

**GENDER, MIGRATION, AND PRACTICES OF POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION IN LETHBRIDGE**

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family, and especially to my father who has sacrificed a lot to be able to support me in pursuit of post-secondary education beyond the borders of Armenia.

Abstract

This research explores political participation of immigrant women in Lethbridge. More specifically, research participants identified the factors that affect immigrant women's practices of political participation in Lethbridge. The analysis draws upon feminist standpoint theory, as well as Sandra Burt's and Martha Ackelsberg's conceptual framework on political participation. Fifteen open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted with immigrant women who have permanent residency or Canadian citizenship, have been living in Canada for more than three years, and are over nineteen years old. As a result of this research the following factors were revealed that affected immigrant women's political participation: immigration status, country of origin, time, language, education, economic stability, opportunity, age and membership in organisations and groups. Overall, the research found out that the level of political participation of immigrant women in Lethbridge is low, especially for those coming from developing countries.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Immigration is a very common practice in our societies today. Although immigrants might be forced to leave their countries for very different reasons, such as economic, political, or natural disasters, all migration to another country entails not only some benefits but also a set of challenges. These challenges might affect different aspects of one's life; for instance, some immigrant women might be discouraged from being socially or politically involved in society, which in turn might result in a low level of political participation of immigrant women in host countries.

Political participation of immigrants plays an important role in Canada. As an immigrant receiving country, Canada accepts thousands of immigrants every year. For many of them, political participation might be the crucial component of the overall integration process into society (O'Neil, Gidengil & Young, 2012; Rooij, 2012). Political participation is also considered to be an indicator of the "health of modern democracies" (Ginieniewicz, 2007, p. 328). Democracy is enhanced when political participation is undertaken by various groups of people. At the same time, equal participation of different groups of people in politics is crucial for political equality (Rooij, 2012). In the Canadian context, those groups would comprise Aboriginals, ethnic minorities, immigrants, etc.

In contrast to many studies of political participation and political engagement of Canadians, there are only a few studies that examine immigrants' political participation. There are even fewer studies that investigate immigrant women's political participation in Canada. Studying the modes of political participation that immigrant women undertake and exploring the reasons that might affect their political

participation will contribute to determining the level of political integration of immigrant women in society. This study aims to address the knowledge gap in immigrant women and political participation in Canada.

1.1 Background

Immigration has been one of the most discussed topics among political scientists since the 1980s. It is one of the biggest processes that has contributed to globalization. Immigration is implicated in different changes and challenging experiences in all aspects of life (Beneria, Deere, & Kabeer, 2013). For many centuries, scholars have overlooked the significance of gender in the migration process. With the growing number of immigrants, and particularly immigrant women, more scholars have started to investigate gendered experiences of mobility (Lutz, 2010).

Canada is one of the most diverse immigrant receiving countries in the world. Each year many men and women come to Canada to start a new life. In 2006, immigrant women comprised 52 % of the total immigrant population in Canada (Chui, 2011). In 2011, the population of Canada comprised 20.6 % foreign born (both men and women compared to 19.8 % in 2006); and the number of immigrant women grew by 14% from 2001 to 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2015). With Canada having the largest proportion of immigrant population among G8 countries (Statistics Canada, 2015), there are limited number of studies that investigate political participation of immigrant women in Canada. Canada is also considered a multicultural country brought about by immigration, diverse ethnicities, culture and language (Bloemraad, 2006). The official Canadian multicultural policy provides “symbolic legitimacy” to cultural heritage (Bloemraad, 2006, p.141). While it is important to have the concept and understanding of multiculturalism in society, it is “who recognizes it” that is even

more important (Bloemraad, 2006, p.153). Hence, the role of government is salient, as the government's affirmation of multiculturalism contributes to "normative standing in the political system" (Bloemraad, 2006, p.153). The reality of the government's social or financial support contributes to a higher incorporation of immigrants in the political or public sphere. Equal opportunities and access to social programs for both native-born and foreign-born citizens boost the sense of civic engagement among newcomers. In this way, a policy of multiculturalism fosters naturalization and participation of immigrants in the receiving society (Bloemraad, 2006).

Both immigrant women and men encounter various challenges in a new country. These challenges may include the process of learning a new language, job seeking, and adapting to a new social environment. As a consequence, immigrants' political participation may be limited compared to the native-born (O'Neil, Gidengil, & Young, 2012). As citizen participation is a critical premise of democratic legitimacy, political participation comprises an important part of immigrants' overall integration process (O'Neill, Gidengil, & Young, 2012). Political participation gives immigrants an opportunity to make their concerns heard or to contribute to changes by selecting representatives who will advocate for their demands and interests. Moreover, political participation is a crucial issue for Canadian policymakers (Nakhaie, 2008). A "democratic audit" would be incomplete without an estimation of political participation (Gidengil, Blais, Nevitte, & Nadeau, 2004, p. 94). Additionally, it is important to study the political participation of citizens of the country as it shows whether their voices are heard (Gidengil et al., 2004). However, there are limited studies examining the political participation of immigrant women in Canada.

Alberta is the fourth largest immigrant receiving province, which received, in 2006, 20,716 immigrants and the number of immigrants increased to 32,640 in 2010

(Government of Alberta, 2011). In Alberta, Calgary and Edmonton are top destination for immigrants. Lethbridge is the fourth favoured place in Alberta, which receives only 1, 7% of all immigrants in Alberta (556 immigrants in 2010) (Government of Alberta, 2011). In 2003, 655 immigrants were living in Lethbridge (Government of Canada, 2013). Ethno-cultural groups of immigrants in 2011, were comprised of Arab and West Asian (approximately 200 people), Black (around 800), Chinese (around 1100), Filipino (around 700), Japanese (around 1500), Korean (around 180), Latin American (600), South Asian (900), Southeast Asian (400), and others (380) (Chooselethbridge, 2016a). In 2012, visible minorities comprised 6% of the total population in Lethbridge (City-data.com, 2016).

This research is conducted in a small city in Southern Alberta. The city of Lethbridge had a population of almost 90,000 in 2013 (City of Lethbridge, 2013). Lethbridge is a good place to investigate political participation as it is an industrial centre for Southern Alberta and is the site of the University of Lethbridge, one of the four Comprehensive Academic and Research Institutions (CARI) institutions in Alberta. There are many international students who attend the university and the Lethbridge College as well as temporary foreign workers who work in the area. Similarly, many immigrant families target this destination, as the conservative social environment helps people feel more secure to raising their children. Main employment sectors in Lethbridge are health care, government service, education, manufacturing, retail, agri-food and financial services (Chooselethbridge, 2016b). In Lethbridge there are more than 24 religious organisations (Canadian relocation, 2016). During the 2015 federal election, voter turnout in Lethbridge was 69.25% (Global News, 2015). It is worthwhile to note that the big change has occurred in Lethbridge in 2015: local politics became women dominated as three women were elected to represent the city

in Edmonton and Ottawa. In the provincial election, May 2015, Shannon Phillips and Maria Fitzpatrick became MLAs for West and East Lethbridge respectively. Moreover, for the first time, a female candidate, Rachael Harder, was elected as the federal Member of Parliament in 2015 (Lethbridge Herald, 2015).

1.2 Research Statement

Historically, the social categories such as gender, ethnicity and immigrant status separately, and the intersection of these categories have been under-examined in the scope of political participation (Abu-Laban, 2002; Black, 2011). Political participation of immigrants plays an important role for different groups' integration into society. Particularly, for a multicultural country like Canada, it helps to develop a cohesive society by reducing the segregation among diverse groups of people (Ginieniewicz, 2007). Although Black (2011) posits that in some cases newcomers and minorities might have the same level of political incorporation as Canadian-born citizens, the picture changes once gender is applied to the scope of political participation (Abu-Laban, 2002; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009).

Compared to native-born Canadian women, immigrant women's political integration seems incomplete (O'Neil, Gidengil, & Young, p. 182; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009). Political participation is a "direct mechanism" for immigrant women to make their voices and concerns heard by directly participating in contributing to changes at the community level or through electing representatives who will do so (O'Neil, Gidengil, & Young, 2012, p.185). Unfortunately, immigrant women who are unaware of their rights and government programs (e.g., programs pertaining to child abuse, legal aid, GST tax credit) have lower political participation compared to other immigrant women who have higher income, and they form the majority of immigrant women (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009, p. 744).

Migration studies mostly focus on the economic and social integration of immigrant women (Read, 2007). There is little information about immigrant women's political engagements, and similarly about factors that prohibit their political participation. O'Neil, Gidengil, and Young (2012) reveal that factors such as education, culture, income and occupation might be determinants of immigrant women's level of political integration. However, more research is required to identify a more comprehensive list of factors that not only prohibit but also promote the political participation of immigrant women.

It is vital to find out the factors that impact the political participation of immigrant women in Canada. The women who have a greater need to be aware of government programs and policies possess less information compared to native-born Canadians, which might result in immigrant women being less empowered (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009, p.755). However, political participation in relation to gender, immigration and ethnicity has been under-examined by political and feminist researchers. Thus, this study aims to find out the level of political participation among immigrant women in Lethbridge and to explore the factors that might affect their political participation.

1.3 Purpose of study

Before 1980s, the study of political participation was limited to formal political participation, which is explained by agreed division among public and private spheres between men and women among political scientists (Burt, 2002). This resulted in overlooking many women's and union's social movements (p. 277). Furthermore, the intersection of gender, migration and political participation has been overlooked for many decades by Canadian political scientists, which is fairly explained by immigrants being non-eligible to vote (Abu-Laban, 2002). The practice of political participation is a "cornerstone," which helps to assess the "health" of democracy in a

country (Painter-Main, 2014, p. 77). Hence, for a multicultural country like Canada, it is vital to estimate the level of participation of different groups (e.g. immigrants, Aboriginals, ethnic minorities, women, etc.) to understand democratic practices.

The purpose of this study is to reveal the nature of political participation among immigrant women in Lethbridge and to acquire knowledge about immigrant women's experiences among different modes of political participation. At the same time, this study aims to fill the knowledge gap in scholarship pertaining to immigrant women and political participation in Canada. More specifically, the objectives of this study are the following: 1) to assess the level of political participation among immigrant women in Lethbridge; 2) to study whether immigrant women are active in the political sphere; 3) to investigate whether there are some modes of political participation that are more common among immigrant women in Lethbridge; 4) to examine whether the extent of political participation among immigrant women differs between citizens and permanent residents; and 5) to explore what kind of challenges immigrant women have in relation to practices of political participation.

1.4 Research questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

- What modes of political participation do immigrant women undertake in Lethbridge?
- What factors affect political participation of immigrant women in Lethbridge?
- Are there any differences between immigrant women with Canadian permanent residency and citizenship in the scope of non-electoral political participation?

1.5 Significance of study

This study investigates political participation of immigrant women in Lethbridge. Exploring their political participation as citizens or permanent residents provides insight into the nature of political participation in host societies. So far there is no study conducted that explores the political participation of immigrant women who are not Canadian citizens. Also, there is no study that examines a broad range of factors that affect particularly immigrant women's political participation in Canada, particularly, in a small city like Lethbridge. Moreover, this research contributes to feminist scholarship by looking at political participation of immigrant women through their lived experiences (Ackerly & True, 2010; Naples & Gurr, 2014). By analysing immigrant women's level of participation in political life, as a feminist researcher, I highlight the role of gender in the practices of political participation and shed light on the major challenges that immigrant women encounter in Canada. In the same vein, I highlight the importance of political participation of immigrant women. The outcome of this research will serve as a reference for policymakers interested in understanding how immigrant women participate in the political process and, hopefully, contribute to migration studies. More importantly, this study contributes not only to political science but also to feminist scholarship by drawing upon marginalized women's experiences and voices, and highlighting how immigration status excludes immigrant women in political life. Although political participation of immigrant women is a new and developing field, more attention is required considering the growing numbers of immigrants in Canada.

1.6 Scope and limitations of study

This study was conducted to find the level of political participation of immigrant women in Lethbridge. Two groups of women were interviewed for this

research: permanent residents and citizens among first-generation immigrant women. All the fifteen participants were residents of Lethbridge for more than three years. The participants were asked about their lifestyle, community involvement activities, political activities, and involvement in organisations and club memberships.

This study however, is limited based on time constraints imposed by the length of the study, recruitment difficulties of research participants, funding, and scholarly literature in political science. The Master of Arts program at the University of Lethbridge is limited to two years which include the whole research process: coursework, fieldwork, ethics application process, and the writing process. Initially, I was planning to interview twenty participants but because of time limitations I had to decrease the number of participants to fifteen. At the beginning of the study, I planned to recruit participants within a month but it took four months to recruit and interview fifteen participants. The recruitment of participants associated with the Lethbridge Immigrant Services and the Southern Alberta Ethnic Association (SAEA) was unsuccessful even after repeated follow-up. Finding participants through community posters was unsuccessful as well; however, one immigrant woman contacted me five months after I finished the fieldwork.

Having no funding for my research was another constraint of the study. Initially, I planned to conduct interviews in some other cities in Southern Alberta in addition to Lethbridge; however, since my study did not qualify for research grants or other financial support the research was limited to Lethbridge. Also funding would have enabled me to provide gifts or gift cards for the research participants as compensation for their participation, which might have encouraged more women to take part in the research.

Literature on gender, migration and political participation in the field is very

limited both in Canadian and Western contexts. There is no similar study, even in Europe available for me at this time. In the Canadian context, the studies on immigrant women mostly focus on visible minorities in bigger cities like Toronto and do not consider the intersection of immigration status (i.e. permanent resident) and gender. At the same time, I was limited to the literature in English, thus I cannot assure what is available on the topic in other languages.

Chapter Two

Theoretical framework

This chapter starts with providing definitions of political participation commonly used by political scientists. A discussion of the different perspectives underlying definitions of political participation reveals how social categories such as gender, ethnicity and immigration status were excluded from mainstream research. Later, a feminist perspective on political participation is provided which draws attention on how a “white-man” was seen as a norm for an ideal participant in studies about political participation. Moreover, feminist scholarship argues for examining social categories such as gender, ethnicity and class in relation to political participation. Finally, the chapter discusses the two main theories on political participation that formed the theoretical framework of this research.

2.1 Defining political participation

Political participation is an inevitable part of democratic citizenship (Gidengil, Nadeau, Nevitte & Blais, 2010) and since 1960s its concept has been widely discussed (Lawrence, 1975; Salisbury, 1975; Verba & Nie, 1975; Mishler, 1979; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995; Burt, 2002; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; Maxwell, 2010; Painter-Main, 2014). The diversity of political participation activities and inclusiveness of various groups of people is a way of enhancing democracy (Painter-Main, 2014, p. 62). Thus, the concept of political participation has been analyzed from different perspectives by political theorists.

Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) define the concept of political participation as: an “activity that has 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” (Verba,

Scholzman, and Brady, 1995, p. 38). They exclude watching news or programs related to political events and communications on political topics (discussions with friends, calls to radio shows on political issues) from the notion of political activity. In contrast, Lawrence (1975) argues that, before his research on political participation, scholars mostly concentrated on explaining what political participation is. He reveals two concepts of political participation and labels them “participation as interaction” and “participation as instrumental tool” (Lawrence, 1975, p. 455). He identifies the first concept as a social group or individual activity or action that boosts “public good” and “shared purposes” (Lawrence, 1975, p.454). This dimension is pertaining to the “view of politics” as a group of activities and relationships “concerned with maintaining community, fostering cooperation among individuals and groups, and encouraging settlement of disputes through public communication” (Lawrence, 1975, p. 454). Moreover, he defines political interaction as political communication which results in improving institutions or just practicing being a citizen. The second concept, participation as an instrumental tool, is a way of “gaining power and legalizing private benefits... [that] recommends strengthening of legal and constitutional guarantees of individual rights” (Lawrence, 1975, p. 455). In this dimension of political participation, “deployment of power becomes the most important way of exercising citizenship” (Lawrence, 1975, p. 459). However, the distinction between these two dimensions of the concept, does not mean they are not equally “plausible” or “valid.”

In contrast to all studies that examine the concept and practices of political participation, the following study focuses on who takes part in non-institutionalized political acts, and why. Painter-Main (2014, p.63) identifies two approaches to non-institutionalized political activities: “repertoire-building” and “elite-challenging” approaches. The first approach includes demonstrations, boycotting some products

and signing petitions as a “ubiquitous part of contemporary politics” (Painter-Main, 2014, p.63). This approach suggests that political protest “has become normalized” (Painter-Main, 2014, p.63). Moreover, it becomes part of those participants’ “repertoires” who take part in institutionalized political activities. Ultimately, “non-institutionalized political activities are part of the normal political process” (Painter-Main, 2014, p.63). “Repertoire-builders” are more likely to possess resources that provide them an opportunity to advocate their beliefs and transform them into actions. Two crucial resources are education and money. Moreover, a few groups of studies suggest that individuals with the most resources are more apt to take part in both institutionalized and non-institutionalized political activities. Elite-challenging approach describes the same modes of political engagement as “the purview of the most vulnerable members of society” (Painter-Main, 2014, p.64). The disadvantaged choose non-institutionalized political activities, as they consider government or other political institutions unresponsive to their issues. This approach focuses on the disadvantaged in terms of economic and social factors. From the Canadian vantage point, many immigrants encounter difficult financial conditions when entering the new country. Therefore, the immigrants are frequently considered disadvantaged in Canadian society. Thus, they can fit into the “traditional purview of the elite-challenging perspective” (Painter-Main, 2014, p.64). Nevertheless, the socio-economic factor is not the only element that makes immigrants disadvantaged. Immigrants can experience other types of difficulties such as integrating into or adapting to a new culture which may have a negative impact on their political integration. Painter-Main (2014) notes that the literature provides three different scenarios for disadvantaged immigrants in relation to their political participation: first, as a result of lack of social integration, immigrants might feel outsiders and

avoid political activities; the second scenario posits that immigrants become more politically engaged as a consequence of social and economic integration; and the third considers that immigrants and visible minorities are more apt to get involved in non-institutionalized activities which do not require citizenship, socio-economic resources and cultural integration. In this way, Painter-Main (2014) discusses not only what constitutes types of political participation, but also who participates in them. Even if citizenship is not required for some types of political participation (for example, protest or signing a petition) and ethnicity might affect political participation, Painter-Main (2014) fails to discuss the role of gender and immigration status in relation to political participation. In the 1970s, Canadian feminist researchers challenging the common idea that politics is a man's domain, started to criticize existing approaches to studies in political participation. In a resultant American and Canadian literature review, Sylvia Bashevkin (1979) notes that Canadian scholars mostly excluded women as they did not "appear to fit the model of the ideal participant" (cited in Burt, 2002, p. 243). She argues that the majority of the researchers were not interested in studying women's political participation. Even if they did so, researchers failed to study the intersection of gender with age, family or occupational status, education and other related elements. Furthermore, Thelma McCormack (1975) identifies three biases in the literature pertaining to social change and women, "first, the notion that women are for social reasons impaired politically; second, that women are rooted in family roles; and third, a tendency to judge the political performances of women by male norms" (cited in Burt, 2002, p. 243). McCormack further notes that the data that shows that women's participation is lower compared to men, is distorted as it reflects "women's recognition, that politics, as it has been constructed, is a men's preserve" (cited in Burt, 2002, p. 243). For many years, researchers have not studied the values

and behaviour of people who did not “fit the traditional norm of white, able-bodied, Anglo-Saxon, male participant” (Burt, 2002, p. 243). Studies on political participation mostly focus on the implications of political acts, rather than who are the participants.

The early feminist studies in history and social sciences mostly concentrate on the division between public and private spheres. This separation concealed the practice of power in the private domain and obscured masculinity of the public domain, and disregarded “the relegation of women to the private domain and their subordination in the public” (Ackelsberg, 2010, p.132). During 1950-1970s, there was a clear division in society between men and women, where the public is men’s sphere and the private is women’s domain. By the 1970s, theorists of participatory democracy and feminists started to discuss how the division of public and private spheres between men and women is vague (Burt, 2002). Later studies criticize dichotomization and gendered features of public and private realms, and argue for “the interdependence of each on the other” (Ackelsberg, 2010, p.132). This gendered division impacted the definitions of politics and political participation.

Feminist scholars argue that political scientists interpret divergence of political participation of particular groups (such as women, minorities, or people with low income or status) relying on their status or “innate proclivities,” and, in this way, they prevent the discipline to find out other explanations that would examine power, status, and sex roles dimensions of politics (Bourque & Grossholtz, 1998, p. 23). However, over the past decade, feminist theorists challenged these definitions and provided other patterns to explain participation or non-participation of women. Temma Kaplan (1997) posits that women become activated by “female consciousness” (“the understanding of what it is to be a woman that is specific to a particular culture and historical moment”) and being originated from “the prevailing sexual division of

labour”, originates notions of obligations and rights (cited in Ackelsberg, 2010, p. 137). Other feminists (notably, Sara Ruddick and Jean Elstain) view that it is women’s “maternal thinking” (being worried for safety and the future of the families) contributes to their political outlook (cited in Ackelsberg, 2010, p. 137). In contrast, Mary Dietz (1987) argues that women are activated by “notions of citizenship and inclusivity” (cited in Ackelsberg, 2010, p.138).

As feminist scholarship on political participation has developed recently, the literature on the topic is quite limited. Feminist scholars particularly criticize political scientists’ interpretation of women’s political participation. Even the study on women’s non-conventional participations appears to be new.

The following section describes the theories on political participation that guided this research by conceptualizing what is political participation. The two theories (Burt, 2002; Ackelsberg, 2010) draw upon feminist perspectives on political participation. And most importantly, they complement each other by “broadening the study of women’s participation” (Ackelsberg, 2010) and by challenging previous political scientists in the field who ignored social categories such as gender, ethnicity and class (Burt, 2002).

2.1.1 Political participation

Burt and Ackelsberg are famous feminist political scientists in the field, and the first feminist scholars to develop research on women and political participation. Burt (2002, p.232) defines political participation as activities or actions that influence directly or indirectly, “public policy and/or the policy-making process.” The scope of action might be different: it might include voting, membership in an interest group, lobbying government, paying money to political parties, or being an activist in social movements. Furthermore, the aims of “participants” may also vary: to influence the

change of a government policy; to get involved in decision-making in a direct way (for example, being herself a politician); or to indirectly engage in representations (electing representatives who raise their concerns and make their voices heard) (Burt, 2002). Being involved in a direct way provides an opportunity for participants to represent the demands of their peers, and simultaneously to be directly involved in the decision-making process. Many political scientists refer to Burt's definition of political participation (Silver, 2005; Lenard, 2006; Cooper, 2006). For example, Silver (2005), in his research about Aboriginals' electoral participation, reflects on the inclusive aspect of the definition. While Burt provides a straightforward definition of political participation in terms of the scope of political activities, she only discusses it in terms of "political activities" rather than "participants." In other words, she does not expand on the variety of groups of people that could be considered participants in political activities.

In contrast to Burt's theory, Ackelsberg (2010) focuses on women's participation by broadening its scope of study. She states that previous studies focused only on traditional modes of political participation (for example, voting), which provide incomplete images of politics or political participation. She challenges that broadening the concept of women's participation will contribute to redefining the concepts and practices of citizenship and participation "for everyone" (Ackelsberg, 2010, p.132). Ackelsberg complements my study as I am examining not only women's participation, but *immigrant women's* participation. Because some of the immigrant women (permanent residents) will not be even eligible to vote, Ackelsberg's theory gives me opportunity to examine their non-traditional political participation.

