

Transcript for The Empty Chair: From Anti-Racist Intention to Action in B.C.'s Post-secondary System – Session 3

BCcampus event held on March 31, 2022

Presenter: Olaolu Adeleye

Introduction by Njamba Koffi

NJAMBA KOFFI:

Hello everybody my name is Njamba Koffi. I'm joining you from the ancestral unceded traditional territory of the Musqueam people. And it is a great pleasure and privilege to be introducing to our next speaker, Olaolu Adeleye. Such a great morning learning from Jennifer and Harshita. I hope you are all finding enormous value from being here in this community. I'm graduating this year from the University of British Columbia with a bachelor's degree, a major in international relations and my name creative writing. But my learning journey started a long time in North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo where I was born. It continued in various African countries that I lived in as a refugee. After my family fled. What has been termed Congo was World War. It continued in Europe as a scholarship student and eventually here in Canada, also as a scholarship student, and a refugee. I'm a published author, my memoir, *Refuge-e: The Journey Much Desired*, explores the lived experiences of refugee youth in different parts of Africa.

Over the past five years, I have engaged in multiple communities in discourses about racial equity, diversity, and inclusion, which has led me to the BCcampus's anti-racism, anti-hate working committee through which I met Olaolu. Now, one of the prompts from Harshita's presentation. What are the world problems keeping you up at night? Really caught me by surprise. We didn't make connections between anti-racism work in North America and what is going on in various communities globally. And they sometimes they think that part of the very harmful racism structures and framework is the isolation that comes with the work, because the work itself often centers Western countries, and frankly centers dismantling white supremacy, at the period of other world problems. I did not think of myself as a black man until I ventured into Europe. And here in Northern Africa, because they come from in Africa, all I see is black people, most of the times. Here in North America, I'm not used to being in a company of black men who inspire.

And that's really something sad to say, the systems and structures are not set up for us. And if I was to make \$1, for every single hour, I have spent, like I have organized over the loneliness of being a young black male youth advocate for anti-hate, anti racism, I'll probably be the next Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk. And wouldn't that, the nice? Anyways, that's one of the main reasons why meeting and knowing Olaolu over the past few months has really mattered to me. You know, from the very first interaction I had with Olaolu when we briefly met online, when himself and Jonathan all reached out to me to see if they would fit to join the anti racism, anti-hate committee, he struck me as a deeply knowledgeable and passionate person. And you wouldn't be curious to know him and his work a little bit deeper, I'm still working on that. I have been on both ends of racism, being subjected to hate, whether directly or through systems and structures, and fighting against it. It doesn't take me much to recognize champions of the work we are doing.

And you're all going to be witnessing one in the next segment of this webinar. You know, Olaolu exhibits, the component qualities that I aspire to in this work, and I'm truly excited to listen to him. As

he shares more about the ways you can move the academic process and discussion about anti racism within post secondary institutions in BC from debate, to deliverables. He's a learning and teaching advisor BCcampus and an associate faculty at Royal Roads University and brings a vast experience and knowledge not only from lived experiences himself, but also from working with multiple entities including the BC government, UNICEF, and many more. I hope you all enjoy and learn a lot from the knowledge and wisdom that he's about to share over to you Olaolu.

OLAOLU ADELEYE:

Wow, Njamba. [Speaks Yoruba.] That means thank you in Yoruba. As Njamba has said my name is Olaolu Adeleye and I have the opportunity to be here on behalf of BCcampus and on behalf of the working group that we have been a part of over these last few months. And so today I share with you a conversation about the present. The word itself has many different connotations, and depending on your perspective, you already have an interpretation in mind. But really, we're here today to have this conversation about moving from equitable intentions to actions, or how I like to say, from rebuttal to reflection, and from advocacy to action. And this title and itself is one becomes inspired by Dr Magassa, who speaks about this concept of the gift that we give. So, I hope you will journey with me as we go through this narrative of what this looks like, in our context. Inevitably, you're all here for different reasons. But why is the act of question that continually will points us to the north star of integrity that will lead us in the direction we hope and desire for our future.

