



Kim Rygiel, Associate Professor
Department of Political Science, Wilfrid Laurier University
519-884-0710 ext. 2032 or krygiel@wlu.ca

Lori Chalmers Morrison, Associate Director
Communications, Wilfrid Laurier University
519-884-0710 ext. 3067 or lchalmersmorrison@wlu.ca

MAY 28, 2019 | 073-19

Opening Communities conference to feature public arts events and discussion focused on welcoming newcomers

WATERLOO – Anti-immigrant discourse is growing more common on the airwaves and internet, so how can communities make newcomers feel at home and help established residents welcome them? That’s the question at the heart of a conference taking place at the [Balsillie School of International Affairs](#) that will feature three free public events: an arts showcase, a documentary screening and a roundtable discussion.

[Opening Communities to Newcomers: Cosmopolitanism, Solidarity Activism and Cultural Connections](#) will take place **June 5 to 7**. Fostering intercultural connections through the arts will be a major theme throughout the three-day event.

“The arts can get us to think about things differently,” said [Kim Rygiel](#), a Wilfrid Laurier University associate professor of political science and associate director of Laurier’s [International Migration Research Centre](#) (IMRC). “The arts can challenge our biases and preconceptions and move us to understand emotionally as well as cerebrally.”

The [arts showcase](#), taking place **June 5** from **7-9 p.m.** at the **CIGI Auditorium**, will feature:

- Photographer **Kemal Vural Tarlan** showing and discussing a selection of photos from his show, [Moving Borders: Crossings, left overs, hospitality](#), which will be exhibited at TheMuseum in Kitchener as part of the seventh annual [Refugee Art Show](#).
- Storytelling by four emerging writers who were among the 19 refugee and immigrant women who participated in **The X-Page Storytelling Workshop**, a 12-week program that culminated in the [Quilt of Stories](#) event at the Balsillie School. **Carrie Snyder, Lamees Al Ethari** and **Tasneem Jamal**, who ran the workshop, will also speak.
- A full performance of **Adrenaline**, a short, one-man play written and acted by Syrian refugee **Ahmad Meree**, which tells the story of a man preparing to celebrate his first New Year’s Eve in Canada after leaving his war-torn homeland.
- A performance of dabke, a traditional Levantine folk dance, by the [Levant Community Dabke Group](#).

The [documentary screening](#), taking place **June 6** from **7-9 p.m.** at the **CIGI Auditorium**, features ***In the Dark Times – A Culture in Exile***, a film that chronicles the lives and work of refugee artists, actors, musicians and activists living in Turkey and Jordan. The film will be followed by a question-and-answer session with filmmakers **Thomas Büsch** and **Sabine Küper-Büsch**.

The **public roundtable discussion**, which takes place **June 7** from **1:30-3 p.m.**, will be held in room 1-42 at the Balsillie School. Titled “Making Communities Welcoming to Newcomers: Insights from Local Organizing in the Waterloo Region,” the discussion will be moderated by Professor [Alison Mountz](#), director of the IMRC and Canada Research Chair in Global Migration.

... more

Opening Communities/Page 2

Panelists will be:

- **Maissaa Almustafa**, a member of the [Reception House Waterloo Region](#) board of directors and recent Laurier PhD graduate
- **Majdi Bou-Matar**, artistic director of the [IMPACT Theatre Festival](#)
- **Marika Galadza**, manager of community engagement with Reception House Waterloo Region
- **Diana Palmerin**, community engagement coordinator for the [Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership's](#) Belong Steering Group
- **Mary Lou Roe** of [Community Coalition on Refugee and Immigrant Concerns](#)

In addition to interested members of the general public, the organizers hope people who are involved with a wide range of organizations that serve newcomers, as well as established residents, will attend.

"Many organizations are asking the question, 'How can we use our resources and activities to incorporate newcomers into our events?'" said **Feyzi Baban**, a Trent University associate professor who is co-organizing the conference with Rygiel. "That's exactly what we're trying to facilitate."

The academic portion of the conference will feature presentations by community activists and scholars from around the world, including Laurier's [Bree Akesson](#), [Patricia Goff](#) and [Ashwani Peetush](#). The conference aims to build on work done at a workshop held in Germany last year with some of the same participants.

"The research aims to push back against the rising xenophobia we're seeing everywhere and create new spaces, new ways of belonging and new ways of interacting with difference," says Rygiel. "Our international guests will also have a chance to learn about what Kitchener-Waterloo is doing as a resettlement centre."

The conference is funded in part by a grant from the Social Science and Humanities Council of Canada. To register for the arts evening and documentary screening, visit [Eventbrite](#). To register to attend the public roundtable discussion, email imrc@wlu.ca.

- 30 -