Atlantis

Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice

Amidst the Noise (3) by Ibe Ananaba

Dialogues and Reflections:
The Scarborough Charter

Edited by Christiana Abraham and Rohini Bannerjee

The cover art for this special issue on the Scarborough Charter shows *Amidst The Noise (3)* by Ibe Ananaba (acrylic and permanent marker on canvas; 55.5 x 85.5 in. 2020). The artwork reflects resilience, with background doodles symbolizing societal turmoil and a central figure representing the strength to unapologetically stand tall above social injustices.

Ananaba, a multidisciplinary artist, explores the impact of socio-cultural issues on contemporary living, using art for social transformation. Recognized with the 1st Prize at Art Masters, Art Vancouver 2019, and listed in the Smithsonian Libraries, Ananaba's work is featured in international exhibitions and publications such as *Masters of Watercolors* (Planeta Muzyki Publishers, Finland, 2018), *Artists of Nigeria* (5 Continents Edition, Italy, 2012) and many more. In 2023, he executed the diversity mural in Berwick, Nova Scotia. He also collaborated with Acadia University for their Decolonizing and Deconstructing Space research project, presented "Black Fashion Is Art" at the Art Deco Museum during Art Basel Miami 2023, and participated in *The Secret Codes* group exhibition at The Textile Museum in Toronto. Ananaba, the 2024 Artist-In-Residence of Visual Arts Nova Scotia, is a member of Visual Arts Nova Scotia and the Black Artist Network of Nova Scotia. www.ibeananabart.com

Amidst The Noise (3) and *In an Embittered World, What is the Colour of Joy?* are used with permission from Ibe Ananaba. Curated by Pamela Edmonds.

Plumes of Progress: An Introduction to the Special Issue on the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion

by Christiana Abraham and Rohini Bannerjee

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Rohini Bannerjee (she.her.elle), daughter of immigrant Settlers from Himachal Pradesh, India, was born and raised on unceded Mi'kmaki territory, on the Dartmouth side of the great harbour of Kjipuktuk. Chevalière de l'Ordre de la Pléiade, Rohini earned her PhD in French Studies at Western University in 2006 and is a Full Professor of French in the Department of Languages and Cultures at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. A scholar, translator, and creative writer, Rohini's primary research focuses on the literatures and cultures of the Francophone Indian Ocean. Papers on Mauritian literature have appeared in *Nouvelles Etudes Francophones*, *Indialogs,* and *portAcadie*. In 2021, she co-edited *From Band-Aids to Scalpels: Motherhood Experiences in/of Medicine* with Demeter Press and, in 2024, *Premières Vagues: Poèmes covidiens des espaces minoritaires et diasporiques de la francophonie* with L'Harmattan, Paris. During her tenure in senior academic administration, Rohini co-led the signing of the Scarborough Charter. Her short stories and poetry exploring themes on belonging, identity, and body image, written in both French and in English, have appeared in Canada, Spain, France and India.

In an Embittered World, What is the Colour of Joy? Acrylic on canvas 60 x 48 in. © Ibe Ananaba 2021

Introduction

The signing of the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education: Principles, Actions and Accountabilities in 2021 signalled an important milestone in Canadian higher education (Scarborough Charter 2021). When presidents and chancellors of forty-six universities and colleges, including the country's largest post-secondary institutions such as the University of Toronto, McGill University, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Calgary, came together in a joint virtual-signing ceremony, the symbolism of the moment was simply seismic. The nationally broadcast ceremony featured Black leaders, Charter drafters, students, and activists who introduced its vision for systemic change in higher education in Canada. This was followed by participating university leaders ceremoniously signing the document to signal their commitment to its principles as partner institutions. However, beyond the lights and cameras, what does this Charter really entail for higher education in Canada?

At a time when universities continue to grapple with how to address Indigenous and Black representation and inclusion, the Charter has been described as a historic "never before seen" framework for action. It is underpinned by four principles: Black flourishing, inclusive excellence, mutuality, and accountability. Commitments outlined in the Charter include increased hiring of Black faculty and staff in relation to their historic underemployment in the higher education sector, decolonizing and broadening curriculum, and the initiation of Black Studies programs across institutions, among others. The Charter has been described as a tool that provides universities with guidelines for their anti-Black racism strategies and a framework for action beyond mere talk, that is, "to be alive to complexity and proactive in the face of crisis; to foster fundamental questioning through rigorous, respectful engagements across difference; and to enable societal transformation" (Charter, 9).

The Charter also signals acknowledgement of what is often whispered in academe's historic hallways of knowledge but not spoken aloud: the existence of systemic anti-Black racism.

Institutional introspection regarding anti-Black racism in Canada was spurred by several incidents of racial profiling of Black students on Canadian university campuses (Tomlinson, Mayor and Baksh 2021) and the global soul-searching that followed the police killing of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man in the United States in 2020. This event sparked massive Black Lives Matter protests including the toppling of colonial monuments in North America and beyond (Abraham 2021).

Deliberations on the Charter began in October 2020 when institutional leaders, including Wisdom Tettey, Vice-President and Principal at the University of Toronto-Scarborough, initiated national conversations referred to as the National Dialogues and Action on anti-Black racism at Canadian institutions. These discussions, led by Black academic leaders and diverse partners from various sectors including students, faculty, staff, senior leadership of partner institutions, as well as Black political and civic leaders outside academia, deliberated on how to make meaningful change. Drawing from this collective work, so began the drafting of the Charter, where the principles, actions, and accountability measures took shape as a collaborative endeavour.

We suggest that the significance of this Charter can be viewed as threefold:

First, via its novel use of language about Blackness and excellence, it introduces into the vernacular terms such as inclusive excellence, intersectional Black flourishing, and Black traditions of research excellence, among others. The Charter calls for the broadening, re-shaping, and revisioning of the ways in which Blackness can be articulated beyond limiting definitions. In so doing, the Charter allows for the concrete re-thinking of necessary reparatory frameworks of space-making and alternative discourses that enrich the discursive space. To a large extent, the Charter provides licence to members of the academy and community to enunciate Blackness through a rich vocabulary that foregrounds evident gaps, absences, challenges, desires, and futures.

Second, the Charter broadens an articulation of anti-Black racism within the frame of the historical and colonial context of Canada[1] where such discourse tends to be ghettoised in closed spaces or otherwise spoken through what critical race studies researcher Yasmin Jiwani has labelled "discourses of denial" (Jiwani, 2006). Premised on a historical legacy that takes into consideration the distinct Black presence in Canada for more than four hundred years, including its history of trans-Atlantic slavery, the establishment of Black communities from the Loyalist era and historic structural Black exclusion, the Charter makes a compelling case for attention to be placed on anti-Black racism in Canada at this juncture (Charter, 5). While the Charter locates the case for anti-Black racism within the framework of Black reparative justice in the Canadian context, notwithstanding its intersections with EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusivity), decoloniality, and Indigenous presence, it makes an unambiguous case for a Black primacy. In so doing, the Charter provides a mechanism that actively reshapes a more radical and inclusive envisioning of pedagogy and, by extension, another kind of epistemology.

And third, the Charter is a concrete step-by step template for action and accountability on anti-Black racism. We suggest that the Charter should be viewed as a call for transformative change that ultimately envisions an alternative university. Rinaldo Walcott, Black Canadian scholar and Chair of Africana and American Studies at the University of Buffalo, argues for an urgent re-thinking of the university as it is currently a space where all is not well. To Walcott, the university remains a contested site of crisis where the most marginalized in its hallways have and continue to struggle for substantive representation at all its levels (Walcott 2023). Walcott suggests that in the face of the necessary reforms needed for the modern university as a fundamentally unequal and reactive site, what is required is the imagining of "a*nother university now!*" (2023, 63).

The Special Issue

This special issue on the Scarborough Charter emerged from our engaged interest in this historic moment. Informed by our combined lived and institutional experiences as Black and Brown identifying women academics who have been committed to the work of critical race studies, anti-Black racism,[2] and EDI[3] at our respective institutions over the years, we were eager to be a part of this important conversation. We wished to explore how these collective actions and accountabilities that the Charter seeks might actually occur. What happens beyond the signing of the Charter and individual universities' optics?

The idea for this special issue first took root a few months after the Charter signing as a call for a virtual academic symposium in collaboration with the journal *Atlantis*. After receiving only a handful of abstracts, most

likely attributable to the newness of the Charter, we issued a broader call for papers for a Special Issue on the Scarborough Charter. Collated here are contributions from scholars, academics, activists, artists, and students who have offered their critical interpretations and engagements with the Charter. While the signing of the Charter has signalled deeper questions, this Special Issue provides some emerging interpretations, along with reflective and creative contributions that surround this call to action. Varied research contributions and reflections propel the following questions and more: How will the Charter influence ways in which the academy frames and considers Black inclusion and excellence? What pedagogical challenges does the Charter pose in its quest to decolonise the academy? Does the mere existence of the Charter prioritise the processes and tangible actions of change? In alignment with the scope of the journal *Atlantis*, that is, exploring Black feminist theory and practice, gender, and social justice, we are pleased to curate wide-ranging perspectives in this Special Issue. These contributions acknowledge historical and current barriers facing Black inclusion in the academy with a focus on lived experiences. Together, these contributions remind us of a grassroots desire for change when dominant cultures, processes, and approaches to academia are forced to recalibrate and make room in such transformative moments.

As a living document, we are keeping in mind that the Charter should also be viewed with continuous critical oversight by Black scholars and critics regarding its implementation and do-ability. For instance, we can explore Rosalind Hampton's (2023) robust critique of current institutional discourse of Black excellence within the neo-liberal university in Canada. She argues that the urge to use the discourse of Black excellence has generated insatiable and unsustainable demands that encourage sacrificing one's health and well-being in exchange for being recognised as exceptional when Black scholars already must be more than exceptional to succeed in the academy. She raises the concern that "institutional discourses and awards structured around Black Excellence both exceptionalize Black students and academics and place us into competition with one another *as Black students and academics*. To enter and exist within the university under the guise of Black Excellence is to distance ourselves from Black averageness, from quotidian Black life and everyday people" (Hampton 2023, 67). Hampton further argues that although the Scarborough Charter focuses instead on inclusive excellence, in reality, the term is often merged into EDI rhetoric in the

academy and may be inadequate to address the specificity of anti-Blackness and its related governing infrastructures.

Starting with an interview with two stewards of the Scarborough Charter, Dr. Adelle Blackett and Dr. Wisdom Tettey, we engage in a robust behind-the-scenes conversation about the Charter and its implications. In this riveting discussion, Tettey and Blackett share their own experiences of leading this historic initiative and take us on a journey from the beginning to various processes in the development of the Charter. They lay out the grassroots consultations that framed and informed the context, foundational principles, and spirit for action on anti-Black racism. This conversation also offers an in-depth analysis of the meanings of the novel language deployed by the Charter around inclusive excellence. As Tettey suggests, the idea of Black flourishing is to ensure that our institutions are places where Black people—faculty, staff, students, and community members—can feel a sense of belonging, where they can see themselves as a part of the mission of the institution where they are supported in order to flourish. This conversation also addresses some of the challenges and difficult terrain around accountability and change that the Charter demands within institutions.

The multi-vocal piece "Poetic Fabulations: Chartering Relationalities of Black Flourishing, Mutuality, Inclusive Excellence, and Accountability" is a creative offering that infuses poetry, risk, and accountability. Along with Black feminist lived experiences and practice, this contribution demonstrates the power of the language of the Charter and how it mobilizes persistent structures in post-secondary spaces. Rooted in poetics, with intention and hope, Anita Girvan, Maya Seshia, Nisha Nath and Davina Bhandar advance non-linear reflections of the grassroots work of the Charter, questioning what happens when institutions sign on to it. In this original approach that merges critical and literary thinking that results in a uniquely poetic prose, readers engage with multiple metaphors intersecting institutional fragility with the "wait and weight" of coalitional politics along with the diverse flavours of performance leadership and the muffling of racialized labour of anti-racist change.

In a data-driven reflection entitled "Moving Beyond Diversity: Using Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought to Foster Black Inclusion through Undergraduate University Admissions," Christopher Stuart Taylor and Grace Gomashie focus on pathways for university

undergraduate admissions. This critical contribution offers insights on current undergraduate admission practices framed through diversity and inclusion initiatives in selected Ontario universities, as well as the limits of such in disrupting systemic barriers faced by Black undergraduate applicants. The authors issue a clarion call for universities to devise concrete paths to making admissions more accessible and inclusive for Black students in Canada. They make the case for the employment of the four principles of the Scarborough Charter as workable frameworks through which Black admissions can be approached. In this provocative work, Taylor and Gomashie also make space for the intersections of critical race theory and Black feminist approaches as deliberate space-making strategies for tackling anti-Black racism.

Eva Cupchik's interview with Karima Hasmani, former Executive Director of Equity Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Toronto and convener of the Scarborough Charter, offers notable insight on looking far beyond EDIA (accessibility) policies and practices within the post-secondary experience. Cupchik's questions distinguish themes in relation to the Charter, intersecting identity (re)construction of Black diasporas, accessible education, and allyship. Hasmani's direct experience convening the National Dialogues and Action, along with her intersectional identity, allows for answers that provoke more questions for the reader. How can senior academic leadership ensure that the grassroots pathways to education move to the forefront? Are universities committed to promoting recruitment practices that provide inclusive strategies for the retention and thriving of all our students? The echoes of hope from the Charter resound throughout Hasmani's considered answers to Cupchik's purposeful questions.

Karine Coen-Sanchez offers a reflective paper that honours her lived experiences as a Black woman pursuing her doctoral degree in Sociology in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa. Coen-Sanchez taps into the wisdom of her own daughter's poetry, one where the individual experience may differ from what the status-quo narrative of graduate studies is promising: an equal experience for everyone. This rich reflection touches on the multiple dimensions of the Black student experience, including acculturative loss, that is, the losing of a part of oneself in order to acquire approval and acceptance by a dominant system. Coen-Sanchez leads many of her paragraphs with the anthem *I wish I knew*, harkening readers to wonder the same about the polite

racism and microaggressions experienced and consequently, almost automatically, dismissed.

Similarly, Shanice Bernicky's personal reflection offers thoughtful insights on the reception of the Scarborough Charter from a graduate student's perspective. Bernicky, a doctoral candidate at Carleton University, lays bare her educational journey through personal anecdotes that have marked her lived experiences with higher education as a Black-identifying student. She meticulously weaves through a rendering of the many challenges that she has faced and continues to face throughout her educational endeavour by critically juxta-positioning the promises of the Charter against the dominant structures and practices of the Eurocentric academy that students like herself often experience as an unwelcoming space. She warns against lumping disparate needs of the many who are traditionally "othered" in the academy in exchange for concrete targeted actions against anti-Black racism. In this important and engaging contribution, Bernicky sometimes makes use of a playful narrative approach by referencing her own living body in unpacking the Charter and its implications. Parts of the body are separated (mind, body, hand, and heart) in order to elaborate the un-learning that she sees as critical to the remaking of whole new selves that the Charter provokes.

When Black students do not feel that they belong in spaces of learning, hopelessness can replace curiosity. The Charter, however, infuses hope into the Black student experience and along their educational journey. Hope is tangible when navigating the punctuated rhymes and epochal rhythms of Dáminí Awóyigà, a 16-year-old student-poet and founder of Damini Creatives, situated in Halifax, Nova Scotia as the city's Youth Poet Laureate. "Rising Black Sea" embodies bravery and redemption, calling upon themes of suffering and transforming via the allusion of waves and energies that erode and transport but, ultimately, heal. Awóyigà's collective we that bejewels her verses invites the reader to unload pain and bias on the shoreline and, with intention, let the waves of the rising Black sea manifest a future of hope.

This special issue ends with closing remarks that were delivered by Adelle Blackett, principal drafter of the Scarborough Charter, at the launching ceremony in 2021. We thought it pertinent to transcribe and also, for wider circulation, translate into French, this time-defying and meaningful prose that sets out both the "daringness of firsts" that surrounds the Charter and the forward thinking vision that it beacons. Grounded in her lived Black-

Canadian and academic experiences, Blackett situates the Charter in historic and social contexts as an archive and framework that should catalyze action. Employing colourful metaphors, she cautions against the inadvertent and reckless use of EDI as a reactive response and end-all approach to the evident gaps in representation in today's academy. Instead, in dealing with the specific issue of anti-Black racism, she calls for Black-led and focused initiatives that involve the full participation of Black members of institutions, suggesting: "Nothing for us without us." In this speech, Blackett makes the case for a reparatory response to the extensive legacies of historic injustice and exclusion as chronicled through Black communities' insistence, against all odds, on their profound humanity, presence, and belonging as something to be reclaimed. For Blackett, what is required is a deliberate, racial reckoning founded on social justice principles in order to rebuild trust and move forward.

Conclusion

With close to sixty institutions as signatories of the Charter at the time of writing, several universities have announced concrete actions for tackling anti-Black racism such as Black faculty cluster hires. These include McMaster University, Western University, University of Calgary, University of British Columbia, and Dalhousie University, among others. As well, attention to student security and dedicated safe spaces and the setting up of Black-focused administrative offices have been initiated. Some universities have also launched Black Studies programs in order to broaden curriculum offerings.[4] These are important, visible signals. However, the holistic range of actions that the Charter provokes will require concerted and sustained long-term planning, funding mechanisms, and adherence to the accountability frameworks that the Charter envisages to ensure that the place of Black history, knowledges, and the Black experience are validated and felt throughout the academy as decolonizing pedagogy and praxis. Intersecting connections with the quest for Indigenous knowledges and inclusion across the academy, while at the same time stressing EDI initiatives, makes the work ahead compelling and challenging.

Reflecting on these many critical perspectives, this Special Issue sparks curious and critical thinking about the iterations of Black flourishing, excellence and promise still to come in Canada's post-secondary landscape.

We would like to share a work of art that we believe captures this moment of promise. The above image, entitled *In an Embittered World, What is the Colour of Joy?*, is by Nova Scotia-based, African inter-discliplinary artist Ibe Ananaba. We are grateful for permission to publish this image, as well as the image on the cover of this issue. We feel that Ananaba's depiction of a "conversation with the future" captures well the current dialogue around the Scarborough Charter. *In an Embittered World, What is the Colour of Joy?* depicts three women sharing a moment of joy and reflection. We interpret this powerful and complex rendition of Black lives as enacting the momentary pause required to savour the transformative joy and promise of the Charter. The artist's use of abstract black and white, layered with flecks of colour, frames the distinct faces of the women who beckon the viewer to not lose sight of the historical significance of the moment. At the same time, we suggest that the painting captures a vision for a deliberate future that comprises a continuous and dertermined step-by-step struggle for change that will involve all of us.

As Audre Lorde reminds us, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not lead single-issue lives. Our struggles are particular, but we are not alone. What we must do is commit ourselves to some future that can include each other and to work toward that future with the particular strengths of our individual identities."[5]

Upwards and onwards, we continue!

Endnotes

1. A persistent myth suggests that people enslaved in Canada were treated better than those enslaved in the United States and the Caribbean. But since the belief that Black persons were less than human was used to justify enslavement in all three places, it stands to reason that the treatment of enslaved Black people in Canada was comparable. See Henry-Dixon 2016.

2. Christiana Abraham has been an integral part of Concordia University's Task Force on Anti-Black Racism since 2021, serving as the subcommittee lead on Concordia History and Relations with Black Communities, as well as a member of the Task Force final-report writing team. She sits on the Advisory Board for the implementation committee of the Task Force recommendations.