Ackelsberg posits that many women are active in non-traditional political

spheres (for instance, protests or demonstrations). It is then important to examine non-electoral activities as they influence “formal electoral/political arena” (Ackelsberg 2010, p.131). Studying women’s activism, who struggles, for instance, for income inequality or health care issues, “expand[s] our limited imagination” regarding policy, and starting from the 21st century, activist women impacted the notion of what issues are relevant to politics and what steps can be done for addressing them (Ackelsberg 2010, p.144). Therefore, I am going to study women citizens and permanent residents’ conventional and non-conventional activities in order to learn more about the broad picture of immigrant women’s political participation in Canada using Lethbridge as an example. Non-conventional activities include acts of “collective behaviour” such as protests, demonstrations and establishment of alternative institutions (Ackelsberg, 2010, p.131). Ackelsberg notes that at the end of the last century, women were active in lobbying social issues as child labour, women’s labour and poor mothers’ needs; simultaneously they were active in developing programs and institutions in order to help those whose needs were not addressed by social policies. There are many women activists who construct houses for homeless women, provide shelters for battered women, and establish clinics for abortion and birth control services, lobby and protest for transmitting different issues in the political agenda (Ackelsberg, 2010). The recognition and awareness of the scope of women’s activism in non-conventional activities promote understanding of concerns of marginalized people.

Drawing upon Ackelsberg’s theory on broadening women’s participation Le Texier (2006) continues to enhance the concept of political participation in a study of marginalized women. Le Texier (2006) argues that marginalized women’s engagement in non-conventional political activities as civic engagement in grassroots organisations might be more effective than conventional participation. Drawing on a

case study, Le Texier demonstrates that women who mobilize against gentrification in barrios (ethnic neighbourhoods in U.S, where the Latino population is over 40%) are “invisible” in studies examining conventional activities. More importantly, through qualitative research he reveals that social networks transform to political ones, which boosts marginalized women’s civic engagement. Political scientists who recently examined gender gaps in political participation also refer to Ackelsberg’s theory (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004). Ackelsberg moved research on women and politics in a new direction by studying grassroots women activism and “challenging public/private split” (Tolleson-Rinehart & Carroll, 2006, p.512). As this study aims to examine not only conventional activities but also non-conventional political activities of immigrant women, it is important to choose a theoretical framework that is inclusive in terms of recognizing a wide range of activities of women’s participation.

2.2 Personal is Political

The slogan “personal is political” was conceived during the women’s movements in the 1960s and 1970s. The slogan means that whatever happens in women’s private spheres, at jobs, home, school or clubs, is the reflections of power dynamics of public spheres (Hobbs & Rice, 2013, p. 60). The fact that women have been excluded from the public spheres provided men the privilege of making decisions regarding their “private matters” (Hunter College, 2006, p. 414). Issues such as sexual and reproductive rights, domestic violence and just women’s human rights were regulated by public laws that were enforced mostly by men.

Hobbs and Rice (2013) suggest a wide range of questions that will help to understand the idea behind the personal is political: Who has power positions at big companies and who cleans those offices? Who does the parenting and who gets paid more? Who buys the sexual access to bodies and who is sexually bought? (p. 60).

Women's social movements have been mobilising against having private or personal and public or political spheres held separately. Feminist movements confirmed the "integral connection" between private and public spheres through women's experiences (p.158). Feminist political and social scientists have been examining how gender-neutral social sciences are actually gender-biased (Hunter College, 2006). The primary studies by feminist political scientists explored how there are two different political cultures (Hunter College, 2006). Baker (1987) argued that men's political activity is determined by being loyal to particular political parties and voting for that particular party's candidates; however, women were mobilized around nonpartisan voluntary associations (cited in Hunter College, 2006, p.415). Consequently, political scientists who were mostly middle-class and male did not consider women's activities in public spheres as "political." In contrast, feminist social scientists have explored women's conventional political participation and involvement in grassroots or community organisations and argued that women vote differently from men (Hunter College, 2006). Feminism is still looking to a social order that will have a "social conception of individuality," which will incorporate men and women as biologically different but equal creatures (Grewal & Kaplan, 2006, p. 159).

Ackelsberg (2010, p. 133) argues that practices of citizenship and "public" participation are still exercised through institutions which are "gendered at their core." Therefore, she calls for "broadening the study of women participation" as long as these institutions "define and structure our politics" (p. 133).

2.3 Immigrant women

Anyone is considered an "immigrant" who moves to Canada aiming to stay permanently regardless of where they are coming from, the language they speak or their skin colour (Hobbs & Rice, 2013). In Canadian society, "immigrant women" is a

socially constructed term which assumes non-white, non-English speaking and working class individuals (Ng, 1996; Thobani, 2000). Ng (2006) posits that women who are educated, white and English-speaking, are mostly not considered “immigrants” in contrast to those who are from developing countries, or visible minority group representatives with a certain job position. Even though Ng wrote her book in 1996, there have been no significant changes in terms of the socially constructed image of “immigrant women.” Thobani (2000) argues that Canadian state through its immigration policy, which regulates access to citizenship, constructs immigrant women as “Others” (p.282). At the same time, this policy makes white Canadian-born or immigrant women as “Insiders.” Hence, as Hobbs and Rice (2013) note there is overrepresentation of Canadian overseas immigration offices, when the majority of immigrants migrate from Asia.

Although an immigrant woman is a person who has acquired permanent residency status in Canada and received the same rights as Canadian citizens, “her social status is another thing entirely” (Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2003, p. 206). As discussed previously, immigrant women are considered to be women of colour coming from developing countries who are not native English speakers and have lower social and economic statuses and/or positions (p. 206). Even when one is a woman of colour and was born in Canada, she is always considered an “immigrant” and always asked “where are you from originally?” However, in this research, ‘immigrant women’ refer to all women who arrived in Canada regardless of their ethnicity, status, position, and English language proficiency. But in this research, I consider the immigration status of research participants, either with permanent residency or citizenship. In contrast to most studies, which focus on the visible minority women as immigrant women, I study women who represent both majority

and minority groups. In the Canadian context, visible minority is defined as “persons who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour and who do not report being Aboriginal” (for example, Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Korean, Japanese) (Statistics Canada, 2009). Therefore, the use of visible minority immigrant women in this study will refer to people who belong to groups mentioned above.

2.4 Intersectionality

Intersectionality approaches people’s lives and experiences through their complexity and diversity (Hobbs & Rice, 2013, p. XX). As Launius and Hassel (2015, p. 114) note “intersectionality is at the heart of feminist analysis,” which originated in 1990s with the work of African-American feminist scholars Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1994), and was further developed afterwards (Hobbs & Rice, 2013). The concept critiques approaches that look at social relations through “gender lens” by overlooking complexities of identities and “intersecting axes of power” that shape individuals’ experiences (p. XX). The factors that intersect and affect women’s experiences include gender, class, race, ethnicity, aboriginality, age, disability, immigrant or refugee status, and geography. However, intersection of these factors is also applied by state institutions which limit people’s equal access to power and privilege.

Launius and Hassel (2015) argue that intersectionality happens not only at the “micro” level but also at the “macro” level.” Crenshaw (2006) presents what structural intersectionality (at macro level) “does” in relation to women of colour. For example, many women become victims of domestic violence as they do not have independent access to information regarding their legal status (Launius & Hassel, 2015). Most importantly, intersectionality is not only related to one’s identity. Intersectionality

also critically reflects on how systems, institutions, categories generate “dimensions of difference” (p. 122). Thus, feminist intersectional scholarship identifies the following four goals: 1) to reveal and incorporate “contradictory and overlapping ways” that shape individuals’ experiences; 2) to rethink curricula and promote institutional change at higher level of education; 3) to build a society that will incorporate all voices and experiences; and 4) to advocate for public policies that will address a wide range of voices (p.122).

The main goal of this study is to generate knowledge that will reveal marginalized and oppressed women’s voices and experiences. Intersectionality of social categories and identities are acknowledged at all stages of this study. Intersectionality is the core of feminist standpoint theory which is applied in this research as a philosophical stance and as “a way of knowing” without privileging any of social identities or categories (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p.25), which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

2.5 Political integration

Political participation is an integral part of political integration (Bauböck, 2006). Considering that one can achieve political integration through political participation it is important to define political integration in this study. The broad sense of political integration I refer to in this study refers to the process of “political integration [that] contains four dimensions” (p.84). The first dimension pertains to the rights, more specifically to the political rights immigrants are granted by the receiving country where the more political rights they have, the more they are politically integrated. For example, in Canada, immigrants have all political rights to get involved in any type of conventional or non-conventional political activities except for voting. Immigrants who have permanent residency can vote only when they acquire

citizenship. The second dimension is “their identification with the host society. The more immigrants identify with the host society the better their political integration” (p.84). It is well-known that at the beginning of the integration process (but not only at the beginning) most of immigrants feel like “outsiders” and not part of the society who can make the change in their communities which might affect their political participation accordingly. The latter will be discussed also in Chapters Five and Six. The next dimension is considered a “necessary condition” for political integration which is “adoption of democratic norms and values by the immigrants” (p.84). Many immigrants come from politically unstable countries where even taking part in non-conventional political activities might be dangerous. This dimension considers immigrants politically integrated when they adopt and exercise, for instance, simple values as freedom or equality by joining a political party in multiparty elections. And finally, the fourth dimension asserts “immigrants’ political integration involves political participation, mobilisation and representation” (p.84). The latter dimension identifies the full integration of a person who is ready to take part in not only indirect political participation through electing representatives, but also to mobilise against the issues they disagree with or represent themselves to other communities/people. As political participation is the core of political integration process, looking at political participation of immigrant women and examining their political practices and experiences will reveal the dimension of immigrant women’s political integration in Lethbridge.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of this research was provided. Also, relevant literature about the concept of political participation was discussed by providing the common definitions of political participation. Two theories that guided this research

were analyzed by identifying how they complement each other and how they are relevant to my research questions.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

In this chapter, research on the political participation of immigrant women is addressed. The literature review is conducted upon studies from Canada and other Western countries (written in English) which explore political participation of immigrant women. This chapter begins by discussing political knowledge and gender gaps among men and women, and the intersection of gender, migration and political participation. More specifically, the Canadian context is addressed by providing historical background of immigrant women's representation and political rights since the mid twentieth century. Later, feminist scholarship explores the different types of community and political involvements by immigrant women while challenging the definitions and measurements of political participation. Studies in the West that focus on gender, immigration and political participation are also discussed in this chapter. The chapter ends with studies that explore constraints affecting immigrant women's political participation.

3.1 Political knowledge and gender gaps

The gap in political knowledge between men and women have been continuously persistent since attainment of women's suffrage (Gidengil, 2007). In studies about gender, gender is considered as a synonym for women; however gender, which is a socially constructed ongoing process, is part of identity for both men and women. Therefore, by mostly concentrating on distinctions of women's political attitude, we preserve the assumption that men's political attitudes are the "norm" (Gidengil, 2007, p.820). Gidengil proposes to "move beyond the gender gap" in measuring the political participation of people (2007, p.821). She notes that we need to start examining the differences not only between men and women, but also among

women based on their class and racial backgrounds. Relying on telephone interviews conducted by the Institute for Social Research at York University, Gidengil and Stolle (2009) reveal interesting findings about gender gaps in political knowledge: gender gaps were “modest” on questions concerning the names of mayor of the city or premier minister, though bigger gaps appear on the questions like the name of the political party that forms the official opposition. However, the gaps among women are much larger: for instance, there was a 20 point gap between women with a family income of less than \$30,000 compared to those with a \$70,000 household income in response to questions about who is the provincial premier and who is the judge “heading the inquiry into the sponsorship scandal” in 2002 (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009, p.756). Furthermore, the gaps between visible minority and non-visible minority women in some cases were even larger. For instance, there was a 25 point gap on the question concerning the name of the governor general—Michaëlle Jean—who happened to be a visible minority woman. There were also differences not only in political knowledge but also in propensity for political participation. For instance, in the 2004 federal elections women with less than a \$30,000 income had a 21 point turnout gap; in comparison, women with a \$70,000 household income and minority women had a 28 point turnout gap compared to non-minority women. The gaps were prevalent in non-conventional political activities (signing petition or boycotting products) (Gidengil, 2007). Despite these striking findings, minority women or poor women are the group of marginalized people who are more likely to be in need of making their voices and interests heard. Thus, we can conclude that women with less income and education are less engaged compared to other women in political life in Canada. Furthermore, Gidengil (2007) notes a very interesting element regarding the “gender gap” and electoral political participation. She states that concentrating only on

gender gaps in political participation generates a number of “potential pitfalls”: the first is “categorical thinking,” as in this way we can forget the fact that there are many men who would put social programs ahead of reducing taxes and “ardent tax cutter” women; the second pitfall is the “risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes” as most gender gap studies conclude that women are more “compassionate” demonstrating “stereotypically feminine traits” (p. 816). Gidengil claims that “men are obviously not all individualistic and atomistic, any more than all women share a sense of community and connectedness” (p.817). Research on the gender gap mostly focuses on why women’s political behaviour is different from men’s. Thus, more research is required in the field in order to “move beyond gender” and to explore what the differences are among different women groups such as native-born, immigrant women, visible minority women, indigenous women, etc. and to include more practical questions in measurements of political knowledge, for example, questions regarding government benefits .

In Canadian context, it is also important to reflect on Aboriginal men and women’s scope of political participation. However, the literature review conducted for this research pertaining to political participation did not include any reflections on Aboriginal peoples’ political participation. Separate literature review on Aboriginal peoples’ political participation was not conducted as it is out of the main focus of this research. Acknowledging the complexities of colonization and practices of political participation of Aboriginal peoples, my study focused only on *immigrant* women’s political participation.

3.2 Gender, Immigration and Political Participation

The economic and social integration of immigrant women has been widely studied in the scope of immigration research; that stated, there are limited studies on

the political engagement of immigrant women (Read, 2007). In immigration studies, only a few scholars have examined how gendered experiences might intersect with political participation of immigrant women (McIlwaine & Bermúdez, 2011; Read, 2007).

Political participation has been widely discussed among scholars since 1960s (Lawrence, 1975; Salisbury, 1975; Verba & Nie, 1975; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995; Burt, 2002; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; Maxwell, 2010; Painter-Main, 2014). Most of these studies discuss modes of political participation and types of electoral and non-electoral participation. In early stages of discussions about political participation, scholars mostly discussed political participation from the perspective of electoral or conventional participation (Salisbury, 1975). Not only was the concept of political participation broadened over the last decades, but the political participation of immigrants recently started to attract attention from scholars in the field (O'Neill, Gidengil, and Young, 2012). However, only a few scholars examine how gender and migration interact with political participation (Abu-Laban, 2002; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; O'Neill, Gidengil, & Young, 2012; McIlwaine & Bermúdez, 2011) and investigate the role of gender, race and immigrant status in the political participation of immigrant women (Kondo, 2012; Abu-Laban, 2002).

Historically, women and some minority groups (Japanese, Chinese, and South Asians) were prohibited from participating in Canadian political life from the 1870s to 1950s. Before the 1980s, gender and ethnicity had not been largely discussed in Canadian research pertaining to political participation (Mishler, 1979). Furthermore, the gender and ethnicity research in political science has progressed during the three decades after the Second World War. Since the 1980s, gender appeared to be “a substantive research area” among Canadian political scientists (Abu-Laban, 2002, p.

269). Today, Canadian women enjoy substantial political freedom, educational and economic opportunities, as well as legal equality (Thomas & Young, 2014). Although women are less apt to be interested in politics, women's voter turnout is at the same level as men's (Gidengil, Blais, Nevitte, & Nadeau, 2004, p.108). Women are even slightly more likely to vote than men, relying on their "stronger sense of duty" as citizens (p.108).

As a result of Canadian women's activism, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibits any kind of gendered discrimination. In 1984, the first woman appointed as a Governor General in Canada was Jeanne Sauvé; she was also the first female member of the Cabinet from Quebec (Governor General of Canada, 2009a). Since 1999, there have been two women Governors General (Michaëlle Jean and Adrienne Clarkson), and only one female Prime Minister, Kim Campbell (June-November 1993). Adrienne Clarkson was also a minority representative and a first generation immigrant born in Hong Kong (Governor General of Canada, 2009b). However, in comparison to other countries in terms of women's representation in national legislatures, in 2012, Canada ranked 47th behind Scandinavian and Western European countries (Thomas & Young, 2014). In 2016, Canada ranked 60th for women's representation in parliament among 191 countries (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016). Moreover, in spite of many improvements of women's conditions in education and participation in public life, surveys still report that men are more interested in politics than women and they are more "knowledgeable about the formal political arena" compared to women (Thomas & Young, 2014, p.374). Even the rising number of educated women does not decrease the gap of women being less interested in politics and being less knowledgeable about formal political sphere: university-educated men score higher compared to university-educated women on possessing

political knowledge in Canada (Thomas & Young, 2014).

Furthermore, feminist theorists argue for broadening the notion of political knowledge. Knowledge about politics includes but is not limited to the names and roles of politicians, candidates, political parties' policy stance, and general knowledge about the formal political arena in the country (Stolle & Gidengil, 2009; Thomas & Young, 2014). Stolle and Gidengil (2009) expand the notion of political knowledge in their research on "the role of social networks in immigrant women's political incorporation" by adding more measures and definitions of political knowledge (p. 727). For instance, feminist theorists note that measurements of political knowledge are missing questions relevant to services provided by the government or other political institutions which might affect citizens' everyday life. On that account, Stolle and Gidengil (2009) state that the gender gap closes or even reverses when people are questioned about more practical aspects of political knowledge, such as government benefits and services. Women who are more informed about government benefits and services are more likely to vote, as they match their preferences with their choice of vote; this gap is reported among different groups of women (Stolle & Gidengil, 2009). The striking fact remains that poor and immigrant women who need government programs and services are likely less informed (Stolle & Gidengil, 2010). The fact remains even today that the vast majority of political leaders and politicians continue to be men. Possessing political knowledge is very important, as it is a crucial resource for political activism and women will continue to be marginalized as long as they lack it (Thomas & Young, 2014).

Thomas and Young (2014) examine, in particular, electoral activities of women in Canada and the obstacles preventing the representation of women in the formal political process. They note that there has been progress in women's electoral

participation in politics. The number of women holding appointed positions increased from “a mere handful of exceptions” to almost a quarter of legislators at both provincial and federal levels over the last decade (Thomas & Young, 2014, p.387). Thomas and Young (2014) posit that women continue to be underrepresented in ministerial cabinet positions. It is important to pay attention to Canadian women’s comparatively high standard of living when considering women’s legal and economic equality as contrasted to countries including but not limited to Sweden, Denmark, and UK (Thomas & Young, 2014; UNDP, 2015). Although they achieved “favourable outcomes to women’s equality,” politics remains “foreign territory” for women (Thomas & Young, 2014, p 388). But “politics matters to women” (p.388). Many issues concerning women are decided by the government: for instance, whether abortions are legal or available; whether women should be paid less money for doing the same job as men; whether women are enabled to get their job back after having a baby; and how health care is funded. These issues matter more to women than men. Therefore, when women are uninterested in politics and are out of the formal arena, men have the opportunity to make decisions on women’s behalf. It does not mean that women will have the same solutions to all these issues. However, the variety of women’s views should be represented when public policy is formulated (Thomas & Young, 2014).

The number of women voters in an election is similar to men voters in Canada (Thomas & Young, 2014). But what can we say about immigrant women? What is the level of immigrant women’s political participation? Gidengil (2007) studies the gender gap in political activism and behaviour between Canadian men and women, and posits that there are differences among different groups of women in terms of the extent of their political participation. Abu-Laban (2002) examines the political

participation of ethnic minorities (i.e., non-British, non-French, non-Aboriginal), while focusing on possible differences between minority men and women in Canada. Abu-Laban labels political power in Canada as a “gendered vertical mosaic” since majority groups possess more power compared with the minority groups, and among minority and majority groups, men have more power than women (p. 268). However, the variety of activities reveal that immigrants and minorities are not passive in the political domain (Abu-Laban, 2002).

The classic definition of political participation pertaining to political activities, identifies it as aiming to have an impact on “the selection and/or action of government officials” (Abu-Laban, 2002, p. 277). The drawback of this definition is that, as a result, scholars focus only on the citizens. In the Canadian context, immigrants might acquire citizenship within three years and be eligible to vote. However, there are many situations when non-citizens may become involved in the political process. For instance, it is possible to become a political party member and participate in their various activities even without being a citizen or being able to vote. Some studies reveal that many non-citizens do so (Abu-Laban, 2002). In the 1980s and 1990s, many migrant women domestic workers, who mostly came from developing countries, took part in many protests and firmly demanded that the Canadian government improve their vulnerable conditions concerning a range of abuses by employers in their homes (Abu-Laban, 2002). This is a good example of how non-citizens may be involved in political activities aiming to impact government policy. Finally, Abu Laban concludes that women, ethnic minorities and visible minorities are under-represented “in positions of formal power” in Canada (Abu-Laban, 2002, p.279). Furthermore, she mentions that studies reveal that both male and female representatives of minorities are politically active, undertaking a variety of political acts from electoral to

community activities. She proposes that the next generation of political scientists should redefine the concept of political participation which considers factors such as immigration, ethnicity and gender (Abu-Laban, 2002).

O'Neill, Gidengil, and Young (2012) examine the intersection of immigrant and visible minority status and how it impacts both conventional and non-conventional political participation of immigrant women. O'Neill, Gidengil, and Young utilized telephone surveys conducted by the Institute for Social Research at York University in nine provinces of Canada (except Quebec). They report interesting findings regarding political participation and immigrant women: immigrant women, particularly representatives of minorities, are less likely to participate in conventional activities (such as voting), as compared to native-born women; immigrant women with European ancestry and native-born Canadians have the same level of non-conventional political participation, compared to non-white immigrant women; immigrant women with European ancestry have achieved political integration in both conventional and non-conventional political activities while native-born minority women have achieved political integration in terms of unconventional activism. They argue that "the full political integration of immigrant and ethnic minority women has yet to take place" (O'Neill, Gidengil, & Young, 2012, p. 193). The authors state that the political integration of women varies among the types of political activities. Although the main focus of this research is the political integration of immigrant women who are representatives of ethnic minorities, O'Neill, Gidengil, and Young (2012, p. 193) posit that immigrant women from majority groups, in the scope of non-conventional participation are integrated, for instance, by signing petitions or participating in demonstrations. To sum up, we see that gender, ethnicity and immigration status are determinants for political participation and that immigrant

women who are minority representatives are not fully politically integrated in conventional politics.

Gidengil and Stolle (2009) investigate how social networks impact not only conventional but also unconventional political participation of immigrant women such as signing petitions, boycotting a product, participating in a demonstration, and a protest. Gidengil and Stolle (2009, p.732) identify two dimensions of social networks which are “strength” of interaction and “sorts of people” with whom women communicate. In the strength dimension of network they distinguish between strong ties (with close people or family) and weak ties (with “casual acquaintances”) (p.732). The second dimension is “bridging and bonding ties” (p.732). Bridging ties connect people from different social backgrounds and bonding ties link people who are quite similar to each other. Gidengil and Stolle conducted their research relying on telephone interviews with 1,286 women living in Toronto and Montreal, and four focus groups with immigrant women in both cities. Gidengil and Stolle argue that the political incorporation of immigrant women is partial, and there exists a gap in political knowledge between immigrant and non-immigrant women. However, some immigrant women are incorporated more politically than others. One of the crucial factors for political participation is the economic well-being of the family. The higher a family’s income, the more the immigrant woman is politically incorporated and the more information she possess regarding Canadian politics and government services. Non-English and non-French speaker immigrant women are less politically incorporated in unconventional activities and possess less political knowledge compared to native-speakers. However, the linguistic barrier is not an obstacle for voting. The most important factor they identify is the length of stay in Canada. According to the telephone survey, women who have lived less than ten years in

Canada are less likely to participate in political activities and know less about Canadian politics. Nevertheless, some immigrant women are politically incorporated as much as native-born Canadian women by being politically active, and informed about government services and politics (p.744). Gidengil and Stolle attempt to explain variation in political participation within social networks. They note that social networks matter to political incorporation. For instance, women who are members of any voluntary organization are more likely to be active in the political domain and to learn more about Canadian politics (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009).

