année scolaire parce qu'on n'avait pas de l'argent pour payer les frais de scolarité, de ne pas avoir de quoi, peut-être valablement se vêtir. C'était, c'était un peu difficile.⁵³

Having lost her father, Joanna also shared she had lost her reference point, someone on whom she could depend for support and advice. However, she noted that the challenges she faced were shared by many families in the DRC; her family's experiences were not unique. This was illustrated by the experiences of Samora and Idara, who both lost their fathers, with Idara defining this moment as the most difficult period prior to leaving the DRC. Keren, too, lost a sibling as a child.

The Positive Childhood Experiences in the DRC

Despite the insecurities and challenges the participants experienced or witnessed in the DRC, they all spoke positively about their childhood and reflected favourably on their life prior to their journey to Canada.

Stress-Free Moments. Participants discussed a happy upbringing, with Yolande proclaiming, "... the Congo that it is today is not what, it's not the Congo I grew up in," regardless of the political and civil unrests that took place during her childhood. Samora also stressed, "... le Congo était un très bon pays, dont tous les habitants des pays voisins préféreraient venir vivre."⁵⁴ Amina's childhood was characterized by her carefree attitude, travelling to various cities as her father was in the military in the DRC, and learning new dialects. Joanna also described her upbringing in the DRC as stress-free, which she believed was typical of Congolese people. She explained:

Ce n'est pas qu'on ne stresse pas en fait, mais, le fait qu'on ne connaît même pas que ce mot stress existe [*éclat de rire*] parce que j'ai appris que le stress existait ici [au Canada], c'est là que je commençais à stresser. Un congolais moyen, c'est quelqu'un qui est, qui vit

⁵³ Translation: "Not having enough to eat, not knowing if we were going to finish the school year because we didn't have the money to pay the school fees, not having enough to maybe afford to wear clothes. It was, it was a little difficult."

⁵⁴ Translation: "... Congo was a very good country, in which all the inhabitants of the neighbouring countries would have preferred to come and live."

vraiment du jour au jour. Souvent, il ne planifie pas. Il ne connaît pas trop ce qui s'en va demain. Et moi, je dis que c'est les meilleurs souvenir dans le sens où ça, c'est juste cette vie où on est juste nous, on [ne] stresse pas pour tout et pour rien.⁵⁵

Thus, Joanna missed being able to wake up in the morning and just live life without stressing or calculating her next moves. However, she admitted that as a child, she had a father and provider who might have carried the burden of stress that she did not. Keisha, too, characterized her childhood as liberating, where she believed that people did not have as many worries as they do in Canada, stating: "...you're just living, you go to school, you come back, you're just always outside. It's not very technological, but it's more fun, interactive, and you're just free."

Strong Family Bonds. A significant aspect of the participants' happy childhood or upbringing was "la chaleur familiale"⁵⁶ (Dalia) and their strong ties to their immediate family. For instance, Francine expressed having "de très bons parents, très, très bons parents, spécialement, j'avais un très bon, très bon père. Mon père, c'était, en tout cas, c'était comme l'âme de la famille."⁵⁷ She remembered her father often telling her and her siblings stories in the evening and making them laugh. Francine also recalled being raised by her older sister, who also paid for her education. Similarly, Joanna expressed that spending time with her family, singing and telling stories — even when there was no electricity in the house — was one of her favourite memories. Jamille shared her fondest childhood memories of going to the family farm and enjoying picnics with her parents and siblings. Her father also built a mini zoo in their backyard with monkeys, a crocodile, a mongoose, and rabbits: "Oui, j'aimais ça beaucoup! Oui!"⁵⁸

Another significant aspect of most of the participants' happy childhood or upbringing was their strong ties to their extended family in the DRC, being surrounded almost daily by aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. Indeed, it is not uncommon for households in the DRC to gather with extended family, who are also significant support networks (Beauchemin et al., 2018). Keisha described her extended family living near one another as forming a "whole village". Bethanie was

⁵⁵ Translation: "It's not that we don't actually stress, but the fact that we don't even know that the word *stress* exists [laughter] because I learned that stress exists here [in Canada], that's when I started to stress. An average Congolese is someone who is, who really lives from day to day. They often don't plan. They don't really know what's going to happen tomorrow. And I say that it is the best memory in the sense that it is just this life where we are just us, we do not stress for everything and for nothing."

⁵⁶ Translation: "the family warmth."

⁵⁷ Translation: "... very good parents, very, very good parents, especially, I had a very, very good father. My father, he was, anyway, he was like the soul of the family."

⁵⁸ Translation: "Yes, I loved it very much! Yes!"

also surrounded by extended family members such as her grandparents, characterizing family life as “everyday.” She stated: “I mean, if you look at a lot of Congolese kids’ family photos, it’s always photos with cousins and people, right? So, you’re always surrounded by family.” Idara also had fond memories growing up with her extended family:

À la maison, comme dans beaucoup de familles africaines, il n’y avait pas seulement nous. Il y avait aussi des cousins, tout le temps. Il y avait des cousins. Il y avait des fois les grands-parents qui venaient, qui restaient avec nous, qui s’en allaient.⁵⁹

Thus, while her immediate family numbered just seven people, she had at least ten to fifteen extended family members residing at the home.

What contributed to the strong family ties were the opportunities to spend time together, particularly through family gatherings and celebrations. One of Bethanie’s favourite memories in the DRC, for instance, was a New Year’s Eve gathering at her grandparents’ home with family members from her maternal side. This was her favourite memory as “I was with my cousins. It was my aunts, my uncles, everyone is opening up the family albums and learning about all these different people who have passed on.” For Samora, it was her wedding day, where family sang, danced, and blessed her with gifts. These strong family bonds within extended families were described by Lehana as “the usual typical Congolese surrounding” or the Congolese “lifestyle.” Other women, such as Michelle, Valérie, and Rosalie, also had fond memories of growing up with extended members of the family and taking part in family gatherings.

The women’s narratives demonstrate the significance of family support and relationships in shaping a positive upbringing. They also show the fluidity of Congolese households, where the household is not organized solely around the nuclear family (Beauchemin et al., 2018). As previously mentioned, it is relatively common for households in the DRC to include extended family, and this was the case for many participants who either lived in households with both immediate and extended family members or maintained strong ties to their extended family. These served as social and emotional networks for participants, as well as a source of nurturing and self-esteem, particularly during times of insecurity.

Positive Communities. Some participants reflected on community life and the positive social environments in which they were raised. Yolande described growing up in a close-knit

⁵⁹ Translation: “At home, as in many African families, it wasn’t just us. There were also cousins, all the time. There were cousins. There were times the grandparents would come, who’d stay with us, who’d leave.”

community, where she would stand at the corner of the street and chat with neighbours until sundown: “It was like growing up in a huge family. I’m still in touch with a lot of those people because we grew up together, right, in the neighborhood. It was one of my favourite memories.” Likewise, Michelle discussed often playing and doing “kids’ stuff” with her neighbours as a child. Amina also referred to her neighbours as “a family” despite frequently moving with her family.

Furthermore, church was important for a few of the women because it had a positive influence on their identity construction, shaping their faith in God (which was vital during times of adversity) and their Christian-based morals. Joanna stated, “... le congolais est un être qui recherche le, beaucoup de surnaturel, le spirituel, et ça, ça aide beaucoup.”⁶⁰ Bethanie also explained:

When you go to church, *ahh!* You won’t even know Congo is suffering!... Church is big in Congo [...] You can’t tell if this person is rich or not. You cannot tell anything. All you know is that you are in a building with everyone who’s just worshipping and having a good time listening to the message.

Church was also important for participants because it allowed them and their families to feel connected to their community and friends. This finding supports the notion that churches are an important part of many African communities, including those in the DRC, since they provide wide networks of support (Lusey et al., 2018). Even though gender inequality and gender norms are established in many Congolese churches, some participants were grateful for the social and spiritual support they received by attending church.

Other aspects of the women’s communities or community life that they enjoyed included the food markets, the cuisine and flavours, the gardens and large living spaces, the trips taken, social life, and the love that people showed one another.

Education and Employment. Another part of the women’s happy childhood or upbringing that they discussed was obtaining an education. Many participants received some form of education prior to leaving the country (many were engaged in the equivalent of a Canadian elementary or high school education at the time of migration) and came from a range of educational backgrounds. For instance, Bethanie had attended an English international school, while Lehana and Jamille attended French schools or were educated in the French system. Further, Joanna attended a convent school, while Idara, Amina, and Francine attended an all-girls school. Francine,

⁶⁰ Translation: “... the Congolese is a being who seeks the, a lot of supernatural, the spiritual, and that helps a lot.”

more specifically, attended a boarding school in Bandundu, where she was first exposed to “une certaine multiculturalité”⁶¹ and diversity, meeting children from different cities and provinces such as Kinshasa and Kikwit. For Idara, it was not until she attended university that she became friends with people from other cities, friends with whom she is still in contact today. Dalia spent part of her childhood studying in Belgium while her father was pursuing his doctorate, and then returned to the DRC to complete her studies. These opportunities stand in contrast with Samora’s experiences, who was unable to study in the DRC due to the lack of opportunity, conveying “mais c’est ça la vie.”⁶² According to Joanna:

Il y a beaucoup de femmes qui n’ont pas eu cette opportunité d’aller à l’école. Il y a beaucoup des femmes qui n’ont pas eu cette opportunité d’être instruit, et beaucoup qui n’ont pas eu un encadrement des repères dans leur vie.⁶³

Michelle also lacked the opportunity to study in the DRC, though this was due to being too young to attend school prior to her family’s relocation to Canada; she only attended kindergarten.

Participants who left Congo in young adulthood were able to complete high school in the country and earn a university degree. For instance, both Idara and Keren earned their medical degrees, and Dalia completed her studies in law. After their studies, Idara, Keren, and Dalia became employed; Idara mentioned working at a pediatric hospital, while Keren mentioned securing a post-study internship. No other participants mentioned that they were employed in the DRC or had the opportunity to become employed, because they were still students or too young. According to Yolande:

... working was definitely not on the tables. The way Congo is structured, there’s no way you could have worked before your eighteenth birthday, really. So, it was even unheard of, of people working until they were — well, it’s either you dropped out of school and started working, and there were not opportunities there [...] the opportunities are few and far between...

Therefore, despite the DRC’s culture of inequality and prevalent gender norms, as discussed in Chapter Five, where women faced barriers in the education system and were often

⁶¹ Translation: “a certain multiculturality.”

⁶² Translation: “... but such is life.”

⁶³ Translation: “There are many women who have not had this opportunity to go to school. There are many women who have not had the opportunity to be educated, and many who have not had a framework of reference points in their lives.”

unable to attend school (Wilson, 1982), most participants were able to attend school and obtain some level of education. Nevertheless, some of the women's negative experiences in the DRC were compounded by their schooling experiences, despite receiving a good education. Francine, for example, attended boarding school from the age of twelve to age eighteen, only returning home for Christmas, Easter, and other holidays or vacations. Thus, she spent a large portion of her time isolated at school rather than with her family, and part of the struggle of being away for so long was dealing with challenges, such as failing a school year, without the support from family. Francine stated:

Ce n'est pas comme ici [au Canada] où vous avez peut-être des cours de rattrapage, ou vous avez des gens qui peuvent vous expliquer des cours en dehors des classes. Vous êtes en plus à l'internat, c'est entre vous, il n'y a personne.⁶⁴

Idara and Joanna's first year at university was a struggle, too, because they had to adjust to a new environment of people from different schools and cities, and to a new system that was unstructured in comparison to their high schools. What hurt the most for Joanna was her financial struggles, sometimes going without food while at school since she spent much of her money on transportation. Her mother was also a widow who struggled to support Joanna's education. Lehana felt limited and discouraged in elementary school since there lacked the freedom to question teachers or to discuss different topics beyond the course material.

Privileged Upbringing. A few women characterized their positive upbringing as privileged. For example, Keren attributed her positive childhood to her parents' social status: her father was a doctor and university professor, and her mother was a nurse. Both Keisha and Francine also had the perception that their families provided them with all they needed and never lacked anything. Francine stated : "... j'avais l'impression qu'on ne manquait de rien, même si — bon, quand tu vois la réalité, c'est qu'on manquait de tout. Mais, mais je n'ai jamais, jamais vécu le manque."⁶⁵ Because Jamille knew she was privileged as a child, it was very difficult for her to claim that she missed her privileged childhood now that she was aware of how people in the DRC were suffering at the time. Some participants also referred to their education as a blessing and a

⁶⁴ Translation: "It's not like here [in Canada] where you might have make-up classes, or you have people who can explain the courses to you outside of class. You're also in boarding school, it's just you, there's no one. Or you study, you understand, you don't understand, it's finish."

⁶⁵ Translation: "I had the impression that we didn't lack anything, even if— well, when you see the reality, we lacked everything. But I never, never experienced the lack thereof."

privilege. Dalia expressed that due to the culture of gender inequalities, few girls or women from her province were able to attend school, stating, “... je suis d’origine Kasaïenne, en principe, d’après notre culture, c’est que la femme Kasaïenne, elle est plus élevée et orientée vers le mariage, mais ça n’a pas été le cas à moi, ni le cas de ma sœur.”⁶⁶ Despite her cultural background, Dalia was able to pursue her studies all the way to university since her father was a university professor. He made certain that his children attended a good school and were well-educated, enough to provide for themselves. Joanna, too, expressed gratitude for having been able to study, to have had good teachers and to have attended a good school, and Keren spoke of how fortunate she was to have gone to such a good school, “l’une des meilleures du pays aussi.”⁶⁷

Gender Norms and Family Practices against Gender Inequality

In discussing their childhood experiences, participants also reflected on their positions in society and the family unit as defined by gender relations and norms during their upbringing, such as the patriarchy that took place in their household and in society that they either endured or witnessed.

Gender Norms in the Household and Society. According to Joanna, women in the DRC were often defined by their roles as mother and housewife, while men were defined by their roles as wage earner and provider. As previously noted in Chapter Five, gender norms are prevalent in the DRC, and many Congolese women and men have supported the performance of gender norms, such as women being defined as caregivers and men as heads of the household (Freedman, 2015; Lusey et al., 2018). Therefore, it is not surprising that participants experienced and witnessed gender norms in the household and in society. Such norms and power dynamics are also enforced in the law, as Yolande highlighted:

My mom, when she worked, my dad had the power to go to her place of work and say, ‘I don’t want my wife to work anymore.’ And that would be the end. I don’t know if that law exists anymore.

In fact, the DRC’s *Family Code* and customary laws have upheld gender discrimination in domestic and private life, stipulating that men are the head of the household and have authority over members of their household, including their wives (Freedman, 2015). Gender norms were

⁶⁶ Translation: “I am of *Kasaian* origin, in theory, according to our culture, it is that the *Kasaian* woman, she is more raised and oriented towards getting married, but this was not the case for me, nor for my sister.”

⁶⁷ Translation: “... one of the best in the country too.”

also prevalent in Jamille's family, where her father was the patriarch of the household, and once he received a prominent position in the government, her mother took on the role of caregiver and became dependent on her father for support and resources:

C'est vrai que la Bible dit — il ne faut pas contredire la Bible non plus — que l'homme est le chef de la famille. Mais en Afrique, ils prennent ça vraiment comme premier degré [*éclat de rire*]! Tandis, et en Afrique, je vois que la femme ne peut rien dire. La preuve, voyez ma mère. Mon père était [*titre omis*] de Mobutu. Il avait tous les privilèges. D'ailleurs, ma mère travaillait comme infirmière quand mon père était président de [*nom de l'organisme omis*]. Mais, c'est papa qui a demandé à ma mère d'arrêter le travail pour s'occuper de ses enfants. Donc, depuis, j'ai toujours vu ma mère à la maison. Mais regardez, mon père, c'est lui qui travaillait et portait la maison. Mais je disais toujours à ma mère, 'Mais, crée au moins une organisation! Fait quelque chose!' J'acceptais pas ça.⁶⁸

Michelle also recalled her mother and aunts staying at home and doing household work such as cooking and cleaning, while her father went to work and provided for the family. Despite being the family's youngest child, Samora found herself in a similar situation. She was expected to do everything around the house as a young female child (such as cooking and cleaning), even when others were present. Samora explained, "Surtout dans la culture africaine, toute femme est considérée comme si elle est créée juste pour le ménage d'où toute la charge de ménage te revient quel que soit ton âge."⁶⁹ Samora also felt she was the target of her mother's punishments at times, being disciplined for not doing household chores such as washing her older brother's dishes.

Misogyny was prevalent in society, and many of the participants were aware, even at a young age, that they lived in a country marked by gender inequalities. Dalia, for instance, stated, "... je vivais dans un environnement où, en tant que femme, je savais que j'étais déjà, mes droits étaient limités." She found it difficult to articulate her point of view in society because she was restricted in that regard, but she admitted that she still tried to express herself regardless of whether

⁶⁸ Translation: "It's true that the Bible says – you shouldn't contradict the Bible either – that the husband is the head of the family. But in Africa, they really take that as the first degree [*laughter*]! Whereas, and in Africa, I see that the woman can't say anything. The proof, look at my mother. My father was Mobutu's [*omitted title*]. He had all the privileges. Further, my mother worked as a nurse when my father was president of the [*omitted name of organization*]. But it was my father who asked my mother to stop working to take care of his children. So, since then, I have always seen my mother at home. But look, my dad, he was the one working and supporting the house. But I always told my mom, 'But at least create an organization! Do something!' I didn't accept that."

⁶⁹ Translation: "Especially in the African culture, every woman is considered as if she is created just for the household where the whole burden of the household falls on you regardless of your age."

this caused her problems. Keren described the “status of woman” (or being a woman) as a barrier to obtaining opportunities: “... tu n’es pas priorisé nécessairement pour certaines choses, pour certaines études, pour certaines opportunités, parce que t’es femme.”⁷⁰ Keisha also witnessed women’s vulnerability to rape during the civil war:

I think for the older women it definitely was hard, especially during the war, because rape was huge, you know, and it wouldn’t be just like one person, it would be like gang rape and they [the rebels] don’t care. They just want to do it because they can, they have power or whatever.

Furthermore, Idara discussed how catcalling became normalized in Congolese culture:

Au Congo, quand un monsieur, un jeune garçon, donc, ceux qui sont la vingtaine, quand il veut aborder une fille qui lui plaît dans la rue, par exemple une fille qui passe, ils ont une [*éclat de rire*], une façon de les appeler. Ils ne sifflent pas. Ils font quelque chose comme [*bruit de baiser*] [*éclat de rire*]. C’est vrai! Et la fille, et la fille se retourne. Elle n’est pas offusquée. Et la réponse elle va faire, ‘C’est moi tu appelles?’ Elle n’est pas fâchée, c’est normal.⁷¹

Idara was also shocked by some of the restrictions President Joseph Mobutu placed on certain choices that a woman, and even a young girl, could make. For example, women were not permitted to wear pants; Idara considered this to be ridiculous. Yolande and Keren also shared the same sentiments as Idara. Since Keren grew up partially in Belgium where everything was more or less allowed, she did not understand why, as a girl, she could not put on pants: “Je ne voyais pas en quoi cela pouvait restreindre.”⁷² Such law, however, was enforced, even by child soldiers. Idara recounted being confronted with a gun by a child soldier (who was about the age of nine) because she was wearing pants out in public:

Il me dit d’enlever mon pantalon dans la rue. Je lui dis, ‘Je ne peux pas faire ça.’ [*Éclat de rire*] Ce qui m’a sauvé, c’est qu’il y avait quelqu’un, je pense, dans une autre, comme une jeune fille qui était pourtant dans leur maison, dans leur parcelle, en train de faire quelque

⁷⁰ Translation: “You’re not necessarily prioritized for certain things, for certain studies, for certain opportunities, because you’re a woman.”

⁷¹ Translation: “In Congo, when a gentleman, a young boy, so those in their twenties, when he wants to approach a girl he likes on the street, for example a girl who is passing by, they have a [*laughter*], a way of calling them. They don’t whistle. They do something like [*kissing sound*] [*laughter*]. It’s true! And the girl, and the girl turns around. She’s not offended. And the answer she’ll give, ‘Is it me you’re calling?’ She’s not upset, it’s normal.”

⁷² Translation: “I did not see in what way this could be detrimental.”

chose, qui est aussi en pantalon. Donc, ça l'a distrait. Il est allé encore suivre cette fille.

Pendant qu'il était distrait, c'est là que j'ai couru.⁷³

Bethanie, conversely, indicated that since she was young at the time, her parents had shielded her from much of the misogyny that existed in Congolese society. And given the prevalence of women's vulnerability and mistreatment, Bethanie found it surprising that Women's Day was widely celebrated in Congo. International Women's Day takes place on March 8th. On that day, women in the DRC are not only celebrated, but they also mobilize for the restoration of peace and equality in the country (Freedman, 2015).

The experiences presented above confirm earlier research and reports on the prevalence of gender inequalities in the DRC, in both the family and society, such as women being relegated to the role of caregiver in the home and being denied rights, autonomy, and freedom. As will be shown, these experiences have had an impact on many participants' decision to leave the country and, eventually, their migration trajectories.

Family Members Promoting Gender Equity. Despite gender discrimination, several participants spoke of their family's support for their ambitions and education, as well as their family's disapproval of the country's gender norms. This was regardless of being condemned or ridiculed by extended family members or members of society for their opposing views on gender norms, such as Francine's father, who was labelled as "efféminé."⁷⁴ She also grew up in what she described as a matriarchal family, a household led by women who were very independent and studious. Amina grew up in a family of eight sisters and no brothers, and her father raised them to be independent and encouraged them to take on roles traditionally occupied by men. Yolande, too, was raised by parents who encouraged her to be independent and to pursue an education:

Yeah, so, my dad always told us, 'Make sure you study, and you can support yourself, because marriage is not an end in itself. And as a woman, you are not less than a man. You can do it on your own.' So, that was always that message for us. And we never felt like we were less than our brother or that he preferred him because he was a boy. He gave us all equal chances [...] even like my mom couldn't go to university and that was because her

⁷³ Translation: "He tells me to take my pants off on the street. I told him, 'I can't do that.' [*Laughter*] What saved me was that there was someone, I think, in another, like a young girl who was in her house, in their plot, doing something, who was also in pants. So, that distracted him. He went again to follow that girl. While he was distracted, that's when I ran."

⁷⁴ Translation: "effeminate."

own dad had stopped her. It was time for her to get married and that was the thing at the time, right? But she put it into us that you have to forge your own way, doesn't matter whether you're a woman, you can do it, you can achieve something.

Idara also shared how fortunate she was to have a father who supported her choices and was “progressive” in his views; at a time when women had limited rights, her father encouraged her to make her own decisions and even motivated her to attend university. Despite growing up in a family with a lot of men, Joanna never felt limited or undervalued because she was a woman. Instead, she was encouraged to pursue her goals and told she had the potential to advance in society. Gender inequalities in society also contributed to Bethanie and Joanna's resilience, who fought and defended their rights as women. Bethanie asserted, “I know my worth. And you telling me I'm a woman and this is what I'm supposed to do and that's not how I'm being raised in my household, of course I'm going to correct you.”

Departing from the DRC

Migration Journeys Prior to Departure

Dalia, Idara, Jamille, and Keren were granted the opportunity to travel abroad during their youth, and even settled in different countries before making the decision to ‘permanently’ emigrate from the DRC. Thus, mobility had become a part of their life. Jamille, for example, had the chance to spend her holidays in Brussels during her elementary school years (grade school in Canada), and Valérie went on multiple trips with her aunts. Dalia, Keren, and Idara spent a few years of their childhood in Belgium and France. Dalia was five years old when her family settled in Belgium so that her father could pursue his doctoral studies, and the family returned to the DRC when his studies were completed. Keren was seven years old when she and her family also settled in Belgium, and they returned to the DRC when she was fourteen. Keren explained that she did not want to return to the DRC because she would be leaving behind her friends and new environment, but she had no choice since her parents were the decision-makers. Keren experienced “un clash culturel”⁷⁵ upon her arrival in the DRC, as the two countries differed in terms of the rights, liberties, and security for women. Idara's family, like Dalia's, settled in France so that her father could pursue his education. She was able to finish elementary school during this period, and the family returned to the DRC after five years in France.

⁷⁵ Translation: “a cultural clash.”

The cases above demonstrate how other forms of mobility can occur before one's actual migration (for instance, travels or short stays in future transit countries; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014), but ultimately, all the participants were confronted with the decision to leave the DRC and resettled elsewhere for several reasons, including family reunification, a willingness to resettle in a Western country, education or professionalism, and the political instability and insecurities in the DRC. While many of these decisions were made at the micro (individual) level based on personal motives and aspirations, they were nonetheless influenced by broader factors (for instance, the political circumstances in the DRC, the available opportunities, family reunification) that, in many cases, ended in a hasty and difficult decision to leave.

Reasons for Leaving the DRC

Family Reunification. Samora left the DRC to be reunited with her husband, who resettled in Canada for employment. Amina left the DRC to also reunite with her husband in Canada, who fled the country because the military was looking to arrest him for political reasons she did not disclose. Despite living in a different country, Amina's husband did all he could to assist her in leaving the DRC, for instance, helping with the paperwork and sending money for her visa.

Resettling in a Western Country. Dalia, who grew up in both Western and African cultures, began to identify more with Western culture and could no longer see herself thriving in a setting such as the Congo's due to the constraints on her rights and freedoms: "Il fallait que je me retrouve dans un milieu qui me permettait de m'exprimer, qui me permettait de m'exprimer, mais d'agir en pleine, comment dire, dans mes pleins pouvoirs et dans le respect de mes droits."⁷⁶ Keren shared the same sentiments, thinking to herself at the time:

Moi, je ne vis pas dans un milieu où les femmes ne sont pas nécessairement considérées.

Moi, je ne vis pas dans un milieu où il y a toutes sortes d'abus. Moi, je ne vis pas dans ce genre de milieu, là où on ne peut pas dire ce que l'on pense."⁷⁷

Valérie, too, left the country as her parents were in search of a better life for her and her siblings in a Western country.

⁷⁶ Translation: "I had to be in an environment that allowed me to express myself, that allowed me to express myself, but to act in full, how should I say, in my full capacities and in the respect of my rights."

⁷⁷ Translation: "Me, I won't live in an environment where women are not necessarily considered. I won't live in an environment where there are all kinds of abuse. I won't live in that kind of environment where you can't say what you think."

Better Education and Career Prospects. Seven of the participants cited education and better career prospects as reasons for leaving the DRC. Francine left the DRC to pursue further education in Spain. Three years after finishing her studies in the DRC and some time after her father passed away, Idara was informed by a friend of an opportunity to obtain a scholarship to study in Japan. Thus, she applied for the scholarship, was called for an interview, and was informed that she had been selected to receive this scholarship. She saw an opportunity to advance in her profession and decided to pursue her doctorate in Japan. Joanna came to Canada to pursue an undergraduate degree, following her brother who had previously come for the same reason. She, too, was informed by a friend of a scholarship to study in Canada with Foreign Affairs:

C'était bien parce que les bourses du Canada sont vraiment régies par le Canada. Ce n'est pas les agents congolais qui font le — en fait, les agents congolais font une présélection, mais la décision finale revient vraiment au Canada. Une bourse de la francophonie et j'ai été retenue [pour] cette bourse-là. C'est ce qui a fait que j'ai quitté le Congo pour venir ici et j'ai poursuivi mes études.⁷⁸

Jamille was forced to leave the DRC when she was fifteen years old since her parents enrolled her and her siblings in a boarding school in Belgium. Both Lehana and Michelle's parents desired to relocate to a country with a better education system and more professional opportunities. Lastly, Yolande wanted to learn English and intended to spend a year in Zambia doing intensive English studies. A few of these participants, like Idara and Joanna, made the decision to move abroad only temporarily; their initial intention was to attend school and then return to the DRC. Joanna, for example, studied engineering in Canada so that when she returned to the DRC, she could help rebuild some of the country's infrastructure. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, participants chose not to return to the country, as will be discussed further in the study.

Political Instability and Insecurities in the DRC. Of the reasons explored by the participants, the political instability and insecurities that existed in the DRC were the main reasons why they left the country. Eleven participants felt this was a forced decision in which they and their families had no choice but to leave. Keisha stated, "But we were kind of forced to leave because there was war, and obviously our family was affected by that, too." And those who were

⁷⁸ Translation: "It was good because Canada's scholarships are really governed by Canada. It's not Congolese agents who make the— in fact, Congolese agents make a pre-selection, but the final decision is really up to Canada. A Francophonie scholarship and I was selected for this scholarship. It's what made me leave the Congo to come here and I pursued my studies."

young when they left the DRC, such as Rosalie, were already aware that they needed to emigrate from the country: "... la migration donc était comme un appui ou pour se sauver."⁷⁹ Michelle recounted the events that led to her father's decision to relocate the family out of the DRC. One day, her father returned home and asked her brother, 'What did you eat? How was your day?' When Michelle's brother answered, 'I ate oatmeal,' he knew the family could no longer live in poverty and political unrest. As a result, the family made arrangements to leave the DRC. Although Jamille's parents forced her and her siblings to attend boarding school in Belgium, the underlying reason was for them to escape the DRC's political situation and her father's vulnerability:

Bon, mon père, mon père était politicien, bien qu'il n'était pas d'accord avec les principes de l'État. Donc, il n'avait pas le choix. Et c'est comme ça que sa vie devenait un peu dangereuse. Donc, il nous a envoyés en Belgique.⁸⁰

Keren sought opportunities to leave the DRC after completing her studies due to the constraints on her rights and freedoms as a woman, as well as the country's instability that made her future unpredictable both socially and economically: "J'ai terminé ce que j'avais à faire. On voulait avoir un diplôme de médecine, le voilà, vous l'avez. Maintenant, c'est le *bye-bye*, OK? Donc, [*éclat de rires*] maintenant, c'est vraiment le *bye-bye*..."⁸¹ Keren's departure from the DRC was something she had intended to do since the day she returned to the country from Belgium, because she had once lived in a secure environment that provided her with unlimited opportunities and the protection of rights. Nevertheless, none of these women expected or desired to leave the country. As Yolande shared:

I can tell you growing up, I always saw myself growing up in Lubumbashi, going to the local university, buying a house in Lubumbashi. I never pictured myself leaving the house at nineteen and moving way away from home. That was never my plans. So, it was just things had changed and Lubumbashi was no longer the same. That was not the city of my childhood. So, you had to adjust in that sense, in that way.

⁷⁹ Translation: "Migration, therefore, was like a lifeline or to save oneself."

⁸⁰ Translation: "Well, my father, my father was a politician, although he didn't agree with the State's policies. So, he had no choice. And that's how his life became a little bit dangerous. So, he sent us to Belgium."

⁸¹ Translation: "I finished what I had to do. We wanted to get a medical degree, here it is, you got it. Now, it's *bye-bye*, okay? So, [*laughter*] now, it's really *bye-bye*..."

The Decision-Makers

The decision to leave the DRC was taken by five of the women on their own, while the remaining participants had the decision made for them by others, such as their husbands or parents. According to research, gender relations and hierarchies in both the household and society can influence whether women could make the decision to migrate (Boyd & Grieco, 2003), which was evident in some cases. To illustrate, with their husbands already settled in Canada, Amina and Samora indicated they had no choice but to leave the DRC to reunite with them. Bethanie's mother also made the final decision to leave for South Africa as refugees when she was a child, after Bethanie's father was already settled there. Bethanie expressed:

... my mom was like, 'Well, it's time for us to go.' So, being that my dad had left [the Congo] already and, you know, my mom was looking at the future and was like, 'Yeah, you know, we need to do this, or we never know.' They left Congo.

Idara was not initially motivated to apply for the scholarship to study in Japan, but it was her father's encouragement that contributed to her decision to apply and accept the opportunity to study abroad. Lastly, while Lehana's parents made the collective decision to leave the DRC, this decision was predetermined by her father, who was already settled in Canada. The decision was clear to be reunited with him. When her parents made this decision, Lehana and her brother, who were young children, had no idea they were leaving the DRC for good. Instead, they were told they were going on vacation to Canada to visit their father:

... my mom was like, 'All right, you remember, you really wanted to see your dad? So, we're actually going to take the airplane tonight and we're going to go see your dad.' And I'm like, 'Oh, that's why we only have three suitcases, right?' So, it was like, okay, sounds good!

Lehana explained that her parents waited until the last minute to inform them of their move to avoid jealousy from extended family members who had already criticized her family for their 'lavish' lifestyle.

In the examples discussed above, men evidently had great influence over migration decisions, even in Lehana's case, when her mother made the decision to have the family reunited with her father in Canada. In other cases, the decision to migrate was clearly a collective decision between parents. Valérie, for instance, stated, "Donc, ma famille, mon père et ma mère, ont décidés

d’immigrer, et puis, bien, j’étais enfant, donc je les ai suivis.”⁸² Michelle also mentioned that her parents made the collective decision to leave the DRC when she was a young child.

Reasons for Relocating to Chosen Destinations

Six participants resettled in Canada directly from the DRC, while nine participants spent months or years in different countries prior to their permanent resettlement in Canada.

Reasons for Migrating to Canada. Those who resettled directly to Canada chose the country for a few reasons, including having family who lived in Canada, which influenced their desire to migrate to the country as well; believing that Canada was a good country; resettling out of curiosity and discovery; and believing that Canada offered many opportunities and resources. Michelle’s parents’ decision to immigrate to Canada was influenced by the presence of her uncle in the country. This was particularly important for them since they were arriving in Canada as refugees, and her uncle could assist them in their settlement process. Her parents also chose to migrate to Canada because French was one of the country’s official languages, and they felt that this would facilitate their incorporation. Samora immigrated to Canada under the family class to be with her husband, who had moved to the country since he believed Canada provided social security, political stability, opportunities, and a good education system.

Joanna came to Canada on a student visa, after being awarded a scholarship to study engineering. Lehana’s father was already settled in Canada, working on her family’s sponsorship applications (for her, her brother, and her mother). According to Lehana, the decision to migrate to Canada was simple for her parents as her maternal grandfather lived in the country and her mother knew a lot about the country, which would have facilitated the family’s resettlement process. Rosalie’s parents, too, were already settled in the country and were able to sponsor her for permanent residency when she was a young girl. She claimed that she was not afraid to come to Canada because she believed it was an ideal and secure country based on the information she had seen in the media (i.e., films, books, communications). With the advancement of mass media and technology, it is common for migrants to learn about “the good life” and opportunities available in their country of settlement prior to their arrival (Schapendonk, 2012, p.28). Learning about Canada in the past is what sparked Dalia’s curiosity in permanently settling in Canada:

⁸² Translation: “So, my family, my father and mother, decided to immigrate, and then, well, I was a kid, so I followed them.”

Pour être honnête, je ne sais même pas pourquoi j’ai choisi le Canada. Peut-être je voulais découvrir le Canada à l’époque, parce que je sais qu’on a, en géographie, en histoire, on a beaucoup appris sur le Canada. C’était peut-être pour moi une, comme une nouvelle, une nouvelle découverte d’un autre pays que la Belgique.⁸³

Reasons for Migrating to Transit Countries. Those who did not migrate directly to Canada settled in what I label as ‘transit countries.’ These countries are also known as temporary countries, locations where migrants may stay for a limited time or indefinitely until their stay leads to further migration, depending on various factors and circumstances (Düvell, 2012). As a result, while some women may have wanted to remain permanently in their chosen destination upon leaving the DRC, factors and circumstances led to their departure and settlement in Canada. As such, it was deemed sufficient to label these countries as ‘transit.’

Many of those who relocated to transit countries did so primarily for educational purposes. Jamille settled in Belgium to first attend boarding school and spent at least five years in the country before migrating to Canada. Francine settled in Spain for three years to study and become a nun. Idara was awarded a scholarship to pursue her PhD in Japan and spent five years in the country before migrating to Canada. Keren settled in England with her husband for ten years after completing a two-week training course in Italy and a four-month university program in Belgium. And Yolande migrated to the United States for four years on a study visa to complete a professional designation after first settling in Zambia for a few years to learn English and complete courses for a diploma.

Another reason for settling abroad was to reunite with family living in the transit country, as in Bethanie’s case, whose family originally migrated to South Africa as refugees but preferred this country since family members were present:

So, in South Africa, we did already have family, friends, and a couple of people we knew there. My dad was working [in South Africa] and then my mom actually found a job and was able to start working, doing small jobs here and there. So, in South Africa, we built a community.

⁸³ Translation: “To be honest, I don’t even know why I chose Canada. Maybe I wanted to discover Canada at the time, because I know that we, in geography, in history, we learned a lot about Canada. It was maybe for me a, like a new, a new discovery of another country other than Belgium.”

Though Canada was her intended destination, Amina was forced to settle in Belgium for eight months while she awaited her sponsorship visa to travel to Canada and reunite with her husband. Valérie resettled in France when she was young, and because she was young, she could not recall why her parents had chosen the country. She remained in France until she completed her university studies. Lastly, Keisha and her family fled the political turmoil in the DRC and settled in Uganda temporarily for four years while her parents prepared the paperwork to be resettled elsewhere as refugees. Uganda, a neighbouring country to the DRC, has a large Congolese refugee community of persons fleeing insecurity and seeking greater economic opportunities (Clark-Kazak, 2011).

Migration to, and Settlement in, Transit Countries

Nine of the women migrated to other countries before settling permanently in Canada, and it is imperative to highlight their mobility to these countries (Schapendonk, 2012), as well as their encounters and gendered experiences in the transit countries, since in most cases, the transit stage had a bearing on subsequent stages of the migration process, including settlement in Canada. The following details the journeys of Amina, Bethanie, Francine, Idara, Jamille, Keisha, Keren, Valérie, and Yolande to their transit country and their settlement experiences.

Migration Trajectories to Transit Country

Some participants' journeys involved multiple destinations, such as stopovers and layovers, or multiple settlement countries where what was once considered to be a final destination had become a temporary one. Thus, some of the participants' motivations and ambitions shifted during their journeys, illustrating that migration trajectories do not always follow well-considered plans (Schapendonk, 2012).

Stopovers, Layovers, and Temporary Stays. On her way to Japan, Idara left Kinshasa and had a layover in Paris, France. After a few hours, she boarded a direct flight to Japan, where she was greeted by a team from the Japanese government who informed her of how to get to her final destination at the university. This meant taking another flight to the city where she planned to live. Yolande initially travelled to Zambia on a visitor's visa, but her dad, via the Lions Club, knew a woman in Zambia who said if Yolande came to the country, she would enroll her in English school. So, after enrolling, Yolande lived with this woman for a month before relocating to the college campus with a friend. After completing her year of English school, Yolande did not want to return to the DRC, so she pursued a diploma. She then felt compelled to pursue a professional

designation after her aunt called her father and suggested she study in the United States. Thus, after three years in Zambia, Yolande made plans to attend university in New Mexico, United States. Yolande was overwhelmed by emotions when she made the decision to leave:

So, when I left Zambia to go to the U.S., that was very heart wrenching because I didn't know when would be the next time I would see my parents, or anybody in my family. It's not easy to move back and forth. And we didn't have the means of communication we have now when you look back. So, if you had a phone call every couple of months, that, you were lucky, right?

Thus, even if it is a chosen decision, migration can be a difficult one too. Yolande had established a strong support network in Zambia, including friends and her church. She was also geographically closer to her family who were living in the DRC than she would have been in the United States. Thus, leaving Africa for the United States was the most difficult decision she made.

Karen, eager to leave the DRC, travelled to Italy to complete a two-week training course. Her travel to Italy included a layover in Ethiopia. She also earned a grant from this training course, which included accommodations and meals. Wanting to explore other opportunities, Keren also applied to a four-month university program in Belgium that began in the same year she arrived in Italy. After completing the program in Belgium, Keren moved to England to reunite with her husband.

Experiences of Insecurity and Vulnerability. Many of the women's migration trajectories were similar in that they did not encounter any complications, issues, or traumas travelling to their transit country, except for Keisha, Idara, and Keren, who experienced moments of insecurity and vulnerability. Keisha's family was forced to escape the DRC when civil conflict began, yet there were no planes or alternative means of transportation available to leave the country at that time. She and her family fled instead to a United Nations compound for displaced peoples in Eastern Congo, with the goal of remaining there until things settled in the country. Plans changed, however, after Keisha's father's friend informed the family of a plane leaving the country by which the family could escape. Keisha said:

There was only one plane leaving and it was like a cargo plane, right? It had no seats. So, we actually, like, smuggled in type of thing [*laughter*] and like the destination was Uganda. But our dad wasn't there. It was just us and our mom [...] and my mom told my dad and then like he met us over there instead of coming back to Congo to deal with everything...

As a result, Keisha and her family faced a precarious journey out of the country to flee to Uganda (a country they did not intend to live in but had no choice) by being smuggled on a cargo plane. When Idara was travelling from Kinshasa to Japan, she felt bewildered and uneasy when she was confronted by border officials during her layover in Paris, France:

Je me rappelle même que quand on est arrivé, on était deux étudiants. Il y avait moi et un autre étudiant congolais qui lui partait pour la Chine. Toujours dans un programme de bourses. Et quand on arrive à l'aéroport, il y a des policiers qui vous accueillent, ils accueillent— donc, l'avion venait du Kinshasa, ils vous accueillent, là ils demandent à chacun, « Où est-ce que vous allez? » J'avais trouvé ça déjà un peu bizarre. On leur a expliqué, mais malgré ça, ils nous ont amenés au poste de police à l'intérieur de l'aéroport. Moi et cet étudiant-là.⁸⁴

Idara explained the issue was that they had a one-way ticket, and the border officials did not understand why, despite clarifying the intent of the trip multiple times:

On leur a expliqué, mais, non, on nous a mis au poste de police à l'intérieur de l'aéroport. Et là, on a vu beaucoup d'autres personnes qui étaient aussi là, on ne sait pas trop pourquoi. On nous a posé la question, on a expliqué... on est resté quelques heures à l'intérieur de l'aéroport.⁸⁵

Perhaps prejudice or subtle biases by the border officials led to this encounter, but fortunately, Idara and the other student were released and were able to take their next flight.

Keren, too, experienced moments of uncertainty while travelling to Italy. She set out on her journey to the country with just \$200 USD in her pocket, believing that this would be enough for her travels. Keren explained her rationale:

Moi, je n'ai jamais eu quelque chose comme cinquante dollars en main quand j'étais au Congo... Non, je n'en ai jamais eu comme ça. Ce n'est pas que je n'en ai pas, parce qu'il n'y en avait pas. C'est que je ne l'ai jamais ressenti nécessairement le besoin de l'avoir

⁸⁴ Translation: "I even remember when we arrived, we were two students. There was me and another Congolese student who was going to China. Still in a scholarship program. And when we arrived at the airport, there were policemen who welcomed you, they welcomed- so, the plane was coming from Kinshasa, they welcomed you, there they asked each person, 'Where are you going?' I found that already a little strange. We explained to them, but despite that, they took us to the police station inside the airport. Me and that student."

⁸⁵ Translation: "We explained to them, but, no, we were taken to the police station inside the airport. And there, we saw many other people who were also there, we don't really know why. We were asked, we explained... we stayed a few hours inside the airport."

[...] J'ai grandi dans un système où on pense toujours que vous êtes enfant, donc, entre la maison et l'université, à chaque mouvement, donc tu n'as pas certaines perspectives.⁸⁶

Keren also had no idea where she would be going after landing in Italy, that she needed to purchase a train ticket to arrive at her final destination, and that this destination was about seven to ten hours away from the airport. Fortunately, Keren met a young woman on the plane who was also making a stop in Italy, and she and her friend who came to pick her up assisted Keren in mapping out her final destination, purchasing her train ticket, and paying for her metro ticket since Keren was low on cash:

Il me reste maintenant plus que 25 euros parce que le billet [du train], lui il coûtait cher. Alors, le gars, juste au moins, il se rend compte de ça... Il me dit, 'Moi, je te prends le billet pour le métro, comme ça quand tu iras là-bas, le billet coûte à peu près 10 euros. Tu prendras le billet de l'autre côté.' C'est comme ça que, heureusement, il m'aurait manqué peut-être 3 euros-là [*éclat de rires*].⁸⁷

Keren also mentioned encountering prejudicial treatment from border officials in Europe while travelling with her Congolese passport:

... nos passeports à nous, en tant que Congolais, on n'est pas nécessairement crédible comme nationalité [...] On te prend avec le nom qu'on a, on se dit directement que tu es, que tu es, on te dit que tu es 'africaine' et tout ça. Donc, eux, ils n'ont absolument aucune considération pour, pour les Noirs avec lesquels ils vivent là-bas [en Europe]. Et ils ne se dérangeant pas pour le montrer.⁸⁸

Nonetheless, when she was in need, Keren had networks in immigration who would assist her (such as in obtaining travel documents and visas) and facilitate her journeys. It appears then that encounters, and social networks facilitated the women's journeys to escape the DRC, overcome

⁸⁶ Translation "Me, I never had something like fifty dollars in my hand when I was in the Congo... No, I never had anything like that. It's not that I didn't have it, because there wasn't any. It's that I never necessarily felt the need to have it [...] I grew up in a system where they always think you're a kid, so between home and university, at every turn, so you don't have certain perspectives."

⁸⁷ Translation: "Now I am left with only 25 euros because the [train] ticket, it was expensive. So, the guy, just at least, he realizes this... He says, 'I'll buy you a ticket for the metro, that way when you get there, the ticket will cost about 10 euros. You will buy the ticket on the other side.' That's how, fortunately, I would have been missing maybe 3 euros [*laughter*]."

⁸⁸ Translation: "... our passports, as Congolese, we're not necessarily credible as a nationality [...] They take you with the name you have, they say straight out that you are, that you are, they say that you are 'African' and all that. So, they have absolutely no consideration for, for Black people who live there [in Europe]. And they don't bother to show it."

barriers, and provide guidance. As Keren indicated, “J’ai toujours eu des gens pour faciliter les voyages.”⁸⁹ Thus, migrants often rely on the assistance and support of others to facilitate their successful passage (Schapendonk, 2012).

Positive Encounters and Experiences in Transit Countries

Positive Settlement. Participants felt well-incorporated into their respective countries of settlement and considered these countries to be an encouraging and welcoming social environment, as well as a promising learning and career environment. Despite arriving to South Africa as a refugee, Bethanie considered herself well-incorporated into the country since her father obtained an excellent job that, as she put it, “[got] us out of that immigrant life”. Although there was little incorporating needed, Keren shared that the little English she studied in Kinshasa facilitated her stay in Italy since she was living in a university setting where English was widely spoken. Keisha indicated that her family settled quickly in Uganda, despite the difficult journey they took, since she and her siblings were quickly involved in school and social activities such as sports. Francine, Jamille, Valérie, and Yolande also discussed being able to incorporate into their transit society through schooling.

Moreover, some participants expressed they felt incorporated when they obtained residency or citizenship. Bethanie was granted South African citizenship, Keren was granted British citizenship, Valérie was granted French citizenship, and Jamille was granted Belgian permanent residency. After obtaining South African citizenship, Bethanie was able to return to the DRC “every once in a while” to visit family and friends. Yet, every time she returned to her country of origin, she was reminded of the country’s positive elements and never understood why her parents chose to leave the country and their family behind.

Established Social Networks. Participants benefitted from their new country’s social environment, establishing strong social networks, and encountering good people who provided support and facilitated their incorporation. In Japan, Idara met many good people and formed a small social network of international students who encouraged and supported one another through their studies. Yolande also expressed having “a very good support system.” For some participants, these support system or social networks also included family members who were already residing in the country, which, according to Keisha, “felt like home.”

⁸⁹ Translation: “I’ve always had people to facilitate trips.”

Negative Encounters and Experiences in Transit Countries

Participants experienced numerous challenges and barriers during the resettlement stage in their transit countries in terms of cultural adjustments, discrimination, employment obstacles, insecurities and uncertainties, isolation or loneliness, and being in a state of transience.

Cultural Barriers. When Idara, Valérie, and Yolande resettled to their respective countries, they described experiencing a general culture shock or a clash of cultures in terms of customs and acceptable behaviour that differed from those of Congo, including in the smallest of instances like how one addresses their teacher. Valérie explained her experiences in France:

[D]ans notre culture, par exemple, on n'appelle pas les gens par leur prénom. Je me rappelle que c'était, par exemple, ma maîtresse. C'était difficile pour moi de l'appeler par son prénom parce que j'étais habitué à dire 'Madame', mais il fallait l'appeler 'Françoise'. Donc, je ne l'appelais pratiquement pas parce que je n'avais pas cette habitude-là. C'est sûr que ça, c'était un choc.⁹⁰

The language barriers that some of the participants faced also contributed to the challenges of adjusting to their respective country's culture. When Francine moved to Spain, she found herself in an environment where she did not speak the language and had to learn Spanish before pursuing her studies. Idara, too, had language difficulties in Japan, but initially assumed that it would be easy to communicate with residents using the little English she learned in Kinshasa:

En quittant le Congo, je pensais que ce serait facile de parler anglais, même si mon anglais n'était pas très bon non plus. Mais, je me disais que ce serait peut-être facile de parler en anglais avec les Japonais, mais complètement non, non, non, non! Donc il y avait ce choc, surtout du côté, du côté de la langue, ça fait que vous sentez moins indépendant, et moi je détestais ça parce qu'il fallait toujours avoir quelqu'un avec vous même pour aller au supermarché au début, pour aller à la banque et tout, parce ce que vous n'êtes pas capable de dire, même les choses les plus simples.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Translation: "[I]n our culture, for example, we don't call people by their first name. I remember it was, for example, my teacher. It was difficult for me to call her by her first name because I was used to saying 'Madame', but I had to call her 'François'. So, I hardly ever called her because I didn't have that habit. For sure, it was a shock for sure."

⁹¹ Translation: "When I left Congo, I thought it would be easy to speak English, even though my English was not very good either. But I told myself that it might be easy to speak in English with the Japanese, but absolutely no, no, no, no! So, there was this shock, especially on the side, on the side of language, it makes that you feel less independent, and I hated that because you always had to have someone with you even to go to the supermarket at the beginning, to go to the bank and everything, because you're not able to say, even the simplest things."

Yolande faced difficulties in terms of accents when she settled in the United States, even though she learned English in Zambia and could speak and understand the language:

I remember going to my history class and — no, it was a sociology class — and the guy spoke, the professor who was up there, and it was an auditorium, a wide auditorium. I don't think I understood 25 percent of what he said, because of his accent. So, that was very overwhelming... although I spoke the language, I had to adapt, right, to the American English.

Discrimination and Conflict. Participants faced discrimination, racism, and tribal disputes in the country where they resettled. Bethanie described how there was a lot of xenophobia toward Congolese people where she settled in South Africa, and how she felt of the situation: "... you always feel like you're conflicted; even though you are very proud to be Congolese, but you're also integrating into another African society that thinks differently of Congolese people. It was really hard..." Yolande also witnessed instances of discrimination against Congolese people in Zambia, explaining that Congolese people (at the time *Zairoises* or Zairians) had a bad reputation in the country, being branded as thieves and ridiculed because of their tribe:

[Y]ou were looked down upon sometimes because they [Zambians] call them [Congolese people] 'thieves,' *kabwalala* [in Bemba]. That was the term they used. I remember when one time I was sitting and I was doing an exam, and one of the teachers, there was a guy in my classroom who cheated. And the teacher called him *Kasai* [*paused*] that that was an insult. I was so mad that day, I went and complained to the director of the school [*laughs*].

Thus, the tribalism that Yolande faced in Congo was also present in Zambia against Kasaians, and Yolande was cautioned to be careful of people because some may dislike her due to her name or tribe. Yolande also faced discrimination in the United States, where she was one of the only Black students in her classes and was looked down on by her professors and peers, such as being called out in front of the entire class for skipping class (due to an interview she had to attend), despite other students missing classes as well. Idara began to learn Japanese to overcome the language barriers she faced, yet she stated that the downside of beginning to understand the language was that she could also now understand the unpleasant and racist remarks aimed at her:

Mais c'est vrai, ça c'est l'autre [versant] de la médaille. Tu comprends, et le positif et [*éclat de rires*] le négatif, bien sûr. Encore une fois, des expériences de racisme, oui, il y en a eu.

Mais au début, c'est difficile d'y répondre. C'était, je trouvais ça très blessant ou bien très [pause] ça me faisait mal à l'aise.⁹²

Employment Barriers. In terms of employment, both Idara and Keren experienced difficulties. Keren struggled to find work despite completing her master's degree in England. Idara also had trouble finding employment opportunities in the DRC once she finished her PhD in Japan because the hospital she once worked at in the DRC did not have a position in her field of study.

Feelings of Insecurity and Loneliness. Some participants reported feelings of insecurity, uncertainty, isolation, and loneliness due to their settlement in a foreign country. Bethanie described some of the dangers she faced growing up in South Africa, such as being attacked several times and going through an armed robbery in which her father and uncles had to break windows for her to flee and call for help. Consequently, she grew up in terror. Yolande became ill with malaria soon after landing in the United States, and she endured feelings of vulnerability and insecurity as she was treated like an exhibition show:

I had never gotten [malaria] back home because my dad was always on top of all the medication and everything else. But coming to the U.S., apparently because of a cold, it created something in my system. And I was like in a zoo at the hospital. They're like, 'The malaria case!' That's how they called me. 'The malaria case! Come and see the malaria case!'... everybody wanted to draw blood from me...

When Idara finished her PhD in Japan, she was unsure of what to do next, asking herself, "OK, qu'est-ce que je vais faire après avoir finit?"⁹³ She contemplated returning to the DRC for a while and began making contacts in the country to see if she could reintegrate into the medical system. However, this was an issue for her since she had completely changed her field of study from the clinical work she once did in the DRC. Therefore, she faced uncertainty over where she would find employment, but she was confident she would not remain in Japan.