3. Rohini Bannerjee served as Associate Vice-President, Diversity Excellence from 2021-2023 at Saint Mary's University. She was a member of the EDI Committee for Universities Canada and represented her institution on the Education Committee for the Black North Initiative. Before senior administration, she served as President of the Saint Mary's University Faculty Union for two terms and was a member of the Canadian Association of University Teachers Equity Committee.

4. See, for example, the following programs introduced by Dalhousie University, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, and York University, among others: https://www.dal.ca/news/2023/10/30/dalhousie-black-african-diaspora-studies-major.html; https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/cbse; https://educationnewscanada.com/article/education/level/university/1/1069370/black-studies-program-expands-to-include-major-minor-options.html

5. A quote from a speech "Learning from the '60s," which was delivered by Black feminist lesbian poet, writer, and activist Audre Lorde at Harvard University in February 1982. It is one of the speeches included in her book *Sister Outsider*.

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Anti-Black Racism and the Signing of the Scarborough Charter: Insights, Processes, Challenges, and Inclusive Futures in Canadian Higher Education.
An Interview with Dr. Adelle Blackett and Dr. Wisdom Tettey

by Christiana Abraham and Rohini Bannerjee (Special Issue Editors)

Keywords: Scarborough Charter; anti-Black racism; Canadian higher education; inclusive excellence

On November 18, 2021, forty-six universities and colleges across Canada signed the Scarborough Charter on anti-Black racism and Black inclusion in Canadian Higher Education: Principles Actions and Accountabilities[1] pledging to fight anti-Black racism and to promote Black inclusion. This Charter represents one of the most significant documents in the history of modern Canadian higher education in its collective, concrete plan of action to specifically address historical and structural issues related to anti-Black racism in institutions of higher learning. These actions include redressing Black underrepresentation among faculty, staff, and students as well as decolonising curricular offerings, teaching and learning, and knowledge production, and in particular representing Black traditions of excellence.

The following conversation with two of the stewards of the Scarborough Charter, Dr. Adelle Blackett, Canada Research Chair in Transnational Labour Law & Development, McGill University (Principal drafter of the Scarborough Charter) and Dr. Wisdom Tettey, Vice-President & Principal, University of Toronto-Scarborough and incoming President of Carleton University as of January 2025 (who spearheaded the initiative, co-convened the Dialogues with Karima Hashmani, Director, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at UTSC, and served as Chair of the Inter-Institutional Advisory Committee[2]),

offers some significant insights into the drafting and implementation of the Charter. This interview provides an opportunity to learn more about the grassroots history and background of the Charter. Our dialogue explores the context, spirit, and various facets of this living document. Moving forward from the fundamentals of the Charter, we ask how universities and colleges will stay accountable and committed to the Charter's bold vision, novel notions, decolonizing principles, and purposeful language.

Christiana Abraham (CA): What was the impetus and the grounding ideology (or ideologies) behind the landmark Scarborough Charter within Canadian higher education in 2021?

Wisdom Tettey (WT): On behalf of Adelle and myself and the larger steering committee, thanks for this opportunity. In terms of history, I think we cannot talk about the Charter without going back to the National Dialogues that gave birth to it.[3] We had gone through, at the University of Toronto at Scarborough, a process of fashioning out a strategic plan at the heart of which was a commitment to inclusion, in particular Black inclusion and Indigenous inclusion. And then around the same time, the world was awoken to the reality of what Black people experience every day; it was made visible in 2020

as things were unfolding in the United States with George Floyd's murder and people waking up to the fact that this thing that Black people experience every day is real. As institutions issued statements, there was a sense of these reactions being a repeat of the regular cycle that we go through. We issue statements to give us a sense of cathartic release, we feel good about it, and then we move on.

And so, because we had made a commitment as part of our strategic plan to convene National Dialogues on these issues of equity and inclusion, these developments gave us the impetus to mobilize people around this moment—people we know who are committed to these same issues—and as a sector to have related conversations. This led to the convening of the National Dialogues and that year we decided to focus on anti-Black racism and Black inclusion. Subsequently, we focused on other areas such as disability and accessibility. And because we all have our networks of people who we know are doing the heavy lifting in different spaces, we reached out and it was really heartwarming to have people say, "Absolutely, this is important."

At these dialogues, we heard very loud and clear from the 3,000 participants, including some 60 partner institutions, that we didn't want just another conversation that ended up making people feel good in the moment, with no substantive change.

This is where the push for a Charter came from. We've all fought for this work as individuals but, in order to move this, we needed institutions to own this. And we had the fortune of having someone of Adelle Blackett's calibre on the Inter-Institutional Advisory Committee who was willing to lead that effort. She, as principal drafter, pulled together a group of colleagues who were a subset of the advisory committee to move us through this process. I thought it was important to set the context because I think people assume this just emerged out of nowhere. There's a backstory to it.

It was imperative for us that we stayed true to the principles and the values that undergird this work while making sure that we're able to bring as many people onboard as possible. We made a conscious decision that we were not going to lower the barrier to entry in a way that makes signing on to the initiative perfunctory. There had to be a solid manifestation of commitment in order to be part of this. Signing is just the easy part. The work that

needs to be done is the more challenging part. And that is where we need concrete commitment.

Adelle Blackett (AB): Thank you, Christiana and Rohini, for the singular opportunity to speak to the Scarborough Charter initiative and thank you Wisdom for setting the stage. I'm also going to dial back to when I participated in the National Dialogues including the preparatory meeting. Present were concerned members of our communities from across the country, not only senior university and college administrators but of course academics broadly, staff members, and students who engaged very meaningfully alongside alumni and even some folks who would go on to become chancellors, just a wide range of people who cared very deeply about moving beyond statements on anti-Black racism toward action. I recalled asking right at the outset about how, beyond dialogue, we could build in concrete, lasting mechanisms to foster transformative change. Undergirding the initiative is recognition that the history of Black presence in Canada needs to be acknowledged and situated, and it needs to be a basis on which action is taken. In this regard, the federally-acknowledged UN Decade for People of African Descent was important.

In addition to the racial reckoning following George Floyd's murder, forcing so many to look again and to see the depth of anti-Black racism, there was also a broad commitment to thinking seriously about our collective histories. This includes of course the history of Indigenous dispossession. It was important, therefore, that the initial Inter-institutional Advisory Committee included senior administrators from Indigenous communities, working collaboratively to convey shared understandings and solidarities in the spirit of mutuality. Mutuality is one of the core principles of the Scarborough Charter.

I would add that we had a keen awareness of the importance of higher education access and what could be done in the university context to actually move us to a place where we could be seen as embracing the need to address anti-Black racism in concrete measures and across the many aspects of life in the higher education sector. Hence, the Scarborough Charter focuses on governance, on research, on teaching and learning, as well as on community involvement. I think that kind of captures the way in which we understood the imperative of action, guided by some core principles. The core influence for us has been to keep our attention on what needs to be done for change to be transformative.

Rohini Bannerjee (RB): What was the process for bringing together such a dynamic team of Charter drafters from across the Canadian higher education landscape?

WT: We recognized the importance and value of bringing the right people together, so that this was not just a cobbling together of anyone, and we remembered that in that moment that there were a lot of performative things going on. We wanted to make sure that the criteria for engaging people were anchored in a solid record of commitment to this work, not just having a bandwagon effect where people think it is the next cool thing to be part of.

We also wanted to make sure that we had representation across the college and university sectors. We wanted to make sure that faculty, staff, and students were represented and those voices were part of it. A lot of times when we talk about these issues, we tend to tilt in the direction of students and faculty and we forget that, within our context, staff are probably among the most marginalized of the marginalized. Making sure that their voices were heard in this, and that they were able to help shape the direction, was important. We wanted to ensure there was geographical diversity as well. We're a bilingual country and so we wanted to make sure that is also reflected.

And even within the Black community, which was always going to be the majority of this group, we wanted to make sure that the diversity of the community was reflected within our group. Making sure that voices that represent the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities were there, making sure that gender is publicly represented, all of those pieces were part of the consideration. But we also wanted to make sure that this was not a burden for just Black people, that we owned this as a responsibility of the whole sector. So non-Black allies who have a record of championing this work were brought into this space as well. There's a lot of commonality between the Black community's experience and Indigenous communities. There's a lot for us to learn from the experience of Indigenous colleagues and we wanted to draw on their experiences and their expertise and bring that to bear on the work. So, we had representation from Indigenous colleagues on this body. I think this gives you some sense of what it was like trying to pull all of these folks together.

As you all know, there's a lot of work that happens at the grassroots but this work is not able to find its way into spaces that would elicit the kind of responses that would make us move forward. So, in addition to the people who are doing the work on the front lines, we needed to bring institutions on board. And the numbers that you see in terms of signatories [to the Charter] reflect a lot of the behind-the-scenes work that was done to bring people on board. One of the things we wanted to make clear was that this initiative was not to be "hijacked" by institutions as their thing. But they are, nevertheless, going to be part of the solution and there was space for them to be part of this. We wanted to make sure that distinction was clear. So, members of the steering committee came in their individual capacities based on their record of similar work.

We can get into the work of being able to get institutions on board and Adelle can share with you some of the dynamics between different geographies and how these things were received in different spaces, but I hope this gives you some sense of that work of pulling people together. These are people with a record, a dedication, and a passion for this work who are not going to be cowed by the structural and systemic challenges that exist. But we were also not going to get people off the hook by making this just Black people's responsibility to move change.

AB: If I may, I'll just offer a bit of a timeline because I think there's so much there and you can see the wealth of insight into the work that went into making this Scarborough Charter more than a piece of paper. But I think what your question is getting at is the vision of co-creation in respect of drafting, right, because co-creation also extends beyond the drafting process to making the Scarborough Charter a truly living document within our institutions. And that's really crucial.

All of the stakeholders whom Wisdom has mentioned were convened during the first in the series of National Dialogues and Action that took place on October 1 & 2, 2020. Remembering that time and that moment, there were panelists, and in our virtual world of 2020, many people were listening intently but were not quite visible to the panelists. They were able to submit feedback subsequently and notes were taken from the various panel discussions. There were also powerful keynotes on our histories, including by Barrington Walker, and that kind of set the tone and of course there was a keynote by Wisdom that underscored that equity is deserved. The bullet point notes from those conversations, many of them happening simultaneously, became part of the record that informed the drafting in the spirit of co-creation.

About a month after the National Dialogues and Action, Wisdom reached out to me and said, "Hey, you know, you might like to join this steering committee." It's like, well, here we are, we might want to draft a charter. So, sure!

I was introduced to the other steering committee members, and we had maybe a two-hour conversation about the potential content of the Scarborough Charter. I appreciated the receptivity to my suggestion that we think about what would enable members of Black communities to thrive, to really flourish, and I welcomed a particularly helpful reflection from Mike DeGagné on lessons from the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

And I'll say this (because it was funny), Wisdom said, "It should take about three hours." Okay!

So, our team of four—Ananya Mukherjee Reid, then provost and vice-president at University of British Columbia (Okanagan Campus), Marie-Claude Rigaud (who had to leave the team and her position as Special Advisor and Associate Secretary General, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and Indigenous Relations, Université de Montréal in May 2021 to take up an appointment as a Québec Superior Court Justice), Barrington Walker, then Associate Vice-President, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Wilfrid Laurier University, and I—got together along with a two-person drafting support team, Natalie Elisha, then Equity Projects Specialist at University of Toronto, and Rena Prashad, Senior Project Specialist at University of Toronto Scarborough.

We had a series of meetings before the end-of-year holidays that were mainly discussions of broad themes, building on the notes that were shared from the National Dialogues, and built an initial content outline. But it was pretty clear that someone needed to take the pen and build a framework, an architecture, and, yes, crystallize a vision for how institutions of higher education could, through principle, actions, and accountabilities, embark on a collective action process through which the important initiatives of each could collectively become greater than the sum of its parts. So instead of working on my book on slavery and the law, drafting the Charter became my first sabbatical project for the 2021 calendar year. So that was the role that I played. The first draft went back to the Inter-Institutional Advisory Committee members for comments, then to the broader community for input, and I drafted further revisions that sought to be responsive in the face of the wide array of feedback—most of which was encouraging and constructive. And I was very touched, if somewhat reluctant, when members of the Inter-Institutional Advisory Committee supported Dr. Malinda Smith's recommendation that I be formally recognized as the Principal Drafter of the Scarborough Charter.

CA: In November of 2021, more than forty universities from across Canada signed on to the Scarborough Charter in an incredibly touching ceremony of its official launch. What did this momentous occasion represent to you? And what about those universities that opted to wait until an action list was in place?

AB: Thank you, Christiana, for those words about the Charter and the launch. There's so much hope and so much aspiration that remains. It's very helpful just to remember, okay, this text, this launch was meaningful for framing why we needed action and why it was so powerful to have such a significant number of leading members of academia, universities, and colleges stand with us and insist on the importance of the principles, the actions, and the accountability. I actually pulled up what I said at the launch because I wanted to bring myself back to the moment. I had strict instructions to speak within four minutes, so I spoke fast.

As I often do, I invoked C.L.R. James, his insistence in *Beyond a Boundary* ([1963] 2013) on the importance of movement, not where you are, what you have, but where you have come from, where you're going, and the rate at which you're getting there.

I exhorted our higher education leaders who had signed onto the Scarborough Charter and members of our communities to focus on continuous, steadfast movement toward achieving Scarborough Charter principles.

And also, there was a caution. And you know what they say, right? You provide a lot of praise and then people remember the caution…. We need to focus on the *how*, we can't be playing at equity. So again, invoking James' cricket metaphor: we need to actually be achieving equity and we certainly should pay attention to the *how* to ensure that the movement is undertaken with our communities' meaningful participation. So, I concluded that we should avoid EDI with a vengeance. And that's somehow what people remembered, probably because folks have lived what it feels like to have equity done "to" you rather than "with and for" you. And so there was an

insistence on *nothing about us without us* as part of moving this forward with care and with love for justice.

WT: I'll just add in terms of how we brought institutions to the table. We thought it was important that these institutions are able to back up what they claim they're doing. And this is a mechanism to make sure that when they sign on to this, they're signing on to a set of commitments. They're not just signing something as a passing phase, in this moment of reckoning; it is something that endures.

There was a lot of back and forth, mostly about reassuring institutions that we understand that there are different categories of institutions that have unique internal contexts that are relevant to their own way of doing things. What we asked of them was to go back and work with their communities to make sure that when this is endorsed it commits the whole institution. That is why the piece about institutional commitment, and therefore obligation, is important, because if you have only Black caucuses on campuses doing this work, they don't have the power to move these things forward.

It was necessary for the highest level of institutional leadership to sign on behalf of the institution, having this be part of their commitment. And it would also go beyond the individual leader at any moment in time, so this is an institutional commitment. But we also wanted to make sure this commitment comes from the grassroots as well. So, a number of institutions went to their communities. And I can tell you that even among Black caucuses in particular institutions, there were differences in engagement because we have, as institutions, historically not been trustworthy as far as members of our community are concerned. People didn't want to be used as props to make institutions feel good. And so there were really robust conversations within particular institutions about whether or not they should endorse this going forward. The other piece of it was working with institutions in Québec, which had their own challenges, and that has some implications for the number of institutions in Quebec that signed on.

And as I said at the beginning, the threshold was relatively high. Even as we understood that the Charter will be operationalized at each institutional based on their particular contexts, it did not take away the fundamental principles and commitments that were necessary to move this forward. I think those pieces are important to keep in mind; this was not all smooth sailing.

We were supported by Universities Canada to work within its own process and structures to bring this to the table. We worked with the Parliamentary Black Caucus, who were supportive as well, and in places outside of academia, just making sure we were able to tap into the power centres as that will have implications for spaces inside of academia, for example the tri-agency,[4] the three federal research-funding agencies in Canada. The college sector had its own dynamics that we had to navigate. That explains, in part, why the number of signatories from that sector are relatively low.

A major factor was the readiness of different institutions to move at particular points in time. And I want to make this point because I think sometimes people look at who signed that day and assume that those who didn't sign were not committed. It wasn't necessarily the case at all. And you know, Rohini you would know this, with your own institution there were thoughtful, methodical approaches to making sure that this was owned collectively before signing on. And so, the process of co-creation did not just happen at this Charter steering-committee level. It was also about co-creation within particular institutions. I think sometimes people just look at who was in at the beginning and say, well, it means people were not committed. In some cases, people wanted to make sure this was done and done right.

RB: Why do you believe there are so few French-language universities signing onto the Charter at this stage?

WT: A lot of it was political. Those institutions that signed up were saying, "We have a role as higher-education institutions to be leaders, not to fold in the face of potential resistance." I work in a space where I understand the dynamics of politics and the implications for leaders and how they make some of these decisions.

I spoke to a large number of institutions in Québec, and I appreciate the challenges that they were dealing with. We had always said that this is not a one-time thing, and we are happy to work with folks to bring them along as things went through. We needed to be understanding of the challenges that people were dealing with. But we were not then going to lower the threshold to the level of those who were going to do what is convenient. It is to say, we are always going to be setting the standards high, but we'll work with you to bring you along into that picture. But we have absolutely no authority to impose this on any institution.

It is particularly important that people were able to mobilize from within these institutions to push institutional leaders and ask them the question, "Why are we not reflected in this space if this is in fact important to us?" I want to be able to acknowledge the work that people did from the grassroots to get institutional leaders [on board] because not all of those who signed up were necessarily ready to sign up. I think Adelle can speak about the particular Québec context because a lot of work has been done.

AB: Almost sixty signatories to the Charter, as we speak, is a significant number, including a significant number of U15 institutions.[5] However, there are a lot of institutions that haven't signed and so when we zoom into Québec, the number of signatories in relation to the whole is not huge. The CÉGEP college network in Québec, which involves two to three years of post-secondary study after high school ends at grade 11 and is completed before entering what are typically 3-year undergraduate university programs in Québec, is very significant. But I think it's fair to say that we are at the very beginning of outreach to CÉGEPs at that level. I said there's a before and after and I meant it, especially for institutions across the country and including in Québec that had not really been engaging with anti-Black racism. This was for many a starting point. And so if you understand change as very much kind of holistic and largely bottom up, those movements are happening now.

Increasingly (and I've been teaching in Québec for almost 25 years), it's kind of now that I'm hearing from some of my colleagues in some of these institutions that are having panels that are addressing anti-Black racism or EDI more generally, where I'm seeing people from racialized communities and, in particular, folks whose origins are in francophone, West and Central African, taking space and addressing these issues, including in official EDI-type positions. But this is relatively new. We've seen the first Black chancellor at a university in Québec, Anglophone or Francophone, Franz Saintellemy, at Université de Montréal. There's no one in Wisdom's position of leadership in the university sector at the moment.

WT: You felt the pause, right? That is the reality. Right?

AB: I believe there are folks who are change-makers. While I think it's important to ask the question about French-language institutions, it's also really important to

contextualize and to keep working at meaningful inclusion, which is why the Scarborough Charter and its principles and the actions that are asked of folks are all significant: the starting point has changed beyond institutional names on a list.

The other piece, and I think Wisdom started to touch on this, takes us a little bit back to the grounding philosophy of this instrument. The preamble sets out the broad regulatory context, the importance of international human rights principles, our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and provincial and territorial human rights legislation. In other words, the Scarborough Charter is a part of a broad enabling framework for action. Institutions like universities and colleges have particular human rights responsibilities. The Scarborough Charter helps to provide guidance but there's a broader regulatory framework that all universities and colleges need to respect. I think that by fostering this deepened understanding we support institutions of higher education to be part of the steadfast movement, as well, of course, as working closely with the tri-agency, unions, and other sector actors who play a major role in how we understand, live, and move forward on equity.