Tastsoglou and Miedema (2003) conducted research that discusses the community participation of immigrant women in the Maritimes. They studied women's forms of engagement in the community from an "integrated feminist and anti-racist perspective" connecting gender, race, class and immigration status (p.212). They reported that immigrant women in the Maritimes are engaged in a range of organizational activities which concern civic, cultural, political and other issues that might arise in their communities. The types of organizations that immigrant women are involved in include the following: ethnic-specific organizations, mainstream religious organizations, multi-ethnic and multicultural organizations, pan-ethnic organizations, and non-immigrant and non-ethnic organizations (such as "political, cultural, women's and civic organizations") (p.216). The most popular organizations among this group of immigrant women were multi-ethnic, multicultural and civic organizations. They claim that women who were politically active were living in Canada for more than 10 years and they were mostly engaged in broader social and political issues within multicultural organizations. One of the research interview participants was organizing "culture nights" to educate people about her culture and to overcome stereotypes. This is an example of broader political activity through

educating Canadians as a way of fighting against racism. “Such broader involvement stretches the boundaries of relevant "community" beyond a specific ethno-cultural community or [...] an "immigrant women's community” (p.217). The values that were important to them in their home countries and its political situation might affect immigrant women’s formal political participation in the Maritimes (p.229). Furthermore, some women organized activities based on their social, immigrant and gender status, for instance, “women's equality, the anti-violence movement, systemic racism, refugee resettlement, labour issues, aboriginal issues, and, though less frequently, political parties and formal electoral politics” (p. 229).

Research on the intersection of immigrant status, gender and political participation is also limited outside of the Canadian context. However, there are a few that consider immigrant women’s political participation worldwide. For example, Jones-Correa (1998) reveals that Latin Americans’ adaptation and political socialization processes appear to be gendered in New York City. Jones-Correa notes that the decision making process for integration or participation in institutions or organizations diverges among immigrants in New York City. This is based on their different motivations and opportunities, which results in different approaches to politics. In terms of political participation, Jones-Correa studies non-conventional, voluntary-based activities relevant to immigration organizations. He states that men and women immigrants derive different social benefits from being active in organizations, which leads to different political strategies. Latin American men immigrating to Queens, New York have less prestigious job positions compared to the positions they had in their native countries. Therefore, getting integrated into immigrant organizations might provide a social arena where previous status is recognized. Women, on the other hand, often enjoy greater economic opportunities

that result in having more opportunity to have a “say” in the household, one of the reasons they are willing to stay in the U.S. Latina women deal with public institutions more through their children. For example, parents’ school groups are an “alternative route to mobilization,” as “immigrant organizations generally deny leadership positions to women” (Jones-Correa, 1998, p. 327). The limitation of this study is that the participants had already been active members of the Latin immigrant population socially, politically, culturally, and through other organizations in New York City. Studying only activist immigrant women, Jones-Correa posits that these women are marginalized in organizations as they do not get a chance for leadership positions.

Kondo (2012) argues that the intersection of gender and migration impacts the motivations and concerns of women through the case study of Trusted Advocates, a multi-ethnic immigrant women organization in Washington. Immigrant women members of Trusted Advocates mentioned that “their concerns and motivations emerge from: their roles as mothers, caretakers or as community leaders, their cultural backgrounds, and experiences based on their ethnic, racial, immigrant, or class status” (p.119). Female members of Trusted Advocates stated that their concerns derive not only from their gendered experiences but also from their experiences as immigrants and their cultural and religious backgrounds. It is important not only to examine the factors that shape immigrant women’s motivations and concerns, but also to study the barriers immigrant women encounter in their political participation. Kondo concludes that the non-conventional participation of immigrant women is under-examined (p.114).

To sum up, the extent of political participation may vary among different immigrant women. The scope of gender, migration and political participation research that was discussed above reveals which aspects of immigrant women’s political

participation have been discussed previously. Some studies (Abu-Laban, 2002; O’Neil, Gidengil, & Young, 2012) are similar to my research as they relate to immigrant women and their political participation, but they study particular immigrant women’s group—visible minority immigrant women. Abu-Laban (2002) presented the only study that briefly referred to immigration status in relation to gender and political participation. The literature reveals that some immigrant women are politically active; however, there are differences between conventional and non-conventional political participation. Some women who rely on their cultural background or ethnicity might be more active in unconventional participation compared to conventional participation. For example, native-born minority women regardless of their age, education or occupational status get involved in unconventional activities due to their high motivation (O’Neil, Gidengil, & Young, 2012). All the studies presented here are the only studies on immigrant women and political participation in the literature.

3.3 Challenges and Constraints of Political Participation of Immigrant Women

Immigrants moving to new countries encounter different types of challenges. These challenges might include having different cultural backgrounds and values, and socio-economic difficulties such as discrimination and social integration (O’Neill, Gidengil, & Young, 2012). As a result, these challenges might impact the level of political participation, particularly for immigrant women (p.185).

O’Neill, Gidengil, and Young (2012, p. 186) identify “three broad explanatory approaches” in the literature on political participation of immigrants that explain the extent of their political participation. Accordingly, they are “ethnic approaches, socio-economic status, and social capital” (p. 186). Ethnic approaches refer to cultural values and socialization processes that are typical to immigrant groups which help to

explain the differences in political participation. The second approach is socio-economic status which includes education, income and occupational status that are directly connected to the resources (i.e., money, time, energy) that are required for political participation. These scholars identify the research on social capital, ethnic diversity and political participation as a “recent area of inquiry” (p.186). The studies on social capital, ethnic diversity and political participation are divided in two groups: the first group of scholars states that being part of ethnic associations and organization promote political participation of its members, while the other group argues that “increased ethnic diversity – especially evident in large urban centres – can lead to social fragmentation and decreased trust, both key elements of political participation” (p.186).

O’Neill, Gidengil, and Young (2012) argue that factors such as resources and socio-demographic profiles explain conventional political participation deficit among immigrant or native-born visible minority or majority women. For example, in conventional political activity, native-born minority women’s participation level would increase if their age or educational background is similar to the native-born majority women. However, this is not applicable to immigrant women, as they already have stronger occupational and educational profiles which might not result in changes of their level of conventional political participation upon migration (O’Neill, Gidengil, and Young, 2012, p.194). On the other hand, they argue that resource and socio-demographic profiles do not help to explain unconventional political participation. Native-born minority women have similar levels of conventional political participation as native-born majority women, regardless of their educational or occupational background. However, for immigrant minority women, two determinants mentioned above might cause reduced unconventional political participation. These

researchers further state that mobilizing networks and the length of stay in Canada also might explain differences in political participation. For example, women who were engaged in different community or associations' activities "were positively associated with women's levels of political activity" (p.194). They also mention that more research is needed to examine the intersection of mobilizing networks, length of settlement, and the level of political participation.

McIlwaine and Bermúdez (2011) investigated Colombian migrants' political and civic participation in London. Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, they examined changes of gender regimes when migrants move to a new country, and their impact on political participation. They posit that there are limited studies that explore how changing gender identities affect political participation. More specifically, in the scope of their study, they include social diversity in contrast to other scholars (Kemp et al., 2000) who target mostly migrant workers, and analyze how intersectionality (i.e., class position and life course) affects political and civic participation (p. 1499). First, McIlwaine and Bermúdez (2011, p. 1503) define gender regimes in the Colombian context as the following: "hegemonic masculinities deeply rooted in machismo that accords power to men over women in all spheres and which is reinforced and maintained through a range of everyday practices." Also, gender identities might change within the intersectionality of race, class, and life course stage, especially with the increasing level of education among Colombian women (p.1506). Therefore, McIlwaine and Bermúdez (2011) state that gender identities might vary among different people in relation to their educational background, class, and work. Second, the survey that was conducted in the scope of this research indicated that more women had European Union or British citizenship compared to men (42% and 30% respectively), which resulted in more women voting than men (accordingly 24%

and 20 %), which the authors linked to their informal political participation (p. 1505). McIlwaine and Bermúdez note that in relation to conventional participation, men are more likely to be engaged in their home countries' elections while women are more involved in host countries' elections (p. 1506).

McIlwaine and Bermúdez (2011) explore interesting findings that apart from immigration status, class position also affects political participation. They argue that immigrants who identify themselves as middle-class in the UK are more likely to participate in British elections compared to working-class migrants, though participation is also linked to the fact that middle-class migrants are more likely to have citizenship compared to working-class migrants. The authors also note that time was a relevant resource for working-class migrants' political participation as they worked in a low- paid job for longer time in comparison to middle-class immigrants, and did not have enough time for other activities. However, working-class Colombian women were more engaged with formal political activities (e.g. voting), which was relevant to their efforts "to secure British citizenship" and to their previous informal political participation (p. 1506). McIlwaine and Bermúdez found that involvement of middle-class women in a political party was less considering the historical exclusion of women from politics in Colombia. They would be more likely to be engaged when they were single and young, or later when their children were older. In conclusion, McIlwaine and Bermúdez (2011) draw attention to the idea that life course, class position, and immigration status intersect and affect political participation.

In the article entitled "More of a bridge than a gap: Gender differences in Arab-American political engagement," Read (2007) adds religion to the intersection of gender, political participation, and migration. In a case study of political involvement of Arab Muslims in the U.S., Read presents the following findings: Arab

Muslim women have a high level of political engagement in comparison to other women in the U.S.; there is not a large difference between men and women's political engagement which assumes that factors such as religion and ethnicity have a major role in "contributing to the political mobilization of Arab Muslim men and women" (p.1088). In terms of factors that might differently affect Arab Muslim men and women's political engagement, Read identifies factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural adaptation, and discrimination. Read posits that one of the barriers of political participation for women is that immigrant women are more likely to be responsible for the family's social well-being, which might inhibit political interest from making their concerns heard.

Robnett and Bany (2011) examine gender differences in political participation and how institutional involvement as a church engagement might affect African-Americans' political participation. They state that blacks in comparison to whites or Latinos have less of a gender gap in political participation. According to Robnett and Bany, the foundation for black activism is the black church which also provides "organizational, financial, network, and physical resources" for promoting political participation (p. 694). However, the level of church involvement differently affects men and women. Church active men are more involved in political activities (i.e., contacting politicians, attending protests, and donating money to political parties) compared to church active women. An interesting finding in this research is that though church engagement increases the level of political participation, it also increases the gender gap in political participation. Thus, black church greatly stimulates men's political participation compared to women's. Although the data was collected in 1993, scholars believe that new collected data would reflect the same results (Robnett & Bany, 2011).

In summary, scholars who examine political participation and/or gender and/or migration, raise the following reasons that might affect immigrant women's political participation: length of stay, language barriers, social networks, religion affiliations, cultural background and political experiences in home countries, personal interest and time. It should be noted, however, that among different groups of women the reasons mentioned above might vary and affect differently.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter, I presented the relevant literature review on the concept of political participation. More specifically, this literature review addressed how gender, immigration and ethnicity are applied to the concept of political participation and the factors that promote or inhibit political participation of immigrant women.

Chapter Four

Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the research process including research paradigms, research design and methods. Personal reflection, data analysis, data management, and ethical considerations are crucial parts of the research that will be presented in this chapter. The chapter ends with detailed descriptions of research participants.

4.1 Philosophical framework

Generation of knowledge is always conducted through distinct lenses, which identify how we see the world. These lenses are our philosophical stance or paradigms. Paradigms entail ontological (“the nature of reality”) and epistemological (“how knowledge is acquired”) assumptions pertaining to the research (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012, p.7). Also, it entails a set of ethical and methodological practices (Higgs & Trede, 2010, p.33). A research paradigm influences us throughout the whole research process (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006, p. 12). For instance, it affects “the goals as well as the values and interests that shape the research project” (Higgs & Trede, 2010, p.35).

The feminist perspective of research appeared in 1960s as a result of women’s activism. In response to positivist approaches, feminist scholars attempt to generate knowledge concerning the social lives and experiences of women or marginalized groups. The final aim of feminist researchers is to promote social change and to improve the conditions of women and other marginalized groups (Bailey, 2012). In general, feminist scholars adopt a similar philosophical framework which posits that “conduct of research and the knowledge it generates...cannot be neutral or objective” (Bailey, 2012, p.395).

Furthermore, feminist researchers examine social issues by using “gender as a lens” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 3). It is important to develop a study of political participation by privileging “women’s issues, voices, and lived experiences” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 3), as historically many groups of women such as visible minority women and immigrant women have been excluded from the research on political participation. Having a white Anglo-Saxon male participant as a model for measuring levels of political participation in most studies (Burt, 2002) identifies the need to integrate other models (for example, immigrant man or woman, Aboriginal man or woman, etc.) and their lived experiences.

Methodology is a set of approaches attempting to make “valid and authoritative” knowledge (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 9). How or to what extent is feminist methodology distinctive? Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) address this question, and provide four points related to it: 1) feminist methodology does not anticipate female scholars studying women, as feminist theory did not generate from the “female body”; 2) the approaches of feminist researchers may be different: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods; 3) there is no ontology or epistemology that we can specify as feminist, though some feminist scholars claim that “feminist methodology is distinctive in how it locates the researcher in the research process”; and 4) feminist methodology differs in the level that “it is shaped by feminist theory, politics and ethics grounded in women’s experience” (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p.15). Although feminist researchers may have different epistemologies and ontologies, they share the following points: “feminist study is politically for women”; feminist knowledge, to some extent, derives from women’s experiences; and feminist research explores “how it feels” to experience gendered social life (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p.16). In other words, feminist researchers disclose gendered social life

by revealing women's experiences and making their voices heard regarding different social issues which have been neglected or under-examined. However, depending on the feminist perspective or approach, the research methodologies can vary (Monro, 2010). Epistemology imparts understanding not only to research practices and interpretation of data but also to choice of methods (Naples & Gurr, 2014).

Feminist standpoint theory offers an "intersectional analysis of gender, race, ethnicity, class and other structural aspects of social life" without privileging any social category (p.25). Looking at political participation of immigrant women with different ethnicities, age, and immigration status I look for immigrant women's voices as a way of knowing what are the practices of political participation without prioritizing any of their social categories. Thus, the intersectional analysis of different aspects of social life offered by standpoint theorists reveal their efforts of generating more objective knowledge.

I conducted my research drawing on feminist standpoint theory, which enabled the research process. Standpoint theory argues:

that one can know the world more fully and more critically from the subject position of the marginalized or oppressed be it the worker marginalized by class structures or the female immigrant oppressed by gender/patriarchal structures and the political economy of global labor for instance (Ackerly & True, 2010, p.27).

Harding, one of the classical standpoint theorists, argues for the importance of objectivity in feminist research. She notes that constructing more objective knowledge is possible with inquiry about the experiences of women and disadvantaged groups, which have been under- examined for a long time (Naples & Gurr, 2014). Naples and Gur (2014) posit that people belonging to marginalized groups hold a 'double vision'

in that they experience both their own and dominant groups' realities (p.33). This helps them to see and understand overall social context (p.33). Thus, standpoint theorists argue that "the knowledge and theories of marginalized populations (women, people of colour, gender and sexual minorities, etc.) hold more epistemic authority than the knowledge and theories developed by dominant groups" (p.33). Furthermore, standpoint theory helps us to grasp how knowledge of gender is interconnected with "women's experiences and realities of gender" (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 61). It attempts to explore how different one group's experiences are from another (for instance, women's experience from men's experience) living in specific social relationships "to the exercise of male power" (p.61).

Feminist standpoint theory represents how we generate knowledge. I seek immigrant women voices on political participation as a way of knowing what political participation is from their own realities. Adopting "additive formulation" of intersectional analysis such as gender plus immigrant status helped me to explore marginalized women's experiences in relation to political participation: in other words, to explore political participation from marginalized people's perspectives (Ackerly & True, 2010, p. 25, 27). With the help of standpoint theory, I explore how is it to be an immigrant woman in Lethbridge having a status of permanent resident or citizen in undertaking political activities.

4.2 Personal Reflection

My interest and motivation for my research topic rely on my previous education, cultural background, and personal experiences. I have a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations and also I studied one semester in a Political Science Department in Germany. In the same vein, being raised in a post Soviet Union, democratic country- the Republic of Armenia- and witnessing people's attempts to

completely exercise freedom of speech through various protests and strikes, increased my own awareness of political participation's role in the society. Furthermore, learning about women's issues and their human rights all over the world, I started to be interested in the field of Women and Gender studies and problems that women face in their lives. When I came to Canada to pursue my Master's Degree, I decided to connect my interests: politics and women. At the same time, being an immigrant here myself, I started to be interested in the questions: To what extent are immigrant women interested in politics? What is their level of political participation?

Migrating to a new country is always challenging. As a result of moving to a new country, one might face a range of difficulties such as employment, culture and linguistic issues, social and economic challenges. Personally, while also facing part of these difficulties, I was questioning myself how these difficulties can impact me and my political activities when I might have a different immigration status (citizenship or permanent residency).

Feminist scholars Ackerly and True (2010) state that the key elements of feminist research ethics are "attentiveness to power," "attentiveness to boundaries," and "attentiveness to relationships" (p.48). These scholars discuss that the researcher's status or privilege might affect the research participant. I recognize that my student and immigrant status, gender, age and identity had an impact on my participants. I felt that when participants learned that my research is about immigrant women and that I am an immigrant like them, I was enabling them to feel more comfortable during the interview. Being attentive to boundaries posits the researcher's assumptions for women that, for instance, some activities or places are more typical to women than to men. As I collected my data through interviews which assumes interactions with participants, I comprehended the importance of positionality throughout the research

process. Although self-reflection is a “good practice” for most researchers, feminist scholars are particularly committed to being reflective about their positionality. Feminist researchers posit the importance of self-reflection on our situatedness (Ackerly & True, 2010). In this research process, I am considered an insider as I am also an immigrant woman in Canada, but being a student and neither a permanent resident nor citizen of Canada defines my outsider positionality. However, in some cases my student status made me an insider as well. Utilizing feminist perspective, it is my ethical responsibility to self-reflect on the “power of epistemology, of boundaries and relationships” in my research (Ackerly & True, 2010, p.25).

4.3 Research design

Research design is an inevitable part of the research process. Designing the research entails different issues such as recruitment of participants, ethical considerations, linguistic issues (for example, the language in which the interview will be conducted), best methods for the particular research, and other issues that might affect the research process and the research itself (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p.49). Gibson and Brown (2009) conceptualize research design as “a matter of working out the relationship between data and research topics” (p.48). Finally, research design gives us an idea how the research will proceed (p. 47). Considering the research questions and feminist standpoint perspective of this research, qualitative research is an appropriate approach to utilize in this study. I initially considered both qualitative and quantitative approaches, but after defining the nature and main objective of this study, I chose the qualitative approach due to its “visibility and acknowledged presence of the researcher in a research account” (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 37). And finally, the nature of this research problem suggests the qualitative approach in order to discover immigrant women’s experiences and make

their voices heard.

4.4 Method

There is no particular method that we can specify as feminist, as feminist researchers utilize various methods in their work (Ackerly & True, 2010). As a research tool, I utilized semi-structured, open-ended interviews. The aim of interviews is to generate knowledge by posing questions to other people (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 133). Even though there are not any methods that we can identify as feminist, there are ethics that feminist researchers follow while conducting interviews. For instance, feminist researchers posit that research participants are not passive participants as they volunteer to share their experiences. At the same time, the participants are also involved in data gathering process (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 141). An important step in the interviewing process is that the interviewer ask herself, while interviewing, “What is she trying to say?,” instead of “What does this mean?” (Ackerly & True, 2010, p.168). Interviews help to involve interviewees in the process of data construction (Reinharz, 1992). A semi-structured interview implies a “specific interview guide” that includes questions constructed beforehand that should be asked throughout the interview (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are like a “guided conversation,” which helps the researcher to gather rich and detailed data (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 134). During my interviews, I covered the following questions:

- Are they taking part in electoral and non-electoral activities, and if so what is the nature of their participation?
- Are they participating in non-electoral political activities (advocacy, petitions, etc.); if they do not participate, what are the main factors that inhibit or promote their political participation?

The flexibility of semi- structured, open-ended interviews in English and Russian helped me to generate knowledge deriving from immigrant women's experiences and to look at the problem from the subject's position. Participants were interviewed in public locations such as the University of Lethbridge library, the public library, the university campus, in my office at University Hall and in my basement. Only the participant and I were present during the interview session. The interviews lasted from an hour to two hours. After obtaining consent of the participants, the interviews were audio recorded. I transcribed the recorded interviews by hand, maintaining the original form of the answers. Organizing the data by themes helped me to be familiar with the materials and made it easier to access them (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006). I kept one copy of all the original transcripts on my computer in a separate folder. All the details and personal information related to the individuals are kept separately from the files that contain the transcripts. I also made a content copy file which includes the transcripts, copies of notes and memos. The only person who has access to all these documents is the researcher. The audio recordings and transcriptions were saved on the password-protected flash drive, and the computer was password protected as well. The consent forms were kept separately from the notes and transcriptions in order to avoid personal identification of responses. For the same purposes participants were named with the following pseudonyms: Anna, Elena, Irene, Katie, Kristine, Lily, Linda, Liza, Lucy, Mary, Nancy, Norah, Rosie, Sarah, and Sherri. After completion of the research, the audio tapes and typed notes were destroyed.

Pilot interviewing was also incorporated into the data collection process. Before starting to interview the participants of this study, I interviewed two colleagues who are international students at the University of Lethbridge. Typically, pilot testing is implemented to identify the weaknesses and limitations of the interview design

(Turner, 2010, p. 757). As a result of pilot interviewing, no flaw was determined in the interview design, but it was a great practice to “exercise” my skills as a new interviewer. The only comment that was mentioned by a pilot interviewee is that sharing my personal interest in the research topic and personal introduction made interviewees feel more comfortable to share information about themselves.

4.5 Recruitment of Participants

Both researchers and participants are involved in data collection processes (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 141). Participants are the ones who might have experience or the information relevant to the research topic, and at the same time they are willing to contribute their time, knowledge and experiences (p.141). A sampling method in qualitative research is utilized in order to find those who possess the experience the researcher is looking for (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Sampling frame was utilized at the beginning of the recruitment process of participants in order to find those participants relevant to this research.

After getting approval from University Human Subject Research Committee (HSRC), I contacted the Lethbridge Immigrant Services and the Southern Alberta Ethnic Association through a letter of communication (see Appendices D and E) requesting the posting of a recruitment letter on their notice boards. This letter also contained a sample consent form (see Appendix B and C). The recruitment notice stated: “Seeking immigrant women who are over 19 years old, can speak English (or Russian, Armenian), lived in Canada for more than 3 years...” (see Appendix F). The poster was also hung on the notice boards at the University of Lethbridge. After receiving no responses to the letters, and being concerned that the word “political” is the factor that had discouraged immigrant women to take part in the research, I changed the wording “political participation” to “community involvement.”

Nevertheless, the only efficient way of recruiting participants was through snowball sampling and “word of mouth.” Although I contacted both of the organisations twice to encourage immigrant women to take part in the research interview and the posters were hung for more than two months at the locations mentioned above, nobody contacted me. The overall process of recruitment lasted almost four and a half months. The snowballing started from the beginning of the search process for potential participants when I asked my landlord and university peers if they knew any potential participants.

The primary aim of the research was to investigate the political activities of twenty first-generation immigrant women in Alberta. Of the projected twenty participants, ten would be Canadian citizens and another ten would be permanent residents all of whom have lived in Canada for more than three years. However, considering the time restrictions of the study I had to decrease the number of participants to fifteen. The selection of participants was based mainly on their age (over 19), and their length of stay in Canada (no less than three years). Ideally, these women should come from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The participants should be conversant in the English language; however, in case they spoke other languages I speak (for instance, Russian and Armenian), they would also be included as research participants. As a result of participants’ recruitment limitations I interviewed ten citizens and five permanent residents.

As I mentioned above, snowballing and “word of mouth” were used to recruit participants. For that purpose, I requested my friends, colleagues and participants to share the poster and information about the research with some potential participants they might know. Thus, the following criteria were applied in the process of participants’ selection:

Inclusion criteria for the research participants. All research participants were immigrant women who had a status of permanent resident or citizen. All immigrant women were older than 19 and lived in Canada for more than three years. And, they were comfortable with being interviewed in English.