I'd like to begin by taking a moment to acknowledge the fact that I'm joining you here today on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen and Xwsepsum people, Esquimalt and Songhees nations, And in addition to making this acknowledgement, I also want to express my gratitude to the territories of Anishinaabe and the Mi'kmaq. These two territories are part of my story. And there are regions of Canada, which I have spent significant amount of time as well. So, in expressing my gratitude for today, I also want to express my gratitude for where I've come from. Let's begin with a narrative. the year is 1992. There are children running around in a school yard. One of the children is approached. He's new to the school. And he's approached by several young boys. And they come up to him and say, "What is your name, we heard it is blank." He responds, thinking that their intention is to welcome him into their space. But in telling them his name, they start to mock it, to the degree where they start speaking about it, and his skin saying that, "Oh, you need to go to the loo." If you're familiar with this term, in England it is the toilets.

Let's pause. Today, over the course of several different acts, I want to offer us an opportunity to look at what it means from a personal to communal, to aspirational perspective, to journey through this conversation. And through similar sentiments that have been expressed by those who presented before me talk about the importance of collective wisdom of lived experiences. So our agenda today, which is presented to you a search in the format of a table of contents, if you will, is done with the intention of us being seated in a theater or your home theater, and going from act to act to act. And then considering an alternate ending, the ending that we hope for. You see when we initially took time to design a facilitation guide, which is what I'll be sharing with you. A lot of our conversation came from a place of what did it mean to go from a personal place to impact in society. We often think about separating our personal experience, from our political perspective and from our professional environment.

But the three are inextricably linked. We often think about anti racism as something that is done by an EDI committee or a branch of an institution. But the reality is it's a human conversation. And so it has to make us question what those structural limitations are, and also makes us have to reflect on what the future that we desire looks like. And so, we'll share with you two resources and I'm going to speak to two resources as I weave them in our conversation for today. The first is the facilitation guide that I designed with the collaboration of BCcampus and it is used as a guide connects to a book written by Abraham Kennedy. But it is not exclusive to this, it can be used in other environments as well. And then a piece that is written by Rohene Bouajram and that is, 'Understand Dismantle an Act.' And this document is a scan that has come up with information about what is available within BC PSIs, as well as some action steps that we can take as we consider anti racism and anti hate within our sector.

Next slide, please. So Act One, stuff and schemas. If we go to our next slide, I want you to take a moment to reflect on these two questions. They are not meant to get a response from you in this very moment. But they are there for you to consider as we continue through this presentation. Now, I'd like to introduce you to someone his name is Tochuku. Recently, there have been many campaigns, talking about reclaiming one's name. Several here in the Pacific Northwest, that have been led by members of different Asian communities, ask them the questions of why do I have an English name? What are, rather what is my original name? Why wasn't that the name that was given when I started school? A few years ago, then Senator Kamala Harris was also teased about her name during her run for vice presidency. Here, we have an example that speaks to the experience of Tochuku. And though in this context, what is referenced is Ebola. As we go back several years ago, the narrative is no different as we consider what has happened around the conversation with COVID.

If you can go to the next slide, I'd like to draw your attention to some very interesting statistics. The first of which is this recent data shared by the black and BC convener project speaks to what experiences racialized specifically black racialized students are having as they come to institutions. The next bullet then also speaks to what the incidence of hate crimes looks like in our country. And the fact is that BC actually is the second worst within the context of Canada. Another breakdown gives you more of an understanding of the intersectional contributions to what has motivated this a practice. And as we go to our next slide, I want us to think about the importance of self and schemas. You see, we all have our own individual schemas. But the conversation of self and schemas is one about challenging our own racism, our own biases. And the scan speaks to this through the themes of building awareness and reflection. Again, it requires self reflection. And it is a commitment to an iterative process, which is a renewal and growth.

I highlight this experience of Tochuku as an example of those of many immigrants. Because the accounts, the narratives, the experiences of immigrants are important, because they give us the opportunity to consider the fact that there isn't a monolithic experience to choose who is black, but Tochuku who is more than Black is Nigeria is an able man. All of these elements are at play. And the his experience looks very different from another black male. As we consider this narrative, I want to point to Candy's idea around this topic. He says there's no such thing as a micro aggression. In fact, any sort of act is really racist abuse. What we see in this case will Portugal is an example of what he terms ethnic racism. Additionally, Dr Mazumder speaks to this in a conversation about experiential equity. and that the ramifications of such speech have psychological and physical impacts terming microaggressions and citing these as the outcome. Our next slide please. At this point, I'd like to invite you to reflect on Tochuku's experience.