RB: Thank you very, very much.

CA: How do you feel about the way in which the Charter has been received? Are you seeing movements toward concrete and measurable actions that actually make a difference?

WT: The only thing I would add is that people are just amazed at how we are able to bring institutions together for common purpose here. Most people look at this and go, "We've got about a hundred members of Universities Canada; you look at Colleges and Institutes Canada[6] and they've got, you know, dozens of members, and we've only got about sixty?" Right? But even internally within institutions, it's not easy to find common ground, let alone across the sector and across the country. So I think all of us who are involved in this work sometimes need to remind ourselves about what has been achieved, even though what is left to be done is huge. This work can be daunting, and it helps to have a sense of proportionality and relativity compared to where we were and where we are. I think it's important to put it in context as well. The commitment to making sure that we are going on this journey together is laudable. One of our colleagues who was a part of the steering committee, you know,

Gervan Fearon, who is president of George Brown College, reminds us that we should look at this as a ramp and that people are at different stages and we can all collectively help one another along. And I think this goes back to the point I was making about recognizing that we are not all going to leap to the same height at the same time. But the commitment to making sure that we are all mutually supportive is important. So, the principle of mutuality is not just in relation to the external but it's also within and how we build common purpose.

AB: The biennial conferences, the first of which took place at the University of British Columbia, alongside Simon Fraser University, offer a really wonderful opportunity to put the movement of the Scarborough Charter front and centre and to enable the kind of dialogue among institutions that this initiative is premised on. What we need to see increasingly as we develop the reporting mechanisms is that each institutional actor is able to explain the actions that they are taking that are context-specific and provide the necessary qualitative and quantitative data on implementation. Actors should also have the opportunity to engage with each other, discuss challenges, and to push each other in meaningful and constructive ways through a process that is built on that mutuality, doing together and with our communities what it would be harder and indeed less desirable to try to sustain alone.

RB: One of the original aspects of the Scarborough Charter is the novel language about Black inclusion and Black excellence that it introduces into the vernacular. Can you elaborate on the origins and meanings of some of this language and their implications for thinking about the place of Blackness in the Canadian academy?

AB: As our drafting committee was honing the Scarborough Charter's key principles, there was an interesting discussion around inclusive excellence and alternative language of Black excellence. While Blackness is of course implicit, what we didn't want to do was suggest that there were different standards of excellence and that somehow Black excellence meant leaving the concept of excellence itself somehow untouched. You'll see in the Scarborough Charter that there is a specific reference under inclusive excellence to Black traditions of research excellence and it was important to us to affirm a capacious understanding of knowledge traditions, pedagogical commitments, and leadership styles that help us to broaden our understanding of "excellence" through a commitment to inclusion. The framing of inclusive ex-

cellence is part of insisting on all of that. What do institutions of higher education mean when their vision of excellence is so narrow that most of the world is not even represented in it? What do we lose that makes us all less than excellent?

Some have framed this in other terms, that is, we're not truly excellent if we fail to be inclusive. So, it's a call for institutions to broaden and remove barriers to excellence.

Of course, inclusive excellence is one of the four principles. I suspect the principle that has probably resonated with many is Black flourishing, in part because it so clearly captures a vision of community that challenges and undermines a deficit model that has been pervasive. When you think about Black flourishing in relation to inclusive excellence, you really are capturing a vision that counters the pervasive historical exclusions and challenges institutional actors to be thinking much more systematically and much more ambitiously about what it is that they need to be doing to support transformative change. It draws in members of communities from across the African diaspora and shapes the kinds of claims that are made.

In this sense, mutuality has also been the basis of some capacious thinking. I couldn't agree more with Wisdom's comments about mutuality. Mutuality has been commented upon by Principal and Vice Chancellor Patrick Deane of Queen's University. He recognized that it is perhaps one of the most challenging principles because we tend to think about universities in a manner that rewards individualism and competitive achievement. Mutuality is very much a principle about how to be in relation with one another, including how to be in relation with the communities in which universities are embedded, certainly locally. And there is specific attention in the Scarborough Charter to Black communities locally as well as transnationally. I love that Deane emphasized the need for modesty and an ability to be "educated by the world beyond our confines."[7]

And so, there's really careful attention to what it means to be thinking seriously of a transformative movement on anti-Black racism through those principles. The accountability piece, reflecting the fourth principle, is everything. It is the movement. It is how signatory institutions are holding themselves accountable to the principles of the Charter, within their own institutions and

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with the actors within and around them, vis à vis each of the other signatory institutions in the Inter-Institutional Forum,[8] and in relation to our societies that so depend on the higher education sector for the kind of intergenerational societal mobility and transformation we need. I would say that each principle is very much adopted because of its resonance and because of the meaning they collectively bring to how we understand the goal of transformation as affirmed in the preamble of the Scarborough Charter.

WT: I think there are two ways in which "Black excellence" was challenging within the existing ways of looking at excellence. It's a push to broaden our definition, which by extension is asking for institutions to move away from a myopic definition of excellence. The very definition of excellence is being challenged here. The other thing that this does (and you folks would have experienced it in different contexts) is it tends to dichotomize excellence and inclusion, where we look at them as somehow antithetical to each other.

Any time you talk about inclusion, it's almost like the next sentence will be, "Oh, you know, it's going to compromise excellence," It is challenging people to appreciate the fact that these things are, in fact, interrelated. A lot of times when people talk about creating space for others to come in, there's almost this unspoken perception that we have to diminish in order to include. And what we are saying is that those are very much intertwined because it allows you to draw on a broad range of excellence that you'd otherwise not be able to see or embrace or bring into the fold.

I think looking at it as challenging existing notions of what excellence means, being very clear that we're not in any way saying you have to compromise excellence in order to do this, but also challenging the notion of dichotomizing these things and turning them into binaries when in fact they're not, right? This critique undergirds the way that we've approached this issue, challenging our institutions to think differently. And in fact, it's ironic that institutions are the ones that are being myopic when we're supposed to be much more broad-minded as higher education institutions. But these systems and structures that claim to be open-minded are, in fact, the opposite. And we need to call ourselves out on these things and push ourselves to a different understanding and appreciation of the benefits of having a broader open mind about what excellence means in our communities.

CA: Thank you for this response but allow me to probe a bit into this critical aspect of the Charter that goes beyond mere language. How do we ensure that higher education hiring committees understand and implement "Black excellence" in its novel and contextual sense, as introduced by the Charter?

WT: Faculty associations have sometimes talked the talk but have not walked the walk when it comes to addressing these questions, particularly around cohort hiring. There's been a lot of push back by our own colleagues. And this is why the accountability pieces matter, and this is why it is important that universities sign and not individuals within institutions, because now governing councils or boards can hold the president accountable. The president needs to hold their vice-presidents accountable all the way through to deans and to chairs and so on. And it has to be not just about the people but our processes, our procedures, and making sure that we are changing those to reflect the direction that we are moving in. So, if a chair is making recommendations [we need to ask the following]: Is the Dean checking to make sure that the advertising was done in the right places? Has the hiring committee gone through a process of unlearning? Because we are products of our history and culture, we have to ask if there has been an intentional effort to make sure we are all learning and that we are held accountable within those milieux where we are having those conversations. Some of these things are not always just unconscious bias. Some of it is truly structural bias. So, if a Dean is really serious about this, they should make sure there is accountability. When a recommendation comes forward, we are not saying every hire has to result in a Black person, but you have to be able to make the case for why that is not the case. What have you done to make sure that the pool is inclusive, and the process is right?

I've had conversations with academic leaders who say how difficult it is to find people. If you're not cultivating a pool of people, it is difficult to expect that somehow, they will emerge out of nowhere. And so, it is not just about the hiring committee. It's all the work that needs to happen from our undergraduate to our graduate students, making sure that they're made to feel a sense of belonging. It's how we advertise, how we draw on existing networks. And if you're not already part of these networks, you don't even know these opportunities exist. How are we reading letters of reference, for example? All of these things are part of what needs to happen.

Even more important is what we do when people come here. Because a lot of times, we can let people through the door but if the environment that they are coming into is not conducive for the work that they need to do, we set people up for failure and blame them instead of our structures for their inability to deliver on what it is that we bring them in to do.

CA: To follow up on this important question of faculty hiring, we have witnessed countless instances of exclusionary practices around hiring (sometimes unintentional or as a result of hidden bias) that continue to create barriers to building diverse faculty representation in departments. How could this unlearning and relearning around these principles of the Charter occur?

WT: There has to be a full arc from long before the hiring committee is constituted to make sure that we are creating the right pathways to that opportunity. When there are hiring committees, what are the accountabilities that they have as hiring committees towards this commitment that we've made and how do we as a community ensure that people flourish? That is the ultimate goal of all of this—Black flourishing, right? It is not just saying let Black people through the door, it's that they thrive, flourish, and make their due contributions to our societies. And so, I would think that processes are an important part of that, accountability is certainly a huge part of that. And we need to make sure that our procedures are revised to be [open] to the kind of changes that we're talking about.

What is excellence? We're using the same measures of excellence, some of which have to do with people's appearances because they don't look like us, right? Somebody comes in and they've got dreadlocks, suddenly people [on the committee] have made a decision even before that person opens their mouth. And so how are we making sure that we're addressing those kinds of things? I would argue that this is work in progress. It's not just people at the top who have to hold themselves accountable. We need to have peers who are helping to ensure accountability. And that is why throughout the dialogue and this process we made sure that this was not just the work of Black people. We all have to be part of this effort collectively.

RB: Some universities have recently launched cohort hires [of Black faculty] in response to the Charter and internal anti-Black racism initiatives. What are your thoughts on the processes of these initiatives?

AB: As you know, I've spent the last two years chairing the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force and writing the report.[10] Our task force heard from hundreds of actors, including members of employment equity groups, on their experiences of these processes that do not take into account the depth of their potential workplace contributions and the particularly important role played by institutions of higher education. I have also been able to assess some of the innovative approaches that have been adopted, including through the tri-agency and the way in which their very clear incentive-based structures surrounding, in particular, the Canada Research Chair (CRC) program have started to help to shift the equity dynamic. If our sector can recruit some of the top talents around the world in some of the most specialized fields and do that in an inclusive manner to build a representative CRC program, then maybe some other workplaces should look more closely at what is happening and what can be learned. We need to make sure we are having the right discussions. We need to pay close attention to how to avoid reproducing patterns of exclusion.

In particular, if you're trying to make changes without being meaningfully consultative of the communities that are involved, you will reproduce patterns of exclusion. If you're doing cluster hires one year but not thinking more comprehensively about how to remove barriers from mainstream hiring processes, you're going to keep reproducing exclusions rather than building inclusive excellence. Do you need to do cluster hires? Of course. It is absolutely important to remedy underrepresentation.

But I worry that institutions are not thinking structurally about what notions like inclusive excellence and Black flourishing entail. They call for holistic processes. They require us to think across the board about the barriers that are embedded in the way that we go about our searches and then in the way that we receive people into our community. We can't just assume they will just fit in but not think about the ways our institutions need to change and the measures we need to take to support transformative change.

It is about being genuinely open to the kind of challenge that inclusion brings to the movement. And I'm going to also mention that we've been thinking about academics when we think about inclusive excellence because that's where the dichotomy tends to emerge most prominently. But with the pluralization of staff members, it arises there too. And we're seeing just the extent of the under-

representation as we move up the hierarchy of people who are on non-tenure track positions of various natures and we need to keep an eye on both where historically marginalized groups and members of Black communities in particular are finding themselves and why and whether we're reproducing a range of patterns of exclusion or of differential inclusion through them.

So, there's a much more comprehensive discussion that needs to take place and that the Scarborough Charter seeks to enable. A closing comment in relation to this is that the Scarborough Charter is part of enabling a process of change. We have to be very careful not to assume that it can encompass all of that change. Its added value is its ability to allow those who are seeking solutions to work together to incentivize important forward movement. It's an opportunity also for various constituencies within institutions of higher education, including Black caucuses, and also student groups and the like, to work with a spirit of mutuality and hold their institutions accountable.

Finally, I'll insist on this again, there's a broader regulatory framework and broader networks of actors who are important to ensuring that we understand the Scarborough Charter initiative to be one specific instantiation of the importance of substantive equality and societal transformation.

WT: It's important, when we have these conversations, to think about hiring committees as not just limited to faculty hiring but for staff hiring as well. The things that we have talked about here are applicable. We should also talk about recruitment and enrollment on the student side. Because I think the same things apply. What kinds of students do we recruit, what opportunities are we extending to particular categories of students? The consultative process that Adelle talked about, in terms of how we are able to determine excellence, is key. The work that the medical school here at the University of Toronto has done, which is now being replicated in other places, is about a process that, again, is not diminishing quality and excellence but recognizing other ways in which we are able to identify excellence and support the students.

So, I think the student piece is important. It is the same thing even with our community partnerships. The Charter doesn't just look inward, it looks outward as well. How do we determine who the partners are, who the difficult partners we deal with are? Because when

something doesn't fit into our mould, somehow, it's difficult and then it becomes a deficit. I think of all these pieces when we talk about hiring. It's one element of how we bring people into our community and create a sense of belonging at the level of faculty, staff, students, community partners, and so on. I think that broad understanding of things is important.

And the last thing I wanted to say is in response to people who talk about the Charter being top down. It is helpful that the facts be known, which is why it's important to tell the story of how we got here. Everyone does their part and hands it off to other people who have a responsibility to deliver on aspects of this. For me, this is not a process you look into and then get off the ramp. No, this is a continuous process and so we need to hold ourselves and institutions accountable. People at the grassroots have engendered this process and their institutions have signed the Charter on their behalf. It's important that they continue to own the process and hold folks accountable. That is why the steering committee is not beholden to one particular institution; it is committed to the overall project that we all have before us. So, I would encourage people to say, "Well, you've signed onto this; therefore you are accountable and we have the license to call you out on what you're doing in support of this."

The biggest asset we've got is the people and their ability to hold institutions accountable because institutions have a tendency to veer off in different directions. And that compass resides with the people in these institutions. Those that have not signed up will do it only if they're feeling the pressure from inside their institution. That pressure should avoid falling victim to false narratives that suggest the work that needs to be done to promote Indigenization and reconciliation cannot be done simultaneously with other initiatives, such as the Scarborough Charter. Our way of looking at this is to say, in fact, anything you do to advance Indigeneity and Black inclusion is mutually reinforcing.

RB: How in your opinion can the Charter and its implementation become more of a grassroots movement across Canadian institutions involving as many students, staff, and faculty as possible?

WT: "Let's have everyone play their role to advance that common purpose," would be the way that I frame it. And let's not create these perceptions that somehow the grassroots are not involved. This, you know, would be a

disservice to them because this outcome is, in large measure, a product of the work, the sweat, the toil, that the grassroots have put into this effort. So hopefully, sharing the story of this journey helps to bridge that divide because I worry when it's framed in those binary terms. And the grassroots should not say, "Our work is done." Because this work is still very fragile. You just have to look south of the border and at some institutions to see that this work is truly fragile. We need to make sure that it's on steady ground, it is solid, and it becomes part of the daily routine in our institutions before we can take a breather. We don't have the luxury of time to be taking our feet off the pedal until the work is done.

AB: And I would just add on that very last point about the divide: there are so many actors along the spectrum, between the grassroots and, you pinpoint it in particular, senior executives in universities. I'm very conscious that I am currently the only non-senior administrator on the Inter-Institutional Steering Committee.[9] There has been a rather deliberate naming in the Scarborough Charter of a range of actors who have a role to play. In this conversation we've referenced the tri-agency and the parliamentary Black caucus. There's also the Canadian Association of University Teachers: what have they said and done about this initiative? What kind of outreach might be necessary there? There's a role for Caucuses of Black Faculty and Staff, as Wisdom mentioned. Many of the student organizations, who have played such a pivotal role for so long, are heralded in the text and are crucial to any continuity on Scarborough Charter principles, actions, and accountabilities. So, the small and representative group members on the Inter-Institutional Steering Committee are all engaged in this important work, in addition to everything else they are responsible for, and they do this work out of commitment and community self-love.

An initiative like this special journal issue, to ensure that there's a conversation about these questions, is absolutely precious for this work. So, thank you again for doing this and for taking the time. I think the ongoing education around the Scarborough Charter—its possibilities and its limits—is crucial and the institutional sense of what can be done with it needs to be thickened and deepened. We are not only moving beyond a binary but really paying close attention to everything along the way and how we use the various levers to move the shared vision forward.

I hope that's helpful. I hope that completes some of the insights. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your energy and your passion. It's been really inspiring.

Endnotes

1. Scarborough Charter on anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education: Principles, Actions, and Accountabilities. 2021. National Dialogues and Action for Inclusive Higher Education and Communities. https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/

2. For a list of committe members, see: https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/nationaldialogues/partner-institutions-organizations-and-contributors

3. The National Dialogues and Action for Inclusive Higher Education and Communities are a series of national forums focused on addressing equity and inclusion in Canadian post-secondary education. The first in the series was a National Dialogue that focused on anti-Black racism and Black inclusion in Canadian higher education. The virtual dialogues took place on Thursday, October 1 and Friday, October 2, 12 pm – 4 pm (ET), 2020. https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/nationaldialogues/

4. CIHR supports the discoveries and innovations that improve our health and strengthen our health-care system. NSERC funds visionaries, explorers and innovators who are searching for the scientific and technological breakthroughs that will benefit our country. SSHRC invests in research and talent that builds deeper knowledge of human cultures and behaviour to strengthen socio-economic prosperity and well-being in society. https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/about-au_sujet/collaboration/tri-agency_funding_programs-programmes_financement_trois_organismes-eng.aspx

5. U15 Canada is an association of fifteen leading research universities across Canada. Members of U15 Canada are those Canadian research-intensive universities that came together in 2012 to form an association dedicated to helping advance research and innovation policies and programs for the benefit of all Canadians. https://u15.ca/about-us/

6. The CIC is the national and international voice of Canada's largest post-secondary education network. This group supports Canada's publicly supported colleges, institutes, CEGEPs, and polytechnics. https://www.collegesinstitutes.ca/

7. https://www.queensu.ca/alumnireview/articles/2023-05-11/principal-message-active-partners

8. The Scarborough Charter Inter-Institutional Forum is comprised of signatory institutions of the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Higher Education: Principles, Actions, and Accountabilities. The Forum is committed to working collaboratively to deliver on the principles, actions and accountabilities outlined in the Scarborough Charter, to redress anti-Black racism and promote Black inclusion in the Canadian higher education sector. https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/scarborough-charter/activities-inter-institutional-forum.

9. https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/documents/corporate/portfolio/labour/programs/employment-equity/reports/act-review-task-force/EEA-Review-Task-Force-Report-2023-v2.pdf

10. The Inter-institutional steering committee on Inclusive Higher Education will hold signatories accountable to the commitments toward best efforts as outlined in the Charter. https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/scarborough-charter/sites/utsc.utoronto.ca.scarborough-charter/files/docs/Scarborough_Charter_EN_Nov2022.pdf

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Unpacking the Scarborough Charter: A Dialogue with Karima Hashmani

by Eva Cupchik

Author: Eva Cupchik self-identifies as a queer, cisgendered, Jewish (Ashkenazi) woman and independent scholar. She is currently a federal policy analyst, specializing in equity, diversity, and inclusion. She defended a doctorate at Western University's Theory Center (conferred 2020) that explored, through in-depth interviews, how Indigenous students experience identity, ways of knowing, health, truth, and reconciliation. She recently completed a Master of Arts within Carleton University's Law and Legal Studies department, focusing on equity, accessibility, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), as it implicates health policy, such as Medical Assistance in Dying legislation. Her post-PhD research engages with queer, Jewish, and Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) knowledge systems, transnational feminist, and Eurocentric phenomenology using quantitative and qualitative research methods. She continues to support 2SLGBTQQIA and neuro-diverse communities through engaged activism.

