

Kenyan-Somali, black, Muslim and Canadian: new doc explores Canada's hyphenated identities

Short documentary 'Hyphen-Nation' by 22-year-old Torontonian puts five black women in conversation

By Amara McLaughlin, [CBC News](#) Posted: Nov 15, 2017 10:28 AM ET Last Updated: Nov 16, 2017 8:58 AM ET

A new documentary by a 22-year-old Toronto filmmaker is analyzing what it means to be an immigrant in Canada.

Directed and produced by Samah Ali, *Hyphen-Nation* features a 14-minute conversation between five women of colour that is inspired by her own cultural experience.

The women discuss how their cultural heritage influences their identities as Canadians and immigrants.

"The whole conversation is what's your hyphen?" explained Ali, calling her debut film a "nuanced" discussion about what black Canadian identities look like.

"And that's what opens it up to so many people to identify with because whether it's themselves or their family members who have an immigration story, everybody typically has a hyphen."

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The women are asked if they identify with being black Canadians.

Ali explains this is both liberating and tragic. She identifies as a Kenyan-Somali woman, along with a Muslim woman and a black woman.

"I don't know if I identify strongly as a Canadian, but definitely when I leave Canada I identify as a Canadian," she said despite being born and raised in Toronto.

"The other parts of my identity, the ones that are more visible, the ones that I practice everyday are definitely the ones that are on the forefront of my mind. Compared to my Canadianness, it's something that I'm not really aware of until I have my passport and I'm travelling to other countries."

"hyphen-nation" documentary



Hyphen-Nation is screening at the **15th annual Regent Park Film Festival.**

Sojin Chun, programmer for **Regent Park Film Festival**, says the short documentary captures the theme of the festival.

"We really want to show different narratives that you wouldn't normally see through other means, through the mainstream media," she said.

The three day event is free and showcases the work of women of colour which reflects Toronto's east end neighbourhood.

"We really make sure we represent all the cultures that are present in Regent Park," said Chun.

Ali explains this is why she wanted *Hyphen-Nation* to premiere at the film festival.

"I want this film to foster a greater community, not only in Canada, but also worldwide."

With files from CBC's Lorenda Reddekopp

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