Amina encountered many insecurities when she left the DRC and stayed in Belgium for eight months while waiting for her permanent resident visa from the Canadian embassy to rejoin her husband. She travelled to Belgium to begin her sponsorship application via the Canadian Embassy in the country since obtaining a visitor visa to Belgium was easier than obtaining one to

⁹² Translation: "But that's right, that's the other side of the coin. You understand, both the positive and [laughs] the negative, of course. Again, experiences of racism, yes, there have been. But in the beginning, it's hard to respond to it. It was, I found it very hurtful or very [pause] it made me uncomfortable."

⁹³ Translation: "Okay, what am I going to do after I finish?"

Canada. This could be attributed to the ties that have been established between Belgium and its former colony (Collyer et al., 2012), which has remained one of the key Western destinations of Congolese migrants (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016). In Belgium, Amina initially lived in a shelter while waiting for her papers. Her visa also eventually expired, which left her without any Belgian documentation that allowed her to remain in the country legally. Therefore, she was reluctant to leave the shelter, fearful that if she were caught by law enforcement, she would be deported back to the DRC. She also expressed feeling insecure while staying at the shelter, saying, “And when they send me to shelter, I say, ‘How I’m gonna stay there, I don’t know anything, I don’t know this country.’ That I did feel insecure.” Amina also felt isolated and lonely during this period since she had no family, she could not work, and she could not do any activities but to stay in the shelter and wait for her Canadian permanent residency papers. She also characterized Belgians at the time (in the early 1990s) as cold and distant, reluctant to greet their neighbours or strangers as people did in Congo:

... in Congo, you see people, they are friendly, kind. Even you don’t know the person, you see the person in the road, you say ‘hello’, you know? You say ‘hello’, you know your neighbour, you know people, your neighbour, right? But in Belgium, I saw it different. You don’t see [anybody] say ‘hello’ to you unless the person [knows] you. You see when you come close to people, it’s like you’re doing something wrong, like, you know?

These encounters also made Amina’s stay in Belgium isolating. Jamille also felt isolated when she and her siblings first arrived at the Belgian boarding school they attended; at fifteen, she was separated from her parents and only saw them on holidays.

State of Transience. Amina, Keisha, and Yolande had to navigate their lives in transit. Belgium and Uganda were both a transit point for Amina and Keisha on a longer journey to Canada, which involved a lengthy waiting period and bureaucratic barriers. Journeys in recent times have become increasingly prolonged due in part to increased border and bureaucratic restrictions (Düval, 2012), factors at play in the case of Amina and Keisha. Amina had to stay in Belgium for eight months as she awaited her permanent residency visa to reunite with her husband in Canada. During this time, she had to undergo immigration medical tests while the Canadian Embassy verified the veracity of her claim. Keisha and her family had to stay in Uganda for four years while applying for resettlement through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) resettlement program. Organizations like the UNHCR aid in the process of

resettling Congolese refugees by submitting resettlement cases to countries like Canada (UNHCR, 2014). Of the refugees under UNHCR's mandate at the end of 2018, the DRC was among the top ten source countries of the total global refugee population while Canada became the largest refugee resettlement country in the world (International Organization for Migration, 2019). While awaiting resettlement, Keisha's family had to go through a series of interviews for their accounts to be verified and to ensure that they had a legitimate reason to resettle. As a result, their journey forward rested on the UNHCR's decision as to whether they would be approved to resettle elsewhere or remain in Uganda. Yolande chose to live in Zambia for a few years to pursue an education. Yet, Yolande had to go to the immigration office every three months to prove her status as a student, or that she was still attending school, since she was granted stay on a student visa to pursue her studies, which placed her in a state of temporariness. This, she said, "was kind of cumbersome."

Overcoming Challenges. Despite the challenges and obstacles, participants were able to overcome the constraints imposed upon them. This was shown by their ability to learn the language, secure employment, and by their overall faith and resilience.

When Idara faced language barriers in Japan, she thought to herself, "OK, il faut vraiment que je m'investis dans l'apprentissage de la langue."⁹⁴ Therefore, she completed six months of language learning prior to beginning her PhD program, as well as additional Japanese classes during her studies. Subsequently, Idara felt better about her stay in Japan since she regained some of her independence, such as the ability to do what she wanted without having to rely on others for assistance. In spite of understanding and speaking English, Yolande enrolled in four months of 'English as a Second Language' classes in the United States to obtain qualifications needed for university admission and to become acquainted with the accents.

In England, Keren eventually obtained a job in marketing communications, though this position had little to do with what she had studied. Thus, she found ways to incorporate her field of study into her responsibilities and ultimately worked her way up to a position in public health.

Jamille, Keren, and Yolande described the faith and perseverance they needed to overcome obstacles. For instance, Yolande drew strength from her faith in God to forge through the language barriers and discrimination, and reminded herself, "I can't stop. I can't let this stop me. I have to find a way to go around it or else I'm going to [be] stuck in this place that I don't like." Jamille, too, described the strength she drew from God during her years in boarding school to overcome

⁹⁴ Translation: "Okay, I really need to invest in learning the language."

isolation and to protect and safeguard her siblings. Thus, resilience was fundamentally entrenched in Yolande and Jamille's faith in God (Smigelsky et al., 2017). Keren's perseverance was demonstrated by how she navigated the labour market to acquire meaningful employment in England by her marriage to a British citizen to secure work benefits that someone usually would not be able to access without proper documentation (i.e., citizenship).

Still, during the interviews, participants mainly identified the support they received from others within their respective countries to assist them in overcoming the difficulties and obstacles they experienced. Social networks and support were extremely valuable to the participants' successful incorporation. Keren explained, "Quand tu arrives, il faut vite se faire des amis."⁹⁵ Yolande also mentioned, "I think I surrounded myself with people who would push me forward, who would support me, who I could rely on." The women benefitted from social networks and support in a variety of ways. For instance, since there are so many Congolese people in Belgium, Amina was able to find a Congolese person who could take her to the Canadian Embassy when she arrived at the airport. The Canadian Embassy also provided her with the address of a shelter where she could stay while she awaited her visa to Canada. Amina eventually made a friend at the shelter who invited her to stay at her place until Amina received her papers. She also received remittances from her husband, which allowed her to meet her basic needs.

Francine's settlement in Spain was aided by the fact that she was welcomed into a school where her needs were already taken care of for her; she did not have to worry about her well-being (for instance, boarding and food). In addition to taking Japanese classes, Idara was assigned a tutor who spoke Japanese fluently to assist her in both learning the language and navigating the city. Keren, too, made a friend in Italy who spoke English a little better than she did, and it was because of her that she was able to get by easier.

When Yolande was attending university in the United States, the DRC was in the grip of civil war, making it difficult for her parents to finance her education. However, Yolande was able to receive financial assistance from her uncle and friends, and she received a scholarship that provided her with in-state tuition, reducing her tuition by one-third. Yolande also received assistance from friends and the Christian Fellowship in both Zambia and the United States to aid with her settlement. While Keren was job hunting in England, an opportunity to shadow the director of public health, as well as to network with department employees, landed her a position

⁹⁵ Translation: "When you arrive, you have to make friends quickly."

with them. But while she sought employment, Keren's husband supported her financially. In England, Keren also had a network of friends who supported one another. For example:

Tu as besoin de manger, tu ne sais pas où se trouve quoi. T'as besoin d'aller arranger ta voiture. Eux, ils ont toujours l'information. Tu as besoin d'aller envoyer les histoires aux écoliers à Kinshasa. Eux savent à quelle agence il faut aller.⁹⁶

Reasons for Emigrating to Canada

Due to their personal and professional accomplishments, many participants' lives seemed to be geared toward permanent settlement in their respective transit countries. Nonetheless, conditions compelled those who spent years in different countries to seek resettlement in Canada.

Seeking a Better Life and Exploring Opportunities. One of the reasons Bethanie's parents wanted to relocate the family to Canada was due to the insecurities that women faced in South Africa. Bethanie stated:

You know, there's a lot of rape, there's a lot of issues. Especially in Congo and South Africa, it's like all of these things, I wouldn't have those [educational] opportunities and to feel safe, to feel like I can do things without being so restricted, without people *surveilling* me, without people telling me what I can and cannot do. So, Canada was going to offer us independence... and safety net.

Bethanie's parents also wanted to relocate to Canada due to xenophobia and internalized colonial issues present in South Africa. Being a country with a history of colonialism, South Africa has faced the long-term consequences of racism, particularly the racialization and oppression of Black communities, including "intra-black racism" post-apartheid, due in part to the difficulties of incorporating Black African immigrants into the new South African society (Tafira, 2018, p.10). As many Congolese people have fled the DRC to seek a better life in South Africa, they have been confronted with xenophobia, which has made their incorporation very difficult (Jong, 2018). Thus, Bethanie's parents decided it was best to leave the country and settle elsewhere to protect their children from racism and oppression. Bethanie claimed it would have been easier to resettle in the United States for her family since they were already given a ten-year visa. However, her father was concerned about access to social services in the United States and felt that Canada had both security and easy access to social services. Though, the ultimate reason why Bethanie's parents

⁹⁶ Translation: "You need to eat, but you don't know where anything is located. You need to go fix your car. They always have the information. You need to go send stuff to students in Kinshasa. They know which agency to go to."

chose to come to Canada was to live in a country that offered a better education for their children. Bethanie's parents felt they were overspending on schooling for her and her siblings in South Africa and yet they were not seeing the benefits of their investment since the future was uncertain professionally, while they believed Canada offered both the education and opportunities to excel.

Francine wanted to return to the DRC after three years in Spain since her plans to become a nun did not work out. However, her departure from Spain coincided with the outbreak of civil war in the DRC in 1998, and she was therefore unable to return home. She was asked to live in the United States by a friend, but the idea of settling there did not appeal to her. Instead, after contacting a friend who lived in Canada, Francine decided to apply for refugee status upon arrival to Canada. She also wanted to relocate to Canada due to its prevalent Francophone communities: "C'était un pays, quand même, où il y a des francophones, où les francophones peuvent quand même trouver leur place."⁹⁷ Francine also acknowledged that she could have remained in Spain, but she felt she needed to see and experience more of the world, while relocating to a country where she could be more easily incorporated. Keisha and her family were assisted by the UNHCR in relocating to Canada after the country accepted to admit them and eventually grant them permanent residence. Thus, Keisha and her family had little input on where they decided to resettle. Despite this, they were relieved to be relocating to Canada because they had learned that the country was welcoming to immigrants.

While Idara was completing her PhD and looking for career opportunities, a friend from the Congolese community in Japan informed her of an economic immigration program to Canada. She had the qualifications to apply and made the decision to submit an application. Coming to Canada was not in her plans; she eventually had a job offer in France and she was in the process of negotiating a work contract in Japan and merely waiting for her work visa so that she could sign the contract. Therefore, when Canada accepted her application, Idara told herself, "OK, bien, si je veux aller m'installer, je ne peux pas passer encore du temps ici. Faut que j'aille."⁹⁸ Ten days after receiving her permanent residency visa, Idara left Japan.

Family Reunification. Another factor that contributed to Idara's fast displacement to Canada was the opportunity to reunite with her now-spouse, who was already settled in Canada. Idara had no intentions of joining her husband at the time she received her permanent residency,

⁹⁷ "It was a country, still, where there are Francophones, where Francophones can nevertheless find their place."

⁹⁸ "Okay, well, if I want to go and settle down, I can't spend any more time here. I have to go."

but when the opportunity presented itself, she seized it. Idara was not the only participant to relocate to Canada to reunite with her spouse. Jamille left nursing school in Belgium to rejoin her husband who had previously settled in Canada to pursue a master's degree, stating, "Oh, j'étais tout contente de venir. J'attendais de rejoindre mon mari [*éclat de rires*]! Oh oui, ça, j'attendais impatientement."⁹⁹ Valérie met her husband on one of her trips to Canada and moved to the country to be with him and begin a new life. Yolande met her future husband in Zambia and had a long-distance relationship with him as he sought opportunities in Canada while she pursued her education in the United States. They married and applied for family reunification when Yolande was in her final year of studies. Keren, too, immigrated to Canada to be with her husband who settled in Canada to pursue opportunities; however, she was initially reluctant to leave England since she had no intention of becoming a new arrival again and re-establishing a career. Thus, she was prepared to return to England if her incorporation proved difficult, stating "Donc, je venais, je regardais. Si ça ne me plaisait pas, je pouvais toujours retourner."¹⁰⁰ Yet, Keren made the decision to stay in Canada because she grew to like the country and felt it was important to remain for her children's incorporation.

Migration to, and Settlement in, Canada

The following details the journey to Canada of all participants in this study, including those who did not experience a transit stage. The women's stories reveal many parallels as well as differences in their journeys to, and settlement in, Canada.

Migration Trajectories to Canada

Journeys to Canada Facilitated. Many travelling from transit countries found that embarking on a previous migration journey made their trip to Canada easier. Keren explained:

Ben, tu sais, c'est différent quand quelqu'un vient d'Afrique, n'avait jamais pris l'avion ou avait pris l'avion à un jeune âge, comme je racontais, moi venant du Congo allant en Italie, et tout ça. Ces déboires là, ça, ce sont des choses quand tu n'as pas pris nécessairement l'avion, tu ne connais pas nécessairement des rouages et tout.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Translation: "Oh, I was so happy to come. I was waiting to rejoin my husband [*laughter*]! Oh yes, that, I was waiting impatiently for."

¹⁰⁰ Translation: "So, I came, I observed. If I didn't like it, I could always go back."

¹⁰¹ Translation: "Well, you know, it's different when someone comes from Africa, had never taken a plane or had taken a plane at a young age, like I was telling you, me coming from Congo going to Italy, and all that. These setbacks,

Valérie also attributed her ease of travel to Canada to living in a country with strong ties and relations with Canada:

Je pense que les relations que les deux pays ont, tu peux partir pour le Canada, puisque le Canada et la France, ils ont tous les deux des relations, ils ont toujours eu de bonnes relations. Donc, bon. Je pense que ça, ça a facilité [le voyage] ...¹⁰²

Further, prior to her permanent settlement in Canada, Jamille was issued a renewable six-month Canadian tourist visa with several entries, which she used to visit her husband. Thus, having previously travelled to Canada on several occasions facilitated her final journey to the country.

Stopovers and Layovers. Bethanie, Dalia, Michelle, and Francine landed in the United States prior to their arrival to Canada, where they prepared to make asylum claims at the Canadian border. Bethanie and her family left South Africa for the United States, where they spent two weeks in a hotel preparing the paperwork to claim asylum. During these two weeks, Bethanie and her family also met with immigration services in Buffalo, who assisted them in putting together their documents and preparing for the border crossing, such as informing them "... 'Okay, this is what you need to say when you get to the border. This is what you need to apply for. You need to give them a good reason why you should enter.'" Bethanie's father accompanied the family until they reached the Canadian border, at which point he had to leave and allow Bethanie's mother to seek asylum as a single parent.

Dalia first spent three months on vacation in Belgium before travelling to the United States to attend a conference. She remained in the country after the conference to sort out her next steps as she had no plans to return to the DRC where the disparities persisted. Ultimately, Dalia used her journey to the United States as an opportunity to apply as an asylum claimant in Canada. During her time in the United States, Dalia contacted an agency who assisted her in getting to the Canadian border to make her claim. Dalia explained the process as follows:

L'organisme n'a pas, va vous recevoir, et vous dites, « Je voudrais faire ma demande en tant que demandeur d'asile. » L'organisme va vous prendre en charge pour dire que, « Vous voulez faire la demande? On, il y a des agents de l'immigration qui viennent, on va faire traverser la frontière, puis vous allez au Canada pour faire vos formalités. » oui. C'est

they are things when you haven't necessarily taken a plane, you don't necessarily know the ins and outs and everything."

¹⁰² Translation: "I think the relations that the two countries have, you can go to Canada, because they both have relations, they've always had good relations. So, well. I think that, that facilitated [the trip] ..."

juste comme un organisme de passage. Tous ce qu'ils prennent, c'est votre nom et tout ça, c'est tout. Ils vous donnent le séjour pour quelques jours et le lendemain peut-être, si vous avez de la chance, le lendemain, on vous fait traverser la frontière.¹⁰³

Francine travelled to the United States from Spain to seek asylum in Canada and described her travel experience as positive and trouble-free. She credited this, in part, to her command of the Spanish language:

Alors moi, ce qui m'a sauvé, c'était l'espagnol parce que c'est quand même la deuxième langue parlée à, la deuxième langue parlée en Amérique. Je parlais pas anglais, mais là, je pouvais écouter les annonces [à la gare de bus] en espagnol. Les dates, les bus qui partent, quelle direction. On le dit en anglais, puis on le répète en espagnol. Et puis, si j'avais besoin de précisions, j'allais demander au comptoir, puis demander quelqu'un qui parlait l'espagnol. Alors donc, j'étais quand même à mesure d'avoir mes informations pour pouvoir prendre l'autobus [à la frontière].¹⁰⁴

Michelle's family left the DRC, stopping first in Belgium before landing in the United States, where they prepared to seek asylum in Canada. Her father accompanied the family to the United States, after which he had to return to the DRC for work. Michelle's father's support on the trip, she thought, aided the family's journey to Canada. Michelle also stated that having her family all together made the journey easier to undertake; she felt secure being with her family, particularly when she did not know what would happen at the borders. Lastly, Michelle mentioned that her faith in God also facilitated the journey; even though she felt uncertain and insecure, prayers with her family eased her worries.

Both Bethanie and Dalia arrived in Canada after the "Safe Third Country Agreement" went into effect in 2004, an agreement signed by Canada and the United States in 2002 as part of the United States-Canada Smart Border Action Plan and under which refugee claimants are required to seek refugee protection in the first safe country they arrive in, unless they meet one of the

¹⁰³ Translation: "The agency doesn't, will take you in, and you say, 'I would like to apply as an asylum seeker.' The agency will take you in to say that, 'You want to apply? We, there are immigration officers coming, they will get you across the border, and then you will go to Canada to do your paperwork,' yeah. It's just like a crossing agency. All that they take, it's your name and all that, that's it. They give you a place to stay for a few days and then maybe the next day, if you're lucky, the next day, they get you across the border."

¹⁰⁴ Translation: "So for me, what saved me was Spanish because it's the second language spoken at, the second language spoken in America. I didn't speak English, but there, I could listen to the announcements [at the bus station] in Spanish. The dates, the buses that were leaving, which direction. They would say it in English, and then they would repeat it in Spanish. And then, if I needed clarification, I'd go ask at the counter, then ask for someone who spoke Spanish. So then, I was still able to obtain my information so I could take the bus [to the border]."

Agreement's exceptions, such as the family reunification, unaccompanied minors, and public interest exceptions (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020). Thus, if refugee claimants arrive in the United States, they are no longer eligible to make a refugee claim in Canada at designated land ports of entry (El Fakhry Tuttle, 2019). Furthermore, Bethanie, Dalia, and Michelle were also seeking asylum in Canada by land border crossing during the post-9/11 period, characterized by a greater securitization of mobility and migration, such as tighter border controls and greater governance and surveillance of people crossing borders (Rygiel, 2012). Crossing land borders during these times could explain some of the insecurities they felt or obstacles they encountered, as discussed later.

Keisha and her family arrived in Canada as refugees resettled from abroad, but they first made a stop in Amsterdam. Keisha enjoyed her trip to Canada, as well as the "nice food" on the plane. She also claimed that the agents assigned to her refugee resettlement case aided in making the journey more bearable.

Other participants simply made layovers on their way to Canada, often to reunite with their spouses or family, or on a student visa. For instance, Idara flew from Tokyo to Vancouver, then to Montréal, where she reunited with her husband and drove to Gatineau. She characterized her trip as stress-free. Jamille flew from Frankfurt to Toronto, then to Ottawa, where she reunited with her husband as well. Samora took several layovers on her way to Canada, flying from Morocco to Turkey, then to Ukraine, and finally to Canada to reunite with her husband. Before flying to Montréal, Lehana and her family had an eight-hour layover in Paris, where she was able to spend time with her uncle at the airport. Joanna also travelled from Paris to Montréal, and then to Moncton where she planned to study on a scholarship. Overall, Joanna described her trip to Canada as positive, with no difficulties, which she attributed to her preparation: "On avait des documents qui étaient en ordre. On avait nos billets, j'avais mon billet d'avion. J'avais tout ce qu'il fallait pour voyager."¹⁰⁵ Joanna was also travelling to Canada with four other friends who were Congolese, which made her travels less difficult emotionally: "Le fait que j'ai des amis avec moi, ça m'a beaucoup aidé [...] C'est ce qui a facilité mon voyage en termes émotionnel, je vais dire."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Translation: "We had documents that were in order. We had our tickets, I had my plane ticket. I had everything I needed to travel."

¹⁰⁶ Translation: "The fact that I have friends with me, it helped me a lot [...] It's what made my journey easier emotionally, I will say."

Stress-Free Border Crossing. A few participants reported a successful and stress-free crossing into Canada. For instance, Jamille, who flew into Canada, was able to persuade border officials that she had no intentions of remaining in Canada indefinitely while travelling on a tourist visa. Jamille also claimed that immigration was relatively simple during the mid-1990s prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, stating, “... ils invitaient les gens, ‘Venez migrer, venez migrer au Canada!’ Oui, c’était très facile.”¹⁰⁷ Both Amina and Yolande were not questioned much by border officials when they arrived at the airport since they both had their landed papers. Yolande stated, “It was like, ‘Welcome home!’” Keisha expressed that crossing the border was simple and that her parents were overly concerned for no reason; when it came to being questioned as children by border officials at the airport, “... they would just be small questions like, ‘Oh yeah, where are you from?’” Michelle and her siblings were subjected to similar lines of interrogation by land border officials, which put them at ease since they were not being aggressively and coercively interrogated. Dalia also expressed that she was treated well by land border officials even though she was seeking asylum after a short stay in the United States:

Quand on arrive, ils essaient de faire de leur mieux pour vous bien traiter. Bien que l’attente, elle est longue, parce qu’il faut poser telle question, il faut vérifier ça, et il faut faire ça, il faut faire ça. De manière générale, j’ai été très bien accueillie, sans problème parce que déjà, le Canada était un pays qui, qui ouvre ses portes à tout le monde. Donc, j’ai été bien accueillie.¹⁰⁸

Experiences of Insecurities and Vulnerability. Some participants experienced obstacles, as well as emotional and vulnerable moments during their migration trajectories. Samora, for instance, found it difficult to travel since it was her first journey out of the DRC and, thus, she was unfamiliar with various passages (like borders) and the languages spoken at her numerous stops. Fortunately, during her journey to Morocco, Samora was accompanied by someone from the DRC, whom she referred to as “un homme brave”¹⁰⁹ for assisting her in finding and making her connecting flight when she became overwhelmed. The journey to Canada was also Joanna’s first trip out of the DRC, and since she was travelling further away from her family, she described the

¹⁰⁷ Translation: “... they were inviting people, ‘Come migrate, come migrate to Canada!’ Yes, it was very easy.”

¹⁰⁸ Translation: “When you arrive, they try to do their best to treat you well. Although the wait is long, because they have to ask this question, they have to check this, and you have to do this, you have to do that. In general, I was very well received, without any problem because already, Canada was a country that, that opens its doors to everyone. So, I was well received.”

¹⁰⁹ Translation: “A brave man”

journey as very intense and emotional. Bethanie also felt a range of emotions on her journey to Canada. She was initially unaware that her parents intended for them to seek asylum in Canada until they arrived in the United States and her parents told her “Change your story,” meaning that they needed to portray themselves as seeking refuge in Canada. Bethanie recounted the moments and feelings prior to their arrival:

So, what hit us really was when we ended up having to now go to an immigration service in Buffalo to help us get into Canada. And that was, I don’t know [*sigh*], recalling that day was tough, you know. My mom cried a lot, and I didn’t like seeing that because it was rough. We had to, like, my parents were like, ‘Okay, you guys need to say you are refugees. You’re coming from suffering.’ And as little kids, like, that’s not what we thought we were coming into, right? So, being that when you’re applying for refugee status, you have to think vulnerability and I never in my life [*saw*] that I would have to beg somebody to go in to pass, and that was just the worst feeling like, ‘What the heck is this like?’

Lehana was also unaware that her family was relocating permanently to Canada. Instead, her mother told her they were travelling to Canada to visit her father, which led to her feeling insecure and emotional. Francine became stressed when she arrived at the Québec land border due to the unknown of whether she would be permitted into the country:

Spécialement, le voyage entre États-Unis et le Canada, c’est vraiment l’inconnu. C’est beaucoup de stress, hein? Donc, tu [*ne*] sais pas s’ils vont te laisser passer. Donc tu [*ne*] sais pas comment les choses vont se passer. C’est vraiment, tu sens tu as la boule au ventre [*des rires*], la boule jusqu’à ce qu’on te dise, « Bon, finalement, tu es bienvenue là. »¹¹⁰

Michelle and Keren also both mentioned stressful moments during their journeys, which they attributed to the unknown and their arrival in an unfamiliar environment.

Insecurity at Border Crossings. Participants encountered barriers and insecurities upon arrival in Canada, particularly for those seeking asylum, which included issues with paperwork, being questioned at the border, and general insecurities regarding making the claim for asylum. Michelle remembered feeling a moment of vulnerability and insecurity as a young child when she and her siblings were separated from their mother at the land border for interrogation. Not knowing

¹¹⁰ Translation: “Especially the trip between the United States and Canada, it’s really the unknown. It’s a lot of stress, right? So, you don’t know if they’re going to let you through. So, you don’t know how things are going to go. It’s really, you feel like you have a lump in your stomach [*laughs*], a lump until they say, ‘Well, finally, you are welcomed here.’”

what was taking place during her mother's interrogation made this part of the journey difficult as well, causing a lot of insecurities and fear. Bethanie described her arrival at the Canadian land border as "nerve-racking," adding, "[t]hose border officials are rough! *Eh!* They will make you cry." She recalls her mother being questioned by a land border official in such a way that it seemed as though they were going to be denied entry. Bethanie also felt that they needed to present themselves as vulnerable to persuade the land border official to grant them entry, noting, "[y]ou need to beg pretty much at those borders." As this was going on, Bethanie described the land border as chaotic, and she could sense other people's agitation as they waited to see whether they would be allowed into Canada. It was a memory she did not want to revisit, stating, "I don't really want to talk too much about it. I just really hated that day..." Bethanie and her family were eventually permitted to enter Canada, yet they were not given refugee status. Instead, they had to submit a claim in Canada. This was also the case for Dalia who was also permitted to enter Canada through land border but had to submit her refugee application once she entered the country, stating that "*les formalités se font au Canada.*"¹¹¹ Under Canada's immigration policy, refugees like Keisha are admitted to the country with permanent residency; yet people seeking asylum remain asylum seekers when they enter Canada until they are granted refugee status (Yoshida & Amoyaw, 2020). They can seek for permanent residency only after they have been granted refugee status.

The aggressive and unjust treatment of asylum seekers at land border crossings by Canada Border Services Agency officers, a practice fueled by the geopolitical context of post-9/11 criminalization and securitization of migration, has come under scrutiny (Atak et al., 2019). At land borders, officers have created insecurities and vulnerabilities for some groups of asylum seekers, such as racialized migrants perceived as a risk or a threat to national security, by overstepping their authority and inquiring into the merits of a claim, questioning the claimant's credibility (sometimes aggressively), and seeking information related to criminality (Atak et al., 2019, p.478; Hyndman & Mountz, 2020). Furthermore, the Safe Third Country Agreement protocol denies entry to claimants who, like Bethanie and her family, first landed in the United States and could have sought refuge there (Hyndman & Mountz, 2020), thus creating greater insecurities and uncertainties for asylum seekers at border crossings. Therefore, it is not unexpected that participants who arrived in Canada seeking asylum experienced the greatest insecurity upon arrival, as they encountered more restrictive asylum measures at the United States-

¹¹¹ Translation: "... the formalities are done in Canada."

Canada land border than participants entering Canada from other immigration classes or through other ports of entry.

Though Francine migrated to Canada in the late 1990s, she too faced similar insecurities when she was threatened by land border officials to be returned to the United States: “Bon, ils m’ont menacé de retourner aux États-Unis et de demander l’asile aux États-Unis parce que c’est de là que je venais.”¹¹² Nevertheless, Francine was permitted to enter Canada and apply for refugee status after extensive interrogation and search of her belongings, emblematic of the constraints that asylum seekers have had to face at the United States-Canada land borders across time.

Furthermore, Lehana faced administrative and bureaucratic barriers at the airport when she and her family had to complete paperwork to obtain their permanent residency:

So, they put you in a room and then you’re like, you go from the atmosphere of the airport to like **poof** to like a room where you don’t have access to talk on the phone, you can’t do anything... it was really a procedure thing and [filling] the [paperwork].

Although this procedure was common, Lehana’s name had been misspelt in the documents (her name was missing an “h” at the end), which prolonged their stay at the airport and prompted further questioning by border officials regarding her identity: ““Who’s *Lehanah*? *Lehanah*? What’s the difference between *Lehana* “h” and without?”... they had to track exactly at what moment the mistake was made and figure out this is actually the person you filled out the papers for.”

Overcoming Challenges. Despite the obstacles, some participants reported that the people they encountered, or their social network (family and friends), facilitated their border crossing. When Bethanie was preparing to claim asylum, her aunt met up with them at the border to accompany them through the process and assist them in preparing their paperwork before being interrogated by land border officials:

... thank goodness my mom’s sister was there, so she was with us through every step of the way, like she was there. Like she even pretended she was one of the people applying, she was just there waiting and stuff. So, she was in the waiting room, everything with us.

When Francine was granted entry, border officials gave her the contact information for a YMCA in Montréal, where she was welcomed to stay until she could settle on her own. She was extremely grateful for this gesture since she had no idea where she was going next, such as which bus to take

¹¹² Translation: “Well, they threatened me to go back to the United States and to seek asylum in the United States because that’s where I was coming from.”

or where to reside. In addition, two strangers she encountered at the border, who spoke Spanish, had family in Montréal and offered to drive her to the YMCA:

Et le soir, finalement, quand on les a relâchés, ils ont payé un taxi, et nous sommes allés jusque dans leurs familles où on les attendait. La nourriture était prête, nous avons mangé. Et puis leurs familles m'ont amené au YMCA finalement. Seule, je ne sais pas comment j'allais me retrouver à tout ça. Mais, Dieu m'a fait grâce.¹¹³

A stranger also assisted Keisha and her family by transporting them to a family shelter in Ottawa. Therefore, these women's experiences exemplified once more how chance encounters along the journey assisted them in overcoming the obstacles they faced at the time.

Positive Encounters and Experiences in Canada

During the settlement stage, each participant discussed their positive experiences in Canada, which included an overall pleasant stay; the availability of social services, resources, and vast opportunities; an easy or rapid incorporation into Canadian society; the prevalence of Canada's multiculturalism; the enjoyment of peace and order; access to rights and freedoms; and the friendly encounters or the development of strong social networks.

Positive Settlement and Sentiments of Equal Opportunities. Amina, Keren, and Yolande shared a general satisfaction with living in Canada since they believed it is a good country to raise children, with plenty of green space. Yolande also said that she preferred living in Canada to living in the United States or the DRC. This was due to the many opportunities Canada has to offer, not just for her, but also for her children, describing Canada as "the land of opportunity for everyone". Yolande went on to say:

I know that here [in Canada], you know, yes, you can have some bad moments, but if you, overall, if you work hard, you land on your feet, and you can be okay. I know that if my children do the same, they don't have to worry. Whereas back home, even with a university degree, I'm not guaranteed to have a job. They'll look at my last name and say, 'She's from Kasaï, oh, maybe not.' You know?

Valérie, too, found that there are more opportunities available for her in Canada than in France. Others, such as Rosalie, also discussed their positive experiences in Canada in terms of access to

¹¹³ Translation: And in the evening, finally, when they were released, they paid a cab, and we went all the way to their families where they were waiting for them. The food was ready, we ate. And then their families finally took me to the YMCA. Alone, I don't know how I was going to end up at all. But God showed me grace."

equal opportunities. Although she was mindful of Canada's history with slavery, Rosalie found it necessary to highlight the positive aspects of living in Canada, such as the existence of equal opportunity for all, or the freedom to create opportunities for oneself. Further, Joanna expressed that Canada has allowed her to realize her professional ambitions as an engineer. Keren also said that, while not always easy, Canada has presented her with the employment opportunities in her field of study, which she desired. According to Amina, in Canada, "... you have [the] opportunity to go to school, you have [the] opportunity to work, and you have [these] as a woman, especially as a woman..." Lastly, in Canada, Idara appreciated the ability to change employment, try new careers, and be innovative in the workplace. She was also pleased with the benefits of volunteering in Canada. Overall, the women believed that every person in Canada is granted equal opportunities, regardless of gender, and, as Francine put it, "c'est à toi vraiment de le saisir."¹¹⁴

Access to Services and Resources. Participants spoke about their positive experiences in Canada in terms of access to services and resources, such as free health care, immigration services (for housing, basic needs, language acquisition, employment, and permanent residency application), employment insurance, and other social services. This was regardless of whether they lived in Ontario or Québec. For example, when Francine arrived in Canada as an asylum claimant, she was welcomed by the YMCA in Montréal, which provided her with shelter, food, and other necessities. Francine expressed, "... arriver à un endroit où je n'avais aucun droit, mais j'étais bien traitée, j'étais nourrie, j'étais mise dans des conditions, quand même de bonnes conditions. J'étais vraiment, vraiment reconnaissante."¹¹⁵ Joanna, too, was grateful for the employment insurance she received when she was unemployed, stating:

... parce qu'en temps normal, tu perds ton travail, mais tu n'as rien, tu n'as pas d'économies, mais tu n'as rien. Tu ne peux rien faire. Mais le fait que déjà, la base, les salaires [au Canada] sont très bien retranchés et les impôts, et tout ça. Mais ça permet qu'il ait cette bonne gestion-là qui est faite aux besoins.¹¹⁶

Similarly, Yolande shared how fortunate she felt living in a country where she did not have to worry about her next meal, and if she ever had to, she knew she could access a local food bank.

¹¹⁴ Translation: "... it's really up to you to seize it."

¹¹⁵ Translation: "... arriving at a place where I had no rights, but I was treated well, I was fed, I was placed in conditions, good conditions. I was really, really grateful."

¹¹⁶ Translation: "... because normally, you lose your job, but you have nothing, you have no savings, but you have nothing. You can't do anything. But the fact that already, the base, salaries are very well deducted and the taxes, and all that. But it allows to have this good management that is catered to needs."

She explained, “I think because you come from a place where [there] is so little, you tend to be more grateful for the little things that, you know, people take for granted here.”

Enjoyment of Rights and Freedoms. Participants enjoyed rights and freedoms that they did not always have in the DRC. Samora valued the freedom and equality of rights in Canada, the equity between women and men, and the fact that no one is above the law, stating, “[l]e Canada, c’est un pays de droit de l’homme. En plus, il y a l’égalité de la loi. Personne ne peut être au-dessus de l’autre.”¹¹⁷ From Amina’s perspective, in Canada, “... you have [the] right to speak, you have [the] right to work. And they [Canadians] respect you [the immigrant]. And you have the freedom to speak, you know? If you see something is not right, you can speak.” This contrasts with her experiences in the DRC, where there was little freedom of expression, especially for women. Bethanie shared similar sentiments, explaining that she was subjected to a lot of sexism and the silencing of her voice as a young girl in both the DRC and South Africa, but that after migrating to Canada, she found her voice. Her perspective of women’s identity also changed:

... in Canada, you learn more about women and women having independence... So, seeing that that was possible in Canada really changed my idea that a woman is more than just like her fixing her life so that she can be a housewife or a mother, or wife. But like a woman can do anything.

Similarly, Dalia stated that she considered her experiences in Canada to be very positive since in the country, she was able, as a woman, to express herself, acquire responsibilities, have self-confidence, and develop into a leader. Keisha expanded on these points:

... in Canada, there’s more like, I guess, opportunities for women compared to back home... I know there’s still people who are fighting for equal whatever [in Canada] ... But here, it’s like you’re a girl, you can go to school, you can go beyond just like grade 6, type of thing, and do whatever the men do too. It’s not like, ‘Oh, no, that’s a man’s job.’ Where over there, it would be like, I’ve never seen a woman work in a garage, you know what I mean? There are just places where you will never in your life see a woman...

Thus, unlike in the DRC, where women are often expected to marry and have children at a young age, Canada has granted participants the freedom to pursue higher education and a career outside of the home. In the participants’ marriages, too, they saw that they were being respected as women. Jamille explained of her marriage:

¹¹⁷ Translation: “Canada is a country with human rights, plus there is equality of law. No one can be above the other.”

Ici, à Ottawa, il n'y a pas le papa et le patriarce, le chef suprême. Non. Vous êtes deux partenaires. Vous vous supportez. Pourquoi? Parce que le *lifestyle* n'est pas le même. Le mari apporte cinquante pourcents, la femme apporte cinquante pourcents. Il y a l'égalité, oui.¹¹⁸

Rosalie also noted that women in Canada have benefited from the struggles for women's liberation, which have given women today the ability to live as humans, in comparison to the DRC where women are still protesting and organizing in associations to fight for equal rights and freedoms. Even as a newcomer, Joanna mentioned that there were laws that protected her, and she did not believe she would have been employed where she works now if these laws that promote fairness and protection for newcomers (those without citizenship) had not been established. As a refugee, Francine also perceived Canada as providing her with a wealth of opportunities. Idara appreciated the right to vote, to express oneself, and make political decisions since she never had the opportunity to do so in the DRC. Valérie made similar claims, in addition to appreciating the ability to establish two non-profit organizations in Canada, stating:

Je dirais qu'une expérience positive c'est le droit, le droit de pouvoir s'exprimer librement, le droit de pouvoir s'exprimer sans qu'on soit — cette liberté d'expression, je pense quand même qu'on n'a pas forcément au Congo. Par exemple, je dirais l'expérience la plus positive... j'ai créé deux organismes à but non-lucratif.¹¹⁹

Easy or Rapid Incorporation into Canadian Society. Participants like Bethanie, Jamille, and Joanna mentioned that they easily and rapidly adapted to Canadian culture and society. Dalia explained, "... je me sens mieux implanté ici au Canada, parce que comme j'ai dit, élevée dans deux cultures [occidentale et africaine], je retrouve mieux ma place dans une structure comme la société canadienne."¹²⁰ Yolande shared this sentiment; having lived in the United States for a few years, she found the transition to Canada to be much smoother than the transition from Zambia to the United States:

¹¹⁸ Translation: "Here, in Ottawa, there is no father and the patriarch, no supreme leader. No. You are two partners. You support each other. Why? Because the lifestyle is not the same. The husband brings fifty percent, the wife brings fifty percent. There is equality, yes."

¹¹⁹ Translation: "I would say that a positive experience is the right, the right to express oneself freely, the right to be able to express oneself without being- this freedom of expression, I think we don't necessarily have in Congo. For example, I would say the most positive experience... I created two non-profit organizations."

¹²⁰ Translation: "... I feel more settled here in Canada, because as I said, raised in two cultures [Western and African], I find my place better in a setting like the Canadian society."

... the biggest transition for me was from Africa to the U.S. From the U.S. to Canada, it's like I spoke the language. People like saying that they are very different than Americans, that there's a big difference between Americans and Canadians, right. And then like to me, they are like cousins, they are related.

In addition to speaking both French and English, Canada's official languages, Yolande received an American education, which she claimed made it easier for her to obtain employment in Canada. Valérie, too, obtained her first employment in Canada relatively quickly after settling from France due to the recognition of credentials and experiences. Like Yolande, Francine and Keren believed that knowing and speaking French facilitated their adaptation to Canadian society since it enabled them to articulate themselves in a way that others could understand, ask for services on their own, and find employment.

Canada's Multiculturalism. Idara, Joanna, Michelle, and Keisha praised Canada's multiculturalism and the opportunity to learn about different cultures or be surrounded by other immigrants. Joanna stated, "[d]onc, j'ai rencontré des gens de plusieurs pays et ça, je trouve que c'est une richesse. C'est quelque chose que je n'ai pas nécessairement eu en RDC où j'étais pratiquement tout le temps avec les Congolais."¹²¹

Positive Changes to Self. In terms of identity, participants discussed the positive changes to self after settling in Canada, especially how being a mother and labourer became central to their identities. Amina said that becoming a mother "... changed my life in so many ways because when I was in Africa, I was young. I wasn't involved in mother activities," such as raising a family or taking care of the household. Amina also mentioned that settling in Canada was a rite of passage into adulthood for her, as she endured the process of becoming a mother and a labourer, which contrasted with her childhood responsibilities in the DRC. Jamille also explained how she became even more mature, responsible, and resilient as a mother, asserting "... on acquiert quand même une certaine force, une certaine puissance qu'on n'a pas au pays. On a la chance de se développer en tant que femme."¹²² Joanna's incorporation into Canadian society was also facilitated by her having to mature quickly after settling, as her parents were no longer responsible for her and she had to quickly learn to care for herself financially and, soon after, for her family in the DRC

¹²¹ Translation: "So, I met people from several countries and that, I find is valuable. This is something that I did not necessarily have in the DRC where I was practically all the time with the Congolese."

¹²² Translation: "... we acquire a certain strength, a certain power that we didn't have in our country. We have the opportunity evolve into a woman."

through remittances. Lastly, Yolande expressed that she became more herself after settling in Canada: “I assumed myself here, you know? Yeah so, that [Canada] is where I embraced being me and entering into adult life and starting my career and doing what I want as opposed to what people expected of me.”

Established Social Networks. Most participants attributed their positive experiences in Canada to establishing a strong social network soon after their settlement and having friendly interactions. Social networks included friends the women met in their transit country prior to settling in Canada or with whom they grew up, family members, strangers through networking, church members, co-workers, and members of the Congolese community. Social networks were pivotal in the early years of the women’s settlement since they provided support and assistance with a variety of things such as navigating the city, demonstrating how to get settled (like how to open a bank account, how to obtain a driver’s license and health card), educating on other cultures, referring to or offering job opportunities, providing religious and cultural support, and hosting the women until they found a place to live. These connections assisted the interviewees with an easier transition and settlement into Canadian society and gave a sense of comfort (particularly when meeting other Congolese citizens). Many of the women’s support networks remain today.

Negative Encounters and Experiences in Canada

The women’s positive experiences in Canada do support some of the literature presented in Chapter Five regarding Canada being a welcoming country for immigrants and promoting a sense of belonging. However, participants also experienced several obstacles that sometimes hindered their sense of belonging. Like many immigrants, the women arrived in Canada with little knowledge of life in the country. Thus, each participant faced multiple challenges and barriers during the resettlement stage, including cultural adjustment and lifestyle change, language barriers, unfamiliarity, isolation or loneliness, adjustment to harsh weather conditions, dealing with issues concerning their immigration status or visas, difficulties finding employment, educational barriers and unrecognized credentials, and discrimination or stereotypes. As Bethanie explained, “[b]eing an immigrant is not easy. Even if you come in here [Canada] by choice...”

Cultural Barriers. When participants first arrived in Canada, they described experiencing cultural shock and a change of lifestyle. Many of these participants had never lived in a transit country prior to arriving in Canada, thus, they were experiencing for the first time a culture that was radically different from that of the DRC. Joanna indicated, “la difficulté se posait peut-être en

termes de différence qu'il y avait entre, je venais d'une autre culture, c'est un autre système..."¹²³ Examples that Lehana and Michelle provided included not understanding Canadian customs and norms, not knowing how people think and behave, having to adjust to a different diet and food, seeing limited farms and agriculture, and experiencing a different education system. Since participants had to become accustomed to Canadian culture to be well-incorporated into society, and since they were not surrounded by many Congolese people nor their culture and traditions, many — particularly the younger participants — felt they were losing their own culture. According to Keisha, coming to Canada, "... if you're not careful, will make you lose everything of your culture... you will lose your roots and lose your connection to your own culture, background and stuff." However, for the older participants, it was much more difficult to be accustomed to Canadian culture and to change their lifestyles. For instance, Samora stated, "[n]ous savons bien étant arrivé ici [au Canada] déjà adulte, [avec] beaucoup de choses à apprendre de la culture occidentale... s'habituer n'est pas facile."¹²⁴

Language was also reported as a cultural barrier that participants faced. While many knew French and could navigate the National Capital Region's bilingual system, others were required to learn English or struggled with the French accents. Amina struggled to incorporate when she first settled in the Toronto area due to her lack of English communication skills:

It was very hard for me to stay in Canada and to feel comfortable because I didn't know English. And I couldn't do anything, even to go to the doctor, even to go to the supermarket, even to do anything [*pause*] it was very hard for me because I didn't know English and I become pregnant right away, so it was very difficult for me to have a baby, you don't know [the] language.

Francine felt the need to learn English so she could feel more at home in Canada and to expand her opportunities; yet, living in Montréal made it difficult for her to learn and practice the language: "Donc, il fallait vraiment que je déménage dans un coin où je peux apprendre et pratiquer l'anglais."¹²⁵ Francine eventually moved to Ottawa. Furthermore, Michelle struggled in school due to language; despite being enrolled in a French immersion school, English still predominated in

¹²³ Translation: "... the difficulty was perhaps in terms of the difference between, I came from another culture, it is another system..."

¹²⁴ Translation: "[w]e know quite well having arrived here [in Canada] already as an adult, many things to learn about Western culture... getting used to it is not easy."

¹²⁵ Translation: "So, I really had to move to a place where I could learn and practice English."

the curriculum, making it difficult for her to understand course material and perform well. Lehana also struggled in school due to her teacher's Québécois French accent, which she found difficult to understand, to the point that her teacher would write her responses to Lehana on a Post-It note.

Other cultural barriers that the women faced during the initial stages of their resettlement were the *unfamiliarities* with navigating the system and accessing social services (such as family doctors), as well as understanding how various structures, like the education and financial system, functioned. Bethanie's case was unique because she expected her parents, who became financially secure in South Africa, to have a house or an apartment ready for her and her family when they arrived in Canada. However, Bethanie and her family struggled to find housing and were living in a hotel, where they had to cook their meals in a microwave:

So, they're [the social service agents] like, 'Okay, we're going to put you in a hotel.' And I was like, 'What?' And I looked at my mom, and I said, 'I thought we had a house?' And mom's like, 'No, we don't have a house. We have to go to the hotel and stay there.' So, the next six months was hell.

At that point, Bethanie was left wondering why her parents had decided to relocate the family to Canada if they were going to suffer financially, as opposed to their experiences in South Africa.

In terms of lifestyles, some of the participants, such as Dalia, found it especially difficult to become a mother or wife in a foreign country. As Dalia put it, "... tu es seule avec l'enfant, il faut chercher un bon *daycare*, il faut que tu ailles travailler, il faut que tu ailles aux études. Essaie de combiner tout ça, tous ces rôles là-bas, c'est pas chose facile."¹²⁶ Idara, too, experienced some difficulties adapting to a new life or way of living as a wife in a foreign country. She stated, "... pour moi, ce sont des changements majeurs par rapport à ce que j'avais vécu la plus grande partie de ma vie."¹²⁷ Therefore, the stresses and challenges of navigating a foreign country were compounded by the women's new status as a mother and wife.

The most interesting obstacle for seven of the participants was the harsh Canadian weather, namely its winters. As Lehana claimed, "... [the cold] was the first big shock [*laughter*], yelling, 'What am I doing here? I was in like thirty-two degrees, like less than a couple hours ago!'"

¹²⁶ Translation: "... you are alone with the child, you have to find a good daycare, you have to work, you have to study. Try to combine all that, all those roles there, it's not easy."

¹²⁷ Translation: "... for me, these were major changes from what I had experienced most of my life."

Feelings of Loneliness. Another obstacle encountered by the interviewees was the loneliness and the absence of family and friends, especially in the early years of settlement. Dalia and Jamille mentioned a general sense of isolation and solitude due to being in a foreign country without any family. Others like Keisha, Bethanie, and Valérie expressed their sadness at leaving behind family members to live in a foreign country so far away and missing events such as weddings and family gatherings. Valérie explained, “[c]’était quand même triste de laisser tout le monde... qu’il y a quand même la distance qui nous sépare. Alors, ça c’est certain que c’est, c’était difficile.”¹²⁸ Bethanie’s sadness is still very present, as she stated:

But being in Canada, though, still makes me miss home very much, like I think it’s just, because I was raised there, I came here when I was thirteen, I felt like a big part of my heart is still there and stuff.

What contributed to Joanna’s feelings of isolation and loneliness was the individualistic nature of Canadian society, saying:

... j’ai appris que le Canada, en vivant ici, c’est vraiment une société très individualiste. Les gens sont seuls... Alors que moi, d’où je viens, j’ai grandi dans une, dans un genre de vie, on va dire, plus communautaire. On ne vit pas seul dans son coin. Et puis on a le gouvernement qui nous aide en vie, en communauté parce qu’on s’entraide les uns les autres.¹²⁹

And part of feeling isolated or alone meant that a few women, like Amina, Francine, and Idara, no longer had the social network they had developed in previous countries (the DRC or their transit country) or the social support they needed in Canada. Amina spent many days alone after giving birth to her first child; her husband had to work, and she had no other family members to support her. Francine was also required to stay in a shelter when she first arrived in Canada since she had no relatives or friends in the country who would take her in and assist her with her settlement. And even when family members could come to visit, Idara admitted, “ce n’est pas pareil, qu’ils viennent, viennent.”¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Translation: “[i]t was sad to leave everyone... that there is distance between us. So, that is certain that it’s, it was difficult.”

¹²⁹ Translation: “... I learned that Canada, in living here, is really a very individualistic society. People are alone... Whereas where I come from, I grew up in a, in a kind of life, let’s say, more communitarian. You don’t live alone in your corner. And then we have the government that helps us in life, in community because we help each other.”

¹³⁰ Translation: “... it’s not the same, that they come, come.”

Issues with Immigration Statuses or Visas. A few participants who arrived on a student visa or as asylum claimants faced challenges with their immigration status and permanent residency application. When Bethanie's family first applied for refugee status, they were denied because her and her siblings had a South African citizenship. Their application also raised questions regarding the fears of persecution they claimed in the application since South Africa did not have any political turmoil at the time. Bethanie realized, "[j]ust because you've entered a country does not mean that you could get it [the refugee status]. You know, we've heard of people who had to get kicked out of the country and stuff like that." Bethanie blamed the denial of refugee status on the public immigration lawyer they were assigned, who did not devote enough time to their case since he was also dealing with many other applications. The public lawyer also failed to clarify the proper documents they needed on file. After hearing from others that public lawyers were ineffective, Francine sought a private lawyer to assist her with her refugee application. However, she was a newcomer and had no job or income. Thus, she struggled to pay her lawyer with the small amount of money she received from social services. Like Bethanie's circumstances, Dalia was also denied refugee status the first time she applied since she did not provide adequate proof that she was at risk in the DRC. This denial caused her a great deal of stress:

C'est difficile. Donc, ça m'a causé beaucoup de stress, oui, énormément de stress. Parce qu'en ce moment-là, en dehors de tous les problèmes auxquels vous avez déjà vécu, en dehors du fait que vous avez abandonné la famille, le tout, vous vous retrouvez encore devant une autre difficulté, que je suis refusée. Qu'est-ce que je fais? Qu'est-ce qu'il va devenir de moi? Qu'est-ce que vous comprenez? Donc, ça c'est énormément de stress.¹³¹

Dalia was under so much stress that she shut down for a period. Part of the stress for both Bethanie and Dalia stemmed from the fact that they were restricted in what they could do in Canada. Dalia, for example, could not attend school unless she paid international fees, and she was unable to apply for certain jobs for which she qualified. As an international student, Joanna faced similar constraints, like being ineligible for the RAMQ or being faced with restrictions on the number of hours she could work on a student visa.

¹³¹ Translation: "It's hard. So, it caused me a lot of stress, yes, a lot of stress. Because at that moment, apart from all the problems you've already experienced, apart from the fact that you've abandoned your family, the whole thing, you're faced with yet another difficulty, that I was refused. What do I do? What will become of me? What do you understand? So, that's a lot of stress."

Education and Employment Barriers. Participants faced challenges and obstacles related to education and employment in Canada. When Jamille decided to resume her nursing degree that she nearly completed in France, the specific program was no longer available at Collège La Cité, a French-language college in Ottawa. Furthermore, her credits could not be transferred for another nursing program since the credits were not equivalent. Thus, she had to forfeit her credits and restart her studies. Joanna earned a merit-based scholarship, which required her to pass her courses with a certain grade point average. However, in her third year of studies, she fell below the average and lost her scholarship, forcing her to temporarily suspend her studies to work full-time and save money to pay her tuition. Francine also faced some financial difficulties when she first relocated to Ottawa to study English and attend the University of Ottawa. Having to pay tuition, Francine was once again forced to live in a shelter until she could work full-time and find a new place to live. Francine was also ineligible for Ontario student grants and bursaries because she only lived in the province for less than a year. Francine conveyed, “c’était très difficile, c’était demandant.”¹³² Lastly, when Lehana and Michelle began attending public school in Ottawa, they experienced a grade retention; Lehana was enrolled in a grade lower than she previously was in the DRC and Michelle had to repeat her school year to catch up with her peers.

In terms of employment, due to a lack of Canadian experience, a few participants had difficulties accessing the Canadian labour market. For instance, Francine indicated,

... à chaque porte que je frappais, on me disait que je n’avais pas l’expérience canadienne. Donc, sans expérience canadienne, je ne peux pas avoir de l’emploi. Ben, sans emploi, je ne peux pas avoir l’expérience canadienne, donc je tournais en rond. C’était difficile.¹³³

Dalia also had difficulty getting recruited, even after gaining Canadian experience, questioning:

Est-ce que je suis refusée parce que je ne suis pas capable de le faire, ou parce qu’il y a d’autres éléments que, d’autres qualifications qu’on exige ici d’avoir? Peut-être l’expérience canadienne n’était pas suffisante, n’était pas suffisante pour me permettre [accès] à certains postes.¹³⁴

¹³² Translation: “... it was very difficulty, it was demanding.”