In early 2023, I conducted a virtual interview with Ms. Karima Hashmani, former Executive Director of Equity Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Toronto, and convener of the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education: Principles, Actions, and Accountabilities. Convened in 2021 and signed by more than forty universities, the Scarborough Charter represents a landmark commitment by institutions of higher education in Canada aimed at combatting anti-Black racism. The Charter is the result of extensive dialogue involving academic institutions, Black Communities, leaders, and activists. This collaboration centres anti-Black racism in Canadian higher education through concrete actions to ensure institutional accountabilities that can foster change.

Karima Hashmani has played a key role in the development and convening of the Charter. Her anti-racism and anti-oppression work spans education, international and community development, social housing, human rights, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Over the past twelve years Ms. Hashmani has supported non-profit organizations, immigrant communities, and youth with their experiences of anti-racism in her local community in Toronto, Canada. At the University of Toronto Scarbor-

ough campus, she was the Director of EDI, working alongside Principal Wisdom Tettey. Ms. Hashmani then became Executive Director of EDI at the University of Toronto (St. George, Mississauga, and Scarborough campuses) where she oversaw the offices of Sexual and Gender Diversity, Indigenous Initiatives, Accessibility, and Anti-Racism. As part of her role as EDI Executive Director at the University of Toronto, Ms. Hashmani co-convened the National Dialogues conference, a series of national forums on equity and inclusion in Canadian post-secondary education held virtually in October 2020. She also served as co-convener of the Scarborough Charter (2021). Ms. Hashmani presently occupies the role of Chief Inclusion Officer at Metrolinx, an agency of the Government of Ontario (Metrolinx 2024), which supports the coordination and integration of transportation in both the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton.

My dialogue with Ms. Hashmani engages a feminist open-ended approach, positing my subject position as a queer and Ashkenazi Jewish-identified cisgendered woman and Ms. Hashmani's personal intersections, which are South Asian from Tanzania, Muslim-identified, mother, and community member. Her intersections remain central in guiding the interview's practice of critic-

ally theorizing equity, diversity, and inclusion, and beckons the call to interrogate 'not only who we are, but how are we in the doing' (Abolson 2011). My conversation with Ms. Hashmani occurred over a recorded Zoom session. Using Zoom captioned transcription services, I edited the longform dialogue to distinguish key themes in relation to the Scarborough Charter.

In organising the resulting text, I distributed themes according to our conversation's flow to demonstrate a feminist non-hierarchal framework. The discussion centered on Ms. Hashmani's role in the Charter's original conceptualization and its foundations. The interview navigated origins of the Scarborough Charter, its rhetorical intentions, institutional reception, as well as Ms. Hashmani's reflections on diversity and inclusion programs within Canadian universities.

Scarborough Charter Origins and National Dialogues on Anti-Black Racism

Eva Cupchik (EC): How do you identify yourself?

Karima Hashmani (KH): I'm South Asian, but from East Africa, from Tanzania. I'm also cisgendered, Muslim, and a mom. So, lots of intersecting identities happening every day. Taking on these roles around equity, is a huge responsibility to ensure that you're checking yourself all the time around your own biases, and how you come into a room, and take up space. Self-identifying is important.

EC: I am wondering if you can offer some background on the origins of the Scarborough Charter. What can you share about the National Dialogues conference?

KH: After the death of George Floyd [May 2020], this is when universities were really being responsive to what is happening in our communities. And how we responded was important, to illustrate how what's happening in the world impacts people, especially Black identifying folks. So, at that point, Wisdom Tettey [Principal of the University of Toronto at Scarborough] and I had a conversation, asking, what do we need? We were already responding as an institution.

We were creating spaces for Black communities, but also for allies, in terms of our collective responsibility, in having healing spaces for individuals, and what that looks like and feels like for students, staff, and faculty. We

already knew what the problems were. We are in a different time, in a different place. And this is an equity person's dream; there is systemic anti-Black racism in our institutions, in our society. And what can we, as colleges and universities do? How do we create actions?

In October 2020, for the National Dialogues conference, we convened students, staff, and faculty communities. We were interested in the challenges and barriers that exist. What does that look like in terms of our principles as institutions? What are those values at the core? What actions are needed in relation to those values? And then, how do we keep ourselves accountable? Those are essential things, in our teaching and learning, in our community engagement practices, in governance.

For the Scarborough Charter's virtual conference, we convened across Canada for two days. The first day was about understanding, knowing, and pushing the agenda for looking at best practices. And the second day was really about actions. We were interested in the options that we needed to create a charter. We wanted to hear different experiences right across the country. Where are the gaps? What are the actions that people want to see happen? The National Dialogues conference was a great way for connecting Black communities across senior leaders and administrators. It was exciting to see the commitment, whether it was universities or colleges that were addressing systemic anti-Black racism, but also in their fostering Black inclusion.

EC: Were the National Dialogues an academic conference where people gave papers or panels? Or was it strategically designed to have a dialogue about the anticipated Scarborough Charter?

KH: We had a focus on research: what are the barriers that Black researchers face? Then we had a section concerning non-Black folks, asking, "So, what is your responsibility? Where can you sponsor? Where can you mentor? Where can you provide access and spaces?" And then there was a community engagement piece where we had community development organizations that were Black identifying who came to the table to say: this is what we need. So, it was a good cross-section of what we were looking for in terms of hearing from individuals on the ground, in the community, and in our academic settings. Black student associations across many organizations also joined in consultations.

EC: I'm interested in the concept of inclusion. I think we need to separate the concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion, to engage with each one and their relations, but also perceive how they are uniquely different. The Scarborough Charter, as you express is directed toward Black excellence and inclusion. Which identity intersections fall within the Charter's directed audience?

KH: The focus of the Charter was to support Black identifying individuals with intersecting identities, including Indigenous self-identifying students who may also identify as Black. We had an organizational committee at the University of Toronto, for example, with students, staff, and faculty who helped convene and create what those two days looked like. It was a collaborative effort. We also had phenomenal commitment for national committee action. There were lots of great conversations around data and ensuring that we're thinking about indigeneity, rethinking Canadian history and making sure that's a pivotal thing we speak to within the Charter.

EC: The Scarborough Charter did not emerge from a constitutional amendment, but from consultation with volunteer partnering communities. It must have been labour intensive for participants to share and record their ideas in a virtual space, requiring emotional, physical, and cognitive energy. Did you find yourselves engaged in challenging dialogues?

KH: I do not feel like they were challenging, but rather, really engaging conversations about various ways to represent information. What would the Scarborough Charter look and feel like? We needed to ensure it resonated with faculty, students, and staff. We wanted to make sure people saw themselves in this document. And then ask does the Scarborough Charter hold institutions accountable?

[Professor]Adelle Blackett was the person who helped draft the Charter, and she had a drafting committee engage in the process. Conversations that led up to the drafting were important. We also held consultations within our own institutions, which are really core. I had lots of conversations with students, with staff, with academics, with different bodies, to ensure continuity with University of Toronto's values.

EC: To summarize, for the convening portion of the Scarborough Charter's origins, there was university level consultation, student participation, national level dia-

logues, and senior leadership deliberation within the university. Could the Charter have been otherwise envisioned?

KH: We wanted to be informed by many different perspectives, where people come to the table and speak to barriers, through their lived experiences. What do we need to be doing to ensure we're addressing anti-Black racism and fostering Black inclusion? The National Dialogues necessarily led to the Charter's drafting. We consulted with the University of Toronto's Anti-Racism Task Forcewhich had students, staff, and faculty, as part of our Scarborough Charter conversation (Bulgin 2021).

The University of Toronto Scarborough is bustling with students who are excited to be there. There are many Black and Indigenous spaces within the campus, fostering inclusive excellence. And it's such a good place to experiment and create charters like this Scarborough Charter.

Signing of the Scarborough Charter

EC: Universities and colleges are incentivized to sign the Scarborough Charter. What do you think is the weight of these signatures? Do you think these may be perceived as operating on a symbolic level, as public relations? Do you think there may be issues about their level of sincerity in funding change-making programs that support equity, diversity, and inclusion?

KH: My hope is that institutions that have signed the Charter are committed to addressing anti-Black racism, beyond public relations. Signing the Charter references accountability; however, your institution can embody the Charter in their commitment to inclusion. I think institutions have signed on, committed to moving the needle about what it means to foster Black Excellence or address challenges and systemic barriers. The system needs to be unravelled and rethought if we want to bolster our governance structures and commitments to learning and teaching. I think there is a commitment to change for Scarborough Charter university signatories.

Pathways to Accessible Education

EC: I recognize the Scarborough Charter is nonbinding, without legal implications. However, there is potential for the Charter to impact university and government anti-Black racism policy, and institutional commitments

that improve accessible education for equity deserving groups. Is it possible that bridging the gap between access to education and the Scarborough Charter accelerates inclusivity?

KH: There are pieces in the Charter that speak specifically to access. How are we embedding access to education into our education from grade school? Are we creating pathways for access opportunities? My parents didn't have a formal education, access, or opportunity, so navigating education for me was different. I'm passionate about creating access and opportunity for students that allows for changing someone's outlook on life, in terms of poverty for people who live around our campuses, and in social housing. Pathways to accessible education create a different avenue for individuals to thrive from within the institution. People need to feel like they belong; they need to feel like there are spaces where they can connect and engage. There needs to be opportunities for Black alumni and racialized folks to share their experiences with individuals and create opportunities. That 'pathways' piece is critical to get folks into our campuses, within an anchor institution. Community organizations in the Scarborough area are critical to create access and opportunities for Black students on campus to thrive.

Are universities supporting wraparound services for under-served communities, in collaboration with community partners and connecting organizations? How are institutions doing right by their recruitment process, through engaging neighbourhood schools and eliminating barriers to accessing education?

EC: How did the University of Toronto respond to the Scarborough Charter's recommendations?

KH: The University of Toronto was very responsive and engaged in conversations around the Scarborough Charter and the Anti-Black Racism Task Force that proposed fifty-six recommendations from consulting students, staff, and faculty lived experiences (Bulgin 2021). How are we creating those pathways and opportunities for graduate students to even pursue education? Institutions that promote the Scarborough Charter are committed to doing this work, in creating these avenues for access and opportunity. Partnering with community organizations can help with advancement, student opportunities, scholarships, bursaries, and fellowships.

Black Diaspora Identities

EC: Black experiences are varied and can also be informed by religious identity, diverse global roots, and experiences that are not firmly oppositional to Whiteness. How do you embody a diasporic identity and how does it inform your work?

KH: Black identity is just not one thing. There is continental Africa, and Caribbean identity. There are so many different identities within the Black community, which is interesting for me to witness. It is important to hear, to listen, to engage. I think there are many things your identity and lived experience can bring to bear on your work. My own personal lived experience includes being from parents who are immigrants to Canada. My parents did not have access to formal education back home, after grade eight. There is a different reality for children of immigrant families, where you come to Canada having experienced discrimination. How do you feel like you belong, whether it's in your community or within society at large? Equity, diversity, and inclusion are different but interrelated concepts. It is really the equity piece that's critical to understanding a history of colonization. What does it mean to be from an equity deserving community? How do you feel like you belong around those tables? What is your role to create a sense of belonging for others?

Allyship and Lending Privileges

EC: It is critical not to reify binaries, white/Black, queer/heterosexual. White-passing experiences can also emerge for Black identifying communities. When doing cross-cultural research, what does it mean to embody allyship? What does allyship mean for you?

KH: I think allyship is critical to accessible education work. I don't think one community can do it all on their own. They need people to lend their privilege toward creating spaces of opportunity, access, and sponsorship, fostering a sense of belonging. How does our education hold us to account with representation on hiring committees, in terms of student/staff recruitment and retention strategies? How do we create spaces where there's career development or progression, and opportunities for individuals? How do university 'student life' staff members create spaces for Black students? These are systemic issues that have existed long before we got here. At the end of the day, how are you lending your privilege as an ally?

EC: Is there a final note on your thoughts on the Scarborough Charter drafting experience or equity, diversity, and inclusion that you'd like to leave with *Atlantis* readers?

KH: The Scarborough Charter is a hopeful forward-looking document that is really grounded in our principles, our values, and on how we're accountable in addressing anti-Black racism. This is not work that can be done with one Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion office. The whole institution needs to be impactful through research, teaching, and learning. It speaks to all those pieces that are really core to institutions.

Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

An outstanding query from my dialogue with Ms. Hashmani was whether universities will be held accountable in their reporting inclusivity (EDI) data to an inter-governmental council. Further, it is unclear whether university senior leadership reports will be subject to vetting by yearly review from the Inter-institutional Steering Committee on Inclusive Higher Education, set out in section 5.1, that retains public council recommendations on structural inclusivity and concrete policy revisions. An important takeaway includes how discussions about equity are critical to decolonizing universities. Hashmani asserts that grassroots pathways to education are critical for universities to honour and enable accessible diversity mandates. University priorities therefore cannot promote recruitment without inclusive strategies for retaining under-represented international and domestic students.

She suggests universities can outreach to high schools across urban and rural landscapes, including Indigenous communities, while creating bridge programs for prospective learners who demonstrate creative potential outside of standard entrance pathways. Moreover, orchestrating dynamic in-person and online teaching platforms may be a funded anchor of inclusive pedagogy across disciplines, thus balancing the Scarborough Charter equity principles with creative learning. Engaging students about their learning journeys, is a means through which universities can echo the Scarborough Charter pathways toward accessible education. Scarborough Charter institutional uptake is a process that requires meaningful ongoing consultation with students, parents, faculty, university staff, and their broader communities of care.

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Poetic Fabulations: Chartering Relationalities of *Black Flourishing, Mutuality, Inclusive Excellence, and Accountability*

by Anita Girvan, Maya Seshia, Nisha Nath, Davina Bhandar

Abstract: This collective work (four authors) demonstrates how persistent structures in higher education are mobilized in the signing of the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education: Principles, Actions, and Accountabilities. We read this event against the grain, as an act requiring relation-building and accountability. Recognizing the promises and risks of this work, and inspired by Black Feminist/coalitional practices which disorient from pre-mapped routes and knowledges in universities and reorient to otherwise ways of being, we name this process "poetic fabulation." We begin with poetry and proceed with seven stanzas that orient thematic reflections in each prose section that follows. The multi-vocality of the piece gives evidence to the experiences of the authors in this work. The interregnum which follows stanza 4, functions at the simultaneous and unruly registers of poetry, analysis, affect, and the somatic, to interrupt the flow, signalling how we experience labouring within the academy. Our work is collaborative, but also entails being hailed and responding in different ways. Using a full spectrum of creative and analytic skills, we navigate towards shared goals to process what we witness in and across post-secondary institution(s), to hold and care for the impacts of discretionary power.

Résumé : Cet ouvrage collectif (quatre auteurs) montre comment des structures persistantes dans l'enseignement supérieur sont mobilisées dans le cadre de la signature de la Charte de Scarborough sur le racisme envers les Noirs et l'inclusion des Noirs dans l'enseignement supérieur canadien : principes, mesures et responsabilisation. Nous considérons que cet événement est contradictoire, un acte qui nécessite d'établir des liens et de faire preuve de responsabilisation. Conscients des promesses et des risques de ce travail, et inspirés par les pratiques féministes noires et coalitionnelles qui se détournent des voies et des savoirs préétablis dans les universités et se réorientent vers d'autres façons d'être, nous nommons ce processus « fabulation poétique ». Nous commençons avec de la poésie et poursuivons avec sept strophes qui orientent les réflexions thématiques dans chaque section de prose qui suit. La multiplicité des voix de cet ouvrage témoigne de l'expérience des auteurs dans ce domaine. L'interrègne qui suit la strophe 4 s'inscrit dans les registres simultanés et indisciplinés de la poésie, de l'analyse, de l'affect et du somatique, et vient interrompre le courant des choses et illustrer notre façon de travailler au sein de l'académie. Notre travail est collaboratif, mais il implique aussi d'être interpellé et de réagir de différentes manières. En faisant appel à tout un éventail de compétences créatives et analytiques, nous évoluons vers des objectifs communs afin de comprendre ce dont nous sommes témoins dans les établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire, de tenir compte des effets du pouvoir discrétionnaire et de nous en préoccuper.

Authors: We are academic workers—at various institutions—who came to know each other through work in a shared institution. We each contributed in different but equally-important ways to this article and to the wider project that brought us together to unpack and move toward the goals of the Scarborough Charter. Anita Girvan (she/ they) is a settler of Afro-Caribbean diaspora in syilx Okanagan land and Assistant Professor of environmental justice and cultural studies at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan. Anita's research and teaching are informed and

inspired by Black feminist and coalitional collaborative approaches to world-building, including through metaphor, stories, music, and other cultural productions. Maya Seshia (she/her), a mixed-race settler with South Indian and British Ancestry, is an uninvited guest living and working in Châ Ûpchîchîyen Kudebi (the area colonially known as "Canmore"), located in Treaty Seven Territory. Maya is a scholar specializing in critical feminist race theory and practice. She holds an MA in Political Science. Nisha Nath (she/they) is Associate Professor of equity studies at Athabasca University and based in Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton). Her work looks at the intersections of citizenship, race, security, and settler colonialism. In addition to collaborating on the Insurgent and Resurgent Knowledges Lab, she is lead author on a co-authored forthcoming manuscript titled *The Letters: Writing Lives through and against the University* with Drs. Rita Dhamoon, Anita Girvan, and Davina Bhandar. Davina Bhandar (she/her/they) is Associate Professor of Gender Studies at the University of Victoria, located on the lands of the Lekwungen (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples. Davina's research and teaching interests are in the intersecting fields of critical race theory, anti-colonialism, abolition, feminist studies, contemporary theories of democracy, freedom, citizenship, sovereignty, and borders.

Adrift, Tethering, Collective Wayfinding

1. Adrift on passages
Seeking relations
Watery flows of diasporic movement
Across traffics of colonization
Drawn together
To learn, to be, to nurture
In spaces that hold promise
But are cartographically violent
In their re-mapping of existing relations
Out of conceit of supremacy

Uncharted and misrecognized,
We find each other
And tether together
To ride the swells and crests
To the shoals[1]

This work begins poetically to metabolize the experience of collectively working on a report on the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education: Principles, Actions and Accountabilities. The report was initiated by one of us who had been tasked with many forms of labour to ameliorate institutional harms—labour shouldered by one of the few Black faculty members. Burdened with fixing the problems of the institution that invalidate one's inclusion, such labour remains a tremendously self-jeopardizing act (see Dhamoon 2020). The report-writing was undertaken in the context of a post-secondary institution where little has been institutionally accomplished on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), nor in countering racism—anti-Indigenous and anti-Black in particular.

Another one of us was contractually hired as a "subject matter expert" to provide an environmental scan of institutional signatories' take-up of the Charter's action plan. This scan was to serve as a site of comparison for our own institution. The two others in our team stepped in to "co-supervise" the project, gesturing to our broader practice of engaging in redistributive forms of labour. As we write, we recognize that there is *power* in naming, yet also *fear* in naming, and *real risk* in naming. For these reasons, the report and the institution have not been named in this piece. "We" is used throughout our writing, not in a universalist appeal, but in signalling our collective authorship in which there is also a generative tension given our structural locations, and our different embodied and affective experiences.[2]

From our jointly held perspective, we were curious to trace how an institution that had accomplished so little vis-à-vis EDI was such a quick signatory to the Charter. To this end, we carefully documented the trail of mishandled and obstructed institutional EDI initiatives, including the perspectives of those who had been involved at various stages. This information contextualized and named the terrain in which the Scarborough Charter was signed.