4.6 Data Management

An analytical computer program called NVIVO 10 was used for data management. The NVIVO program was an efficient and easy tool to organize all the data and “to renew familiarity with them” (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 212). Throughout my research NVIVO helped me to organize and analyze the data. It is very useful software when you have voluminous amount of transcribed data with various answers. It also lets you code all the answers and then compare these answers from different participants’ answers. Moreover, a researcher can also import documents and notes from word processing programs into the project they create in NVIVO (p.83). All the data I had was coded by the interview questions. In this way, every interview question which was coded in NVIVO contained the answers to that question. As a result of organizing the data, other common themes also appeared which were coded as well.

4.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis is an inevitable part of the research process where “data informs theory” and “theory informs data” (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 219). Typically, data analysis answers the research question by providing description and explanation (p.219). Moreover, it scrutinizes “the relationships between components of data” through “generalized themes” (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 6). In this research, generalized themes were the following: political and non-political activities; modes of political participation; and the factors that affect political participation. Gibson and

Brown define data analysis as a practice “about the relationship between data and conceptual problems” (p. 6). However, it is the data that determines what kind of analysis should be applied; what experiences should be reported; and what concepts should be described (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 233).

A thematic approach to analysis was applied in this research. A thematic analysis aims to find relationships, commonalities and differences throughout a data set (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 127). According to Gibson and Brown (2009) a thematic analysis is pursuing the following three “sets of aims”: “examining commonality,” “examining differences,” and “examining relationships” (p. 128). In my research, I followed these three sets of aims. Primarily, having organized most of the data by interview questions, I examined every question within its responses one by one in order to identify commonalities, differences, and relationships among answers. Examining commonalities aims to find common categories in the data “as an example of x” (p.128). Afterwards, a researcher examines differences across the data relevant to a particular issue. And finally, a researcher explores relationships among different categories and elements of the analysis; for instance, how various categories are related to each other and how these categories are relevant to general themes (p.129).

The data was primarily collected in this manner: each of the interviews were recorded, transcribed and in some cases translated. During this process, I had been reflecting on Gibson and Brown’s suggested three “sets of aims.” Moreover, the process of data management was another opportunity to explore commonalities, differences, and relationships throughout the data set.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are grounded in the whole research practice, regardless of whether it is feminist research or not. However, feminist researchers focus specifically

on the following issues: avoid harming participants; be respectful; verify confidentiality; informed consent; protect privacy; and “develop reflexivity [...] with regard to issues about disclosure” (Bell, 2014, p. 99).

For my research, I took all reasonable measures and steps to conform to a high standard of ethics throughout all stages of the research. Careful considerations were used for confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity throughout the research process and whatever is reported. Before every interview, the participants received a consent form in order to become acquainted with details regarding the research topic and their participation in it beforehand (see Appendix B). At the same time, before starting to interview I described every detail of the research process relevant to them as well. All the participants made an “informed decision” (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 89). All participation was entirely voluntary with consent to future use of information. Accordingly, one of the participants did not want to be audio-recorded, and therefore, I had to take handwritten notes of the interview. All the participants were reminded that they had the right to withdraw, at any time, for any reason, given or not. All the digital information and data concerning participants was password protected. Ultimately, the approved Application for Ethical Review of Human Subject Research (HSRC) assures the ethical consistency of my research.

The information relevant to their right to withdraw from the research was included in the consent letter and mentioned before the interview. Moreover, participants were informed from the start of the interview that they could withdraw at any time during the interviewing process; they could also withdraw either during a session, or by informing me by phone or email.

4.9 Description of Participants

A total of 15 participants were recruited for this study. All the participants had

a diverse ethno-cultural background (Scottish, n=2), (Bangladeshi, n=2), (Irish, n=2), (Bhutanese, n=1), (Nigerian, n=2), (Iranian, n=2), (Chinese, n=2), (Russian, n=1), and (Filipino, n=1). All the immigrant women were educated and had lived in Canada for more than four years (the length of staying in Canada ranged up to 42 years). Detailed information about each participant is presented in the following section.

4.10 Profiles of Participants

Two groups of immigrant women were interviewed: immigrant women who are citizens and immigrant women who are permanent residents. After four months of seeking research participants, I interviewed five permanent residents and ten citizens. However, three participants had acquired citizenship recently (1-2 years ago). In the next section, I provide more detailed information about the participants, keeping in my mind the feminist research ethic that implies “attentiveness to boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, attentiveness to relationships, and commitment to self-reflection” (Ackerly & True, 2010, p.118). More specifically, in each participant’s profile I reflect on the demographic and personal information (e.g. age, education, home country, immigration status, economic stability of the family, length of staying in Canada) that is crucial to consider while analysing their political participation.

4.10.1 Anna

Anna is a senior lady in her mid 60s, born in Scotland, and trained as a nurse in England. Afterwards, she became a midwife in Scotland. Before coming to Canada, Anna lived for four years in South Africa where she met her husband. Anna arrived in Canada as a landed immigrant. In the beginning, Anna and her husband migrated to Vancouver and after two years they moved to Calgary. Anna and her family lived for thirty years in Calgary, where Anna had two children. Anna retired from nursing nine years ago; as she and husband like Southern Alberta, they decided to stay in Alberta.

It has been nine years since Anna and her husband moved to Lethbridge. I found Anna's contact information through Linda, another participant when I was seeking more research interview participants. I interviewed Anna in the public library where the atmosphere was very quiet and fostered a friendly talk. Anna likes to camp, to garden, and to go to the farmer's market. She mentioned that with the activities she used to do only during the weekends, now she might do them during the week as well. Anna is an active community member who is trying to balance her time between the community and her husband. Anna volunteers for the hospital once a week. She also sings in the church choir, and for that reason, she has practices twice a week in the church. She is also an active volunteer for the church soup kitchen. Anna considers a church a good way to meet people. At a younger age, Anna was busy with curling and skiing activities. Furthermore, she was also taking her children to many activities which took a lot of her time as well. Although Anna was never part of a parents' group, she initiated a program to bridge grandparents with pupils. So for the pupils who had grandparents living in other countries, it was a great chance to interact with older people. After arriving in Lethbridge, Anna joined the Canadian Federation of University Women. Anna mentioned that she was very active during the recent provincial elections and she was campaigning for Maria Fitzpatrick.

4.10.2 Elena

Elena is originally from Bangladesh. She came to Lethbridge in 2008. The purpose of arriving in Lethbridge was the pursuit of post-secondary education. After eight months, her husband joined her in Lethbridge. Elena got her bachelor's degree in Bangladesh. After graduating with Master of Science degree she got a job in the professional and business services domain. Elena is 34 years old and she has one daughter. Elena became a citizen a year ago. Elena is a friend of my colleague, who

helped me to find two participants for my research interviews—Elena and Nancy. I interviewed Elena in my office. Elena finds Lethbridge a very good place to live if you have a safe job and a kid. According to her, everything is easier in this small city (i.e., childcare, traffic). Elena lives with her mother-in-law who helps her with household as her husband works in Brooks. Elena spends her evenings with her family, and during weekends she is busy with cleaning, buying groceries, watching movies, and playing some games; sometimes she also goes out of the city with her family. Elena follows Hinduism and she practices it at home as there are no temples in Lethbridge. She is a member of the newly established Bangladeshi Students Organization of the University of Lethbridge (BSOUL).

4.10.3 Irene

Irene is senior lady who was born in Ireland. She lived a couple of years in England, and after being trained as a nurse she moved to Canada at the age of 24. She arrived in Manitoba as a landed immigrant where she stayed only a couple of months. Afterwards, she moved to Pincher Creek and lived there for 20 years. Irene has lived in Lethbridge for 14 years. She is married and does not have any children. Because of some health problem she does not work right now, but she had been nurse for a long time. Health issues are also the reason that, at this moment, Irene cannot take part in many activities. I met Irene with the help of Linda. Irene preferred to meet in the university. I interviewed her in the food court on campus. Irene does not have any siblings in Canada; all her family live in Ireland. Irene likes living in Lethbridge as she considers it to be one of the safest places in terms of weather and climate. The only thing she does not like about Lethbridge is the wind. Irene goes to the gym, works out, and during the summers likes to camp. Also, she is involved with women's groups, but because of some allergies she avoids many meetings where a lot of people

are present. Irene is also a very active member of the Canadian Federation of Nurses' Union both in Pincher Creek and in Lethbridge.

4.10.4 Katie

Katie is originally from Bhutan. She is 42 years old, and she came to Lethbridge four years ago as a landed immigrant. When she was 17 she moved from Bhutan to India. She has two degrees from India at the undergraduate and graduate level respectively. Her whole family lives in Lethbridge as well. I interviewed Katie at her workplace after her office hours. Katie was very excited to talk about women's issues and she shared that it is the topic that she would like to study. However, since I started my communication with Katie, she was hoping that she can be helpful for my research. Katie is a single mother and has one daughter, who is 15 years old. Katie mentioned that when she just arrived in Lethbridge she had to do different types of part-time jobs which affected her dream to go back to school. Kate is very interested in empowering women, and she helps women from Bhutan to pass the citizenship test and teaches some English classes. Katie has received a permanent job position recently, which makes her very happy as she can feel more secure and spend more time with her daughter. Katie spends her weekends by helping other Bhutanese women from the Bhutanese Society in Lethbridge and spending time with her daughter.

4.10.5 Kristine

Kristine is a 41 years old lady from Nigeria. She received her primary education in Nigeria, and then continued her studies in the U.S. She possesses a Bachelor of Arts degree and had some open studies in Canada. Kristine is full-time employed at a childcare program and is mother of two teenaged children. I got in touch with Kristine through one of my peers. Kristine is a very active church

participant and is very enthusiastic personally as a community member. Although Kristine acquired her citizenship only a year ago, she lived in Lethbridge for six years which was the first place her family arrived. Kristine is very active in her church community. She does a lot of volunteer activities in her church. Kristine enjoys living in Lethbridge as she prefers living in small cities. According to Kristine, although it is very hard to find job in Lethbridge, it is a secure place in terms of a low crime rate. Kristine's favourite place in Lethbridge is her own house. Kristine looks forward to weekends as it is an opportunity for her to spend time with her children, watch a movie together with her family, visit friends, and talk with some friends. She also does some cooking and cleaning for the week. Kristine also likes that Lethbridge has a lot of programmes for families and children. I interviewed Kristine in the public library. We had a very nice and friendly talk which both of us enjoyed. It was the longest interview I conducted, which lasted for two hours. Kristine confessed at the end of the interview that she had never thought about the importance of political participation and she would like to be more active and participate more in political activities.

4.10.6 Lily

Lily is a very cheerful woman who came to Lethbridge 15 years ago from Iran. She is 41 years old. She is married and has a son. She got married two weeks before coming to Canada. Lily has a background in Environmental Science and she acquired her bachelor's degree in Iran. When Lily had just come to Lethbridge she did not know any English. She came with a visitor visa, while her husband came with a student permit. She learnt English while doing different types of work out of her field. She worked in restaurants and retail before finding a job in her field. It has been a few years since Lily and her husband acquired citizenship. In the beginning, when Lily

had just arrived in Lethbridge, she wanted to move to another place, as she felt it was a boring place for a young person. Later, when she settled down, she liked it more. She finds that people are very friendly in Lethbridge and she received a lot of help and support when she had just arrived. Lily is a very sociable person, so she did not have any problems in finding friends even when she could hardly speak English. Lily feels that Lethbridge is a stable place compared to the country she came from. Lily likes to go to the pub with her husband, and during the winter they go skiing. She always has plans for the weekends to entertain her son. I got Lily's contact from Anna. Lily and I met in a cafe for a Sunday breakfast. It was very interesting to talk to Lily as she had the experience immigrant women face when they migrate to another country and how they adapt to another community. However, Lily mentioned throughout the interview that she was not helpful for my research as she was not active in political activities, but she was very open to sharing any kind of information that might contribute to my research.

4.10.7 Linda

Linda is a senior lady who came to Canada 42 years ago. She is 65 years old, and it has been two years since she moved to Lethbridge from Calgary. Linda was the English teacher of my landlord at the Read-on program in the public library. For the purpose of the interview, Linda preferred to meet me in my house. At the beginning of her life's journey, she came to visit Canada for only six months but after meeting her husband she stayed in Canada. Linda has three children who are in their mid 30s. Linda's family is still in Ireland, so she does not have many relatives around. Linda has been a citizen of Canada for 38 years. She has a bachelor's degree in Spanish and Linguistics. She also has a diploma certificate in English as a Second Language (ESL). She worked for 13 years at a college in Calgary. She finds it very interesting to

be involved with foreign students. Linda is a friend of Anna and Irene, and not surprisingly she is also part of the women's group, Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW). All of them are active members of the book club organized by the CFUW. The CFUW raises money for women who live in Lethbridge and for the University of Lethbridge scholarships. During the week Linda goes to yoga classes, has dinner with her friends, goes for walk, buys groceries, and watches TV. Linda is also auditing a Spanish class. On Saturday mornings Linda enjoys reading her favourite newspaper which has a particular focus on what is happening in the world. Linda is a very active woman and she helped me to find some of my participants.

4.10.8 Liza

Liza is a 22 year old undergraduate student in the Sociology department. Liza was born in England, and then moved to Scotland when she was a baby until she was 18. When she was 14 her family migrated to BC, though after six months they moved back to Scotland because of financial and economic conditions. However, her brother stayed in Canada and moved to Lethbridge. In 2011, after graduating high school, Liza came to visit her brother and decided to stay in Lethbridge as well. When Liza had just come to Lethbridge, she saw it as a very beautiful city. Now, she sees Lethbridge as a very conservative place. She thinks that Lethbridge is a nice combination between the city and the country. Before starting her program, she worked in retail and found some of her friends at her workplace and with her housemates. But she did not feel connected with them. In the university she found like-minded friends. She is also married, but does not have any children. Liza was my first research participant. It was very exciting to have such an active community member as a first participant. Liza is also president of a student club on campus. I interviewed Liza in my office. I found Liza through one of my peers in my program.

Liza is a very enthusiastic person and she was very interested to take part in the interview. Although she came to the interview after her classes, she was responding openly to the questions providing all the information she could. Having a background in sociology and a minor in women and gender studies, she was the only person who expanded on political participation not only in terms of electoral participation but also in terms of non-electoral participation.

4.10.9 Lucy

Lucy is my landlord's friend. I saw her twice previously before inviting her for the interview. Lucy is a 44 year old woman from Iran who works as a laboratory technician at the University. She preferred to conduct the interview in her office. However, she did not feel comfortable being recorded. For that reason I took notes of the whole interview. It is almost ten years since Lucy and her family moved to Lethbridge; her husband's admission to the University of Lethbridge was the reason for coming to Lethbridge. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees in Iran; Lucy is married and has two sons; and she has acquired her citizenship recently. Lucy likes Lethbridge because it is a safe city to raise the kids. She also feels comfortable to practice her religion here, to cover her head and to pray. She mentioned that in the beginning, the transition to Lethbridge was very hard. But because Lethbridge is small, they adapted well. She found her friends through University networking, who then connected them to other Iranians. Lucy feels that she has a very busy life. The everyday routine for her is to go to work in the morning, then to bring children home, cook and take them for some activities. Lucy also mentioned a few times that she is afraid she is not a good candidate for my research as she is not politically active. As most of the answers to the questions were "no," I was trying to discover the reasons that might inhibit her participation. During the interview, I felt that she also had

language barriers, so I offered her an opportunity to look up the new words in the dictionary.

4.10.10 Mary

Mary is a friend of my landlord, and she immigrated to Canada from China in 2005. She was 44 when she arrived in Lethbridge and faced many challenges. She could not find any job in her field; therefore, she worked in retail for a while. Mary shared that she grew up during the revolution in China and it was very hard to receive education during that time. However, she succeeded and received her Bachelor's degree in Biology. She has been widowed since 1998 and does not have any children. Mary enjoys living in Lethbridge as she likes quiet places and also feels safe in the city. Mary mentioned that people in Lethbridge are very friendly and she found most of her friends through her jobs. Mary has been a citizen of Canada for five years. Mary had some language barriers during the interview, so I had to explain some English words. Regardless of language difficulties, Mary was very willing to help me and provided as much information as she could; yet she mentioned during the interview that she is not that helpful for my research because she is not active in politics.

4.10.11 Nancy

Nancy received her Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Lethbridge. When she was 20 she came to Lethbridge after graduating high school in Bangladesh. Nancy is married now and she has started her second bachelor's degree. Nancy started her second degree in an absolutely different field because with her previous degree in Biological Sciences it was very hard to find a job. Although it is hard for her to get a job in Lethbridge, Nancy and her husband are willing to stay in Lethbridge. Lethbridge is the first place in Canada that Nancy arrived at. Every time

she goes to another city, on her way back to Lethbridge she feels like she is returning home. Nancy's brother lives in Calgary, but he used to live in Lethbridge when Nancy first arrived. Nancy has acquired permanent residency recently. Although she grew up in a very big city, she still likes Lethbridge as it is a very quiet place where people are friendly and helpful. Moreover, she never felt alone as there are many people from Bangladesh in Lethbridge. I interviewed Nancy in my office during the summer when she was taking summer courses. She was a little tired when she arrived for the interview because of fasting during Ramadan, however it did not affect the interview. Nancy was trying to find a summer job but had not found anything. She said that usually a woman's life changes after marriage in her culture; however, she did not feel that difference. She is still a student, and her husband is very supportive and helpful to her.

4.10.12 Norah

Norah is another friend of my landlord who came from China to Lethbridge to continue her postdoctoral studies in 2008. Norah is 37 years old and she received her post-secondary education in China. Her first child was born in China, and in Canada she gave a birth to twins. Norah and her family acquired permanent residency three years ago, and they are now in the process of applying for citizenship. Norah said that she did not care about citizenship as much as about immigration, as she does not think that it will affect her immigration status in any real way. Norah considers that stability is not related to the city but more on immigration status or job. Norah had language barriers as well and she asked me to send her an interview guide beforehand to prepare the answers. During the interview in my basement, she did not encounter new words but it was difficult for her to express herself well. Norah confessed that she had some hard times in the beginning and she wanted to go back to China, as she does not

have to work as hard there as in Canada. When I invited Norah for the interview she was concerned that she would not be able to help me. I explained to her that she does not have to be active in political activities. Currently, Norah is taking a program in a college in order to find a job. Norah shared that her family has a regular routine, which was very similar to the other participants (i.e., work and home).

4.10.13 Rosie

Rosie is a Russian woman who was my landlord's classmate at the Read-on program. I interviewed Rosie in Russian at her house. She arrived in Lethbridge in 2008 and has two children. Rosie was 31 years old when she arrived in Lethbridge and currently is a permanent resident. Before starting the interview Rosie did not feel confident about her knowledge relevant to my research project. I explained to Rosie that she does not need to worry about that as I interview the participants regardless of their level of political participation. Rosie has some language barriers in English; she was planning to go to Quebec because her second language is French. Except for her children, her whole family is back in Russia. Rosie likes that Lethbridge is a warm and quiet city; and that she has a job which helps her to provide an average level of life for her children. During the weekends, she buys groceries, prepares food for the week, and tends to her garden. At the end of the interview, Rosie felt more comfortable to talk about her feelings as an immigrant relevant to political participation. She talked about her personal experiences and perceptions of political participation reflecting on her status as permanent resident.

4.10.14 Sarah

Although Sarah was born in Lethbridge, as her parents were in Lethbridge before, she never lived in the city until the last two years. Sarah grew up in Nigeria and after graduating with her bachelor's degree in 2007, she came to Edmonton,

Canada in her early 20s. It has been only two years since she moved to Lethbridge. Sarah is an undergraduate student now and the mother of a five year old child. Her husband works and lives in the US. Sarah has an introverted personality which made it more difficult to interview her. She is a very nice and cheerful person but she did not like to expand on her responses. For that reason, I probed every question before asking her. Sarah does like Lethbridge as she prefers quiet places because of her quiet personality. Sarah is volunteering now with Lethbridge Family Services and she also goes to an African Church. Sarah is not employed yet.

4.10.15 Sherri

Sherri is originally from the Philippines, and with her family moved to Lethbridge in 2010. I interviewed Sherri on campus during the weekend. She had only an hour for the interview, so I tried to be efficient in my time management. Although there was a time pressure, we covered all the aspects of my interview. Sherri and her husband received their graduate education in the U.S., and Sherri was 35 when they arrived in Lethbridge. Sherri also mentioned that Lethbridge is a safe place for her children. During the weekends Sherri buys groceries, cleans the house, goes to the church, and sometimes goes out for a movie. Most of her friends she met at the church or were parents she met at her children's school.

4.11 Summary

To sum up, this chapter provided the crucial elements of the research process. These elements include, but are not limited to, the philosophical framework, research design, and methods. More specifically, the recruitment of participants was explained and detailed profiles of the participants were provided. Data collection, data management and data analysis were also described. Finally, procedures to comply with ethical considerations were clarified.

As a result of thematic analysis two major themes were revealed: modes of political participation, and factors that impact political participation. These two major themes will be presented in Chapter Five and Chapter Six including the synthesis of findings and discussion of this research.

Chapter Five

Modes of political participation

In this chapter, I report the findings and analysis regarding modes of political participation. The first part of the chapter presents immigrant women's non-political activities, community involvements, and membership to different clubs. The second part of the chapter reveals different modes of political participation by analyzing which are the most common among immigrant women in Lethbridge.

Drawing on the findings of this research, the discussion and analysis are presented in this chapter which articulates immigrant women's perspectives and experiences of political participation in Lethbridge. The main objective of this chapter is to analyze the level of political participation among immigrant women by critically reflecting on theories of political participation in order to explore the relationship between the theoretical framework and the data presented in this research.

5.1 Community involvement and membership in organisations

In this section, I will describe the different social and community activities, clubs and sports that immigrant women were engaged in. It is crucial to explore whether immigrant women are involved in groups other than political activities to survey immigrant women's lifestyles, their engagement in other activities, and their practices. In the same vein, to avoid any misconception of modes of political participation I asked participants about their membership in clubs, organisations, and community engagements to find out any possible mode of political participation undertaken therein. Acknowledging debates about what is considered to be "political," the open-ended question about their membership or engagement in different activities demonstrates any possible political participation within the organisation, society or club of which they are members.

In 2011, immigrants comprised 13% of the population in the City of Lethbridge (City of Lethbridge, 2013). Since 2001 immigration flow to Lethbridge has been lower compared to provincial and national levels. The latter might explain the small number of immigrant associations in Lethbridge: Southern Alberta New Japanese Immigrant Association, Canadian Bhutanese Society, Southern Alberta Ethnic Association (SAEA). Migration to another country and/or community is always challenging both socially and economically. Most of the immigrant women I interviewed did not have any friends or acquaintances in Lethbridge before their migration. Most of the interviewees took part in some community activities or clubs which helped them to find some of their friends.

Before asking every question, I was probing it by expanding on what I mean by asking this or that question. For example, in probing what kind of activities I mean, I mentioned some examples such as community activities, school, NGOs, political party activism, parents' groups, the Library's Read-On program, Lethbridge Immigrant Services, SAEA, and the Woman's Space Resource Centre. Most of the interviewees were familiar with the examples I mentioned, and some of them were active in some of the activities. For instance, Katie participated in a few meetings with parents' groups, was also active with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and had a chance to volunteer for the Read-on program where she helped a lady from Africa to improve her English. She said,

Initially when I just came and I wasn't working, I went for couple of meetings of parents' board... And yeah I just participated a little bit but I wasn't driving then so then I always used to think I wish I could just help them volunteer, but then I just not at the school, but my daughter and me , we volunteered YWCA for making Christmas card. So couple of times I volunteered there, YWCA with her [daughter].