¹³³ Translation: “... at every door I knocked on, I was told I didn’t have Canadian experience. So, without Canadian experience, I can’t get a job. Well, without a job, I can’t have Canadian experience, so I was going in circles. It was difficult.”

¹³⁴ Translation: “Am I being turned down because I’m not capable of doing it, or because there are other elements that, other qualifications that are required here to have? Maybe the Canadian experience wasn’t enough, wasn’t enough to get me into certain positions.”

As an international student, Joanna was only allowed to work for up to twenty hours a week during scheduled breaks in the school year. This became an obstacle when she had to pay her own tuition on top of other expenses including rent, necessities, and sending money to her family in the DRC. Further, Joanna had to complete the coop requirement of her program, but there were limited engineering firms in New Brunswick, which made it difficult for her to find a well-paid internship.

Idara sought employment assistance from a women's settlement centre in Gatineau but was disappointed when agents simply asked for her resume to send to an employment agency and focused more on the acquisition of social services rather than offering concrete information on the Canadian job market or how to apply for jobs. And when Keren eventually found work in her profession, it was only a contract, conveying, "... ce n'était pas facile parce que pendant tout ce temps, tu es en train de chercher un boulot permanent. Tu es vraiment déjà dans ton domaine de travail et c'est déjà bien. Mais tu ne gagnes pas encore de l'argent."¹³⁵ When Samora first started working in Canada, she was not respected by her co-workers who took advantage of her as a newcomer and assigned her tasks that were beyond her responsibilities.

Many of these educational and employment obstacles resulted in financial difficulties (such as the inability to pay rent, purchase necessities, pay for school, or make investments) and stress for participants. Bethanie also felt the pressure to do well in school and to take care of her siblings while her mother worked, seeing the sacrifice that she was making to ensure that they all had a roof over their heads. Bethanie stated, "... it put a lot of pressure on me as a young woman in my family, and as the only girl in my family..."

Discrimination and Conflict. For all but one participant, the most mentioned challenge in Canada were encounters with discrimination, anti-Black racism (misogynoir), and stereotyping,¹³⁶ which occurred in three distinct settings: in school, in the workplace, and in society. Such incidents added to the burden of migration and reinforced past findings in the literature concerning the marginalization, oppression, and discrimination that immigrant women often face in Canada, a country that is generally seen as accommodating and welcoming to immigrants.

During their studies (whether in elementary school, secondary school, or university), Bethanie, Lehana, Michelle, and Joanna shared their experiences with racism, stigma, and

¹³⁵ Translation: "... it wasn't easy because all this time, you're trying to look for a permanent job. You're really already in your field of work and that's already good. But you're not making any money yet."

¹³⁶ Francine indicated that, while she was subjected to discrimination, she decided to overlook and overcome it. As a result, she avoided discussing her experiences with discrimination.

stereotyping. Bethanie, for example, felt stigmatized by her peers due to what she termed the “single narrative story about Africa”, or the “negative perceptions about what it’s like to live in an African country, what it’s like to grow up in an African country...” Such negative and false assumptions included the notion that Africans always come from a rough upbringing and struggle to survive (for instance, always living in poverty, unable to grasp Canadian customs). Bethanie’s peers were even taken aback when she one day showed up at school wearing Ralph Lauren clothes. In addition, Bethanie described facing instances of anti-Black racism and colourism: “[y]ou know, I never noticed colourism, never noticed that there was a difference [between] being a darker skin, like Black girl, or a lighter skin or like a brown-skinned Black girl.” Even though she grew up in South Africa, where racism and apartheid were a part of the country’s history, Bethanie noted that she was not subjected to racism as profoundly as she was when she moved to Canada. Further, although Bethanie believed that women were given equal rights in Canada, she was nevertheless silenced as a Black woman by her peers:

... being a Black woman, like the moment you have something to say, all of a sudden, you have people telling you you’re aggressive, you are angry, you’re this, you’re that. At the same time, it still showed me that there’s a lot of inequalities, you know, why is it okay that like some guy can have this opinion, but the moment I have something [to say], I’m being told, ‘Oh you’re lefty, you’re left wing!’

Lehana’s experiences were quite similar to Bethanie’s, particularly in terms of how her peers perceived her as an African, with questions like, “‘Did you live with lions?’”, “‘Have you ever had pizza, or have you ever tasted a hamburger?’” Lehana explained that her lifestyle in the DRC was very similar to that of her peers in Canada; she went to amusement parks, went on a cruise vacation, and had maids who helped around the house while her parents worked, thus the line of questioning by her peers puzzled her. Others would also tell Lehana, “‘Oh, you’re not a typical Congolese girl’” because she did not match a stereotype that they had in mind, such as being a dancer or an athlete, as well as dressing differently. She also heard many racist remarks about Congolese people. Furthermore, Lehana’s teachers had low expectations for her and her academic performance, occasionally making her rewrite tests to validate her good grades. Lehana indicated, “‘I’d like to think they’ve been misinformed of who you are and how you act, and everything. And you have to educate them.’”

Michelle experienced discrimination at school in the form of bullying. Her teachers, like Lehana's, also did not consider her to be a bright student and had low expectations for her. For instance, she had an English teacher in high school who belittled her and her assignments and was surprised to learn that she had received an academic medal for students with an average grade of 90 percent or higher. In fact, Michelle was the only Black woman to receive this medal, prompting her to question, "They still think that Black women, or Black people in general, cannot aim that high or cannot reach a goal of 90 percent and up? That they are not smart enough to reach that point?" Joanna did not face overt discrimination, but she did face subtle or covert discrimination at university due to her status as a temporary migrant, such as being passed over for an internship that was awarded to a Canadian woman, despite meeting all the criteria. She elaborated,

... je ressentais en ce moment-là, c'était un choix qui n'était pas clair, qui n'était pas... c'est quoi le mot, ce n'était pas, judicieux, peut-être? Je ne sais pas, mais, c'était vraiment juste probablement basé sur le fait que, elle était plus privilégiée parce qu'elle était canadienne [...] Mais dans les agissements, dans les traitements, on peut ressentir qu'il y a une certaine différence qui est fait, qui est, qui est visible lorsque tu es étranger ou en tant que femme, que lorsque tu es canadienne.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, Joannie remarked that this was not unusual, since "ce que tu mérites c'est ce qui est défini pour toi."¹³⁸ In other words, Joanna thought it was normal for her to be passed over for certain opportunities since she was not a Canadian citizen, and that she needed to work extra hard to showcase her skills and be recognized as an immigrant woman since she did not have the same resources and privileges as someone who is Canadian.

Participants also faced racism and discrimination in the workplace, both in terms of hiring practices and when looking for employment. As a Black woman, when Amina completed her hairstylist apprenticeship and received her license, she found it very difficult to find work. She recalled her encounter with anti-Black racism when she was called for an interview:

When I go in [for the] interview, the person saw me — sometimes it's like they see a ghost! And we talk, after he [asks] me 'Oh, okay where you from?' When I say, 'I'm from Africa,'

¹³⁷ Translation: "... I felt at that time, it was a choice that was not clear, that was not... what's the word, it was not, wise, maybe? I don't know, but, it was really just probably based on the fact that she was more privileged because she was Canadian [...] But in actions, in treatments, you can feel that there is a certain difference that is made, that is, that is visible when you are a foreigner or as a woman, than when you are Canadian."

¹³⁸ Translation: "... what you deserve is what is defined for you."

‘Oh, okay... I’m gonna call you.’ [pause] That was painful. ‘I’m gonna call you.’ And you come home, nobody calls you.

Despite her experience as a hairstylist, Amina found herself in this situation several times, and sometimes, she also found that her accent on the phone would deter managers from hiring her. It became so difficult to find work that Amina was willing to take on jobs as a shampoo girl to make an income. Amina stated,

I didn’t know there are racists here in this world. Because us in Africa, we accept everybody, especially in Congo. We accept everybody, we love everybody, we greet everybody, you know? So, I didn’t know about the racists, I didn’t know there is a difference *entre* black and white.

Keren was also subjected to discriminatory hiring practices, such as the time when her manager advertised a position specifically for her but was left searching for Keren’s CV after it was purposefully left out of the pile of CVs for review. Keren asserted,

Donc, c’est pour vous dire que nous appliquons et nos CV n’arrivent jamais là où ils doivent arriver. Ils sont déjà censurés quelque part. Donc, ça c’est, ça c’est vraiment quelque chose qui m’a fait comprendre que oui, il y a du racisme ici.¹³⁹

In other instances, Keren has faced mistreatment from colleagues because she is a Black woman in a management position, such as not receiving vital information from doctors and researchers, which were often relayed to her assistants instead. She questioned, “Alors comment faire ton travail si tu n’as pas ces informations?”¹⁴⁰

During a job interview, Dalia was asked by the hiring manager how she would care for her child if she were hired to work for the company. Dalia stated, “... il y a pleins de gens qui ont des enfants qui travaillent, mais les circonstances que la question a été posée, je l’avais trouvée discriminatoire. Et j’étais surprise...”¹⁴¹ Additionally, Idara and Valérie were both turned down for permanent positions, despite already working in these positions on a temporary basis. To illustrate, Idara’s position was converted to a permanent position, and as standard procedure, she was instructed to apply and go through the interview process to maintain her position. Instead of

¹³⁹ Translation: “So, that’s to tell you that we apply and our resumes never get to where they need to get to. They’re already censored somewhere. So, that’s, that’s really something that made me realize that yes, there is racism here.”

¹⁴⁰ Translation: “So how can you do your job if you don’t have this information?”

¹⁴¹ Translation: “... there are plenty of people who have children who work, but the circumstances in which the question was asked, I found it discriminatory. And I was surprised...”

offering her the job she already had, they offered her a nine-month contract and hired someone else in the permanent position. Idara's employer went so far as to claim that she did not meet the requirements since she had been on maternity leave. Idara also felt that in her current position, because she has been a vocal advocate for women's rights, she is being portrayed as a stubborn woman who refuses to accept her 'position' as a woman. In Valérie's case, she was filling in for someone on maternity leave, and when the position was advertised for a permanent employee, she was not selected and had to train the person who was hired. Valérie commented, "[j]'allais remplacer une personne pour finalement qu'on puisse me remplacer. Donc, quelque part, c'était pour moi, c'était comme une forme de discrimination."¹⁴²

Lehana and Michelle also faced discrimination in the workplace after graduating from university. Engineering was already a male-dominated profession, but Lehana's difficulties in the field were exacerbated by her colleagues' prejudice towards her due to her race, expressed through the questioning of her work, spending hours during her presentations to verify her calculations, and subjecting her to stereotypes. Lehana said, "would this have happened if I were not Black, type of thing?" Michelle was also subjected to microaggressions when she first entered the workforce. She also felt that in order to advance in her career, she needed to put in extra effort, such as earning a master's degree, thinking to herself, "I'm a Black woman, you must do this to standout, you have to go the extra mile to standout." Yolande has also faced discrimination in the workplace, where she worked with colleagues who had negative perceptions of Black people, but who later confessed to her that their views had changed since working with her.

Lastly, participants also experienced discrimination in their daily lives. While waiting for her bus, an older White man approached Keisha and said, "You [*n-word*]! How dare you come to our country! Go back to where you're from, you African monkeys!" Yolande has been looked down on while walking down the street, has had women clutching their purses as she walked by, and has been prejudged by a car dealer that she and her husband could not afford a new vehicle the moment they walked in. Rosalie stated that it was only recently that she recognized the injustices she experienced in Canada due to her growing understanding of the legacy of colonialism in the country. She expressed wanting to live according to her skills, abilities, and differences, not based on the colour of her skin. It was also not in her to think that she was different

¹⁴² Translation: "I was going to replace a person so that finally I could be replaced. So, in a way, it was like a form of discrimination for me."

from others because of her Congolese origin or because she was a Black woman. Yet, she had experienced prejudice and hoped that one day she would be able to have discussions based on differences, the elimination of stereotypes, and the ability to move forward. Jamille also lamented:

[*Pause*] Ici au Canada, j'avais remarqué, même à Bruxelles, huh? En tant que femme noire, le racisme. Parce que déjà tu es une femme, tu es noire, tu dois te, comment dirai-je... tu dois te perfectionner encore plus pour te faire accepter, pour te faire valoir. Vous montrez que, « Non, je suis une femme. Je suis noire. Je viens de l'Afrique, mais je veux quelque chose. »¹⁴³

Samora, too, faced discrimination, but she explained that most of it originated from other immigrants with “des mauvais caractères.”¹⁴⁴ Yolande shared the same sentiment, indicating that the prejudice she experienced had also come from within the Congolese community:

... sometimes it's even the other immigrants who are meaner to you than the people who are born here. I have never understood that, and sometimes it comes from our own community, right. You get the, it's just so gratuitous, it's like, why would you? I'm not here to hurt you. Why would you just mistreat somebody who comes from, instead of building each other up. We don't build each other up. Specifically in the Congolese community. We don't.

Overall, the women's encounters with anti-Black racism, or misogynoir in particular, were evident and distressing, impacting their incorporation and settlement experiences across social settings.

Imported Gender Norms. Remarkably, gender norms were rarely imported from the DRC into the women's households in Canada (at least not to the extent that the women felt suppressed in their roles). Yet, this was experienced by a select few, including Lehana, Bethanie, and Samora, who were charged with household responsibilities; Valérie, who had to forego her studies to become the primary caregiver for her children while her husband worked; and Jamille, whose husband would not allow her to participate in activities he deemed too political. In the early years of settlement, when Jamille and Amina became mothers, they also held gender roles from the DRC, taking on domestic responsibilities and remaining socioeconomically dependent on their husbands.

¹⁴³ Translation: “[*pause*] Here in Canada, I had noticed, even in Brussels, huh? As a Black woman, the racism. Because already you're a woman, you're Black, you have to, how do I say this... you have to perfect yourself even more to make yourself accepted, to make yourself stand out. You show that, ‘No, I'm a woman. I'm Black. I'm from Africa, but I'm worth something.’”

¹⁴⁴ Translation: “...bad temperament.”

Overcoming Challenges. When confronted with some of the challenges and barriers discussed above, a few participants stated that if things did not go as planned for them in Canada, they could still rely on their connections to other countries. This was especially true for those who came to Canada for economic or familial reasons, as they had the option to leave. For example, when Idara faced employment obstacles, she expressed that she could have left the country at any time and looked for work elsewhere, recognizing that the opportunity existed:

Mais ce que je trouve d'intéressant au Canada, c'est que, à n'importe quel moment, si je veux me revirer de bord, je peux le faire. Donc, c'est ça que je me dis. Je me dis si je n'aime pas ce que je fais, par exemple, demain, je peux le faire [ailleurs].¹⁴⁵

Keren also stated that she had the option of leaving Canada and returning to England, where she had already established roots and could find other, if not better, employment opportunities. Keren explained, "[j]'avais un choix. J'avais un autre passeport qui était très beau, celui de *British*. Donc, un choix. Donc, je venais, je regardais. Si ça ne me plaisait pas, je pouvais toujours retourner."¹⁴⁶ Likewise, Bethanie recognized her privilege of being able to return to South Africa if things were too difficult for her and her family or if they were denied refugee status a second time.

None of the women have left Canada, but they have instead remained resilient in the face of adversity, as shown by their ability to adapt to Canadian culture (which, for many, was a challenge given their strong attachment to their Congolese culture and identity), become implicated in society, learn English, obtain a degree, secure employment, and receive support.

Part of overcoming cultural shock, loneliness or isolation, and unfamiliarity for Amina, Bethanie, Dalia, Jamille, and Lehana entailed adapting to a new culture and embracing new ways of living in Canada, such as adopting new behaviours (for instance, norms, expected behaviours and habits), keeping an open mind, becoming curious of how things are done, asking many questions, and understanding the Canadian mentality (for instance, the way things are perceived by Canadians). Dalia indicated, "je suis curieuse. Quand j'arrive quelque part, je ne peux pas rester avec les mains croisées..."¹⁴⁷ Bethanie also found it easier to adjust to Canadian culture when she

¹⁴⁵ Translation: "But what I find interesting about Canada is that at any time, if I want to turn around, I can. So, that's what I told myself. I told myself if I don't like what I'm doing, for example, tomorrow I can do it [elsewhere]."

¹⁴⁶ Translation: "I had a choice. I had another passport that was very nice, that of British. So, I had a choice. So, I came, I observed. If I didn't like it, I always could go back."

¹⁴⁷ Translation: "... I'm curious. When I arrive somewhere, I can't just sit there with my hands crossed..."

and her family moved to the south of Ottawa, where she was surrounded by other immigrants who could relate to her, claiming:

The South is definitely a place with a lot more BIPOC¹⁴⁸ people, BIPOC immigrants. And I thought, ‘Oh, my gosh, like finally I see people who look like me or who are cultured like me.’ You know, this [adaptation] will probably even be more better.

Further, Amina, Bethanie, Lehana, and Dalia took the time to learn about Canadian culture and build a network of friends by becoming implicated in society, such as volunteering at (or attending) church and festivals, as well as volunteering in their communities. Valérie also learned about Canadian culture by becoming active in her community and advocating for human and women’s rights. In terms of church, Bethanie, Yolande, and Lehana felt at home in their respective churches, where they met other immigrant and Congolese families with similar lifestyles and stories, easing their incorporation into Canadian society. Yolande conveyed that “you find your place there [at church] and you have a good support system...”

Additionally, the church and Christian organizations assisted Bethanie and Michelle’s families in settling into housing, as well as purchasing food, furniture, clothes, and bedding. Strangers also stepped in to support Francine in times of need, such as the building manager at her first bachelor’s apartment who gave her an old sofa and a TV stand since she could not afford to buy furniture, or the bus driver who let her on the bus without a ticket since she had spent all her money on her immigration lawyer’s fees. Other participants sought assistance from their communities in navigating the Canadian system. To illustrate, when Amina first settled in Toronto, she did not speak English and was pregnant with no family support, yet she sought assistance from the *Centre Francophone*, which connected her with a French doctor and provided her pregnancy resources and support. Dalia received assistance from a community centre serving newcomers in the Niagara region, where she was able to develop connections and learn English.

Additionally, Amina, Francine, Jamine, Keisha, Michelle, and Samora enrolled in English courses (or attended school that offered English classes) to improve communication with members of society, mitigate the impacts of culture shock and misunderstandings, reduce the stress of incorporating into Canadian society, attend university, and increase job prospects. Samora’s main objective and concern when she first arrived in Canada was to learn both French and English since she knew it would help with her incorporation. Keisha also prioritized learning English, both in

¹⁴⁸ BIPOC is a term and an acronym for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour.

school and through communication with neighbourhood kids, since English was the language used by many of her peers both in and out of school. Recognizing that they struggled with English, Keisha and Michelle were given extra assistance in school with their homework and with mastering the language. Keisha became so fluent in English, it was like speaking her mother tongue: "... even my Swahili, it's not as strong as it was before. I didn't even know English, but now like English, you could think it's my first language, you know." Francine said that taking English courses, "... c'était pour favoriser mon adaptation et aussi retourner à l'école, l'université ici..."¹⁴⁹ Jamille was advised by immigration services to take English courses to increase her opportunities, and after a year of doing so, she was able to study at Saint Paul University in Ottawa and at the University of Ottawa. Amina disclosed that as she took up learning English, she began "enjoying the life and the place" she now calls home, Canada.

Most importantly, the majority of participants found support and comfort from members of their families (who were already settled in Canada), such as spouses, parents, siblings, or extended families (uncles, aunts, cousins), who formed their first social network in Canada, assisting them in accessing resources, navigating through the Canadian system, and encouraging them through challenges and obstacles.

Furthermore, participants used a variety of approaches to secure employment, including volunteering, being self-determined or self-motivated, networking, and receiving support. Both Idara and Keren were promoted to permanent positions after volunteering in their respective fields of work, where the women were able to develop a social network that referred them to managers. Participants' self-motivation and self-determination also assisted them in securing jobs. For Dalia and Keren, this entailed doing research, knocking on companies' doors, and asking questions. As Keren said when discussing job opportunities (and echoed by Dalia), "[m]oi, je suis quelqu'un qui va les chercher. C'est ça la grande différence. J'ai appris qu'il faut aller les chercher là où ils sont. C'est ça. Tu ne peux pas rester et on va venir te les donner."¹⁵⁰ For Jamille, self-determination entailed pursuing professional training and educational opportunities to enhance her resume, to help her stand out from other candidates, and to keep her skills from stagnating. Jamille rationalized,

¹⁴⁹ Translation: "... it was to facilitate my adaptation and also to go back to school, university here..."

¹⁵⁰ Translation: "Me, I'm someone who goes out and searches for them. That's the big difference. I've learned that you have to go and seek them out where they are. That's that. You can't just stay and have someone come and give it to you."

La vie, c'est un combat. Il faut savoir être déterminé et combattre. Oui. Surtout à Ottawa, c'est très compétitif. Tu dois être la crème de la crème. Déjà, nous nous sommes, on fait déjà la différence au niveau de la culture. Donc, il faut vraiment se valoriser d'une façon.¹⁵¹

Dalia and Francine also pursued educational opportunities to improve their chances of finding work in Canada. Dalia attended the University of Québec in Outaouais (in Gatineau) and then la Cité in Ottawa, while Francine attended Saint Paul University and the University of Ottawa to earn a bachelor's and a master's degree. Fortunately, many of Francine's credits from the courses she took in Spain were transferable, thus, she only needed a year and half to earn her bachelor's degree. For Joanna, earning an engineering degree and passing her exam to become a licensed professional engineer enabled her to find employment in Canada. Idara, like Jamille, has also occasionally participated in online training opportunities to refine her skills for future job prospects.

Throughout their life stories, participants also discussed the support and assistance they received from their social networks, families, and friends in securing employment. Francine stated, "... quand on rencontre des gens qui croient en toi, quand tu rencontres des gens qui t'acceptent tel que tu es, ça te permet quand même d'avancer dans la vie et de prendre de risque..."¹⁵² This was the case for Idara, Jamille and Keren. Through colleagues or old acquaintances who were aware of their work ethics, skills, and abilities, they were referred for positions. Keren also contacted former colleagues whom she met abroad and were now living in Canada to seek settlement advice, assistance, and guidance toward job opportunities.

Securing employment, in turn, meant that participants could overcome their financial difficulties and become both socially and economically incorporated into Canadian society. As Joanna stated, "... le travail au Canada reste vraiment une source d'établissement de base. Si tu ne travailles pas, tu ne peux pas vivre ici. Tout part de là."¹⁵³ For instance, Dalia's first job enabled her to support herself and meet her basic needs. Joanna was able to learn about the Canadian system, and thus better incorporate into Canadian society, through her first job at Bell Canada:

¹⁵¹ Translation: "Life is a battle. You have to be determined and fight. Yes. Especially in Ottawa, it's very competitive. You have to be the best of the best. We're already, we already make distinctions in terms of culture. So, you really have to value yourself in some way."

¹⁵² Translation: "... when you meet people who believe in you, when you meet people who accept you as you are, it allows you to advance in life and to take risks..."

¹⁵³ Translation: "Work in Canada remains a very basic source of settlement. If you don't work, you can't live here. It all starts there."

... j'ai travaillé dans un centre d'appels... c'est un bon point d'entrée pour comprendre le système canadien parce que tu parles avec des Canadiens en fait. Et j'étais technicienne chez Bell. On va dire, je travaillais pour le réseau Internet, donc les gens appelaient quand ils avaient des difficultés à se connecter. Mais là, j'apprenais leur langage, j'apprenais leur accent, j'apprenais la culture en même temps.¹⁵⁴

This job also provided Joanna with private insurance. Moreover, some participants were able to receive promotions shortly after landing their first employment. For example, Jamille's first job in Canada was a housekeeper. However, due to her connections and references, she was able to secure numerous contracts in various roles within the Canadian federal government, as well as a permanent position with an airliner. Comparably, Keren transitioned from being assistant to a manager of a community organization to regional research coordinator at a hospital in Ottawa.

In addition, Bethanie and Michelle's families received remittances from their fathers, who continued to work in the DRC to help support their families. Due to the remittances, Bethanie and her family were able to afford a private immigration lawyer, who assisted them in obtaining permanent residency on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. Dalia received help applying for social assistance from a community centre serving newcomers, and as a result, "je n'ai pas eu recours à ma famille pour le financement ou quoi que ça soit."¹⁵⁵ Francine received social assistance when she first arrived at the YMCA in Montréal, allowing her to purchase necessities, bus tickets, and her immigration lawyer's fees. Dalia and Francine were both on social assistance for a brief time before they were able to secure employment and become financially independent.

Several participants were able to cope with their challenges and surmount obstacles because of their faith in God and the belief that He was in control of their situation. For instance, when Bethanie discussed the refusal of her refugee status, she said, "[b]ut part of me also knew God wouldn't allow us to come this far to lose. And so, yeah, we got our PR [permanent residency]." Similarly, Keren discussed how she communicated with God her struggles and sacrifices in moving to Canada in the hopes that He would grant her a steady employment:

¹⁵⁴ Translation: "... I worked in a call centre... it's a good entry point to understanding the Canadian system because you're actually talking to Canadians. And I was a technician at Bell. Let's say, I was working for the Internet network, so people would call when they were having trouble getting connected. But there, I was learning their lingo, I was learning their accent, I was learning the culture at the same time."

¹⁵⁵ Translation: "I didn't have to rely on my family for funding or anything."

... je lui [Dieu] ai dit et je me suis dit, « J'ai passé dix années de ma vie en Angleterre. Petits boulots, j'en ai fait. J'ai terminé mes études, j'ai commencé un autre boulot, je suis sur une bonne voie et je décide de venir ici. Je ne vais pas retourner en arrière. »¹⁵⁶

Jamille expressed that God had given her the wisdom to navigate her migration experiences and gain the skills and abilities she needed to obtain the many jobs that she did, as well as to feel well-incorporated into society. For Joanna, Rosalie, Francine, and Yolande, their faith in God was sufficient to keep them strong and reassured through their struggles. Joanna said, "...ça m'a beaucoup aidé... d'avoir cette relation avec Dieu qui est, on va dire, la source de toutes choses."¹⁵⁷

Others were able to cope with, and overcome, the challenges because they maintained an optimistic or overall resilient attitude, particularly when confronted with employment obstacles and discrimination. In terms of her employment and financial struggles, Francine said, "[j]e vis toujours dans le contentement, quel que soit le degré de choses, quel que soit ce que je vis, j'essaie vraiment de tirer le maximum de la situation... on peut toujours, toujours être heureux si on le décide..."¹⁵⁸ Joanna also noted her perseverance and determination in achieving her career goals:

Il faut que tu te battes beaucoup. Il faut que tu montres tes compétences, il faut vraiment que tu travailles trois fois plus pour qu'on reconnaisse qui tu es en tant qu'immigrante. Et encore plus en tant qu'immigrante alors qu'un canadien va avoir un bon support et tout ça.¹⁵⁹

Keren, too, labelled herself as "une battante, un bosseuse,"¹⁶⁰ willing to pursue opportunities that will benefit her regardless of how difficult it may be, while Valérie and Yolande addressed the importance of working hard to reach their goals. Further, Bethanie shared how her mother has kept the microwave pan they used in the hotels they lived in as a memento of their financial burdens and struggles to find housing, but also of their resilience in overcoming challenges.

When it came to dealing with anti-Black racism and discrimination, Idara, Joanna, and Keren learned how to assert their rights, speak out against racist remarks or discriminatory actions,

¹⁵⁶ Translation: "I told him [God] and I said to myself, 'I spent ten years of my life in England. Small jobs, I've done. I finished school, I started another job, I'm on a good path and I decided to come here. I'm not going backwards.'"

¹⁵⁷ Translation: "... it helped me a lot... to have this relationship with God who is, let's say, the source of all things."

¹⁵⁸ Translation: "I always live in contentment, no matter how bad things are, no matter what I'm going through, I really try to make the most of the situation... you can always, always be happy if you decide to..."

¹⁵⁹ Translation: "You have to fight a lot. You have to show your skills, you really have to work three times harder to be recognized as an immigrant. And even more as an immigrant when a Canadian is going to have good support and all that."

¹⁶⁰ Translation: "... a fighter, a hard worker."

and advocate for change or reform by serving on diversity and inclusion committees. Bethanie and Rosalie indicated that learning about Canada's history with Indigenous peoples and slavery had educated them on racism and prepared them to speak out against such offences. Keren has learned to defend herself against those who have offended or discriminated against her, while Yolande has learned to just keep moving forward, stating, "I'm Black and I'll stay Black and it's not going to change. You take it or leave."

Moreover, participants had to renegotiate their identities to overcome some challenges. Some participants mentioned that adapting to Canadian culture meant losing their own cultural identity; however, others felt that adapting meant not only adjusting to a new culture and new ways of living, but also retaining one's own culture and lifelong beliefs and values. For instance, Michelle's mother wanted her and her siblings to retain their cultural identity by being raised in a Congolese household, speaking Lingala and embodying Congolese values, culture, and history. Thus, Michelle learned to adapt to Canadian culture while maintaining her Congolese identity. Rosalie, on the other hand, felt that because she arrived in Canada at a young age, it was easier for her to embrace and adopt Canadian culture while setting aside some of the culture she had known from the DRC, or "*ceux que vous avez déjà acquis, comme votre façon de faire*", renegotiating her identity to feel more at home in Canadian society. This is not to suggest that Rosalie rejected her Congolese identity, but that she had to shift her identity to facilitate her incorporation into Canadian society. Indeed, migration has sociocultural impacts on immigrants as they adapt into a new sociocultural setting, such as changes in language, food choice, religious beliefs, cultural festivities, and traditional dress (Mawire et al., 2020). Migration, however, can also encourage sociocultural diversity or the diffusion of cultures, like in Michelle's case. Yolande also discussed the shift in her identity and how, rather than imposing her way of being and thinking that was previously common and acceptable in other contexts (such as the DRC or Zambia), she had to present ways of being and thinking that were more accepted by those in Canada. Yolande said, "... you have to find a way of doing things that is more palatable to others, if you see what I mean", in order to better relate to colleagues.

Those who became mothers also spoke about having to renegotiate their identities as women, such as their aspirations, desires, and priorities, to resolve the challenges of motherhood and rediscover themselves. Valérie elaborated,

C'est certain que lorsqu'on est célibataire et qu'on n'a pas d'enfants, et qu'on est mariée, on a des enfants, la vie change, les priorités changent. Ce n'est plus seulement soi-même, mais on doit s'ajuster par rapport au mari, par rapport aux enfants, s'assurer que, ben, il y a une balance quelque part.¹⁶¹

Jamille also sacrificed many of her aspirations for her children, such as returning to France and continuing her studies as a nurse, but her aspirations for a better future for her children outweighed her own and were a new source of motivation for her to succeed in her career in Canada.

In fact, when considering the impacts of migration, several participants experienced changes in their identity, as well as acquired new perspectives on women's positionality. Though Michelle's forced migration to Canada resulted in the loss of her Congolese citizenship, she still considered herself Congolese and believed that her migration experiences had only strengthened her since she was able to adapt quickly to her circumstances. However, she acknowledged that this could be easier to do as a young child than as an adult when she compared her experiences to her mother's. Yolande thought the same regarding her identity, asserting:

You'll never take the Congolese girl out of me because it's part, I'm a mix of both. I see myself as this hybrid [*laughter*]. You know, and that's when, when I went back home in 2014, that was the first time I'd been home in almost sixteen years, and you go there, it's home but it's not home. You realize that your life — yes, it's part of your upbringing and everything else, but your life is no longer there anymore.

Yolande went on to describe how the countries she has settled in have shaped her identity: "... the years I spent in Zambia are very precious to me... That's where my walk strengthened in the Lord, the U.S. gave me my education, and Canada, that's where everything came together, right?" Bethanie and Idara did not believe their identities had changed because of their migration experiences until they returned to the DRC for a visit. Idara stated:

... du fait d'être passé ici et là sans se rendre compte qu'on ramasse quelques petits bouts de cultures par ci, par-là. Et on, en fait, quelque chose qui [ne] ressemble pas vraiment à ce qu'on a, ce qu'on avait chez soi même, la façon de voir les choses.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Translation: "It's certain that when you're single and don't have children, and you're married, you have children, life changes, priorities change. It's no longer just yourself anymore, but you have to adjust to your husband, to your children, to ensure that, well, there's a balance somewhere."

¹⁶² Translation: "... the fact of having passed here and there without realizing that we pick up a few bits of cultures here and there. And we, in fact, something that doesn't really resemble what we had, what we had back home, the way we see things."

Migrants' encounters with external systems to one's home country and new discoveries (e.g., information, knowledge) can lead to changes in identity and perspective, as well as a person's growth and development (Mawire et al., 2020). Keren confirmed this by stating: "Et justement, ces étapes-là, partout où je suis passée, tout ce vécu-là me permettent aujourd'hui de regarder le monde différemment."¹⁶³ Keren also claimed that navigating the various spheres is what shaped her into the person she is today. Yolande expressed the same sentiments:

Well, I think by going, first of all, going through several countries gives you different perspectives on things. And so, you see things a certain way that people here do not necessarily think. So, you bring a different point of view to the table, and that's, I think that's what my different migrating experiences, how they are influencing my choices and what I do.

Changes in the women's identities and perspectives included their views on gendered norms and values, as illustrated by Lehana:

I guess it changed the whole, 'Oh, you're a woman, you have to stay home,' type of thing. And then adjusting between, finding the adjustment between your culture, what your parents expect, what the Canadian society expects of you, type of thing. I think in the adjustment, there was a change, I would like to believe.

Following her migration trajectories to Canada, Valérie became more conscious of the state of the DRC, as well as the country's political instability and exploitation, in areas such as women's rights and children's welfare and development. Nonetheless, this shift in identity and perspectives led a few women to experience backlash from family members. For instance, Idara and Michelle's family back home in the DRC would refer to them as *Muzungu* (in Swahili and Bemba) or *Mundele* (in Lingala), which translates to "White-washed," or simply as *la Canadienne* (French for "the Canadian"). Bethanie also had similar experiences, where her family back home would refer to her as *bana na poto* (in Lingala), meaning "child from Europe" (or a variation of White-washed).

Other participants thought that the voyage had little impact on them. Despite experiencing a forced migration to Canada, Keisha believed her identity remained intact since she was still young and growing up when she embarked on her journey, and that the experiences of migration only naturally shaped her identity. She explained, "the surroundings you grow up with affect who

¹⁶³ Translation: "And precisely, those stages, everywhere I passed through, all those experiences allow me today to look at the world differently."

you become.” Francine felt her migration had no impact on her since her travel to Canada went well and did not call anything into question. She did, however, mention that her migration to Canada gave her a sense of self-confidence, which motivated her incorporation. Samora shared the same sentiment, particularly after migrating to a country far from her home for the first time “[p]endant qu’on n’y a jamais pensé et c’est arrivé.”¹⁶⁴ Idara was also very proud of herself as a woman for making her own migration decisions. She elaborated:

Je dois dire que je suis fière de moi d’avoir pris cette décision [de migrer de la RDC] [*éclat de rires*] parce que je me disais, je me dis c’est une décision que j’ai prise toute seule. C’est une décision que j’ai prise à l’époque quand j’apprenais en tant qu’une femme seule, une femme seule, célibataire. Au-delà de la trentaine même. Donc, peut-être, on se dirait, « Mais comment? Au lieu qu’elle se précipite vers le mariage. » À l’époque, quand je faisais mes plans, donc, j’étais seule. J’étais seul. J’avais pris cette décision toute seule de venir. J’étais fière de moi.¹⁶⁵

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Overall, participants faced a diverse range of experiences and outcomes during their migration trajectories to Canada, all of which (both facilitating and disruptive events) impacted how their life course unfolded (Wingens et al., 2011). As they reflected on their migration journey, participants were proud of their achievements thus far and grateful for the opportunity to share their narrative since it allowed them to comprehend their lived experiences, including the challenges and opportunities that emerged, as well as how migration affected their lives. As Jamille noted of her life stories, “[c]’est très enrichissant parce que ça te situe un peu où tu étais avant, où tu es maintenant, où tu t’en vas.”¹⁶⁶ Several participants have since returned to the DRC on a few occasions to visit family and friends, an experience Bethanie characterized as feeling “complete”, or that Keren characterized as “le sentiment d’être chez soi.”¹⁶⁷ Yet, none of the participants have planned for a permanent return to the country due to the roots they have built in Canada and the

¹⁶⁴ Translation: “While you never thought about it [leaving], and it happened.”

¹⁶⁵ Translation: “I have to say that I’m proud of myself for making that decision [to migrate from the DRC] [*laughter*] because I would say to myself, I say to myself this is a decision I made on my own. It was a decision I made at the time when I was studying as a single woman, a single woman, unmarried. Beyond my thirties even. So, maybe, they would say, ‘But how? Instead of her rushing into marriage.’ At the time, when I was making my plans, so, I was on my own. I was on my own. I made that decision on my own to come. I was proud of myself.”

¹⁶⁶ Translation: “[i]t’s very enriching because it gives you a sense of where you were before, where you are now, where you’re headed.”

¹⁶⁷ Translation: “... the feeling of being at home.”

risks that many anticipate when retuning to a country with ongoing conflicts, turmoil, inequalities, and tribalism. For the time being, some participants, such as Yolande, cannot help but feel like “a traitor to some extent” since their lives are no longer in the DRC.

Discussion of Participants’ Gendered Migration Trajectories

By examining the women’s migration trajectories, we can refute the notion that their migration is a simple, linear, one-directional, and permanent process, as previous transit migration studies have shown and argued (e.g., Schapendonk, 2012; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schwarz, 2020). For example, in the participants’ life stories, the decision to leave family behind and embark on a journey elsewhere was framed by some as an abrupt and difficult decision to escape insecurities and inequalities and pursue greater opportunities elsewhere. In a few cases, the decision to leave was not disclosed to the participants until the final moments. Furthermore, a few participants had experienced some form of mobility prior to their emigration from the DRC. This subsequently impacted their decision to leave the country and pursue opportunities elsewhere since they had been exposed to a different culture more accepting of women’s freedom and equality, which resonated with them. Others settled in transit countries (sometimes multiple) prior to their arrival and settlement in Canada, countries in which participants had unpredictable stays or that they initially considered as their permanent home. This was shown in the cases of Bethanie, Valérie, and Keren, who became South African, French, and British citizens, respectively, or in the circumstances of Keisha and Amina, who spent an indeterminate amount of time in Uganda and Belgium (respectively) while awaiting resettlement in Canada. Others had stayovers or layovers with impactful experiences, such as Michelle and Bethanie who experienced moments of vulnerability and uncertainty at the border on their way to Canada. Thus, the women’s migration trajectories support the premise that migration is not an abstract transition from one’s country of origin to their final destination or a clearly structured process (Collyer et al., 2014; Mallett & Hagen-Zanker, 2018). Rather, their migration trajectories comprised of impactful decision-making, actions, experiences, interactions, networks, and circumstances that not only rendered each of the women’s migration and settlement experiences unique (Schapendonk, 2012): each stage created both obstacles and opportunities that the women faced during their settlement in Canada (Wachter et al., 2016). An example from the women’s life stories is the difficulty in accessing certain social services or economic opportunities in Canada because of one’s mode of

entry (for instance, as a refugee), which was influenced by factors such as the autonomous decision to flee the DRC's culture of inequality, the influence of social networks on one's aspiration to settle in Canada, encounters with insecurity in transit countries, or changing migration projects.

Moreover, the experiences uncovered in the women's life stories were profoundly rooted and mediated by micro, meso, and macro factors at all stages of their migration, which influenced the outcomes of trajectories. At the micro level of analysis, factors included the women's decision-making processes (e.g., the decision to leave the DRC or transit countries, actions taken to surmount obstacles or address ambiguities along the journey, personal agency, and coping mechanisms); their aspirations (e.g., goals for employment and education abroad, reuniting with family, achieving higher standards of living, and settling in specific destinations); emotions (e.g., fear, vulnerability, stress, gratitude, joy); and transformation of subjectivities and identities. At the meso level, factors included the women's social networks (e.g., family, friends, acquaintances, and chance encounters); resource mobilization from networks along the journey (e.g., knowledge, skills, support, furniture, clothes, and remittances); and power relations (e.g., gender or racial power dynamics in the home, workplace, or the community). At the macro level of analysis, factors included bureaucratic hurdles with immigration applications (e.g., obtaining visas and permanent residency); border controls and security (e.g., questioning at borders); and open immigration programs and services (e.g., family reunification and assistance to refugees). These findings are consistent with previous studies discussed in Chapter Three, about the impacts of individual sociopsychological processes, social networks and interpersonal ties, and institutional structures on migration trajectories (e.g., Awumbila et al., 2017; Grillo, 2007; Ho, 2011; Mahieu et al., 2015; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schapendonk et al., 2020; Schwarz, 2020; Wissink et al., 2020).

To illustrate, there are various types of migration, including labour migration, family reunification, refugee and asylum-seeker movements, and temporary movements (Castles & Miller, 1998). At the micro level, gender relations in the family influenced the migration type that each participant experienced, such as whether they were classified as 'dependent' migrants reuniting with their spouses or travelling with their families (family reunification, refugee movement), or 'independent' migrants pursuing personal aspirations abroad (temporary movements, refugee movement). At the meso level, support networks such as chance encounters or agencies aided participants in their onward migration by assisting them in overcoming obstacles or addressing difficulties related to one's migration. Lastly, at the macro level, implicit gender

norms and biases in immigration policies or border regimes have rendered some participants (such as Amina who sought family reunification and Bethanie who arrived as a young asylum seeker) vulnerable during migration trajectories (e.g., facing bureaucratic restrictions) or that impacted their mode of entry into Canada (e.g., presenting oneself as a vulnerable refugee).

Furthermore, previous research on Congolese women's migration has revealed that they often face trauma, insecurities, isolation, and hardships during their journeys from the DRC to their new country (e.g., Saksena & McMorrow, 2020; Wachter et al., 2016). As per Wachter et al.'s (2016) study on Congolese refugee women, these factors are often brought on by the women's sudden loss of home and support networks, pervasive risk of gender-based violence, poverty, and food insecurity (to name the few). While the women in this study did not experience most of these circumstances, participants who arrived in Canada as government-assisted refugees or refugee claimants (even if their original decision to leave the DRC was under different circumstances) were more likely to face some trauma, insecurity, vulnerability, isolation, or hardships along their migration trajectories, particularly at border crossings. And, as Wachter et al. (2016) noted, these experiences are often the consequences of pre-migration experiences, such as the war or violence in the DRC, which resulted in the forced migration of some participants and the experience of trauma or isolation at certain points along their journey. Thus, certain experiences from growing up in a repressive political regime, such as the Congo's, affect the migration and post-migration stages of some Congolese women's migration trajectories.

That said, the life stories presented in this chapter also assist in unpacking how the women's migration trajectories are gendered, answering the first research question in the following sections. Migration has been defined in the literature as a gendered process in which various systems of gendered power relations at the micro, meso and macro levels play a significant role in shaping women's migration processes and outcomes (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Carling, 2005; Espín & Dottolo, 2015; Mahieu et al., 2015; Timmerman et al., 2015). I have also defined migration trajectories as gendered, women enacting and experiencing mobility differently due to gender norms and relations that are firmly embedded in societal structures and institutions throughout the migration trajectories (see Chapter Three). This includes the impacts of gender relations or dynamics on decisions and aspirations (migration projects), types of social networks, access to resources, types of migration, modes of entry, and immigration status. Such gender-related factors have expressed themselves in the women's migration trajectories — whether explicitly or

implicitly — and influenced aspects of their settlement in Canada (Mahieu et al., 2015; Schrover & Yeo, 2010). Table 6 summarizes the instances of gender-related factors at the micro, meso, and macro levels that I identified as impacting the women’s migration trajectories from the DRC to Canada.¹⁶⁸

Table 6

The Relationship of Gender Relations and Gender-Related Factors to Migration Trajectories

Stages of Migration Trajectories	Analyzed Gender Relations and Factors
Pre-Migration Stage: The DRC	Micro: Gender equality and inequalities in the family (e.g., gender roles and norms, decision-making powers); migration projects Meso: Gender inequalities in society (e.g., gender discrimination, gender-based violence, gender roles and norms) Macro: Gender inequalities and educational barriers, inequitable family laws
The Journey: Migration Trajectories and Transit Countries	Micro: Gender equality and inequalities in the family (e.g., gender roles and norms, decision-making powers); insecurities, isolation, and vulnerability; motivations and aspirations (i.e., migration projects); resiliency and agency Meso: Available opportunities and resources; distinct social networks Macro: Types of migration; border crossings and modes of entry; immigration documentation/application
Post-Migration Stage: Canada	Micro: Gender equality and inequalities in the family (e.g., gender roles and norms, decision-making powers); insecurities, isolation, and vulnerability; resiliency and agency Meso: Available opportunities and resources; distinct social networks; gender discrimination Macro: Immigration status; immigration documentation/application

Note. The gender-related factors highlighted in the post-migration stage reflect the ongoing effects of such factors resulting from the women’s migration trajectories rather than the experiences that follow from settling in Canada.

¹⁶⁸ The presentation of results may suggest a linear idea of migration, yet the findings are interpreted in a way that facilitates comprehension of the women’s experiences, particularly the gender-related factors implicated in their migration trajectories.

Gender-Related Factors in the Pre-Migration Stage of Trajectories

Gender Equality and Inequalities. The DRC has been described by Freedman (2015) as a culture of inequality, in which gender norms and unequal gender relations have become widespread and entrenched within society since colonialism. This culture of inequality was apparent in the women's accounts of their upbringing in the DRC, most evident in the family and society, as well as in the three main political eras during which the women grew up. Many of the participants experienced or witnessed unequal gender relations in their family household, where they or their mothers were subject to gender roles and had to obey inequitable gender norms. As a young girl, Samora was expected to fulfill gender roles, such as being responsible of household chores. Michelle, Jamille, Joanna, and Yolande's mothers were under their husband's "authority" (Freedman, 2015, p.30), in the sense that their husbands, as the head of household, had the power to determine whether they should work. Yolande's mother did work, but she revealed that her mother was also once under the authority of her own father (Yolande's grandfather), who forbade her from attending university and instead compelled her to marry young and take on the role of caregiver to her husband and their children. Gender norms were thus passed on from generation to generation in some cases and experienced by women of all ages, including children like Samora.

As heads of household, husbands had control over the family's finances since they were the primary source of income. The consequences of this are significant: not only does it contribute to place women and girls in subservient positions in the household (Lusey et al., 2018), but if the husband is no longer present, the family may be deprived of resources, as in Joanna's case when her father passed away. This would later influence Joanna's decision to leave the DRC on a scholarship to pursue an engineering degree in Canada and to provide for her family back in Congo through remittances.

Participants also experienced or witnessed unequal gender relations in society, which impacted what they could wear, the resources they could access, and their vulnerability to gender-based violence. Women's inability to wear pants in public, the prevalence of misogyny and gender discrimination (such as catcalling or refusing women certain work and educational opportunities due to their gender), and vulnerability to rape were all examples given in the life stories. Such norms are even reinforced by child soldiers, according to Idara, which is not unexpected considering that many (child) soldiers in the DRC are taught dominant forms of masculinities and gender discourses in the military (Baaz & Stern, 2009). Much of the gender relations and norms

in the household and society appear to have stemmed from systemic factors like colonial laws and values, policies, and legislations such as President Mobutu's *authenticité* and the DRC's *Family Code*, which have established Congolese society as patriarchal with power disparities between men and women (Freedman, 2015; Wilson, 1982).

While many Congolese women are raised in environments that attempt to instill in them the need to conform and internalize traditional gender norms (Lusey et al., 2018), many of the participants (and their families) have challenged the status quo, especially through education. For instance, despite growing up in a patriarchal family, Yolande's parents encouraged her to break away from gender roles and pursue an education. Both Idara and Dalia's fathers encouraged and motivated them to pursue higher education, and both were able to earn an undergraduate degree despite societal norms. Challenging societal norms was especially important for Dalia, who was *une femme Kasaienne*, or a woman who is meant to marry instead of study. These examples were a particularly significant finding because, since the colonial period, the education system has played a substantial role in the decline of the status of women in the DRC, for instance, offering fewer opportunities for female education (Wilson, 1982). Thus, despite being raised in a culture of inequality, the women were empowered by their families (mainly by their fathers) to pursue opportunities that are often denied to women in the DRC. This was often due to families recognizing the value and benefit of participants obtaining an education to escape the turmoil in the DRC and live the prosperous life that many did not experience growing up.

However, the participants' social status also had an impact. For example, Dalia, Joanna, and Keren recognized their privileged upbringing and higher socioeconomic status in the DRC. Keren's father was both a doctor and university professor, while Dalia's father was also a university professor. Francine, Jamille, and Keisha recognized that they were financially stable and were never short of resources. From this viewpoint, it is understandable that some of the participants' fathers acknowledged the value of education and encouraged their daughters to pursue their educational goals abroad. Leaving the DRC thus became acceptable in the household.

Migration Projects and Decision-Making. Although participants enjoyed much of the freedom granted to them in their family to pursue an education, they were not granted similar freedoms in society and sometimes faced backlash if they voiced their opinions too strongly. It is in part due to these pervasive social norms that five participants (Dalia, Francine, Joanna, Keren, and Yolande) were compelled to embark on a journey elsewhere and seek educational and

professional opportunities, or simply a better life. According to Boyd and Grieco (2003), the socio-cultural context of the country of origin can influence how migration decisions are taken (i.e., whether it is an autonomous decision for women) and how migration occurs (i.e., economic or family migration). It appears, then, that these five participants did not adhere to the culture of inequality in which the decision to migrate is often made by men (Boyd & Grieco, 2003), but instead, planned their own mobility and aspirations, or migration projects, which also impacted their migration type and the journey in which they embarked. This also contrasts with the idea that women are involuntary migrants who are forced to leave their country of origin to follow their spouses (Lutz, 2010; Sharpe, 2001). The autonomy in their decision to migrate can also be attributed to their family's openness to gender equality in the household, as well as the women's class position in the DRC and their family's financial resources, which provided access to migration as a strategy to escape the DRC's culture of inequality and pursue opportunities.

Idara also embarked on a journey to Japan to pursue an education, yet her father's encouragement played a significant role in her decision. As a result, it is not her father's authority that played a role in this decision, but rather his support that enabled her to migrate. Lastly, Jamine, Rosalie, Valérie, Michelle, and Keisha's parents made the collective decision to leave the DRC, illustrating that their mothers had equal decision-making powers to their spouses. Nonetheless, as young girls with limited agency, these participants were not given the autonomy to choose whether and where to migrate.

For other participants, the decision to leave the DRC was made for them by husbands or fathers. Due to traditional gender roles in the family, two of the women's husbands made the decision for them to leave the DRC and to be reunited in Canada. Amina and Samora, however, expressed that they did not want to leave the DRC but had no choice, which is illustrative of the male authority and decision-making in the family (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). Amina stated:

... it wasn't even my idea to leave Congo one day, no. Because I met my husband and because he had a problem in Congo, that's why I have to move here. So, I have to follow him. That's why I left Congo. But [in] my mind... I didn't have [the] idea to leave Congo one day, no.

Therefore, as Schapendonk and Steel (2014) observed in their study, the "intimate spheres" of the women's marriages shaped their migration (p.266), both in terms of the decision to migrate and the type of migration, as the women sacrificed their desires to remain in the DRC to reunite with

their husbands who wished to remain in Canada. This also raised some challenges and created vulnerabilities affecting the women's journeys, which will be addressed in the following section. In the cases of Lehana and Bethanie, their fathers were already settled in Canada and South Africa, respectively, therefore what seemed to be a gender-neutral decision between their parents was arguably determined when the fathers already settled abroad.

Overall, the extent of women's autonomy is linked to migration experiences, and decision-making powers (whether they wield them or not) is an important impetus to migration trajectories. Namely, instances of gender relations and norms manifesting in the pre-migration stage, whether in the home or society, influenced the start of the women's migration trajectories. The next section will highlight how these factors have produced additional instances of gender-specific disadvantages and opportunities, demonstrating how the women's gender-based experiences in the DRC might intersect with their migration experiences (Wachter et al., 2016).

Gendered Migration Trajectories

Scholars have identified multiple ways in which gender relations affect women's migration, including their ability to migrate, the timing of their migration, and their final destination (Boyd & Grieco, 2003); their experiences of gender discrimination throughout their migration (Carling, 2005); the social networks and resources they have access to (Lutz, 2010; Mahieu et al., 2015; Schrover & Yeo, 2010); and the rights and entitlements that come from women's distinct trajectories and modes of entry (Mahieu et al., 2015).

Dalia, Joanna, and Amina expressed that they did not encounter any gender-related factors that may have impacted their journeys to Canada. Joanna claimed, "[j]'ai voyagé comme tout le monde, et je suis arrivée [au Canada], il n'y avait pas de problème au niveau de l'aéroport, il n'y avait pas des gens de, on va dire, comme triages."¹⁶⁹ Dalia also indicated that she was never subjected to discrimination during her journey, but was merely treated as "une être humaine ordinaire."¹⁷⁰ Lastly, Amina felt she was well-respected as a woman by immigration agents in both Belgium and Canada, claiming:

¹⁶⁹ Translation: "I traveled like everyone else, and I arrived [in Canada], there was no problem at the airport, there were no people from, let's say, like triage."

¹⁷⁰ Translation: "... an ordinary human being."

I didn't feel little. I didn't feel mistreat, no. No, they [the immigration agents] was talking to me as a human being, and with respect, they explained to me everything. They didn't mistreat me, no. I didn't see that. No.