Inspired by Black feminist creative and political practices, such as those of Dionne Brand (2002), El Jones (2022), and Audre Lorde (2017/1977), we have chosen a poetic form mixed with reflective analysis. This mixed form allows us to metabolize, make sense of, and ground the ways in which we are called to do social transformation in the university, yet often still remain abandoned by the university, among other institutions of power (Gilmore 2015). Poetry provides a way of integrating *thinking and feeling* as a "revelation or distillation of ex-

perience" that offers not merely word-play, but insight and a "disciplined attention" to truth (Lorde 2017/1977, 8–9).

We have each experienced uneasy relationships within higher educational institutions, and some of us are still in precarity; we haven't yet entirely given up on the possibilities of sustaining community in and beyond this institution. As a way through what often *feels* intractable in our work together, "Poetry is not only dream and vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before" (Lorde, 2017/1977, 9).

We also witness the ways the university *thinks* it wants "us," but *feels*—in its reactive affects of self-protection—hostile to the transformative justice that our presence and labour entail. While we struggle to gain access, feel our way through, and arrive, the structures of the institution move in on us as we push back. Despite the Scarborough Charter and many other policies, charters, offices, and positions instituted to ameliorate structural harms in universities, numerous forms of exclusion remain (Edmunds and Lind 2021). This continues in a context where EDI, DEI, EDID, IDEA and other 'taming' acronyms have been initially embraced so thoroughly by the neoliberal university in attempts to manage a diverse host of colonial and exclusionary foundations. Even as we are critical of these management strategies, we are currently witnessing strong conservative backlash in some universities against any small gains provided by attention to what EDI evokes. The roots of these acronyms can be traced to the generative provocations of the 1960s civil rights movement, and framing has shifted from tolerance, to multiculturalism and, over the past two decades to some permutation of an often-amorphous iteration of equity. These acronyms tend to conflate and flatten important diverse communities and specific interventions. While there are often common targets of critique that we work on coalitionally, each of these elements has particular histories that also need attention. As Black scholars constantly remind (Cooper 2022; Ibrahim et al 2022; Henry 2023; Nelson et al 2020; Thompson 2022), anti-Black racism has a longevity in the Canadian post-secondary environment, so even when shifts take place that selectively 'incorporate' Black communities and knowledges, we must cautiously navigate ecologies that are persistently hostile to Black, Indigenous, and other racialized presences and knowledges.

Existing terms of engagement in the academy protect that which has always been protected—colonialism, white supremacy, power, *qua* the institution itself.

Because of the institution's self-protective posture, we are often left combing a non-existent archive. Such a process is not our experience alone but is structured in communities that articulate the methods of "critical fabulation" as a way of marking and archiving presences out of absences without the conceit of restoring a completeness to an always violent archive (Hartman 2008). We thus connect the creative–imaginative poetic form with a political–creative act of fabulating.

This poetic fabulation is not an easy articulation. We are not suggesting that the commitments of the Scarborough Charter to transform institutional practices that have absented Black bodies from curriculum, erased Black histories, and muted Black presence are caught up in a lie that we are attempting to expose. By choosing this use of "poetic fabulation" we engage Saidiya Hartman's process of "critical fabulation," as further developed and explored in Tavia Nyong'o's generative "Afro-Fabulations" (2018). Thinking with Nyong'o, we resist reading the term "fabulation" as simply a lie, but read it as that which "exposes the relation between truth and lying in an other-than moral sense" (2018, 6). Nyong'o positions his interest in "fabulationality —the entangled and angular socialities generated by fabulation [which] is of course also inspired by the 'poetics of relation' pioneered [SIC] by Édouard Glissant" (6). What we are calling "poetic fabulation" enables us to write through the narrative of that which is absented by the institutional presencing of the Scarborough Charter. Amidst the swells of familiar institutional directives to provide timely "deliverables," we pour in time and labour with intense care that haunts racialized bodies. In our labour processes as we are subjected and subjectified (Bannerji 2023) our scholarly work is a constant proving ground of "legitimacy." Through the power grid of the institution, we wait precariously, we ride crests of possibilities. Not knowing the degree of change possible, though knowing there *must* be change, collectively and creatively we come together in a politics of navigating, questioning, (surviving) all that is named, yet institutionally unaddressed. But we also think about small discursive shifts that we witness that may yet enable change if we think of the long histories that have landed us here and of the possibilities yet to come. Resting in a space of inertia is not a healthy course of action for our own well-being in institutions/in life, nor the well-being of com-

munities we work with and those to come inside and outside of academia.

We turn to poetics to consider what it means when institutions sign onto the Scarborough Charter, to explore the relation between truth and lying and all of the discursive, insurgent, possibilities in between. This poetic fabulation simultaneously disorients yet collectively reorients as we dream, vision, and imagine new paths. We do so in multiple nested contexts where our encounters in one university are both specific to that university, and at times generalizable to a larger landscape of higher education. In form and content this piece also reflects how steadying ourselves through eddies and currents is a process of balancing multiple and simultaneous affective and analytic registers in which we enter this work. Beginning with poetry, the seven stanzas structuring this piece orient thematic reflections in each prose section that follows, a multi-vocality that gives evidence to the relationally intertwined experiences of the authors in this work. An interregnum titled "metabolizing affect" follows stanza 4, providing a moment of intentional interruption, drawing together the simultaneous unruly registers of analysis, poetry, affect, and the somatic through which we experience and engage in our work within academe. In doing so, we articulate a breathless fatigue in the midst of swimming in troubled waters, even as we pull ourselves out, drawing from lifelines of those that have come before and that are with us now.

Scarborough Charter in the 2020 Conjuncture: Histories, Possibilities and Foreclosures

2. Following ancestral traces,
A charter arrives
Naming the unfinished matter of abolition
The currency of the "afterlife of slavery,"[3]
Charting re-humanizing pathways
Through thorny brambles
That reveal just enough daylight,
But that also cut and scratch
Institutions scrambling to charter (virtue?)
Saying the sweet words
Mapping routes to 'inclusion'

Is it a living breathing document
that will pave the way for you
to capture and dream of better worlds?

The map is laid out for you (2020 moment)
Causing the violent disruption,
the cycles of crisis
that could no longer be ignored,
now is your chance to emerge
and make the demands
that will let you belong.

But Lee Maracle reminds us
That "maps never lead to uncharted places"[4]
And Dionne Brand shows the folly of
Mapping routes, roots and return.
Those colonial projects,
Extracting origins and essences,
Leave only fissures,
Displacement and dislocation
Marine ecologies bear witness
To salty tears

As yet un-chartered tracing
Destination deferred
Performative pre-celebrations,
Tokenized bodies,
Whose presence is
All-too-soon revulsed
Yet, finding each other,
together, we push on.

The emergence of the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education was preceded by decades-long contestations to support Black Canadian Studies, as well as to support Black scholars and students in the hostile spaces of Canadian academe (Ibrahim et al 2022). These lineages of contestation were felt in the crystalizing moment when graduate student/emerging scholar Shelby McPhee was racially profiled in 2019 at the University of British Columbia during the annual meeting of the Black Canadian Studies Association. The association's annual meeting, where he was presenting his work, was being held under the umbrella of the annual Congress of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, where multiple scholarly associations meet simultaneously (BCSA 2019). The treatment of McPhee echoes patterns where other Black students, faculty, and staff are regularly questioned and carded on university campuses (Elghawaby 2019). The practice of carding on campus grounds is an extension of racial surveillance and segregation deeply rooted in histories of Canadian anti-Black racism, such as municipal "sundown laws," property ownership restrictions, and contemporary anti-Black

policing practices (Maynard 2017; Walcott and Abdillahi 2019).

These forms of anti-Black racism constituted a tipping point in the Canadian context, and along with that conjunctural May 2020 moment, have paved the way for a number of institutionally supported but Black and relational community-led initiatives, including the Scholar Strike labour action and teach-in network, the Canadian Association of Cultural Studies 2022 meeting, "Another University Now," and critical Black Studies programmes emerging in several Canadian universities, joining longer-standing programmes at York University and Dalhousie University (Cooper 2022). The violence against Black bodies on the streets neither ended nor began with George Floyd, nor did protests against this violence begin or end with Black Lives Matter. Similarly, the attempt to 'fix' academe's anti-Black racism has neither begun nor ended with the signing of the Scarborough Charter (Walcott and Abdillah 2019). However, the Charter initiates a way forward as it explicitly names the fact of anti-Black racism in the academy. Thus, it offers a possible anchor to ground the long lineages of demands in order to steady life in these institutions (Cooper 2022).

The other context of the Charter connects with the Scarborough campus of the University of Toronto, where the Charter-forming dialogues began in October 2020, but also to the complex set of relations and presences in that district. Witnessed by the palpable shift in the Canadian literature and film scene, Scarborough is a site of long-standing Black presence, including the presence of other diverse arrivant communities for whom the margins of Toronto have been home (Chariandy 2018; Hernandez 2017; Leung 2018). The name Scarborough is also a colonial imposition upon the land of Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Anishnaabeg, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples whose presence is invisibilized in the naming of the Scarborough Bluffs as a colonial echo of limestone cliffs found outside the town of Scarborough in England (Hodge 2020). The Scarborough Charter thus holds tensions of colonial roots and routes of diverse communities.

Returning to the higher education ecology, the signing of the Charter operates on at least two levels: the first is as a point of challenge to the hegemony of a universalist (white, colonial) institutional culture that does not understand—nor want to—the implications of how it has remained structurally inaccessible and hostile to Black

people. The signing of the Charter, its explicit naming of anti-Black racism, and its subsequent referencing and amplification act as a sonar disturbance in the watery depths of institutional navigation. The sound waves bouncing off the Charter not only cause a ripple effect but potentially cast adrift those institutional practices that have intentionally silenced those barred from access, or those who gain access and are then subsequently abandoned. Pointing to a different direction from the shallows of EDI, these waves emerge from a more robust set of principles in their articulation of *Black Flourishing, Mutuality, Inclusive Excellence, and Accountability*.

The second level at which the Charter operates turns on the specific actions it demands of signatories. If institutions get beyond the shock and defensiveness of naming anti-Black racism, there is much direction within the Charter. Two aspects are immediately useful in our contexts: 1) collecting disaggregated data to establish targets and timelines to remediate gaps, and to develop mechanisms and resource commitments to support inclusion of students, staff and faculty (ss. 2.1.1. and 2.1.2); and 2) reviewing systems that govern discipline with a mind towards protection against reprisals (s. 1.1.2.)

On the first point, the collection of data at this particular institution has been decidedly superficial, with such shallow "data" foreclosing any forms of accountability. When one of our collective was asked by the university to write something for Black History Month during her first year of employment, she asked (as a non-expert in Black history) if there were other Black scholars, staff or students to collaborate with and was told that the university *doesn't collect this data*. Of course, her question was not simply about demographics, but served as a prompt to recognize a general and structured invisibility/non-presence or precarious presence of other Black scholars and staff and students within this university. For Black scholars, there is a paradox of invisibility *and* hypervisibility even when numbers are few (Girvan 2021). Black people have occasionally been celebrated in the still relatively few number of "equity hires," but often continue to be read as threatening.

This connects to the second point on discipline given the constant hum of punitive effects when simply showing up in the institution in the "skin we are in" (Cole 2020). Although the Scarborough Charter and our work was discursively celebrated prior to the release of our report, the ways that we and other Black and Indigenous colleagues have been disciplined, surveilled, and con-

strained even as we were tasked to transform, demonstrates that we cannot exceed our skin; we are interpellated from the moment of entry within an institution that resists the very work that we have been hired to do. In their work on the "undercommons," Fred Moten and Stefano Harney name this tension:

> Call out to it as it calls to you. But for the subversive intellectual, all of this goes on upstairs, in polite company, among the rational men. After all, the subversive intellectual came under false pretenses, with bad documents, out of love. Her labor is as necessary as it is unwelcome. The university needs what she bears but cannot bear what she brings. (Moten and Harney 2013, 26)

With this built-in institutional defensiveness and fragility, securing any specific actions and processes has been difficult in the three years since the signing of the Charter. The challenge comes as we continually point to the Charter in order to demand that impact is made, and in doing so get read as provocative irritants in those moments when we simply evoke the Charter as a *course of movement*, rather than as virtue signal. Nonetheless, we do witness that more of our colleagues are aware of the Charter and are joining the call to move in inclusive directions and also connect these struggles intersectionally, and alongside the struggles of Indigenous colleagues in rigid colonial institutions.

Coalition, or Divide-and-Conquer Politics?

3. And what of the ecologies of other charters?
Brampton, for international students?
Okanagan, for mental health?
What cruel neo-liberal institutional tricks
Bring us to divide and conquer
That which is entangled?

Anansi trickster agency reveals
belonging is always contingent
—the web ensnares you
even as you seize hold
of precarious structures
to spin a different web
to hold communities
Charting contingent route—
"Come here! No watch your step!"
"Pose, don't speak, back.
"We don't want to hear, step back."

As these histories render clear, naming and *redressing* the specificity of anti-Black racism in higher education are integral. In thinking expansively and relationally of the Scarborough Charter, a crucial aspect of this work lies in charting mutually-supportive pathways. The Charter itself makes clear a commitment to:

> [Transcend] any suggestion that to redress anti-Black racism and foster Black inclusion is a zero-sum proposition by underscoring the complementarity of commitments to Indigenous communities and other equity groups. (7)

We take this commitment seriously. In university ecosystems, a structured pattern of treating each "equity issue" as discrete, erects boundaries around siloed identities and, thus, threatens to ignore or undo decades of work that has demonstrated the imperative of intersectionally-bound struggle (Crenshaw 1989). This does not mean that we conflate all struggles in higher education as equivalent: differences must be named. However, the white settler colonial neoliberal institution's fractured logics of identity work to submerge our naming of these intersecting, interacting, and relational structures of power, especially when critique comes through coalitional and reciprocal politics practised in real time, in the everyday. Moreover, the walling off of intersecting structures of dominance into discrete identities to be managed and regulated by the university often enacts divide-and-conquer tactics. Particularly within contexts of structured scarcity, this boundary-making cultivates competition for space and resources, even manifesting in fleeting, yet structured, calendar logics as Girvan, Dove and McGreer have recently described (2023). The attempted fracturing of time, space, and ultimately relationality reinforces a political status quo in its attempt to let *division* flourish: "Let 'them' fight it out amongst themselves so that 'we' can stay the course." In the case of Black faculty in many Canadian institutions, due to structured barriers there simply are not enough people in institutions to lead the charge and continue to remediate structures that are hostile. Under these conditions, the racialized labour of anti-racist institutional change is further entrenched, with the substantive impacts on anti-Black racism, unclear.

In a context where the stakes of our collective engagement are high, we also witness a proliferation of charters. For example, the Okanagan Charter pulls post-secondary institutions to commit to a transformative vision for health in all aspects of their operation. And the Bramp-

ton Charter attempts to interrupt the erasure of the experiences of international students in a context in which the predatory academy continually extracts from them in the movement to 'internationalize' (Bhandar, forthcoming). In our shared experiences pushing for implementation of the Scarborough Charter, we see how a charter can anchor how we coalesce to work differently, in support of Black faculty, students, and staff. Moreover, in an academic context that is replete with intersecting harms, the Charter can help to render the complexity of these structures more manageable. The Scarborough Charter can be one of many tethers for a coalitional politics that invites a process of intentionally coming together with focused energies, only to regroup and coalesce in other contexts for other struggles. This kind of sustaining coalitional work is necessary under conditions in which our labour could be infinitely extracted to remediate everything, everywhere, all at once.

Paying attention to those who have come before us, struggling in some of the same ways as we do now (Ferguson 2012; García-Peña 2022), we also see how we must maintain an ethics and posture of vigilance. What do we know of these other charters? From what histories of struggle do they emerge, and how and why are universities responding? What relationalities are being charted through these moves? How do we draw the lines of possibility and peril, but ensure that the locus of our energies does not foreclose us from (en)acting otherwise?

We name these tensions here, as opposed to resolving them; a coalitional politics requires the constant collaboration and negotiation around sustaining expressions of futurity and hope as an abolitionist "discipline" (Kaba 2020) when individuals in our collectives are so depleted. Regardless of the vocabulary we engage, our commitments are shaped by our witnessing work, and the readying of spaces for those who come after. A call for a coalitional politics, then, is operating at multiple interconnected registers, including a fundamental analysis and understanding that "Black histories on Turtle Island are complexly interwoven with foundational genocides of Indigenous communities, and their own perseverance, resurgence and sovereignty" (Girvan 2021). This coalitional relationality (Girvan and Chua, 2021; Girvan et al. 2020) requires a listening and learning from Indigenous colleagues, who have carefully navigated how institutions take up the calls to act from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Tait and Ladner 2017). In witness of the 'wait' and 'weight' of this work, particularly when insistence gets met by a disciplining institution, we

learn alongside Indigenous colleagues that the investment is not in the institution that is suddenly committed to Indigenization or to fighting anti-Black racism. Rather, the investment and commitment are to each other—to presence scholars, epistemes, and communities, amidst political insurgence and resurgence that is never solely located *within* the institution, nor solely located as a reaction *to* the institution (Gaudry and Lorenz 2018; García-Peña 2022).

As we try to make sense through poetic narrative, we acknowledge that one of our goals is to charter uncharted relationality. Witnessing colleagues mobilizing so persistently and insistently to render the struggle against caste-based discrimination legible to a broader anti-colonial and anti-racist politics, we see that part of the task is to un-charter the usual routes and roots of knowledge (Patel 2016; Soundararajan 2022). These over-trodden paths of hegemonic canons and communities have attempted to evacuate knowledges and communities that have long existed. Too many of us come into universities believing that we shouldn't be here, and that our knowledges don't count. The Charter calls us to "[decentre] epistemic Eurocentrism," but most critically "[hold] open space for expansive, world-inspired learning that broadens disciplinary canons to include Black expertise and knowledges" (Charter, s. 2.3.1). The attempted evacuation of those non-dominant lineages of knowledge has accompanied the ebbs and flows of people coming into and often leaving inhospitable institutions. We have heard and witnessed those tales of departures. They are not well-documented but they have come to us in whispers, so we work to hold open this space for a (re)turn.

Laboured Breath

> *4. Who bears the burdens*
> *of charting and acting?*
> *Breathwork*
> *Gestures which signal institutional change,*
> *Igniting skeptical optimism,*
> *The hope returns, then taken away,*
> *Fear feared perseverance*
> *Inhale*
> *the realization of familiarity*
> *of this pattern,*
> *the labour involved*
> *in piecing together*
> *the pieces of hard heart work*
> *Quickening, beating, pulse*
> *to subvert and continue*

to push on and push
and protect and support
through connections and creativity
Exhale

Metabolising Affect: Interregnum

We are affected and effected through efforts of chartering/charting. Institutional gestures acknowledging anti-Black racism are held to account by those who recognize overdue movement—discursive dressings which assuage white supremacy's reign, its state a combination of persistence as well as an always *in-crisis crisis*, due to decades of critical questioning, constantly destabilizing its stubborn reign.

Seismic waves fracture.

Costume change after costume change—acknowledgements, apologies, public gestures of possibilities and shifts to come. Yet, as we hold up the mirror to 'you,' the institution, the reflection reveals you have just morphed, yet are still much the same. Raising, reminding, researching what Black scholars, staff, and students have long named.