In this case of an immigrant woman who has social and language skills, and at the

same time a citizenship and a permanent job, we see she is more willing to get involved in school councils contrary to the other immigrant women who are still struggling with requirements for citizenship and finding a permanent job. For example, in contrast to Katie, Kristine is a citizen, has a job, and possesses very good language skills, and has been a very active representative at parents' group. She notes,

I did that for couple of years. I was parents' rep in my child's classroom. They had me to volunteer to remind them if they need to bring something for some party or email... Political change... I think even in this school where my daughter attends this issue of cuts in the cost of education, cuts to all these support, this school sent an email so that people sign something or respond something. I did that because I felt I have a chance to engage in this area and don't cut the funding, may be I'm just one more vote, just one more voice to cut it.

Kristine has a very strong sense of how even one vote matters. Considering her children's future, it is very important to her to bring and encourage any positive change in the community or at school. I surmise that even if she encounters any social issue that shares her concerns and she has resources (time, money, knowledge) to initiate signing petition or boycotting a product, she will do it. At this stage of her life, Kristine gets involved in activities which she does not even consider "political"; however, the scope of activities addresses "the personal is political." In other words, she takes part in a few activities that are affecting her or her family personally such as cuts in education cost.

From the activities I probed as examples, Lucy was only familiar with parents' group and the Read-on program; however, she never took part in them. The only activity she did before finding a job was fundraising for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Norah attended parents' group only twice and then stopped. She comments,

We couldn't blend in because of our culture and communication, so we stopped. I thought it is not our thing if we were there, we just look at their face and their thing and we didn't get talk because we didn't know their culture

how to just blend in the topic and just communicate with others. Also I'm not the person who is talkative, I think it's awkward when you just went there and just stand by yourself.

Norah's personal experience with the parent's groups indicates that cultural and linguistic barriers prevented her further participation in this group. But more importantly, the stress she had regarding immigration and finding a job also impacted her participation.

Rosie took part in the Read-on Program and activities for parents organized by the Family Centre which were related to how to raise children in a positive way. Sarah is also part of Lethbridge Family Services where she helps African and Bhutanese immigrants to learn more about Canadian culture.

Although some women indicated that they did not really have time to be active in anything, they would still be part of some initiatives. For instance, Sherri mentioned:

I'm so busy I'm not really involved in anything specific. Only if I have time, I used to volunteer for Red Cross when I didn't have work, and then a church. But right now I don't really have, except for the foundation we have- the Read World foundation where we collect books, but we send it to Philippines, it's not really for Lethbridge.

As I mentioned previously, Linda, Anna, and Irene are friends. All of them are active members of the women's group called Canadian Federation of University Women. CFUW is a national organisation where women get involved with different initiatives such as child poverty, education, scholarships, health care, violence against women, and clean and safe environment. The latter also consists of different clubs such as book club, Readers in Elementary School Group, and Advocacy and Issues (CFUW, 2016). However, all three of them were mostly active with the book club. As Anna mentioned later:

Through that we got into the no-fracking thing, and I definitely didn't agree with the fact that they were going to start fracking within the city limits and I felt quite passionate about it so we joined the no-drilling Lethbridge thing and we were there with our placards and stuff and I said, I haven't done this since I was nursing, we went for strike at 1998 and it was February and it was like - 26 and we were going up and down outside the hospital with our placards you know. So I guess I was a little politically involved with that...

From Anna's narratives it is obvious that she gets involved in political activities that she strongly supports. And, more importantly, she recognizes and realizes that her activism is political. During the interview, Linda and Irene mentioned as well that they participated in the "no-fracking" Lethbridge protest through the women's group, CFUW. This group has more interesting activities including but not limited to raising money for women who live in the Lethbridge area and raising money for scholarships at the University of Lethbridge. Irene also took part in a project, which was collecting women's sanitary supplies, particularly for developing countries, within the CFUW. Furthermore, Linda expanded more on the women's group's initiatives. Within the women's group Linda was part of another initiative:

I was up in University with a women's group except because they had an anti abortion thing last October-November. I was there with an umbrella and nobody asked me would you like to put the umbrella up so you don't have to see those but I was there. We supported that. You know it doesn't mean that we don't what is called nothing to do whether you agree or you don't agree with abortion. It was just offensive. And it was an American outfit those Americans and they came up here.

The women's group raises another issue on child poverty, particularly in Lethbridge.

Linda mentioned:

Because a few women in the group also belong to the United Church and the United Church is interested in child poverty and they are trying to it's not just the United Church; all these groups are trying to get the government to provide more funding to these children who need help; you might say well who are these kids? We see them in that school. They are like little Mary and Johnny walking down the street and maybe you can't tell that these children in grade 4 cannot read properly.

Furthermore, many women get involved in activities or organisations

pertaining to their field of work. Irene has also been active with the Canadian Federation of Nurses Union at the local level, and occupied different positions such as Vice-President and other executive board posts. Anna was also a member of the Nurses Union through which she took part in the protest back in 1980s. Similarly, Lisa, who is an undergraduate student, established her own club, which is aiming to engage students in social justice issues. They are planning to publish a magazine where many social and political topics will be covered. Lisa is also attending many events organized by the Woman's Space Centre regarding "trans" identity and murdered and missing indigenous women.

Linda has always been active in sports and has had an active social life even if she had a young family. She said,

So I used to play a hockey once a week... And I have been always been involved with children's activities. So you know my kids would be going to the place and then I would invite little friends home and then I meet them up: that's how I met a lot of mothers. You know through this play activities and then through the school because you have something in common and then when they come and pick up the little kid you say have you got time for cup of tea and that's how you meet people.

Moreover, Linda used to campaign for volunteers for the cancer research centre and diabetes; and she was also part of the Flowers of Hope campaign, which was dedicated to children with mental disabilities. However, in terms of political activities she got involved more after retiring.

I had a chance to interview two Bangladeshi women who were mostly active with the newly established student club- Bangladeshi Students Organization of the University of Lethbridge (BSOUL). BSOUL unites all the Bangladeshi graduate students and some community members. Within BSOUL they organize potlucks and cultural events. Apart from BSOUL, Nancy participated in other activities like volunteering for the International Dinner organised by the International Centre on

campus.

Some of the participants (Anna, Kristine, Sarah and Sherri) were also part of different churches. Although Kristine and Sarah are members of the same ethnic church, only Kristine, who was more active with the church, shared some practices relevant to political participation. For example, she mentioned that every year one of their church's representatives has a breakfast with the Mayor. Personally, she never had a chance to go to those meetings. She also mentioned that during provincial elections her vote was affected by the church, which I will discuss later in this chapter. Sherri and Sarah did not identify any practices that might be "political" in the church. But Anna shared that she was part of the committee in her church which decided to recognize gay marriages and became the "United Church." Looking at immigrant women's experiences with churches reveal that in some cases even the church affects the vote of women who attend. Kristine revealed that even in their church women are provided different venues to meet politicians. At the same time, intersection of the scope of different activities in church sometimes implicates the lack of political participation of immigrant women. For example, Sherri who was attending the Catholic Church mentioned she only goes to church on Sundays and no political issues are discussed there.

To sum up, while discussing different activities generally, participants revealed that membership in certain groups or organisations might result in some political activities; however, not all of them do. Immigrant women's experiences and practices are different relying not only on intersectionality of different social categories, but also intersectionality of the scope of their social community involvements. For example, the participant who was involved with women's group and United Church got involved in child poverty addressing initiatives which was on both the women's

group and United Church's agendas. Newly immigrated women were more involved in social communities that united specific ethnic or cultural groups relying on ethnic or religious aspects. The participants who were involved in ethnic associations or clubs (e.g. Canadian-Bhutanese society, Chinese Society, BSOUL) did not indicate any possible political activities initiated by these groups. The ethnic associations in Lethbridge were mostly providing their members social and cultural events and different kinds of support such as helping to integrate into the society and acquire language skills. This finding is consistent with another study (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009) which argues that ethnic communities do not contribute to immigrant women's political activism and knowledge about Canadian politics. Immigrant women in this study who were from developing countries and lack English skills were more involved in ethnic or religious organisations. In some cases, the church would shape political practices of immigrant women who were more involved with it. For example, the church would provide an opportunity to meet with some political candidates or Mayor, or would encourage the congregation to vote for a Progressive Conservative candidate. In contrast, immigrant women from more developed countries (e.g. UK, Ireland, Scotland) and who were retired, or a student with no children were interested in many important social, political, and economic issues. Their activities included child poverty, ecological environment, abortion rights, education and much more. The immigrant women from this study challenged how the scope of social or political involvement in their communities might be affected not only by social categories such as age, education, ethnicity, gender, but also by which social communities they join or get involved with initially after moving to Canada in order to socially integrate into the new society. Even though Ackelsberg (2010) argues that women are active in non-conventional activities as well, it is not the case for immigrant women in Lethbridge

who are coming from developing countries with corrupted political systems; these middle-aged women with families are not socially or economically integrated into the society.

5.2 Conventional participation

5.2.1 Elections

Conventional participation includes more than just voting. Except for voting, permanent residents are eligible to become political party members; they can donate money to a political party, and perhaps attend a dinner with a political party candidate. All of the immigrant women I interviewed identified elections as an important political activity. Almost all the immigrant women who were eligible to vote exercised their right. Moreover, before the elections, all of the participants watched candidates' campaigns and became acquainted with candidates and their political parties' platforms. Even the participants who were not active in non-conventional participation would still describe the significance of elections and voting. More importantly, all of the participants mentioned that they made their choice of candidates by themselves as a result of their own research. Even some of the women who were not eligible to vote tried to be more knowledgeable about the political parties' platforms.

Kaitie, who was not eligible to vote, expressed her willingness to participate in elections and be informed about their platforms beforehand. She said,

I would not just go like that. I have just have to really research the party and who is doing what and I would just give my part of vote out there.

On the contrary, Kristine was eligible to vote in the provincial elections after acquiring citizenship; however, her choice was affected by the political party

representative and church “prophet.” Kristine shared that she voted for that particular party candidate as the “prophet” promised him their vote after his campaign in the church:

After meeting with Jim, one of our elder prophets that we respect talked to us about Jim, and said I want to submit with this person. Just based on that respect we have for that and it another cultural thing, when you know somebody all pass to that person. Out of respect to this person we came to this meeting, and we said yes already, so we just went with that.

Before elections, Lucy, Lily and Mary have discussions with their neighbours, friends and colleagues, and these discussions shape their choice of candidates.

The economic stability of the family plays an important role for Norah. When I asked her if she was eligible to vote, would she vote, she replied:

Depend on my status, everything based on life economic of the family, if you can find a job I will participate. But if you can't find a job probably I will not have time for it.

Rosie, a permanent resident, mentioned that when she is eligible to vote “*it will be totally different period of life.*” The right of voting is a synonym of citizenship (in other words, of “being Canadian”) for immigrant women in Lethbridge. For Rosie, being eligible to vote means that she will be a Canadian citizen which will make her a “legitimate” member of society. At the same time, she will be more economically and socially integrated without feeling an “outsider.” Although Sarah has always participated in elections back in Edmonton, she did not vote in Lethbridge. She said,

Haven't since I came to Lethbridge, each time you should go there is always something but in Edmonton I was very active, I voted every time...

Sarah explained the reason for being active in conventional participation in Edmonton compared to Lethbridge:

Well In Lethbridge I had a child, so in Edmonton I was kind of single, no extra responsibility, right now it's like everything I do by myself no extra help, so it's hard to take that extra time to go and do like extra stuff...

Nevertheless, every time she participated in voting, she voted after being acquainted with the candidates' or parties' political platforms. Sarah notes,

Well, for vote I usually like to watch campaign on TV when you hear each party talking about candidate, talking about what they are going do for the province. So I make sure I listened very well and I don't make mind until I listen to them, so each which I think it will benefit me as a citizen and also as some immigrants or a lot of people that who might need.

The interviews with 15 participants, indicate that most of the immigrant women were associating political participation with only conventional participation. Furthermore, all immigrant women who were eligible to vote participated in elections by becoming “prepared” and informed beforehand. In terms of voting as a conventional political activity, immigrant women have a high participation rate. This finding is consistent with a study that states that political integration depends on a particular mode of political participation (O’Neil, Gidengil & Young, 2012). All the women had a sense of the importance of their vote and were cautious about it, which was reflected in their “research” on the political parties and candidates before giving their vote respectively.

From the findings reported by the participants, we can conclude that almost all immigrant women who are Canadian citizens recognize and exercise their responsibility—voting in provincial and federal elections. Even though all the immigrant women dealt with election/voting process very seriously, most of them did not take part in any other activity except for voting itself and gathering political knowledge about the candidates or political parties before the elections through media. For immigrant women who just acquired citizenship, are middle-aged and come from developing countries with corrupted political systems, conventional participation is limited to voting. Furthermore, immigrant women coming from political regimes like communist do not get involved in other conventional activities even when they do not

have a family or are economically well-established (for example, Mary). However, immigrant women who lived in Canada for more than thirty years, originally from a developed, English-speaking country participate not only in elections but also other conventional activities. For instance, Anna after being retired became more politically active and even during the last provincial elections joined Maria Fitzpatrick's provincial electoral campaign. Looking at different intersections of social categories, immigrant women's practices in Lethbridge indicate that conventional participation means different things for newly immigrated women from developed countries in comparison to immigrant women who are retired and are fully integrated. For example, immigrant women from developing countries considered voting as their responsibility, which they were bestowed as a result of acquiring citizenship and having a feeling of obligation to exercise it. In their eyes their responsibility as citizens were completed only by taking part in elections. Even though both theories of Ackelsberg and Burt acknowledge the fact that different social categories affect women's political participation, the theories do not address how political participation differs when immigrant women are originally from developing countries, had negative experiences in political spheres, and, at the same time, are struggling with economic and social integration. Nevertheless, all the immigrant women were mindful about their vote and exercised their right which is the only mode of political participation that they acquire after becoming a Canadian citizen. Thus, most of immigrant women in Lethbridge give importance only to elections in terms of conventional participation.

5.3 Non-conventional participation

The non-conventional modes of participation such as talking about issues with politician, rallies, and donations to activist groups had the same very low level of participation among both citizens and permanent residents among the immigrant

women in this study, except for signing petitions. The other modes of political participation that had some participation such as protest, contacting and meeting politicians, or political activities promoting social change were mostly undertaken by the same group of immigrant women (i. e., Linda, Anna, Irene, Lisa). This finding is consistent with Gidengil and Stolle's (2009) study, which reports that "political participation of immigrant women is very partial" (p. 741). Their study was conducted in Montreal and Toronto which are some of the most immigrant populated cities.

Through looking at immigrant women's experiences and practices in Lethbridge this study found out that non-conventional political participation (more specifically, in terms of protest, contacting and meeting politicians, or political activities promoting social change) was limited to the particular group of immigrant women. Linda, Anna and Irene have a similar intersection of age, ethnicity and education. It is important to note that all three women took part in protests not only after retiring but also when they were in their late twenties and early thirties. Anna and Irene joined the big protests in early 1980s regarding nurses' rights, which is a good example of "personal is political" slogan which addresses the scope of political activities personally affecting them. Linda who is not a nurse took part in another protest regarding the funding cuts in her college in Calgary. All the participants mentioned that the factor of having a young family and children affects political participation, which I will discuss later in Chapter Six. Furthermore, Lisa, who was another research participant who took part in non-conventional political participation has many social categories in common with the three senior women mentioned above. First of all, she has the same ethnicity (originally from Scotland) and she is coming from a developed, English speaking country, she does not have children, and she is highly educated. She is also engaged with the student club which has political and

social initiatives in Lethbridge similar to the three women mentioned above who are members of a women's group. To sum up, only "white" majority immigrant women, who had membership in social/political clubs and groups took part in non-conventional activities in Lethbridge. This finding enhances Ackelsberg's theory which argues that sometimes women are more involved in non-conventional political activities, however, in the case of a small city like Lethbridge minority immigrant women did not even consider taking part in non-conventional activities except for signing petitions.

5.3.1 Contacting politicians

Regardless of their immigration status, any resident of a community can contact any politician for different concerns and issues. Among the immigrant women I interviewed not many of them contacted any politician. I noticed that all the immigrant women who contacted politicians were mostly living in Canada for more than ten years and were members of activist groups or organisations. Thus, contacting politicians was not a frequent practice among the participants.

As a citizen of Canada for more than 35 years, Anna contacted politicians a few times. She said,

The first one was in Calgary and it was when they were going to get rid of PBS, like public broadcasting service on the television, and if you wanted to watch, you had to buy a converter. And I thought this is absolutely ridiculous... so I wrote to the CRTC, the CBC, I wrote to my MLA, my MP, to them all. There were enough people who did that. Because of the power of people, they backed that and said no. you wouldn't be required to buy a converter...

Anna contacted politicians every time when she had a major concern. Obviously, understanding the "power of people" and power of politicians such as a Mayor or a

Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) she contacted them regarding social issues related to her community such as television services or water bills. She notes,

So and then in Lethbridge about 3 or 4 years ago they decided to charge a different way for your water. I got the phone, I wrote to the mayor , I wrote to every councillor and I said this is not on... and I said I do not approve whatever you are doing to hide this the water... and I guess again there were enough people who wrote and have that back though.

Anna is one of the fifteen participants I interviewed who all live in the same city and everybody in the city pay water bills similarly; however she was the only participant who took initiatives to raise her voice to issues she considered unfair. She remarks,

So you know you have to realize, the whole fracking thing too, if you get enough people involved, this inspired people, absolutely... oh I wrote one not long ago, to the CBC foundation or something, it was to do with CBC, and I just wrote my MP as well about what I thought the diminished funding for CBC and had the programming had diminished for years.

By virtue of her position, Irene also contacted the provincial government a few times.

She notes,

In the past, I have written some stuff, I signed petitions as well, fracking, there was in coffee shop, there might be also some forms that I sent to MLA. It was through the mail... for example, pension issues it might be relevant to me personally and to my job, but it would be provincial sort of thing, wasn't specific just to me...

Participants who were active specifically in conventional participation had an opportunity to talk about social change with politicians. Similarly, some of the immigrant women who took part in non-conventional participation also asked questions regarding some changes or concerns. Although most of the women did not talk about any change with politicians, most of them had questions and concerns that they would like to ask. For instance, Anna had concerns about government funding to a particular organisation which she addressed during a conversation with Maria Fitzpatrick, the MLA for East Lethbridge:

I'm sure there are plenty: well certainly with Maria, because I know her personally, about funding for the 5th on 5th. It's a place in downtown that will , they kind of pick up youth, I think between 18-35, who have fallen through the cracks and can't get jobs. And they will help them find jobs... All government funding has stopped and that place almost closed, and I think the municipal government stepped in and gave them \$20,000.00...

Irene, who has been active provincially on behalf of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, asked questions about the changes relevant to nurses during meetings with politicians:

When we were on strike back in 1988 a group of us met with local politician and each of us had some questions that we prepared to ask. I have been also in some public forums like in elections time when you stand in line and ask some questions, and also when the local health board became regionalized in 1995 there was meetings around them so I went and asked some questions as well that had to do with the implications for rural communities people.

Irene's passion about issues related to nursing can be explained by being a nurse and being elected for executive positions with the Nurses Union. She attempted to attend meetings with politicians if she had resources such as transportation and time. In contrast, Kristine revealed that she had an opportunity to ask some questions to a politician, but at that moment she was not informed enough about her community and she considered herself ignorant. Kristine said,

That's interesting question. I will be asking myself how much I'm aware of my community. How much do I know? When we were talking with Jim, I did not have anything to ask I don't know I'm so ignorant; we had some people asking about immigration, what are the avenues that provides opportunities for business entrepreneurship.

Equally important, most of the participants had some questions that they would like to ask hypothetically. The majority of questions rose from the issues that might affect the participants personally. For example, Lily had concerns with the New Democratic Party budget allocations when it won in the provincial elections:

I would like to ask what is the real reason that they want to raise the minimum wage? Don't they think of the consequences after that? Because if you raise the money. it will be inflation... That's the reason they shouldn't do that and

also like I don't know. they just wanted the vote that's why they offered that to people that's not going happen in 4 years. In 4 years NDP will be gone but the consequences are, they are for the next party and by then they make enough money and go away right? So the thing is: are they thinking of that really, when they talk about that kind of things? That's one thing in my mind because that's pretty important I think.

Mary, being a technician and at pre-retirement age, was concerned about her pension and consequently she wanted to ask politicians about it:

I would like to talk about benefits for technician. We didn't have pension so I would like to talk this, the benefits.

Rosie was interested to ask questions about immigration policy:

I would like to ask about their predictions about migration laws and how many immigrants they would accept? How long it will take to get citizenship.

However, not all the participants had questions or concerns to voice with politicians. For example, when I asked Nancy if she would like to ask any questions of any politician or to talk about any change, Nancy said,

Now not, but may be in the future my mind can change, as I'll grew up may be I'll start knowing them more, but now I don't have any idea to ask any questions to them.

In other words, for Nancy “it is not the time for politics” as she is a student now and does not possess enough knowledge about Canadian politics. Even though Nancy has been living in Canada for more than five years, it became clear from our conversation that she had not managed yet to integrate socially and politically. Also some participants revealed some factors that discourage immigrant women from contacting politicians and feeling confident in being part of many activities, which include language barriers and being informed about the local politics. For instance Mary said:

I think my English is not that good and we are new immigrants so we didn't know the policy very well, so that's why I avoid these kinds of activities always.

In the same way, Rosie shared her difficulties with language barriers:

...another reason I don't want to look like a freak a strange person with bad English trying to make changes which suit for me, so it's probably all wrong I don't know which women would try to change in political life here when they

moved here.

A few participants mentioned that they do not like to contact politicians personally. For example, Lisa, who has been active with various political activities, prefers to sign petitions or pre-written letters, rather than contacting politicians directly. Similarly, Linda mentioned:

You know in that regard I will sign a petition but I won't write letters. So I think it's laziness more than anything. 'Cause I only have so much time in a day and quite my yoga time. And then I don't know. I can't ... people do that."

From the opinions expressed above, we can conclude that in some cases the lack of knowledge and information about the community and local politics affect the willingness of participants to voice some concerns or questions they might have with politicians. Even if some of the women who had concerns and questions which might even affect them personally, they never had a chance to meet any politicians and ask them questions. Although contacting and meeting politician was not a common practice among the women I interviewed, further on throughout the interview they revealed some concerns or changes they would like to ask or discuss. This indicates that sometimes having better conditions in Canada compared to the home countries they came from, and not being politically active does not mean they do not have any concerns as residents or citizens. These immigrant women never voiced their concerns due to the following: language barriers and in consequence a lack of confidence; and a personal preference of "not liking" to personally contact any politicians. In Chapter Six I will analyse more thoroughly these factors that impacted political participation of immigrant women in Lethbridge.

5.3.2 Signing petitions

Not surprisingly, the majority of the immigrant women I interviewed signed a petition at least once. Among the modes of political participation I included in my interview

guide, signing petitions was the most widespread type of political participation among both citizens and permanent residents not considering elections. Moreover, many women prefer to sign a petition rather than personally contacting any politicians. Hence, I will present the different types of petitions signed by the participants in order to report the diversity of issues they are engaged in, which reflects the social or political change they want to see in their community.

All the women I interviewed were aware of what signing a petition is. All of the women felt positively about signing a petition and were willing to sign a petition if it reflected their beliefs or opinions. For example, Lily did not sign the petition against Lethbridge fracking as she did not agree with it:

Yes, that was in my work, they did the same thing, but no I didn't sign it because I didn't believe in it. If I believed, yes sure...

Lily explained her disagreement with the petition as she is a scientist in ecology and knows how important these experiments are in the sciences. At the same time, she did not share the people's worries that fracking would cause extensive ecological harm. Undoubtedly, Linda, Anna and Irene signed a petition pertaining to fracking in Lethbridge. More interesting, Kristine, Sherri and Norah also signed a petition against the drilling in Lethbridge. Furthermore, Anna and Linda also signed a petition against the funding cuts of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Similarly, Katie shared her experience with signing petitions:

Yeah I like that, the signing petitions. I think I signed a couple of them. I don't want to say a couple of them but I signed a petition I just don't even remember very much, but you know that was for gender, like you have a choice to abort a child. That was a petition, I feel that I just like that because you, when a mother, I know it's not a very good idea to abort, but when you know that you are not going to give good life to the person who is coming and if you want to cease that it's a personal choice.