And since our conversation today is about the empty chair, I would like to ask you to pull out your phone and pointed at our QR code. And with the prompt, which is offered to you, I want to ask you, what is it or why is it that Tochuku's chair is empty? You have 25 characters, so we'll need to be a short response. But we'll share the screen now. And we'll see what ideas are generated. Why is the chair empty? Or what is the cause of the empty chair for Tochuku? Fear of unknown alienation racialized people are... Isn't seen as a person. A feeling of disrespect, absolutely, racial abuse, unwelcome, alienation, isolation. These are all good. I mean, they're not good. But they're all spot on in relating to this context. Absolutely. Let's see a couple more not embracing differences. White supremacy. Thank you. Please feel free xenophobia, another great response. Feel free to continue to include your responses as we shift gears. And we consider some other elements of self and schemas now. And then going back to the slides.

What we have created within the facilitation guide is an exercise, which suggests and again, this isn't the only exercise that can work in this context. But for our purposes, it's conversation about privilege. You see, we're all privileged in many different ways. And that conversation of privilege allows us then to understand how our different privileges can enable or rather help and support and really advocate for the changes we want to see. Privilege considers many intersectional elements, socio economic standing, faith, gender, education, language, many, many things to account for. And so this is again to catalyze for the conversation of what this looks like for you when we consider self schemas. Next slide, please. The year is 2003. There's a young teenage boy getting off a bus and he's on his way to a gathering. At least he thinks he is. It's about seven or eight o'clock in the evening. But it's an October evening. So, it is dark outside. He's walking on the sidewalk and then all of a sudden he hears sirens, "Stop.

Do you have anything on you that would cause me harm?" "No, no sorry. Sorry, sir. I don't." "Please keep your hands where I can see them." You fit the description. Next slide please. Pause. Again, I'd like you to consider these questions as a point of reflection as we now unpack society systems. OK, at this point, I'd like to introduce you to Ruqayya this past January or every January now for the past five years on January 29. Our government has decided to commemorate the loss of lives from the massacre in Quebec City and this really points to where our nation is in this conversation of plurality. See, the experiences of Muslim people within our context are often made into a singular experience. And like that which is shared with require, this becomes an infringement or impingement on their ability to fully express themselves, inform us. Tomorrow is the start of Ramadan. So, perhaps it's timely, as I share this, and request that even as people ask, or inquire about the experiences or the choices that Muslim people will make over the course of the next month.

To do so, with honor, dignity, and respect. Next slide, please. Here we see that faith motivated, excuse me hate crimes actually decreased across the country. This that is a couple of years old, very interestingly, that which is targeting Muslims, has actually increased. And please know even as we think about data, it is important to consider that sometimes our data systems are not the best in reflecting the true realities. And maybe even more importantly, there's many people who won't come forward. Because trauma isn't something that always invites people to express their experiences. Additionally, I'd like to bring your attention to this data that was shared by UVic, Professor Rob Gillezeau. And in it, we see that if we were to have a conversation about having a society and a government that reflects the society, that we are very far behind, in our context. So, in this conversation, we have to ask ourselves, how is it that we're counting for those different experiences? How is it that we're counting for those different voices?

Next slide, please. Our conversation of society and systems is one which is about accounting for the structural racism, the history and the things that underpin the experiences of those in a society that doesn't see them. In our scan, this is seen through the themes of knowledge and competence, how one can enhance their knowledge, how one can expand their vocabulary, how one can intentionally take a step. And so, we have to think about why these voices and these narratives are important in this context, to the conversation of Islamophobia, the points to an emphasis to an area faith, which is perhaps not as appreciated within the context of a given society. And thus, we create what Adichie refers to as the single story what Stuart Hall refers to as the misrecognition of difference again, invite you to pull out your phone record Ruqayya's chairs empty, why? What is the cause of the chairs empty? Discrimination, fear, ostracism, exclusionary systems othering, lack of safety to live her reality I'm assuming is that word, yeah Islamophobia, assumptions, ignorance, bias.