Task forces and various forms of documentation are required to "prove" *again* and even then, recommendations are undertaken and made public at discretion. The institution repeatedly evades its work to name and address racism flowing through organizational charts, policies, everyday actions and interactions, surveillance, and profiling.

Careful reading of contracts, legalistic language makes clear who is protected and who is not. Evoking fear, as legalistic language reminds that holding up the mirror is inherently and increasingly risky. A task too big to be bounded by start and end dates, nevertheless, reminders of power ebbing through contractual relations—

'time is of the essence'

…for those doing the research, yet not applied to those who receive "deliverables." Work can be owned and selectively shared by those who did not write. Contracts create possibilities, but also protect institutional power, evoking and disciplining, through constraints and fear, dictating what is, and is not shared, and with whom.

To take up this work is inherently risky for the racialized bodies who are tasked with this labour.

Walking into dangerous waters

…sometimes because we are compelled, sometimes because tasked (Henry 2023). Performative gestures which nod to change suggest possibilities. Utterances in meetings reveal and disrupt.

Tentative moorings

…and non-performative signals of change are mixed with the familiar yet still painful backlash, or fear of such.

Discretionary Power

5. Open waters,
use your discretion
Amidst discretionary power
To navigate landmarks,
Hardened edifices
Shallow waters
Dive in at your own risk

No life-guard on duty
Protected/unprotected
The signing of charters,
the signing of contracts
Transactional? Contractual?
Good faith
What faith?

Our experience of pushing for institutional change with the report on the Charter also reveals the patterned responses of the institution (and actors within the institution) who continually veer, steer, and strategically maneuver away from accountability. These responses are not unique to the Scarborough Charter backlash or counter-critique across time and space, such as contemporary attacks on critical race theory. There have been past pushbacks to developing anti-racism offices on Canadian post-secondary campuses in the mid-1990s (Sefa Dei 1993), and there is a longstanding, always slippery invocation of academic freedom to silence critique of the structures of heteropatriarchal whiteness at universities who are invested in occupation and imperialism (Salaita 2015). There *is*, however, a distinct specificity to the long lineage of backlash against Black faculty and students in

the Canadian post-secondary context. The Scarborough Charter was signed a long *52 years after* Montreal riot police stormed Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University) to break up a two-week long peaceful protest that had coalesced in support of un-answered complaints of racial discrimination launched by six Black and Caribbean students—students who came into an even longer history of anti-Black racism in the "afterlife of slavery" (Hartman 2007, 6) where Black people have been read as fungible, disposable, threatening, devoid of intelligence, etc.

In the experience we narrate, the discretionary—and often disciplinary—use of power is one mechanism through which we have witnessed and experienced backlash when pushing for institutional accountability as a signatory to the Charter. Drawing from Nath and Allen's research, we see how discretionary power mobilized by the university is never actionable vis-à-vis accountability (Nath and Allen 2022; Nath and Allen 2023). There are few askable demands of discretionary power *because* it is so ephemeral and untethered, even if authorized and legitimized through the institution's assertion of jurisdiction (Nath and Allen 2023). To the contrary, the kind of institutional power variably made available to Black, Indigenous, and other racialized scholars is residual; this kind of power is always met with a demand that it/we be rendered institutionally accountable. Residual power, too, must be answerable.

Consider how seriously the institution takes enunciating that it is a signatory to the Charter, raising questions about where and how the Charter is invoked. In faculty-wide meetings, or institution-wide strategic objectives? As a regular agenda item, with no substantive time for updates, discussion, and collaboration? The sudden appearance of the Charter within an institutional landscape can be disorienting. Of course, the suddenness is anything but, reflecting decades of pushing, struggle, and institutional intransigence with respect to fighting anti-Black racism (Carty 1991). Yet, the seeming sudden appearance can signal a politics of hypervisibility that Black, Indigenous, and other racialized scholars are pulled into. In *these* institutional contexts, again the rockiest of waters, Black scholars are regularly disappeared, but can be selectively pulled up and out when the institution itself feels it needs to be saved. What a weight it is to be the life preserver for an institution that enacts its discretion by choosing who to submerge and when.

The multiple iterations of discretionary power we've witnessed are moments where those invested in the institution *qua* institution *could* act otherwise, particularly in deciding when to delay or defer action, and how. These deferrals happen in multiple ways: delaying for further study; subjecting proposals to hyper-surveillance around 'bias' and 'accuracy'; undertaking 'risk assessments' for legal compliance or exposure; asserting the importance of a project to move it up the institutional hierarchy, but also *away* from continued dialogue and collaboration; and, normalizing all these exceptional processes, effectively gaslighting those who have done the work. These points of decision can render the Charter (and work mobilizing the Charter) increasingly distant from the politics, labour, care, and communities animating it in the first place. This severing can feel particularly violent. What happens to the politics animating the Charter as it is moved through and digested in the body of the institution? *How might we stay close to this work and refuse the discretionary enactment of its disappearance?*

Discretion can also animate the impetus to sign the Charter (or engage in other commitments to anti-racism, equity and decolonization) in the first place. Where the intention *is* for universities to formalize their responsiveness to the struggles that animate the Charter, the sudden appearance of these sites of cross-institutional coalescence invite attentiveness to process. If the impetus for the enunciation as signatory is, for example, compliance with external funding bodies, this shapes what becomes possible or imaginable to the institution. *How might we disorient and (re)orient the university's discretionary processes (or sometimes discretionary turn to process) to cultivate other imaginaries?*

Through a kind of discretionary temporality, just as swiftly as the Charter can appear, it can disappear when Black faculty and those in coalition assert that remediation of ongoing harms must occur. Discretion is also invoked spatially by the institution, in its attempt to regulate when and where, public and private. The Charter can be declared publicly, but ongoing harms are privatized, individualized, and distanced from the lineages, patterns, and systems the Charter urges us to name. The Charter can be invoked openly, but the careful questioning of what is being declared, and why, is jettisoned to the privacy of email or individual follow-up or, in harsh backlash, to public and private disciplining and a dismissal of concerns. Even the language of "anti-Black racism" is selectively disappeared by the institution in its truncated reference to the title of the document: The

Scarborough Charter ~~on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education: Principles, Actions, and Accountabilities~~.

The institution's attempt to rewrite how we engage in space and time is political, even as it works to strip the Charter of its politics. Demands and assertions that are rooted in lineages of insurgent and resurgent political struggle get sequestered to the terrain of complaint, litigation, and contract. How must the institution see or understand the Charter such that it enunciates the commitments therein while at the same time enacts ongoing violence against Black faculty, staff, and students? How, to engage the language of El Jones (2023), does the institution become reconciled with its own audacity? What does it mean to be signatory to a document, when the institution empties it of all of its embodied (past, present and future) struggles?

Disorienting (the) Institution

6. Mirror held up ~
the reflection/echolocation
of violences registered,
as contracts end,
months pass,
communications unanswered,
communications closed;
Attempted silence unsuccessful,
Dust collects,
Is then wiped off,
Gravitational pull,
Tide in, tide out
Un-ceasing waves.
Finding ways
Through hallways,
Under closed doors,
In gatherings,

Instead of residing solely within critique, loss, or lack, this pausing on our collective experience enables not only a tracing of the institution's power, but of ours as well. Discretionary power derives its authority and legitimacy from structures, but also relies on a context of scarcity, in which benevolence and discipline trade on each other. The discretionary power mobilized to frustrate Scarborough Charter commitments is also relational; through the exertion of discretionary power, there is an expectation that, in return, we deploy a kind of residual power that is granted as a favour, but is just as easily pulled back. Indeed, the report that grounded how

the four of us came together was initially only possible because of "residual funds." When we collectively resist the terms of this invitation to engage institutionally sanctioned power, we have witnessed how the impacts of our coalitional power can both disorient and (re)orient, as we pry open and attempt to creatively grow something through the cracks.

These disorienting and (re)orienting possibilities are tethered to *how* we struggle and mobilize. In asking and expecting that the Scarborough Charter be treated as more than a document and in mobilizing it as a mirror to hold up to the institution, we have witnessed what it can look like to profoundly disorient the institution. For example, for the institution who presences the Charter as an agenda line and brief time allocation in meeting documents, insisting that the time and space allocated to the Charter be grounded in demonstrable action, has challenged a politics of inclusion and declaration that is regularly mobilized to buttress the institution itself. In publicly asserting that the Charter be removed from meeting mentions if no goals, plans, or metrics accompany its presence, this constitutes a profound refusal of an institution that is wanting to interpellate Black scholars into the role of accepting presence at all costs. To recast and reflect this back disrupts how the institution writes itself as benevolent in their provision of the most minimalist space of presence.

Or, in carefully laying the groundwork for understanding how our institution had come to be a signatory while being one of few Canadian post-secondary institutions with no equity plan, framework, or office, we simply began to ask questions in light of the (at best) ambivalence and (at worst) obstruction vis-à-vis equity-related matters. As opposed to directing our questions towards those who can exert their discretionary power to closure, we treated our questions as a kind of interventive evidence gathering (Allen et. al. 2023), approaching those who had been enlisted as institutional 'champions' (Ahmed 2012, 131), and querying *them* to follow the impact (or lack thereof) of their own labour. *Siloing is strategically valuable to an institution that does not want us to put the pieces together*. The act of questioning, which is enabled through the vocabulary of the Scarborough Charter, holds potential to unmask discretionary power. Questioning disorients by mirroring and amplifying violent disjunctures that the institution is reconciled with, but never wants to presence in the same moment or space as its declaration of its "commitment to action." This mirroring exposes the institution's investment in se-

curing and consolidating itself in the face of a set of disorienting politics that challenge hegemonic forms of common sense which maintain anti-Black racism and directly protect some over others.

Tentative Moorings and Futurities

Our collective experience in this project, and more broadly in multiple institutions, urges us to consider the Scarborough Charter not as a panacea to longstanding anti-Black racism, but as a provisional map for tracing harms of existing maps in institutions, and a provisional, aspirational movement, borne out of long lineages of past efforts. The exact coordinates for this movement remain elusive since the work of documenting harms, revealing them to the university, and attempting to remediate these harms remains weighty and frustrating (Ahmed 2007). We know that this weight has led to very public departures from Canadian universities for some, like Charmaine Nelson (Khan 2022), and more quiet ones for others. What is more, we know that Black flourishing depends upon, and is in relation to, the thriving of other communities for whom universities have not always been healthy and supportive destinations. As we witness the gathering of others across universities and other institutions in "community as rebellion" (García-Peña, 2022), we are fabulating new relationality that we have proven exists beyond the confines of this one project, one contract.

This work of defying the disciplining and siloing of communities is not incidental, as it breathes poetic, affective, somatic, and analytic life into how we choose to come together in institutions that would rather choose for us. For us, the prying open and growing something within the cracks includes incubating creative practices which foster communities and knowledge production among marginalized groups. This mutual and relational flourishing has included presencing the material practices that are intrinsic to our insurgent and resurgent ways of knowing (e.g., singing, weaving, playing dohl, growing and nurturing other-than-human life), reclaiming space for these practices, and reorienting our attention away from the repair of the institution. We (re)witness these practices as part of our epistemic labour within the academy, even if—or perhaps precisely because—they are not legible to academe (Bhandar et. al, forthcoming).

In writing this piece alongside others in this collection, we wish to provide tentative moorings to navigate institutional waters with the Scarborough Charter and so

many other elements and poetic maps. Dionne Brand poetically suggests the routier or "ruttier" as a long oral form poem memorized by sailors as embodied knowledges which sailors hold to provide orientation for those adrift on the water (2002, 212-13). The ruttier's key orientational knowledges are infused with non-linear, multi-dimensional and elemental bearings from the sky, from shifting lively waters and from land. Christina Sharpe similarly picks up these rhythmic incantations in a call-and-response, evoking Brand's ruttier in her "wake work" (Sharpe 2016).

Wayfinding in institutions is often non-linear and requires tracing knowledges that have not been archived, so we seek out and listen in non-linear, multi-dimensional ways to charter through the gaps. Gaps are found in the movement in between the space of something resembling the truth, and the relational exposure of something that resembles the lie. To "critically fabulate" (Hartman 2008) our way, charting from "here" to "elsewhere" (other*wise* worlds) as a set of aspirational moves with an undefined destination that rings with liberatory tones, expressive forms are the sites of our dreaming. As one important expressive form, "poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of that freedom" (Lorde, 2017/1977, 10). As we make demands in the name of this Charter and other uncharted relationality in higher education, we acknowledge the highs and lows of the swells that we ambivalently ride:

> 7. Adrift on passages
> Weathered by prevailing winds
> Anchoring together
> To stabilize
> Against chronic institutional disorientation
> Dropping small anchors
> Strategically, in small acts
> Sonic disturbance
> Seismic waves
> Challenging conventional cartographies
> Reorienting resurgent resonances
>
> Fabulating futurity
> Without guarantees[5]

Endnotes

1. See Tiffany Lethabo King's 2019 theorization of "the shoals" as an oceanographic term for a ridge or shallow place in the water that may interrupt smooth navigation. King metaphorically suggests the Black shoals as an interruption to the flow of white settler colonial possession and thus, its enacts a potential place of coalition with Indigenous decolonial projects.

2. Where the designation of discrete categories of identity—through acronyms like IBPOC—risks reducing people and communities to individualized "others," positionality and structural location are politically salient as we work to map relationships to anti-Black racism in higher education. We have returned to this generative tension many times during our collaboration, also noting that this piece, and the report that brought us together, are only possible because we have intentionally come together (as women-of-colour) in coalition. We also note that this piece doesn't and perhaps cannot articulate the many conversations we've had about the potential and perils of the Scarborough Charter—conversations that cannot be pulled apart from our positionalities and structural locations.

3. See Hartman 2008, 6.

4. See Maracle 2015.

5. With thanks to Stuart Hall for the notion of a politics "without guarantees," a phrase which appears in many of his talks and essays, including "Race, the Floating Signifier" (2021/1997). With this orientation in his thought and politics, he cautions those of us with transformational   desires to proceed without relying too heavily on the stability of essential and fixed categories which often emerge from the logics of a hegemonic science that produces racism itself.

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Moving Beyond Diversity: Using Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought to Foster Black Inclusion Through Undergraduate University Admissions

by Christopher Stuart Taylor and Grace A. Gomashie

Abstract: This paper argues that concrete actions are needed to address anti-Black racism and foster Black inclusion in Canadian higher education. These pertinent actions should target the systemic barriers faced by Black students when accessing post-secondary institutions. Through our reflections on current admissions practices of research-intensive Ontario-based universities, this paper highlights how currently used frameworks of diversity and inclusion may not be effective in disrupting the myth of meritocracy and mitigating systemic barriers faced by Black undergraduate applicants. We recommend that undergraduate admissions practices be grounded in a critical understanding of the four principles of the Scarborough Charter (Black flourishing, inclusive excellence, mutuality, and accountability) to support Black admissions, and that critical race theory and Black feminist thought be used as frameworks to create specific admissions practices and programs that disrupt anti-Black racism. The paper will generate further discussions on what it means to foster Black inclusion through university admissions and enrolment in a transformative manner.

Résumé : Cet article soutient que des mesures concrètes sont nécessaires pour lutter contre le racisme envers les Noirs et favoriser l'intégration des Noirs dans l'enseignement supérieur canadien. Ces mesures pertinentes devraient cibler les obstacles systémiques auxquels font face les étudiants noirs lorsqu'ils accèdent aux établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire. Par nos réflexions sur les pratiques actuelles d'admission dans les universités ontariennes de recherche intensive, cet article souligne comment les cadres de diversité et d'inclusion actuellement utilisés peuvent s'avérer inefficaces pour briser le mythe de la méritocratie et atténuer les obstacles systémiques auxquels font face les candidats noirs de premier cycle. Nous recommandons que les pratiques d'admission au premier cycle soient fondées sur une compréhension critique des quatre principes de la Charte de Scarborough (l'épanouissement des Noirs, l'excellence inclusive, la mutualité et la responsabilisation) afin de favoriser les admissions des Noirs, et que la théorie critique de la race et la pensée féministe noire servent de cadres pour créer des pratiques et des programmes d'admission qui perturbent le racisme envers les Noirs. Cet article suscitera d'autres discussions sur ce que représente le fait de favoriser l'intégration des Noirs de manière transformatrice dans l'admission et l'inscription dans les universités.

Keywords: admissions; anti-Black racism; Black affinity groups; equity and inclusion; restorative justice; systems change

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Introduction

This paper reflects on current admissions practices of research-intensive Ontario-based universities and highlights that currently used frameworks of equity, diversity, and inclusion may not be effective in disrupting the myth of meritocracy and mitigating systemic barriers faced by Black undergraduate applicants. We argue that post-secondary institutions adopt admissions practices and programs shaped by the perspectives of critical race theory, Black feminist thought, and the foundational principles of the Scarborough Charter to address anti-Black racism and foster Black inclusion in Canadian higher education. Examining admissions practices is a key issue as post-secondary institutions acknowledge and work towards combating anti-Black racism as expressed in their signing of the Scarborough Charter in 2021. With over 50 post-secondary institutions as signatories, there is a strong national collaborative attempt to offer concrete measures to redress these current challenges and foster Black inclusion in higher education. Following the murder of George Floyd, post-secondary institutions in Canada have made varied, disparate efforts to address anti-Black racism, including activities such as issuing public statements, the formation of anti-Black racism task-forces, cluster hires of Black faculty, and in some cases the creation of Black Studies programs. Institutions, including but not limited to York University, the University of British Columbia, Dalhousie University, the University of Toronto, and Toronto Metropolitan University, have developed or are developing Black Studies or African and Africana Studies programs (CBC News 2021; Orford 2021). However, while post-secondary institutions are willing signatories, implementation of the non-binding principles and actions outlined in the Scarborough Charter is widely thought to be slow. As the signing of the Scarborough Charter passed its two-year mark in November 2023, we are interested in the ongoing initiatives of signatory institutions to mitigate systemic anti-Black racism. In particular, we reflect on the public-facing admissions policies for domestic and international Black applicants seeking undergraduate enrolment in the 2023-2024 academic year. This real-time account provides a useful assessment of the resources post-secondary institutions have made available to Black applicants as they prepared to submit their university applications by winter 2023, the deadline for most undergraduate programs.

Our reflections, which contribute to future discussions on tracing the development and assessing the effectiveness of Black-inclusion programs, are shaped by our positionality. We, as researchers, feel that our social identities inform how we approach this work. Our research team comprises the following individuals working in Canadian universities: a Black woman who is a postdoctoral researcher in the field of equity; and a Black man working as a senior executive in equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism. Our races, genders, and lived experiences working within post-secondary institutions inform how we understand White supremacy, anti-Black racism, and the importance of the perspectives of critical race theory and Black feminist thought. We also want to point out that for this paper, we define "Black" as an aggregate term for individuals who identify as African, Black Caribbean, Black North American, Afro-Latin, and persons of African descent or origin. While we recognize the unique cultures, languages, and customs across these communities, we define "Black" in this way in consideration of ideological, political, and social constructions of Pan-African ideals of "Black" and in consideration of how the Black race-based data obtained through Canadian census reports describe Black student experiences and Black population numbers as aggregate data. However, we are cognizant of how "Blackness" is viewed as a shifting category for those who may, or may not, identify as "Black."

In the remaining parts of the paper, we contextualize anti-Black racism in the broader national environment in terms of Canada's image as a "multicultural nation," followed by the theoretical underpinnings of the study. We then identify the systemic barriers facing Black students when assessing higher education, highlight some case studies of ongoing inclusive admissions policies and practices, and share our conclusions and suggestions for future work.