While serving on a parent's group board, Kristine signed another petition against funding cuts in education, which was circulated by the other parents in her daughter's school. Rosie, who was not interested in being active in the local community and in politics, signed a petition in Canada supporting Russians who live in Russia. In accordance with her activism with missing and murdered indigenous women, Lisa signed petitions demanding a response. As Nancy was not sure what is meant by signing a petition, I probed it by suggesting an example of the recent petition against the taxation of feminine hygienic products in Canada; and she remembered that she signed it as well. Many women are eager to sign a petition, particularly when it affects them personally in a negative way. For instance, Lucy, who did not take part in non-conventional political activities, signed a petition against cutting funds in her field, which would affect her personally. Nevertheless, only three participants had never signed a petition—neither in Canada nor in their home countries—Lily, Sarah, and Mary. Mary never signed a petition because: "*Nobody ever asked me to do it...*"

Considering how many participants of my research signed a petition at least once, this is evidence that immigrant women feel secure and positive about signing petitions. Signing a petition is a political act which individuals utilize for expressing their political voice by providing a written form signed by many people to political authorities or entities (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009, p. 728). Gidengil and Stolle (2009) note that petitions mostly address issues such as human rights, environmental issues, and fair labour standards. This aligns with this study where the main petition indicated by the immigrant women was the prevention of fracking in Lethbridge, an environmental concern. Also, in signing a petition, all the participants were reached to sign one which did not take a lot of time or money, and did not presume a high level of English skills. This finding is supported by Rooij (2011), who argues that

immigrants in Western Europe are more likely to sign a petition than to be engaged with a political party, as the former does not require a large social network and also other resources such as money or time (p. 470). All of the research participants were willing to sign a petition, particularly if the issue affected them personally, and, as presented above, some of them had already done so. Most importantly, the participants who had never signed any petition simply never had a chance or a “reason” to do so, and any other constraints were not identified by the participants.

5.3.3 Protests

Protests are not very common among immigrant women in Lethbridge. Only immigrant women who have been active with different groups or clubs participated in protests in Canada. However, some of the participants took part in protests in their home countries but not in Canada.

As members of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Union, Anna and Irene took part in protests and strikes for better conditions for nurses (e.g. wages, pensions, etc.) in the 1980s. Also, Linda remembered two protests she took part in: one of them was in Calgary against tuition fee increases, and the second one was against US President George Bush when he came to Calgary:

Well, definitely the fees in Calgary protest. Oh I know, we went this was in Calgary there 4 of us; we were all immigrants actually women and we protested against George Bush when he came to Calgary in the G8...

In Lethbridge, Linda participated only in the anti-fracking protest.

As previously discussed, some of the participants took part in protests in their home countries. Before coming to Canada, when Elena was an undergraduate student back in Bangladesh, she had been a very active student who would take part in many activities organised on campus. For example, Elena took part in a protest that was

dedicated to a girl who was raped:

So in the university when I was doing my bachelor's I would participate in anything what would happen, so one was like I can tell you it , one of my friend she was from a different department so she has been raped and that protest was really milestone for us so.

However, Elena never participated in any demonstration or protest in Canada. She explained:

People were offering [to take part in a protest] few days ago I got offer to go to anti-bullying in the workplace ...but I never feel like going, but actually because I don't have time I'm kind of person if I do something I want to do that from my heart with full respect and full time but so I don't have like enough time to do some research and talk about these kind of things

Although Nancy did not take part in any protest in Canada, in Bangladesh she joined a protest against a principal, who was forced to resign because of political affiliation. Sherri also joined a protest in the Philippines against a Christian fee hike; however, she did not take part in any protests in Lethbridge. Two immigrant women from China did not participate in any protests either in Canada or in China. Particularly, while talking about their political experience in China, both participants said that protests could not possibly occur as the government will not let that happen.

It is clear that from the immigrant women only Lisa, who possesses permanent residency, joined protests in Lethbridge. It is also important to remember her activism within her own club which promotes social justice, and her engagement in different clubs. Furthermore, among immigrant women with citizenship only three senior ladies (Anna, Linda and Irene) took part in protests elsewhere in Canada and in Lethbridge. Equally important, some of the women (Sherri, Elena, and Nancy) took part in protests back in their home countries. However, all of them explained it differently. For instance, Elena was an undergraduate student in Bangladesh with more time to dedicate to activism, and more importantly, when she commits to anything, she wants to be absolutely involved in it. Elena said: “from my heart with full respect.” Nancy

voiced her personal dislike of politics, which was generated from her home country. Sherri explained that she has recently become a citizen in Canada, and since she did not have a right to vote earlier she did not really care about the local politics.

5.3.4 Political rally

Throughout the interviews conducted for this research, most of the immigrant women would focus on conventional participation while talking about political participation. All the participants who were eligible to vote had a very serious attitude towards elections and were cautious about their responsibility (voting) as citizens. Although most of the immigrant women eligible to vote exercised their right and responsibility as a citizen, few of them were involved in other conventional activities (i.e., donating money to a political party, campaign rallying) rather than just voting.

The only immigrant women who took part in a political rally either in Canada or in their home countries were the two senior ladies—Anna and Linda. Anna joined rallies twice, which occurred in Lethbridge. The first was dedicated to Rachel Notley, provincial leader of the NDP and now premier when she visited Lethbridge, and the second was the campaign rally for Maria Fitzpatrick, provincial MLA in Lethbridge. In contrast to her political activism, Irene never joined any political rally in Canada, unlike in Ireland which she explained as the following:

You know maybe in Ireland you were influenced by your family whereas when you leave home you need to think yourself, sometimes your affiliation is affected by your shift work, but I can say I was more involved than my friends or colleagues.

Lily, who never joined any political rally either in Canada or in her home country, expressed a very interesting opinion about being involved in a political rally in Iran. She describes how that particular political experience might turn out to be a dangerous practice:

No, it is dangerous country to be politically involved. As I said my friend could be a good choice for you to talk to. She used to be in women groups of activities, that's why maybe they moved from Iran. You better run for your life no jokes with that government.

Even though almost all immigrant women who had citizenship took part in elections and exercised their right in a responsible manner, only one immigrant woman joined rallies. Considering the social location of Lethbridge and its community, there are not many political cafés or clubs that would encourage people to get involved in rallies or other type of “collective behaviour” activities, or would provide a platform to have political debates. The main factor that influenced Anna to get involved with the campaign rally was that she personally knew Maria Fitzpatrick and was confident that she is a very good candidate. Intersections of race, age and being a native English speaker affected her willingness to get involved. Minority immigrant women in this study who were from developing countries with corrupted politics, mostly had young families and children, and lack language skills, did not consider getting involved in this kind of political activities. Moreover, they did not have social networks that might encourage them to become politically engaged as in the case of Anna.

5.3.5 Donating money to political party and activist groups

Donating money to political parties was not a common experience among the immigrant women I interviewed. The only participants who donated money to a political party and activist groups were members of those political parties or activist groups. Anna and Kristine both made donations to political parties when they joined these parties accordingly.

Although having limited economic resources, Lisa “donates” another kind of resource to the political party activism—time. She said,

I'm trying to use my time and my skills more than money. Just because I also believe that there is a difference between charities and like activism and grassroots foundations. like I don't mind donating money cause I think that it's also important, but I think it's more important to like do every day actions to change an ideology so if I can, like I have a wide voice like I can present my ideas well usually, so I can do it more than I can donate money at this stage of my life, I definitely want to contribute more of my physical presence.

Irene was the only participant who donated money to the activist groups. She particularly donated money to a women's group. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that most of the participants made donations to medical foundations and charities. For example, Elena is a member of Canadian Cancer Society and she is a regular donor to their fund drives. Nancy also makes donations to the Canadian Cancer Society. Kristine is sponsoring two children through World Vision, and, at the same time, makes donations to the Lethbridge Community Family Centre and Food Bank. Sherri also sponsors a child from the Philippines and she has been active with the Red Cross as well. Lily prefers to help people who live in developing countries and she makes donations to children who live in Africa through UNICEF, and said:

So monthly it goes from our pay-checks, but not here. I'm thinking about maybe I'm right or wrong, I always prefer to send money to other countries that they don't have good economy if you are from poor family, there is no way you can live good, you always going live good, but here if you poor it's because you are just lazy...

Lucy made some donations to the Food Bank. She also donated money to the Salvation Army, Value Village, Canadian Diabetes Association, and the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. Anna shared her authentic experience in making different donations this way,

Apart from the church, where I give a regular monthly donation that comes out from our bank account. And oh I have friend who writes for the right to conquer the cancer so she writes every year, so I always give her donation for that. Then my husband had kidney disease, a kidney transplant so I always give once a year to the kidney foundation and then I had a friend who died from ovarian cancer so I usually donate to the ovarian cancer Walk of Hope in September.

Mary contributes only to one medical foundation—the Alzheimer Society. When I asked Sarah about her donations to any activist groups, she shared:

Not to political groups but to the cerebral palsy association, to the diabetic association too.

Most of the immigrant women who are permanent residents did not make any donations to any charities, except Nancy. Rosie had plans to start making donations to Russian children in Russia:

I would like to do separate account and to give money to Russian fund to support children, I will arrange it soon.

While talking about the economic condition of her family, Norah mentioned that she does not like to be engaged with many activities as they require membership fees or donations.

The fact that immigrant women do not take part in other non-conventional political activities, shows how important the role of signing petitions is: almost every woman signed a petition at least once. In this research, signing a petition was rated as the second most common mode of political participation among the immigrant women after voting in elections. Analyzing the process of signing petitions in relation to factors that impact political participation reveals an interesting finding: signing a petition is a short process which does not consume a lot of time; it does not have any political implications on the signers personally; it does not require much language facility. Obviously, signing a petition addresses most of the constraints identified by the participants in this research.

5.3.6 Political activities undertaken by immigrant women for social change

Drawing upon Ackelsberg's broad concept of political participation, the interview question about political activity promoting social change envisages a context to involve a variety of political activities undertaken by immigrant women.

According to the findings reported in the previous chapter, few of the participants joined a political activity promoting social change. Among all the citizen participants only three senior ladies had experience in this kind of political activity. The range of political activities related to issues such as nurses' rights, child poverty, gay marriage, social injustice, indigenous rights, and fracking. It is crucial to note that Linda, Anna, and Irene took part in these activities as members of unions, clubs or organisations. This is consistent with another study (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009), which states that membership in associations might result in an increase in political knowledge through social networks.

To explore different political activities aiming to promote social change among immigrant women, research participants were asked to remember any political activities that they took part in as a member of any group or just by themselves for promoting social change. Most of the immigrant women who undertook any political activity promoting social change, likewise protests, were members of a club and/or group. In most cases, when I asked the participants if they undertook any political activity promoting social change, the response was negative. However, all of the women who had never participated in any political activity for promoting social change were willing to take part in any political activity if it is reasonable and interesting to them or if it affects them personally.

Eight of the participants indicated that they are members of religious organisations. In most of the cases, women would be also involved in activities initiated by their religious organisation. However, only one of them mentioned that some activities might be political ones aiming to bring social change. Anna said,

I'm sure there is stuff in Calgary that I did. The United Church is very inclusive, so there was a big debate about gays' rights so a lot of people left the church... so they were inviting gay people and welcoming gay people. And the United Church actually agreed that they would perform marriage

ceremonies for gay people, and so I did joined the committee, that was involved with the church becoming Affirming Church. It was in Lethbridge too...

The two senior ladies (Anna and Irene) took part in strikes and demonstrations regarding issues which were affecting them personally in their 30s, as they were both nurses and they were fighting for nurses' labour rights. Anna and Irene recently retired from nursing but took part in strikes in 1980s. Moreover, Irene, as a member of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Union executive board, has been advocating with the government at the local and provincial level. Although Irene and Anna joined nurses' strikes in their early 30s, Linda became more active in the political domain after her retirement. Anna and Linda, as active members of CFUW, became involved in anti-fracking activities. As Linda indicated,

The [women's] group here became very active with fracking thing...They were going to drill for oil, so we became involved and we got signatures, and actually I was on television getting signatures. We took part in protest with big signs but we couldn't call our self CFUW, it hadn't been passed by Canadian head so we called ourselves Black Spots...

Another initiative Anna and Irene got involved in was dedicated to child poverty in Alberta. Anna said,

...we all made these dolls and they were called poverty dolls and we tried to get, I think 90.000 children, oh yeah, we gave each MLA and parliament one of these dolls. So I have got involved with this, so I made quite a few. so she went up to Edmonton and gave all the MPs a doll and that was to represent the children in poverty, but then we cut out paper dolls, and we strung them into one big banner. I think at that time 72.000 children in Alberta who were in poverty, so we did 72.000 these paper dolls.

Most of the immigrant women who have permanent residency did not participate in any political activity for promoting social change. The only active participant among permanent residents is Lisa, who was not active politically before starting university, and now undertakes many interesting activities. Even though realizing that she is not eligible to vote, Lisa was "campaigning" among her friends

and peers unofficially, and said:

...with recent election [provincial elections] particularly on social media I was a big advocate of NDP, and I attended some community meetings and I also tried to encourage people to vote. With our club we organised an activity of like voting station shuttle that people who didn't know where to vote or didn't have like a vehicle could contact us and we could provide a drive or instructions how to vote...

She explained her activism aiming to see a positive change in her community:

I definitely I promoted NDP, I didn't volunteer for them specifically. I really supported them because being in Lethbridge and learning about Canadian history and learning about Indigenous issues and Indigenous rights they are the only party that supported that and also other environmental and social factors that are fundamental to me for like fully functioning healthy economy and like, happy citizens, so I really try to promote that and people that were scared having a non-conservative government I tried like explain my opinion, in a way I was doing lots of interpersonal campaigning on a daily basis.

Lisa is also very active in social media where she tries to support and encourage feminist activities:

and also I very like political individuals now so mostly by social media and by like different activities that I support like I try to support feminist kind of activities and organisations and things like that so yeah I'm very big in my online presence, also in the classroom also in the community like I tie myself quite strongly to different movements. So even I wasn't able to vote I was trying to get other people to vote 'cause I think democracy is important.

It is important to note that Lisa is a president of a newly established campus club, which focuses on issues in social injustice. However, before coming to Canada, Lisa did not have any knowledge about politics in Canada and has had never been interested in political issues. She said,

When I first moved to Canada though, my parents taught me that politics was just stress, so I wasn't politically engaged, I didn't know how like provincial and federal levels government work, I didn't really know anything and I wasn't engaged in community and social and political issues. It wasn't until University began.

Lisa, one of the youngest participants with permanent resident status, was involved in a range of political activities: non-official campaigning for the NDP party, voicing

social injustice issues in Lethbridge through the newly established club's newsletter, and revealing issues concerning missing and murdered indigenous women. Nevertheless, there are a few important factors to mention about Lisa: before starting her program with a major in Sociology, she had not had any political knowledge about Canadian politics for two and a half years; she has been always discouraged by her family who taught her that "*politics is always stressful*"; she does not have any children, and she is active with different clubs on campus.

Some of the participants never thought about taking part in any political activity. When I asked the participants whether they would like to participate in any political activity that might affect them or their family personally, which would also promote social change, almost all of the interviewees demonstrated an interest in taking part in activities that might affect them personally or might be relevant to them. For example, Nancy mentioned:

Actually I never thought about it, actually your question knocked my brain, I would definitely...

Nancy was concerned about the discrimination and prejudice toward Muslims in the airports and on campus as well (for example, women harassed for wearing hijab, men called Mohammad); therefore, she was willing to take part in activities that might address these issues.

As Ackelsberg notes women's activism historically broadened the understanding of what is politics. She argues that studying women's activism will enhance our understanding of "traditional domain of politics" and at the same time will challenge our understandings of practices of political participation and citizenship (2010, p. 132; 144). When we look at non-conventional political participation in Lethbridge, one marginalized group among participants are immigrant women, particularly those who have not acquired citizenship yet and who have been mostly

overlooked by political scientists. Immigrant women's activism in Lethbridge pertaining to indigenous women's rights, child poverty, gay marriage, social injustice, and fracking demonstrates the usefulness of Ackelsberg's theory (2010) in broadening the concept of political participation regarding which issues can be considered "appropriate" to politics. However, immigrant women enhance Ackelsberg's theory, by challenging that examining non-conventional participation of *immigrant* women will complement the wide range of political activities. In this study, those activities mentioned above were practiced by only majority immigrant women who were from developed countries, retired or young with no children, and members of groups with political affiliation.

Thus, immigrant women in Lethbridge were not active in political activities promoting social change. The most active women among the participants, who had initiated many social and political activities, were senior ladies engaged in different clubs and organisations/associations. It has been a long time since these senior ladies acquired citizenship in Canada (more than 35 years). The other middle-aged immigrant women who had recently acquired citizenship (2-8 years ago) did not take part in any political activities aiming social change in their community. In terms of immigrant women who possess permanent residency, the only woman who participated in political activities became interested and more active after becoming a student at the University of Lethbridge with a major in Sociology. It is also important to note that she is married with no children. In Lethbridge, intersection of immigration status, ethnicity, family/children, language skills and age affect non-conventional political participation. It is important to note that I do not privilege any of these factors/social categories as every immigrant woman's experiences are different. Immigrant women's experiences reveal that middle-aged women from developing

countries who have young families and difficulties in communicating in English were not interested and in some cases even did not consider getting involved in political activities that would promote social change in their communities.

5.4 Immigrant women and their level of political participation

In contrast to other studies (Read, 2007; Jones-Correa, 1998; McIlwaine & Bermúdez, 2011; Kondo, 2012; Gidengil, 2007) that focus on gender gaps in political participation among immigrants, this study only explored immigrant women's political participation. Black (2011) argues that immigrants' level of political incorporation is very close to that of Canadian-born citizens. But this is in contrast to the findings of this study that found that the overall level of immigrant women's participation among most modes of political participation in Lethbridge is low. Furthermore, the latter is supported by other studies (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; O'Neil, Gidengil & Young, 2012), which claim that immigrant women's political integration is not complete because of their low participation.

The two theoretical framework applied in this study were useful in terms of defining what can be considered political participation within its wide range of activities initiated by women's activism, and, at the same time, inclusivity of these two theories in terms of "participants" in political activities. Burt (2002) acknowledges the fact that political scientists expanded the narrow definitions of political participation since 1980s and that contemporary studies examine intersection of gender, ethnicity and age. In addition, Ackelsberg (2010) calls for broadening the study of women's activism in order to integrate the full range of activities undertaken by women.

Considering that most of the immigrant women are not active in the political domain, there is no difference among permanent residents and citizens in terms of

non-conventional participation. Both have low levels of political participation. However, if we consider social categories such as gender, age and ethnicity suggested by Burt (2002), the situation changes, as the only participants in non-conventional participation were Linda, Anna, Irene and Lisa who were also the only participants for conventional activities (except for voting). Ackelsberg (2010) highlights the importance of examining non-conventional participation in order to have a complete image of political participation. However, she discussed that anyone can get involved in non-conventional activities regardless of their citizenship status. The same attitude towards non-conventional political participation was expressed by immigrant women in Lethbridge. As most of the permanent residents and citizens mentioned, they do not see a reason to be engaged in the political domain if they cannot vote. In terms of conventional participation, the level of immigrant women's participation by means of voting is the highest compared to other modes of political participation, as most of them voted in the recent provincial elections (May, 2015). This finding is consistent with the study of Gidengil and Stolle (2009) that reported almost 57% of survey respondents took part in the recent provincial elections and voting was rated the highest among other modes of political participation (p.742).

As Burt (2002) argues the same political activity might have other meanings for different *citizens*. Immigrant women's experiences with various political activities and intersections of social categories enhance that view: practices of citizenship or political participation have different meanings for different groups of immigrant women. For example, for most minority women in Lethbridge, practices of political participation were limited to the conventional participation which is also reflected in their low participation in different social and political activities in Lethbridge. Thus, the next chapter will present the factors that might affect political participation of

immigrant women resulting in low levels of participation.

Chapter Six

Immigrant women's experiences with political participation: Factors affecting political participation of immigrant women in Lethbridge

One of the main objectives of this study is to identify the factors that might prohibit or inhibit political participation of immigrant women. The low level of immigrant women's political participation presented in the previous chapter presumes factors that affect them. Also, immigrant women were asked what might stop them from undertaking or joining any political activity. Considering that participants had very diverse and particular demographic backgrounds, some factors revealed as a result of the findings might be particular to them as individuals. However, as all the participants had some social features in common (immigration, children and age group), several of the factors such as time management and personal interest are common for most of them. It is also important to note that different factors such as economic stability, linguistic barriers, and immigration status were revealed when exploring particular modes of political participation. For that reason, I will analyze which mode of political participation is associated with that factor accordingly.

In contrast to other research (Ginieniewicz, 2007) that examines factors that promote or inhibit political participation of particular groups, such as Latin Americans in Toronto, I studied a demographically diverse group of immigrant women in Lethbridge. Ginieniewicz (2007) argues that factors such as personal relationships, age, personal interest, previous political participation, language, discrimination, lack of knowledge and time, and education impact political participation of Latin American immigrants in Canada. In this study, I assessed the following factors: immigration status, country of origin and political experience there, time, language barriers,

opportunity, education, economic stability, personal interest in politics, membership in organisations and associations, and age. These factors were revealed during the discussions with the research participants and the intersectionality of women's social categories and experiences. Although this study and Ginieniewicz's research examine different demographic groups, most of the factors identified in this study appear similar to previous studies on immigrant women in Toronto (Ginieniewicz, 2007).

6.1 The impact of immigration status on political participation

Burt (2002) and Ackelsberg's (2010) theories on political participation challenge "fixed identity categories" presumed in political participation that deny the complexity of gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, class, and age (Ackelsberg, 2010, p. 142; Burt, 2002). Acknowledging the fact that citizens are not the only ones "eligible" to participate in politics, I decided to examine not only immigrant women who have citizenship, but also permanent residents who are overlooked in the field. During the whole research process I was paying attention to the immigration status of the participants in order to explore the political participation of immigrant women who have permanent residency. In the same vein, I was keeping in mind the complexity of gender, age, and ethnicity, which is addressed in Burt's and Ackelsberg's theories.

As discussed previously, political participation includes a range of activities like protesting against established policies in an attempt to convince governments to change or adapt policies (Burt, 2002, p.232). Furthermore, Burt states that "we have moved on to discussions of ethnicity, gender and age that will, hopefully, make the next generation of political scientists more sensitive to the issues that have been ignored for so long by leading members of the discipline" (2002, p. 244). Continuing the discussion on identities that were ignored by political scientists in relation to

political participation, Ackelsberg questions: “Are there any differences in patterns of engagement or in grounds of mobilization, by race? class? age? region?” (2010, p.138). The three categories (gender, age and ethnicity) were reflected in the findings of this study; however, the findings challenge one more identity category—immigration status, which was not addressed in the two theories mentioned above. The findings of this research report that retired immigrant women who are “white” with European ancestry were more politically active compared to middle-aged non-white women. But what really mattered to immigrant women of this research in relation to political participation was immigration status. Looking at categories mentioned by both theorists we can make an assumption that political participants have to be citizens. In other words, neither of them mentioned that for non-conventional participation immigrant women are not required to be citizens. Even for conventional participation, immigrant women are eligible for all activities apart from voting. Not indicating immigration status among the “identities categories” in relation to political participation generates an assumption that immigrant women who undertake political participation might have different ethnicities, or ages but are assumed to be citizens. Equally important, the same assumption was voiced by the majority of research participants who possess permanent residency or acquired citizenship recently. For example, Elena and Sherri correlated political participation with citizenship. Elena said that she is planning to be more politically active as she is now a citizen:

No I didn't [participate] but I want to because I just became citizen last July, so I'm fairly new but this year I voted but before voting I was following what political leaders were saying . I also followed the results very closely and I still follow NDP activities. Before I became a citizen I didn't feel like , I feel like if I'm not going to vote but I was , when I started to work here I was still following some of political activities because we get our fund from the government so when government changes it affects us or any financial decision made by the government about the institution also affects us so it's

kind of interest for me but after becoming citizen obviously...