Nevertheless, an analysis of the participants' experiences revealed that migration is a gendered process at various stages of the journey (the journeys undertaken, and the transit countries or layovers/stayovers visited), even for those who made the autonomous decision to migrate and with the intention of escaping the DRC's culture of inequality. And, in most cases, gendered processes were unrecognized or unobserved by participants but had an impact on their migration. Thus, a key finding that will be demonstrated in this study is that participants' migration trajectories from the DRC to Canada are gendered, manifested at micro, meso, and macro levels of analyses. The gender-related factors are reflected in the women's migration projects; migration types; experiences of insecurities, isolation, and vulnerability; available opportunities and resources; immigration documentation or application; border crossings and modes of entry; gender roles and relations (e.g., decision-making powers); resiliency and agency; and distinct social networks. These elements will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Gender-Related Factors in Transit Country Settlement and Stopovers. Gender-related factors were evident in various aspects of the trajectories of the nine participants that set out on a journey to transit countries. Many of these emerged because of their migration projects. I previously discussed migration projects as the narratives or options in which migrants choose their own factors or reasons for wanting to migrate to another country (Grillo, 2007). Migrants' aspirations to relocate to another country are also referred to as migration projects. Therefore, as stated in the preceding section, participants were compelled to leave the DRC for their transit countries not just in pursuit of educational opportunities but also to escape the DRC's culture of inequality and political instability, suggesting that their migration projects were founded on their gendered perceptions of the world — that the environment for women's equity and freedom is better elsewhere — and their desire to escape gender inequality, even when the decision to leave was not made independently. Others were compelled to leave the DRC to reunite with their husbands settled in Canada, illustrative of the impacts of gender relations on the women's desire to leave the country.

Some participants, such as Idara and Francine, set off on their journey with a specific and well-defined project in mind, knowing exactly where they were going and why (pursuing a

doctorate in Japan and aspiring to be a nun in Spain, respectively). Others, however, were weighing their options as they embarked on their journey and pursued various projects to determine what was the best and most realistic way to achieve their aspirations (Grillo, 2007). To illustrate, Keren pursued various educational opportunities in Italy, Belgium, and finally England to attain her professional aspirations. Her marriage to a British citizen also influenced her migration project to settle permanently (at least initially) in England. Amina's migration project was initially aimed toward Canada, but she altered her migration project and felt it best to await her permanent residency to Canada in Belgium, though her stay would be indeterminate, and she would be left in a state of uncertainty and insecurity. Keisha and her family had intended to seek refuge at the UN compound for displaced persons in Eastern Congo during the civil war, yet their migration project changed when a family friend proposed they flee to Uganda via cargo plane. They would eventually reside in Uganda for four years before being relocated to Canada. Regardless, participants' migration projects were gender-based in terms of decision-making powers (autonomous decision versus decision made by father or husband) and migration motivations and aspirations (for reasons including escaping gender inequalities and insecurities), which ultimately defined their migration types.

Women are increasingly involved in all types of migration. The nine participants who travelled to transit countries did so as voluntary or forced migrants, and as temporary migrants (on student or travel visas), refugees, or permanent residents (under family reunification). But despite the diversity of the women's migration types, their stories revealed gender-specific migration patterns that have been documented in migration research discussed in earlier chapters.¹⁷¹ Gender inequality in the DRC was a significant factor in Idara, Keren, Francine, and Yolande's decision to embark on their journey as voluntary and temporary migrants (or students) to pursue their educational and professional aspirations. Indeed, since the onset of political unrest in the 1990s, Congolese women have increasingly migrated from the DRC to Western countries for socioeconomic reasons and as autonomous migrants, as men's unemployment rates in the DRC increased and women gained more status and decision-making power within the household (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016; Toma & Vause, 2014). However, the impacts of migration on

¹⁷¹ Valérie was compelled to migrate to France as a 'dependent', but of the eight participants who settled first in transit countries, only Valérie initially settled as a permanent resident (and eventually a French citizen) when she accompanied her parents to the country. Because not much was shared of her experiences to, and in, France, an analysis of gender-related factors beyond her migration type could not be done.

these participants, as well as their vulnerability to experiencing harmful expressions of patriarchy during their trajectories (through various social contexts and encounters; Espín & Dottolo, 2015), have been strongly influenced by such migration types. To illustrate, when Idara set out on her journey to Japan, she felt uneasy and shocked when she was confronted by border officials during her layover in Paris, France, due to her temporary status and the prejudices the officials may have held of her as a young Black student that made them question her motives for travelling. Yolande was also questioned by a border official who assumed she was a drug dealer when she visited her husband in Canada from the United States, adding, “she couldn’t understand why I would just come for a week.” Because migrant women are often regarded as ‘dependents’ to spouses or other male migrants by immigration policies and practices (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Kofman et al., 2000; Simmons, 2010), it is unsurprising that being a temporary migrant woman raised some concerns and resistance at a layover or border for Idara and Yolande.

As a temporary migrant still developing her migration project, Keren experienced moments of uncertainty and vulnerability due to her unpreparedness for her initial journey to Italy; she was lost, confused, and unsure of how to reach her final destination from the airport, and she did not have enough money to purchase transit tickets. Keren believed she was in this predicament because she grew up in a society where she was often regarded as a child, even as a twenty-seven-year-old at the time, while it could also be related to the culture of inequality. As a young woman in a patriarchal society, she had few financial responsibilities in the family and thus never felt the need to carry around much cash, even when she travelled: “Je prends \$200 USD et je pense que c’est suffisant [*éclat de rires*].”¹⁷² The patriarchy in the DRC, which often defines men as the providers for their families and gives them control over the family’s resources (Freedman, 2015), can have an impact on women’s ability to migrate (Boyd & Grieco, 2003), as in Keren’s case, where a lack of financial independence in the family impacted her outlook on migration, even when she had access to the resources needed through her father in the DRC, her mother in Belgium and her husband in England.

Gender-related factors were also identified during the women’s stay in their transit country — stages in the migration process that are often overlooked in migration studies — because of their migration project and status as temporary migrants. Overall, the women stated in their life stories that they were well-incorporated into their respective transit countries and saw these

¹⁷² Translation: “I took \$200 USD and I think that’s enough [*laughter*].”

countries as an encouraging and accommodating environment. Despite this, participants were subjected to certain gendered interactions that created both obstacles and opportunities during their migration. For example, as a young girl, Jamille felt isolated the moment she arrived at the Brussels boarding school where her parents had enrolled her as a strategy to escape political insecurity spurred by her father's position in President Mobutu's government. While the intentions of her parents were genuine, Jamille was subjected to social pressure common among adolescent girls in the DRC (McLean & Modi, 2016), to be a good student and find time to study while caring for and ensuring the well-being of her siblings. Her desire to protect her siblings, however, outweighed the expectations of being a good student, where "[c]haque année, on me menaçait d'être renvoyée, chaque année!"¹⁷³

As student migrants, Idara, Keren, and Yolande were in a state of transience lasting from months to years. Although they were permitted to remain in their respective countries to pursue an education, they were aware that their stay was only temporary. Yet, unanticipated challenges in the form of unemployment arose, reinforcing the gender disparity that Congolese women face in terms of educational and professional opportunities in the DRC, which these women sought to escape in the first place. Despite having earned her master's degree in England, Keren struggled to find work in her field of study due to her status as a non-British citizen. Idara, too, struggled to find work after completing her PhD. In pursuit of work, she also considered returning to the DRC or settling in France. Yolande had to jump through bureaucratic hurdles to remain in Zambia as a student, including visiting an immigration office to prove her student status and eligibility to remain in the country.

Moreover, gender-specific migration patterns were also apparent in Bethanie and Keisha's migration trajectories to South Africa and Uganda, respectively. Since the civil wars in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there has been an increased outflow of refugees and asylum seekers into neighbouring countries such as Uganda and South Africa (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016; Freedman, 2015). In general, women are overrepresented as refugees and displaced persons (Harzig, 2001; Lutz, 2010), and though migration from the DRC to neighbouring African countries is predominantly male (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016), Bethanie and Keisha's migration as refugees to South Africa and Uganda was a result of the migratory choices available to them and their family. According to Harzig (2001), "[o]ften due to fewer resources being made available to

¹⁷³ Translation: "[e]very year, I was threatened with dismissal, every year!"

them by family and support networks, women have fewer options for seeking refuge, usually escaping to neighbouring countries” (p.19). The only viable option for Bethanie’s mother was to seek refuge in South Africa after Bethanie’s father had already migrated to the country to pursue his studies. Keisha’s mother seized the opportunity to migrate to Uganda when a family friend suggested the possibility of being smuggled aboard a cargo plane since no other options or means of transportation were available. As a result, for Keisha’s mother, safety overshadowed all other concerns, such as the family’s illegal border crossings and non-status in Uganda. Thus, the resources and opportunities embedded in the women’s social networks prompted their decisions to settle in their respective countries.

However, Bethanie and Keisha’s experiences as young refugee girls presented them with challenges and vulnerabilities. Examples provided in the life stories were Bethanie’s repeated encounters with insecurity (being attacked several times, going through an armed robbery, struggling financially, and living with the prevalence of gender-based violence), and Keisha’s state of transience as she awaited resettlement. Awaiting resettlement, Keisha and her family were unable to fully (and permanently) rebuild their lives, despite their best efforts to form ties and seek conditions that would allow them to incorporate into society for as long as required (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008), such as enrolling in school, maintaining ties with family members living in Uganda, and being involved in social activities. This state of transience not only put Keisha in uncertainty, but also made her more vulnerable to exploitation as she was unable to exercise numerous social and economic rights throughout her time in the country.

Unlike the others, Amina, who planned to settle in Canada, was forced to stay in Belgium for eight months while her Canadian permanent residency application was being processed. Settling in Belgium was a strategic response to the options available to her at the time: obtaining a visitor’s visa to Belgium was far simpler than obtaining one to Canada, allowing her to escape the dangers emerging in the DRC while she awaited permanent residency. However, Amina’s migration trajectories to Canada were made more vulnerable and insecure by her strategic response and her aspirations to reunite with her husband. For instance, her visitor’s visa expired, and she became undocumented; she resided for a few months in a shelter, afraid to leave for fear of being deported; she lived in a state of transience; and she was unsure whether the Canadian government would grant her permanent residency. Amina also felt isolated and lonely since she was separated from her family and friends and found it difficult to connect with others in Belgium. Like Keisha,

Amina also had to overcome bureaucratic obstacles to continue her journey onward, including completing applications, medical examinations, and interviews, as well as enduring waiting periods for approvals. What facilitated dealing with these bureaucratic obstacles for both Keisha and Amina were the help they received from their father and husband, respectively, in filling out forms and providing money to cover the cost of applications; thus, the outcomes of the women's migration were still reliant on men and the resources they provided (Boyd & Greico, 2003).

Notably, the women's life stories showed how they overcame obstacles through resiliency, perseverance, and tactics. Congolese women have shown to possess strength and agency under precarious situations during migration to propel them through the adversity they faced (Wachter et al., 2016). Among those who first settled in transit countries, Jamille, Keren, and Yolande relied on their faith in God to persevere in the face of uncertainty and isolation. Keren also drew on her marriage to a British citizen to gain access to job opportunities. Therefore, rather than continuing to depend on her husband for financial support, Keren used her marriage to a British citizen to demonstrate and establish her permanence in the country, mobilize social capital, and profoundly influence her access to opportunities and realize her employment aspirations. To circumvent being found suspicious of wanting to stay in Canada while visiting her husband on a visitor's visa, Jamille managed to reassure border officials that she had no intentions of staying in Canada permanently, pulling on her enrollment in school as a measure of her permanence in Belgium and lack of interest to remain in the country. Bethanie, Keren, and Jamille even sought changes to their immigration statuses while settled in transit countries (being granted citizenship and permanent residency), which brought positive outcomes to their migration trajectories, such as the ability to work or leave the country to visit family in different countries. Lastly, the women participated in their new society in various ways to adapt, gain autonomy, and feel well-incorporated, such as attending and performing well in school, seeking employment, getting married, or participating in community activities.

Most importantly, the women relied on chance encounters and both bonding and bridging social ties to overcome challenges. Wissink et al. (2020) highlight the importance of chance encounters in structuring migrants' experiences and migration trajectories. For instance, migrants can cross borders, mobilize resources, or find jobs through a chance encounter along the journey with someone who shares a valuable resource at a critical point that shapes the migration trajectory (Wissink et al., 2020). In the life stories, Keren and Keisha relied on chance encounters and

acquaintances to safely arrive at their destinations. To illustrate, on the plane to Italy, Keren met a young traveller who, along with her friend, assisted Keren in purchasing the required tickets to reach her final destination. Keisha's family friend, whom they met while fleeing political unrest, informed them of the cargo plane that could take them to safety in Uganda. Amina's chance encounter at the airport in Belgium benefitted her in finding the Canadian Embassy. Amina later befriended a woman at the shelter who offered her a place to stay to feel more secure while awaiting her permanent residency to Canada. Thus, chance encounters can provide migrant women with a source of support, enabling them to deal with precarious circumstances or to proceed with their journey (Wissink et al., 2020).

Collyer (2007) and Wissink et al. (2020) also highlight the importance of social networks (both bonding and bridging ties) in structuring migrants' experiences and in facilitating onward migration, which was also evident among participants of this study. As discussed in Chapter Two, bonding social ties are tighter or stronger bonds inherent in networks of friendship and kin, while bridging social ties are weak ties in social networks such as ties with members of organizations or acquaintances (Teorell, 2003). For instance, Keren and Idara relied on their relationships with fellow students to learn English and Japanese, respectively, or help them navigate their respective cities and education system. Keren also relied on networking opportunities in Britain to find a job after completing her master's degree. Bethanie and Keisha relied on family members who lived in their respective transit country (South Africa and Uganda, respectively) to assist them in settling in and learning the basics. Keren and a few of her friends in England formed a women's network to help one another incorporate into society in various ways. Similarly, Idara and a few other international students formed a small social network to motivate one another through their studies and support one another in Japan, while Yolande depended on her friends and Christian Fellowship in both Zambia and the United States for support and assistance with her settlement. Moreover, Amina received remittances from her husband to pay for the sponsorship application and purchase essentials during her eight-month stay in Belgium, as she was unable to work or earn an income to support herself.

As a result, the women often relied on chance encounters and bridging social ties for short-term and immediate responses to obstacles, while they relied on establishing social networks and maintaining bonding social ties to address long-term settlement goals and obstacles. This includes

mobilizing the resources available to their husbands or fathers to assist in settlement. Participants took advantage of their circumstances to overcome obstacles along their journey.

Gender-Related Factors in Journeys to Canada. Apart from Amina, the eight participants who embarked on a journey to, and settled in, transit countries experienced changes in their aspirations and motivations, causing their migration projects and trajectories to shift once more. Many, like Idara, Jamille, and Keren, were able to migrate again in part because of the education and employment they obtained, which provided them with the means and resources to do so. As per Castles and Miller (1998), migration that begins with one type of movement often continues with another (e.g., starting as a labour migrant and continuing as a permanent settler), and this was true for the majority of the eight participants who settled in transit countries, arriving in Canada under a different migration type than when they left the DRC. For instance, Francine's migration project was altered from migrating to Spain on a student visa to finding herself in a transit situation where her migration trajectories continued onward to Canada as a refugee claimant. The other women who settled in transit countries also sought resettlement in Canada to be reunited with their spouses or to seek refuge; yet, unlike when they first set out on their journey, this decision was not always an autonomous one, but involved their spouse or parents. Indeed, similar to Schapendonk and Steel's (2014) findings, many of the women's journey to Canada were made possible, or dependent on the opportunities made available, by the fact that their husband or father had already settled in the country. Therefore, while leaving the DRC empowered these women and gave them a sense of autonomy, their migration trajectories also resulted in new dependencies on their spouse, which recreated old gender relations from the DRC.

For example, Valérie, Keren, and Yolande sought resettlement in Canada under the family class (through the sponsorship process) as their husbands were already settled in the country as permanent residents. In Keren's case, she was hesitant to make this decision because she had become well-incorporated in England and did not want to become a new arrival again. Jamille had one more year of school to become a nurse and was working as a student nurse when she decided to visit her husband in Canada on a tourist visa. She indicated, "[j]'avais une belle vie. Je travaillais. J'étudiais, ce que j'aimais bien, et je me disais, 'Bon, si on vient [au Canada], on va revenir à Bruxelles.'" ¹⁷⁴ However, when she became pregnant with her first child, Jamille's

¹⁷⁴ Translation: "I had a good life. I was working. I was studying, which I liked a lot, and I said to myself, 'Well, if I come [to Canada], I'll come back to Brussels.'"

temporary stay in Canada turned permanent, and her migration project adjusted accordingly. Lastly, despite some of the women's higher education levels and professional careers, Idara was the only participant who migrated to Canada under the economic class, though having her husband in the country was, in part, an incentive for relocating.

Therefore, even as some participants made the autonomous decision to leave the DRC, their spouses, and the desire to start a family, were driving factors in their final decision to migrate (again) to Canada. This implies that while migration enabled the women to escape gender norms prevalent in Congolese society, and a means of achieving autonomy in transit countries (Carling, 2005; Matos, 2016; Tastsoglou et al., 2005), the erosion of patriarchy was not simple, such that the women's increased autonomy is not inherent in migration, but rather a result of the need to renegotiate gender relations both during and after the migration process (Willis & Yeoh, 2000). The life stories also revealed how marriages, relationships, or becoming a mother had an essential part in redefining both the women's migration project and migration type, serving as a motivating factor for them to leave their transit country and to continue their migration trajectories onward to Canada. Conclusively, much of the eight participants' migration projects and their migration types to Canada remained gendered, as they had been for the majority of those who journeyed straight to Canada from the DRC as refugees or family migrants, apart from Joanna, who travelled to Canada on a student visa. To underline, women are often overrepresented in family reunification, spousal, or refugee migration flows, resulting in the gendering of migration (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Kofman et al., 2000), including within Canada where immigration policies are designed to favour men as principal applicants and women as dependents or spouses (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; O'Neill et al., 2012; Simmons, 2010).

In most cases, participants' migration entailed some gender-related factors stemming from their migration projects and migration types, impacting both the journey and their settlement in Canada. These included experiences of insecurity and vulnerability at border crossings, particularly for those who sought to enter Canada as refugees and who were interrogated, separated from their mothers, or permitted to enter Canada but not granted refugee status, prolonging their state of uncertainty.

To illustrate, Yolande needed to renew her Congolese passport to make her final trip to Canada after being granted permanent residency. Her husband, however, had to sign authorization for her to be issued a new one: "You have to get authorization from your husband to get a

[Congolese] passport. And I was like, ‘What kind of silly law is that?’” Therefore, even though Yolande was no longer living in the DRC, the country’s culture of inequality persisted through her Congolese passport. In another example, most participants either travelled alone to Canada or were accompanied across the border by only their mother. In fact, Bethanie’s parents had determined that the family, led by a lone mother, needed to present themselves as coming from vulnerability while claiming asylum to increase their chances of being welcomed into the country. Bethanie’s parents worried that if border officials assumed they were arriving for reasons other than security (i.e., educational or professional reasons), they would not “respect you” and would turn them away.

Thus, presenting oneself as ‘vulnerable’ was part of a family migration strategy for border-crossing to avoid being refused at the border (Ryan et al., 2009). However, this decision reinforced gendered stereotypes of women and children as fragile, vulnerable, and in need of refuge. Bethanie noted that the tough and hostile Canadian border regime compelled her, her siblings, and especially her mother to present themselves as vulnerable to be allowed to cross the border, even though Bethanie did not see her family as being in a distressed situation since her father had a good job in South Africa and, to her recollection, her family was living a relatively good life. The waiting room, where other migrants were seeking asylum and feeling “agitated” (Bethanie), and the interrogation room, where migrants like Bethanie’s mother were left nervous while being harshly questioned, exacerbated this sense of vulnerability. As Carling (2005) and Bonifacio et al. (2012) contend, migration can be an oppressive experience for migrant women as they are often placed in subjugated positions due to power relations ingrained in society’s structures, including implicit gender norms and biases in border regimes and admissions. These norms and biases compelled Bethanie and her family to present themselves as vulnerable and in need of refuge, while the implications of this included interactions and experiences that were distressing and traumatic.

Furthermore, many immigration laws and regulations are gendered (Erel, 2009), including Canada’s immigration policy, which limit the mobility prospects of migrant women. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Canadian points system is designed in such a way that migrant men (or the male head of the family) often meet the criteria under the economic class, whereas many migrant women enter the country under the family class, either as spouses or dependents of the male family member who entered the country previously (Simmons, 2010; O’Neill et al., 2012). Similar circumstances were observed among some of the study’s participants, such as Amina, Keren,

Samora, Valérie, and Yolande who entered Canada through the family class as spouses, and Lehana and Rosalie, who entered Canada through the family class as dependents.

As per Mawire et al. (2020), family members may not also meet a country's rigorous immigration requirements for entry, preventing them from immigrating together. Keisha's father initially refused to enter his name on the UNHCR's refugee resettlement application, fearing that the family would be rejected if he, being a man, was included. Keisha stated, "... I think he was scared to put his name just in case... But when he saw, you know, the process actually happening, then he said, 'OK, just put my name in too.'" In Bethanie and Michelle's cases, it was a family migration strategy for both of their fathers to remain in the DRC to decrease their odds of being denied entry to Canada. Consequently, separating family members was a strategy to survive the rigors of the Canadian border regime (Ryan et al., 2009). Yet, this decision was also made so that the men could continue to financially support their family in Canada: while the fathers worked in the DRC, the mothers could ensure the children's safety and well-being in Canada.

While Amina did not believe she encountered any gender-related factors during her migration trajectories, looking back at her journey to Canada, she characterized it as especially dangerous for a woman who was an irregular migrant, isolated in an unknown country, and faced insecurities and uncertainties:

As a woman, it's very risky, it's very risky because you don't know where you're going and you don't know what is going to happen because there are some people, too, that travel like that, they didn't reach the place they were supposed to go. They face a difficult situation. But as a woman, it's very risky. I thank God nothing did happen to me.

Bethanie also understood the challenges of travelling as a woman from her mother's perspective:

I would say through my mom, like seeing how like we were alone, and we don't have like our father with us and stuff like that. And, you know, sometimes as women, you are not always going to ask, like sometimes you don't really know the right questions and stuff like that.... I was young, too, right? So, I felt like it was definitely a lot of pressure to have to really put yourself out there and be more vulnerable and stuff [as an asylum claimant].

Bethanie also thought that the journey to Canada was tough because, as a Black immigrant, she had to prove to border officials that she and her family were worth the investment to be admitted to the country. She stated:

Like isn't me going to school enough? Isn't the fact that my mom was able to get a job enough? But it shows you the kind of stigma that you have to go through as an immigrant and as a woman, as a Black person. It's like they don't believe in you [...] And like I said, this journey was a lot of vulnerability and forced vulnerability. Like, I felt like I don't have to be proving to anyone why I should be here. You know, I'm here because I'm here!

Thus, irregular migration resulted in undue burdens, vulnerabilities, and insecurities for participants.

Participants who possessed the required language skills or were familiar with the journey to Canada found it beneficial to overcome potential challenges. This was evident with Francine, who was able to obtain the necessary information for the bus she needed to the land crossing through her command of the Spanish language, or Valérie and Yolande, who did not encounter any difficulties traveling to Canada since they had previously visited family in the country. Participants also relied on both bonding and bridging social ties to overcome migration challenges, and the present study found that many participants may not have crossed the Canadian border as efficiently without some form of social support. As per the life stories, Bethanie and her family met with immigration services in the United States in preparation for their land border crossing. Bethanie's aunt also accompanied the family to the border to provide additional assistance and moral support. Dalia sought the assistance of an agency in the United States, which accompanied her to the Canadian border to make her refugee claim. Michelle and her family also briefly stayed in the United States, where they prepared to seek asylum in Canada with the assistance of her father, before his return to the DRC.

Therefore, participants formed new support networks along their migration trajectories to Canada, including family members who had already settled in Canada or immigration agencies. This study also revealed that, contrary to expectations, refugee claimants plan their journeys in advance and "maintain a degree of agency and control over their lives" (Ray, 2018, p.787), as crossing the Canadian border successfully requires some level of preparation, knowledge of immigration regulations, and support networks. Other ways that newly formed support networks assisted the women along their trajectories to Canada included help from chance encounters at the airport who assisted in making connection flights or provided transportation to a shelter; friends who travelled with them and made the journey more bearable and less emotional; and border agents who provided information to nearby shelters or social workers. Again, social networks proved vital

for participants during their migration trajectories, providing the resources they needed to journey on or overcome systemic constraints. The migration trajectories of Congolese women appear to be most successful with the support of social networks.

Conclusions from Participants' Migration Trajectories

Overall, studying Congolese women's migration trajectories underscores the need to analyze the journeys to, and experiences in, transit countries, as well as layover or stopover sites (Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou, 2008). The 'in-between' spaces of migration and the experiences embedded in such trajectories to destinations revealed a range of overt and covert gender experiences. This study demonstrated how gender-related factors can influence many aspects of the participants' migration. This included the reasons for migrating, who made the decision to migrate, the types of migration undertaken, the types of networks accessed, the resources and opportunities available at destinations, the power dynamics encountered, the vulnerabilities experienced, and the implicit gender biases in immigration policies. Thus, the findings validate my first hypothesis in Chapter Two, that participants' migration trajectories will be gendered, embedded with gender-related factors at the micro, meso and macro levels. However, the intersection of gender, race, age, and social class also influenced the ways challenges and opportunities were experienced throughout the trajectories.

Some of these experiences were overt, in the sense that they were apparent to participants while they were undergoing their migration trajectories. For example, the interviewees noted that gender inequalities in the DRC (both in the household and in society) played a significant role in their decisions to leave the DRC. Furthermore, while some participants received familial support to migrate, others had only a minor say in the matter, if at all. Thus, gendered power dynamics were also evident in the decision-making process. However, the gendered nature of the women's experiences was mostly implicit or less apparent to participants. This included migration projects (impacted by gender-related factors in the DRC), which influenced the types of migration and destinations, opportunities and constraints that resulted from specific types of migration and modes of entry, implicit gender biases that occurred from seemingly gender-neutral immigration policies, structural power relations at border crossings, resource mobilization, and empowerment and diminishment of power dynamics. It was also less apparent to interviewees how their social class affected their ability to migrate, develop social networks, and overcome obstacles.

Ultimately, the links between gender and migration are complex, which can involve other factors like social class, and the outcomes of the interviewees' migration trajectories show how dependent they were on both the explicit and implicit gender-related factors that were discussed earlier. Yet, these factors also had an impact on how participants settled in Canada. This is illustrated in the following section, where I explore how the outcomes of the interviewees' gendered migration trajectories had socioeconomic impacts in Canada, demonstrating why it is important to understand how gender interacts with migration and how the outcomes of this interaction can impact incorporation. This will lay the groundwork for Chapter Seven, where I analyze the impacts of gendered migration trajectories on political incorporation.

The Impacts of Gendered Migration Trajectories on Settlement Experiences in Canada

Gendered migration trajectories had social consequences for some of the participants, including the impacts of the women's migration projects and modes of entry into Canada. To illustrate, among participants who entered Canada seeking asylum at the land border, some faced difficulties with their permanent residency application. For instance, Bethanie and Dalia were initially denied refugee status the first time they applied. Francine faced significant financial stress during the application process to pay for her lawyer while unable to earn an income. In addition, participants who arrived on a student visa or as refugee claimants were unable to access many socioeconomic benefits enjoyed by many Canadian citizens and permanent residents, resulting in financial burdens and pressure, such as not being able to enjoy free access to the province's healthcare system; to apply for jobs, work full-time hours, or be eligible (or chosen) for qualified positions; to be able to access post-secondary education at domestic fees or scholarships and bursaries; to travel abroad and visit family; or to purchase a home or find a secure place to stay. Indeed, affordable housing was a frequent source of stress for Bethanie, Francine, and Michelle. As a result, gender norms and biases embedded in immigration laws and regulations mediated participants' rights and entitlements and demonstrated the power of citizenship in being excluded from or gaining access to social and economic rights beneficial to one's incorporation (Mahieu et al., 2015). The women's trajectories had an impact on what they could do once they arrived in Canada (Vasey, 2016; Wingens et al., 2011), where many of their efforts were focused on acquiring necessities, such as food and shelter, prior to beginning the process of incorporation.

These challenges were not limited to those who entered Canada as students or refugee claimants. Many who entered Canada under the economic or family class encountered barriers to

the recognition of their foreign education and experiences, which limited their access to the Canadian labour market. For example, Idara, who came to Canada under the economic class, still required assistance from a women's settlement centre when she first arrived. Further, some participants, including Jamille and Keren, had to surmount systemic obstacles (e.g., discriminatory hiring processes) to achieve their desired occupations.

Regardless of immigration status, participants also experienced insecurities and isolation because of their migration projects and migration type, such as the stress of navigating an unfamiliar country; losing support networks, particularly in raising children; and uncertainty about the future and one's successful incorporation. Participants were also subjected to discrimination. In fact, the women's life stories revealed how migration can initiate the process of 'othering', where the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and immigration status (Black Congolese immigrant women) had significant impacts on the women's experiences in Canada and sense of belonging (Kofman et al., 2000; Thobani, 2000). As per Castles and Miller (1998), a society that subordinates women is also likely to racialize 'ethnic minorities'; this is the case in Canada, where immigrant women often face greater barriers and discrimination (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Thobani, 2000). In the life stories, discrimination contributed to barriers to particular job opportunities; created processes of exclusion, marginalization, and silencing; suppressed cultural identity; exacerbated inequalities in school and the workplace; undervalued skills, knowledge, merit, or contributions; and generated labelling and stereotyping. These challenges experienced in Canada were also exacerbated by the women's migration experiences (e.g., the opportunities and challenges, decision-making processes, access to support network and resources, migration outcomes, vulnerability, and isolation), resulting in increased stress that marked their incorporation (Wachter et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, the women's gendered migration trajectories also resulted in various opportunities, particularly in terms of transforming identity, gender roles and relations. Migration trajectories, according to Wals (2011) and Schapendonk et al. (2020), have transformative impacts on individuals, including changing identities and statuses, aspirations, and perspectives as migrants navigate through various experiences and encounters, as evidenced by the life stories. Notably, the women's migration trajectories overlapped with their experiences of becoming an adult, a wife, or a mother, which resulted in greater responsibilities and autonomy; shifting aspirations and perspectives to reflect their new statuses and process of growth; and feeling more self-confident,

resilient, and mature. Furthermore, migration has been argued and proven to alter gender relations in the sense that migration experiences can improve, transform, worsen, or reinforce gender relations in the receiving country (Carling, 2005; Tastsoglou et al., 2005; Timmerman et al., 2015). In this study, most women's migration experiences did, in fact, erode many of the gender roles and power dynamics that were prominent in Congolese families in the DRC. Among those who first settled in their respective transit countries, migration provided them with new privileges and a (re)newed sense of autonomy, notably those who spent much of their settlement as independent, young, and single women (for instance, Yolande, Keren, Jamine, Francine, and Idara). Those who travelled with their parents (Valérie), were resettled as refugees (Bethanie and Keisha), or were in transit to Canada (Amina) also gained new perspectives on gender roles and relations after being exposed to women's rights and liberties that were present in their new society but not in the DRC, or experiencing or witnessing vulnerabilities, insecurities, and gender discrimination.

These new perspectives and experiences were imported to Canada, even after many reunited with their spouse and had children. For example, most women were employed, self-sufficient, and supported their families financially (this included, for some, supporting their families back in the DRC). Where relevant, participants were also equally involved with their spouses in decisions affecting the family and gained independence. Spouses also encouraged participants' employment goals, ambitions, and self-sufficiency. Even when confronted with employment barriers or financial difficulties (i.e., the inability to find a job or a well-paying job), participants persisted in their efforts to improve their economic status by returning to school to earn a degree or taking additional training opportunities to improve their prospects of being able to support their family. These findings challenge the notion that immigrant women, as 'dependents', may not have the time, energy, or means to pursue a higher education or a better paying job because of their roles as mothers and wives (O'Neill et al., 2012). These experiences also highlight the efforts made in renegotiating gender norms and power relations as they are understood in the DRC (Willis & Yeoh, 2000), such that they do not all manifest in the receiving country. Similarly, most of those who migrated to Canada directly from the DRC were able to renegotiate gender norms and relations in the household. That is, because gender is socially constructed and context-dependent (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Mahieu et al., 2015), most participants (e.g., Dalia, Rosalie, Lehana, Michelle, and Joanna) were able to modify established gender norms from the DRC in Canada (a country relatively democratic and liberal), gaining or maintaining

autonomy, becoming self-sufficient, pursuing higher education, and facing less pressure to perform gender roles after a certain age (e.g., getting married after school).

Nonetheless, the life stories also revealed that not all gender norms and relations were eliminated within the household, as evidenced by Bethanie and Lehana and the pressure they felt to perform certain household chores for their family; Valérie, who had to forego her studies to become the primary caregiver for her children; or Samora, who continued to perform traditional gender roles in the family. Nor were gender norms necessarily rejected by the women; for example, Samora felt great satisfaction in supporting her husband, while many participants found tremendous joy in caring for their children and household since they had a profound sense of responsibility as a mother and wife. Thus, this study unveils the dynamic nature of the women's roles and responsibilities in the household. Furthermore, much of the independence and autonomy achieved by participants in the household did not always transfer to other aspects of their lives; patriarchy and unequal power relations may impact women differently depending on their temporal and spatial context (Carling, 2005). This was exemplified by the discrimination experienced by participants from their classmates at school, co-workers, and strangers, despite their continuing efforts to contribute to Canadian society. Regardless of Canada's multiculturalism policy, anti-Black racism and racial hierarchies remain, marginalizing and oppressing Black immigrant women as an inferior social group (Bannerji, 2000; Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Kofman et al., 2000; Maynard, 2017; Thobani, 2000). Yet, even when the statuses of 'immigrant woman' or 'visible minority' are a source of lower social standing in Canada (Bannerji, 2000), the interviewees proved their ability to adjust to this through their resiliency and ambitions to erode inequalities and discrimination in their lives.

Concluding Remarks on Gendered Migration Trajectories

Overall, a few scholars have worked to refute the notion of migration as a simple transition from one's country of origin to a final destination, drawing attention to the experiences of migration and the spatiality of the journey. By taking a trajectory and life course approach, this study shows that the time spent during migration is a critical one that has an impact on immigrant women's incorporation (Ho, 2011; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Schapendonk, 2012). Further, by adopting a gendered perspective to migration, the women's life stories also revealed how gender (as a dynamic and changeable social construct) operates during migration trajectories and, in turn,

impacts the outcomes of the women's journey and settlement in Canada (Carling, 2005; Mahieu et al., 2015; Schrover & Yeo, 2010; Timmerman et al., 2015). While the socioeconomic impacts were evident, the next chapter will focus more pointedly on the impacts of gendered migration trajectories on the women's political incorporation in Canada.

Chapter Seven: Congolese Women's Political Incorporation

Political incorporation is the dynamic process of gaining access to and achieving both formal and substantive citizenship through engagement with the political system (political debates, practices, and decision-making), as well as gaining access to political institutions and achieving political equality (Bloemraad, 2006b; de Rooij, 2012). The degree to which citizens participate politically is a measure of their political incorporation into Canadian society. Yet, previous studies have revealed that immigrant women are less likely to participate in politics or have less political knowledge than native-born Canadians and immigrant men (see Bilodeau, 2016; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009), thus contributing to their political marginalization. Numerous factors explaining the gap in political participation were identified in Chapter Two (from pre-migration factors to post-migration factors). Uniquely, this chapter examines the impacts of gendered migration trajectories on immigrant women's political incorporation, as well as the cumulative impacts of social cleavages like gender, race, ethnicity, class (socioeconomic resources), and immigration status that they find themselves embroiled in on their repertoires of political participation. This chapter also explores how immigrant women may overcome, particularly through informal and less visible means, some of the obstacles they may have faced due to their migration experiences and the interlocking systems of power or oppression in Canada. Thus, the intent of this chapter is to provide answers to my remaining research questions.

To that end, this chapter is organized in four sections. The first section responds to the second research question: *What forms does political participation of first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin in Canada take, and how can the modes and traits of their political participation contribute to understanding their process of political incorporation?* Thus, this section contextualizes and investigates the interviewees' various forms of political participation in both the DRC and Canada, as well as their levels of political participation and incorporation. I also analyze how the women's political participation reflect the three pillars of feminists' definition of the concept (see Chapter Three). Drawing on these findings, an in-depth examination of the women's political incorporation in the Ottawa-Gatineau region will be possible. It is hypothesized that Congolese women will participate in informal political activities more frequently than formal political activities, increasing their sense of political incorporation. This section's findings will also assist with the evaluation of the impacts of the women's gendered migration trajectories on political participation and incorporation, which will be examined in the second section.

Thus, the second section responds to the third research question: *How do gendered migration trajectories affect the political participation and incorporation of first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin in Canada? How do the women, in turn, overcome the barriers imposed by their migration experiences and incorporate politically in Canadian society?* In short, this section analyzes how elements of the women's gendered migration trajectories highlighted in Chapter Six influence the forms and levels of political participation identified in the first section. It is hypothesized that the women's gendered migration trajectories will create certain obstacles to their political incorporation in Canada, while some will use their experiences to promote political participation. In this section, I also examine the ways in which participants navigate the impacts of their migration trajectories. It is expected that participants will generally overcome the barriers imposed by their migration experiences by defining their own sense of political agency and belonging through informal political activities like participation in ethnic or community organizations.

The third section responds to the final research question: *In what ways does immigrant women's identity as Black Congolese immigrant women in Canada impact their repertoires of political activities?* In this section, I explore how the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status affect participants' repertoires of political participation. It is anticipated that the interviewees' participation will be impacted to some extent by instances of marginalization and discrimination due to social cleavages that they find themselves embroiled in. The final section concludes this chapter by discussing the findings in relation to the literature and my hypotheses outlined above.

For the purposes of this research, I adopt feminist scholars' notion of political participation, which I highlighted in Chapter Three as the active dimension of citizenship and the exercise of political agency in which participants (re)claim and (re)articulate rights, create shifts in the political order, and transform societal and community laws based on personal or collective needs. This can be accomplished through a variety of transformative activities and sites of contestations chosen in accordance with the women's particular experiences and circumstances. However, to accurately portray participants' political experiences and reflect their political agency, I also employ their definitions of political participation to identify and analyze their overall patterns of political incorporation. This is consistent with the work of scholars (e.g., Abu-Laban, 2002; Lister & Pia, 2008; Martiniello, 2006; Morales, 2011) who describe political participation as an open

concept in which immigrant women are given the opportunity to define their own patterns of political participation; that is, how they choose to express their needs, relate to their community's political processes, and achieve political incorporation. As will be seen, this can involve participants serving on their children's school board, where they participate in decision-making and advocate for the needs of their children and other racialized students. Moreover, by enabling participants to define what it means to participate politically, the women may reject the idea of some elements of their engagement as being political, as will be shown in one case, even if scholarly definitions may implicate them as such. I embraced the women's perspectives as they are shaped by their lived experiences and how the women interpret the term *political participation*.

To avoid identifying every act or activity as political and rendering the concept of political participation trivial (Rasmussen & Brown, 2002), I only considered acts or activities that had the purpose or intention of bringing about change, transformation, or disruption in society in some way, even if such results were not achieved (Isin & Nielson, 2008). This might include a desire to effect change in one's community, participate in decision-making processes, or obtain or exercise political rights and duties.

Political Incorporation in the DRC and Canada

The purpose of this section is to highlight participants' various forms of political participation and levels of political participation in both the DRC and Canada. Examining the interviewees' political participation also required looking at their social participation. When approaching political participation as an open concept, it was important to ask participants about their social activities in both the DRC and Canada, to account for any political activities that they may have engaged in as part of their social involvement, but that they may not have necessarily identified as such (for instance, advocacy through religious groups). Social participation, according to Couton and Gaudet (2008), comprises "... a number of practices that includes voluntary sector activities as well as a range of other forms of interaction within the public and private spheres (helping neighbours, getting involved in informal groups, etc.)" (p.23). However, in the case of immigrant women, the distinction between political and social participation is often blurred, particularly when they can both take place in similar spaces, such as volunteer or community involvement in groups, organizations, or associations.

Furthermore, because political participation is often understood as occurring in the public sphere (Lister, 2003), some interviewees did perceive and discuss it in this manner. For example, participants like Michelle, Samora, and Valérie defined political participation as “... un engagement dans la vie publique pour apporter des changements positifs dans la vie de nos concitoyens...”¹⁷⁵ (Francine), such as voting in Canada, joining a political party, supporting electoral candidates, voicing needs and interests to elected representatives, and participating in formal decision-making processes. They also defined participation as occupying a position of influence to generate change in society, to uphold the will of the people and consider their needs or concerns by advancing a vision and initiatives on their behalf, and to formulate laws and policies for the betterment of society. Therefore, the language they used to characterize political participation is a formal understanding of politics; yet their social participation may also have political significance that they were unaware of. Indeed, many of the women’s life stories revealed how various forms of political participation, such as political participation aimed at social justice, were fostered by social participation (Couton & Gaudet, 2008). Therefore, it was important to ask participants about their social activities to identify additional forms of political participation reflective of feminist conceptions discussed in Chapter Three.

Based on these findings, an in-depth examination of the women’s political incorporation in the Ottawa-Gatineau region is conducted, including whether they are politically involved, whether their political participation has increased since leaving the DRC, how they are politically involved, and how their forms of political participation inform the ways they incorporate politically in Canada. Table 7 below summarizes whether participants engaged in social or political (formal and informal) activities in the DRC and Canada. Only two participants were involved or active in formal or informal political activities in the DRC, though eight were involved in social activities. In comparison, the women were much more active in Canada, both politically and socially.

¹⁷⁵ Translation: “... an engagement to public life to bring about positive changes in the lives of our fellow citizens...”

Table 7*Participants' Involvement in Political and Social Activities in the DRC and Canada*

Participants^a	Political Activities in the DRC	Social Activities in the DRC	Political Activities in Canada	Social Activities in Canada
Amina	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bethanie	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dalia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Francine	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Idara	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jamille	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Joanna	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Keisha	No	No	Yes	Yes
Keren	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lehana	No	No	Yes	Yes
Michelle	No	No	Yes	Yes
Rosalie	No	No	No	Yes
Samora	No	No	No	No
Valérie	No	No	Yes	Yes
Yolande	No	No	Yes	Yes

^a = the names provided for participants are pseudonyms.

To maintain anonymity, the names of certain associations or organizations in which the women were (or are) members were omitted to minimize identifiers, unless they were members of well-known movements or organizations, or members of the *Communauté Congolaise du Canada Ottawa-Gatineau* and the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises* — the recruiting partners for this study — without providing specific information on their roles or titles. Instead, a description of their level of participation in such groups in relation to the research topic is provided. Footnotes containing translations of French quotes are once again provided.

Political Participation in the DRC

Informal Political Participation. In the DRC, only Dalia and Francine were involved or active in political activities. Dalia partook in informal politics, where the activities in which she

participated “ont comme conséquence que ça va faire bouger les choses dans la politique.”¹⁷⁶ For instance, while attending university, she was the president of a women’s association that advocated for women’s political and social leadership, and through her position, she planned activities that reinforced and strengthened women’s leadership capacities. Dalia also shared that she served on the board of directors for a few organizations that sought women’s viewpoints on social issues to be considered in national policy decisions. Though Francine indicated at the start of her interview that she was never politically implicated in the DRC, her life-stories interview revealed that she had in fact participated in an informal political activity as a young adult through her involvement with the Catholic Church. Francine recounted:

... j’ai quand même assister [à la] fameuse marche du [16] février... ça c’est, disons, la seule chose parce que c’était l’Église catholique qui avait organisé cette marche-là. Donc nous, on avait participé à ça. Mais à part ça, non. Je n’avais pas d’engagement politique.¹⁷⁷

The event Francine is referring to is a pro-democracy protest, organized by the Catholic Church on February 16th, 1992, to call for the reconvening of the *Conférence nationale souveraine* (National Sovereign Conference), which aimed to guide Zaïre through a democratic transition of government during President Joseph Mobutu’s dictatorship (Prunier, 2001). This protest was known then as “the march for hope,” during which the police and army opened fire on unarmed protestors, killing seventeen, according to official reports, though a greater number is speculated (Prunier, 2001, p.144). As a young student at a convent, Francine took part in this protest in support of the Catholic Church but did not engage in any other forms of political participation thereafter. Though Jamille was profoundly interested in politics growing up, she indicated that she remained an observer or passive participant in political activities rather than an active participant, particularly those involving her father, a member of President Joseph Mobutu’s government. This was also the extent of Idara’s involvement, a passive participant, as she simply attended meetings of a women’s rights organization and never played an active role in raising awareness of, or advocating for, women’s rights. Overall, just two participants demonstrated some level of political participation in the DRC, although in Francine’s case, her participation was a sole occurrence, implying that her political incorporation, like that of other participants, was very low in the DRC.

¹⁷⁶ Translation: “... have the consequence of shaking things up in politics.”

¹⁷⁷ Translation: “... I nevertheless attended the famous march of February [16] ... that was, let’s say, the only thing because it was the Catholic Church that had organized that march. So, we participated in that. But apart from that, no. I had no political engagement.”

Reasons for Low Political Participation. Similar reasons were given for participants' lack of political participation in the DRC. Most participants explained that they were too young to get involved in politics. For instance, Bethanie, Keisha, and Michelle had not yet reached their adolescent years and were simply too young to be implicated, especially given the risks of being politically active at the time of their upbringing. Valérie also mentioned that she was not of age and thus did not possess the legal right to be implicated in the country's formal politics prior to departing for France. She stated, "[c]'était pas parce que je ne voulais pas, mais plutôt parce que j'étais pas encore majeure."¹⁷⁸ However, Valérie expressed that she had always wanted to be involved. Similarly, Yolande believed that if she had remained in the DRC into her adult years (post-university), she might have had the opportunity to engage in political activities. Other participants like Lehana, Keren, and Rosalie shared that the opportunities to get involved, even as adolescents, were just not available to the young Congolese population during their upbringing as opposed to this population's involvement today, or that the opportunity to get involved never presented itself at that age. Today, several youth organizations, church-based youth centres, and regional youth networks encourage the youth to participate in advocacy, demonstrations, sit-ins, and petitions for the protection of human rights (Kasherwa, 2020). For example, from 2016 to 2018, numerous social movements and youth organizations in the DRC held demonstrations in support of free and fair presidential and legislative elections. Participants, to this study, on the other hand, did not have access to or knowledge of such opportunities. According to Lehana, this was often due to students' focus with school, which did not allow for other activities: "I guess it wasn't an option, right? It was just, you have your set schedule... you go to school, depending if you go from 7:00am to 12:00pm or to 4:00pm, that was your schedule. You just followed it." Amina voiced a similar opinion, stating that she was too young and too keen to finish school to be politically involved in the DRC, and soon after she graduated, she was preparing to reunite with her husband in Canada. While Joanna acknowledged that many young students who do become politically involved in the DRC are often at the university level, she remarked that many of them are men rather than women: "Mais, souvent, on voyait que des jeunes, des jeunes hommes. Pas les jeunes femmes, parce qu'en même temps que la femme est très fragile au Congo, en même temps

¹⁷⁸ Translation: "[i]t wasn't because I didn't want to, but rather because I wasn't of age yet."

on veut protéger cette femme-là...”¹⁷⁹ This exclusion of women in political advocacy, Joanna admitted, had diverted her interest in politics.

The second most common reason for the women’s non-participation in politics was that they were either refused access to political activities by others, such as family members or feared the dangers that such involvement carried. For Bethanie’s family, particularly for her grandfather, politics carried stigma, “... even if you think you’re doing it for the right intentions, like you’re going to fall into that whole like power hungry thing, even when you’re coming with the right intentions in the beginning.” As a result, even if she had expressed an interest in politics, her family would not have permitted her to pursue it. Valérie’s parents, too, refused her involvement in any political activities, including voicing her opinions, as they lacked confidence in the government and feared that something bad would happen to her. She stated, “... j’avais certainement mes opinions, mais mes parents m’ont, à l’époque, qui ne me laissaient pas vraiment m’impliquer parce qu’ils trouvaient que c’était dangereux.”¹⁸⁰ Idara spoke generally of how many husbands forbade their wives and daughters from participating in politics for fear of subjecting them to harassment, which was consistent with Freedman’s (2015) findings that women in politics were often insulted as prostitutes, “loose” or “easy” women, as well as questioned by the public on their morals and fidelity to their husbands (p.111). For Joanna and Samora, what prevented them from participating politically in the DRC was not people per se, but the political system itself. Joanna explained:

Les gens à l’est du pays vivaient des rébellions fréquentes. Et elles étaient souvent, surtout les femmes, des victimes. Peut-être que si j’avais grandi dans ce contexte-là, j’aurais peut-être été militante. Mais j’ai grandi dans un contexte où, oui, la politique ne va pas. Oui, le système est un peu [*pause*] boiteux. Mais il n’y a pas de liberté d’expression. Les gens ne s’expriment pas. Ceux qui sont au pouvoir, c’est parce qu’ils veulent garder leur place, ils ne dénoncent rien.¹⁸¹

Samora also asserted,

¹⁷⁹ Translation: “But, often, we only saw young people, young men. Not young women, because as the woman is very fragile in Congo, we want to protect this woman...”

¹⁸⁰ Translation: “... I certainly had my opinions, but my parents had, at the time, wouldn’t really let me get involved because they thought it was dangerous.”

¹⁸¹ Translation: “People in the east of the country experienced frequent rebellions. And they were often, especially women, victims. Maybe if I had grown up in that context, I might have been an activist. But I grew up in a context where, yes, politics is bad. Yes, the system is a bit [*pause*] flawed. But there’s no freedom of expression. People can’t express themselves. Those who are in power, it’s because they want to keep their place, they don’t denounce anything.”

Bref, à mon avis, la politique de notre pays est diligentée par la violence, imposition du plus fort, c'est à dire, si tu veux parler en soi-disant toute liberté, il faut s'adhérer à une opposition de semblant, se retrouver au rang du parti au pouvoir, s'arranger derrière les mensonges au détriment de la population. Bref, il n'y a pas de liberté d'expression.¹⁸²

Thus, the lack of free speech prevented Joanna and Samora from participating politically. Joanna later admitted that because of the repressive system, she became unaware of her political rights.

Politics also represented violence and danger for participants, and such activities were not popular among women, as Joanna previously noted. Idara explained,

Pourquoi? Parce que quand on s'engageait dans la politique, surtout dans un — quand on avait une opinion contraire à la majorité présidentielle, à l'époque, c'était, les étudiants étaient plus du côté, bien sûr, de l'opposition. Et quand il y avait quelque chose, une activité qui se passait comme une revendication, une marche quelconque, il y avait toujours des morts. Donc, je vois, y avait très peu de femmes qui s'engageaient dans ce genre d'activités.

C'étaient surtout les étudiants hommes, les garçons qui allaient aux marches.¹⁸³

Such dangers were among the reasons Idara's father discouraged her from becoming politically involved, particularly in protests, even as a university student. When protests were scheduled, she recalled her father sending her a message telling her to avoid the protest and return home to safety. Lehana's parents would deliberately seek to protect her from the dangers of politics by travelling to Brazzaville, the Republic of the Congo (the DRC's neighbouring country), sometimes for a weekend or for weeks. Likewise, Jamille's father discouraged any political inclinations or engagement in political groups due to the dangers. Jamille's father was also aware of the perils of politics, having nearly been poisoned for his opposing views while serving in the government. Yet, at fourteen years old, if she had been given the chance to be implicated, Jamille would have gladly taken it, stating, "[j]e m'opposai déjà à tout ce qui se passait."¹⁸⁴ Finally, Yolande discussed how she was afraid to get involved in politics, especially after witnessing the backlash her classmate

¹⁸² Translation: "In short, in my opinion, the politics of our country is driven by violence, the imposition of the strongest, that is to say, if you want to speak in so-called freedom, you must join an apparent opposition, to be in the rank of the party in power, to settle behind the lies to the detriment of the population. In short, there is no freedom of speech."

¹⁸³ Translation: "Why? Because when you got involved in politics, especially in a — when you had an opinion contrary to the presidential majority, at that time, it was, the students were more on the side, of course, of the opposition. And when there was something, an activity that took place like a demonstration, a protest of some kind, there were always deaths. So, I can see, there were very few women who engaged in these kinds of activities. It was mostly the male students, the boys who went to the protests."

¹⁸⁴ Translation: "I was already opposed to everything that was going on."

received when he opposed President Joseph Mobutu's regime, but was nevertheless forced into politics under President Joseph Mobutu's reign in the sense that she and her classmates were required to perform rituals. Yolande explained:

So, we were like political. We were all involved. You had to do certain things. You had to like, every single time Mobutu came, they got us out of schools, and we had to go welcome him, line up around the boulevard and wave at him and, you know, clap hands for him. And if you missed that, that was a big deal. So, it was, it was [*pause*] how can I put it? It's a dictatorship. That's what you do. You don't even think about it.

Political rituals such as parades or ceremonies for leaders can be a significant means of legitimizing the state and their position of power while fostering a sense of belonging among citizens and minimizing social conflicts and dissatisfaction with the political regime (Kertzer, 1988). In this sense, while Yolande was never involved in conventional political activities in the DRC, she and her classmates were involved in symbolic politics through presidential ceremonies.