Absolutely. Please continue to populate this we'll go back to the slide deck again and here I got within be a facilitation guide. The invitation is for you to take a moment to map out and locate yourself within a society. Picking a theme, it could be the judicial system, it could be the education system, it could be housing, what are the systems in place? And as you really think, and really map them out, where are you in that system? What is your proximity to power? What is your ability to impact change? And how do those systems express or rather impede on your expression on the fullness of who you are as a person? Next slide, please. Schools and syllabus. The year 2017 a racialized faculty member at BC PSI has just finished their first term of teaching and they're looking at the reviews that they've been given I've never had anyone like them before. I don't believe that they are a reflection of the values or ethos of these programs I don't believe that their knowledge is reflective of our reality here pause can you go to the next, please.

Take a moment to reflect on the following questions. And now we're going to shift gears. And so I asked you again to pull out your phone this time to participate in an exercise. And please do this without using Google. Of course, there are no marks for this quiz. Perhaps there are bragging rights before our purposes please indulge me as we consider the following our first question on your quiz and for each response we will share what the majority of people have voted for and what the correct responses. We'll give you a few seconds to read the question. So, the majority of you have voted for Austria OK. And the correct answer is Austria give yourself a pat on the back if you selected Austria our next election by the way, one of these authors is a Nobel Laureate not to influence or impact your decision if you even know which of them it is. OK, and again, the majority of you have selected is getting close Chinua Achebe it and the correct answer is well done. Our next question, who does not belong?

And again, the majority of you have selected Mark Twain and the correct answer is indeed Mark Twain. OK, our next one. I will let you know there is more than one correct response on this one as a hint. And our correct response, or the majority of you have voted for war and peace and Anna Karenina, OK, and the correct responses are those to perfect. Our next question the author of Cien anos de Soledad and the correct response Gabriel Garcia Marquez. OK. Two more the majority of you are voting for Vietnam. And the correct response is Vietnam. OK. And our last question money or done interestingly was actually recently read out in the BC legislature. Majority of you have voted for interesting. What is the correct response? Saadi Shirazi. OK, thank you for indulging us. I don't know if we'll share the results. I don't think that's important. But what is important, as we go back to our slide deck, is a conversation around understanding and appreciating alternate, rather equally as valuable perspectives.

This concept that was referred to by Harshita as collective wisdom. At this point, I'd like to introduce Anna Maria to you. And as we think about Anna Maria, and we think about this idea of a transdisciplinary way of learning, wants to appreciate the different perspectives on any given issue. The wealth of knowledge, the perspective springs to the table, if I have an orange in front of me, and we have a conversation about what is this orange? Or what meaning does this orange have to? The biologist tells me about the nutritional value. The philosopher says to me, what is the meaning of the orange? The artist talks about the orange from the perspective of its color and the value to their palates. Or perhaps it has a muse. And each of these responses is equally as valuable. All of them are correct. And if this is true, even in this example, how much more so is it as we think about the variance in cultural perspectives? Can we shift to the next slide please? As we consider again, the experiences of racialized people on campus.

The first information the first bullet speaks to the experience of students. Again, this idea of their reality not being reflected or welcomed in a certain space. The second bullet highlights the experience of a faculty member and then essentially being told to leave maybe not directly. But their points has been made, that point has been made. So, as we have a conversation again, about why schools and syllabus is important on our next slide. It is important because schools and syllabus makes us consider what is going on in our communities in our classroom, in our curriculum. Our scan has highlighted two themes rather a theme of accountability and highlighted two actions really, which talks about how to situate oneself within the context and also how to take a step beyond the experience of racialized people this are important because they allow us to get from a conversation of ethno-centrism to one which is ethno-relative one which can appreciate two different perspectives. Thussu refers to this as imperialist epistemology that which says, because you studied over there or because you went to that institution, or because it was written in that language can possibly be important.