Multiculturalism in Canada

Canada is a settler-colonial nation-state that labels and prides itself as being multicultural - with the Government of Canada describing multiculturalism as a sociological fact of Canadian life (Brosseau and Dewing 2018). The results of the recent national census also support this multicultural image or reputation of Canada, with over 90% of the population, aged 15 and older, agreeing that "ethnic or cultural diversity is a Canadian value" (Statistics Canada 2022,1). The census also highlights a rich religious and ethnocultural portrait, with over 450 ethnic and cultural origins, 450 languages, 200 places of births, 100 religions, and a growing racialized (or non-White) population (16.1% of the total population). Black people are the third largest group, representing 4.3% of the total population, with a greater presence in Ontario and Quebec. Figures like these are often regarded with a sense of pride, as many feel ethno-cultural representation is one of Canada's strengths. However, underlying these numbers, as acknowledged by Statistics Canada, was the worsening of racial inequalities during the COVID-19 pandemic, brought into the mainstream spotlight by the Black Lives Matter movement, anti-Asian discrimination, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on residential schools (Statistics Canada 2022). Political or ideological multiculturalism is not just about numbers. Rather, the census data should be "used by public decision-makers, employers and service providers in health care, education and justice to better meet the needs of all groups in Canadian society and to foster an inclusive society and social cohesion" (Statistics Canada 2022, 1). Leigh Patel, in *No Study Without Struggle: Confronting Settler Colonialism in Higher Education*, stated: "Understanding settler colonialism as an ongoing structure provides a more robust route to understanding how various populations experience distinct but deeply connected forms of marginalization from formal institutions… including higher education" (2021, 27). We contend that the contrived benevolence of "accepted" ideals of

multiculturalism obfuscates the true nature of settler colonial oppression in Canada.

Notions of "multiculturalism," particularly as it is understood in Canada since 1971, the year the country released its official policy on multiculturalism, subvert critical discussions about structural racism against non-White peoples, often ignoring their experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and oppression to make space for the cultural mosaic—Canada's seemingly-inclusive response to the American melting pot. This understanding of multiculturalism negates the true message of multicultural "inclusion" in Canada: that it must fit within a bicultural (phenotypically white and linguistically English and French) framework. Hence, the importance of applying critical race theory to the machinations of white hegemony in Canada. Ironically, when the Canadian government claims that "Canada's history of settlement and colonization has resulted in a multicultural society made up of three founding peoples—Indigenous, French, and British—and of many other racial and ethnic groups" (Brosseau and Dewing 2018), it erases the occupation, genocide, and acts of violence committed by European colonizers so as to emphasize the new "diverse world" created through settlement and colonization. In addition to the erasure of colonial violence, another challenge that arises through Canada's emphasis on "multiculturalism" is the aggregation of experiences of racism across racialized communities. In fact, institutions often do work to eliminate racism more broadly without understanding how different communities experience racial violence in distinct ways (Dei 2000).

Anti-Black racism, in particular, is a foundational feature of Canada, embedded deeply within institutions. Black Canadian scholars, including but not limited to Rinaldo Walcott (2021), Carl E. James (2023), Awad Ibrahim et al. (2022), Afua Cooper (2006), Robyn Maynard (2017), Barrington Walker (2020), Natasha L. Henry (2021), David Austin (2023), Funké Aladejebi and Michele A. Johnson (2022), Adrienne Shadd et al. (2009), and Kitossa et al. (2019), have researched and written extensively to expose the "myth" of the Great White North. These scholars have added to the literature on the historical and contemporary prevalence of Black exclusion and anti-Black racism in Canada. It was thirty years ago that Stephen Lewis, then Advisor on Race Relations to the Premier of Ontario, wrote that "what we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-[B]lack racism … just as the soothing balm of 'multiculturalism' cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its

primary target" (Lewis 1992). Despite its inability to disrupt anti-Black racism, multiculturalism is a key concept that manifests in institutions across the country as organizations work to create social change using frameworks of equity, diversity, and inclusion. One may argue that the policies of equity, diversity, and inclusion in Canada are founded on the ideological principles of multiculturalism. Higher education is not exempt from these efforts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, attempts at social change often "amount to no more than well-worded mission statements and cosmetic changes" (Henry et al. 2017) that do nothing to disrupt the "inequality, indifference, and reliance on outmoded conservative traditions [that] characterize the modern neoliberal university" (Henry et al. 2017). Systemic anti-Black racism and normalization of Whiteness are also foundational to post-secondary institutions (Crenshaw et al. 1996; Henry et al. 2017; Lewis 1992) and require frameworks that move beyond equity, diversity, and inclusion to admit and support Black students, enabling them to flourish and thrive.

Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought and Scarborough Charter

The framework we use for this study is the Scarborough Charter (2021); we apply its four overarching principles, namely "Black flourishing," "Inclusive Excellence," "Mutuality," and "Accountability" to Black university admissions. The Scarborough Charter was designed to support "inclusive excellence" for Black communities in post-secondary institutions in Canada. Intersectional Black flourishing recognizes the pivotal role of universities and colleges in advancing and disseminating knowledge and innovative research and their ability to address structural barriers for Black applicants to foster equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice. The principle of inclusive excellence encourages higher education institutions to embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion in their governance, research, teaching, and learning as well as lead the conversation and actions around redressing anti-Black racism and restorative justice and promote a more intersectional, equitable, and inclusive society. Furthermore, guided by the principle of mutuality in their engagement, interactions, and relations with Black communities at a local, regional, national, or international scale, institutions of higher education must acknowledge their role as anchor institutions in fostering economic development in the Black community. With accountability in mind, universities and colleges can commit to meaningful continuous education and improvement and pledge

to take concrete action to implement inclusion across their structures, policies, and procedures. They can advance policies that respect, acknowledge, and support the complexity and intersectionality of Black life. In adopting these principles, post-secondary institutions can perform actionable commitments in the areas of governance, research, teaching, and learning, and community engagement, as outlined in the Scarborough Charter.

Critical race theory and Black feminist thought are key references for the Scarborough Charter as they are essential to disrupting anti-Black racism through their analysis of racial power and Whiteness. Critical race theory was born out of extensive research by predominately racialized legal scholars whose work "challenge[s] the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole" (Crenshaw et al. 1996). Crenshaw et al. go on to explain that critical race theory scholars must work "to understand how a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America" (Crenshaw et al. 1996). Broadly speaking, critical race theory affirms the existence of racism, racial power, and White supremacy. As such, social analyses using critical race theory must understand how White supremacy perpetuates the subordination of racialized people in order to change the current structures of racial power. Unfortunately, common interpretation of the term White supremacy focuses on individuals committing acts of racial violence, instead of systems of oppression. Legal scholar, F.L. Ansley, disrupts this:

> By "[W]hite supremacy" I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of [W]hite supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic and cultural system in which [W]hites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of [W]hite superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of [W]hite dominance and non-[W]hite subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley 1989)

Critical to the discussion of White supremacy is how invisible and covert it is in perpetuating systemic racism. In fact, "critical race theorists argue that the majority of racism remains hidden beneath a veneer of normality, and it is only the more crude and obvious forms of ra-

cism that are seen as problematic by most people" (Gillborn 2015). That White supremacy as the foundation to institutional structures, policies, and practices is often unseen implies there is a neutrality to institutions that is simply not true. This false narrative of neutrality furthers false notions of meritocracy in a feedback loop, which suggests that the experiences of racialized individuals are due to their own failings and not the system that oppresses and excludes them. It is unfortunate that in Canada, even with the reactions following the 2020 murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, most post-secondary institutions have yet to significantly challenge the ideals of "neutrality," "merit," and "excellence." Critical race theory challenges the fallacy of fairness by making space to refute hegemonic ontologies.

Additionally, Black feminist thought layers atop critical race theory to ensure the unique experiences of Black women are not overlooked while institutions work to understand the racism and oppression faced by racialized people more broadly. Black feminist thought centers the experiences of Black women and ensures that anti-racism efforts examine the intersections of race, class, and gender, amongst other facets of identities (Crenshaw 1989). Black feminist thought also highlights misogynoir to describe anti-Black racist misogyny experienced by Black women, which is often disregarded when institutions focus solely on gender diversity (Bailey and Trudy 2018).

In the academy, for example, there has been extensive focus (of late) on the recruitment of women into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs due to their disproportionately lower enrollment rates (LaForce et al. 2016). Most institutions do not appear to disaggregate these data by race to identify specific approaches that are needed to encourage young Black women to enroll in STEM programs. Instead, there is a broader focus on gender "diversity" and an erasure of unique experiences of discrimination and racism being faced by Black women students.

Systemic Barriers Faced by Black Students

The principles of critical race theory and Black feminist thought highlight why narratives of diversity and multiculturalism fail to disrupt anti-Black racism in education. Indeed, Lewis outlined this failure in his 1992 report on race relations to the premier of Ontario:

> While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Southern Ontario, it is the Black community which is the focus. It is Blacks who are being shot, it is Black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping out…. (Lewis 1992)

These observations ring true decades later, and it is still well documented that domestic Black students experience disparate outcomes in education compared to their peers across Canada (James and Turner 2017; Turcotte 2020). In 2000, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a Code of Conduct for Ontario schools and made changes to the Education Act to provide educators with increased authority to suspend and expel students (James and Turner 2017). Assumptions of neutrality would suggest that since this policy applies to all students equally, this is a fair policy change that serves to keep classrooms focused and safe. Challenging the concept of hegemonic "neutrality" is at the core of critical race theory and Black feminist thought. In practice, however, it was Black students who were disproportionately impacted by the zero-tolerance nature of the new Code of Conduct. Toronto District School Board (TDSB) data released in 2015 reveal that 42% of Black students in high school were suspended at least once, compared to 18% of White students and 18% of other racialized students from 2006 to 2011 (James and Turner 2017). Expulsion data were worse: 48% of all expulsions were Black students, despite Black students only representing 12% of all students (James and Turner 2017). Not only were these punishments disproportionately experienced by Black students but they also contributed to the ongoing associations of criminality with Blackness and Black youth and exacerbated the school-to-prison pipeline (James and Turner 2017). Additionally, these disciplinary measures exacerbated the disparate outcomes experienced by Black youth as they resulted in students missing school, thereby impacting their grades for potential university applications. Since Black youth are not more disruptive than their peers, we must examine these data through a critical race theory and Black feminist thought analysis to see how the education system failed these students and how interpersonal anti-Black racism manifests in the discretion that educators use to selectively enforce this Code of Conduct. In addition to experiencing excessive

discipline, researchers found that 53% of Black high school students in the TDSB were enrolled in academic courses compared to 81% of White and 80% of other racialized students (James and Turner 2017). Once again, it is important that we use critical race theory and Black feminist thought to analyze these data and disrupt notions of neutrality. The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the period of enslavement and colonization in Canada and throughout the British imperialism in the Americas facilitated the dehumanization and criminalization of Black bodies (Maynard, 2017). Enslavement was a process of legislated illiteracy; it was illegal for enslaved peoples to read or write. "Education" was a tool for empowerment and liberation (Taylor 2016). Notably, Canadian universities are founded on admissions processes that prioritize academic courses in secondary school as a prerequisite for admission. This feeds into the fallacious myth of "merit," a concept that critical race theory thoroughly rebukes. As such, James and Turner's (2017) research on secondary school processes of disproportionately streaming Black students into applied classes is linked to the lower feasibility and likelihood of said students pursuing and attending post-secondary education. High schools play a key role in determining access to post-secondary education through academic and applied streams of study (Robson et al. 2019; Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario 2020). Students in an applied track of study, who are primarily racialized students, especially Black boys and those from lower-income households, are less likely to complete their high school education and gain admission to post-secondary programs as compared to their colleagues in the academic stream. They also obtain lower assessment scores for math and literacy (Robson et al. 2019; Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario 2020).

In fact, Statistics Canada data on educational attainment of youth in Canada also reveal disproportionalities for Black students at the post-secondary level:

> Black youth were less likely than other youth to attain a postsecondary qualification. For example, among Black boys aged 13 to 17 in 2006, approximately half (51%) had a post-secondary qualification in 2016 (when they were aged 23 to 27), compared with 62% of other boys [and] 34% of Black girls aged 13 to 17 in 2006 had a university degree 10 years later, compared with 41% of other girls from the same cohort. (Turcotte 2020)

These data indicate that Black students are either not entering and/or not graduating from post-secondary institutions at rates equal to their peers. Given that post-secondary institutions are not neutral spaces and are grounded in White supremacy, this information raises questions about why these students have lower educational attainment at the post-secondary level.

Similarly, international Black applicants may face barriers caused by systemic racism when applying to Canadian institutions (Irete 2022). For example, a report highlighting experiences of racism by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (the federal government department responsible for administering student visas) revealed that there were "widespread internal references to certain African nations as 'the dirty 30'" and that employees often stereotyped Nigerians as "corrupt or untrustworthy" (Pollara Strategic Insights 2021). These associations once again reveal the connotations of criminality rooted in enslavement that are associated with Black students, this time crossing international borders to create barriers to accessing university education.

Data on successful student visa applications also highlight how challenging it can be for international students to attend university in Canada: "In the first half of 2020, most African countries sat well below the 48 percent average approval rate. Countries like Ethiopia and Cameroon hovered at 19 per cent, and Burundi as low as four per cent" (Irete 2022). Inextricably linked to decisions regarding which international students are granted visas are capitalism and economic privilege. As part of the student visa application, all international students over the age of 18 must submit proof of financial support in the amount of at least $10,000 per year, plus $833 per month (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2022). These financial requirements do not take into account the high international tuition costs or the additional sums required to support any family members immigrating with the student. Therefore, even if a Black international student manages to have their student visa approved, there is a large concurrent financial obligation before relocating to Canada.

In addition to the systemic barriers that Black international students face at the government level, universities sometimes create access barriers to education. Some students are required to take English-language tests even if they speak the language fluently and have been educated in English (CBC News 2022). As highlighted in a CBC News story, Nigerian students, for example, are often

asked to provide proof of English proficiency, despite English being the official language of the country (2022). In the words of students cited in this news story: "In Nigeria from the preschool to kindergarten to elementary school to high school we have been taught in English" and "it's unacceptable and likely just an oversight that has just continued on for decades" (CBC News 2022). Additionally, the fees for these tests can be prohibitive for some, creating an additional access barrier.

Finally, universities may not be equipped to analyze international curricula to ensure that applicants from countries outside Canada have the correct prerequisite courses. To be "included" one must "fit" within dominant and oppressive structures of admissibility. While some schools follow the British-patterned education system or the International Baccalaureate system (both of which are commonly assessed in Canadian universities), others may follow domestic education systems (e.g. West African Examinations Council) that may be unfamiliar to those reviewing university applications in Canada. If a university is unable to perform curricular analyses for school systems outside of Canada, this may add to the barriers that Black international students face as the prerequisite knowledge they have already acquired may not be understood or accounted for in the review of their application.

These barriers (racist stereotypes impacting visa approval, burden of financial proof, English-language proficiency tests, and lack of curricula conversions) all act to decrease access to university education for Black international students. For domestic Black students, systemic policies like streaming, coupled with the anti-Black racism seen in disciplinary decisions, create barriers that may prevent admission to undergraduate programs at the university level. It is important for post-secondary institutions to be cognizant of these barriers and effectively create and adopt policies and programs to remediate, if not eliminate, them.

Case Studies

Having provided a brief overview of the challenges facing Black domestic and international students and the need for the perspectives of critical race theory, Black feminist thought, and aspects of the Scarborough Charter, we highlight some cases of specific policies and programs targeted at fostering Black inclusion in higher education. We contextualize our analyses and reflections

on admissions practices, and focus on six Ontario-based universities, namely McMaster University, Queen's University, University of Ottawa, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, and Western University. These universities are a part of a 15-member university association, known as the U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities, which includes some of the most research-intensive institutions in Canada. Collectively, the member universities of this association conduct research valued at $8.5 billion annually and hold at least 80% of contracted private-sector research and university patents (U15 Canada 2023). Nationally, they train more full-time graduate students (58%) and attract more sponsored research funding (77%). These impressive numbers suggest that member universities are very well positioned to implement actions outlined in the Scarborough Charter framework to address anti-Black racism and therefore make good case studies. We limit our reflections and critique to admissions pathways and the availability of resources, while suggesting how these institutions can leverage the Scarborough Charter to foster Black inclusion.

Comparing the admissions pathways across the six universities, equitable access for Black students is largely limited to specific programs and is not wide-reaching institutionally. An example is the Black Student Application Program (BSAP), an optional application stream for Canadian and permanent resident applicants who are Black African, Black Caribbean, Black North American, or multi-racial with Black ancestry. It is only applicable to a handful of professional degrees such as medicine at the University of Ottawa and law at the University of Toronto. The BSAP has a dedicated admissions quota for Black students. Another such example is the Queen's Accelerated Route to Medical School (QuARMS) which provides a unique pathway into its medical school for up to ten Indigenous or Black graduating high school students. There is a need for more comprehensive pathways that appeal to students interested in disciplines other than health sciences, medicine, or law. More non-discipline-restricted programs such as the University of Waterloo's *Sankofa* Pathways to University (SPU) that launched in the summer of 2023 for Black youth in the Toronto and Waterloo region seem to be a promising option. Other programs could adopt examples such as McMaster's Equitable Admissions for Black Applicants (EABA) for the Bachelor of Health Sciences (honours) program that supports equitable admissions to reduce barriers and mitigate bias in the supplementary applications evaluations for undergraduate programs. Universit-

ies could consider using equity admissions self-identification in conjunction with the academic record of Black applicants to confront systemic institutionalized racism and increase the global ethno-cultural representation of the student population such as what is done in the Queen's Equity Admissions Self-Identification (EASI) questionnaire. While universities have alternative pathways not necessarily tailored to Black students such as first-generation pathways, it is important that these are partnered with Black organizations, programs, and communities.

With regards to the resources, it is important that students know or expect that there is a community of support in their academic journey at their prospective university. While having Black-led clubs and activities on campus is very useful, examples of community and welcoming spaces should go beyond these efforts. Providing resources such as entrance awards, scholarships, admissions pathways, diversified curricula, academic support, supports for mental and physical well-being, immigration advising, mentorship, designated spaces, and anti-racism services are some of the ways to demonstrate a welcoming environment for students. Of the six universities, McMaster should be commended for its approach to fostering the overall well-being and success of Black students with their Black Student Success Centre (BSSC): none of the other institutions currently have a BSSC in addition to the regular student success centre. This BSSC's vision is to support, foster, and champion holistically the success and well-being of Black students in a welcoming, safe, and connected space. The BSSC provides services for enrolled Black students that include general check-ins, funding (scholarships, bursaries, and awards), application support, office hours with their Black faculty, financial literacy and coaching, academic advising, and student mentorship. Its website also boasts of several Black-focused student clubs and groups on campus and faculty-led initiatives to bring Black students and faculty together. This could be reassuring for a high school student looking to connect with a community on campus. Another university with amalgamated resources is the University of Toronto; it has a webpage dedicated to future Black undergraduate students which lists programs and resources, including enrichment programs, STEM, academic mentorship, summer programs, peer mentorships, to reduce barriers to post-secondary education. Its Award Explorer, a scholarship search engine, allows students to filter and specifically target admissions awards for Black students: other scholarship or funding tools could emulate this. The

other universities also provide resources for Black students including shared experiences from current Black students, anti-racism resources, leadership opportunities, and a webpage for entrance awards but they would benefit from creating a more centralized resource for future and current students. As related to academic programming, apart from Queen's Bachelors in Black Studies and Toronto's Bachelor of Arts in African Studies, the other universities have a minor, certificate, or interdisciplinary option in Black Studies, Black Canadian Studies, or African Studies. These are important opportunities for universities to expand and diversify their academic programming in response to the Scarborough Charter.

