

Jasmin Habib: Our final group is entitled Motherland Cultural Belonging in the Wake of Populism. It's Mariam Flifli, Charity Nonkes, Michelle Gomez, Saleha Habib and Sarah Lukaszczyk. Come on up.

Sarah: How are you doing? My name is Sarah. My last name is Lukaszczyk or as the class knows me as the other Sarah. With that I want to echo what was said earlier today to get in the panel discussion that we are just visitors to this land. We recognize that in our group, we want to acknowledge the land that we're standing on. We are standing on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnawbe and Haudenosaunee peoples.

That's really important, because as much as you visit, or didn't yet, we'll go over this, our exhibit, we ourselves are visitors and so we really need to acknowledge that because even if our own experiences in being Canadian, and where our Canadian identities will go in the future, and we'll experience similar tensions, maybe not even to the same extreme. We have to grapple with the fact that the Canadian identity, especially for our generation coming up, is something that's evolving. We have to appreciate the tensions and the pressures that other cultures, ethnicities, and the above, push upon our own identities and forming.

But, to go back to why we're here. So, real quickly, introductions. I'm Sarah and I'm in Geography, Environmental Management and Peace and Conflict studies.

Michelle: I'm Michelle. I'm in Political Science and Business.

Saleha: I'm Saleha. I'm in Chemical Engineering.

Mariam: I'm Mariam. I'm in Political Science.

Charity: I'm Charity. I'm in Arts and Business, majoring in Peace and Conflict studies.

Sarah: Okay, moving on to the good stuff. So the home. The home is a private space. The home is where you form identities. Where your sense of belonging. You get your cultures, your values from them. You get the stories from your grandfathers, your great grandmothers. From your ancestors. These are the people who are building the foundation for where you're going to go into the world and how you're going to perceive it.

When we come into the public space as this generation, we have to remember all the baggage and the history and the values that we were taught in this private space. We came out with this idea of creating the motherland. In our exhibit, we tried to replicate the home because it's the private space that's bringing forward our identities and then when we leave that space, how is it being negotiated in the public realm.

What is it that's making us hide some of those stories our parents taught us that we should be embarrassing? What are those values that we decide to forgo because in light of what everybody else is thinking? So for us, the home, it's something to be cherished. At least in my home, maybe some others, you might be told outside that there's certain things you don't say at the table. Religion, politics, or money. In my home, among family and friends, that was always, always discussed. I can't help it sometimes not shying away from it when I hear

something that's contrasting or maybe as we have been echoed, or to echo what others have said already, this common good. This social good. Why don't we cherish that? Why don't we preserve it? And why don't we extend it from our own homes to recognize that each one of us has value to contribute to the greater society.

With that, just to reiterate, our piece if you haven't seen it already, was about the home. So when you enter the space, you'll be greeted by a fireplace. Digital. But as you come in, that's the warmth. That's when you start to feel the sense where the house becomes a home and so when we proceed, you get to see some tangibles. We give you some items that we ourselves found identity from, and sense of belonging. Some of us with garments, some it were actually certificates of becoming a Canadian citizen, some of them come down to a coin, which wasn't valued because of its financial value. It was because of the value, of the connections with it.

For the ceremony, in Finland, they did two hands clasping one another to emphasize unity. The other coin for Canada was the sun rising. The sun meets all of us when we come into this great land of Canada. But as you proceed in the space, we also have photos of ourselves and these photos come with what we identify. What is our citizenship and what is our other land? Where do we come from? Where are our ancestors? Then, as you continue in the space, there's a large map that greets you and we want you to interact with it. Show us and tell us where you're coming from. What is it that's coming with you as you enter the public realm.

Lastly, there are our voices. Our voices are echoing and speaking to what it is that we've experienced in the public space. What have been the positives and what have been the negatives. And what it is we envision when we move forward into what we want from the future.

Mariam:

To echo what Sarah just amazingly presented, I wanted to discuss a little bit the current political climate we're facing as Canadians, and as global citizens. Recently Canada celebrated its 150th birthday. This was a celebration of what it means to be Canadian. It's often been argued that when crafting the identity of Canada and Canadians in general, as citizens, we come together with all these different identities into one social and political fabric. And as Canadians, we often pride ourselves on our multicultural and cosmopolitan mindsets.

A quick visit to cities such as Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, will quickly demonstrate to anyone the successes and auspicious of immigration. It will also demonstrate to us all the shortcomings of integration. Recently, an environment has been bred where newcomers feel like outsiders and leeches. This, of course, is concerning because it impacts both the abilities of these newcomers to integrate into society and truly let their ambitions come under the sunshine, as Sarah so nicely presented to us.

It also creates an environment in society where communities are failing to interact with one another and work with each other, and prosper together, and create these industries where everyone kind of has an equal benefit from. This essentially results in vibrant and productive democracies to deteriorate in the name of cultural backlash and fear, which is quite unfortunate.