Sherri shared that she took part in some protests in the Philippines, and explained the reason for participating in the Philippines but not in Canada as the following:

Because in Philippines I'm a national and I'm a citizen and then like the person I know, the person I was campaigning for, I know here in Canada we just became Canadians recently, so until then I didn't really care about what is political. Cause it's not like I have right to vote, and then I can't do anything if I'm not a citizen. Let the citizens decide it, because I can't vote anyway...

Sherri's and Elena's responses identify the importance of immigration status in relation to political participation for immigrant women in light of the relatively higher level of political participation in their home countries as citizens there. Sherri explained that she did not see the importance of being politically active before acquiring citizenship in Canada as she cannot vote and change anything. Therefore, the status of "citizenship" grants them confidence to voice concerns as "citizens."

Almost all of the participants reported difficulties in pursuing social and economic integration; in particular, immigration was a stressful process for some of the newly immigrated families. Most importantly, the majority of the immigrant women correlated political activism with citizenship, and identified some implications of immigrant status: a sense of belonging; eligibility to vote; and the sense of responsibility and duty as a citizen. For instance, Rosie indicated that she does not feel like a "Canadian" but feels like a "visitor," which makes her think that her voice is not important enough to join non-conventional activities:

There are number of reasons: first I'm not Canadian, I feel like I'm visiting so my voice is not so important. I'm an immigrant and I immigrated because I didn't agree with political activities in my country so I moved to the country I like, and there is no way I want to change anything here, I love everything here for now and why I should change something?

Similar to these findings Painter-Main (2014) argues that immigrants might feel they are "outsiders" and avoid participating in any political activities. Nevertheless, not all

immigrant women who have recently become Canadian citizens feel sufficiently confident to get politically engaged in Canada. Even though she is a Canadian citizen, Lucy feels different in Canada; she feels she is discriminated against in the process of searching for a job. For this reason, she explained that she is more likely to be politically active in Iran, as there are more issues that she does not agree with, and issues that might be more related to her belief and culture that she is more confident to talk about. A similar opinion was expressed by Rosie that she does not feel confident getting involved in the political sphere in Canada. More specifically, she does not feel comfortable to be politically active for the following reason: she does not have a sense of belonging in Canada yet, which inhibits her political participation. She said,

It's just an immigrant way, you know if you don't like just move away. I remember a saying in my country: you don't set rules when you are a guest. So I feel like a guest so what is the reason I will make new rules in house that I don't belong to.

Most of the immigrant women in this study did not feel as full members of the society or community, or, in other words, were not integrated socially during the first few years after arrival. The social integration resulted in other implications pertaining to a sense of belonging. For instance, few participants mentioned that their voice is not important especially as they are not citizens; even after acquiring citizenship the feeling of an “immigrant” and being “different” is still prevalent among the immigrant women, which impacts their political participation in Lethbridge. Lucy who had been a citizen for a few years, mentioned that she still feels like an immigrant in Canada; and she is more likely to be active in Iran because people share the same values and aspirations.

Equally important, Liza is a good example of how an individual who is not a citizen can contribute to the community by voicing issues on social injustice. Being knowledgeable about her rights and having a strong desire to see positive change in

her community, she even got involved in non-official campaigning during the provincial elections in Alberta in 2015. This kind of experience should be acknowledged by future theorists and politicians to encourage political integration of newcomers.

Thus, the emergent finding of this study is that immigration status does matter. Ackelsberg (2010) who calls for research to explore women's non-conventional participation, should consider how immigration status might affect the level of political participation of an immigrant woman who is, for example, a permanent resident and not eligible to vote. Ackelsberg argues that women are sometimes more active in non-conventional political activities. However, the immigrant women of this study enhance our understanding of how the intersection of immigration status, age, family, and ethnicity, affect immigrant women's non-conventional participation. Further, immigration status in relation to political participation matters for both conventional and non-conventional activities. Even during the provincial and federal elections in 2015, it seems that none of the political parties considered approaching immigrant women who are permanent residents to join a campaign or to become a political party member. Thus, political parties are unlikely to seek out permanent residents for support.

In contrast to Ackelsberg's and Burt's studies, there is a study (Abu-Laban, 2002) that refers to immigration status in relation to political participation. Abu-Laban (2002) examines political participation in relation to gender and ethnicity. Although this study argues that definitions of political participation by political theorists only consider citizens' political activities, Abu-Laban does not expand on how immigration status might affect political participation or how immigration might be integrated into the complexity of gender, ethnicity, and age. In contrast, another study (O'Neil,

Gidengil & Young, 2012) that considered the concept of immigration while investigating political participation of immigrant minority women, only studied the immigrant women who possess citizenship and argued that immigration impacts political participation of women.

6.2 Country of origin and personal interest in politics within their previous political experiences

Participants in this study had similar responses to the question “what stops you from joining a political activity?” Almost all of the immigrant women who do not have any interest in politics were originally from non-democratic or politically corrupt countries. Equally evident, none had positive experiences with politics/political activities in their home countries. The country of origin then is a crucial factor relevant to political participation.

Before being interviewed, a few immigrant women mentioned that they were not the best candidates for my research as they were not informed about politics and they did not take part in any political activities. In particular, throughout the interview, when I asked them about their political activities, some of the participants indicated that they did not have an interest in politics, or simply did not like politics without identifying any real reason. For instance, Katie shared:

I never had an interest in politics, honestly...

In the same way, Nancy explained:

Personally, I don't like politics, that's why here in Canada my mind does not tell me to go to join any activities like that, because I'm living my life in a different way, I have many things in my life to do, I don't like to and really don't need to join these stuff, I think it makes people's life really complicated...

Crucially, before talking about her lack of interest in politics, Nancy expressed her opinion about the politics in her country:

I don't like any political activities from my childhood, because in Bangladesh the political system is really corrupted. It's sad but true the whole world is corrupted. Especially political stuff, I don't like corruption I like to have very simple life.

Elena and Nancy who were originally from Bangladesh mentioned that the political system is corrupted back in their home country which reflected their attitude towards politics. They expressed lack of trust and lack of interest in politics. When I asked Nancy how she felt about Canada, she replied:

No Canada is much better than other countries, of course there is still corruption but they like to think about safety of their people, I love Canada because of the safety issues, maybe there is crime in bigger cities but in small cities like Lethbridge there is less crime that's why I like Lethbridge, that's another reason.

Katie who shared that she never had interest in politics was born and raised in Bhutan under an absolute monarchical system, which restricts political activism in the country. Similarly, Lily and her husband have not had any trust in politics until now. She was raised in a country where the political system is corrupted and where being politically active might be even dangerous. Tastsoglou and Miedema (2003) have similar findings; they argue that political situations in immigrant women's home countries affect political engagement in host countries.

Regardless of their length of residence in Canada and their age when they arrived in Canada, immigrant women from developing countries with corrupt politics had a very low level of political participation in Lethbridge. Immigrant women of this study revealed that political experiences in their home countries is a strong factor that affects their interest in politics and willingness of getting involved in any political activity except for voting. In contrast to Ramakrishnan's study (as cited in Black, 2011, p.1174) that argues immigrants from non-democratic countries are likely to vote less, in this research, country of origin impacted political participation in terms of non-conventional political participation, but not voting itself as all the immigrant

women who were eligible to vote took part in elections except for Sarah. Nancy and Elena who acquired their second degrees in Canada and arrived Canada at a younger age compared to other women, still did not get involved in any political activities even as students on campus. Most of the women who witnessed negative political experiences in their home countries spoke about their lack of trust in politics. Even though acknowledging that the political system in Canada is different, they would not get involved in any activities unless they affect them personally (for example, funding cuts). Thus, the previous negative experiences in the political sphere inhibit immigrant women's political participation in Lethbridge regardless of their immigration status.

6.3 Time management

Most of the participants explained their low level of political participation because of lack of time. More than half of the participants mentioned lack of time as a constraint for political participation. It is important to note that all the women who mentioned it have children and family. Furthermore, most of them shared that they prefer to spend their spare time with their children and family. For example, Elena explained that she does not have time for political participation and that her family is her number one priority:

Actually, I don't have enough time with my job and my family, because my family is my first priority.

Similarly, Sherri indicated in the beginning that one of the reasons which prohibited her political participation was time:

I just don't have time. All my free time is like for the weekend is full, yeah, it's spoken for. It's hard when you have kid and you have to do everything by yourself, right...

Even though time was mentioned as a main reason for inhibiting immigrant women's political participation, I explored that time might be one of the reasons, not the main

reason for restricting political participation. For instance, Lily, indicated that time prohibited her from political participation:

The first thing is of course the time. The timing for me is kind of wrong, maybe when I'm a little older and kind of retired then I have more time to do that. But not it's not really as I said when we first came here because we had lack of trust to politicians, of course it kept me back. but now I can trust them more even I think partially they are still corrupted but they are most trustable than that what we have there of course. And I would like, you know your voice will be heard at least here right? So I don't mind to go for any of those, but as I said like the time is not helping.

Later, she explained her busy schedule of having a child, a family and a lot of friends affect time management. Although her husband would be willing to take care of their son while she joins a political activity, Lily was unaware that she can attend many political activities with her son. Whether there are other reasons disguised as a "lack of time," needs to be considered. Lily described her situation:

Even before that because our life here was crazy so we should have always pursue the money. It's not like as I said I do not want to participate, I always think about it, even talk about it like "oh this year I want to go and advertise for this party that I like more" but never worked out. The only thing I have now we discuss politics with one of my co-workers who is from Ukraine and he is very involved in politics, we always discuss, we always have the opposite directions though. There is a little bit of conflict there but well...

The main reason for Lily's low political participation is her lack of trust in politics, which was generated in her home country by witnessing people's unsuccessful experience of political participation and corrupt politics. She said,

...mostly didn't have time to volunteer for anything, it's not like I don't have in my heart, but I really want to. but I need to make time for it like politics involving in it, I have not had any chance to, the thing is we don't, from the background I have, for the ages I have been here, I didn't really trust the politics and politicians and that's why, like in Iran right? We don't trust politicians of course and people are very involved in politics [in Canada]. Like I still follow up some to see what's going on here. No mostly here, because back in Iran it's mostly helpless anyways. I do go of course for voting and stuff like that, but my husband doesn't believe that and says: "oh they are always cheating," because we do have that mentality of cheating on votes. You are not part of the politics, but here you can really be part of the politics...

Although in the beginning Lily explained her lack of political participation because of time, later she disclosed her and her family's lack of trust in politics. Lily has been living in Canada for more than fifteen years, but she had not been politically integrated. Simply, politics has never been part of her lifestyle; neither before coming to Canada nor after living for many years in Canada. Kristine also explained her lack of participation because of lack of time. However, while comparing conventional political participation of immigrants from Nigeria in Canada and back in Nigeria, she expressed interesting ideas which identified how previous political experiences and motivations might affect current political participation:

Back home we take voting seriously, people would risk their life and go for voting, even when they know that these guys will get there and they will kill you...when we leave home and we come here we feel like most of the needs we are challenged over there they are met here. So people become careless what else is happening. When people here call for a vote, they are like ah, I have power, transport, I get paid. So you are fine with that because it is what you are trying to vote for over there. The all motivation for vote is not there. There is not that much to decide to change anything.

More specifically, Kristine identifies how different stages of immigrants' adaptation impact their political participation. For example, as she mentioned above in the beginning of their arrival and social integration process, they have different motivations and reasons for political participation which reflects the politics in the country of origin. For example, back in Nigeria, people fight for basic human rights and public utilities, for example, water or electricity. As Kristine explained after arriving Canada the motivations for getting involved in political activities change:

Then we begin to learn more. And more of us engage in true work. And we engage with higher powers and higher authorities. We start to understand that things are happening and people need to begin to vote on salient issues that when they will come out, you will be shocked when was that it was passed, you hear how bills are being passed... I'm not like that, ah bills whatever it does not bother me... Now you begin to bother because things include your religious rights, your value as a family so now people are attentive to those type of things, if your status does not let you vote but just be aware of that it, what the

bill means. What it imply you and your family, so people now are getting more and more aware... It's not about your day to day life; it's about your values.

Kristine interpreted the meaning and the role of political participation for Nigerians differs back in her home country and in Canada. After immigrants relocate to a developed country like Canada, the scope of people's needs and concerns change. Now, immigrants concern themselves about freedom to exercise their religion and cultural values. Like Kristine, Rosie mentioned a few times that she is passive in any political activities as she does not see a reason to change anything in Canada, Rosie said,

I think since I'm immigrant and I immigrated because I didn't agree with political activities in my country so I moved to the country I like and it's no way I want to change anything here. I love everything here for now and why I should change something? It's just immigrant way, you know if you don't like just move away... For sure some activists come and ask if you want to sign something, I'm very passive and I have my family, I think I should improve life of my family instead of going out, like it's just my choice, I should start the change from myself and family, instead of changing the world. Like as I chose to move from Russia instead of changing the country or the world...

Obviously, Rosie, who is still a permanent resident in Canada, is very connected to her country and has in her mind issues and concerns typical to her country. For example, the issues which include but are not limited to lack of job positions and economic instability. However, immigrant women being at this primary stage of social and political integration assume that there is no "real" reason for political participation. For example, Rosie and Norah do not see the importance and value of their participation. Both of them expressed a similar idea about their own political participation while talking about political activity promoting social change. Both of them feel they are each a very "little figure": too little to be capable of bringing any change or their voice is not important. Norah described her case,

I didn't participate anything like that because I always just think I'm a very little figure, nobody will care about me but I think this sort already coming informed so I didn't attend any activity like to fight for better life but I started

to realize it works if you just, what you fight for is good thing for most people here, the government will listen to it so I think may be in my later life I will just start care myself care my idea then I will just speak out and act for my thought, for my life but I mean just now I started to realize that. It will change if you just work for that...

Thus, we can see that being originally from a country where political freedom is not allowed impacts immigrant women's values related to political participation and their own roles as activists in the host society.

Time was the most common excuse among the immigrant women in Lethbridge. Most of the immigrant women who were using time as explanation were those who arrived from developing countries, were employed or trying to find employment and had young families. The most interesting fact is that although time was the first excuse immigrant women would use to explain their lack of political participation, during the discussion immigrant women revealed other factors that affected their political participation. One of these factors was their previous negative experiences with political activities which resulted in the lack of interest in political activities. The second factor was immigration status that led to a lack of confidence and sense of belonging and hence reluctance to join political participation. Thus, we can conclude that "time" is not the only main reason that prevents immigrant women from political participation; a complexity of social categories and different experiences such as immigration status, family status, ethnicity, country of origin, etc. are also significant. However, more in-depth research needs to be conducted in the field in order to explore the following questions. First, what does time stand for when immigrant women use it as an explanation? Second, what makes immigrant women's daily life so occupied that this restricts them from being fully integrated into the society by being politically active, or it is more socially acceptable to have a so-called "I don't have time" as excuse?

6.4 Language

Language barriers are one of the most common challenges that non-native speakers face when they migrate to another country. Most of the participants I interviewed were not native English speakers. They expressed how language barriers impact them negatively at different levels (for instance, social and political involvement). This concern was expressed by Rosie whom I interviewed in Russian. She felt uncomfortable to answer questions with her “bad English.” Similarly, Mary had difficulties with English which restrained her from asking questions with politicians and limited her political knowledge. As per reported findings, language barriers are a substantial factor as they restrict more than political activism. Norah stopped attending parents’ group because of being unable to communicate properly. Gidengil and Stolle (2009) argue that language barriers might impact non-native English speaker immigrant women’s non-conventional political participation and their knowledge about Canadian politics. Ginieniewicz (2007) asserts that the lack of English skills was a barrier for Latin Americans’ political participation, too (p. 337).

6.5 Education

All the immigrant women in this study were highly educated. This limits my research to analyze how education might impact political participation. As all the research participants were highly educated, it is not possible to analyze how the level of education might affect immigrant women’s participation. Considering the fact that immigrant women have low political participation in Lethbridge and some of the participants attended the University of Lethbridge, education did not promote involvement in political participation. However, one participant revealed how a major in a specific field might not only bring awareness of social and political issues happening locally and worldwide, but also increase political participation of an

immigrant woman with permanent resident status. More specifically, Lisa mentioned that she had never been interested in politics before arriving in Lethbridge, especially being discouraged by the family who had associated politics with something negative. Before starting school in Lethbridge as a student in Sociology, she worked for two years and was never involved in any political activity. But learning about social injustices motivated her involvement in many non-conventional and conventional activities although she was not eligible to vote. Even though Liza was not the only student being interviewed she was the only “white” majority immigrant woman who was married with no children. The intersection of education major, ethnicity, language, and family status contributed to her involvement in political participation. Other women who also attended University of Lethbridge with other majors and were representatives of developing countries with lower language skills never got involved in any political or social activities on campus. The most active immigrant women—three senior ladies—in some cases have even lower degrees compared to other immigrant women from developing countries. Thus, immigrant women in Lethbridge reveal that education does not play a big role in a small city like Lethbridge in terms of making people as “attractive network members” due to their education or income in contrast to immigrant women in bigger cities (Gidengil & Stolle, 2009, p. 740). In Lethbridge, immigrant women from English-speaking, developed countries with lower education had more social networks and were more politically involved than other immigrant women from developing countries with higher education.

6.6 Economic stability

Norah revealed how important economic stability is for her family at the moment. One of the reasons that inhibits her political participation is the economic stability of her family. In other words, the first priority for her family is to find a

permanent job and “then to think about other things.” Furthermore, she does not like being asked for donations on different occasions. She said,

First, no time, second just different culture, it is very hard to really participate in that, third reason donations apart this, there are so many donations I don't like this, another thing is at least I think our life is not very stable because I have no job I think the most important thing is finding job then to care about other things...

This finding is similar to other studies (Gidengil, 2007; Gidengil & Stolle, 2009; Stolle & Gidengil, 2010) that established income is a crucial factor in relation to political participation. These studies argue that the greater the income of an immigrant woman’s household, the more she is likely to be politically active.

In terms of employment, immigrant women are divided into three groups in this study: non-employed students, employed middle-aged women and retired senior women. There is no difference among immigrant women from developing countries who are employed or students (non-employed) in terms of their level of political participation. The important factor is that the majority of the participants were citizens and had been living in Lethbridge for a long time: accordingly, it is more likely that they are employed. In summary, economic stability is an important factor in relation to political participation. This is particularly true for immigrant women who have permanent residency; they are more likely to be in the stressful process of finding a permanent job. Having difficult economic conditions in the family inhibit their political participation, particularly for the modes of political participation that involve financial contributions. All the immigrant women who had permanent residency and were not active in the political sphere were from developing countries, had young families with children and were economically unstable as they did not have permanent jobs.

6.7 Opportunity

Drawing upon a literature review in the field, some studies suggested opportunity as a factor that might impact political participation (Mishler & Clarke, 1994). The aim of asking this question was to reveal whether immigrant women are provided an “opportunity” to get involved in political activities. The results of this research show that only a few participants were asked to join political parties or protests. Participants were approached more for political party membership rather than protests. Nevertheless, the majority of participants, particularly those who were not active in the political domain, were not approached by anyone. During the discussion about this question and what kind of concerns they would like to address, I attempted to follow-up with the participants to understand whether they would be interested to join any political activity if it voiced their concern regarding any issue. All the participants were willing to join those political activities unanimously. Moreover, considering that most of the participants had some concerns or questions that they would like to ask politicians but had never done so suggests that they might not even have had the opportunity to do so.

In some other cases, personal subjective reasons were revealed that prevented immigrant women from political participation. For example, Sarah had her own reason for not participating in political activities. She explained that most of the activities are organized during the weekends, which she spends with her son, and there are not activities organized during the week when her son would be in day-care.

Irene, who has always been active in the political domain, has a medical condition that inhibits her activism. She said,

Right now yes because I'm off work with disability and I feel have to be careful, my concern is if I'm seen to be really involved the question will be

asked how I can complete the work? And if I'm really that sick how I can be involved in these political activities, so I feel that I should be careful how involved I get publicly, I might get involved more privately than publicly.

However, she would still try to get involved in a way that does not require physical presence.

For one of the most politically active participants, Linda, the most important factor is that she is interested in what she is doing. She remarks,

Well the only thing that I need to be interested in whatever it is, and whatever activity is needs to be on the same side as what I believe. Otherwise, I wouldn't get involved but my husband doesn't say you can't go or anything like that.

I hypothesized whether immigrant women receive an invitation to join any political activities that might affect the level of their political participation. For that reason, participants were asked if anybody asked them to join a political party or protest. Anna mentioned that she was invited to almost all activities she took part in such as joining NDP political party and an anti-fracking protest. Although Elena was invited as well to join a political party and participate in an anti-bullying campaign in a workplace, she never joined:

People were offering but because, few days ago I got offer to go to anti-bullying in the workplace ...but I never feel like going, but actually because I don't have time. I'm kind of person if I do something I want to do that from my heart with full respect and full time but so I don't have like enough time to do some research and talk about these kind of things.

Irene was invited by the Canadian Federation of Nurses Union in Edmonton to join activities (for example, meeting with the government), but she did not manage to do so because of lack of transportation and her shift work. Irene was also invited to join a political party; however while living in Pincher Creek she did not want to disclose her political affiliation living in such a small community. Kristine joined the Progressive Conservative (PC) party as a result of the PC representative campaign in her church.

However, some of the participants had never been approached by anyone with

an offer to join a political party or protest. Although they have recently acquired citizenship, Lucy, Sarah, Sherri and Mary have never received an invitation to join any political party or protest. This lack of contact might happen because of the delay between acquiring citizenship and political parties receiving updated information from Elections Canada (Bennett & Bayley, 2012). Norah, Katie, Rosie and Nancy, who are permanent residents, also were never asked to join a political party or a protest.

As the interviews were conducted after the Alberta provincial elections in 2015, some of the immigrant women with citizenship reported that they were approached by some political parties who had encouraged them to vote, but they were not offered any political party memberships. Two participants were not approached by anyone even though they had become citizens recently. This is another example of misconception about political participation among immigrant women, which assumes that political participation requires citizenship. As discussed previously immigrant women stated that they have concerns and questions regarding different issues they would like to ask politicians. The women voicing such concerns are from developing countries with low levels of political participation. The fact that they have questions/concerns indicate that they are not involved in the political sphere not because they have no “reason” to get involved but simply they were not given a chance. Immigrant women who were involved with different social and political groups were invited to take part in different political activities. The intersection of age, ethnicity, language, family, and social networking also contributed to their political engagement.

6.8 Membership in organisations, groups or associations

The majority of recent immigrant women I interviewed had some connections with ethnic organisations or even just with people who share the same ethnic

background. However, no political activity was identified within these groups/organisations. Similarly, Stolle and Gidengil (2009) explore social networks and political incorporation of immigrant women, and argue that engagement in ethnic communities is less likely to contribute to political incorporation of immigrant women (p.754).

Immigrant women who were active in non-conventional political activities were members of some organisation or association. As the findings show, Linda, Lisa, Anna and Irene took part in non-electoral activities as members of groups and associations. Gidengil and Stolle (2009, p. 753) claim there is a correlation between membership in any voluntary organisation and political participation of immigrant women.

Thus, participants in this study reveal that immigrant women who are “white” and originally from English-speaking countries are members of social and political organisations or groups get more involved in political activities in comparison to immigrant women who are from developing countries with corrupt politics, have young families, and are, in most cases, economically unstable. More importantly, the participants of this study reveal that immigrant women who are visible minorities in Lethbridge are involved with their own ethnic associations that do not have any political inclinations about issues in their communities.

6.9 Age

As earlier discussed, the most politically active participants were three senior ladies who were from Scotland and Ireland. Irene who does not have children had been always politically active, but Anna and Linda became more politically engaged after retirement. Both Anna and Linda became more involved when their children were in high-school. Particularly, most of the political activities they identified were

undertaken after retirement.