A less common reason for participants' non-participation in the DRC was a general disinterest in politics. Keren, for example, was too focused on her studies at university and preoccupied with work, which led her to believe that politics was not her domain. Lehana admitted that she never liked politics and had no interest in it. This was due to her father's occupation as a government banker that made him largely absent from the family: "I don't know just because of how much I saw my dad not being there or leaving at night, just trying to solve things, because obviously the government there is very different than the government here..." Francine felt she had never been in situations that compelled her to become political, while Joanna was uninformed of her rights as a citizen, thus she never had an interest in politics. Joanna said,

Tu milites lorsque tu sais c'est quoi tes droits, lorsque tu sais qu'est-ce que, c'est quoi les responsabilités de l'État dans lequel tu vis, où tu es née. C'est quoi les responsabilités de tes dirigeants? On ne connaît pas ça et on [ne] nous apprend pas ça à l'école... lorsque moi j'étais jeune et que j'étudiais au Congo, ce qui fait que, on n'a pas eu cette ouverture-là du monde politique, ou de s'occuper des choses politiques.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Translation: "You advocate when you know what your rights are, when you know what is, what are the responsibilities of the state in which you live, where you were born. What are the responsibilities of your leaders? We don't know this and we are not taught this in school... when I was young and studying in Congo, which meant that, we didn't have this exposure of the political world, or to care about political things."

Social Participation. Despite low levels of political participation in the DRC, eight participants chose to become involved in social activities throughout their upbringing. These included participation as church volunteers providing aid to those in need in the community such as the elderly and the sick at hospices; in community service such as cleaning up one's community, administering polio vaccines to children, and informing the community on protective measures against HIV; and as members of organizations that promote cultural events and activities within the community. Many of the participants' social involvement took place through the church, which is not unusual given the importance of religion in Congolese culture (Smigelsky et al., 2017). According to Joanna, the church was an important resource, particularly for young people, offering a variety of social activities that most were unable to participate in otherwise, and such activities helped establish positive social networks and enhance well-being. She stated,

Par contre, au Congo, ce n'est pas un système où les jeunes peuvent aller — déjà par manque d'argent — s'offrir telles activités ou que les parents vont inscrire les enfants à telle activité. Et l'église, en ce moment-là, devient en fait une ressource essentielle parce que la plupart des jeunes qui sont dans les églises, et une des choses qui les retiennent dans les églises, c'est que lorsque tu es dans une église, tu peux participer à une chorale qui est une bonne activité. Tu peux participer à des rencontres, à des conférences. Tu peux aller visiter des lieux touristiques du pays en groupe avec des jeunes... L'église reste vraiment une, une ressource très, très importante au Congo pour les jeunes.¹⁸⁶

This was exemplified by Francine and Amina, who volunteered through their church at a young age to care for the sick and elderly. Thus, church participation entailed much more than attendance or joining choir, but also assisting the community. Indeed, community care was an important reason why participants were engaged in social activities in the DRC; Amina likened the need to care for her community to caring for “my family.” For Francine, “[c]’était vraiment donner sa vie pour les autres, c’était vraiment être là, au service des autres.”¹⁸⁷ Others' participation mirrored their career aspirations. Idara, for instance, was in medical school when she volunteered to

¹⁸⁶ Translation: “However, in Congo, it is not a system where young people can go — already for lack of money — and do such activities or that parents can register their children in such activity. And the church, at this point, becomes in fact an essential resource because most of young people who are in churches, and one of the things that keeps them in the churches, is that when you are in a church, you can participate in a choir which is a good activity. You can go to meetings, you can go to conferences. You can go visit the country's touristic locations with a group of young people... The church really remains a, a very, very important resource in Congo for young people.”

¹⁸⁷ Translation: “[i]t was really giving your life for others, it was really being there, serving others.”

administer polio vaccinations to children, noting, “déjà donc ça m’intéresse.”¹⁸⁸ Keren, too, was a medical student when she volunteered to inform her community about protective measures against HIV. Understanding that HIV was not widely known at the time, she believed the message being conveyed was important, stating, “... en tant qu’étudiante aussi en médecine, je me disais que ça serait bien quand même de promouvoir.”¹⁸⁹ Social participation also enabled Keren and Bethanie to break away from their regular routines, and create social networks with peers.

Notably, the social domain was perceived by participants as the most welcoming to women, with Amina noting that “there used to be a lot of women involved.” Women in the DRC often play critical roles in their family and community. Therefore, they will often take on roles of social caregivers outside of the home. Because women frequently engaged in social activities, Idara stressed the ease and freedom she enjoyed in her social activities, in contrast to the political sphere, where women were often silenced: “... on était à l’aise, on était entre nous, donc on pouvait un peu faire et dire ce qu’on voulait librement.”¹⁹⁰ Further, women were often respected in the social domain, as Bethanie stated, “... they were treated with respect. They were given the leadership to make sure that things were functioning...” Francine had a similar experience as a volunteer with the church, remarking, “les gens quand même, avaient une considération pour nous.”¹⁹¹

Despite eight of the women being involved in social activities, this involvement was still limited owing to their age. For example, Lehana stated, “it wasn’t even known that you can do that [social activities].” Yolande asserted, “you went to school, that was your job. That’s it.” Social participation was also limited due to a lack of opportunities to participate. Yolande, for instance, commented, “... I don’t think there were too many opportunities that you have now. You have nongovernmental organizations, you have so many. At that time, no.” Ultimately, due to the constraints that prevented women from participating in political activities, participants were able to leverage their status as social caregivers and volunteer in social-related groups and activities. Similar constraints, however, prohibited participants from fully participating in social activities in the DRC and limited their possibilities for social engagement. It can consequently be inferred that the women had low levels of both political and social incorporation.

¹⁸⁸ Translation: “... already it interested me.”

¹⁸⁹ Translation: “... as a medical student as well, I thought it would be good to promote it anyway.”

¹⁹⁰ Translation: “... we were at ease, we were among ourselves, so we could do and say what we wanted freely.”

¹⁹¹ Translation: “... people still had regard for us.”

Interestingly, when examining patterns of participation in the pre-migration and post-migration stages, participants' level of political and social participation increased, with participants being more actively engaged in social and political activities in Canada than in the DRC. Since their arrival to Canada, all but one participant (Samora) participated socially in Canadian society, and all but two (Samora and Rosalie) participated politically (whether formally or informally). Whether gendered migration trajectories had an impact on the increasing level of political participation post-migration will be explored subsequently.

Political Participation in Canada

Table 8 below highlights participants' various forms of political participation in Canada. These activities were broken down into two categories based on the women's life stories and the literature review: formal political involvement and informal political involvement. Formal political involvement entails engaging in society's formal political processes, such as voting in Canada, joining a political party, supporting electoral candidates, or occupying a position of influence (i.e., representative). Informal political involvement entails a diverse array of activities performed by participants beyond the formal political sphere to voice their concerns or needs and shape the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Examples include taking part in change (including policies and laws) within the context of one's experiences, concerns, or environment; volunteering in advocacy groups, network-based communities, boards of directors, organizations, and associations; and mobilizing for one's ideals or defending one's rights through political activism. Activities related to civic duties were categorized as 'formal political involvement' since civic duty activities and formal politics were intertwined, and the distinction was blurred during the women's interviews.

Table 8*Forms of Formal and Informal Political Involvement of Participants in Canada*

Participants^a	Formal Political Involvement	Informal Political Involvement
Amina	Voting	Cooperative membership; advocacy through religious group
Bethanie	Volunteering for a political party's campaign; lobbying for Black local candidates; civic duties; conventional political knowledge through participation in political events or conferences	Advocacy through community groups (petitions and rallies); protests
Dalia	Town hall meetings	Cooperative membership; advocacy through seminars
Francine	None disclosed	Advocacy through religious groups
Idara	Voting	Advocacy through ethnocultural and community groups, school board
Jamille	Voting; volunteering for a provincial candidate; party membership	Petition letter
Joanna	None disclosed	Petition letter; membership of professional organization
Keisha	Voting; conventional political knowledge through participation in political events or conferences	Protests; petitions
Keren	None disclosed	Advocacy through ethnocultural group
Lehana	Voting	None disclosed
Michelle	Volunteering for a municipal candidate	Advocacy through professional network association
Rosalie	None disclosed	None disclosed
Samora	None disclosed	None disclosed
Valérie	Voting; candidate for city councillor; volunteering for a provincial and federal candidate	Advocacy through ethnocultural and community groups, board of directors
Yolande	Voting	Petitions

^a = the names provided for participants are pseudonyms.

Formal Political Participation. Ten participants identified formal political participation as a means of politically incorporating into Canadian society. Electoral participation or voting was the most common way for participants to become politically involved in formal politics and express their political views or opinions. Voting is often regarded as the “embodiment of citizenship”; once immigrants have been naturalized, they may expand their political incorporation by voting, thereby becoming part of the formal political community, gaining representation, and influencing decision-making (Bueker, 2005, pp.104, 107). Canada has three levels of government: the federal (national), provincial and territorial, and municipal (local) governments. In addition, only Canadian citizens 18 years of age or older are eligible to vote in any level of government election (Nakhaie, 2006). This contrasts with several European countries, where EU citizens residing in another EU member state can vote in local and European Parliament elections, and where foreigners are granted voting rights at the municipal level if they meet residency conditions (Bauböck, 2006). As a result, some consider voting to be a privileged political act as well as a fundamental civic duty as a citizen (Bueker, 2005).

When they became eligible to vote in Canadian elections, some participants also felt this sense of duty and significance in voicing their concerns for democracy. Yolande, for instance, claimed, “I’ve always made sure I voted on issues that matter to me. And, you know, sometimes people I’ve wanted in power haven’t been voted for. But at least I made my voice heard.” Idara had similar sentiments, having gained a new sense of political agency coming to Canada, saying,

Donc, j’ai cette fierté, et je suis, comment dire? Je ne sais pas quel mot utiliser. Reconnaissante peut-être? Je ne sais pas, mais je sais que j’ai la chance d’avoir, d’avoir cette opportunité-là. Donc, je la saisis. Je me sens chanceuse, voilà! En même temps. Donc, satisfaite et fière.¹⁹²

Coming from the DRC, women faced political repression and barriers to voting (or to accessing formal politics in general) despite having the right to vote since the Constitution was passed in 1967 by President Joseph Mobutu (article 29; Freedman, 2015). Thus, there was a likelihood that these experiences would lead participants to refrain from voting activities in Canada. Nevertheless, Yolande and Idara wanted to commit to the responsibility of being active citizens by exercising

¹⁹² Translation: “So, I have this pride, and I’m, how can I put it? I don’t know what word to use. Grateful maybe? I don’t know, but I know that I am fortunate to have, to have this opportunity. So, I take it. I feel fortunate, that’s it! At the same time. So, satisfied and proud.”

their right (and freedom) to vote to affect the course of events in Canada, and they were delighted for the privilege and opportunity to vote and participate in political decision-making processes. According to Idara, “[l]e vote, c’est quelque chose, comme je l’ai jamais fait au Congo. Je n’ai jamais eu cette opportunité-là.”¹⁹³ Jamille and Amina were also proud for the right and opportunity to vote and contribute to the well-being of their communities. Similarly, Valérie noted that voting and the right to express oneself freely had been a positive experience for her in Canada, adding, “... cette liberté d’expression, je pense quand même qu’on n’a pas forcément au Congo.”¹⁹⁴ She also saw the benefit in voting for representatives she trusted and believed in their ability to represent her and her values, particularly when she herself could not run for elections due to her responsibilities as a mother, wife, and community leader.

Despite being granted voting rights at all levels of government, just two participants discussed voting in municipal elections in Ottawa or Gatineau. This interest, as noted in Nakhaie’s (2006) findings, was due to their membership in non-profit organizations and associations, which allowed them to be rooted in the larger Ottawa or Gatineau community, and thus, increased their likelihood of participating in municipal elections. The remaining five participants who discussed voting as a form of political involvement were more active in provincial (Ontario and Québec) and federal elections as these were more familiar to them, particularly through conversations with friends and neighbours. As Yolande indicated, “... sometimes we discuss the issues, and we’ll decide what to do about it...” As per Schmitt-Beck and Grill (2020), these informal conversations regarding public issues in the private sphere can have an impact on formal institutions (i.e., elected representatives) and decision-making processes such as policies enacted by vote. To this degree, social capital is important for voting, as argued by Bevelander and Pendakur (2009).

In addition to voting, two participants were involved in electoral campaigns: Valérie as a candidate for city councillor and Michelle as a volunteer coordinator for a candidate running to be a municipal councillor. Citizenship allows immigrants to run in elections since they acquire the same political rights as the native-born population (Bueker, 2005). Valérie stated of her experiences as a candidate for city councillor:

¹⁹³ Translation: “[v]oting, it is something, like I never did in Congo. I never had that opportunity.”

¹⁹⁴ Translation: “... this freedom of expression, I think anyway that we don’t necessarily have in Congo.”

Je pense que c'est la possibilité qu'offre ce pays, à pouvoir d'avoir une voix, de la faire entendre et de pouvoir — et d'être, de [se] sentir valorisée, je pense. C'est quelque chose que, par exemple, au Congo, beaucoup n'ont pas.¹⁹⁵

In addition, Valérie believed in her capacity to represent her community (particularly to speak on issues or concerns that others in her community may not be able to) and to contribute to the advancement of her community, remarking, “[j]e pense que lorsqu’on a quelque chose à partager à la société, il faut, il faut le faire et ne pas avoir peur de le faire et pour oser.”¹⁹⁶ Michelle became a volunteer coordinator for a municipal candidate. She was responsible for recruiting, training, and scheduling volunteers, as well as canvassing, or going door-to-door and making phone calls to constituents to inform them of her candidate’s political platform for the community, such as reinvestment in public services. Michelle’s political volunteerism originated from her belief in the municipal candidate and the vision this candidate had for implementing measures or initiatives to support the community’s needs. According to Tolley (2011), there is some evidence of women having greater electoral access at the municipal level as many of the barriers that impact participation at the provincial and federal levels are less evident or significant at the municipal level. These include fewer financial obstacles, less demanding time commitments that are more suitable to women’s roles as spouses and mothers, and community issues that women are perceived to be more interested in being addressed at the municipal level rather than at higher levels of government (Tolley, 2011). The latter was particularly true for Valérie and Michelle, who were both active in the community and participated in several activities and engagements in the community associative milieu.

Other participants volunteered for political parties or candidates in similar ways to Michelle, particularly at the provincial and federal levels. This included Bethanie, who volunteered for the Liberal Party and their campaigns, and advocated and lobbied for Black candidates in her local community; Jamille, who volunteered at events to promote the Ontario New Democratic Party and the candidate running for Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP; provincial election campaign) in her constituency; and Valérie, who volunteered for the political campaigns of

¹⁹⁵ Translation: “I think that this is the opportunity that this country offers, to be able to have a voice, to have it heard and to be able— and to be, to feel valued, I think. It’s something that, for example, in the Congo, many people don’t have.”

¹⁹⁶ Translation: “I think that when you have something to share with society, you have to, you have to do it and not be afraid to do it and to be bold.”

candidates running to be a Member of Parliament (MP; federal election campaign) and MPP. Participation in campaign activities is an additional form of participation in formal politics, and while becoming a citizen and gaining voting rights may open new avenues for expressing political interest, such as campaigning (Eisenberg, 2015), not being a Canadian citizen did not prevent Bethanie from engaging in such activities. Notably, despite her lack of citizenship and inability to voice her concerns or choose her representatives through ballot, she made a conscious effort, even as a non-citizen, to partake in political campaigns and advocate for candidates who would represent her interests. She also partook in civic duties, such as volunteering for a federal election and presenting information in her community with regards to the political parties in Canada, where to receive election information, and the importance of voting. Bethanie also had conversations with friends, encouraging them to vote. For Bethanie, these activities were an opportunity to influence formal political processes without having voting rights — her participation calls into question the relationship between migration and citizenship rights (Eisenberg, 2015). That is, Bethanie had engaged in acts of citizenship, constituting herself as a citizen by rendering participation in formal political activities as *the* quality that qualified her as a citizen, rather than an outcome of being a citizen (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006).

While electoral participation was a common activity among the ten participants who engaged in formal politics, it was not the only form of formal politics employed to feel politically incorporated in Canadian society. Notably, this study revealed three additional types of formal political activity: acquiring conventional political knowledge through political events or conferences; party membership; and town hall meeting participation. Knowledge of Canadian governments, political leaders, and the political system are a few examples of conventional political knowledge (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009). And while political knowledge is deemed a civic engagement (O'Neill, 2006), it is viewed as playing an important role in immigrant women's political incorporation (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009). This was the case for Bethanie and Keisha; by attending political events or conferences, they were able to gather more knowledge about Canadian politics, which led to additional forms of political participation. Bethanie, for example, was selected by her high school teachers to attend the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board Youth Ottawa Speakers Series, where she met with a city councillor to discuss how the municipal government works in Ottawa and current issues in the city such as the waste management system and social issues affecting low-income families. Bethanie was also given a tour of City Hall and

took part in a question session where she learned about ways that she, as a youth, can impact decision-making in Ottawa. As a result of this experience, Bethanie gained a lot of political knowledge about municipal politics, was inspired to serve her community through volunteerism, and “I thought I was going to be a political analyst.” Though she would not go on to become a political analyst, this experience laid the groundwork for her career path in urban and regional planning to respond to the needs of low-income families in her local housing communities.

Furthermore, Keisha attended the National Christian Youth Summit, a non-partisan three-day summit hosted by MPs at the Parliament of Canada for Christian youth to learn about Canada’s government and formal institutions, as well as to explore the intersection of faith and national affairs and how they can serve in Canada while being Christians (National Christian Youth Summit, 2019). Keisha participated. She heard from parliamentary leaders and the prime minister, took part in panel discussions where she asked MPs questions related to the government, and learned about her prospects of becoming a political leader despite not having specific credentials (for instance, a political science degree). This experience was insightful for Keisha; coming from the DRC, where corruption was prevalent in politics, it was difficult for her to trust the Canadian government, and therefore she had no intentions to learn about Canadian politics or participate politically in Canada. However, “... seeing their [the MPs’] day to day lives and asking them questions...” enabled her to gain more political knowledge and realize that politics was not all bad. Keisha explained, “I actually got, like, very interested [in politics] that I Googled random things just to know what’s happening, you know?” This experience led Keisha to vote in the 2019 Canadian federal election: “I actually didn’t vote before until the election that just happened.” She also appreciated the summit so much that she returned the following year to learn more about politics and how she could become a political leader in the future. Keisha exemplifies how political resocialization among immigrants from repressive countries can lead to political learning and participation in Canada (White, 2017).

Joining a political party is another type of formal political participation that is evidenced in this study through Jamille’s case. After becoming a registered member of the Liberal Party, Jamille received information about forthcoming events and attended several of them, where she was able to share some of her own political ideas and discuss personal and community concerns with MPs. For Jamille, the value of joining a political party was to get access to political leaders with whom she could discuss her needs and concerns, as well as those of her community. Jamille

remarked, “[d]’ailleurs, c’est pour ça qu’on a des députés pour nous représenter. Alors pour que les députés nous représentent, ils doivent nous entendre, et pour qu’ils nous entendent, il faut qu’on leur donne des idées.”¹⁹⁷

Lastly, Dalia attended various town hall meetings during election seasons with politicians who sought to discuss topics that concerned constituents and to seek change. Conventional gatherings, such as town hall meetings, allow citizens to enter the public sphere to voice their needs and concerns to political leaders while also expressing their views on public policy issues, bridging the gap between citizens’ lived experiences and political decision-making (Schmitt-Beck & Grill, 2020). Dalia had the opportunity to meet politicians and ask them questions in town hall meetings, which not only informed her vote in elections but also allowed her to provide her input on key policy issues, notably those affecting immigrants and their settlement. For instance, when a politician running for an election described their plans concerning immigrants and their incorporation, Dalia inquired,

« Bon, ok. La question de l’immigration, elle est là de longtemps. Qu’est-ce qui prouve que ce que vous voulez faire aujourd’hui ça va [être] différent de ce qui a été fait avant? Parce qu’on est immigrant depuis, ça fait douze ans, moi je vis ici. Je ne vois vraiment rien de changement. Qu’est qui prouve que vous allez changer? » ... C’est toujours des questions qui aident les hommes politiques à changer leur perception et tout ça. Donc, je participe beaucoup à ce genre d’événement.¹⁹⁸

Attending these meetings was important for Dalia since her arrival in Canada (and prior to obtaining citizenship), as it allowed her to share her viewpoints on key issues affecting her and her community. She asserted,

... avant que je me mette à critiquer, je dois me rassurer que j’ai contribué, j’ai donné un point de vue, j’ai donné des idées, j’ai fait ceci. Et puis après, si ça ne fonctionne pas, je

¹⁹⁷ Translation: “[i]n fact, that’s why we have MPs to represent us. So, for MPs to represent us, they have to hear us, and for them to hear us, we have to give them ideas.”

¹⁹⁸ Translation: ““Well, okay. The immigration issue, it’s been around for a long time. What proves that what you want to do today is different from what was done before? Because we’ve been immigrants for, it’s been twelve years, I’ve lived here. I really haven’t seen any change. What evidence do you have that you will change?” ... It’s always questions that help politicians change their perception and all that. So, I participate a lot in this kind of event.”

peux critiquer parce que j'ai contribué. Donc, c'est ça qui me motive beaucoup à participer à ces activités.¹⁹⁹

Thus, town hall meetings can serve as a platform for even non-citizens to feel politically incorporated into the Canadian political system.

Informal Political Participation. Generally, when immigrants leave their country of origin, they also leave most of their social network behind and must re-establish that network in their new country (Hudon, 2015). As a result, once immigrants feel established in that new country, they join and volunteer in groups such as religious organizations, ethnic associations, social clubs, community centres, and professional networks to build social capital and facilitate successful incorporation into society (Handy & Greenspan, 2009). Despite previous research indicating that immigrant women are less likely than Canadian-born women to be members or participants in groups such as organizations or associations (Hudon, 2015), this study found that most participants became very active in a variety of activities, some immediately after their arrival in Canada. As per Bethanie, "... what made me integrate into the Canadian society was my community," and the various activities in which she took part. The women in this study were members or participants in a variety of social groups and activities, including religious and ethnocultural groups, community organizations, community services, charities, public seminars and conferences, and network associations. These social groups and activities, according to participants, were also widely engaged and performed by other women. For example, when discussing women's participation in an ethnocultural association she was a member of, Yolande remarked, "Yes, other women are involved. They are there and they're involved. Very much so. Even so, more than myself. Some of them, I don't know where they find the time. [*laughs*]." While men were present in some social groups and activities, they were largely absent from the women's narrative of their social and political landscape, which can be explained by the fact that immigrant women are more likely to participate in ethnic, religious, and community organizations (Brown, 2014; Harell, 2017) where women predominate. As Idara noted, "... on est entre femmes"²⁰⁰ in organizations, associations, and committee groups that attend to women's concerns and interests. Therefore, it appeared that men's influence on their social participation was minimal in these social settings.

¹⁹⁹ Translation: "... before I start criticizing, I have to reassure myself that I contributed, I gave a point of view, I gave ideas, I did this. And then afterwards, if it doesn't work, I can criticize because I contributed. So, that's what motivates me a lot to participate in these activities."

²⁰⁰ Translation: "... we are among women."

Again, it was critical for participants to discuss their social participation in Canada to account for any political activities that they may have engaged in as part of their membership or participation in social activities or groups, and that they may not have identified as such, especially given some of the women's definitions of participation being limited to the sphere of formal politics. Indeed, while participation in social activities may have served as opportunities for incorporating into Canadian society, as will be seen, many of the women's social activities translated into opportunities for political participation. Altogether, participants engaged in various political activities — often linked to their social participation — that can be classified into eight categories: participation in ethnocultural or broader community groups, cooperatives, religious groups, protests, petitions, boards, professional networks, and public seminars.

Nine participants were members of, or participated as volunteers in, ethnocultural and broader community associations and organizations. Ethnocultural associations are especially important among African immigrants and to their settlement and incorporation since they offer members the opportunity to acquire social capital and networks, which help them navigate Canadian institutions like hospitals and schools (Kyeremeh et al., 2021). This was also the case for participants, who became involved in culturally relevant associations, such as the *Communauté Congolaise du Canada Ottawa-Gatineau* and the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*, to network with other Congolese immigrants in the Ottawa-Gatineau region and facilitate their incorporation in both Canadian society and the Congolese community. Rosalie, for instance, once volunteered for the *Communauté Congolaise du Canada Ottawa-Gatineau*, where individuals of Congolese descent congregate to engage in fluid and friendly conversations, as well as to network with one another. Dalia was also a member and participant in the organization, having become involved for three reasons:

Premièrement, parce que je suis congolaise, deuxièmement, parce que je voulais savoir qu'est-ce que cette communauté est en train de faire, et puis troisièmement, c'est de voir quelle pourrait être mon apport dans ça. Donc, c'est pour cela que je participe.²⁰¹

Through this organization, Dalia took part in various activities, including the adult-youth exchange, a networking event for Congolese people of all ages. Francine and Valérie were also among those involved in the *Communauté Congolaise du Canada Ottawa-Gatineau*. Francine

²⁰¹ Translation: "Firstly, because I am Congolese, secondly, because I wanted to know what this community is trying to do, and thirdly, to see what my contribution could be in this. So, that's why I'm participating."

believed that as someone who wanted to give back to the community and contribute to Canadian society in some way, she would be most valuable in the Congolese community, where she could assist in building a sense of belonging and solidarity. For instance, when Francine settled in Ottawa, she joined the *Maison Congolaise* (Congolese House), the *Communauté Congolaise du Canada Ottawa-Gatineau*'s committee that aimed to build a communal house for members to congregate or assemble, comparable to a Congolese community centre. Francine was responsible for calculating the feasibility of building such a house. Unfortunately, the project did not come to fruition when a new president of the association was elected. Valérie was also once a member of the organization's council, taking part in the planning of cultural events and gatherings of the Congolese community. She expressed the following about her incorporation into Canadian society as a result of her membership in the association (among others): "... j'ai créé ma place, j'ai pris ma place en faisant, en étant active dans la communauté, en prenant part aux différentes choses qui se passent dans le milieu associatif, dans toutes les communautés."²⁰² This is evident in her participation in various other associations and organizations, both cultural and in the broader community, which will be discussed below. Since the *Communauté Congolaise du Canada Ottawa-Gatineau* is a well-known non-profit organization among the Congolese population in the Ottawa-Gatineau region and has been established in the community for nearly two decades, it is not unexpected that a few participants were members or participants of the organization at some point during their settlement in the region.

Other women were involved in the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*, which strives to connect women of Congolese descent in the Ottawa-Gatineau region and beyond for networking and resource sharing for the community's well-being. Further, understanding the challenges that immigrant women in general, and Congolese women in particular, experience upon settling in Canada, Keren explained that the association's goals were to assist and educate women through events and conferences, as well as "[s]ortir de son isolement..."²⁰³ Keren and Idara were both active members and participants of the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*, coordinating various community activities such as thematic events like how to invest; "Raising Proud Black Kids" following the death of

²⁰² Translation: "... I created my place, I took my place by doing, by being active in the community, by taking part in the different activities that happen in the associative environment, in all the communities."

²⁰³ Translation: "...to come out of one's isolation..."

George Floyd in May 2020 due to police brutality in Minneapolis (United States), to discuss with parents how best to raise children to be proud of their Black identity; social gatherings like *Samedi, le sport* (Sports on Sunday), where members gather every Saturday to play various sports to stay active and get out of social isolation; and networking events to connect with individuals who share similar interests or careers. Keren felt that for her to be able to build a social network for herself and other Congolese women in Canada, “... ça prenait justement que j’organise ces genres d’activités là.”²⁰⁴ Coordination of these activities was also important for Idara to offer a space for women to acquire critical knowledge and information that would assist in their settlement in Canada, from other women who have gone through similar migration experiences. She elaborates,

On s’est dit, ça peut être intéressant pour les femmes immigrantes pour savoir peut-être comment l’éducation des enfants, du système scolaire, comment le comprendre, comment mieux participer? Parce que quand on arrive, on vient avec — on connaît le système de là-bas [la RDC], mais on ne connaît pas comment ça fonctionne ici.²⁰⁵

Yolande and Joanna were also active members of the *Congolese Women’s Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*. Yolande not only offered ideas for cultural events, but she also helped supply essential goods to the Congolese community through the association, such as masks and hand sanitizers to Congolese households during the COVID-19 pandemic. Joanna organized social activities for young Congolese girls and women, particularly those in relationships, providing support and guidance based on her own experiences as a woman, wife, and mother.

Aside from the two Congolese organizations, Michelle was active with another one, founded by a Congolese friend, which aimed to raise funds for an orphanage in the DRC as well as a residential facility for elderly women. Michelle’s role included promoting the organization’s GoFundMe page, raising money for the orphanage and facility, donating some clothing items, and assisting with organizing social events such as a Christmas party for children in the DRC.

Participants have also participated in groups, associations, and organizations in the broader community, often related to their self-identity, personal interests, or field of study. For example, since her arrival in Canada, Bethanie had been involved with several groups in Ottawa. As a recent immigrant, Bethanie wanted to make contributions in the community by assisting those in need of

²⁰⁴ Translation: “... it took me to organize these kinds of activities.”

²⁰⁵ Translation: “We said to ourselves, it could be interesting for immigrant women to know how their children’s education, the school system, how to understand it, how to better participate? Because when we arrive, we come with—we know the system from over there [the DRC], but we don’t know how it works here.”

services and support to help them incorporate, as she had received from others. Her involvement in groups included the Door Youth Centre, a community centre where youth aged 12 to 18 participate in volunteer opportunities and gain a sense of civic responsibility and engagement in the community while acquiring the knowledge and skills to become independent and responsible members of the community (Door Youth Centre, n.d.). Bethanie saw the youth centre as “... a very, very important centre, actually, for a lot of the youth and some of the youth that come, they are very vulnerable and stuff like that. Some maybe foster kids, and all that. So, we were there helping.” Her involvement included assisting in educational and social activities during the summer months to promote the youth’s growth and development. Bethanie was also an active participant within the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), a multi-issue, membership-based community union of low- and moderate-income individuals who advocate for social and economic justice in the Ottawa-Gatineau region (ACORN, 2012). As a participant, Bethanie volunteered to do taxes for low-income families, commenting,

... that was a really good experience because it exposed me to meeting different types of people. Like everyone was coming from different walks of life, like self-employed people, people who didn’t speak English or French and needed their kids to pretty much like — it exposed me to the different kinds of people coming. I had people who were suffering with retirement, you know. So, you’re meeting a lot of different people from different low-income circumstances, you know, people who are in extreme debt, people who are just suffering and never were able to make it out. You’re meeting immigrant and newcomer families.

Bethanie also volunteered at an Indigenous reserve near the provincial border between Ontario and Manitoba, assisting in the establishment of a literacy program for Indigenous children while learning about the Indigenous community “because I’d always been advocating for Indigenous rights and being in an Indigenous community, it taught me a lot.” It was difficult for Bethanie to witness many of the children who could not read at their grade level, “[b]ut we were there to help. We were there to encourage them.” Moreover, Bethanie assisted with the painting of community fences in Ottawa communities, stating, “[w]e would go into communities, we would clean retirement homes like buildings that were, of course by the OCH, which is the Ottawa Carleton Housing. So, I did a lot of volunteering with them.” Her desire to assist communities stemmed from her personal experiences living in housing and observing a lack of resources and investment

in the community. Lastly, Bethanie was a member of the Black Student Leaders Association's (BSLA) executive committee, a student association at the University of Ottawa, with the goal of "creating safe spaces for Black students and any marginalized students. And we did a lot of events talking about different issues that spoke to everyday life, as you know, Black people, Black students, Black youths." Her involvement with the BSLA developed from her high school experiences with anti-Black racism and a desire to promote and establish safe spaces for Black students at university, something that she lacked in high school.

Joanna, like Bethanie, was a member of student associations at the University of Moncton, including the Engineering student and Congolese student associations. Her participation was socially based to create networking opportunities for herself as an engineer and Congolese student, therefore facilitating her settlement in Moncton, New Brunswick. Joanna also joined the Umoja Engineering Network, a group of Congolese engineers who aim to respond to the DRC's engineering needs and to carry out projects in the country to contribute to its development and restructuring (Umoja Engineering Network, 2021). Joanna saw this group as an opportunity to meet other Congolese people in the field of engineering. She also hoped that as a member, she would be able to collaborate with others on future engineering projects. She stated, "... s'il y a des opportunités dans le futur pour travailler en collaboration avec telle ou telle firme, ou telle ou telle personne, c'est ça qui est visé en tant que membre."²⁰⁶

Lastly, Idara and Francine were both involved with organizations that provided services to immigrant women in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. For instance, when Idara first settled in Gatineau, she volunteered for the *Accompagnement des femmes immigrantes de l'Outaouais* (AFIO), a regional non-profit community organization that serves immigrant women and responds to their needs to enable them to incorporate into society (AFIO, 2020). Her volunteer work included assisting with social activities such as end-of-year parties, where she not only served her community, but which also facilitated her own social incorporation. When Francine moved to Ottawa, she volunteered with Immigrant Women Services Ottawa (IWSO), a community-based organization that helps immigrant and racialized women incorporate into society, rebuild their lives, and accomplish personal goals by offering a range of settlement and integration services (IWSO, n.d.). Francine expressed, "... ce que je voulais faire c'est vraiment travailler pour les

²⁰⁶ Translation: "... if there are opportunities in the future to work in collaboration with such and such firm, or such and such person, that's what I'm aiming for as a member."

immigrantes, aider les immigrantes parce que, ayant passé par là, je comprenais mieux les systèmes et je pouvais aider les autres à s'intégrer davantage."²⁰⁷ Through her volunteer work, Francine was able to assist other immigrant women by sharing her experiences, offering them support, and directing them to resources and services. She stated, "Je me sentais quand même utile dans ce travail-là."²⁰⁸

Three participants' social participation in ethnocultural or community groups, associations, or organizations transitioned to political participation, either through the same groups they were members or participants of for their social activities, or through branching out to other groups in the community. When discussing political participation, Keren asserted,

Pour moi, la participation politique, c'est vraiment, um, être engagée en fait. Être engagée, ce n'est pas seulement dans les lois, les politiques machin. C'est vraiment déjà être une personne engagée, croire à quelque chose, à un idéal et se battre pour. C'est ça en fait... Et puis avoir des solutions qui, de manière à ce que tu puisses changer les choses, tant soit peu dans la mesure de tous moyens, là où tu es, tu peux agir.²⁰⁹

Thus, she and Idara used their membership in the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises* as a platform to raise community concerns and advocate for Congolese women's health, rights, and empowerment in the Ottawa-Gatineau community, as well as in the DRC. For instance, Keren and Idara organized a walk that invited all women in the Congolese community to join forces and promote Congolese women's health and well-being. Notably, in organizing this walk, Keren and Idara took an active role in increasing awareness of and the need to ensure Congolese women's good health. This walk also took place in other countries including the DRC, the United States, and Belgium. Keren explained,

C'est une journée de sensibilisation pour marcher pour la santé de la femme congolaise. On a organisé ça, et [cela a été] un succès. On a eu des images de Kinshasa, on a eu les images aux États-Unis. On a, donc, bref — en Belgique, partout.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Translation: "... what I wanted to do was really work for immigrants, help immigrants because, having been there, I understood the systems better and I could help others integrate more."

²⁰⁸ Translation: "I just felt useful in this work."

²⁰⁹ Translation: "For me, political participation, it's really, um, being engaged in fact. To be engaged, it's not only in laws, in political things. It's really already being an engaged person, believing in something, in an ideal and fighting for it. That's what it is in fact... And then to have solutions that, in a way that you can change things, to the extent that you can, where you are, you can act."

²¹⁰ Translation: "It's a day of awareness to walk for the health of the Congolese woman. We organized this, and a success. We got pictures from Kinshasa, we got pictures from the United States. So, in short— in Belgium, everywhere."

This is an example of transnational citizenship, as Keren and Idara engaged in a cross-border political practice of seeking to empower Congolese women, form solidarity, and raise awareness of Congolese women's health in Canada and the DRC in collaboration with other Congolese women's organizations in various other countries (Bauböck, 2006; Kennedy-Macfoy, 2012). This also established a type of membership and belonging that blurred the boundaries between various political states (Bauböck, 2006; Brekke, 2013). As per Idara, members of the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises* often sought to plan "comment participer peut-être au développement au pays,"²¹¹ implying that transnational practices were common among the women. Similarly, Keren and Idara held local conferences to mobilize for Congolese women's health. For example, they organized a conference on breast cancer awareness after discovering that, contrary to what some physicians assumed, many cancer resources were unavailable or inaccessible to the Congolese community. As Keren explained,

... il y a plusieurs barrières comme ça qui font que quand vous êtes en train de nous dire que vous avez mis des ressources à notre disposition, ces ressources-là, nous, on ne les a jamais vu. Donc ça signifie que vos ressources ne sont pas culturellement adaptées à nous.²¹²

While raising awareness about breast cancer, they also sought to transform the way information and resources were communicated to the Congolese community by inviting physicians as panelists to share vital information with the community while also listening to the community's needs. Keren went on to say,

Alors, c'est comme ça que même dans notre conférence avec le cancer, on est allé les chercher, eux qui viennent sur notre panel parce qu'ils — on doit apprendre d'eux, mais aussi ils doivent savoir comment *dealer* avec nous. Nous ne sommes pas, nous sommes des gens un peu particuliers par notre culture, par notre façon de voir les choses, de concevoir la maladie, etcetera... qu'ils soient là, qu'ils écoutent aussi. On n'est pas en train de les accuser. On est en train juste de les éduquer.²¹³

²¹¹ Translation: "... how to maybe participate in the development of the country."

²¹² Translation: "... there are several barriers like that which make it so that when you are telling us that you have made resources available to us, those resources, we have never seen them. So, that means that your resources are not culturally appropriate for us."

²¹³ Translation: "So, that's how even in our conference about cancer, we went looking for them, those who came on our panel because they— we have to learn from them, but also they have to know how to deal with us. We are not, we are a little bit unique by our culture, by our way of seeing things, of conceiving sickness, etcetera... they should be there, they should listen too. We are not accusing them. We are just educating them."

Bethanie demonstrated her propensity to participate in social activities that she passionately supported; nevertheless, she found space for her involvement to manifest into political action through some of her membership in groups or associations. Helping low-income families with their taxes through ACORN, for example, encouraged Bethanie to advocate for low-income families and their needs, such as better housing and Internet accessibility. Bethanie indicated, "... you learn a lot about why it's so important to help people out and advocating, we would advocate for Internet accessibility, anything to make it easier for communities that, of course, had higher rates of low-income families." Through her involvement with the BSLA, Bethanie co-created safe spaces for Black students to voice their needs and concerns, and advocate for change and inclusivity in the Ottawa community. Furthermore, her involvement with ACORN and Door Youth Centre made her realize many hidden issues within her community that made her question the decision-making processes within it, propelling her to get involved with advocating for low-income families, as well as racialized youth. As Bethanie explained,

You know, my community reflected a lot of the things. It reflected our needs, our wants... Why is the housing not taken care of? You know, or like we're seeing single moms who don't have education and stuff, immigrant women, why is that?... I've also seen like a lot of people with disabilities who didn't have access to the things they needed or housing or accessibility in buildings and stuff. So, there was a lot of things like in my everyday life that I was continuously questioning when it comes to the socioeconomic factors of people that made me want to be more curious in participating in politics.

Her community service with Ottawa Carleton Housing also developed her sense of political identity (Yates & Youniss, 1998), motivating her further to get involved in political engagements, particularly after experiencing for herself the housing crisis and lack of resources while living in social housing. Therefore, once Bethanie realized she had the opportunity, she began advocating for the needs and rights of marginalized members of her community, such as immigrant women, low-income families, racialized groups, and individuals with disabilities. As a result, Bethanie claimed the local groups she was a member of as political spaces where she could mobilize for specific political causes significant to her and linked to her own experiences (Erel, 2009; Kennedy-Macfoy, 2012). This was also Bethanie's way of performing citizenship practices even though she was not a citizen herself (Nyers, 2006). Bethanie's advocacy took the form of signing online petitions and participating in rallies to demand change in her communities. Beyond these, Bethanie

participated in several protests advocating for Indigenous peoples' rights, particularly after her visit to an Indigenous reserve to help establish a literacy program for Indigenous children, as well as protests advocating anti-racism, social justice, and more civic resources for the Black community because "I wanted to see more youth and Black youth, just children, first generation, second generation being more involved." Keisha also participated in anti-racism protests in Ottawa, such as the recent Black Lives Matter protest in early June 2020 in response to the killing of George Floyd. According to Bilodeau (2008), protest politics has become a common means for individuals in Western democracies to express their political voice, though participation in protests was uncommon for my participants.

Two participants joined ethnocultural and community groups to engage in political activities related to issues that were particularly important to them. Valérie, for instance, was involved in a number of associations, including the *Association des africains du Canada, d'Ottawa* (African Canadian Association Ottawa; ACAO), which promotes the welfare of African Canadians and the Black community while also ensuring the accessibility and availability of services to this community (ACAO, n.d.-a). In addition to organizing festivals and events to promote African cultures and empower the African and Black communities to participate in discussions and decision-making that impact them, the association has several committees that advocate for the needs of the community, including the Democratic and Civic Engagement Committee; the Settlement, Integration, and Careers Committee; and the Anti-Racism, Equity and Justice Committee (ACAO, n.d.-b). Therefore, through her membership with the ACAO, Valérie pursued initiatives aimed at establishing ties between the African and Black communities of Ottawa and the broader community, as well as to promote the community's needs, and protest anti-Black racism and discrimination. Valérie was also the co-founder of two non-profit organizations that also advocate for human rights, social justice, and women's rights. Speaking about her non-profit organizations, she remarked that "mon activisme, il a surtout pris, on va dire, de l'ampleur par rapport à la lutte contre la violence faite aux femmes, surtout la violence de l'arme de guerre,"²¹⁴ in which she has never hesitated to advocate for the rights of women. Valérie's duties and mission included,

²¹⁴ Translation: "... my activism, it has especially taken, shall we say, the scale in relation to the fight against violence done to women, especially violence as a weapon of war."

... beaucoup d'organisation, planification des événements, organiser des formations, donner des formations, organiser des réunions, comment dirai-je, dans tout ça, se rassembler. C'est vraiment rassembler la communauté autour d'un thème commun qui va être soit notre francophonie, soit notre, la justice sociale, soit notre Congo justement. C'est ça. C'est rassembler. Je pense que dans toutes les activités que j'ai faites, ça revient à ça.²¹⁵

Overall, while Valérie was actively involved in formal politics, she also expressed the importance of advocating in the community for the issues that were most important to her.

Furthermore, Idara expanded her political participation in groups to include broader community organizations, such as volunteering for Results Canada, a non-profit organization that campaigns to reduce global poverty through education and action, including influencing decision-makers to improve policies, implement more efficient programs, and increase resources to combat poverty (Results Canada, 2021). Idara was particularly interested in advocating for more investment in international development and immunization to minimize the number of deaths by preventable diseases, which stemmed in part from her interests in public health. As a volunteer, she attended meetings to learn more about the campaign issues and how to be an advocate, and she campaigned on social media platforms such as Twitter, posting and sharing messages on key issues “qui sont peut-être adressés aux responsables qui prennent des décisions et tout. C'est avec ça que j'aide activement.”²¹⁶ Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and blogs have become popular entry points into digital activism, allowing activists to communicate their messages to a variety of audiences, including the general public and political leaders, as well as raise awareness of political issues to a large number of people quickly and cheaply (Harlow & Guo, 2014). Idara's political activism also served as a platform for transnational citizenship and an attempt to impact social change throughout the African region. As Idara said,

... c'est vrai que je suis ici, je suis canadienne, mais je suis d'origine africaine. Donc, j'ai toujours un lien avec mon continent d'origine... Donc, s'il y a moyen de pouvoir changer un peu le, je ne sais pas, les stades des pays en voie de développement, principalement

²¹⁵ Translation: “... a lot of organization, planning of events, organizing trainings, giving trainings, organizing meetings, how shall I say, in all this, getting together. It's really about bringing the community together around a common theme which is going to be either our Francophonie, or our social justice, or our Congo. That's what it is. It's bringing people together. I think that in all the activities I have done, it comes down to that.”

²¹⁶ Translation: “... that are perhaps addressed to decision-makers and all. That's what I actively help with.”

l'Afrique, si je peux y contribuer, même indirectement, à travers de, de *Results Canada*, pourquoi pas?²¹⁷

Aside from ethnocultural and community groups, associations, and organizations, two participants were engaged in political participation through their membership in housing cooperatives, which provide at-cost housing and services, such as amenities, to residents who are members and shareholders of the cooperative (Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, 2021). Many housing cooperatives in Canada were developed as part of government social housing initiatives for low- to moderate-income households, however, there exists many different types of cooperatives today. As members, residents share responsibilities for building management and maintenance (Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, 2021). They also attend general meetings, have the right to run for the board of directors, and have voting rights to influence decisions on housing policies, regulations, and rules, as well as to elect board of directors. Dalia was the president of a committee in a cooperative, where she was involved in decision-making processes to improve conditions in her neighbourhood, including inadequate housing conditions. She expressed,

Donc, je participe à ceci parce que je n'aimerai pas que demain, je sois sur la rue en train de critiquer, « Oh, mais ces gens ont fait ça, ils ont dit ça, et patati patata. » Oui, c'est vrai, on va critiquer, mais quelle était ton rapport? Quel est l'effort que tu as fourni pour [ce] qui est de changements?²¹⁸

Amina was also an active member of her cooperative, where she often voiced her concerns during general meetings to influence decision-making processes on housing regulations and to advocate for positive changes on behalf of her community. She explained, "I am involved in difference making. When something doesn't go well in the community, I have to be involved..." Amina also exercised her right to vote by electing residents to the board of directors she thought would best represent her community's interests. Thus, Dalia and Amina developed a political identity through their membership by demanding adequate resources and security for their community, as well as

²¹⁷ Translation: "... it's true that I'm here, I'm Canadian, but I'm of African origin. So, I always have a connection with my continent of origin... So, if there is a way to change a little bit the, I don't know, the stages of developing countries, mainly Africa, if I can contribute to it, even indirectly, through, through Results Canada, why not?"

²¹⁸ Translation: "So, I participate in this because I don't want to be on the streets tomorrow criticizing, 'Oh, but these people did this, they said that, and yada yada.'" Yes, it's true, we'll criticize, but what was your contribution? What was the effort that you put forth for there to be change?

influencing decision-making processes to address some of the challenges they faced in their housing cooperative and to ensure the well-being of residents.

In addition, participants were also involved in signing petitions, which are political acts through which individuals express their political voice to decision-makers (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009). While petitions may reveal their identities publicly, for example, by providing their name on a document that may be presented to a political leader (Bilodeau, 2008), participants were not averse to signing petitions if it meant voicing their concerns. As Yolande explained, “[t]o me, it’s to take advantage of, if I can have a say in something, I’ll do it and influence the direction of things in the country.” This was especially important for her since in the DRC, she had to “make sure I keep my mouth shut because you don’t know who’s listening... if somebody followed you because you say the wrong thing, right?” given the regime she was living under. Most participants in this study who participated in petitions did so by signing petitions that were related to their needs or concerns rather than creating new ones. To illustrate, Yolande signed a petition opposing the development of new condominiums in her neighbourhood in Québec. Yolande, who was concerned about the environment and her community, asserted:

So, it’s my responsibility to go and say, ‘No!’ and to sign the petition and say, ‘We don’t want this here because, you know, there are animals here, you’re going to destroy this, and they won’t have anywhere to go. And it’s going to be too crowded. These are the only few green spaces we have left in Aylmer now.’ So, this is, this is my way of contributing to political life.

Among other petitions, Amina also signed a petition to block the municipal government’s decision to destroy a forest in her neighbourhood to make place for the development of new homes, stating, “I was involved in signing the petition to oppose them, you know, the government. Yeah, if I see something, like in the government, it’s not going well, I can speak out...” Keisha had signed many petitions since high school, particularly those found online related to multiple issues that concerned her and her Christian beliefs, including anti-racism in school boards. As people’s access to, and usage of, the Internet have risen in recent years, social movement and activist groups have increasingly used online tools to mobilize people, including online petitions (Elliott & Earl, 2018).

Furthermore, two participants had contacted ministers or agents in government for a cause that was important to them. Joanna lost her scholarship while at the University of Moncton and she was on a student visa that did not permit her to work to supplement her income, so she decided

to apply for a work visa while she sorted out her scholarship issues. Her visa application, however, was denied, so she decided to write to an agent at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), to plead her case for her to be permitted to work. Joanna recalled:

La première demande que j'ai faite a été rejetée. Ils n'ont pas voulu m'accorder la possibilité de travailler... Puis, j'ai trouvé le courriel de ce monsieur-là... qui travaillait à l'immigration que je ne connaissais pas. Et je lui ai écrit en gros un courriel et j'ai détaillé ma situation. Je lui ai expliqué. Je me rappelle que c'était un vendredi, un vendredi après-midi. Puis j'ai fermé mon ordinateur, je me suis dit, « Ah, bon, advienne que pourra! » ... Et la même journée, le monsieur a répondu, et il m'a accordé le visa temporaire pour travailler en attendant d'avoir un visa comme travailleur qualifié, même si je n'avais pas encore fini mon université.²¹⁹

The opportunity to become political emerged as a result of Joanna's financial difficulties, even when she was uncertain if she had the legal right to make such a demand. Fortunately, "... il avait le pouvoir, et je ne savais même pas qu'il avait le pouvoir de décider en fait. Et c'est arrivé."²²⁰ Nevertheless, writing a personal letter to the agent at IRCC proved to be an influential way to petition for change in her visa decision. This was likewise true for Jamille. When she first started working at Health Canada, she wrote to Minister Allan Rock, requesting malaria medications to send to the DRC, which was ravaged by the disease:

... j'ai dit, « Écoutez. Je travaille ici [à Santé Canada], mon pays, la RDC, connaît des difficultés très difficiles, il y a une pandémie de malaria. Est-ce que ce serait possible que je passe par vous directement? Je ne veux pas passer par quatre chemins. Je passe par vous directement si vous pouvez m'aider, pour me donner des médicaments [que] je peux envoyer en RDC? ». ²²¹

²¹⁹ Translation: "The first application I made was rejected. They wouldn't give me the opportunity to work... Then I found this gentleman's email... who worked at immigration that I didn't know. And I basically wrote him an email and detailed my situation. I explained it to him. I remember it was a Friday, a Friday afternoon. And then I shut my computer, I said to myself, 'Ah, well, come what may!' ... And the same day, the gentleman answered, and he granted me the temporary visa to work while waiting to get a visa as a skilled worker, even though I had not yet finished my university."

²²⁰ Translation: "... he had the power, and I didn't even know he had the power to actually decide. And it happened."

²²¹ Translation: "... I said, 'Listen. I work here [at Health Canada]. My country, the DRC, is having a very difficult time, there is a malaria pandemic. Would it be possible for me to go through you directly? I don't want to beat around the bush. I'm going to go through you directly if you can help me, to give me some medications where I can send to the DRC?'"

Minister Allan Rock responded to her letter by putting her in contact with a Swiss doctor, whom he had requested to provide Jamille with malaria medications for her to deliver in Kinshasa whenever she was ready. As a result, Jamille's letter petitioning for malaria medication alerted Minister Allan Rock about the DRC's malaria situation, prompting him to act. Jamille's letter was also an example of transnational activism on behalf of the malaria-stricken Congolese population.

Participants were fairly involved with religious groups in their communities. Among the participants in this study, seven were highly implicated in church in various ways. Joanna had been involved in music at her church and in a small group where she mentored young couples along with her husband: "Donc, si jamais il y a des couples, des jeunes couples en difficulté qui ont des problèmes, on les aide."²²² She did this because she, herself, was married and understood the struggles that women often go through in marriage. Joanna explained,

... des fois, en tant que femme, on a des difficultés, on a — il y a des outils pour nous aider... Donc, c'est ce que je fais, ça c'est toujours dans le but de pouvoir aider et de pouvoir donner de ce que j'ai reçu. Donner un peu de mes expériences, partager de mes expériences.²²³

Amina had been involved in various activities run by the church, such as supporting other members if they were sick or had a death in the family, organizing parties and seminars, helping the vulnerable in the community, and most importantly for her, being involved in youth ministries. Keisha had also been involved with youth and children's ministries. She explained,

So, for kids' ministry, it would be like teaching or going for overnight camps... And then for youth ministry, as a youth leader. So, I would just do whatever like the Pastor told me that I needed to do. So, sometimes it did involve teaching and stuff like that. Other times would be preparing games or outreach activities, being present, you know, messaging people and things like that.

Similarly, Bethanie volunteered at her church, helping with summer camps for students, organizing social activities, and leading a leadership program for the youth. Bethanie delved deeper into the latter activity:

²²² Translation: "So, if there are ever couples, young couples in difficulty who are having issues, we help them."

²²³ Translation: "... sometimes, as a woman, we have difficulties, we have— there are tools that can help us... So, that's what I do, it's always with the aim of being able to help and to be able to give what I have received. To give a little of my experiences, to share my experiences."

... how to be in leadership spiritually, but also how to just be a leader in general for your community, for yourself, for your family, for everything. So, church was really a huge part, especially when I was young, like I was so involved in church, it kept me busy and stuff like that, you know?

Lehana, as well, was involved with children's ministry prior to moving to her current location in Ottawa, stating,

... the community where I used to live, I used to be very involved with like volunteering... I was one of those people at church helping out with like the supper, helping out with the lessons and all the stuff. So, my helping with society has really been on the more of the helping side.