It isn't one of the items that are canonical in our context. Freire speaks to this as the pedagogy of the oppressed. questioning how we can create curriculum that is specific to each context that reflects the different ways of knowing of being of those who are present. Next slide please. Again, I ask you to pull out your phone and reflect on Anna Maria has experience why is the chair empty for Anna Maria? Disregard racism, lack of understanding. colonized way of thinking. White washing, ignorance misunderstood, colonialism, yep, Western centrism? Origin and ratio of experience, these are all good. It's all good. OK, thank you all for sharing there. Let's go back to our slide deck. Again, within the facilitation guide, the invitation here is to really reflect on what it is that you're doing, depending on your position as learning designer, as a faculty member, as an administrator, to audit your curriculum, asking whose voices have been included, who's been invited into the discussion? What has been reflected?

And how is this reflective of your community campus? How is it reflective of our contemporary society? How is it showing the diversity and the richness of that which exists at your institution? Next slide, please. As part of the information that will be shared, or that is shared in the scan that was created by Rohene Bouajram is six different recommendations of how we need to improve our approach to anti racism and anti-hates here within our British Columbian context. The first of which speaks to an importance of actually getting more information. As I spoke to in the conversation about the data of what hate crimes look like for Muslims in Canada, there's always a gap because we have to consider how are these narratives being shared? What of these narratives is being shared? And what actions are being taken when this information is actually shared? Directly connected to this is an evaluation of what things

we have in place, what resources are in place, much of the time the conversation within anti racism and anti hate is, Where can I find a resource?

Where can read up on this? Or what podcasts can I listen to or subscribe to? And really, it's asking, Are these resources that are available the best resources? Are they the most effective? Are they the most accessible? Are they giving the answers that are needed to help people to take that next step, which points to the idea of a clear roadmap, and that's helping people to really actually charts the journey, or where they are in their journey and what steps they need to take to continue that journey. And that conversation on an individual and institutional level. We also found that there is a gap in the capacity really, for how and what we're offering in terms of training in the realm of anti racism and anti hate. Institutions also are speaking to this area, but their positions aren't perhaps as pronounced as it could be. And so really thinking about how can we make this more explicit? How can we show a stronger position of this? And finally, really, something that underpins each of these is increasing the awareness and the impact of what is happening to racialized people as we talk about anti-hate and anti racism if we could just shift to the next slide ,at four success and solidarity.

The years is 2022. Different racialized faculty research, researchers, students, staff of BC PSIs have come together to engage in a conversation about their experiences, about their lived experiences, about the trauma that they've experienced in their different positions about the realities that they face on a day to day basis being part of the BC PSIs. And together, they formulate a space which is enriching, encouraging, and one, which is inspiring change in a unique way. Next slide, please. As we talk about the future that we want, what does that look like? Please take a moment to reflect on this question. And our next slide, please. I've had the privilege and opportunity to be part of a conversation and more than a conversation with 20 others in our BCcampus anti-hate anti racism group. And as you can see there with some of the information that is offered, this group is very unique in that it reflects a wide range of different intersectional elements. Our ages are diverse, our agendas are diverse, our positions within BC PSIs are diverse, the number of BC PSIs that are present, is substantial.

Well, it's about a third of the BC PSIs that are reflected there. And in addition to that, there are people who are working in multiple spaces, some in BC PSIs, some in civil society organizations, some of the government and some in other areas that hadn't been defined by this graphic. And again, partly is thanks to COVID Make one of the few things we thank COVID for our virtual ability to communicate has allowed us to actually tap into six different geographies, four of which represent four economic regions here in BC. And in this conversation in this space, much of the sentiments that are being expressed are the beauty of being in a space where people are authentically able to share their ideas, and to see others who reflect their experiences and actually understand what it is they're saying. There is an inspiration, to do more, to find ways to hold people accountable, to really think about what steps can be put into place that are actionable for faculty, for administrators, as we hold them accountable for the future that we all desire.

Next slide please. And one such initiative that has already began this conversation at several institutions across the country, and actually a few of them here in BC, Simon Fraser, UNBC, UBC, UVic, Kwantlen I believe, and perhaps some others. And this is a conversation specifically around anti racism as a relates to anti black hate anti black crimes. But it is a sentiment and it is an approach which is equally as applicable to any racialized community. What underpins this, and this was designed by Dr. William Tettey at the University of Scarborough is the VP at the University of Scarborough, or rather, the

University of Toronto Scarborough. And the conversation really is about this idea of thinking about the different aspects and experiences within our post secondary institutions. So governance, research, teaching and engagement, again, curriculum, the classroom, the community. And what it is is a consideration that then allows us to think about the many different ways in which those experiences intersect to then impact the experiences of those around campus, specifically, the experiences of racialized people.