This brings me to ask, what does multiculturalism truly mean in today's era? It's a buzzword. It's a catch phrase. As Justin Trudeau likes to bring it up, which is great, but do we truly know what that means and what it will continue to mean? I also question, will the defense of multiculturalism be able to hold weight against the current rise of xenophobic populism, particularly that from the right wing of the political spectrum.

Our efforts to grapple with the political crisis we face today as a global community, have not been sufficiently ambitious. We've made real progress in defining populism, recognizing that it exists, but moderate progress in analyzing its effects and particularly its negative and dangerous effects on society, but barely any progress in identifying any potential remedies.

Saleha: We're arguing that the current political climate and the secure test space that we live in has really confined our dialogue and the way we interact with each other. Our discussions on the individual level, and at the state level, no longer encourage openness or international cooperation, but instead the domestic political agenda and the foreign policies and the way that we view each other have become heavily influenced by populous ideals around citizenry and they've created stereotypes against immigrants and refugees that are coming into other nations.

It's created a world that has replaced welcomes with travel bans and multiculturalism is seen as a threat to democracy. Immigrants have become burdens and states hesitate before they are open to welcoming them. Instead of creating a sociopolitical environment where their identities are valuable to democracy, we now live in an era where populist ideals overwhelm our society and the voice of many becomes drowned out by the voice of the few.

Charity: With a global climate that's becoming more and more xenophobic and restricting to asylum seekers or refugees, we often like to separate ourselves from this populous rhetoric happening throughout the world. Canada proclaiming itself as a multicultural haven, at times let us forget that we, and this nation, are not excluded from fear of the other. Statistics Canada surveyed 34 city areas in Canada and found that the region of Waterloo ranked 3rd highest for reported hate crimes.

This number is likely low because hate crimes often go unreported. The fear of the other is very present in Canada and our exhibit titled M(Other)land, begins to explore how these stereotypes are internalized and challenged by everyday people. And what belonging in Canada feels and looks like.

The exhibit critically analyzes how these different identities influence our perceptions of Canada as a multicultural nation, and how these ideals impact Canadian citizenship and democratic futures more broadly.

Saleha: So just bringing everything together, based on what Sarah and everyone has talked about throughout this presentation and the exhibit, some of you may have visited. I want to emphasize the purpose of our exhibit, which was essentially to provide insight into the experiences that we've had as first and second generation immigrants who have been exposed to different societal and political structures outside of Canada and how those experiences have really influenced us in the way we act in our communities. We also linked our past experiences to how we've sort of integrated ourselves into the communities

that we're a part of and that are a part on the larger scale, a part of the Canadian mosaic of society.

We also decided to focus on the negative populous rhetoric around immigration and through self-reflection drew links between the types of rhetoric that we have faced and been exposed to in the past and how that affected our self-identification in the wake of populism essentially.

Through our stories, we aimed to discover and present how populous sentiments have been factored into the formation of our individual immigrant identities and how has that affected us. Whether it's encouraged us or discouraged us in terms of participating as citizens of the global society as well as locally in our communities and Canada in general.

To bring everything together, we really hope that through our exhibit, we were able to bring across the idea and emphasize how important it is to recognize individual diverse experiences and how they shape and influence our participation as citizens. Whether it's within the sovereign nations that we are part of, but also in general on a global scale, as part of the world at large.

Just to continue on, for those of you who didn't get a chance to visit our exhibit, we wanted to play a snippet and give you a sneak peak into what the audio recordings that we played in our homely environment were about.

Mariam: It's about a minute. If you can spare us one more minute.

Recording: We divide ourselves into race, class, or religion and blame the other for their and their our own loss of jobs, experience of violence and lack of opportunity. Just the attention to detail that I've had since I was a kid, to learning the one language and not the other, it really creates this feeling of isolation. Despite every effort to make me feel welcomed. That comes back to this factor of language skills and being able to communicate.

Recording: Rather we should work as a community to ensure that everyone feels welcomed and that we belong so we're inspired to actively participate in their communities as well as work towards creating a more inclusive community.

Recording: Now, I fell a sense of pride and gratitude for Canada, because after 21 years, we finally found a place to settle as citizens. But there are still people who try to contest that because for some I'll never be Columbian enough, and for others I'm too Columbian.

Recording: Through the lack of interaction with one another...this resulted in vibrant and productive democracies to deteriorate in the name of self-centeredness, cultural backlash, fear, and bigotry.

Mariam: These were interviews. We interviewed each other. Asking each other what we feel like as second generation immigrants and for some of us, first generation immigrants. Our experiences and interactions with populism. It was, I think, the best part of our project because we got to know each other and we got to share common sentiments. The recording gave a nice aesthetic to just having us speak at our exhibition. Thank you for your time.