Yolande was involved with nursery at church, taking care of babies, but was also part of forming a group of racialized women who support one another during both good times and bad times. The group members would visit those with newborns, those who felt lost in the community, those who were sick, or those who had lost a loved one. Lastly, Francine had been implicated in various activities in her Congolese catholic church. She had been a member of the board of directors:

Bon, dans le conseil d'administration, c'est nous qui donnons des orientations un peu à, les orientations à l'église... où est-ce que nous voulons que l'Église soit, quelles sont les activités que nous pensons qui peuvent amener l'Église à atteindre ses buts avec la mission de l'Église, avec les objectifs que l'Église veut atteindre.²²⁴

These activities that were planned were for both church members and the broader community. Furthermore, as a board member, Francine helped set up a sponsorship system for refugees:

Donc, ce que nous avons fait, c'est vraiment pour faciliter les membres de la communauté qui veulent parrainer leurs parents qui se sont réfugiés quelque part, nous, comme organisme — donc nous avons la permission de le faire — nous avons la signature, nous avons un compte en banque et là, si quelqu'un veut, il peut mettre l'argent dans notre compte, nous faisons les démarches pour la personne comme église.²²⁵

²²⁴ Translation: "Well, in the board of directors, we're the ones who give direction to, directions to the church... where we want the church to be, what activities we think can lead the church to achieve its goals with the church's mission, with the objectives that the church wants to achieve."

²²⁵ Translation: "So, what we have done is really to facilitate the community members who want to sponsor their parents who are refugees somewhere, we, as an organization — so we have the permission to do it — we have the signature, we have a bank account and there, if someone wants, they can put the money in our account, we do the paperwork for the person as a church."

While religious groups are shown to be an essential source of social participation for participants in this study (Jiang, 2017), they also serve as the first point of contact to the political world, where immigrant women often take the lead in organizing and managing collective religious activities to transform and improve conditions within their communities (Vertovec, 2009). Two participants were able to engage in political activities through their church, one reflecting transnational politics. According to Jiang (2017), religious services are more likely to focus on spiritual growth rather than non-religious matters such as political mobilization. However, political mobilization can be connected to the church's mission or duties, as illustrated by Francine's experience as a member of her church's committee that supported the *Comité Laïc de Coordination* (CLC) movement in the DRC. CLC is a Catholic Church lay organization that led demonstrations to force former President Joseph Kabila not to run for a third, unconstitutional term (Fides, 2019). According to Francine, such demonstrations were established "dans des différents endroits dans l'Église catholique. Donc, nous aussi on en avait ici un peu avant les élections, on en avait ici."²²⁶ As a result, Francine received a direct call from the church to mobilize in support of the CLC, raising awareness of the potential for political corruption in the DRC and mobilizing for election reforms. Amina's church participation in assisting vulnerable populations in her Ottawa community, such as the homeless population, stimulated her anti-poverty activism with other church members by raising awareness of the need for economic equity and resource accessibility in her community. As a result, engaging in church activities led to informal political participation (Jiang, 2017).

Idara, unlike the other participants, became involved with her son's school's social committee, where parents organized social events for the children, like movie nights and end-of-year festivities. As a result of this, Idara became a member of the school's advisory board, where she participated in meetings, reading through documents, and commenting or advising on decisions made by Québec's Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Idara's participation on the advisory board was significant not just because it impacted her son, but also because she wanted to represent the interests and needs of all Black students and parents at her son's school. Idara stated,

²²⁶ Translation: "... in different locations in the Catholic Church. So, we also had it here a little before the elections, we had it here."

Mais il y a beaucoup de parents Noirs à l'école, mais il n'y a personne sur les comités. Alors je me suis dit, « Ben, si j'ai le temps quelques minutes, pourquoi pas? » Donc, ça m'a motivé. Non seulement parce que j'aimerais que — j'aimerais bien qu'on soit plus visible et que nos besoins soient pris en compte. Alors, si on n'est pas là, la table, personne [ne] va comprendre nos besoins. Je sais que sur le conseil consultatif, dès le premier jour, je l'ai dit clairement que je suis là pour représenter *ma* communauté parce qu'on n'a pas accès à ce genre d'informations. Donc, si je peux de l'amener même à deux ou trois personnes, c'est déjà un bon début. Donc, je dois être là.²²⁷

Valérie also served on the boards of directors of both a Francophone hospital and a college in the Ottawa region, to advocate for needs and interests related to *la francophonie*, given her own affiliation to the Franco-Ontarian community in Ottawa.

Furthermore, professional organizations, such as the Order of Engineers, which oversees and regulates the engineering profession, are tasked with promoting the needs and interests of those who work in the profession they represent. Joanna is a member of the Order of Engineers, which acts as “une assurance” if any issues develop throughout her profession. This membership is compulsory: “... à l'Ordre des ingénieurs, mais là, je n'ai pas le choix; c'est un ordre professionnel. C'est comme ça, tu dois faire partie, c'est réglementé.”²²⁸ While the professional organization is meant to regulate her profession, Joanna's needs and interests are also represented in negotiations, advocacy, and lobbying. Therefore, professional organizations can serve as a platform for political engagement, and members can support or contribute to these engagements. According to Joanna, “...c'est toujours l'intérêt que j'ai, de pouvoir servir, de pouvoir aider et de pouvoir contribuer.”²²⁹ In another instance, Michelle became a member of the Black Employees' Network group at the government department where she was employed. This is a professional networking association she co-lead that provided a safe space for Black employees and assisted them in advancing their careers in the federal government by reviewing policies, forming working

²²⁷ Translation: “But there are a lot of Black parents at the school, but there's none on the committees. So, I thought, ‘Well, if I have the time for a few minutes, why not?’ So, that motivated me. Not only because I'd like to— I'd like for us to be more visible and have our needs considered. So, if we're not there, the table, no one is going to understand our needs. I know that on the advisory board, from day one, I made it clear that I am there to represent *my* community because we don't have access to that kind of information. So, if I can bring it to even two or three people, that's a good start. So, I must be there. So, that's the idea.”

²²⁸ Translation: “... at the Order of Engineers, but there, I have no choice; it's a professional order. It's like that, you have to be part of it, it's regulated.”

²²⁹ Translation: “... it is always an interest of mine to be able to serve, to help, and to contribute.”

groups to support the Deputy Minister's commitments to anti-racism and diversity, contesting Black employees' marginalization and discrimination in the workplace, and developing anti-racism strategic plans. Therefore, Michelle used her professional position and government workplace as sites for contesting the marginalization and exclusion of Black employees in her government department.

Lastly, A few participants' social participation entailed engagement in seminars and conferences. This was the case of Michelle and Bethanie, who participated at the Model African Union as delegates representing an African country's interests and gaining an understanding of international relations and conflict resolution. Dalia organized her own seminars to raise awareness about immigrant settlement and incorporation difficulties in her community with the goal of effecting change. For instance, she presented a seminar titled *Au-delà des défis* (Beyond the Challenges), where she presented to governmental organizations and those dealing with immigrants to advise them on developing a new perception of immigrants. As Dalia explained,

... la question de l'immigrant est toujours perçue en termes de défis... Alors, ma présentation à moi devant ce groupe d'organismes, c'était de leur permettre de voir que, il est certain le fait que quand les immigrants arrivent ici, ils font face aux défis, tout le monde, tout le monde dans cette salle ici, on faisait face, pas tous les mêmes défis, mais il y a des niveaux différents. Donc, quand on arrive dans un pays, on fait face à plusieurs problèmes : problème de langue, on est désorientés, on perd nos, comment dire, nos motivations... Quand je vais devant les différents organismes communautaires qui m'offrent différents services, le fait d'y aller, c'est déjà un défi qui est supprimé. Donc, au lieu de voir la réalité des immigrants comme étant [des] défis, voyez plutôt comme au-delà des défis.²³⁰

Therefore, Dalia's seminar was political in the sense that her goal of providing this new perspective to organizations was to influence their decisions and services to better reflect the experiences of immigrants, and that immigrants' realities are not always based on challenges.

²³⁰ Translation: "... the question of the immigrant is always perceived in terms of challenges... So, my presentation to this group of organizations, it was to allow them to see that, it is certain the fact that when immigrants arrive here, they face challenges, everyone, everyone in this room here, we faced, not all the same challenges, but there are different levels. So, when we arrive in a country, we face many problems: language problems, we are disoriented, we lose our, how to say, our motivations... When I go before the different community organizations that offer me different services, the fact of going there, it's already a challenge that is removed. So, instead of seeing the reality of immigrants as challenges, see it as more than challenges."

Reasons for Low Participation. Only two participants indicated no formal or informal political participation in Canadian society, and one participant stated that their only form of political activity was voting in elections. Samora stated that she was not implicated here in Canada since her number one priority as a wife in Canada was to care for her family, expressing, “[ç]a me rend fière de ce que je suis une femme qui jusque-là prend soin de ma famille. C’est ma quotidienne en tant que femme de foyer.”²³¹ She also attributed her lack of involvement in activities to a dislike of them in Canada in comparison to the activities and communities in which she had previously been involved in the DRC, particularly in the church. Instead, Samora would rather observe what was taking place in society and devote her time to her family.

Rosalie was involved in a few activities in Canada that she did not consider political in nature. For example, she participated in a forum where individuals came together to express themselves on political and socio-cultural topics, such as their dissatisfaction with political activities in the DRC and in Canada, and what members of the group might do to help ease some of the challenges. When questioned why she did not consider this element of her engagement to be political, Rosalie replied that she regarded these activities as more communal or social than political or informal political activities because they were done to support the community, such as organizing bereavement activities and contributing to urgent community needs. As Rosalie put it, “la différence se trouve entre l’entraide et des décisions.”²³² Furthermore, while Rosalie enjoyed politics and considered political affairs to be a priority in her life, participating in politics was not on her agenda at the time of our interview.

While Lehana voted in a few Canadian elections, her life stories revealed that she was solely involved in social activities that never translated into political activities. This was owing to witnessing the consequences of being involved in politics in the DRC when she was younger:

... after hearing people like, are getting killed because they, they give their opinion on stuff or they wanted to go ahead and go against something, I think from being very little, it has really struck me if I can say that. And honestly, when you speak, if you ask me anything about politics, honestly, I can’t speak. I really can’t. I really can’t put my words on it. It’s

²³¹ Translation: “[i]t makes me proud that I am a woman who takes care of my family. This is my everyday life as a housewife.”

²³² Translation: “... the difference is found between self-help and decision-making.”

no interest. My involvement side is more to help and to have fun in the community type of thing.

Thus, for Lehana, coming from a repressive regime had an impact on her views on politics (Bilodeau, 2008), as well as her desire to participate in ways other than voting.

Overall, while the life stories of Samora and Rosalie may have shown that they were not engaged in political activities, or in Lehana's case, simply just voted, the absence of such experiences in the life stories may not reflect their lived experiences. That is, they could have been more politically involved than they chose to disclose or acknowledge.

Discussions of Participants' Political Incorporation in Canada

Bloemraad (2006b) defines political incorporation as the process by which immigrants become part of mainstream political institutions and practices, or by which immigrants can access and achieve formal and substantive citizenship comparable to the Canadian-born population. Since the purpose of this study was not to compare the political experiences of immigrant women to those of Canadian-born women, I sought to measure participants' political incorporation by examining the degree to which they participated politically in Canada through various means of exercising political agency and relating to political debates, practices, social change, and decision-making (Morales, 2011). This included how the women defined political participation and what they considered to be political activities. The results of the participants' formal and informal political participation in Canada were discussed in the preceding section. In contrast to the literature, many of the participants in this study were active in formal political participation at some point during their settlement in Canada. This included voting, volunteering for an election candidate, attending town hall meetings, becoming a member of a political party, and gaining conventional political knowledge through participation in political events or conferences.

However, in response to the second research question, these findings revealed that participants were more likely to participate in voting than in other formal political activities, with seven of the ten women participating in formal politics by voting in at least one election in Canada. The literature would relate this to the low cost of voting (Verba et al., 1995) or the anonymous nature of voting (Bilodeau, 2008; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001), particularly given that participants came from a repressive political regime where they risked backlash for opposing the government. Yet, given Canada's opportunity structure for voting participation that grants all citizens the right to vote in any election — regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity — participants

saw voting as the simplest and most accessible (or welcoming) means of voicing their political opinions and seeking change for society, including changes to policies and laws that would benefit them. For instance, Yolande stated: “I’ve never felt like I was marginalized for my participation, for voting. I’ve never felt that I was marginalized here. So, it’s always, it felt natural and it’s not even, I don’t even give it a second thought.” Moreover, given that the participants in this study came from a different political regime in which women faced barriers to voting despite having been granted the right to do so, or where political participation was restricted, they enjoyed their newly acquired freedom to vote and have a say in the direction of the country, even if it meant that their preferred politician would not be voted in.

Nevertheless, while ten participants were active in formal politics, it appeared that some were more politically incorporated through formal politics than others, as evidenced by their participation in a variety of formal political activities. To illustrate, six participants participated in at least one type of formal political activity since arriving in Canada and becoming a citizen, such as voting (Amina, Idara, Lehana, and Yolande), attending town hall meetings (Dalia), or volunteering for a candidate (Michelle). Jammille, Keisha, and Valérie, on the other hand, complemented their participation in voting with other forms of political involvement. For them, it was important to be as involved as possible to contribute to the well-being of their community and to ensure that their needs, and the needs of other immigrants, were best represented in the formal political sphere. Bethanie was also one of the most involved participants in formal political activities. Despite not possessing formal citizenship to access the same political rights as the other participants who were citizens (e.g., voting rights or the ability to run for office), she discovered other formal activities that allowed her to access and influence the formal political sphere in some way. This included volunteering for a political party’s campaign, lobbying for Black candidates running for office, and participating in political events or conferences to gain conventional political knowledge to later participate in political change or disseminate political information to motivate others to participate in politics. As a result, Bethanie performed citizenship practices without possessing citizenship, rendering her political incorporation into Canadian society indistinguishable from that of other participants in this study. Her participation also proved that becoming a citizen was not required to motivate immigrant women to become politically active.

When assessing the women’s overall political incorporation, it became evident that participation in formal politics was less important in becoming politically (and socially)

incorporated into Canadian society than participation in informal politics. This was reflected in the types of formal political activities in which many engaged that often limited their participation to election seasons, which generally occur every four years for federal, provincial (Ontario and Québec), and municipal (Ottawa and Gatineau) elections. Thus, their reliance on activities such as voting and campaign activities to feel politically incorporated was minimal. As Lehana admitted, electoral politics was “a small part of my activities,” as it was for Keisha, who had only voted in one election since becoming eligible to vote. In fact, voting was less likely performed by the younger participants in this study (those in their 20s and 30s), which concurs with O’Neill et al.’s (2012) findings. Idara, however, also admitted, “... depuis que je suis arrivée, le seul vote où j’ai participé, c’était le dernier [en 2019].”²³³

It was also clear that participation in formal politics was less important in feeling politically incorporated because of the lack of diversity in formal political activities identified by participants in comparison to the diversity in informal activities. Further, this was reflected by the number of participants who did not indicate involvement in formal politics or who correlated their political incorporation primarily with informal political participation. In addition to Francine, Joanna, and Keren, who did not disclose any formal political participation, the majority of those who did (apart from Valérie and Michelle), associated their political incorporation primarily with informal political participation. This was exemplified by the women’s definition of political participation, and the distinctions they made between formal and informal political activities. To illustrate, while Valérie defined political participation as “... un sens d’engagement envers ses citoyens, envers les gens qui vous ont donné le pouvoir de pouvoir les servir et non les diriger,”²³⁴ Keren explained,

Tu peux aller être seulement membre de ce conseil scolaire là, des parents, des élèves et intervenir sur le *board*. Tu vois un peu, c’est déjà une participation politique parce que politique, ce n’est pas seulement d’aller au Parlement avec Trudeau. C’est vraiment, déjà tu peux faire de politique chez toi, à la maison. Et puis après, tu étends dans ta rue. Tu peux en faire aussi.²³⁵

²³³ Translation: “... since I arrived, the only vote I participated in was the last one [in 2019].”

²³⁴ Translation: “... a sense of commitment to its citizens, to the people who have given you the power to serve them and not to rule them.”

²³⁵ Translation: “You can go and be only a member of this school board, of parents, of students, and intervene on the board. You see, it’s already a political participation because politics, it’s not only going to Parliament with Trudeau. It’s really, first you can do politics at home. And then after, you extend to your street. You can do it too.”

Bethanie also remarked, “I think political participation can be anything, anything that concerns who you are as a citizen, your story of your area, the history you’re in and the society you’re living in.” Notably, the women’s life stories corroborated previous findings that showed immigrant women were more inclined to identify with and participate in informal politics, reflecting the first pillar of feminists’ definition of political participation as informal politics (e.g., Erel, 2009; Lewicki & O’Toole, 2017; Lister, 2003; Ralston, 2006). The women’s informal political participation included membership in ethnocultural, community, and religious groups; professional networks; housing cooperatives; and network associations.

As discussed, examining the participants’ life stories revealed minimal distinctions between their social and informal political participation. Originally, many participated in social activities for various reasons, many of which were not necessarily political. Predominantly, participants were involved in social activities to give back to the community. Francine commented, for instance,

Tout d’abord, personnellement, je pense qu’on ne peut pas vivre juste pour soi. On n’est pas fait pour vivre pour soi, on est fait pour vivre pour soi et pour les autres, alors. Et chacun donne ce qu’il peut donner selon ses moyens.²³⁶

Thus, Francine’s participation in Canadian society stemmed from giving back to the community that welcomed her, and contributing, in some way, was very important to her. This importance of giving back to the community was also felt by others like Idara and Jamille, who found participating in social activities to not only be an important way of giving back to the community in Canada, but to the community in the DRC and helping those who were vulnerable in both countries.

Another common and similar reason for the women’s participation in social activities was that they felt it a duty to help their community. Amina explained,

Because I did see a lot of people they need help, but they didn’t have people to help them. That’s why I thought I was able to do it and I did do it through my activities, because it’s a community life, yeah. It’s a community life, and I did feel [an] obligation to do it, to help. Some of this duty also stemmed from personal experiences of being an immigrant woman or of being Black in Canada, as was the case for Bethanie, who stated, “... being in school, where there

²³⁶ Translation: “First of all, personally, I think we cannot live just for ourselves. We’re not meant to live for ourselves, we’re meant to live for ourselves and for others, so. And everyone gives what they can give according to their means.”

was lack of support for Black students, for Indigenous students, for People of Color, it pushed me to work on building the things that we didn't receive."

Participants were also involved in social activities to establish a social network in Canada and to support others in the community. As women's social network structures are altered and diminished due to their migration, social activities become critical spaces where most individuals can be socially included while also committing time to help and support others (Couton & Gaudet, 2008). Yolande commented,

I've always said there's a need of women to come together so that they can help each other. Men cannot always solve our problems. We have a specific way of seeing things, of dealing with issues that only women — and you know men don't talk about issues, eh?... And it's not only, you know, yes, we network and stuff like that. The opportunities, there's so many things you can do. There are new people coming into Canada, you can show them the ropes, you can train, direct them, and give them advice.

This was comparable to Keren's reasons for her social participation, in which she claimed that there was power in building a social network for oneself:

... surtout aussi chez vous, dans votre pays, au Canada ici, comme on dit, « la force du réseau », il fallait donc avoir un réseau, un réseau important, et c'est justement ça, c'est le réseau.

Thus, being socially implicated in society for Keren was about connecting with people and discovering new things within the community.

Social participation also meant providing mentorship for others in the community, such as Amina who was especially involved with youth:

... I spent most of the time with the youths because they need a lot of help, and they have — a lot of youth, they have so many problems, but they don't tell their parents. They don't speak. But they need somebody to be there for them, when they — for advice, to help them, how to be a person, how to respect yourself. And that's what I did like much, to be with youth, to help them, to help them, yeah.

Another reason was that participants were simply interested in the activities in which they partook, such as Francine, who became implicated with her Congolese catholic church because she enjoyed being part of a choir.

Nonetheless, in Canada, many of the women's social participation translated into political participation, where their involvement primarily began as volunteerism and membership, and progressed to that of activist. As Gidengil and Stolle (2009) pointed out, immigrant women who belong to religious and voluntary associations or organizations are more likely to be politically active since such groups may foster political engagement, enhance civic skills, and foster a sense of political efficacy. Furthermore, while many religious groups and immigrant community associations or organizations receive provincial or federal funding to deliver programs and services to immigrants, they also serve as a vital space for fostering collective identities as well as political learning, action, and incorporation (Black, 1987; Bloemraad, 2006a; Couton & Gaudet, 2008). These aspects were evident in this study where ethnocultural, community and religious groups did not inhibit participants' political incorporation, but rather achieved it by promoting the interests and concerns of immigrants, which increased the women's interest in contributing to the process of social change and reclaiming rights, resulting in these spaces becoming the women's primary civic communities (Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Morales & Pilati, 2011). Therefore, while participation in social activities was associated with high levels of participation in informal political activities, not all forms of social activities contributed to this.

Aside from advocacy through ethnocultural, community, and religious groups, participants' political participation (protesting, petitioning, and advocacy) extended beyond formal political institutions and into local, national, and transnational spaces through participation in housing cooperatives, school boards or boards of directors, professional network associations, and public seminars. Participants were able to broaden the social issues for which they advocated through these informal political spaces and activities, as opposed to what formal political participation afforded them. In fact, a few participants felt that the social issues at the formal level were overly restricted by political leaders' agendas, which did not necessarily align with their interests or concerns. Idara, for example, only voted in the 2019 federal election since the issues discussed in previous election debates "n'étaient pas du côté qui m'intéressait [*rires*]."²³⁷ Instead, she focused her advocacy efforts on Congolese women's health and well-being, poverty alleviation, international development, immunization in the African region, and the needs and interests of Black students, which she attended through ethnocultural and community groups, as well as an advisory board. Keisha, too, stated that she exclusively volunteered and devoted her

²³⁷ Translation: "... were not what I was interested in [*laughter*]."

activism to “organizations that align with my values,” such as anti-Black racism and social justice for Black people in Canada, rather than to politicians or groups claiming to support other causes or issues. Other social and political issues advocated by participants included adequate housing and Internet accessibility for low-income families, adequate infrastructure for persons with disabilities, the rights of Indigenous and racialized groups, human rights and social justice for women, environmental concerns, medical interventions for the DRC, political rights in the DRC, rights of employees, and *la francophonie*.

Six participants felt they had limited capacity to effect change and decision-making on particular issues that concerned them through formal political participation, so they engaged in informal political activities instead. According to Amina, “I can be involved in like my community, but in politics, I just follow but I’m not involved because, I don’t know [*chuckles*], it’s difficult to influence change...” Bethanie also claimed, “[b]ut what I know is I can influence my community. So, that’s the level of politics I will participate in.” Therefore, informal political activities were more inclusive and tailored to the women’s advocacy interests, and in many cases, the women’s informal politics bridged the gap between them and formal political institutions (Erel, 2009). For instance, Valérie helped establish ties between the African and Black communities of Ottawa and the broader community through her participation in ACAO, while simultaneously promoting the interests and needs of the African and Black communities to decision-makers. Dalia demonstrated this bridging by hosting public seminars and inviting decision-makers to hear her insights on immigrant settlement and the services required to meet the needs of newcomers to Canada. Overall, the women’s informal political activities highlight the importance of studying immigrant women’s political incorporation through a more in-depth examination of their various types of political activities, as the study’s findings corroborate how equally (if not more) important informal activities are for political incorporation when compared to formal political activities.

Participants’ political participation also exemplified the second pillar of feminist definitions of the concept: political participation as political agency and identity. For instance, through the different types of activities they participated in, the women were able to exercise political agency by acting intentionally to advocate for change within their communities; feeling empowered to denounce poverty, racism, discrimination, inequalities, and marginalization that they and others had experienced; and claiming their social activities as sites of political activism. Amina, for example, stated the following regarding her activism through her housing cooperative:

I am happy and empowered because my voice, I'm giving my voice to speak for people that cannot speak, for people that cannot defend, because some people they don't speak, some people they don't defend. So, as a woman, I'm happy to be involved, to do that. Especially in community work, where you [are] living with other people.

Valérie also expressed how empowered she felt as a result of the recognition she received for the activities in which she participated, as well as how proud she felt for inspiring others to take action, stating, "... c'était surtout le retour chez certaines personnes que j'ai eu à rencontrer qui se sont senties inspirées et qui ont commencé eux aussi à faire des choses... ça fait ma joie, mais ça fait aussi ma fierté."²³⁸ Participants also exercised political agency by developing a self-awareness of their ethno-racial identity and a sense of belonging to their communities (Ralston, 2006). To exemplify, Dalia remarked of her political participation,

... moi-même je suis immigrante. Donc, je suis curieuse sur la question de l'immigration : qu'est ce qui se passe autour de moi, quelles sont les décisions qui sont prises pour moi? Parce que, comme je vous ai dit, j'aime toujours donner mon point de vue. Donc, quand il y a une possibilité de donner mon point de vue, je donne.

Bethanie also spoke of how volunteering in her social activities gave her a sense of belonging and incorporation:

Volunteering was, well, it was building a lot of the community and a lot of the integration for me, because I got to help people. I got to learn more stuff. And I also got to be around things that I was similar to: African people, African culture and all that kind of stuff.

The transition from being alienated from politics in the DRC to becoming politically active in Canada also reflected the evolution of participants' political agency.

Emerging from the women's political agency was identity politics. Participants were most likely to participate in activities that were geared toward their particular needs and experiences (Kondo, 2012), as well as activities that allowed them to participate in identity-based advocacy as immigrant women (Black Congolese immigrant women), young adults, professionals (e.g., public servants), or coming from low-income backgrounds. This included participation in gender- or ethno-racial specific groups such as the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*, the ACAO, the BSLA, and the Congolese catholic church, where participants

²³⁸ Translation: "... it was especially the return of some people I met who felt inspired and who also started to do things... that makes me happy, but it also makes me proud."

organized with others around shared identities to advocate for the interests and needs of Congolese and other Black ethnocultural groups in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. Nonetheless, while participants' initial intentions for organizing may have been based on their personal lived experiences — for instance, Bethanie's advocacy for adequate housing in her community was inspired by her own lived experiences in housing — their participation in social activities had broader implications for their community.

Lastly, participants' political participation displayed the third pillar of feminists' conception of the concept, political participation as manifested in unconventional political spaces, such as rendering private issues like Congolese women's physical health into an object of public political struggle to change how medical services are made visible and accessible to Congolese women. This was especially important for Keren, who explained how in the Congolese community, medical diagnoses are kept private and frequently go untreated due to stigma or religious beliefs that the diagnosis is the result of spiritual bondage (or oppression) or that prayer can cure the diagnosis. Keren elaborated,

... parce que nous [les congolais], on va te dire, « *Te, c'est ça yango te! Non, eza ba liens! Eza ba liens! Il faut kosambelela yango pe oza kokata ba liens! Il faut kosambelela yango...* (français : *Non, ce n'est pas ça ! Non, ce sont des liens! Ce sont des liens ! Nous devons prier pour cela et briser les liens ! Nous devons prier pour cela...*) » Alors que nous, scientifiquement, c'est l'expression génétique.²³⁹

Thus, Keren felt it was important to call on practitioners to become culturally sensitive to Congolese traditions and administer culturally sensitive services and resources to Congolese women through the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*, a non-profit organization located beyond the formal political sphere. The boundaries between the private and public spheres were also blurred (England, 2017) by demands for change in medical practices and regulations that had direct consequences for Congolese women's health, well-being, and lives.

Participants were also more inclined to articulate their needs or concerns and advocate for social and political change in the context of their social and professional commitments, as illustrated above. This also included professional network associations and religious groups, which

²³⁹ Translation: "... because we [Congolese people], we will tell you, 'No, it's not that! No, it's bondage! It's bondage! We must pray for this and break the bonds! We must pray for this...' while we, scientifically, it's a genetic expression." [Quote in Lingala]

were sites already accessible to the women and where they thought they might better exercise their political agency. Other activities, like protesting and petitioning, were also undertaken by a few participants due to their ease of access. As Keisha commented, "... the petition ones [*laughs*], you know, it's just there [*laughs*]."

Finally, the findings of this study revealed certain acts of participation that cut across the formal structures of the nation-state and into multiple spaces and communities, as some of the women's political activities were aimed towards the DRC. This included Idara's efforts to affect social change throughout the African region, as well as Jamille's petition to Minister Allan Rock for assistance in delivering malaria medication to the DRC. Acts of participation also entailed women from various social contexts banding together for a common cause, such as the walk organized by Keren and Idara, which also took place in other countries to raise awareness and the need to ensure the well-being of Congolese women while forming cross-border solidarity. Such transnational activities imply that political incorporation and transnationalism are mutually reinforcing processes (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005).

All-in-all, by integrating a feminist analysis of participants' political participation, this study has challenged the narrow understandings of the concept and highlighted the need for a broader understanding of what qualifies as political participation (Konda, 2012). I found evidence that most participants were experiencing political incorporation, as demonstrated by their active political participation in both formal and informal political activities, though participants were more active in informal activities regardless of age or length of stay in Canada. Therefore, while many participants actively maneuvered between the formal and informal political arenas (Kondo, 2012), most regarded informal political activities as important to their political incorporation. Furthermore, rather than a desire to belong in Canadian society through its formal political institutions, the women's political incorporation was defined by a desire to create new spaces of belonging to affect change within their communities. Even when asked if their level of participation in such activities enhanced or diminished their political incorporation, participants indicated feeling strongly incorporated into Canadian society as a result of their informal political participation beyond the formal political sphere. For instance, Valérie responded,

... dans la communauté canadienne, c'est à dire je suis une militante pour les droits humains, pour la justice sociale, pour le respect et des droits de la femme. Donc, c'est ça en fait qui a fait vraiment mon établissement ici. Ce sont les choses pour lesquelles je me

bats, je milite, auxquelles je crois que tout le monde a le droit d'avoir, et je n'ai jamais hésité en fait de m'exprimer, et, c'est ça. Je pense que c'est ça qui a vraiment fait mon intégration ici.²⁴⁰

Therefore, the women's capacity to advocate for their communities and make significant contributions is what made them feel politically incorporated. However, while this study contradicts passed statements that immigrant women are apolitical, this is not to say that participants did not face barriers to their political incorporation. Highlighting these barriers is part of my discussion in the section that follows.

The Impacts of Gendered Migration Trajectories on Political Incorporation

In Chapter Six, the women's life stories revealed the ways in which gender played a central role in shaping their migration trajectories. This included the effects of gender relations or dynamics on decision-making and aspirations, types of migration, modes of entry, social networks, access to resources, and immigration status, as well as how their gendered migration trajectories had profound socioeconomic consequences as the women settled into Canadian society. The following discussion focuses on the relationship between the women's gendered migration trajectories and political participation, shedding light on those aspects of the migration process that had the greatest impact on participants' political incorporation in Canada. Notably, while many of the women were able to become active in formal political activities, the discussion that follows will reveal some of the barriers they faced as a result of aspects of their migration trajectories that limited their participation in the formal political sphere, as well as the degree to which they did so. However, findings also revealed how participants engaged in informal political participation in response to some of the impacts of their migration trajectories, becoming active in activities and collective actions within the groups and communities that provided them the space to engage. This encompassed a range of activities, some of which began as volunteering and evolved into political activities.

²⁴⁰ Translation: "... in Canadian society, that is to say I am an activist for human rights, for social justice, for respect and women's rights. So, that's what really made my settlement here. These are the things that I fight for, I advocate for, that I believe that everyone has the right to have, and I've never actually hesitated to speak out, and, that's that. I think that's what really made my integration here."

Migration Projects, Migration Types, Modes of Entry, and Immigration Status

Gender-related factors were reflected in participants' migration projects, migration types, modes of entry, and immigration status in Canada. These were also the most common migratory factors in the women's life stories that impacted their political incorporation in Canada. Briefly, I uncovered in Chapter Six how the interviewees were commonly compelled to leave the DRC or were brought out by their parents or spouse to pursue educational opportunities not always available to women in the country, to escape the country's culture of inequality or political instability and seek a better life elsewhere, or to reunite with their spouse or father who had already settled in Canada as permanent residents. As a result, the participants' migration projects or aspirations were often based on the perception that elsewhere was better for women's equity and freedom, as well as on their desire to escape gender inequality and gain more socioeconomic opportunities, or that they were impacted by unequal powers of decision-making in which the decision to leave the country was made by husbands or fathers. Consequently, the migration projects of participants determined their migration types, modes of entry, and immigration status in Canada. That is, migration projects had bearing on how participants migrated, entered, and settled in Canada. Eight participants migrated to transit countries voluntarily or forcibly as temporary migrants (on student or travel visas), refugees, or permanent residents under the family reunification category. However, what began as one type of migration continued to Canada as another, with all fifteen participants migrating as asylum seekers or refugee claimants and family, economic, or temporary migrants (on student or tourist visas). Women often dominate in refugee and family migration classes, which is how most participants entered Canada. Nonetheless, their migration types, modes of entry, and immigration status after arrival (as defined by the gender-related factors discussed in Chapter Six) were found to have some impact on their political participation and incorporation.

The three participants who migrated to Canada as asylum seekers making a refugee claim at the border (Bethanie, Dalia, and Francine)²⁴¹ faced the most difficulty incorporating politically into Canadian society, especially in the early years of settlement. Having settled in Canada with an irregular status and as non-citizens, these participants were unable to effectively exercise their political rights since formal political activities, such as voting in federal, provincial, and municipal

²⁴¹ I was unable to comment on Michelle's political participation during this period of her settlement in Canada since her experiences as a refugee were seldom discussed in relation to politics during our interview.

elections, as well as running for office are political rights guaranteed to *all Canadian citizens*, and not *all members of society* (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982). Similarly, because they were not Canadian citizens, the women felt that formal political participation was not only beyond their grasp, but also beyond their responsibility in Canada. As Francine indicated, “Je n’ai jamais pensé politiquement, pour vous dire la vérité!”²⁴² Bethanie also expressed, “I felt like it [electoral politics] didn’t concern me because I really was, I was not a citizen and I felt like it was not really my business right now.” Dalia stated that her priority upon coming to Canada was not to get politically involved, but rather, “[m]on objectif vraiment était de pouvoir quitter le pays [la RDC] pour m’établir dans un autre pays et recommencer à zéro.”²⁴³

According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA; 2018), Article 34 of the 1951 Refugee Convention mandates receiving countries to “‘facilitate [as far as possible] the assimilation and naturalization of refugees. They shall in particular make every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings and to reduce as far as possible the charges and costs of such proceedings’” (pp.25-26). Citizenship is not only an important component of refugees’ incorporation into the receiving society, as it provides a variety of benefits such as feeling a sense of belonging, but it is also a prerequisite for obtaining full political rights (International IDEA, 2018; Kyeremeh et al., 2021). The first two requirements for becoming a Canadian citizen are that applicants must be permanent residents and have lived in the country for three of the last five years (IRCC, 2021a). Refugees resettled in Canada by the UNHCR, such as Keisha, become permanent residents upon arrival (UNHCR Canada, 2021), and thus face fewer time barriers to naturalization than asylum seekers like Bethanie, Dalia, and Francine who described their ordeal of having to apply for refugee status in Canada and having their claim approved before they could apply for permanent residency in the country (IRCC, 2019). In Bethanie and Dalia’s cases, their claims were initially denied, and in Francine’s case, she struggled with administrative costs, mainly the cost of hiring a lawyer to assist her with the application process. These did cause some delays in their becoming citizens, as did the fact that the time they spent in Canada between the date they made their refugee claim and the date their

²⁴² Translation: “I never thought politically, to tell you the truth!”

²⁴³ Translation: “[m]y goal was really to be able to leave the country [the DRC] to settle in another country and start over.”

status was approved was not credited towards physical presence in Canada as an authorized temporary resident or protected person (IRCC, 2021).²⁴⁴ Bethanie described the ordeal as follows:

... I do remember the first three years, us doing a lot of interviews. We now had to go through the first interview, which was the interview of what we have been doing so far in Canada and why we should continue the process, continue the [refugee] claim process. And we passed through that. And then we did another interview about, you know, why we needed to continue the claim again, why we needed to stay, and we passed that. So, we were thinking, 'Okay, we are on the right track.' Like, you know, things are going smooth. We're doing our interviews. We're confident and everything is looking good. But eventually, I don't know what happened. Somewhere, three years later, something, we were denied for refugee status.

Bethanie went on to say regarding the process of becoming a permanent resident and being eligible for Canadian citizenship: "Here, it feels like there's so much restriction. So, that was tough. But we are here now and like, we're doing, we're getting in the process for the citizenship. It was not easy." Dalia also spent three years applying for refugee status, an experience she labelled as "très négative parce que vous êtes très limité à beaucoup de choses..."²⁴⁵ She recounted,

Oui, l'expérience, c'est une expérience négative et lourd à supporter. C'est que quand vous faites ces demandes, ces démarches là, ça veut dire vous abandonnez un peu tous ce que vous avez au pays : le travail, les amis, la famille, tout. Tout ce que vous aviez acquis au pays, vous décidez d'abandonner et vous soumettez une demande. Et quand la demande est refusée, c'est, c'est très lourd, très lourd à supporter.²⁴⁶

Though Dalia's citizenship acquisition was delayed, she persisted in exploring her options and overcoming obstacles in her quest to become a citizen. Winter (2020) also highlighted a few additional hurdles to citizenship acquisition that the women also encountered, thereby contributing to delaying the process of becoming citizens, mainly the costs of the application process, where, according to Bethanie, "[y]ou have to think about how you're going to cut your costs."

²⁴⁴ According to IRCC (2021b), "Each day of physical presence in Canada as an **authorized temporary resident or protected person** before becoming a permanent resident, counts as one half day, with a maximum of 365 days credit towards physical presence" (emphasis in original).

²⁴⁵ Translation: "... very negative because you are very limited to many things..."

²⁴⁶ Translation: "Yes, the experience, it's a negative and heavy one to bear. When you submit these applications, these steps, it means giving up a bit of everything you have in your country: work, friends, family, everything. All that you had acquired in the country, you decide to abandon and you submit an application. And when the application is refused, it's, it's very heavy, very heavy to bear."

Therefore, if voting is deemed as “the core component of democratic citizenship, and an essential requirement for a political system to be deemed fully democratic” (International IDEA, 2018, p.35), then the women’s mode of entry as asylum seekers and subsequent immigration status as refugees awaiting permanent residency marginalized them from Canada’s democratic process and the formal political sphere. So too did the imposed barriers to citizenship acquisition that would allow them full access to political rights, such as the lengthy waiting period for the approval of their refugee status and the granting of permanent residency. The impacts of this are also apparent in Table 2 (in Chapter Four) when examining Dalia and Francine’s number of years with citizenship relative to the time spent in Canada. Once more, this reveals the power of citizenship in mediating participants’ political rights and entitlements (Mahieu et al., 2015).

Furthermore, as the women’s life stories revealed, asylum seekers and refugees are among the most marginalized groups in society, having embarked on often perilous journeys to reach their country of settlement and facing challenges to incorporating into a vastly different society (Mallett & Hagen-Zanker, 2018; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Schapendonk, 2012; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Wachter et al., 2016). They also confront many social and economic challenges and insecurities upon settlement in their receiving country, including low-wage incomes, isolation, and disempowerment (Wachter et al., 2016). The experiences of racialized migrants are considerably more pronounced as they endure gender and racial discrimination, oppression, victimization, and subordination (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Ralston, 2006; Wachter et al., 2016). Thus, it is not surprising that Bethanie, Dalia, and Francine prioritized more pressing concerns in the early years of settlement, such as adapting to their new country and addressing the socioeconomic challenges outlined in Chapter Six (International IDEA, 2018). These included financial burdens and the inability to access the healthcare system, apply for jobs, and find a secure place to stay. As Rosalie remarked during her interview, there are priorities that women must address, such as access to food and shelter, that prevent them from being politically involved, even for women who want to get involved but must first address their basic needs to survive and settle in a new country. As per the International IDEA (2018), “... compared to more pressing humanitarian and livelihood-related concerns, political engagement might seem to be an extravagant commodity that can hardly be afforded” (p.12).

Nevertheless, Bethanie, Dalia, and Francine were able to participate in politics and make their voices heard in Canada through both formal and informal means of political participation.

For instance, while applying for refugee status and permanent residency, Bethanie found other means of influencing the formal political sphere by volunteering for a political party's campaign, lobbying for Black candidates in her community, and gaining conventional political knowledge through participation in political events. Dalia, too, had participated in town hall meetings to lobby for immigrant rights in her community since her arrival in Canada. Bethanie, Dalia, and Francine also participated informally through community and religious groups, protests, housing cooperatives, and seminars. Additionally, while the women relied on community and religious groups to assist them with settling in Canada, these groups evolved into spaces for them to express their advocacy within their communities. Thus, even though the women could not vote or run for office as asylum seekers/refugees (and later permanent residents), their experiences demonstrate that this, as well as the barriers to citizenship, did not deter them from participating politically.

Jamille and Joanna, who arrived in Canada as authorized temporary migrants, faced comparable experiences to Bethanie, Dalia, and Francine, with some notable differences. For starters, they were unable to formally participate in Canadian politics since they did not possess the formal political rights that are accorded to Canadian citizens. Joanna, too, felt that opportunities for political engagement were limited because she was not a Canadian citizen. She stated,

... c'est que le statut que j'ai eu en arrivant au Canada qui ne m'a pas beaucoup permis de faire autre chose que ce que je devais faire en ce moment-là. Et là où je suis rendue, c'est un peu le résultat de ce que j'ai été.²⁴⁷

Moreover, temporary migrants, like asylum seekers and refugees, often may not know the extent to which they can engage in political activities in their receiving country. As Joanna stated, following a discussion of her friend's political activity,

En fait, je n'ai pas participé, on va dire, dans des activités politiques parce que je n'ai pas eu nécessairement les opportunités pour le faire. Et puis, il n'y avait pas de situation qui me permettait d'aller... Peut-être je ne les savais juste pas. Je n'avais pas la connaissance que j'ai aujourd'hui de pouvoir peut-être, comme cette femme a dit, de saisir les médias pour telle situation, pour qu'on puisse m'écouter, pour me faire entendre.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Translation: "... it's that the status I had when I came to Canada didn't allow me to do much other than what I had to do at that time. And where I am now is a bit of a result of what I was."

²⁴⁸ Translation: "In fact, I didn't participate in, let's say, political activities because I didn't necessarily have the opportunities to do so. And then there was no situation that allowed me to engage... Maybe I just didn't know about them. I didn't have the knowledge that I have today to be able to maybe, like this woman said, to go to the media for such and such situation, so that I could be listened to, to be heard."

As well, because the laws or expectations in Canada were unclear or obscure, Joanna preferred to remain politically silent, at least in the formal political sphere. According to Armony et al. (2004), when governments focus on immigrant integration, less attention is given to clarifying the ways in which newcomers can participate in public institutions and community organizations. Thus, immigrants often struggled to find spaces and ways to participate politically as they are unfamiliar with the community and the political decision-making processes.

Further, both Jamille and Joanna did not intend to stay in Canada permanently when they first arrived, so getting politically involved was not a priority. Joanna explained, “... je suis arrivée premièrement comme une boursière pour dire que ma vie, c’était étude. Après, ben, je suis étudiante internationale, je dois travailler pour gagner l’argent, alors le focus n’est pas nécessairement sur militer pour quelque chose...”²⁴⁹ Jamille also commented on her visit to Canada on a six-month tourist visa, stating, “... je me rappelle parce que j’ai dit, ‘OK, je viens, je reste un peu, je termine et puis je reviens [au Belgique].’ [*éclat de rires*].”²⁵⁰ Joanna’s objective was to complete her education so she could return to the DRC to assist with infrastructure development, whereas Jamille came to visit her husband and planned to finish her studies in Belgium. Still, an opportunity to become politically engaged did emerge for Joanna while she was in school, as she opted to submit a personal letter to an agent at IRCC petitioning for a change in her work visa decision. Thus, while temporary migrants are not permitted to vote or run for office, they are nevertheless permitted to petition for change, whether on personal or collective grounds. Yet, Joanna and Jamille felt more compelled to engage after receiving their permanent residency. Joanna reflected on her journey from a temporary migrant to a permanent resident, saying,

... il faut qu’on ait une cause qui nous tient à cœur. Des fois, on ne le trouve pas tout de suite, dépendamment d’où est-ce qu’on est dans notre vie. Mais avec le temps, avec le bagage qu’on accumule, avec les expériences qu’on a et aussi avec notre vécu, que ça soit nous-mêmes, nos expériences ou les expériences des autres, ça nous donne en fait des éléments qui permettent de porter cette cause à cœur et de militer pour ça.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Translation: “... I came first as a student on scholarship to say that my life was about studying. Then, well, I was an international student, I had to work to earn money, so the focus was not necessarily on advocating for something...”

²⁵⁰ Translation: “... I remember because I said, ‘Okay, I’ll come, I’ll stay a while, I’ll finish, and then I’ll come back [to Belgium].’ [*laughter*].”

²⁵¹ Translation: “... we have to have a cause that we care about. Sometimes, we don’t find it right away, depending on where we are in our lives. But with time, with the baggage that we accumulate, with the experiences that we have and with our life experience, whether it is ourselves, our experiences or the experiences of others, it gives us elements that allow us to take this cause to heart and to militate for it.”

Jamille's migration project also changed when she became pregnant, and she eventually converted her temporary status to permanent status when she married her spouse. She evaluated this aspect of her migration experience as very positive since "[c]'était passé vite. Cinq ans après [à partir du jour d'arrivée], j'avais ma nationalité."²⁵² Jamille became more politically involved as a result of this change in status, both formally and informally, such as through petitioning, volunteering for a provincial candidate, and joining a political party. Jamille credited her positive migration experience for her political involvement:

Mais parce que je pense c'est la positivité de ma migration, parce que si ma migration était négative, je pense pas que j'allais avoir ce moral de m'impliquer dans quelque activité.

C'est l'aspect positif qui nous pousse à aller encore plus loin.²⁵³

Again, Jamille demonstrated that a lack of Canadian legal status did not deter her from participating politically in Canada, engaging in both formal and informal political activities. Obtaining permanent residency also provided Jamille a better sense of belonging, and because she felt she needed to establish herself in her new country, her permanent status led to increased participation as an investment in her future. As per Jamille, "[i]l est clair que ça sera jamais le paradis, mais on peut améliorer la vie, n'est-ce pas?"²⁵⁴ This may also have been the case for participants who came to Canada under the family and economic classes and were granted permanent residency status upon arrival, as they were progressively more inclined to participate politically as they remained in the country.

While participants with permanent residency status upon arrival did not benefit from full political rights and could not vote or run for office, their advocacy began through informal political channels such as ethnocultural and religious groups and petitions as they sought to improve conditions in the new communities where they anticipated to reside permanently. This was evidenced when participants expressed a desire to give back to the community or to promote the well-being of others and their community. As per Keren, "... je pense que c'est important. Je pense que chaque personne devrait quand même, on a chacun des idées différentes et c'est, tout le monde devrait pouvoir essayer d'intervenir, essayer de faire en sorte que l'autre puisse vivre mieux."²⁵⁵

²⁵² Translation: "[i]t happened quickly. Five years later [from the day of arrival], I had my nationality."

²⁵³ Translation: "But because I think it's the positivity of my migration, because if my migration was negative, I don't think I would have this morale to get involved in any activity. It's the positive aspect that pushes us to go even further."

²⁵⁴ Translation: "[i]t's clear it's never going to be paradise, but we can make life a little better, right?"

²⁵⁵ Translation: "... I think that's important. I think that each person should, we all have different ideas and it's, everyone should be able to try to intervene, try to make it so that the other can live better."

Valérie also expressed her ambition to build a better community by “sensibiliser contre les discriminations, contre la violence faite aux femmes, former des leaders, s’associer pour un monde meilleur.”²⁵⁶ Those with permanent residency status upon arrival were also more likely than those who arrived as asylum seekers or temporary migrants to vote or run for office once they obtained citizenship, possibly due to a greater attachment to Canadian society as a result of having emigrated to Canada on a permanent basis, which made them more desirous to have their voices heard and influence the direction of the country. Yolande noted, when discussing her political participation in Canada, “[h]ere is home, so, you do something about your home.” Amina also added,

Canada [has] become my home, it [has] become my home. So, I have to take care of my home. I have to be involved in activities like voting that can make Canada good... for me and other people [immigrants] coming, you know?

This may also explain the greater degree of political participation both formally and informally after obtaining citizenship, such as through running for city councillor, volunteering for candidates, and participating in housing cooperatives, ethnocultural and religious groups, protests, advisory boards, boards of directors, or professional network associations. In some instances, participants like Idara and Keren also mobilized awareness and advocated for reforms in the DRC through their political activism.

However, for a few participants (Samora, Amina, and Jamille), arriving (or being sponsored) as a permanent resident through the family class may have posed some barriers to political participation, particularly in the early years of settlement, due to unequal gender relations (Freedman, 2008). Though it will be discussed further in the following section, it can be stated now that participants who came to Canada to reunite with their spouses were either socioeconomically dependent on their husbands to assist them in their settlement or were preoccupied by familial responsibilities, limiting their opportunities to engage in political activism (Freedman, 2008). Others (Keisha, Lehana, and Michelle) began formal political participation after acquiring Canadian citizenship since they arrived in Canada as dependents and felt too young or were too concerned with their education to participate in politics altogether.

Consequently, the women’s life stories reveal how the gendering of migration, including the migration types, modes of entry, and immigration status that defined their gendered migration

²⁵⁶ Translation: “... raising awareness against discrimination, against violence against women, training leaders, joining forces for a better world.”

trajectories to Canada, created both barriers and opportunities for political participation in the formal and informal political spheres. Though all participants were entitled as non-citizens to a limited set of political rights — or freedoms as defined by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom* (1982) — such as the freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, there appeared to be a threshold to entering the formal political sphere due to modes of entry and immigration statuses that participants needed to overcome. Therefore, if Canadian immigration policies target women as dependents or spouses under the family class, and if women often dominate the refugee class, then Canada's immigration laws and regulations function to marginalize immigrant women from the formal political sphere due to their modes of entry and immigration statuses (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; O'Neill et al., 2012). Nonetheless, participants actively claimed political rights and entitlements, particularly through informal political activities in the early years of settlement, and with each change in immigration status (for instance, from refugee to permanent resident to citizen), it appeared that participation increased gradually in both formal and informal activities. Furthermore, as non-citizens, most participants relied on social activities and ethnocultural or religious communities to incorporate into Canadian society, and like Ralston's (2006) study, these activities and communities established them as civic citizens long before they were granted formal citizenship. And wanting to give back to the communities that had supported them during their settlement, participants opted to continue to engage in political activism in the context of their lived experiences.

Migration Projects and Migration Experiences

As previously mentioned, migration is a process defined by a series of interrelated life events, experiences, or turning points, and as a trajectory, migration may impact and be interconnected to other trajectories such as political incorporation processes (Wingens et al., 2011). The participants' migration projects or aspirations to leave the DRC, settle in transit countries, or embark onwards to Canada were turning points that resulted in instances of vulnerability, insecurity, instability, or strain along migration trajectories. These included instances of vulnerability and uncertainty at land borders or airports; feelings of isolation, loneliness, or uncertainty in transit countries; barriers in obtaining resources or employment; and the stress of navigating a foreign country. Furthermore, the women's migration to Canada was a rupture in their lives (Ralston, 2006; Tastsoglou, 2006), as they lost support networks, such as close family

members, and navigated and adapted to changes in their personal identities such as becoming spouses and mothers. While these experiences had an impact on their settlement in Canada, a few regarded the participation in informal political activities as an opportunity to give back to their communities, much as the women had been supported or assisted along their migration trajectories. Therefore, the conditions or turning points during the women's migration trajectories created conditions of opportunities for informal political participation in Canada.

Amina, for example, found it her duty to help those within her community in Canada to feel supported and secure, as well as to advocate for those who could not advocate for themselves as a result of the help and the support she received during her uncertain and stressful migration trajectory to Canada. She stated,

I came from Congo to Canada, and I meet people, they greet me, they treat me well. So, I have to be in activities to advocate for another people, to give back for what I received. So, I have to give back, I have to show that.

Thus, her migration trajectory provided her with the resources (or experiences) to support her community in Canada, and she often did this through informal political activities. Keren had difficulties acquiring her immigration papers to come to Canada because it took a long time for them to be granted, and she experienced some settlement challenges. Having navigated some of her own migration challenges, "... ça m'a permis justement d'être une personne qui sait que les femmes ont des besoins...", needs that she could relate to and help address or overcome through participating in the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*. Her migration experiences have also allowed her to rediscover her interest for "les milieux participatifs, organisationnels, ONG, des associations, des trucs comme ça,"²⁵⁷ since these settings empowered her to advocate for immigrant women like her. Keren's experiences echoed Dalia's, as she noted,

... en tant qu'immigrante, je connais la réalité des immigrants. Je connais les difficultés par lesquelles on passe. J'ai aussi une idée de comment les surmonter. Donc, c'est ça qui me permet de participer à ces activités. Donc, j'ai dit, parce que j'ai vécu ces réalités, j'ai entendu des gens parler de certaines réalités, j'ai fait face à cela, j'ai surmonté ceci, j'ai des solutions à proposer. Donc, je participe pour pouvoir aider les gens à s'en sortir.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Translation: "... participatory, organizational, NGO, association settings, things like that."