How can we create collaboration? How can create accountability? How can we ensure that we are actually accounted for the different experiences of those who are from racialized communities, the different intersections as well. I believe this link to this has been offered and it will be shared again, at the end of our follow up. If we can go to our next slide, please. Our conversation of success and solidarity is really about looking at the status quo and asking ourselves, again, what is the future we want a future that we can only reach through engagement, through collaboration, through holding people accountable for their actions. And in our guide, rather in our scan, we have a conversation about what this looks like, again, pointing back to intentional and inspired action. This, again has to be an introspective exercise first before it can be an external one. What are the steps that you as an individual can take? And what is the impact that you hope to see? How can those steps that you desire to take be reflected in some tangible in a societal level?

Again, our conversation here is important because it really speaks to this idea of building something that is reflective of a group of people whose voices have not been brought to the table. And who better to speak to what inclusion looks like than a group that has been excluded. Dr Medan refers to this as the importance of context, and the context matter. Dr Magassa refers to this as the gift that we give ourselves. Next slide, please. Within the facilitation guide, there is an invitation for you to take a moment to really reflect on what anti racism means to you. What actions do you want to take? And through prompts offered by a template for a anti racist statement, it asks questions of you of what that can look like in your own individual experience, but also at your own institution. And if we can go to our next slide. When we talk about success and solidarity, these are words, which have great meaning. Success is something that is continually evolving. It reflects on what is transpired, but also thinks about what is to come.

The years 2021. And it's a young boy's first day of school. Because father's with them lining up as they await their teacher, his teacher for the year. His dad kneels down to his level, and it's also I'm proud of you. Remember your voice, it is powerful. Remember that your story is special. They're there for you to share with those around you. Make sure that they say your name correctly. Next slide please. I began with speaking about this idea of the present without offering it a specific definition. And I did that purposely because similar to our initial conversation within act number one, our conversation of schemas is one that really points to the meaning that we take for any given word. But in this context, the present actually is a signifier of multiple things within the frame of self and schemas and our first act, it is asking, who is present, maybe more important, who is absent in the conversation of society and systems? It is asking about what is the present status quo? Where is our society?

When we think about these issues, in the conversation about schools and syllabus, the conversation is how our BC PSIs presenting this as an area of importance. How are racialized people receiving that in their experiences? In a conversation of solidarity and success. It is what we, as the working group would like to present to you as a gift. Next slide please. I want you to think back to the four really three plus

one narratives that we shared over the course of today. The first have Tochuku and his experience of name calling, of not being seen. The gifts we give Tochuku is one of inclusivity. Think of Ruqayya the comments about their job about their time of prayer. The fact that our society doesn't reflect the things that they need for the full expression. The gift to give require is plurality. Think of Anna Maria fully knowledgeable, equipped to educate, to offer suggestions to offer value at their institution. But their requests or suggestions were not welcomed. And thus the gift that we give Anna Maria is representation.

And for our final group, those of us who have been part of this working group, which we will share some explicit and specific recommendations in the coming weeks. The gift that we give our group which represents a larger group within BC PSIs accountability. Next slide please. I end with this for your consideration from CLINPSYCH_IND. And in it, you will see the top graphic which speaks to what many racialized people would tell you is their experience in this conversation of anti racism, that it exists in the space that is reserved for the EDI branch of their organization. But it is not mainstreamed into every single area and facet of their expressive institutions, that their personal narratives and experiences are not given precedence or importance when the conversation is being had. And for that, I asked you to consider the second portion of the graphic that this process is one that is iterative. It doesn't just happen in one month of the year. And it is challenging. But it is necessary if we truly want to think about a future that we desire if we truly want to achieve an ultimate ending.

Like Jennifer said, it isn't about just receiving the recipe and checking a box. There perhaps isn't a blueprint, because it is one that we create. But there's one that has to be created with the voices of those who express it the most. Thank you for your time today. We'll be including some references for you to look at later. And stay tuned for some recommendations from our working group.