In this research, the factor of age impacted political participation; however it is important to reflect that these three senior ladies had come from similar geopolitical countries and at the same time had lived for many years in Canada. Stolle and Gidengil (2010) note that older women possess more political knowledge than younger women. However, Lisa who was the other active and comparatively young participant was married with no children and was very involved with the local community. Thus, age is a dependant variable which is linked to factors such as family, children, country of origin and economic stability. For example, Lisa who is a “white” immigrant woman is in her early twenties, and does not have children, gets involved in political activities. Similarly, three senior ladies from developed countries got more involved in political sphere after retirement, which they explained partially by not having children to take care of. In the case of immigrant women from developing countries, age did not inhibit or contribute to political participation. For example, Mary who is in her late fifties, widowed with no children and economically stable did not take part in any political activity except for voting.

6.10 Summary

Chapter Six revealed the emergent findings of this research that contribute to feminist scholarship on political participation. There is no study that investigates political participation and immigration status in terms of permanent residency and citizenship separately, exploring how these categories affect immigrants’ political participation, particularly immigrant women. This study attempted to fill the knowledge gap on political participation. As a result, immigrant women of this study expressed that immigration status matters in relation to political participation. The experiences and voices of immigrant women enhanced the two theoretical framework

applied in this study. Burt's and Ackelsberg's theories failed to discuss how immigration status affects political participation. Moreover, the theories overlooked that non-citizens are eligible to participate in all political activities except for elections. Many immigrant women in Lethbridge are not motivated to participate in any political activities as they are not eligible to vote. Participants indicated that citizenship provides them more confidence and a greater sense of belonging which might contribute to their political involvement.

This study revealed factors that account for the low levels of political participation among the immigrant women who participated in this study. The factors include country of origin and immigrant women's experiences with political participation in these countries of origin, time, language, education, economic stability, opportunity, age and their membership in organisations or associations. The factors identified as a result of this research emerge interconnected with other factors. For example, although immigration status was identified as a primary factor, it was not revealed as an isolated factor. On the contrary, immigration status generated implications and appeared interconnected with factors such as language barriers, discrimination (or "feeling different"), time, country of origin and previous political experiences. The factors identified in this study reveal that there is big difference among immigrant women's political participation who came from English-speaking, developed countries in comparison to those who came from developing countries. At the same time, "white" immigrant women's involvement in political and social groups/organisations also contributed to their involvement in political activities in contradiction to immigrant women who are from developing countries and are members of ethnic or religious organisations.

To sum up, this study enhanced the theoretical framework applied in this study by examining immigrant women's political participation with different immigration statuses. "Immigrant women" as category was missing from the theoretical framework used in this study, particularly immigrant women with permanent residency who are not even considered in the discussions pertaining to political participation. Earlier studies in the field overlooked the fact that these permanent residents are future citizens and their scope of political participation begins to form from the beginning of their stay in Canada.

Chapter Seven

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

7.1 Summary of Findings

The objectives of this study were to explore different modes of political participation among immigrant women in Lethbridge. More specifically, to assess the level of political participation among immigrant women and to find out what factors affect political participation of immigrant women in Lethbridge. In order to explore immigrant women's experiences with political participation and to achieve objectives of this study I interviewed immigrant women with diverse demographics (i.e., age, ethnicity, immigration status, education).

The findings discussed in Chapters Five and Six indicate that immigrant women have low levels of political participation in Lethbridge. This finding is demonstrated by the modes of political participation they are engaged in—conventional and non-conventional. Conventional participation includes elections, campaigning, donations to political parties, dinner a political party candidate, and political party membership. Non-conventional participation includes political activities promoting social change, contacting politicians, protests, signing petitions, donations to activist groups.

Consequently, the factors identified by immigrant women were addressed in this research, which are: immigration status, country of origin and personal interest in politics, time management, linguistic barriers, education, economic stability, opportunity, membership in organisations, groups, or associations and age.

Literature reviewed in the field of political participation revealed many knowledge gaps. Specifically, knowledge gaps related to this research are limited to studies about immigrant women and their political participation, and studies about the

role of immigration status for immigrant women. In conducting a literature review, no study was found that discusses the distinction among modes of political participation for non-citizens. Moreover, there is no study that examines how immigration status might affect political participation and its different modes. Abu-Laban (2002, p. 277) notes the fact that theorists of political participation define the concept by only focusing on citizens. Burt's (2002) and Ackelsberg's (2010) theoretical framework on political participation also overlooked immigration status in relation to political participation. The findings of this research enhanced Ackelsberg's and Burt's theories on political participation by adding another category (immigration) to other issues such as gender, class and ethnicity, which have been ignored for many years by political theorists. In contemporary scholarship on political participation immigration status should be considered, which has been always ignored in the research as it does not fit the traditional model of "Anglo-Saxon white male participant" (Burt, 2002, p.243).

This research contributes to feminist scholarship as immigrant women's voices and experiences revealed the importance of immigration status for immigrant women pertaining to political participation. Many immigrant women explained their low level of political participation by not being eligible to vote. In other words, immigrant women do not see a reason to be politically active or to get engaged in activities promoting social change in their community if they cannot vote. Similarly, some of immigrant women who recently acquired citizenship explained that since they are now citizens "it is the time" to get involved.

Feminist standpoint theory guided interviews with immigrant women. They expressed the idea that citizenship grants them feeling of being "Canadian," which entails a sense of belonging and confidence needed for taking part in political

activities. Immigrant women who do not have citizenship are “invisible” both in the literature and in practice. While addressing the scope of political participation Burt (2002) and Ackelsberg (2010) consider only practices of citizens by overlooking permanent residents’ engagement in political activities. Unlike the misconception that immigrant women with permanent residency can get involved only in non-conventional activities, permanent residents are only restricted from voting. Although Acklesberg (2010) was mostly focusing on non-conventional political participation, she did not address how non-citizen, immigrant women get involved in non-conventional activities. In practice, immigrant women with permanent residency were not approached by anyone as well to join any kind of political activities. Although Ackelsberg argues that women are more active in non-conventional participation, immigrant women of this study enhance that *immigrant* women’s practices of non-conventional political participation are different: 1) immigrant women who have permanent residency and came from developing countries have very low levels of participation in non-conventional political activities, which is also partially explained by the type of activities provided at the ethnic or religious groups they attend; 2) in contrast to immigrant women from developing countries, women from developed countries who are English native speakers were more involved in non-conventional activities as members of social or political groups.

7.2 Conclusion

Conducting feminist research on political participation was critical as it helped to examine immigrant women’s experiences pertaining to political participation; made marginalized women’s voices heard; and attempted to make them more “visible” as immigrant women have been overlooked for many years. Fifteen interviews with immigrant women with diverse demographics conducted for this research gave a

substantial insight in terms of providing immigrant women's different perspectives and experiences related to political participation. Before starting the interview most of the participants identified that they might not be helpful for my research and they will not contribute to my research as they do not have any experiences in political participation. During the conversation with them I realized that they understood political activities as conventional activities such as voting, campaigning and rallies. At the same time, some were involved in political activities as citizens.

The implications of this research are that many immigrant women during interviews mentioned that they never thought about taking part in political activities. Moreover, some of them considered themselves ignorant about political participation. Most importantly, at the end of interview the participants learnt that they do not have to be citizens to contact politicians, to campaign or to take part in protests. As a result, the participants of this research revealed that the extent of immigrant women's political participation is very low. In other words, immigrant women who live in Lethbridge are not politically integrated. There were not big differences among citizen and permanent resident immigrant women in terms of non-conventional participation as both groups were not active.

While exploring immigrant women's experiences some factors were revealed that affected political participation of immigrant women. Many immigrant women mentioned that without being a citizen and eligible to vote they did not see a reason to get involved with local political activities. Most of the immigrant women indicated time as the biggest constraint on their participation. However, most of the women who provided the "time excuse" were originally from politically unstable countries (for example, Nigeria, Iran, Bhutan). Other women indicated language barriers and economic instability of their families prevent them from getting involved with

community or political activities. Thus, the intersection of ethnicity, marital status, age, immigration status, economic stability, and membership in organisations affect immigrant women's political participation. However, I want to highlight that I do not privilege any of these social categories or factors as immigrant women's experiences are diverse in their own way. The factors and social categories mentioned above that overlap in most of the participants' experiences might not be applicable in bigger cities in Canada.

In contrast to the low levels of political participation among immigrant women two political activities were revealed which had high participation rates: voting and signing petitions. These two activities were widely popular among immigrant women regardless of their ethnicity, immigration status and age. Most of the immigrant women exercised their responsibility (voting) as citizens in a "serious manner": all immigrant women became familiar with political platforms of political parties and candidates before voting for them. This demonstrates that immigrant women feel responsible to exercise their right as citizens and, at the same time, it shows the importance immigrant women give to voting in contrast to claims that "they are not interested in politics." More research should be conducted in the field to explore the reasons that lead immigrant women to participate in elections and the factors that inhibit their political participation. This would provide insight as to how to boost immigrant women's political participation in order to have political equality in Canada. Thus, the complexity of gender, immigration status, ethnicity and age in relation to political participation indicates the importance of intersectionality in this research.

To sum up, this research contributed to feminist scholarship by examining categories such as gender, age and immigration status, ethnicity in relation to political

participation by observing marginalized women's experiences in political activities. This study enhanced Ackelsberg's and Burt's conceptual framework on political participation by including immigrant status in relation to political participation. Immigrant status, particularly permanent residency should be considered in the relevant discussions as permanent residents are eligible to undertake most of conventional and non-conventional political activities. Also, this research examined the differences among different groups of women who participated in this research that did not reinforce gender stereotypes regarding political participation. Most of the studies related to immigrant women's political participation have been conducted in bigger cities in Canada (i.e., Toronto, Montreal). In contrast, this study contributed to the feminist scholarship on political participation by exploring practices of political participation among immigrant women in a small city like Lethbridge. Despite low levels of political participation, this study found out that immigrant women get involved in political activities as "Canadians." In Lethbridge, immigrant women become familiar with political parties' platforms from "Canadian's" perspective; in other words they vote for particular parties/candidates as they might address voters' concerns not as "Bhutanese" or "Chinese" but as "Canadians."

7.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study have practical, political and social implications for policy-making. Some of the reasons that affected women's political participation are misconceptions about citizenship and political participation, language barriers, lack of knowledge about Canadian political systems, economic stability and previous political experiences. Canadian policies and immigration programs should consider addressing these issues. More programs should be developed to educate immigrants on: 1) Canadian political system; 2) immigrants duties, rights and responsibilities as

permanent residents and citizens; 3) different government programs available for immigrants; and 4) different modes of political participation. It would be helpful for immigrant women to take part in workshops that would explore how immigrant women can get involved in different community social and political activities. Canadian policies should consider political integration of immigrants and particularly immigrant women as an integral part of their overall integration, which will result in greater political equality and representation (Rooij, 2012).

This study has implications for educational institutions and their international centres. Some of the research participants were students at the University of Lethbridge who after graduation stayed in Lethbridge and became permanent residents and citizens of Canada. International centres in colleges and universities could organise workshops for these international students about the Canadian political system, how they can get involved and what they can change in their communities or in Canadian politics. For example, they could provide information about federal and provincial organizations; how they can get involved in them and what kind of issues they can participate in with provincial or federal governments.

One of the primary goals of this research was to contribute to feminist scholarship. This study contributed to the scholarship by studying marginalized groups who have been ignored previously, in this case, immigrant women. For future research it will be worthwhile to explore immigrant status and its various stages further in order to find out levels of political participation in different stages of immigration. More research is needed to examine both immigrant women and men with different immigration statuses in order to see whether immigration status affects immigrant men's political participation as well. At the same time, future research should consider research participants with more demographic diversity. This research

was limited as it did not include participants from Middle East, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.

Some participants had language barriers during the interviews which might have limited their ability or willingness to share their experiences and concerns. It might be considered in the future to interview participants in their mother tongues if they have language barriers. Although qualitative research provided rich insight to immigrant women's experiences, a research project using mixed methods might be considered to examine complexity of gender, ethnicity and immigration status in relation to different modes of political participation in bigger cities.

The findings of this research suggest that regardless of the extent of immigrant women's political participation most of immigrant women signed a petition at least once and the women who were eligible to vote participated in elections. Thus, further research in the field is required, which would investigate what are the reasons that even non-active immigrant women sign petitions more frequently compared to other activities; and whether those reasons can be integrated into the general context of political participation, revealing factors that affect political participation. Future studies might also examine if there are any other factors that inhibit political participation aside from immigration status, country of origin and relevant political experiences, time, language barriers, membership in organisations, economic stability, opportunity, education and age.

Immigrant women are equal members of the society who are often not active in political activities, regardless of the fact that they are future citizens who may contribute to society. It is important to explore the practices of political participation among immigrant women in order to assess democratic practices in Canada and to improve their political engagement, which will ensure political equality in the country.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Semi-structured interview guide

Introduction : My name is _____, and I am graduate student at the University of Lethbridge, major Women and Gender Studies. My research topic is political participation of immigrant women in Southern Alberta. And my research attempts to investigate to what extent immigrant women are politically integrated in Lethbridge. Before starting the interview I would like to thank you for your coming and taking part in interview today also for your form of consent. First of all, I would like to inform you that no records or any information will be kept with your names. I assure confidentiality and anonymity of all your responses. Also, I would like your permission to record our interview conversation. The reason for recording is that it will contribute to having accurate data consisting of your answers and opinions. Finally, I would like to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw whenever you want so.

Questions:

Profile:

1. I would like to know more about your immigration to Canada.

- Country of origin
- Age when you arrived to Canada
- Educational background

How long have you been living in Canada and in Lethbridge?

- immigration status in Canada (citizen / permanent resident)

Are you planning to become citizen of Canada in the future?

How do you find Lethbridge? Is it stable place to live in?

How do you spend your time (on weekends)?

- Your typical example of your week, weekend
- Do you watch TV?
- Do you read news?

Activities:

1. Since you arrived to Canada, what kind of activities you have been part of?

(Community activities, school, NGOs, political party activism, etc)

2. Are there any organisations, charities that you belong to?

- If yes, what do you do there?
- Do they ask for any type of donations there?

I met some women who are part of religious organizations? Do you belong to any?

- If yes, different faith organizations have different political engagement, do you know are there any political engagements in your faith community?

3. Have you ever taken part in any political participation in terms of promoting social change in your community?

- If yes, could you please indicate what type of political participation did you undertake?
- If no, would you like to take part in any political activity that may promote social change?
- Are there any reasons that prohibited your political participation?

3. Have you ever contacted any politician?

- If yes, how or in what way did you contact her/him?
- What was the reason for contacting the politician?

4. Have you participated in rallying or campaigning since you are in Canada?

- If yes, what were the main reasons?

Do you remember attending any meeting with politicians?

- If yes, could you tell more about it?

Have you ever had dinner with candidate of political party?

If yes, can I hear more about it?

5. Have you ever donated money to any political party?

Do you remember any donations you have done to activist groups?

6. Have you ever participated in elections?

- If yes, did you make your choice by yourself or did anybody or anything influence your choice?
- If no, do you think that there are any factors that prohibit your voting?

To summarize, I think we have covered almost all the aspects of the problem. You have been very patient, but do you think that we have missed out anything? Do you have any comment that you would like to add? Finally, I want to remind you that by the end of the 2015 you will be sent the research summary and findings.

Appendix B: Consent letter

Dear participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study “Gender, migration, and practices of political participation in Southern Alberta.” This project is being conducted by a graduate student, Greta Vardazaryan, from the Department Women and Gender Studies at the University of Lethbridge. Please read the following information about the study before you sign the consent form.

Purpose

The goal of this project is to examine the level of political participation among immigrant women in Lethbridge.

Procedure

This research will require about 60-90 minutes of your time. During this time, you will be interviewed about your experiences in political activities in Canada. The interviews will be conducted wherever you prefer (e.g. Library or Campus of the University of Lethbridge,).The interviews will be tape-recorded with your permission and later transcribed. If you decline to be tape-recorded, I will only take notes on my computer.

Risk

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. If you feel any discomfort the interview will be stopped and I will turn off the recorder. You may also find the interview to be very enjoyable and rewarding, as we will discuss about your experiences as an immigrant woman.

Benefits

By participating in this research, your voice will help in exploring the extent of political participation among immigrant women in Southern Alberta. Your experience will contribute to an improved understanding of the major challenges that immigrant women in Canada encounter with political participation. The findings may also be used someday by policymakers interested in understanding how immigrant women participate in the political process in Canada.

Confidentiality

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity. While the interviews will be tape-recorded, the tapes will be stored in a secure location. The typed interviews will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Lethbridge, and only the researcher will have access to the interviews. The interviews might be quoted in the study, but they will be treated anonymously by using another name. No personal identifying information will be linked to your interview responses. All information will be destroyed after completion of the research.

Participation

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from

the study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw, there will be no loss of any services or benefits that you might be receiving from Lethbridge Immigrant Services or the Southern Alberta Ethnic Association. Please, indicate whenever you feel uncomfortable to reply to any question, so I will move on the next questions. At any time you decide to withdraw, you will have a choice to decide whether you want to contribute your data or to destroy it.

Contact Information

If you require any information about this study, or please call (*Greta Vardazaryan*) at (403-359-1301) or email at greta.vardazaryan@uleth.ca. If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, you may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Lethbridge at 403-329-2747 or research.services@uleth.ca.

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on the experience of political participation of immigrant women, and consent to participate in this study.

_____ (Printed Name)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

I give permission for Greta Vardazaryan to contact me for follow-up information for the research project (please circle one):

Yes _____ No

Request for Summary of Findings

If you would like to receive a summary of the results of the research project, please write your e-mail address below.

.....

Appendix C: Consent letter (Russian version)

Уважаемая участница,

Приглашаем Вас принять участие в исследовании "Гендерные аспекты миграции и практики политического участия в Южной Альберте." Этот проект проводится магистрантом Гретой Вардазарян из Факультета Женщины и гендерные исследования в Университете Летбридж. Пожалуйста, ознакомьтесь со следующей информацией об исследовании, прежде чем подписать форму согласия.

Цель

Целью данного проекта является изучение уровня политического участия среди женщин-иммигрантов в Летбридж.

Процесс

Это исследование потребует около 60-90 минут вашего времени. В течение этого времени, вы будете отвечать на вопросы о своем опыте в политической деятельности в Канаде. Интервью будет проводиться там, где вы предпочитаете (например, библиотека или кампус университета Летбридж). Интервью будет записан на диктофон с вашего разрешения, затем будет переписан.

Риск

Во время интервью нет ожидаемых рисков или неудобств, в связи с данным исследованием. Вы также можете найти интервью очень приятным и полезным, так как мы будем обсуждать о вашем опыте в качестве женщины иммигранта.

Польза

Участвуя в этом исследовании, вы будете вносить вклад в области изучения степени участия в политической жизни среди женщин-иммигрантов в Южной Альберте.

Конфиденциальность

Ряд шагов будут предприняты, чтобы защитить Вашу анонимность и идентичность. В то время как интервью будет записано на диктофон, запись будет храниться в безопасном месте. Транскрибированное интервью будут храниться в закрытом шкафу в университете Летбридж, и только исследователь будет иметь доступ к интервью. Интервью может быть использованы в исследовании, но они будут рассматриваться анонимно, используя другое имя. Вся информация будет уничтожена после завершения исследования.

Участие

Ваше участие в этом исследовании является полностью добровольным. Тем не менее, вы можете покинуть исследование в любое время и по любой причине. Если вы решите уйти, не будет никакой потери каких-либо услуг или преимуществ, которые вы, возможно, получаете от Сервиза иммигрантов или Южной Альберты Этнической Ассоциации. Пожалуйста, укажите, когда вы

чувствуете себя неуютно, чтобы ответить на любой вопрос, чтобы я перешла на следующие вопросы. В любое время как вы решите покинуть, вы будете иметь возможность решить, хотите ли вы, внести свой вклад или хотите уничтожить информацию которую вы дали раньше.

Контакты

Если вам потребуется какая-либо информация об этом исследовании, позвоните (Вартазарян Грете) по телефону (403-359-1301) или по электронной почте на greta.vardazaryan@uleth.ca. Если у вас есть какие-либо другие вопросы, касающиеся ваших прав как участника данного исследования, вы также можете обратиться в Управление научных исследований этики в университете Летбридж позвонив по номеру 403-329-2747 или research.services@uleth.ca.

Я прочитала выше информацию о данном исследовании об опыте участия в политической жизни женщин-иммигрантов, и соглашаюсь на участие в этом исследовании.

_____ (Имя)

_____ (Подпись)

_____ (Дата)

Я даю разрешение Грете Вардазарян связаться со мной если понадобится для последующей информации для исследовательского проекта (нужное обвести):

Да _____ Нет

Запрос результатов

Если вы хотели бы получить информацию о результатах исследовательского проекта, пожалуйста, напишите свой адрес электронной почты ниже.

.....

Appendix D: Letter to ASAE

Dr. Surya Acharya
President of SAEA,
207 13 Street North, Lethbridge,
AB T1H 2R6, Canada

Dear Dr. Surya Acharya,

My name is Greta Vardazaryan and I am a graduate student in Women and Gender Studies Department, at the University of Lethbridge. I am conducting a research project that is going to analyze the extent of political participation of immigrant women in Southern Alberta. I am planning to interview ten citizens and ten permanent residents who have been living in Canada for more than three years.

This research will require 20 participants. The selection of participants will be based on their age (over 19), different demographics, experiences and the length of stay in Canada (no less than three years), immigration status (permanent residents or/and citizens). Potential participants will be interviewed in English (if applicable might be in Russian and Armenian also) for 60-90 minutes. The confidentiality and anonymity of every participant will be maintained in compliance with ethical standards.

Considering the diversity of your association members, I am writing to request your cooperation in giving your kind permission for putting up a poster at the office of Southern Alberta Ethnic Association which will include the invitation for prospective participants and the information about the study. I believe your organization has members who would be part of this study input. Please let me know if your organization is able to assist me in this research project.

If you require any information about this study, please call *Greta Vardazaryan* at (403-359-1301) or email greta.vardazaryan@uleth.ca.

I am looking forward to hearing from you. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Greta Vardazaryan
MA Student
Women and Gender Studies Department
University of Lethbridge

Appendix E: Letter to Lethbridge Immigrant Services

Program Director
Immigrant Services
1107-2A Avenue North
Lethbridge AB T1H 0E6

Dear Program Director,

My name is Greta Vardazaryan and I am a graduate student in Women and Gender Studies Department, at the University of Lethbridge. I am conducting a research project that is going to analyze the extent of political participation of immigrant women in Southern Alberta. I am planning to interview ten citizens and ten permanent residents who have been living in Canada for more than three years.

This research will require 20 participants. The selection of participants will be based on their age (over 19), different demographics, experiences and the length of stay in Canada (no less than three years), immigration status (permanent residents or/and citizens). Potential participants will be interviewed in English (if applicable might be in Russian and Armenian also) for 60-90 minutes. The confidentiality and anonymity of every participant will be maintained in compliance with ethical standards.

I am requesting your cooperation in giving your kind permission for putting up a poster at the office of Immigration Services which will include the invitation for prospective participants and the information about the study. Please let me know if your office is able to assist me in this research project.

If you require any information about this study, please call *Greta Vardazaryan* at (403-359-1301) or email greta.vardazaryan@uleth.ca.

I am looking forward to hearing from you. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Greta Vardazaryan
MA Student
Women and Gender Studies Department
University of Lethbridge

***Research on political
participation of immigrant
women in Southern Alberta***

University of Lethbridge graduate student
looking for *immigrant women* who are:

- Aged 19 years or older
- Who have been living in Canada for more than three years
- Who are Permanent Resident or Citizen of Canada
- Who are comfortable to be interviewed in English (Russian and Armenian are also applicable)
- Who are willing to share their experiences in political sphere

If you are interested please contact at (403) 359-1301
or email at greta.vardazaryan@uleth.ca