²⁵⁸ Translation: "... as an immigrant, I know the reality of immigrants. I know the difficulties we go through. I also have an idea of how to overcome them. So, that's what allows me to participate in these activities. So, I'm saying,

Others drew on their migration experiences to inform their political activities. For instance, when Valérie migrated to France with her parents, she had the opportunity to live in a different society and learn about another culture, as well as to witness the sociopolitical issues in other cultures that needed to be resolved. She explained, “[l]’emploi, par exemple, l’employabilité. Oui, le chômage est partout. Mais pourquoi est-ce qu’il y a tant de gens, tant de jeunes surtout, qui ont leurs diplômes et puis qui n’ont pas d’emploi à la sortie? Pourquoi tant de pauvreté?”²⁵⁹ Valérie felt that after witnessing this, “... ça me donne envie de m’engager, ça me donne envie de tout d’abord de crier fort contre ça...”²⁶⁰ Likewise, Yolande believed that having lived in different social settings during her migration had given her a unique perspective on social issues that she could contribute through her participation:

... it’s like you see things differently and, you know, how other places are functioning... And people can get that through traveling as well, right, because it expands your horizons. So, you can bring a different point of view to the table. Not necessarily that it’s going to be taken into consideration, but at least you bring it to light.

Michelle discussed how her migration experiences as a refugee and a Black woman in Canada taught her to have compassion for others and to seek to understand their struggles and stories, to be more informative and to provide aid, just as she had done through the Black Employees’ Network group. Therefore, each of the women’s informal political participation had important political value to them since they were influenced by their personal migration experiences.

Lastly, to overcome migration obstacles, such as isolation, in transit countries, five participants (Keren, Idara, Yolande, Valérie, Jamille) joined or formed informal groups in their respective transit countries that served as important channels for generating a sense of belonging, creating social networks, and obtaining important information or resources (Bloemraad, 2006a). To reiterate from the life stories, the women participated in volunteer activities, they joined religious and social groups, and formed social networks with peers. While this facilitated their incorporation in their respective transit countries, the women also drew on these experiences to facilitate their political incorporation in Canada. According to Valérie, “[l]e milieu associatif c’est

because I have lived these realities, I have heard people talk about certain realities, I have faced this, I have overcome this, I have solutions to propose. So, I participate so that I can help people get through this.”

²⁵⁹ Translation: “[e]mployment, for example, employability. Yes, unemployment is everywhere. But why are there so many people, especially young people, who have their diplomas but don’t have a job when they graduate? Why is there so much poverty?”

²⁶⁰ Translation: “... it made me want to get involved, it made me first of all want to shout loudly against it...”

un milieu dans lequel j'évolue depuis près, je dirai de plus de dix ans. J'ai commencé déjà quand j'étais en France et puis ici [au Canada], ben, j'ai continué dans la prise de différents rôles.”²⁶¹ In France, she primarily volunteered in non-profit organizations as communications director, assistant, president, and trainer. Valérie further explained, “[c]’était seulement de créer des changements positifs dans la société, de réseauter également, surtout de — et aussi de se développer personnellement.”²⁶² She used her previous experiences to further advocate for women’s rights and leadership, human rights, and social justice in Canada. Keren, Idara, Yolande, and Jamille also volunteered in, or participated in social groups in their respective transit countries, interpreting for immigrants, participating in city-run cultural activities promoting African culture, and establishing a social network for immigrant women, thus demonstrating the importance of giving back to the community and building social networks prior to their arrival to Canada. These experiences were carried over to Canada, where they continued to participate (politically) in ethnocultural and community groups. Thus, immigrant women’s migration experiences can closely relate to their effective political incorporation in Canada and higher levels of political participation, particularly in the informal political sphere. This emphasizes the necessity of analyzing the ‘in-between’ spaces of migration, as it discloses influential experiences on settlement outcomes in the receiving country.

Travelling Gender Norms from the DRC

Migration trajectories variously resulted in improvements, modifications, transformations, deteriorations, and reinforcements of gender relations for participants, as addressed in Chapter Six (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Tastsoglou et al., 2005). For some participants, certain gendered experiences from growing up in a culture of inequality were reinforced by their migration and continued to affect political participation and incorporation in Canada. This was observed among those who migrated to Canada under family reunification to reunite with their spouses. Notably, not all gender norms and relations from the DRC were eroded within the household, which influenced whether participants engaged in political activities, particularly in the early years of settlement, as well as the types of political activities in which they participated.

²⁶¹ Translation: “The associative environment is an environment in which I have been involved for nearly, I would say for more than ten years. I already started when I was in France and then here [in Canada], well, I continued in different roles.”

²⁶² Translation: “[i]t was just to create positive change in society, to network as well, especially— and also to grow personally.”

In line with Freedman (2008), this study found that a few participants' political participation in Canada were constrained by gender inequalities that stemmed from their upbringing in the DRC, and which defined their role in the household as largely domestic. This limited their opportunities for political participation in both formal and informal political spheres. Thus, the gendered inequalities that were transferred from the DRC during the women's migration trajectories and reinforced in Canada produced a private-public divide and a barrier to political participation. This was further reinforced by the women's immigration status as a 'dependent' (i.e., spouse under the family class), which effectively placed a few into positions of dependency in relation to their spouse (Freedman, 2008).

Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019) found that African immigrant communities are not always willing to abandon "culturally rooted sexist gender norms" (p.591), but instead reaffirm these norms as cultural imperatives that must be maintained in the receiving country. For example, Rosalie believed that for Congolese women to be implicated in the politics of their receiving country, they needed to break free from a culture in which women are not meant to voice their concerns or express themselves politically. As she stated in her interview, "[c]'est la culture qui suit les gens."²⁶³ This was evidenced in Samora's case. As one of two participants who indicated that they had not participated in political activities in Canada, Samora's levels of political participation were affected by traditional gender norms and relations dominant in the DRC, which were reinforced in Canada. She held strong beliefs that men were the heads of the household and women were caregivers and subservient, about which she stated, "... ce que je n'arrive pas à faire, je demande l'aide à mon mari."²⁶⁴ Furthermore, Samora took pride in her domestic role of caring for her family, while limiting her engagement in the public sphere. Therefore, migration did not emancipate Samora from the DRC's gender norms and values, as these were not rejected by her. Indeed, Freedman (2015) was questioned by her participants for her "use of the term 'gender' to describe the roles and norms associated with masculinities and femininities, and the relations between men and women, arguing that 'gender' was a Western concept which had no utility for the Congolese..." (p.3). Like Freedman (2015) reasoned, Samora's experiences do not place her as a victim or one in need of emancipation, but rather highlights how gender norms and relations

²⁶³ Translation: "It's the culture that follows people."

²⁶⁴ Translation: "... what I can't do, I ask my husband for help."

in the Canadian context had an influence on her political participation. This is also applicable to Amina and Joanna.

Amina was likewise placed in a domestic role when she arrived in Canada, where she had to care for her newborn child shortly after settling in the country and handle domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning while her husband went to work. What made it much more difficult was the lack of family to support her, which would have given her more time to engage in political activities. Amina indicated,

... in Congo when you have a baby you have so many people, family members, they come and help you. Sometimes, all day, you don't do anything, they come, they cook for you, they help you for the baby, they take care of the baby, but it was very difficult.

Women, according to Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019), play an important role in rebuilding their family in receiving societies; however, when they arrive without the support of the extended family or friends on whom they relied in the country of origin, the burden of domestic labour is compounded, potentially creating a barrier to their incorporation. This was clear in Amina's case, as her limited support system made it difficult for her to engage in political activities and incorporate politically. Moreover, Amina's dependence on her husband for her transition and incorporation into Canadian society (for instance, by providing financial support and assistance navigating the Canadian system) confined her to a domestic and dependent role, at least until her child was placed in daycare and she was able to gain some autonomy.

Jamille encountered similar circumstances, where her role as a mother limited her political participation in Canada, forcing her to give up many of her political ambitions, which she did not regret. When asked about the barriers to her political participation, Jamille replied,

... je me suis plus occupée de la famille. Mais si je me concentrais plus [sur la politique], ah oui, j'aurais pu aller loin parce que je voulais même viser la députation. Mais c'est vraiment, disons, je me suis beaucoup sacrifiée pour mes enfants et je [ne] le regrette pas.²⁶⁵

Having children in Canada caused Jamille to limit her political participation, as the extent to which she could participate was determined by her prioritization of her children's needs. Keren, on the other hand, whose children were also born in Canada, highlighted how her opportunities for

²⁶⁵ Translation: "... I was more focused on the family. But if I concentrated more [on politics], ah yes, I could have gone far because I even wanted to aim for MP. But it's really, let's say, I sacrificed a lot for my children and I don't regret it."

political participation increased as her children became older and her responsibilities as a mother lessened, remarking,

... je ne sais pas si c'est peut-être aussi l'étape de ma vie, mon âge ou quoi que ce soit et tout ce qui me permet ça aujourd'hui. Mes enfants sont plus grands et tout, aussi, donc j'ai quand même certaines facilités.²⁶⁶

Therefore, given that their children were born during the early stages of settlement, some participants' political participation was influenced by their new obligations as mothers, as parenting and caring for the well-being of their young children took precedence over striving to participate politically.

Moreover, Jamille's husband was opposed to her participation in certain political activities. As someone who engaged in film and theatre, when asked if she had used film and theatre to inspire social or political change in her community or as a platform for advocacy, Jamille replied, "Non, [*chuchotement*] parce que c'est mon mari qui ne le veut pas. C'est ça. J'ai eu beaucoup d'opportunités, mais il ne veut pas."²⁶⁷ According to Jamille, this might have been due to the gender norms her husband held as "un homme africain"²⁶⁸ regarding her engagement in political activism on a public stage. For Joanna, she deferred the act of political engagement to her husband, adding, "... c'est quelqu'un qui aime beaucoup ça. J'ai l'impression que je lui laisse seulement, qu'il va dire, va aller s'informer ou être membre d'un comité dans le quartier, et personnellement, ça ne m'implique pas directement."²⁶⁹ Therefore, for Joanna, the presumption was that her husband was a political actor while she was not, a gender norm that was prevalent in the DRC.

Participants' gendered responsibilities in the household also influenced the type of political participation in which they engaged. Notably, as participants assumed more household and child-rearing responsibilities, they made greater political investments in their local communities than in the broader society, through both formal political activities (e.g., city councillor candidate, volunteer for a local MP, voting) and informal political activities (advocacy through local community, ethnocultural and religious groups). Furthermore, my findings from analyzing

²⁶⁶ Translation: "... I don't know if it's also maybe my stage of life, my age or whatever and everything that allows me that today. My kids are older and everything, too, so I do have some abilities."

²⁶⁷ Translation: "No, [*whispers*] because it's my husband who's not wanting it. I've had many opportunities, but he doesn't want it."

²⁶⁸ Translation: "an African man."

²⁶⁹ Translation: "... he's someone who really likes it. I have the impression that I just leave it to him, that he will say, will go and get information or be a member of a committee in the neighborhood, and personally, it doesn't concern me directly."

participants' life stories also suggest that their political engagement largely reflected their internalized attitudes that women were responsible for the survival of their communities, mirroring their prior social participation in the DRC in community and religious groups. Amina expressed, "As a woman, I have a responsibility to take care of myself, to take care of my family, and to take care of my society, as a woman." She went on to say how important it was to have women involved in the community, claiming, "[b]ecause when women they are there, they make order..." Bethanie shared similar sentiments, noting, "I've learned that uplifting our community also means putting women at the forefront." Because of the internalized beliefs that women are responsible for, and central to, the survival of their communities, their perception of political participation was shaped more by a strong sense of community than by conventional ideas of politics (Piper, 2006).

By and large, some participants' migration trajectories reinforced some gender norms that influenced their political participation as well as the spaces and activities in which they participated, demonstrating how gaining greater political autonomy is not always inherent within migration or that gender norms can be renegotiated or transformed to benefit women's political agency (Carling, 2005; Willis & Yeoh, 2000). As per Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019), research has shown that immigrant women generally have a limited capacity to renegotiate or modify gender relations in their favour. Bilodeau (2016) also theorized that just as immigrants' opinions about politics in the receiving country are shaped by the political norms in their country of origin, it would be reasonable to expect the same for gender norms. However, this was not the case for most women in this research, including Amina, Jamille, and Joanna, who were collectively involved in a wide range of political activities, both formal and informal. As illustrated in Chapter Six, the participants' gendered migration trajectories resulted in various opportunities for transforming gender norms and relations. Particularly, many of the gender roles and power dynamics that were prominent in Congolese households in the DRC were eroded by most of the participants' migration experiences. This included whether participants took onto themselves, as women, to participate politically in Canadian society. In most cases, having lived in transit countries prior to arriving in Canada made them more aware of the disparity between the political rights and opportunities they had in the DRC and those they had abroad, as highlighted earlier by participants.

Furthermore, and similar to Kondo's (2012) findings, political participation offered a chance for a few participants in this study to transform prevailing traditional gender roles from the DRC and acquire important civic skills that they might not have been able to enjoy in the DRC.

Amina and Jamille, for example, were able to renegotiate traditional gender roles by collaborating with their husbands regarding household responsibilities and decision-making, and they became increasingly independent. This, in turn, permitted the women to participate in more political activities than when they initially settled in Canada. Jamille's political agency was also closely related to her identity as a mother, stating, "... je suis devenue plus mature, encore responsable en tant que mère. Plus, bon, visionnaire... La preuve, quand j'ai écrit la lettre à son honorable Alan Rock et qui m'a donné, qui m'a aidé pour les médicaments."²⁷⁰ Others like Keren, Idara, and Valérie, drew on their experiences of autonomy and freedom in transit countries to lobby for gender equality and women's rights within their communities. When discussing her advocacy for women's rights, Valérie indicated,

... le fait d'avoir eu trois cultures, d'avoir la vie au Congo, en France, et ici au Canada. Et donc, tout ça, en fait, ça me permet de voir, de voir comment ça se passe à différentes échelles, au niveau politique, aussi bien communautaire, aussi bien des droits sociaux, des droits légaux, légales, pardons. Alors c'est certain que ça nous donne envie de, *to give back*, n'est-ce pas?... s'assurer qu'elles aient une voix.²⁷¹

Once again, the "contextual characteristics" of participants' migration trajectories shaped their political participation (Lacomba, 2016, p.532). For most, gender norms and practices were modified and renegotiated as participants migrated from the DRC to Canada. This was seemingly influenced by how gender norms were defined in the various places the women settled in and that had permeated the perceptions and decisions of both participants and their spouses.

In summary, to respond to the third research question, there is evidence that participants' gendered migration trajectories limited their level of formal political participation, particularly during the early stages of settlement. In particular, migration projects, migration types, modes of entry, immigration status, migration experiences, and travelling gender norms from the DRC hindered their capacity to participate in formal political activities. Participants, for instance, were unable to vote or run for office as non-citizens. Those who migrated as asylum seekers faced greater barriers to acquiring citizenship and, thus, were marginalized from Canada's democratic

²⁷⁰ Translation: "... I became more mature, more responsible as a mother. More, well, a visionary... The proof, when I wrote the letter to his Honourable Alan Rock and who gave me, who helped me with the medication."

²⁷¹ Translation: "... the fact of having had three cultures, of having lived in Congo, in France, and here in Canada. And so, all of this, in fact, it allows me to see, to see how things happen at different levels, at the political level, as well as the community, as well as social rights, legal rights, legal, pardon. So, it's certain that it makes us want to, to give back, right?... to make sure that they have a voice."

processes for a longer period. They were also less inclined to participate in formal politics since they needed to address more pressing socioeconomic concerns to be settled. Those who arrived as young dependents were less likely to participate in politics as they were more invested in their education. Participants who settled in transit countries drew on previous experiences to shape their political participation in Canada. Finally, travelling gender norms impacted whether and how participants engaged in political activities. However, participants proved that immigrant women's political participation may take various forms and should not be limited to electoral politics (Armony et al., 2004).

Regarding the third research question, this study also shows how participants overcame the barriers posed by their migration trajectories. While some participants did participate in formal political activities, most participants surmounted the barriers by exercising their capacity for political agency in the informal political sphere such as in ethnocultural, community, and religious groups, protests, professional network associations, school boards, and signing petitions. This was not surprising given that participants were initially involved in many of these groups or activities to feel a part of their communities. These gradually manifested into political action due to the civic skills and resources they acquired and their consciousness of the needs of their communities that they sought to remedy. While these activities were not always directed at the formal political arena, that participants utilized their voices within these activities to benefit society at large and maintain some influence in formal politics is profoundly political (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009). As Lister (2003) contends, informal political participation is neither marginal nor unequal to formal participation and can produce equivalent outcomes and influence.

A few participants even expressed a desire to get more active in formal political activities in the future, or at least expressed the possibility of doing so. When speaking of a future prospect of getting involved more in formal politics, Keisha stated,

I think the more I grow, the more I want to get involved, the more I want to, I guess like go for change and promote change... I'm not like 100 percent like 'politics, politics,' [in the formal sense] but I think it's important and I wouldn't mind being involved, you know? Keren also expressed, "J'avais toujours dit, 'Je serai députée, je serai députée!' Et je me dis que quelque part, ça va... Donc bientôt, je vais commencer à regarder de ce côté-là. Voilà! [*éclats de*

rires]”²⁷² Joanna stated that she intended to get engaged in formal politics “s’il y avait une situation qui le demandait. Surtout quand nous sommes dans un pays où on a quand même la liberté d’expression. On peut s’exprimer dans le respect des règles, dans le respect des lois établies.”²⁷³

Political (De)Marginalization through the Intersections of Social Cleavages

This section focuses on expanding on the previous findings by analyzing the impact that participants’ intersecting social identities of gender, race, ethnicity, class (socioeconomic status), and sometimes immigration status had on their political participation, specifically on their repertoires of political activities, using La Barbera’s (2012) intersectional-gender approach. That is, while acknowledging the centrality of gender in immigrant women’s experiences, I am also interested in examining how the intersections of gender and other social identities influenced the participants’ political participation. Previous studies have discussed how immigration and ethnic minority statuses have shaped immigrant women’s political participation and incorporation, particularly when focusing on conventional political activity. They also showed that ‘added’ barriers resulting from racism and discrimination rendered them less likely to engage in conventional political activities than native-born women of dominant groups in society, and more likely to engage in women’s groups, religious organizations, and ethnic association (O’Neill, 2006; O’Neill et al., 2012). This was observed among the participants in this study. As discussed in Chapter Six, participants were confronted with discrimination in both transit countries and Canada with respect to anti-Black racism and misogynoir in school (e.g., racist remarks, bullying, stereotyping), in the workplace (e.g., discriminatory hiring practices), and in society (e.g., racist or sexist remarks). These experiences were found to have an impact not just on their socioeconomic incorporation into Canadian society, but also on their political incorporation. Namely, in accordance with Harell (2017), participants’ social identities were implicated in intersecting inequalities and oppression, which affected their daily lives, their repertoires of political activities and the activities made available on the basis of their social positionalities.

Many policies and initiatives have been implemented at all levels of government in Canada, an immigrant-receiving and multicultural country, to encourage immigrants’ political

²⁷² Translation: “I had always said, ‘I’ll be an MP, I’ll be an MP!’ And I figure that somewhere along the line, it’s going to happen... So soon, I’m going to start looking into that. That’s it! [laughter]”

²⁷³ Translation: “... if there was a situation that required it. Especially when we are in a country where we have freedom of expression. We can express ourselves in compliance with the rules, in compliance with the established laws.”

incorporation. This includes Canada's multiculturalism policies, which have encouraged the election of immigrant community leaders into public office and provided government resources to immigrant communities to create opportunities for political inclusion (Bloemraad, 2006b), and Québec's interculturalism that encourages the equal participation and contributions of all groups that respect democratic values in the public sphere (Laxer, 2013). Two participants stated that they felt accepted within the formal political sphere, particularly when it came to voting. In a prior section, I highlighted how Yolande never felt marginalized for voting and that it felt like a natural or normal process for her to participate in as an immigrant woman. Amina further stated that when it came to voting and engaging in politics with other Canadians, "I never felt anything like to [be] judged as a Black person, as a Congolese person, no. No, there is no, I didn't see any difference..." However, while measures have been implemented with the intention of promoting and increasing immigrant political participation and incorporation, nine participants experienced or observed some hurdles to or disadvantages in succeeding in the formal political sphere due to their identities as *Black Congolese immigrant women* (sometimes referred simply in the women's interviews as *Black women*, *Black*, or *women*).²⁷⁴ As Idara acknowledged,

... bon, je dirais en tant que Noire, d'abord, en tant que Noire, on est perçue d'une certaine façon par les autres, pas toujours positif, même pas 'pas toujours,' *très souvent* pas très positif pour des raisons diverses, à cause de manque d'information, ou bien tout simplement basé sur rien du tout. Je ne sais pas, mais on remarque que quand on est une personne Noire, c'est, on est perçues différemment.²⁷⁵

Idara further explained that Black people are often marginalized from the political sphere because they often have different needs and ways of perceiving things than dominant groups in society ("... je parle de la majorité japonaise, ici la majorité caucasienne..."),²⁷⁶ which are not sought after. Consequently, Black individuals like herself have a difficult time entering the political realm to not only voice their opinions, but also to have these heard and considered.

²⁷⁴ While participants may not have always identified as 'Black Congolese immigrant women,' I recognize that their social cleavages as Black (race), a Congolese (ethnicity), an immigrant (immigration status), and a woman (gender) have different ontological bases yet are constructed and interrelate to each other in the Canadian context to create unique experiences of marginalization and oppression for participants in the formal political sphere (Yuval-Davis, 2006b).

²⁷⁵ Translation: "... well, I would say as a Black person, first of all, as a Black person, we are perceived in a certain way by others, not always positive, not even 'not always', *very often* not very positive for various reasons, because of a lack of information, or simply based on nothing at all. I don't know, but we can see that when you are a Black person, you are perceived differently."

²⁷⁶ Translation: "... I am speaking of the Japanese majority group, here the Caucasian majority group..."

Michelle also discussed instances of marginalization she faced in her social and political activities; as a Black woman, the ideas she puts forward in debates or conversations are sometimes met with “Urgh, here she goes again!” by men with whom she converses. In this circumstance, she believed that the men were reluctant to collaborate with her because of her identity as a “Black woman putting forward ideas.” Furthermore, as a volunteer coordinator for a city councillor, Michelle acknowledged the barriers that her candidate faced as a Black immigrant woman. Despite her candidate’s many years of community leadership and the pertinent initiatives she sought to implement within the community, Michelle remarked that the constituents were simply not ready to see a Black woman in a leadership position. Lastly, in carrying out her civic duties and lobbying for Black candidates, Bethanie expressed, “... there’s been moments definitely where I was silenced and not just silenced as a woman, but also silenced as a Black woman.”

Despite Canada’s multiracial and multiethnic diversity, ethnoracial and gender discrimination appeared to be a barrier for some participants, limiting their capacity to fully engage in Canadian politics. This experience left some participants feeling as though Canadian society did not view them as befitting of the same right to political participation or to represent them as political leaders because they were Black Congolese immigrant women. Certain groups’ political recognition is reliant on the dynamic of social relations of power influenced by Canada’s sociohistorical context (Abu-Laban & Niegut, 2000). For instance, the exclusion of immigrant women from political rights have stemmed from Canada’s history as a White-settler colony and the slavery of African peoples, the denial of rights to many racialized immigrants, and the marginalization and suppression of racialized immigrants through immigration laws and policies (see Chapter Five). These sociohistorical processes (among many others) have created and legitimized ethnoracial hierarchies within Canadian civil society, in which the socially constructed racial category of ‘White’ and European ethnocultural groups have been placed in positions of privilege and power, marginalizing racialized immigrants as those to be excluded from Canadian civil society and from the enjoyment of political rights (Joseph, 2018; Sharma, 2006).

Furthermore, patriarchal sentiments and attitudes have further marginalized racialized immigrant women as being unconforming to Canadian culture, norms, and values established by White European men in the early formation of Canadian society (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Thobani, 2000). As a result of discrimination and social practices that reinforce hierarchies, immigrant women are left with partial citizenship and are devalued in terms of political

participation and recognition (Siemiatycki & Saloojee, 2003), which is similar to what some participants reported. Discrimination and social hierarchies have resulted in many political disparities between immigrant women and Canadian-born women from dominant social groups. For example, fewer immigrants are represented in Canadian politics, their voices and particular needs are silenced and marginalized, and native-born Canadians are the object of unfavourable sentiments toward them (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010; Berry, 2013; Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Joseph, 2018). Therefore, formal political participation is neither equal nor universal for all citizens, given the systemic disadvantages that immigrant women face in Canadian society (Brown, 2014). Discrimination and social hierarchies are also paradoxically reinforced and institutionalized by integration policies like Canada's multiculturalism policies and Québec's interculturalism, which have concealed the conflicts and power relations associated with differences and failed to avert discriminatory public discourse that marginalize racialized groups (see Chapter Five; Bannerji, 2000; Bloemraad, 2012; Galabuzi, 2006). Therefore, the policies were not always effective in combating social inequalities stemming from gender, race, ethnicity, or immigration status (Abu-Laban, 2014).

Furthermore, some participants faced opposition from members of the Congolese or other African immigrant communities in the region. As previously stated, some African immigrant men and immigrant communities may be unwilling to abandon culturally accepted discriminatory gender norms (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019), such as those in which men are political actors occupying the public sphere and women are apolitical actors relegated to the private sphere. Participants in Okeke-Ihejirika et al.'s (2019) study, for instance, indicated that most leaders of African community associations were men, and that women who tried to defy gender norms were met with harsh judgments from their communities. Therefore, the refusal of some members of the Congolese and other African immigrant communities in the Ottawa-Gatineau region to embrace transforming gender norms posed a barrier to participants' political participation within the community (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019), causing at times tensions between participants and other African (or Congolese) Black men. Yolande commented on the work of the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*, saying, "I would say sometimes, you know, especially for men, they would say, 'Another women thing, eh? They're doing another women thing.' [laughter] That's the way they treat it."

These sentiments were shared by Keren, who co-organized several of the association's lobbying events, remarking that as Black women, "[o]n doit d'abord montrer que nous sommes sérieuses par rapport à ce que nous faisons"²⁷⁷ Keren discussed a time when she and other members of the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises* were planning one of their first events on investing in Africa and faced implicit opposition from their community partners, who were African men. She recalled how their partners did not take them seriously since they were an all-female organization, saying remarks like, "vous venez de naître là et tout, vous avez de grandes ambitions."²⁷⁸ Their partners were likewise looking to plan the event in partnership with the women, not just to assure the event's 'success,' but also to demonstrate to the community that they, too, had women present in their organization. Joanna, a member of the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*, explained how Black women are often stereotyped in both Canadian society and immigrant communities, "[m]ais tout ça là est sous-entendu. Ce n'est pas quelque chose qui est, qui est brandi comme ça devant ta face, mais c'est toujours sous-entendu..."²⁷⁹ This is exemplified in Keren's interactions with her community partners, who did not believe in her team's ability to organize a successful event, especially one dealing with the topic of investing in African infrastructure, but this was never explicitly shared with the women.

This sort of stereotyping, according to Francine, has caused many Congolese women in the community to take a step back from political initiatives, "... ce qui fait qu'on donne beaucoup de place aux hommes."²⁸⁰ In the end, Keren and her team turned down their partners' help and organized "une conférence impeccable, de l'avis de ceux qui ont été là."²⁸¹ She concluded, "Donc, vous devez prouver que vous êtes sérieux"²⁸² to win the community's respect, a barrier to political participation that men in the community may not often confront. Like Keren, Francine encountered some resistance from men (particularly priests) in the Congolese catholic community in the early days of her religious group's expansion, including her vision for the church, the activities they planned, and her leadership, stating,

²⁷⁷ Translation: "[w]e first have to show that we are serious about what we are doing."

²⁷⁸ Translation: "'you were just established and everything, you have big ambitions.'"

²⁷⁹ Translation: "[b]ut it's all implicit. It's not something that's, that's brandished in front of your face, but it's always implicit..."

²⁸⁰ Translation: "... which means that we give a lot of space to men."

²⁸¹ Translation: "an impeccable conference, in the opinion of those who were there."

²⁸² Translation: "So, you must demonstrate that you are serious."

... tout au début, j'étais très claire de ce que je voulais, où je voulais aller. Et puis, je n'ai pas voulu donner au début le leadership à qui que ce soit, même pas aux prêtres. C'était difficile parce que ça ne se comprenait pas.²⁸³

After recounting how some attempted to impose their own vision onto the church, she concluded,

Donc, oui, les gens peuvent penser que c'est parce que tu es femme, j'étais plus jeune aussi à l'époque. Mais quand même, si tu sais que, si tu sais ce que tu veux et ça te tient vraiment à cœur, ben, ça, ça peut passer.²⁸⁴

Joanna further remarked, "Les gens peuvent nous arrêter par rapport à ce qu'ils font, par rapport à ce qu'ils disent, mais c'est à nous de pouvoir repousser ces barrières-là..."²⁸⁵

Indeed, for some participants, the opposition from their communities (the Canadian and immigrant communities) motivated them even more to continue their activism and community leadership, raise awareness against discrimination, and as Idara noted, "... de changer un peu cette vision que les gens ont de nous. Mais aussi, en même temps, leur dire, 'Voilà, c'est comme ça qu'on est. Voilà, c'est ça nos besoins.'" ²⁸⁶ Others were inspired by their experiences of anti-Black racism and gender discrimination, as well as their experiences of political marginalization as Black Congolese immigrant women by peers, colleagues, or strangers, to engage in informal political activities over formal political activities, where their participation sometimes reflected their lived experiences of discrimination and the need for diversity and inclusion. According to Yolande,

... some issues, you know, you could say, if it's 'Black Lives Matter', you know, you can relate to some of those issues as a woman. You can relate as an immigrant. You can relate to some of them. So, all those things affect you differently. And you want to bring your contribution to those where you can.

In other words, one's experiences as a racialized immigrant women can serve as a catalyst for change. For instance, Bethanie said, "I went through a very, very racist experience in high school

²⁸³ Translation: "... at the very beginning, I was very clear about what I wanted, where I wanted to go. And then I didn't want to give leadership to just anyone at first, not even the priests. It was difficult because it was not understood."

²⁸⁴ Translation: "So, yes, people may think it's because you're a woman, I was younger then too. But still, if you know that, if you know what you want and you really care about it, well, that, that can happen."

²⁸⁵ Translation: "People can stop us based on what they do, based on what they say, but it's up to us to be able to push back those barriers..."

²⁸⁶ Translation: "... to change a bit this vision that people have of us. But also, at the same time, tell them 'This is how we are. This is what we need.'"

and the school did not protect me the way that I wanted them to. They did not do anything to address that issue.” She added,

... going through the racism and seeing that it’s not okay, it’s not okay that this is happening to me just because I’m an immigrant, just because I’m Black, just because I’m a woman, and then going into these social spaces, it influenced me to do better and to be a change.

Therefore, Bethanie’s political participation included the creation of safe spaces for Black students as well as protesting against anti-Black racism and oppression. Valérie also sought to combat discrimination within Canadian society through her participation in groups like the ACAO. Keisha purposefully chose to get involved in political activities, such as protests or participation in the National Christian Youth Summit, which reflected diversity and inclusivity, stating,

I think everywhere that I’m involved in, there’s always, it’s never like a White-run place, you know what I mean? Where like [it’s] majority White people and then I’m the odd one out, type of thing... So, it made it easier and *funner* without those things hindering [participation] in any way.

This was also true for Michelle, who explained that as she grew older, the activities she became engaged in were primarily related to issues that affected her life, such as the Black Employees’ Network group. Because she encountered numerous barriers as a Black employee in the public sector, she felt it was important to be involved in this professional network to be a part of a reform movement in her department and the federal government. For her part, Francine explained how she never paid any attention to the instances of discrimination that she did experience, believing,

... ça permet quand même d’avoir une certaine confiance en soi aussi dans la faisabilité, dans ce qu’on veut faire... ça te permet quand même d’avancer dans la vie et de prendre des risques beaucoup, tu sais, beaucoup plus grands qu’on le prendrait si on vivait trop des choses négatives...²⁸⁷

This was Francine’s motivation in her religious group. Thus, inequalities related to gender, race, ethnicity, and immigration status led participants to resort to alternative forms of political participation to become agents of change from the margins of society (Parham-Payne, 2017).

²⁸⁷ Translation: “... it allows you to have a certain self-confidence also in the feasibility, in what you want to do... it allows you to move forward in life and to take risks a lot, you know, much greater than you would if you lived in too many negative things.”

Lastly, the experiences of discrimination and marginalization impacted some participants' political activities through a desire for self-representation within their communities. Most Canadian municipalities are governed by White men on city councils, leaving women, racialized individuals, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ individuals underrepresented and excluded from the decision-making process (Tolley, 2018). This also extends to the Ottawa and Gatineau city councils (see City of Ottawa, 2021; Ville de Gatineau, 2021), despite the growing diversity in both cities. This inspired Valérie to run for city councillor, Michelle to work as a volunteer coordinator for a Black candidate, and Bethanie to advocate and lobby for Black candidates in her local community who sought to increase representation. Others, on the other hand, opted to establish self-representation through informal political activities. For example, Idara became a member of her son's school's advisory board because "c'est réel que les Noirs ne sont pas si représentés."²⁸⁸ Thus, she wanted to ensure that the voices and experiences of all Black students and parents at her son's school were heard and represented. Furthermore, Idara's involvement with the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises* was to ensure that Congolese women's voices and opinions were known and heard in the community:

On a des façons différentes de voir les choses, mais les autres, souvent, ne savent pas ce que nous on pense. Ils n'ont pas pris le temps de nous parler, parce que nous-mêmes aussi, on ne va pas vers eux. On reste dans notre bulle. C'est comme ça que moi, justement, dans les expériences dites politiques [*rires*], je pense que c'est ça que je recherche.²⁸⁹

She further stated, "... je ne pourrai pas rester là juste à regarder, puis me plains, et je me suis dit qu'il faut faire quelque chose, même minime."²⁹⁰ Keren had similar views of her involvement with the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises*, adding,

Oui, c'est un peu pour aider les femmes congolaises, par exemple, dans *Congolese Women's Network*, c'est vraiment pour aider. C'est vraiment pour changer l'image que nous avons. C'est ça aussi, changer un peu l'image que les autres ont de nous et aussi

²⁸⁸ Translation: "it's true that Black people are not so represented."

²⁸⁹ Translation: "We have different ways of seeing things, but others often don't know what we think. They haven't taken the time to talk to us, because we don't go to them either. We stay in our bubble. That's how I, in the so-called political experiences [*laughs*], I think that's what I'm looking for."

²⁹⁰ Translation: "... I couldn't stand there and just watch and then complain, and I thought to myself that I must do something, no matter how small."

l'image que nous avons de nous-mêmes, que nous sommes capables, nous en tant que femmes congolaises, de faire des choses dans ce pays.²⁹¹

Francine's leadership in the Congolese catholic community stemmed from her experiences of feeling invisible in society despite being racialized, stating, "J'habitais à [*lieu omis*], j'allais dans une église à côté, je ne me retrouvais pas... j'avais jamais un 'bonjour', il n'y avait personne qui, tu sais. Je n'étais même pas visible alors que j'étais la minorité visible!"²⁹² Indeed, while the term 'immigrant women' refers to a visible social category (Ng, 1987), immigrant women are often rendered invisible, marginalized, misrecognized, and oppressed in their receiving societies (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Erel, 2009). Therefore, Francine felt it was important to help in the establishment of the Congolese catholic community for others like her to feel represented and welcomed in the larger community. Bethanie joined the BSLA to create safe spaces for Black university students to voice their concerns. She remarked,

... they [society] have a lot of negative perception that Black women can't get along. Black women are always fighting and arguing. But that wasn't us. It was a bunch of Black women who just wanted to make a difference in our community, and we took that seriously because that was our passion. So, I felt strong.

She also wanted to use this platform to debunk the single narrative about African people, stating, "Our perception of Africa is not the same as what other people think it is. So, when I came to university, finally I was able to speak about this."

As per Siemiatycki & Saloojee (2003),

One of the consequences of dealing with the effects of exclusion and discrimination is that members of racialized and minority communities and their organizations find other avenues to engage in political activity. Certainly, social identity has a direct bearing on both the form and the extent of political participation. This is the substantive dimension of political participation (p.4).

This was evident among participants whose political participation was impacted by discrimination.

²⁹¹ Translation: "Yes, it's a bit to assist Congolese women, for example, in *Congolese Women's Network*, it's really to help. It's really to change the image that we have. It's also to change the perception that others have of us and also the perception that we have of ourselves, that we are capable, as Congolese women, to do things in this country."

²⁹² Translation: "I lived in [*location omitted*], I went to a church nearby, I never fit it... I never got a 'hello', there was nobody there, you know. I wasn't even visible even though I was the visible minority!"

The intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, and immigration status have an impact on the interviewees' political incorporation, but class has also been shown to have an impact. As stated in Chapter Three, in the context of this research, class is defined as the women's access to socioeconomic resources like higher education and paid employment. While participants were candid about the impacts of anti-Black racism and discrimination on their political participation, the dimension of class and their socioeconomic status were far less discussed. However, as Bowleg (2008) asserts, "[t]he interpretive task for the intersectionality analyst is to make explicit the often implicit experiences of intersectionality, even when participants do not express the connections" (p.322). As a result, absent narratives in the women's life stories, such as the dimension of class, should not be ignored, nor should more weight be given to the explicit narratives on the significance of the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, and immigration status. In this section, then, I analyze how class is inextricably linked to the women's political experiences.

When examining the women's life stories in Chapter Six, I note that most participants had relatively high socioeconomic status, both in the DRC and Canada such as, for instance, Yolande who expressed, "I grew up in [a] middle-class family. Both my dad and mom worked, and they instilled in us those values." This meant that her family, like many of the participants' families, prioritized higher education and employment, and their class statuses and social positionings were key for being able to pursue such opportunities in the DRC and abroad due to the potential and actual resources they possessed, such as their parents' wealth or access to critical social networks connecting them to such opportunities. This was notably the cases of Dalia, Idara, Jamille, Keren, and Yolande, whose parents had relatively high-status professions (for instance, academics, doctors, and politicians), elevating their families' social standing and resources. Furthermore, while migration experiences posed barriers to participants' socioeconomic incorporation in Canada, most were able to pursue educational and employment opportunities that contributed to their social mobility. In total, twelve participants had earned or were in the process of earning a university degree (bachelor's, master's, or doctorate), and twelve held paid jobs (e.g., junior analyst, psychotherapist, engineer, government employee, research manager).²⁹³ Altogether, the women's initial social positionings in the DRC and the educational opportunities this afforded them, as well as their eventual 'middle-class' status in Canada, had beneficial effects on the degree and scope of their political engagement. As Bethanie explained,

²⁹³ This excludes Rosalie who did not provide her employment status and educational level.

My parents come from very educated background, I myself come from a very educated background, and also being able to speak English or French, has had a big effect on my participation in Canada [...] Having an education and being able to communicate with people easily, having access to the internet, knowing how to read, you know, all of these factors really did help in being politically involved within my local parameters. Even being employed and gaining income, and all those things...

The women's class or socioeconomic status means that they had greater access to resources like money, time, social networks, and skills (e.g., political knowledge, language skills, leadership, resourcefulness) that they could mobilize to facilitate more agentic possibilities. That is, despite the above-mentioned barriers to formal political participation, participants were able to mobilize some resources gained from their employment and educational backgrounds that enabled them to identify and participate in informal political opportunities, including leading or co-founding associations and organizations that advocate for social justice and women's rights. The beneficial impacts of higher socioeconomic status are also notably illustrated in how the interviewees engaged in politics through university associations and employment, which provided them with a space to develop and apply the skills and political interests needed to participate politically in broader society. Bethanie was a member of the BSLA executive committee at the University of Ottawa, Joanna was a member of the Engineering student and Congolese student associations at the University of Moncton, and Michelle was a member of the Black Employees' Network group at her government department. Being involved on campus and at work raised their awareness of various concerns and issues facing their communities; as well, it instilled in them the desires, spaces, and abilities to engage in political action and serve their communities.

There was also a discernible distinction among participants, as those considered to have lower socioeconomic statuses (due to education levels and employment status) had lower levels of political participation in both formal and informal spheres. Notably, Samora, who had a high school education and worked a part-time contract position, had limited political engagement. Thus, if political resources are linked to educational attainment and employment (Verba et al., 1995), Samora was not in a social position that fostered political interest and engagement or enabled easier access to political possibilities, both formally and informally. This added to the traditional gender norms from the DRC that she retained, which hindered her levels of political participation.

Accordingly, while anti-Black racism and discrimination hindered the interviewees' formal political participation, their social positioning as middle-class Black Congolese women also contributed to their political engagement and to the ways they engaged. Mainly, their socioeconomic status promoted their participation in the informal political sphere since they could access the necessary resources, and for some participants (Idara, Keren, and Valérie), this mobilization of resources resulted in their recognition as social and political leaders in the Congolese and broader Ottawa-Gatineau communities. As Keren remarked of her social position, "... je suis quand même parmi les privilégiés."²⁹⁴

By applying the intersectional-gender approach (La Barbera, 2012), or an intersectional way of examining participants' political participation and incorporation, their life stories revealed how their political experiences were mediated by interlocking systems of oppression (Brown, 2014) constructed not only by their gender, but also by their race, ethnicity, class, and sometimes immigration status. Regarding the fourth research question, the interlocking systems of oppression created unique systemic barriers to certain repertoires of political participation, namely in formal political activities or activities in immigrant communities, as well as opportunities for other forms of political participation in the informal political sphere. For instance, because of social cleavages, the women faced systemic barriers to running for office or advocating within the Congolese immigrant community. Yet, because of their identity as Black Congolese immigrant women and their socioeconomic status, participants engaged in politics in ways other than what is conventionally understood to be political (Brown, 2014), thus demonstrating their resiliency and ambitions by advocating for change with a view of dismantling inequalities, stereotypes, and discrimination in the lives of other immigrant women (Kondo, 2012). Thus, the experiences of discrimination and marginalization, as well as the political resources made available by their socioeconomic status, created opportunities for greater participation in informal political activities through ethnocultural, religious, and community groups, protests, and professional networks. Indeed, the assertion of participants' social identity as middle-class Black Congolese immigrant women against discrimination and exclusion created a politics of advocacy and protest as they sought for their communities (Congolese and Canadian) and the formal political sphere to change, which in turn, redefined their positions in society (Siemiatycki & Saloojee, 2003). As stated by Bethanie, "... to be able to go to a platform and speak about the things that I love the most, which

²⁹⁴ Translation: "... I'm still among the privileged."

is home [the DRC], and being able to share my experiences... the future can be bright for African women...”

When these experiences are viewed in their sociohistorical context, it becomes clear that intersectionality manifested itself at the macro levels of society through policies, laws, and institutions (for example, in Canada’s colonial rule, immigration policies, and multiculturalism policies), as well as in micro relationships in the form of discrimination, intolerance, and marginalization (Yuval-Davis, 2006b; Covarrubias, 2011). Furthermore, the circumstances of the participants’ lives before migration (for instance, gender inequalities, a repressive political regime, war insecurities) and their gendered migration trajectories had considerable impacts on their political participation. However, because of migration, participants’ position in Canadian society as immigrant women became defined by race, ethnicity, immigration status, and social class (Castles & Miller, 1998; Kofman et al., 2000), leading to experiences of discrimination and exclusion that further impacted their political participation, as well as opportunities for political engagement in more agentic ways. Therefore, employing an intersectional approach also demonstrated in this study that participants’ gendered migration trajectories mutually intersect with social cleavages in Canadian society to affect their repertoires of political participation. This also underscores the relevance of migration in terms of political incorporation.

Concluding Remarks on Congolese Women’s Political Incorporation

Overall, despite several studies reporting lower levels of political participation among immigrant women (e.g., Bilodeau, 2016; O’Neill et al., 2012; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009), this study points to two key insights that question this assumption. First, ten out of fifteen participants were engaged in formal political participation, which included not only voting, but also volunteering for an election candidate, attending town hall meetings, becoming a member of a political party, running for city councillor, and gaining conventional political knowledge by participating in political events or conferences. Participants were most often engaged in electoral politics, particularly voting, as posited by Bilodeau (2008), Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001), and Verba et al. (1995), since participants viewed voting as the simplest and most accessible way of expressing their political opinions and achieving social change. Second, while participants faced barriers to formal political activities, particularly during the early years of settlement, most surmounted these barriers in the informal political sphere, as all but two participants exercised

their political agency through participation in ethnocultural, community, and religious groups, protests, professional network associations, school boards, and signing petitions. In fact, most participants regarded informal political activities and the ability to create new spaces of belonging to effect change as important to their sense of political incorporation in Canada, which confirms my second hypothesis. These findings are also consistent with many studies that examine immigrant women's political experiences (e.g., Erel, 2009; Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017; Ralston, 2006). Therefore, the findings suggest that gaining access to formal political rights is not necessarily an indication of successful incorporation (International IDEA, 2018).

Furthermore, several studies have theorized and explored the different variables that contribute to immigrant women's low levels of political participation, such as having previously lived in a repressive political regime (Bilodeau, 2008); gender norms embedded in immigration laws (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Morokvasic-Müller, 2014; O'Neill et al., 2012); fewer time, energy, and resources due to roles as mothers and wives (O'Neill et al., 2012); and social capital (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; Lowndes, 2000). This study, however, also found that gendered migration trajectories had influence on participants' political participation, generating barriers to participate in formal political activities. Within these trajectories, the most impactful factors analyzed were those linked to migration projects, migration types, modes of entry, immigration status in Canada, migration experiences, and travelling gender norms from the DRC. For example, this chapter showcased how gender biases and inequalities, resulting from the women's modes of entry and immigration status, as well as their role as dependents in the private sphere, influenced their access to formal political rights. In turn, their levels of political incorporation were impacted, particularly in the early stages of settlement. Participants drew on their migration experiences (for instance, the insecurities and vulnerabilities they experienced, as well as the civic skills they obtained through participation in transit countries) to shape the form of political participation in which they engaged. Travelling gender norms from the DRC also posed a hindrance to one participant's political participation since settling in Canada. Therefore, the findings of this study support my third hypothesis in Chapter Two, that migration trajectories, or the 'in-between' spaces of migration, would impact participants' political incorporation.

I also hypothesized that the different stages of participants' migration would intersect and, in some circumstances, exacerbate the challenges they would confront as they sought political incorporation in Canada. This was the case for most participants. For instance, the decision to flee

the DRC's culture of inequality, shifting migration projects, or encounters with insecurity in transit countries all impacted participants' modes of entry to Canada, which in turn, delayed and hindered when they could engage in formal political activities. While I primarily hypothesized the linkages between migration trajectories and political incorporation, the findings suggest that migration trajectories or the 'in-between' spaces of migration are dynamically interconnected to other stages of migration, both the pre-migration and the post-migration stages. The women's gendered migration trajectories affected their political participation, but the experiences from the DRC (pre-migration) and Canada (post-migration) were also intricately linked to these effects.

Additionally, participants' migration trajectories and experiences simultaneously created opportunities for greater engagement in informal political activities, validating the second component of my third hypothesis. This was especially relevant for participants who settled in transit countries, who drew on their experiences of vulnerability or civic skills obtained through previous social and political activities to overcome barriers presented by their gendered migration trajectories and impact their propensity to engage in informal political participation rather than formal political participation. Furthermore, participants' political participation increased over time, which is consistent with the findings of Rooij (2012), White (2017), and Adman and Strömblad (2018). This was due to participants' engagement in community-based groups, as well as changes to immigration status, which resulted in a stronger sense of belonging and the desire to invest in one's future and community.

Therefore, by incorporating a gender analysis of political participation and a trajectory approach to migration, the findings of this study provide some credence to prior theorization and research findings (e.g., Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Schapendonk, 2012; Wingens et al., 2011; Mahieu et al., 2015) that migration experiences are indeed significant for immigrant women's incorporation, in this case political incorporation. Notably, while migration trajectories were shown to impact participants' political incorporation, and as difficult as the experiences of migration were, they were also shown to be a facilitator and often far more positive for participants as they often drew on their migration experiences to identify relevant political spaces and activities. Further, as compared to their political experiences in the DRC, the women's migration trajectories and the experiences that emerged from the 'in-between' spaces of migration resulted in the women's greater levels of political participation and incorporation in Canada.

Lastly, this study illustrated how the social cleavages that participants found themselves embroiled in created both obstacles and opportunities for political participation in similar ways as the impacts of their gendered migration trajectories, that is, a greater propensity of participation in informal political activities than in formal political activities. There is, thus, clear evidence to support my fourth hypothesis, that instances of political marginalization owing to gender and racial discrimination may influence participants' political participation. Regardless of the women's level of political incorporation, those who were engaged in politics all suffered marginalization and discrimination at some point throughout their political incorporation. This study did, however, also reveal the significant implications of ethnic and immigrant status discrimination on participants' political (de)marginalization. For instance, participants felt they were marginalized from the political sphere because they had different needs and ways of perceiving things as Black Congolese immigrant women. Others faced opposition from some men of the Congolese and other African immigrant communities in the region for taking on leadership and activist roles in their communities, violating gender norms from the DRC. However, in the face of discrimination and exclusion, participants' assertion of their social identity as Black Congolese immigrant women created a politics of advocacy and protest as they sought change in their communities. Their socioeconomic statuses also suggest that their employment and higher levels of education functioned as sources of resources (e.g., money, time, and skills) that benefited their political advocacy and protest. Thus, the findings are significant as they inform our theoretical understanding of the impacts of interlocking systems of oppression on immigrant women's political participation and incorporation.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This chapter concludes my study on immigrant women's political incorporation. My thesis is one of the few, if any, qualitative studies to examine the impacts of migration on first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin and their political incorporation in the Canadian context, and to study the impacts of social cleavages on Congolese women's (or immigrant women's) repertoires of political participation in Canada. This research contributes in various ways to the current literature in migration and political studies on immigrant women's political participation. First, I briefly summarize the key research findings in relation to each research question, highlighting their empirical contributions to the field of migration and political studies. Second, I recall my research objectives and I discuss the analytical and methodological contributions of my research to the literature. Third, I review the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future research. Lastly, regardless of the limitations, I discuss recommendations for decision-makers based on my thesis's rich findings.

Summary of the Research Findings and Empirical Contributions of the Thesis

Using the life stories of first-generation immigrant women from the DRC residing in the Ottawa-Gatineau region, this qualitative study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. How are the migration trajectories of first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin gendered?
2. What forms does political participation of first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin in Canada engage in, and how can the modes and traits of their political participation contribute in understanding their process of political incorporation?
3. How do gendered migration trajectories affect the political participation and incorporation of first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin in Canada? How do the women, in turn, overcome the barriers imposed by their migration experiences and incorporate politically in Canadian society?
4. In what ways does immigrant women's identity as Black Congolese immigrant women in Canada impact their repertoires of political activities?

Regarding the first research question, the life-stories method assisted in unpacking how participants' migration trajectories were deeply gendered, with gender-related factors embedded

firmly at the micro, meso, and macro levels. The findings further indicate that these factors impacted the outcomes of the women's migration trajectories to Canada (for instance, whether and how they settled in transit countries). Altogether, these factors include the impacts of gender relations or dynamics on decisions and aspirations (migration projects), types of social networks, access to resources, migration types (e.g., family reunification, refugee and asylum-seeker movements, labour migration, and temporary movements), modes of entry (economic, family, or refugees), and immigration status after arrival. Furthermore, the women's life stories show that participants' migration trajectories and experiences did have some socioeconomic impacts on their incorporation in Canada. This mainly entailed financial burdens and pressures; the inability to apply for jobs, work full-time hours, or be eligible (or chosen) for qualified positions; barriers to post-secondary education or scholarships and bursaries; the inability to purchase a home or find a secure place to stay; barriers in the recognition of their foreign education and experiences; subjected to discrimination; and transforming social identities, gender roles, and gender relations. These findings demonstrate how specific gendered migration experiences have impacts on women during settlement in the receiving society, and how the same can be applied to the study of political incorporation.

The first contribution of my research, then, is that it supports numerous other studies that theorized and found migration to be gendered and shaped by complex gender dynamics (e.g., Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Carling, 2005; Pessar & Mahler, 2003; Tastsoglou et al., 2005; Wingens et al., 2011). Specifically, my findings support previous studies that gender-related factors at multiple levels and destinations influence immigrant women's migration, establishing particular trajectories, experiences, and outcomes. The gender-specific nature of migration has seen a growing body of research in migration studies since the 1980s, and my research reinforces the importance of examining this in studies on migrant women.

The second research question sought to identify the forms of political participation that participants engage in, as well as what the modes and traits of their participation reveal of their process of political incorporation. This meant assessing participants' political participation in the DRC and their participation in Canada to see whether their degree of political participation increased and what types of political activities they often engaged in. To explore the impacts of gendered migration trajectories on political incorporation, I first highlighted the women's levels of political participation and diverse forms of participation. The results showed that participants'

levels of political participation in the DRC were significantly lower than those in Canada. Indeed, only two participants were involved or active in political activities such as advocacy through a women's association, board of directors, and protest in their country of origin. Participants, instead, were more likely to participate in social activities in the DRC, owing to women's important role as caregivers of their communities. In Canada, all but two participants were involved in political activities. Formal political activities included voting, volunteering for political candidates, party membership, and running for city councillor. Informal political activities included advocacy through ethnocultural, community and religious groups, petitions, protests, professional network associations, and school boards. Many of these informal political activities emerged from the women's involvement in social activities; for instance, what began as volunteerism for an ethnocultural group evolved into political activism with that (or another) group. Though the majority of participants felt politically incorporated, they were more active in informal political activities and regarded these activities as important to their political incorporation, indicating that they felt strongly incorporated into Canadian society as a result of their informal political participation.

Therefore, the second contribution of my research is that it supports previous research in feminist scholarship that immigrant women often engage in political activities that go beyond the conventional understanding of politics. Much existing feminist scholarship has focused on how immigrant women have challenged the concept of political participation, calling for a more inclusive discourse and analysis of political participation that includes unconventional political practices and spaces (e.g., Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006; Erel, 2009; Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017; R. Lister, 2003; Ralston, 2006). In keeping with this, my research corroborated that the first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin in my sample were the most engaged in informal political activities in Canada, challenging conventional notions of being political. While participants in this study did engage in formal political activities, they were more active in informal political activities and considered these activities as important to their political incorporation. This can be explained by the fact that informal political activities assisted the women in overcoming a) the barriers to the formal political sphere presented by their migration experiences, and b) the marginalization, oppression, and discrimination they faced due to their gender, race, ethnicity, and immigration status.

Furthermore, my findings revealed a link between participation in social activities and informal political activities, which is likely the most unique contribution to feminist scholarship stemming from broadening the definition of political participation. Therefore, my research suggests that more studies are required to examine how participation in social activities can lead to informal political participation for immigrant women. This was the case with my interviewees. By considering both formal and informal political activities rather than a heavy focus on formal political activities as the sole means of expressing one's views on political issues or advocating for change, the women were able to tell a different story of their levels of political participation. Namely, studying primarily formal political participation would have marginalized some participants' advocacy work. This fills the gap in literature on social and informal political activities.

Regarding the third question, despite high levels of political participation among participants in both formal and informal political activities, the interviewees experienced numerous barriers to political incorporation due to aspects of their gendered migration trajectories. Notably, migration projects, migration types, modes of entry, immigration status after arrival, migration experiences, and travelling (and transforming) gender norms and relations were found to have impacts on participants' political participation and incorporation. The women were confronted with barriers that limited their participation in the formal political sphere. To overcome these barriers, the results revealed, participants engaged in informal political activities and became active in activities and collective actions within the groups and communities that provided them with the opportunity to engage. This encompassed a range of activities, some of which began as volunteer work and evolved into political activities. Participants also explored alternative forms of formal political participation, such as volunteering for political parties, which did not require citizenship and enabled them to overcome some of the hurdles they experienced in influencing the formal political sphere. Furthermore, participants' migration experiences created opportunities for political participation since the women drew on their previous experiences (the support of networks, the acquisition of civic skills) as motivation to become politically engaged in Canada. Thus, their migration experiences were strongly linked to their effective political incorporation in Canada and higher levels of political participation.

The third contribution of my research, then, is that it supports prior findings in transit migration research that show migration is not a simple, linear, one-directional, and permanent

process, but rather a dynamic journey embedded with complex experiences (e.g., Harzig, 2001; Schapendonk, 2012; Schapendonk & Steel, 2014; Schwarz, 2020). This was important to demonstrate in my study since migration is often regarded in studies of immigrants' incorporation as a straightforward movement, with migration experiences overlooked or rendered almost meaningless to incorporation. As illustrated in Chapter Two, scholars studying immigrant political behaviour often identify pre-migration and post-migration experiences as factors that can potentially hinder successful political incorporation. These include studying the privileges of citizenship (e.g., Lister, 2003; Young, 1989), transferability (e.g., Black, 1987), imported political socialization or pre-migration socialization (e.g., Jones-Correa, 1998; Wals, 2011), repressive regimes (e.g., Bilodeau, 2008), experiences with gender inequalities (e.g., Bilodeau, 2016), human capital (e.g., Diehl and Blohm, 2001), social capital (e.g., Gidengil & Stolle, 2009), and political capital (e.g., Oliveira, & Carvalhais, 2017). However, the results of my study reinforce other authors' claims that we should study immigrant incorporation by paying attention to the impacts of migration (e.g., de Valk et al., 2011; Ho, 2011; Wingers et al., 2011).

My research also reinforces claims that we should transcend traditional approaches to migration and pay particular attention to how migration is a dynamic journey and experience full of encounters, uncertainties, vulnerabilities, insecurities, changing plans and destinations, and transforming identities and subjectivities that shape incorporation (Schapendonk et al., 2020; Schwarz, 2020; Wachter et al., 2016). What distinguishes my research from others is that it fills the gap in the literature that often lays emphasis on pre-migration and post-migration factors to explain immigrants' incorporation levels. My research did so by identifying some of the ways in which gendered migration trajectories influence immigrant women's political incorporation. Thus, this research confirms the applicability of the trajectory and life course approach to migration.

In response to the final research question, the findings provided strong evidence of the effects of the women's intersecting identity as Black Congolese immigrant women in Canada on the repertoires of political participation. On the one hand, participants experienced political marginalization, discrimination, and oppression from Canadian society and the African immigrant community, due to discriminatory policies, laws, discourses, and sentiments, as well as unequal gender relations. On the other hand, such experiences also created opportunities for political participation in similar ways that the impacts of their gendered migration trajectories did, namely, by fostering a propensity to participate in informal political activities. Participants were motivated

to engage in informal political activities that reflected their lived experiences of anti-Black racism and misogynoir, such as anti-discrimination advocacy, the creation of safe spaces for Black individuals, and the desire for self-representation. Furthermore, participants were motivated to engage in political spaces that were more inclusive of the diversity of their identities, such as immigrant-based associations. Therefore, participants' repertoires of political activities were primarily comprised of informal political activities. Yet, further investigation revealed that the women's socioeconomic statuses and middle-class social positions served as sources of relevant resources (e.g., money, time, and skills) that also benefited their participation in informal politics. When considering the results altogether, these illustrate how participants' gendered migration trajectories mutually intersect with social cleavages in the Canadian context to shape their repertoires of political participation and degrees of political participation.

Based on these findings, the final contribution is that my findings confirm prior quantitative research indicating that social cleavages like the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status have an impact on immigrant women's repertoires of political participation in Canada in more nuanced ways (e.g., Harell, 2017). Scholars like Brown (2014) have called for more research into how interlocking systems of power shape the political experiences of racialized or immigrant women in the United States. My findings are unique in that they add to the study of this largely unexplored (yet important) issue in Canada and reinforces the need of using an intersectional lens for understanding identity in the study of immigrant women's political incorporation, and how social cleavages impact the repertoires of political participation.

All-in-all, participants' life stories revealed that gendered migration trajectories did have impacts on their political incorporation (both hindering and facilitating political participation). Social cleavages in the Canadian context also had impacts on their political participation. Yet, their stories also illustrated their resilience and resourcefulness as they overcame the obstacles and seized on political opportunities along their migration journey.

Research Objectives and Analytical and Methodological Contributions of the Thesis

This research aimed to identify the links between immigrant women's political incorporation and gendered migration trajectories. More specifically, this study aimed to:

1. Develop an original analytical approach by studying the links between migration and political incorporation that combines a trajectory and life course approach to migration with a gendered analysis of migration trajectories.
2. Explore the diverse modes of political participation taken by immigrant women, as well as the extent to which gendered migration trajectories affect their political participation and incorporation, as studied through the experiences of immigrant women of Congolese origin in the Canadian context.
3. Analyze the impacts of the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status on immigrant women's repertoires of political participation.
4. Contribute to both feminist and migration debates concerning the political inclusion of immigrant women by illustrating the ways in which political incorporation is redefined through their informal political practices and conscious decision-making.

While this is a study with a small sample, its findings suggest that there are significant linkages between migration trajectories and political incorporation. In terms of the first objective, this research offers an original analytical approach in the study of immigrant women's political incorporation, and thus makes an important analytical contribution to migration and politic studies. Specifically, it combines a trajectory approach to migration with a gendered analysis of migration trajectories to identify the effects of gendered migration trajectories on immigrant women's political incorporation. Rather than taking a traditional approach to migration and studying how pre- and post-migration factors impact participation, this research contributes analytically to knowledge by considering a new way of studying the impacts on immigrant women's political incorporation by extending existing approaches in migration studies and sociology (the trajectory approach and the life course approach) to the study of political behaviour. Understudied (if at all), I analyzed the impacts of gendered migration trajectories (the experiences embedded in the 'in-between' spaces of migration) on immigrant women's political incorporation in their receiving society. By centering my analysis on gendered migration trajectories or the in-between spaces of migration, this thesis fills a gap in the literature on immigrant women's political incorporation by demonstrating that gendered experiences and outcomes embedded in migration trajectories also have significant impacts on immigrant women's degree and modes of political participation in their receiving societies, mobility factors and processes that are overlooked. As discussed, migration is much more than a beginning and an end; the dynamics of migration trajectories are

just as important as pre- and post-migration experiences, where every migration journey is comprised of unique circumstances, networks, and decision-making that renders each migration and incorporation experiences different (Schapendonk, 2012; Wingens et al., 2011). There is a considerable amount of research on migration trajectories and immigrant women's political incorporation; however, there is scant literature that connects the two. As a result, this thesis offers a unique perspective of how migration trajectories can affect immigrant women's incorporation in their receiving societies, as well as a reflective understanding of how gendered migration trajectories can be employed as a concept to study immigrant women's political positionings, which was critical in this thesis in identifying additional (and hidden) explanations for immigrant women's 'lower levels' of political participation in Canada.

Concerning the second objective, this study is part of a larger conversation about the need to analyze immigrant women's levels of political participation, including their modes of participation and the barriers to participation. The findings revealed the many modes of political participation by the interviewees and the ways in which their gendered migration trajectories influenced their political participation and incorporation. Most importantly, the findings speak analytically to feminist insights on citizenship and the partial citizenship of immigrant women. Namely, my research on the impacts of gendered migration trajectories on the levels and modes of political participation revealed that immigrant women were more likely to engage in informal rather than formal political participation. This result was arrived at by approaching political participation as an open concept, in which public acts aimed at influencing institutions can also be carried out in the personal, domestic, and everyday spheres of life. Thus, political participation includes participation in social activities, which reflects the finding that the distinction between immigrant women's political and social participation is often blurred, especially when these might occur in similar spaces, such as volunteer or community involvement in organizations or associations.

The findings also revealed that participation in conventional politics or formal political activities, like voting and running for office, only partly reflected the political strategies chosen by participants and studying these alone would have ignored the many forms of activism and political agency among participants who faced barriers to the formal political sphere and to substantive citizenship (Lewicki & O'Toole, 2016), as well as the unconventional political spaces in which they acted. Participants instead opted to engage in informal political activities that were important

channels for generating a sense of belonging, political agency, and identity politics (such as advocacy through ethnocultural- and community-based organizations, protests, school boards, and petitions), as well as to engage in a variety of spaces and sites with the goal of contesting and transforming community laws and practices (local, national, and transnational). As a result of my analytical focus on informal practices of citizenship, I was able to challenge the top-down perspective on citizenship and identify these various strategies and sites of political participation. My research confirms that immigrant women's political participation reflects the three pillars of feminists' definition of political participation (as informal politics, political agency and identity, and as manifested in unconventional spaces), and gives a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of gendered migration trajectories on the interviewees' political incorporation.

Furthermore, this study adds another perspective to the question of immigrant women's partial citizenship. In essence, while participants may have faced barriers to the formal political sphere, by broadening my analytical understanding of political participation, the participants' informal acts and practices of citizenship can be seen as also contesting their partial citizenship (or exclusion from accessing the political rights and duties that citizens are entitled to), as they found other ways to engage in politics and enact their political subjectivities and rights in less formal public sites and settings. Thus, by approaching political participation from less conventional understandings, this thesis contributes to the feminist literature on political participation and citizenship by highlighting the significance of informal political activities and sites of contestations for immigrant women's political subjectivities, as well as by emphasizing their agency as political actors by offering a more nuanced and more agentic depiction of their partial citizenship.

Lastly, this thesis focused on a particular group of immigrant women, first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin, a population that is largely understudied in the Canadian context, contributing to the knowledge of their distinctive political and migration experiences. As per Kyeremeh et al. (2021) and Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2019), Africans, and particularly African immigrant women, are the least researched of all immigrant groups in Canada, with little being known about their incorporation experiences. Therefore, this thesis underscores the need to provide a platform for Congolese women's voices to be heard regarding their unique migration and political experiences while expanding the current literature on the challenges faced by African women in Canada.

In terms of the third objective of my thesis, this research aims to make an original contribution to knowledge of immigrant women's political incorporation by adopting an intersectional approach and by contributing to an emerging conversation about intersectional insights in the study of immigrant women's political participation in Canada (Harell, 2017). The results of this study reinforce the importance of applying an intersectional analysis to immigrant women's political participation and to how social cleavages impact the repertoires of political activities, an approach that has received little attention in the Canadian context, particularly in qualitative research. My study uncovered how immigrant women face some barriers to political participation due to interlocking systems of power, and how these barriers are overcome by the women's participation in informal political activities. Therefore, adopting a qualitative method offers a possible response to many quantitative research that question why immigrant women participate less in formal political activities. Furthermore, because many studies are quantitative, the intersectional approach in my study revealed nuanced experiences that sometimes these studies are unable to. For instance, this study revealed that participants faced not only hurdles to or disadvantages in succeeding in the formal political sphere as Black Congolese immigrant women, but they also faced opposition from some men in the Congolese and other African immigrant communities in the region. Thus, an intersectional approach revealed the historical and current impacts of anti-Black racism and discrimination (including misogynoir) in Canadian society and communities on Congolese women's political participation, factors that have been articulated sparingly in political studies. This study also revealed that, despite the barriers Black Congolese immigrant women experienced, those with greater socioeconomic resources participated more actively in unconventional and agentic forms of political participation. As such, my intersectional approach posits that discourses of gender in political studies can no longer exclude other social cleavages like race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status as determinants of immigrant women's political incorporation and participation in Canada (Brown, 2014). This is a unique methodological contribution to the literature that emphasizes the significance of situating immigrant women's experiences — in this case, as middle-class Black Congolese immigrant women — and using a qualitative method to reveal the complexities in these experiences.

Regarding the final objective, my results add to the existing feminist and migration debates by illustrating how Black Congolese immigrant women in Canada challenge conventional understandings of political practices and conscious decision-making, as previously discussed.

However, the interviewees' experiences also complement debates on political incorporation by disproving the notion that political inclusion is a straightforward process and a condition of social cohesiveness for immigrant women. Instead, their narratives demonstrated that their political inclusion and engagement were fraught with barriers, conflicts with native-born and immigrant populations, unequal access to political rights and opportunities, and fluctuations in the degree to which they participated (such as being less politically involved as young adults and becoming more politically involved as adults). Participants, in turn, discovered ways to redefine their political inclusion to include informal political practices that would enable them to gain access to political rights, opportunities, and representation within their communities, as well as overcome different power hierarchies that prevented them from entering political life. Accordingly, this study problematizes the concepts of political integration and assimilation in political studies by conveying, through my participants' experiences, how political inclusion is a dynamic process in which immigrant women's political participation does not have to reflect that of the dominant group or native-born population for them to be political or achieve a sense of political belonging.

Limitations of the Research

Though results of this study were revealing, there were some limitations to the study and avenues for future research. First, because this study focused on a specific group of immigrant women (first-generation immigrant women of Congolese origin) residing in a specific region of Canada (the Ottawa-Gatineau region), the findings cannot be generalized (Wachter et al., 2016). This is despite participants' experiences validating prior research findings and hypotheses, as well as the significance of this research in terms of identifying the links between migration and political incorporation and the complexities of immigrant women's political participation. In other words, the results cannot reflect the migration and political experiences of all immigrant women in Canada. For instance, immigrant women who may not be fluent in either of the official languages (French or English) or who live in less densely populated regions of Canada (Ralston, 2006) may have different experiences and political outcomes than participants in this study. This, however, should not discount the relevance of studying Congolese women's migration and political experiences in Canada since there has been very little research on this population in the Canadian context and, thus, my research contributes to the existing literature.

The findings' generalizability is also limited due to the small sample size of this study (N=15 participants). The purpose of this study was not, however, to generalize findings to all Canadian immigrant women, but rather to increase knowledge and understanding of how gendered migration trajectories might affect immigrant women's settlement in the receiving society. Nevertheless, future qualitative research on the migration and political experiences of immigrant women from different countries and with a larger sample size is needed to identify whether their experiences are comparable, whether Congolese women's forms of political participation can be extended to other groups, or whether new elements emerge. The findings of this study also stress the importance of doing more comprehensive research on immigrant women's migration and political experiences.

Second, the use of the *Communauté Congolaise du Canada Ottawa-Gatineau* and the *Congolese Women's Network/Réseau des Femmes Congolaises* as the main source of participant recruitment from groups likely contributed to the sample consisting of a majority of politically active women, as the women who volunteered to participate in my research were already heavily involved in these groups, either as leaders or active members. Furthermore, relying solely on these groups for recruitment may have contributed to the class bias in my sample; that is, most participants would be classified as middle-class based on their reported education and occupation during the interviews. Class or access to socioeconomic resources like higher education and fulltime employment are often considered as enablers of greater political participation (Harell, 2017). Indeed, this study found that the participants' initial middle-class social positionings in the DRC and the educational opportunities this afforded them, as well as their eventual middle-class status in Canada, had favourable impacts on the degree and scope of their political engagement. Therefore, the participants' social class may also explain why the sample consists of a majority of politically active women. This limitation also alludes to a lack of coverage of certain populations in the sample, which may have resulted in data omissions that could have had a significant impact on my findings. Therefore, more purposeful sampling could be utilized to recruit participants who are less politically involved to uncover other gendered barriers and experiences that may not have been discussed by participants in this study. As well, future research employing an intersectional analysis could also aim to recruit participants that represent different social classes to uncover the varying impacts of class on political participation and incorporation.

Third, previous studies have looked at how pre- and post-migration factors impact the degree of political participation of immigrant women in particular, and immigrants in general (e.g., transferability, imported political socialization, civic resources, social ties, political opportunity structures, citizenship regimes). However, my study did not fully analyze how these factors, identified in Chapter Two, may have intersected with participants' migration experiences to shape their political participation in Canada, unless the factors were discussed by participants or were inextricably related to their migration experiences (e.g., gender inequalities in the DRC, forms of oppression arising from social cleavages in the Canadian context). Future research should consider more of these factors and their impacts. For instance, greater attention could be paid to mechanisms of exclusion in the Ottawa-Gatineau region that may limit immigrant women's political participation based on which side of the interprovincial border they reside (Veronis, 2013). Is one province or city more conducive to political participation than another? Is it significant for political incorporation to live in one city than the other? While the purpose of this study was not to compare the experiences of participants living in Ottawa against those living in Gatineau, my small number of participants did not reveal any significant disparities in terms of political participation based on where they lived. This could be owing to their greater participation in informal political activities that is not limited to place of residency, unlike access to social and economic services and programs. Yet, a more targeted examination may yield further insights on the differences in political experiences.

Lastly, this study demonstrated how gender-related factors shaped participants' migration experiences and trajectories, and subsequently impacted their political incorporation in Canada. Since migration is a gendered process in which gender norms and relations shape migration processes and outcomes differently for women and men (Carling, 2005; Espín & Dottolo, 2015), it would be interesting to explore how the migration and political experiences of first-generation Congolese men differ from that of Congolese women. Namely, how do Congolese men's migration experiences differ from those of Congolese women? How could these differences in experiences result in varying outcomes of political incorporation for Congolese men, such as varying patterns of political participation and incorporation? Which gender-related factors have a greater influence on Congolese men's political participation and incorporation? How might an examination of Congolese men's experiences reveal additional gender-related factors impacting Congolese women's political incorporation in Canada that were overlooked in this study?

Recommendations

Despite the study's limitations, the experiences of Congolese women illustrate a great deal, and my research findings enable me to offer a number of recommendations for decision-makers to facilitate immigrant women's political incorporation in Canada. First, decision-makers should consider the gender-specific nature of migration to better combat discriminatory migration practices and respond to how gender influences risks, vulnerability, inequalities, marginalization, and oppression, as well as access to political rights and opportunities (International Organization for Migration, 2012).

Second, the findings demonstrate a link between social and informal political activities. As a result, government programs aimed at improving immigrant women's political incorporation should consider how participation in social activities might lead to political engagement. Civic engagement is already seen by the Canadian government as an important measure of a healthy and functioning democracy (e.g., Turcotte, 2015). Civic engagement includes membership or participation in a union or professional association, a political party or group, a sport or recreational organization, a school group or community association, a service club, or an ethnic or immigrant association (Turcotte, 2015). Therefore, governments should recognize informal political activities as legitimate forms of political participation and invest more in civic engagement or social activities to promote informal political participation.

Third, my findings demonstrate that regardless of their mode of entry or immigration status, immigrant women's political participation begins from the outset of their settlement in Canada. Therefore, the focus of government policies and programs should be to promote immigrant women's political incorporation from the moment they arrive in Canada, in order to minimize the obstacles linked to their gendered migration trajectories (International IDEA, 2018). This includes the government providing civic education and adequate information about the Canadian political system and political rights to immigrant women as soon as they arrive, as well as increasing support to ethnic, immigrant, religious, settlement or community groups to continue to promote immigrant women's political incorporation and empowerment, and to create or identify opportunities for political participation (O'Neill, 2006; International IDEA, 2018). The Canadian government should also support or encourage the political incorporation of immigrant women, particularly those who settled as refugees, by enacting more favourable citizenship requirements

or eligibility criteria that significantly improves the acquisition process and access to formal political rights (International IDEA, 2018).

Lastly, my findings show how social cleavages can impact immigrant women's repertoires of political participation in Canada. While such impact contributed to the diversity in political activities among participants in this study, it also points to the need for governments to implement policies that reduce barriers to engagement, such as acting against implicit discriminatory and oppressive policies; improving immigrant women's access to formal political rights, for instance by offering increased access to political resources (O'Neill, 2006; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009); and reducing barriers to educational attainment (and higher levels of education) and employment opportunities to gain access to greater socioeconomic resources and social capital that would foster greater participation.

Concluding Remarks

This study fills the knowledge gap on immigrant women's political incorporation by using the life-stories method to analyze the links between migration and political incorporation. By drawing more attention to the lived experiences of Congolese women, the findings of this research were significant not only for what they revealed about racialized immigrant women's gendered migration trajectories and settlement in Canada, but also for how political incorporation and participation should be studied more broadly to include the vast political activities that are often beyond conventional understandings. It is hoped that this study could be used as a reference for future research to highlight the importance of studying racialized immigrant women's migration and political experiences.

Furthermore, the beneficial effects of the life-stories interview on participants are often overlooked in many studies. My research provided a space for Congolese women to express their voices, experiences, and knowledges in migration and political studies as well as for them to (re)discover aspects of themselves and their experiences that they had never considered before. As Joanna stated,

... je me suis entendue parler et puis j'ai dit, « wow! » C'est comme si je me découvrais moi-même à m'écouter parler [*rires*]. Et puis c'est comme si je relatais ma vie, et puis je le voyais passer devant moi, c'est extraordinaire.²⁹⁵

Idara also commented, "... quand je prenais mes décisions que j'ai fait, j'ai jamais réfléchi de cette façon, mais je comprends maintenant [*rires*] plus clairement comment j'ai fonctionné sans le savoir. Bon [*éclat de rires*]."²⁹⁶ This should serve as a reminder of the importance of qualitative research that allow immigrant women to be heard and to share their unique experiences in spaces that often marginalize their knowledges.

²⁹⁵ Translation: "... I heard myself speaking and then I said, 'wow!' It's like I discovered myself listening to myself speak [*laughs*]. And then it's as if I was telling my life story, and then I saw it flash before me, it's amazing."

²⁹⁶ Translation: "... when I was making my decisions that I did, I never thought that way, but I understand now [*laughs*] more clearly how I operated without knowing it. Well [*laughter*]."

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Appendices

Appendix A: Certificate of Ethics Approval

Université d'Ottawa Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche	University of Ottawa Office of Research Ethics and Integrity	
17/09/2019		
CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL		
Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	S-04-19-3133	
Titre du projet / Project Title	Assessing the Impact of Gendered Migration Trajectories on the Political Incorporation of Immigrant Women: The Case of Immigrant Women of Congolese Origin in Canada	
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis	
Statut du projet / Project Status	Approuvé / Approved	
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	17/09/2019	
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	16/09/2020	
Équipe de recherche / Research Team		
Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Mansanga TANGA	Département de sociologie et d'anthropologie / Department of Sociology and Anthropology	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Dominique MASSON	Institut d'études des femmes / Institute of Women's Studies	Superviseur / Supervisor
Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments		

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie | www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

Note: The certificate of ethics approval was renewed twice, once for the period of August 18th, 2020 to September 16th, 2021, and once for the period of September 17th, 2021 to September 16th, 2022.

Appendix B: Consent Form

English Copy



Consent Form for Life-Stories Interviews

Title of the Study:

Assessing the Impact of Gendered Migration Trajectories on the Political Incorporation of Immigrant Women: The Case of Immigrant Women of Congolese Origin in Canada

Mansanga Tanga (doctoral researcher)

The School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa
120 University Private
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 6N5

Dr. Dominique Masson (thesis supervisor)

The Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa
120 University Private, Office 11035
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 6N5

Purpose of the Study: My name is Mansanga Tanga and I am a doctoral student and researcher from the School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies at the University of Ottawa. I am deeply interested in questions of migration and the political incorporation of immigrant women in Canada, in particular, immigrant women of Congolese origin from the Democratic Republic of Congo living in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. As a result, I am currently developing a doctoral research project on the impacts of the experiences during migration on the political incorporation of immigrant women of Congolese origin in Canada. This includes a study of the role of gender in shaping migration experiences. In addition, this project examines how these women may (or may not) overcome the constraints presented by their migration experiences, particularly through their engagement in the informal political sphere such as in community organizations, protests and diaspora politics.

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to take part in the abovementioned research study conducted by me, Mansanga Tanga, and supervised by Dr. Dominique Masson.

Participation: Your participation will consist of participating in two (2) life-stories interviews based on your migration experiences from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Canada, and of your political incorporation in Canada. Each interview will last about two (2) hours each with the possibility of being longer depending on the life stories being told. Interviews will be audio-recorded with your consent. These recordings will be used for the purposes of collecting information only and to gain further understanding of important aspects of the research.

Knowing that interviews will be audio-recorded, you:

- ☐ A) Give consent to have your interviews audio-recorded;
- ☐ B) Do not give consent to have your interviews audio-recorded.

Risks: Your participation in this study will entail that you volunteer very personal information, including your possible experiences of gender inequalities, violence, trauma, exploitation, insecurities, and uncertainties throughout your life trajectories. It is possible that this may cause you to feel a heavy emotional and psychological burden, this may provoke strong emotions concerning the subject in question, and/or this may provoke a concern about the confidentiality of the information being given. Every effort will be made to minimize these risks. First, I will try to minimize the emotional and psychological impacts of my questions by allowing you to withdraw from the interview if the emotional burden becomes too heavy, or by allowing certain questions to be avoided. Second, I will respect the confidentiality clause discussed further in the document. Third, I will provide a list of psychological services in the Ottawa-Gatineau region that you can refer to if the emotional and psychological burden is too heavy.

Benefits: Your participation in this study will contribute to the advancement of knowledge on immigrant women's political incorporation in Canada and the links between migration and political incorporation. Your participation will also help produce new knowledge on a population that is still understudied in the Canadian context (the Congolese community). Lastly, your participation will help contribute to the ever-growing need to include the voices and knowledges of minority women in literature and academia, and create a shift in the direction of how and what knowledge is being produced.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: The information you will share will only be used for the purposes of this specific research (including research publications and conferences) and for a potential post-doctoral research. Your anonymity will be protected using a pseudonym or a code name and it is this that will be used in publications and conference presentations. The only other person who will know of your identity is my supervisor, Dr. Dominique Masson, who will also have access to the audio and transcripts. Yet, if you discuss of your position and activities and these are widely known in the community (possible identifiers), this confidentiality cannot be maintained and guaranteed. If you are also identified, the people you have spoken about during your interviews (particularly family members) may also be identified even if they are not named.

Knowing this, you:

- ☐ A) Agree that quotes from your interviews appear in publications with the use of a pseudonym or code name and possibly other identifiers. In this case, your anonymity may not be fully protected, as people who know you well and your identifiers may be able to identify you;
- ☐ B) Prefer to remain completely anonymous in the publications of the research using a pseudonym or code name and that no potentially identifying information appears if quotes are published from your interviews.

If at any time during the interviews you provide information that you feel should remain confidential, this information will not be quoted or used in the publications of the research.

Conservation of Data: The data collected (such as the audio-recordings of interviews, transcripts, fieldnotes, memos, concept maps and coding) will be kept in a secure manner on a password-protected personal computer and a password-protect USB key. The paper copies of research documents (such as consent forms) will be kept in a locked security box in my home, as the principal investigator. Only Dr. Dominique Masson and I will have access to the data. Electronic materials and paper copies of research documents will be conserved for 10 years after the end of the project (2021), stored and locked away in a security box.

Voluntary Participation: You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed unless you grant me permission to keep and use the data.

Acceptance: I, _____ (*name of participant*), agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Mansanga Tanga of the School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies, and supervised by Dr. Dominique Masson.

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the researcher or the supervisor at the following addresses:

Mansanga Tanga (doctoral researcher)
The School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa
120 University Private
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 6N5
[REDACTED]

Dr. Dominique Masson (thesis supervisor)
The Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa
120 University Private, Office 11035
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 6N5
[REDACTED]

If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact:

The Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall
550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel.: (613) 562-5387
Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is yours to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____
(Signature) (Date)

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____
(Signature) (Date)



Formulaire de consentement pour les entretiens de récit de vie

Titre du projet :

Assessing the Impact of Gendered Migration Trajectories on the Political Incorporation of Immigrant Women: The Case of Immigrant Women of Congolese Origin in Canada

Mansanga Tanga (chercheuse doctorante)

École d'études sociologiques et anthropologiques
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Dr. Dominique Masson (directrice de thèse)

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pièce 11035
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 6N5

But de l'étude : Je m'appelle Mansanga Tanga et je suis une étudiante au doctorat et chercheuse à l'École d'études sociologiques et anthropologiques de l'Université d'Ottawa. Je suis intéressée par des questions de la migration et de l'incorporation politique des femmes immigrées au Canada, en particulier, les femmes immigrées d'origines congolaise de la République démocratique du Congo et vivant dans la région d'Ottawa-Gatineau. De ce fait, j'élabore actuellement un projet de recherche doctoral sur les impacts des expériences vécues durant la migration sur l'incorporation politique des femmes immigrées d'origines congolaise au Canada. Cela inclut une étude de l'influence du genre dans les expériences de migration. De plus, ce projet examine comment ces femmes peuvent réussir (ou non) à surmonter les contraintes imposées par leurs expériences de migration, notamment à travers l'engagement dans la sphère politique informelle comme dans des organisations communautaires, manifestations et politiques diasporiques.

Invitation à participer : Vous êtes invitée à participer à la recherche nommée ci-dessus qui est menée par moi, Mansanga Tanga, et supervisée par Dr. Dominique Masson.

Participation : Votre participation consistera à participer à deux (2) entretiens de récit de vie sur vos expériences de migration de la République démocratique du Congo jusqu'au Canada, et sur votre incorporation politique au Canada. Chaque entretien durera environ deux (2) heures, avec la possibilité d'une prolongation en fonction des récits de vie racontés. Avec votre consentement, les entretiens feront l'objet d'un enregistrement audio. Ces enregistrements ne seront utilisés que pour la collecte d'informations et pour mieux comprendre les aspects importants de la recherche.

Sachant que les entretiens seront enregistrés, vous :

- ☐ A) Consentez à ce que vos entretiens soient enregistrés.
- ☐ B) Refusez que vos entretiens soient enregistrés.

Risques : Votre participation à cette recherche impliquera que vous partagiez des informations très personnelles, y compris de possibles expériences d'inégalité entre les sexes, de violence, de traumatisme, d'exploitation, d'insécurité, et d'incertitudes qui ont marqué votre trajectoire de vie. Il est possible que cela vous fasse éprouver un lourd fardeau émotionnel et psychologique, que cela provoque de fortes émotions concernant le sujet abordé, et/ou que cela provoque des inquiétudes au sujet de la confidentialité des informations partagées. Tous les efforts possibles seront déployés pour minimiser ces risques. Premièrement, j'essaierai de minimiser les impacts émotionnels et psychologiques de mes questions en vous permettant de vous retirer de l'entretien si le fardeau émotionnel est trop lourd, ou en permettant d'éviter certaines questions. Deuxièmement, je respecterai la clause de confidentialité discutée plus bas dans ce document. Troisièmement, je fournirai une liste de services d'aide psychologiques situés dans la région d'Ottawa-Gatineau auxquels vous pourrez avoir accès si le fardeau émotionnel et psychologique est trop lourd.

Bienfaits : Votre participation à cette recherche aura pour effet de contribuer à l'avancement des connaissances sur l'incorporation politique des femmes immigrées au Canada, et sur les liens qui existent entre la migration et l'incorporation politique. Votre participation aidera également à produire de nouvelles connaissances sur une population encore peu étudiée dans le contexte canadien (la communauté congolaise). Enfin, votre participation contribuera au besoin toujours grandissant d'inclure les voix et connaissances des femmes de la minorité dans la littérature et le milieu académique, et de créer un changement de direction en ce qui concerne la manière dont les connaissances sont produites et le type de connaissances produites.

Confidentialité et anonymat : L'information que vous partagerez ne sera utilisée que pour les buts de cette recherche spécifique (y compris les publications de recherche et les conférences) et pour une recherche postdoctorale potentielle. Votre anonymat sera protégée par l'usage d'un pseudonyme ou d'un nom de code et c'est celui-ci qui apparaîtra dans les publications et les présentations dans les conférences. La seule autre personne qui connaîtra votre identité est ma directrice de thèse, Dr. Dominique Masson, qui aura aussi accès aux enregistrements audio et aux transcriptions. Mais, si vous discutez de votre position et de vos activités, et que ceux-ci sont largement connus dans la communauté (identifiants possible), cette confidentialité ne pourrait toutefois pas être maintenue et garantie. Si vous êtes également identifiée, les personnes dont vous avez parlé lors de vos entretiens (en particulier les membres de votre famille) peuvent également être identifiées, même si elles ne sont pas nommées.

Sachant cela, vous :

- ☐ A) Acceptez que des citations tirées de vos entretiens apparaissent dans des publications en utilisant un pseudonyme ou un nom de code, et possiblement d'autres identifiants. Dans ce cas, votre anonymat pourrait ne pas être complètement protégé, dans la mesure où les personnes qui vous connaissent bien ou qui connaissent vos identifiants pourraient vous identifier;
- ☐ B) Préférez rester complètement anonyme dans les publications de la recherche par l'utilisation d'un pseudonyme ou d'un nom de code et qu'aucune information qui pourrait vous identifier n'apparaîtra si des citations tirées de vos entretiens sont publiées.

Si vous souhaitez fournir des informations et que vous souhaitez les garder confidentielles, ces informations ne seront jamais citées ou utilisées dans les publications de la recherche.

Conservation des données : Les données recueillies (tel que les enregistrements audio des entretiens, les transcriptions, les notes de terrain, les mémos, les cartes conceptuelles et le codage) seront conservées de façon sécuritaire sur un ordinateur personnel et sur une clé USB, tous les deux protégés par un mot de passe. Les copies papier des documents de recherche (tel que les formulaires de consentement) seront conservés dans une boîte de sécurité verrouillée chez moi au domicile en tant que chercheuse principale. Seule Dr. Dominique Masson et moi-même auront accès aux données. Les documents électroniques et les copies papier des documents de recherche seront conservés 10 ans après la fin du projet (2021), enfermés dans une boîte de sécurité.

Participation volontaire : Vous n'êtes pas obligé de participer et si vous choisissez de participer, vous pourrez vous retirer de l'étude à tout moment et/ou refuser de répondre aux questions sans subir de conséquences négatives. Si vous choisissez de vous retirer de la recherche, toutes les données collectées jusqu'au moment de votre retrait seront détruites, à moins que vous m'accordiez l'autorisation de conserver et d'utiliser les données.

Acceptation : Je, _____ (*nom de la participante*), accepte de participer à cette recherche menée par Mansanga Tanga de l'École d'études sociologiques et anthropologiques, laquelle recherche est supervisée par Dr. Dominique Masson.

Pour tout renseignement additionnel concernant cette étude, vous pourrez communiquer avec la chercheuse ou la superviseuse aux adresses suivantes :

Mansanga Tanga (chercheuse doctorante)
École d'études sociologiques et anthropologiques
Faculté des sciences sociales
Université d'Ottawa
120, rue Université privée
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 6N5

Dr. Dominique Masson (directrice de thèse)
Institut d'études féministes et de genre Faculté des sciences sociales
Université d'Ottawa
120, rue Université privée, pièce 11035
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 6N5
[REDACTED]

Pour tout renseignement sur les aspects éthiques de cette étude, vous pourrez vous adresser au :

Responsable de l'éthique en recherche
Université d'Ottawa, Pavillon Tabaret
550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel. : (613) 562-5387
Courriel : ethics@uottawa.ca

Il y a deux copies du formulaire de consentement, dont une copie que vous pourrez garder.

Signature de la participante : _____ Date : _____
(Signature) (Date)

Signature de la chercheuse : _____ Date : _____
(Signature) (Date)

Appendix C: Sociodemographic Questionnaire

English Copy

Participant Code Name:

Date, time, duration of interview:

Place of the interview:

Other persons present? Who?:

Language used: EN or FR

DIRECTIONS: Please answer the following questions as accurately as possible.

1. What is your date of birth?
2. Where in the DRC were you born?
3. Where in the DRC were you raised?
4. [If applicable] What was your last country of settlement before Canada?
5. When did you settle permanently in Canada?
6. What was your landed immigration status? (family, economic, refugee, temporary)
7. [If applicable] What was your last city and province of residence before Ottawa (ON)/Gatineau (QC)?
8. Where do you live now?
 - a. How long have you lived there for?
9. How long have you been a Canadian citizen?
10. Do you possess other citizenships?
11. Did you have relatives or friends from the DRC living in Canada during your settlement?
12. What is the highest level of education you have completed? Less than 8th grade; Some high school; High school graduate; Some college/vocational/post-secondary/university; College/vocational training/post-secondary/university; Some graduate school; Graduate degree; Professional degree; Other (Specify)
13. Specify your employment status: Homemaker; Student; Part-time; Full-time; Entrepreneur; Retired; Unable to Work; Looking for a Job; Other (Specify).
14. Specify your occupation:

15. What is your marital status? Single; Separated; Widowed; Married/Common-law; Divorced; Other (Specify)
16. How many children do you have?
17. What language(s) do you speak at home?
18. What language(s) do you speak at work?
19. What language(s) do you speak with friends?
20. Overall, how was your migration experience? Positive, negative, or neutral.
21. Were you involved in political activities in the DRC?
22. Were you involved in societal activities in the DRC?
23. Are you involved in political activities in Canada today?
24. Are you involved in societal activities in Canada today?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this personal profile.

French Copy

Nom de code du participant :

Date, heure, durée de l'entretien :

Lieu de l'entretien :

Autres personnes présentes? Qui? :

Langue utilisée : EN or FR

MODE D'EMPLOI : Veuillez répondre aux questions suivantes aussi précisément que possible.

1. Quelle est votre date de naissance?
2. Où êtes-vous née en RDC?
3. Où avez-vous été élevée en RDC?
4. [Si applicable] Quel a été votre dernier pays d'établissement avant le Canada ?
5. Quand vous êtes-vous établi de façon permanente au Canada ?
6. Quel était votre statut d'immigrant reçu ? (Famille, économique, réfugié, temporaire)
7. [Si applicable] Quelle était votre dernière ville et province de résidence avant Ottawa (ON)/Gatineau (QC)?
8. Où habitez-vous maintenant ?
 - a. Depuis combien de temps y vivez-vous ?
9. Depuis combien de temps êtes-vous citoyen canadien ?
10. Possédez-vous d'autres citoyennetés ?
11. Aviez-vous des parents ou des amis de la RDC qui vivaient au Canada pendant votre établissement ?
12. Quel est le plus haut niveau de scolarité que vous avez atteint ? Moins de 8e année ; Études secondaires partielles ; Diplôme d'études secondaires ; Études collégiales, professionnelles, postsecondaires ou universitaires partielles ; Études collégiales, formation professionnelle, études postsecondaires ou universitaires ; Études supérieures partielle ; Études supérieures ; Grade professionnel ; Autre (préciser)
13. Précisez votre statut d'emploi : Femme au foyer ; Étudiante ; Temps partiel ; Temps plein ; Entrepreneur ; Retraitée ; Incapable de travailler ; À la recherche d'un emploi ; Autre (précisez).

14. Précisez votre profession :

15. Quel est votre état civil ? Célibataire ; Séparé ; Veuf ; Marié(e)/conjoint de fait ; Divorcé(e) ; Autre (précisez)

16. Combien d'enfants avez-vous ?

17. Quelle(s) langue(s) parlez-vous à la maison ?

18. Quelle(s) langue(s) parlez-vous au travail ?

19. Quelle(s) langue(s) parlez-vous avec vos amis ?

20. Dans l'ensemble, comment s'est passée votre migration ? Positif, négatif ou neutre.

21. Avez-vous participé à des activités politiques en RDC ?

22. Avez-vous participé à des activités sociétales en RDC ?

23. Participez-vous à des activités politiques au Canada aujourd'hui ?

24. Participez-vous à des activités sociétales au Canada aujourd'hui ?

Merci d'avoir pris le temps de remplir ce profil personnel.

Appendix D: Thematic Interview Guide

English Copy

The experiences before leaving the DRC:

This section will focus on information based on your experiences in the DRC, in order to grasp an understanding of who you were prior to migration and how you grew up in the DRC, highlighting in particular your experiences of political participation and gender inequalities.

1. Describe to me your upbringing in the DRC.

Prompts/Prompt questions:

- a) Family (parents, siblings); childhood; schooling; friends; work
- b) How was Congo at the time?
- c) What are your favourite memories? What are your least favourite memories?
- d) How was your life as a woman in your family and in society?
- e) What do you miss about Congo and your way of life? What do you not miss?

2. In the DRC, describe your involvement in any kind of political activities.

Prompts/Prompt questions:

- a) [If so]: What are the reasons for getting involved in political activities?
- b) [If not]: What are the reasons for not getting involved in political activities?

3. In the DRC, describe your involvement in any kind of societal activities beyond small group activities with family.

Prompts/Prompt questions:

- a) Organizations; community or ethnic groups or associations; church
- b) [if so]: Why was it important for you to be involved within these activities?
- c) [If not]: Explain why you were not involved in any kind of societal activities.

4. [If involved] How were you treated as a woman within the context of your activities?

Prompts/Prompt questions:

- a) How did you *feel* as a woman within the context of your activities?
- b) Were there other women involved? Who? How so?

Motivations for leaving the DRC for another country like Canada:

This section will focus on the story behind the decision to migrate out of the DRC and settle into Canada as their final destination.

1. Tell me the story behind your decision to leave the DRC.

Prompts/Prompt questions:

- a) Who made the decision to migrate?
- b) What influenced your decision to migrate and ultimately settle to Canada?
- c) Explain why you chose to settle in Ottawa/Gatineau.

Recounting your journey to Canada (including the difficulties, surprises, multiple destinations and various encounters):

This section will focus on the trajectories and experiences of migration, or the journey, shedding light on the micro/meso/macro factors related to your experiences, decision-making processes, the role of gender, as well as the transformative effects on your subjectivity and identity.

1. Describe how your journey to Canada was like.

Prompts/Prompt questions:

- a) What were the different stages of your journey (e.g., the different stops)?

- b) Describe to me each stage of your journey: how did you arrive? How was your time in each stage? What were the difficulties encountered?
 - c) How did you respond to the difficulties?
 - d) Did you encounter any trauma, insecurities, violence? Explain.
- 2. What made your journey to Canada easier? Explain.
Prompts/Prompt questions:
 - a) People, events, situations
- 3. What made the journey difficult? Explain.
Prompts/Prompt questions:
 - a) People, events, situations
- 4. How was it to go through this journey as a woman? As a Black Congolese woman?
Prompts/Prompt questions:
 - a) How did your migration experience affect you internally (your identity, way of being)?

The processes by which you incorporated into Canadian society:

This section will focus on the story behind your experiences of settling into Canadian society after your experiences of migration, uncovering how migration has shaped your settlement and incorporation.

- 1. What was it like arriving and settling into Canada?
Prompts/Prompt questions:
 - a) Describe some of your positive experiences of settling in Canada.
 - b) What do you think were the reasons for these positive experiences?
 - c) Describe some of your negative experiences of settling in Canada.
 - d) What do you think were the reasons for these negative experiences?
 - e) What steps did you take to adjust your life in Canada? Describe any barriers you may have faced.
- 2. What has changed in your life as a Black Congolese woman once you settled in Canada? Explain.
Prompts/Prompt questions:
 - a) Family dynamics; work experience; education; sense of self ["I felt that..."]

The various activities that you participate outside of the home:

This section will focus on the various activities that you are engaged in, which could be identified as being political, and of the consequences and impacts of your migration experiences in creating the conditions of opportunities or constraints for political participation in Canada.

- 1. How would you define political participation? What does it mean for you?
- 2. Since arriving to Canada, describe your involvement in any kind of political activities.
Prompts/Prompt questions:
 - a) [If so]: Why did you get involved in these activities?
 - b) [If so]: How did it make you feel getting involved within these activities in Canadian society?
 - c) [If never involved in the DRC]: Why was it important for you to be involved now in Canada in comparison to when living in the DRC?
 - d) [If not]: What are the reasons for not getting involved in political activities?

- e) [If not]: Have you thought about being involved in any activities? Which ones? Why?
 - f) [If involved in the DRC and not now] Why have you chosen not to get involved in activities now that you have settled in Canada?
3. Since arriving to Canada, describe your involvement in any kind of societal activities beyond small group activities with family.

Prompts/Prompt questions:

- a) Organizations; politics; community or ethnic groups or associations; church
 - b) [If so]: Why was it important for you to be involved within these activities?
 - a) [If so]: How did it make you feel getting involved within these activities in Canadian society?
 - b) [If never involved in the DRC]: Why was it important for you to be involved now in Canada in comparison to when living in the DRC?
 - c) [If not]: Explain why you are not involved in any kind of societal activities.
 - a) [If not]: Have you thought about being involved in any activities? Which ones? Why?
 - b) [If involved in the DRC and not now] Why have you chosen not to get involved in activities now that you have settled in Canada?
4. How are you treated as a woman within the context of your activities? How are you treated as a Black Congolese immigrant woman within the context of your activities?

Prompts/Prompt questions:

- a) Are there other women involved? Who? How so?
 - b) [If involved in the DRC] How does it feel as a woman within the context of your activities in Canada in comparison to the DRC?
5. Looking back at your migration experiences, what is your perception of how your migration experiences may have influenced your involvement in political and societal activities in Canada?

Prompts/Prompt questions:

- a) How are your current responsibilities linked to your migration experiences?
- b) Describe which aspects of your migration may have influenced your involvement.

Les expériences avant de quitter la RDC :

Cette section se concentrera sur les informations basées sur vos expériences en RDC, afin de comprendre qui vous étiez avant la migration et comment vous avez grandi en RDC, en soulignant en particulier vos expériences de participation politique et d'inégalités de genre.

1. Décrivez-moi votre enfance en RDC.

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Famille (parents, frères et sœurs) ; enfance ; scolarité ; amis ; travail
- b) Comment était le Congo à l'époque ?
- c) Quels sont vos souvenirs préférés ?
- d) Quels sont vos souvenirs les moins chers ?
- e) Comment était votre vie de femme dans votre famille et dans la société?
- f) Qu'est-ce qui vous manque au Congo et à votre mode de vie ? Qu'est-ce qui ne vous manque pas ?

2. En RDC, décrivez votre participation à toute sorte d'activités politiques ?

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) [Si oui] : Quelles sont les raisons de s'engager dans des activités politiques ?
- b) [Si non] : Quelles sont les raisons de ne pas s'engager dans des activités politiques ?

3. En RDC, décrivez votre participation à chacune des activités sociales au-delà des activités en petits groupes avec la famille ?

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Organisations ; groupes ou associations communautaires ou ethniques ; église
- b) [Si oui] : Pourquoi était-il important pour vous de participer à ces activités ?
- c) [Si non] : Expliquez pourquoi vous n'avez participé à aucune activité sociale.

4. [Si vous avez participé] Comment avez-vous été traitée en tant que femme dans le contexte de vos activités ?

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Comment vous *sentez-vous* en tant que femme dans le contexte de vos activités?
- b) Y avait-il d'autres femmes impliquées ? Qui ? Comment cela se fait-il ?

Motivations pour quitter la RDC pour un autre pays comme le Canada :

La présente section porte sur l'histoire de la décision d'émigrer de la RDC et de s'établir au Canada comme destination finale.

1. Racontez-moi l'histoire de votre décision de quitter la RDC.

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Qui a pris la décision de migrer ?
- b) Qu'est-ce qui a influencé votre décision d'émigrer et finalement de vous établir au Canada ?
- c) Expliquez pourquoi vous avez choisi de vous établir à Ottawa/Gatineau.

Raconter votre voyage au Canada (y compris les difficultés, les surprises, les destinations multiples et les rencontres diverses) :

Cette section se concentrera sur les trajectoires et les expériences de migration, ou le voyage, en mettant en lumière les facteurs micro/méso/macro liés à vos expériences, les processus décisionnels, le rôle du genre, ainsi que les effets transformateurs sur votre subjectivité et identité.

1. Décrivez comment s'est déroulé votre voyage au Canada.

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Quelles ont été les différentes étapes de votre voyage (ex. les différents arrêts)?
 - b) Décrivez-moi chaque étape de votre voyage : comment êtes-vous arrivée ? Comment s'est passé votre temps à chaque étape ? Quelles ont été les difficultés rencontrées ?
 - c) Comment avez-vous réagi aux difficultés ?
 - d) Avez-vous subi des traumatismes, des insécurités, de la violence ? Expliquez.
2. Qu'est-ce qui a facilité votre voyage au Canada ? Expliquez.

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Personnes, événements, situations
3. Qu'est-ce qui a rendu le voyage difficile ? Expliquez.

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Personnes, événements, situations
4. Comment est-ce que c'était de vivre ce voyage en tant que femme ? En tant que femme noire congolaise ?

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Comment votre expérience de migration vous a-t-elle affecté en interne (votre identité, votre manière d'être) ?

Les processus par lesquels vous vous êtes incorporé à la société canadienne:

La présente section porte sur l'histoire de votre établissement dans la société canadienne après vos expériences de la migration, en découvrant comment la migration a façonné votre établissement et votre incorporation.

1. Comment avez-vous vécu votre arrivée et votre établissement au Canada ?

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Décrivez certaines de vos expériences positives d'établissement au Canada.
 - b) Quelles sont, selon vous, les raisons de ces expériences positives ?
 - c) Décrivez certaines de vos expériences négatives d'établissement au Canada.
 - d) Selon vous, quelles sont les raisons de ces expériences négatives ?
 - e) Quelles mesures avez-vous prises pour adapter votre vie au Canada ? Décrivez les obstacles auxquels vous avez dû faire face.
2. Qu'est-ce qui a changé dans votre vie de femme noire congolaise depuis votre arrivée au Canada ? Expliquez.

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Dynamique familiale ; expérience de travail ; éducation ; sens de soi

Les diverses activités auxquelles vous participez à l'extérieur de la maison :

La présente section porte sur les diverses activités auxquelles vous participez et qui pourraient être considérées comme étant politiques, ainsi que sur les conséquences et les impacts de vos expériences migratoires dans la création de conditions d'opportunités ou de contraintes pour la participation politique au Canada.

1. Comment définiriez-vous la participation politique ? Qu'est-ce que cela signifie pour vous?

2. Depuis votre arrivée au Canada, décrivez votre participation à toute sorte d'activités politiques.

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) [Si oui] : Pourquoi avez-vous participé à ces activités ?
- b) [Si oui] : Comment avez-vous ressenti le fait de participer à ces activités dans la société canadienne ?
- c) [Si vous n'avez jamais participé à la RDC] : Pourquoi était-il important pour vous de vous impliquer maintenant au Canada par rapport à l'époque ?
- d) [Si non] : Quelles sont les raisons de ne pas s'engager dans des activités politiques ?
- e) [Si non] : Avez-vous pensé à vous impliquer dans des activités ? Lesquelles ? Pourquoi ?
- f) [Si vous étiez impliqué en RDC mais pas maintenant] : Pourquoi avez-vous choisi de ne pas vous impliquer dans des activités maintenant que vous êtes établis au Canada ?

3. Depuis votre arrivée au Canada, décrivez votre participation à toute sorte d'activités sociales autres que des activités en petits groupes avec la famille.

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Organisations ; politique ; groupes ou associations communautaires ou ethniques ; église
- b) [Si oui] : Pourquoi était-il important de participer à ces activités ?
- c) [Si oui] : Comment avez-vous ressenti le fait de participer à ces activités dans la société canadienne ?
- d) [Si vous n'avez jamais participé à la RDC] : Pourquoi était-il important pour vous de vous impliquer maintenant au Canada par rapport à l'époque ?
- e) [Si non] : Expliquez pourquoi vous n'êtes pas impliquée dans des activités sociales.
- f) [Si non] : Avez-vous pensé à vous impliquer dans des activités ? Lesquelles ? Pourquoi ?
- g) [Si vous étiez impliquée en RDC mais pas maintenant] : Pourquoi avez-vous choisi de ne pas vous impliquer dans des activités maintenant que vous êtes établis au Canada ?

4. Comment êtes-vous traitée en tant que femme dans le cadre de vos activités ? Comment êtes-vous traitée en tant qu'immigrante noire congolaise dans le cadre de vos activités ?

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Y a-t-il d'autres femmes impliquées ? Qui ? Comment ?
- b) [Si vous étiez impliquée en RDC] : Comment vous sentez-vous en tant que femme dans le contexte de vos activités au Canada par rapport à la RDC ?

5. En repensant à vos expériences de migration, quelle est votre perception de la façon dont celles-ci ont pu influencer votre participation aux activités politiques et sociales au Canada ?

Questions incitatives/propositions :

- a) Comment vos responsabilités actuelles sont-elles liées à vos expériences de migration ?
- b) Décrivez les aspects de votre migration qui ont pu influencer votre participation.