Additionally, as outlined in the Scarborough Charter, post-secondary institutions can apply the four principles-based commitments to action to admissions; in the areas of university and college governance; to research, teaching and learning; and to community engagement. This step offers a much more comprehensive approach to advancing Black inclusion in higher education. Our adapted Scarborough Charter Framework for Black admissions and enrolment in the appendix section can serve as guide for post-secondary institutions (see Appendix 1). In the concluding section of the paper, we share our final reflections, including limitations of the case studies and future directions for institutions to explore.

Final Reflections, Conundrums and Future Directions

As this paper is designed as a reflection on current Black-focused initiatives in the area of admissions to post-secondary institutions, it is key for us to understand how programs such as admissions pathways, while laudable, do not on their own fundamentally enhance Black student numbers and experiences at these institutions. We suggest that not changing systems to make them more equitable, but creating programs that capitalize on the status quo may contradict "inclusion." For example, the Black Student Application Program, Equitable Admissions for Black Applicants, and *Sankofa* Pathways to University are needed programs and have moved the dial on Black inclusion. However, we contend that they may not be fully transformative as these programs' effectiveness are rooted in utilizing existing frameworks of post-secondary institutions (e.g. creating programs but not necessarily changing curricula, epistemologies, and ontologies). These institutions will also need a stronger emphasis on Pan-African and Black studies programs, con-

ducting reviews of governance structures, and humanizing Blackness and Black thought as respected academic archetypes. Post-secondary institutions in Canada must not only acknowledge that their institutions are predominately White, but unpack how anti-Black racism and Black exclusion operate within them. This must move beyond the simple recognition of Black "firsts," "quotas," "pathways," or what Deborah Thompson refers to as the "only ones'' (2022). However, while limited, Black communities on the campuses of predominately White institutions do create spaces of care and belonging.

While current admissions programs tend to target Black domestic students, additional steps could be taken to remove recruitment barriers for Black international students. The Scarborough Charter has made great strides in raising awareness of anti-Black racism in post-secondary institutions, building on similar work on equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education such as Universities Canada's *Principles on Indigenous Education* (2015), *Inclusive Excellence Principles* (2017), and *Report on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion* (2019), as well as *Colleges and Institutes Canada's Statement on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion* (2021). However, there is room for further discussions and continued innovation, considering the Scarborough Charter's seemingly benevolent utilization of the term Black excellence. Kevin Gosine (2019) argues that Black excellence is "actually an elitist concept that veils and enables systemic racism and resultant inequalities. Embedded in the meritocratic idea of 'excellence' is the belief that equality of opportunity flourishes, and understanding that, in turn, underpins an ostensible color-blindness or 'treat everyone the same' philosophy for creating an equitable society" (254). This disguises a class-based and power analysis of our historical understandings of Black liberation and Black peoples adopting white supremacist ideologies of heteronormative and "civilized" ways of being. In addition, "Black excellence" appears to be dependent on the fallacy of "equity, diversity, and inclusion" as a bastion of supporting "true" inclusion, but merely maintains the status quo (Taylor 2024). We must ask ourselves: if we bring in more Black students to conform to the existing system, why does it need to change? While the Scarborough Charter is necessary and signals needed "guardrails" for institutional and interpersonal change for Black stakeholders (faculty, staff, and students) in predominantly White institutions in Canada, we argue that transformational change is needed for higher education in Canada to break away from its roots in exclusion. Hence, the interpretation of

"Black excellence" as set out by the drafters of the Charter needs to be understood and implemented.

We worry that despite the well-intentioned principles and actions proposed in the Scarborough Charter, the most benevolent outcome of many of the initiatives described in this paper could lead to pursuing a mirage of equity within an inequitable system. Sticking with the concept of "excellence" within a predominantly White institution could be a miscalculation of change. As such, the Scarborough Charter promotes Black equity within an inequitable system that risks supporting Black elites that adopt and achieve metrics of Eurocentric understandings of "excellence," whether they are adopted as "inclusive" measures of excellence or not.

With these reflections and conundrums, this paper has sought to generate further discussions on what it means to foster Black inclusion through university admissions and enrolment. While most policies of equity, diversity, and inclusion in universities do not address in a transformative way the systemic barriers that Black students face when accessing post-secondary education, we welcome past and ongoing steps and measures being taken by them, such as signing the Scarborough Charter, committing to implementing the principle-based actions, setting up anti-racism units and working groups, performing institutional anti-racism reviews, drafting anti-racism reports, and implementing recommendations. What we look forward to from institutions is a stronger sense of urgency and the listening to and representation of marginalized Black voices.

As has been noted in the Scarborough Charter, there is a need for data-backed and evidence-based policies, programs, and student pathways to comprehensively support Black students across most, if not all, programs. While we understand that universities and colleges are working to improve the representation of their student bodies, we also encourage them to consider the heterogeneity within and across different Black communities, and not render Black students to a single sociodemographic check box.

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Appendix 1: An Adapted Scarborough Charter Framework for Black Admissions and Enrolment

Principle	Action			
	Governance	**Research**	**Teaching and Learning**	**Community Engagement**
Black flourishing	- Leadership on equity across all governance structures, especially admissions boards - Inclusive admissions processes - Inclusion of Black faculty on admissions boards	- Proactive engagement to redress Black underrepresentation across research disciplines and grants - Research support practices in the form of mentorship, scholarship and sponsorship	- Welcoming and accessible spaces - Academic programs, curricular and co-curricular development that enable and support Black student leadership, insights, actions, well-being and success	- Comprehensive community-based studies on the histories of slavery, colonialism and racial injustice - Inclusion of the recommendations of these studies - Continuous dedication to research, teaching, and community engagement
Inclusive excellence	- Identification of the extent of underrepresentation of Black students through baseline data compilation and analysis, with recruitment as the initial focus for action to foster inclusion - Comprehensive strategies where gaps exist, including targets, timetables and transparency mechanisms, and providing sustained resource commitments to recruit Black students and support their successful program completion	- Recognition, critical engagement with, and celebration of traditions of Black intellectual excellence across the academy and plural communities of knowledge - Increased equitable and inclusive participation by Black students on research teams, internships, fellowships, and other forms of research recognition that celebrate student excellence	- Black and Black Canadian studies across academic disciplines that decentre epistemic Eurocentrism and broadens disciplinary canons to include Black expertise and knowledges - Scholarships, bursaries, fellowships, research opportunities, mentorship and alumni engagement to support Black admissions to universities and colleges, Black enrollment in graduate and post-doctoral studies and Black thriving through to program completion	- Pathways for access to higher education for Black students, including student outreach with local, regional, national and international communities and robust "wraparound" support - Mechanisms for ongoing outreach and sponsors for broader Black communities, including Black staff among career advisors and advancement professionals, as well as alumni mentors from Black communities
Mutuality	- Reassessment of the existing campus security and safety infrastructure and protocols to protect the human dignity, equality and safety of Black people on campus - Periodic climate surveys that consider local community relations, to assess and guide initiatives to build inclusive campuses in a manner that is responsive to the specific needs of Black students	- Co-design and co-construction of research about Black communities - Collaboration on the development of Tri-Agency Canada guidelines on research affecting Black communities, fostering community-engaged research principles and advancing representation of Black community members and respect for their lived experiences	- Outreach programs from grade school through university and college - Policies, educational sessions and practices of inclusion that sustain harassment-free classrooms and other learning environments	- Requirement of Black community prior-impact assessments, to move equity initiatives away from risk mitigation toward proactive, sustainable opportunity creation and integrating Black community impact assessments into any restructuring initiatives - Robust community partnerships with Black-led organizations

Account-ability	- Ethical data co-creation and governance practices - Data collection to foster inclusive, just, equitable post-secondary environments that are enabled by rigorous, evidence-based decision-making - Exercised caution in the face of the systemic inequalities and racial biases that may be perpetuated within artificial intelligence, big data, surveillance and other technological advances, and deepened understanding of technological inequities - Mapping, retrieving, maintaining and sharing of reliable, disaggregated data on Black representation over defined periods of time, and partnering with Statistics Canada and other relevant external institutions - Benchmarking data to enable comparisons over time and between signatories to the SC and promoting transparency about the reasons that any identified categories of data may not be collected - Suitably staffed office in senior administration dedicated in whole or in part to redressing racism across the university or college with responsibility for academic affairs, human resources and student life and learning	- Specific data collection on the representation of Black student researchers on research teams, in research grant awards, and fellowships - Robust reporting mechanisms and reward systems that assess and recognize research contributions to intersectional Black flourishing, inclusive excellence and mutuality	- Anti-Black racism education for all members of the university or college, especially those on the admissions and recruitment boards - Performance expectations for members that build capacity on anti-racism and Black inclusion - Robust reporting mechanisms that assess and recognize teaching and learning contributions to intersectional Black flourishing, inclusive excellence and mutuality	- Enabling and reporting on co-creation in the data collection process by communities most concerned - Retaining contact with professional orders and related regulatory bodies where they exist to be able to assess the admissions and career progression of Black university and college graduates

Always (Un)learning: A PhD Student's Reflection on the Scarborough Charter

by Shanice Bernicky

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A s a multi-racial PhD student (Trinidadian, White Settler-Canadian, and so many other pieces of me, some lost with my ancestors), I have wandered through post-secondary education with very little interactions and meaningful relationships with the few other Black students I crossed paths with. In graduate school this feeling of alienation has been heightened as there is only one of us per cohort. Reading the Scarborough Charter (2021), I am emboldened by its calls to action and principles for equitable worldbuilding and for positive Black educational futures. But I am also afraid that these words, written by those committed to this future and proactive present, will be overshadowed by the many equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) plans that post-secondary institutions have released, which lump together the disparate experiences of all those historically and contemporarily Othered, while evading some sort of firm accountability to the communities involved. I teeter between the cathartic process of learning my place in this historic moment, but I demonstrate the stickiness of a Eurocentric academic upbringing, and the process of unlearning to think of myself only as a token or worse, an imposter, still struggling to accept the power of my voice and experiences in the higher education system. In this reflective piece, I weave together sections of the Charter along with my own experiences as a Black-identifying graduate student in this most recent wave of EDI practices in a settler-colonial state. I do this by separating parts of all living beings, that is, the body, the mind, and the heart, which produce contradictory reactions for me, but are what make us whole.

Body
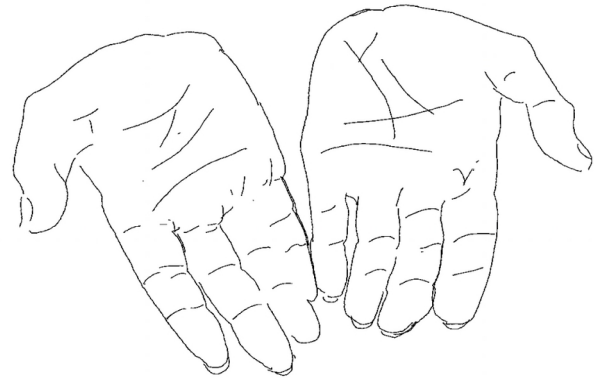
Bodies—casings for our hearts and minds. Bodies—skin, scars, stretch marks. Stretch marks to trace how we have grown—stretched through time and space. As a PhD student who has taken very little time off between degrees, my body has grown to be comfortable in educational settings. It did not begin this way, however, as I struggled to carve a place for myself during my undergraduate and master's degrees.

Few bodies with medium-dark skin and coily hair like mine have the opportunity to enter higher education be-

cause of the systemic barriers that disproportionately affect Black bodies from enrolling (James 2021; Statistics Canada 2022). Reading the Charter, section 2.3.2. is an essential step: "providing scholarships, bursaries, fellowships and related, dedicated support including increased research opportunities, mentorship and alumni engagement to support" (13). I received an entrance bursary that covered most of my undergraduate degree. Without it I would not have been able to attend. Increasing the number of scholarships for Black students is a first tangible step that alleviates one major barrier. Many EDI plans in higher education institutions have outlined this step, although before funding packages can be made, more Black students must apply, and their applications must be accepted. To go further, 4.4.2. stipulates that post-secondary institutions must engage in "retaining contact with professional orders and related regulatory bodies where they exist (including doctors, dentists, nurses, engineers, lawyers, social workers, teachers, skilled tradespeople) to be able to assess the admission and career progression of Black university and college graduates" (16). This passage suggests a way to mitigate biases in the enrollment process and should be extended to as many programs as possible. Applying to post-secondary institutions is nerve-wracking and I remember how shocked I was during my interview to enter a Bachelor of Communication Studies program. I was asked to interpret a random quote for an upper-year student and a tenured faculty member—both white-presenting. While I cannot remember the words, I do remember the sentiment. Something related to semiotics and representation. I burst into tears as I stumbled to respond. My body betrayed my mind. Struggling to regain control, I justified my reaction by telling them that I was bullied in elementary school. I was, but that was not why I cried. I cried because I was so afraid of failing my family, mainly both of my grandmothers. Grandma, who worked so hard for her grandchildren to succeed in this country and Nanny, who has only shared snippets of the violence she endured but let me be as weird as I wanted, just like her, regardless of the realities of our worlds. A short quote on a tiny piece of paper. Three bodies in a classroom with one long table between them. I'd fail them because I don't have what it takes to be here. I wonder if such a process could have been avoided altogether. Some folks haven't had the luxury to cultivate the confidence to promote themselves and their skills. Maybe if the procedure had been considered by Black faculty members, it would have been designed differently to ensure that all bodies who entered had a say in how they championed themselves and who was in the room

to guide them through the process was thoughtfully considered. I was accepted and both interviewers were extremely kind, but that moment left a scar.

My current department created an anti-racism committee to oversee the implementation of anti-oppressive approaches to communication and media studies course requirements and the organization of events on the subject of anti-racist pedagogy and communication theory. While the Charter calls for an inter-institutional forum, it should go further to require all departments to create an anti-racism committee for more individualized approaches for each institution involved. In addition, we must acknowledge that any form of committee work associated with anti-racism often falls on the shoulders of racialized individuals on top of their regular workload and "This takes away from time needed for research, publishing, developing curriculum, or building networks" (Hirji, Jiwani, and McAllister 2020, 177). Thus, for the equitable application of any of the calls in the Charter by Black, Indigenous, and racialized individuals, there needs to be some form of added compensation or the alleviation of teaching duties and in the case of upper-year undergraduate and graduate students, the awarding of course credits. This might be considered a large ask, but given the emotional, mental, and physical labour required, it is a considerably small payment. These individuals would be working to improve the environment for many. There is a pattern of those committed to these movements being the ones who would benefit the most from the culture shifts and power dynamics. I do not see this changing any time soon at many Canadian institutions, especially smaller ones, so we need to be realistic about how to support folks in a transition period.

I had to unlearn that my body didn't belong in university settings. It wasn't because we weren't worthy that there were few of us here; it was because of the structures in place that kept us out. Once I learned this, I moved in and claimed my space because of the funding I had received to be there—and still have, to be here now. I burrowed into the building and brought my slippers. As I sit here and write, my feet are in the comfy sandals I change into every time I enter the PhD offices. This office is now another home, where I hold close my peers and I am held by them as we move through the trials and tribulations of graduate school.

Mind
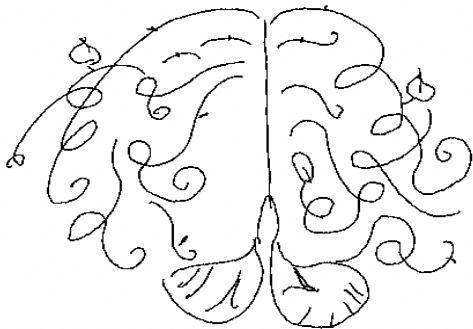
I like to think of our brains as a clump of tangled vines, with each node capable of budding new leaves if provided the nutrients they need. My mind is often clouded with feelings of inadequacy and undeservingness. My mental health is managed by medication and cuddles from my companion species. I never wipe the tears from my eyes or walk away from what I am doing when a low period comes, where I repeat to myself, "I might be a token, but I still have work to do." I cannot afford to take a break because I have no idea where to turn for safe support that understands and respects my circumstances in the university, if I ever let myself ask for help. I know that dread is a typical feeling for many graduate students, with plenty of memes to prove it, but the helplessness and isolation is amplified when you have limited examples of what your future might look like if you continue through academia. This is often modelled by Black professors, in my case, Black, female-coded professors. But in this country, they are so few and far between.

While the Charter calls for the increased appointment of Black faculty, it does not address the hardships that come with being the EDI hire. (While I do not believe that we should feel like this type of hire, a reality is that we can feel like this.) My field is currently reckoning with racial injustice and, as a result, is not the most hospitable place for Black students or faculty with lacking support systems. Our mental health is not considered in the Charter and should be. We need access to Black therapists and counsellors, or at least those with anti-racist training, and we need clear areas of the university (both physical and virtual) to retreat to when we are in crisis. A part of retention is ensuring the mental health and well-being of every diverse mind-body. Increasing Black faculty will increase the burden of caring for broken Black students while Black faculty members are broken themselves having come through highly oppressive institutions. This is something that will inevitably happen for a few years while universities are in transition, adopting the Charter's interventions and, thus, proactive access to support networks are essential.

Our minds carry with them intergenerational memory—the roots clinging to moments we may not even remember. The Charter, however, carries forth the long history of anti-Black education practices and calls for education of such atrocities for all staff and students along with a commitment to anti-racist praxis (4.3.1, 15). This should not be compared to the internal bias training that EDI plans recommend. Specifying that this is a learning opportunity rather than a training session decentres the oppressor's privileges, worries, and shame. Each of us can then sit with our own discomforts and do our own research to find ways of practising allyship. Moreover, anti-racism is an iterative process but what we have become used to is a series of EDI plans with specific yearly benchmarks. The Charter makes no mention of dates alongside each principle it offers us, cementing the never-ending commitment to decolonizing our minds, letting our vine-y brains intermingle and grow.

This said, intergenerational memory is just as sticky on the side of racist legacies. Calling for "inclusive excellence" (2 and 2.1 of the Charter) does not adequately address the assimilatory side of inclusivity in governance structures. As Black folk, we have our own internalized racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia to reckon with. This is, however, lightly balanced with the call for intersectional research and teaching and learning which grapples with the vast differences across members of Black communities (4.2 and 4.3). Furthermore, in practice towards students, it is not enough to develop courses with anti-Black racism as the subject or the inclusion of more pan-African history, as courses such as these end up relegated to special topics. The approval of course syllabi should also be a review of how an anti-racist lens has been adopted. This task can be relegated to anti-racism committee members, including undergraduate and graduate students who may have course material suggestions to provide a more kaleidoscopic view.

Minds are skeptical things. While first reading the Charter my mind raced frantically as I worried that its words would be filed along with EDI plans developed for all marginalized groups. The language of EDI still clings to the notion of the "equity-seeking" individual.

Not only this, but "When diversity becomes a conventional form of speech, what is being named as diverse becomes less significant than the name 'diversity'" (Ahmed 2012, 58). The people behind the word become overshadowed by the word itself. I understand the need for categorization to a degree. Ultimately, we need to move beyond such delineations and, according to the Charter, this means "Underscoring the need to move beyond the notion of equity seeking groups to recognize that equity is deserved, as an incarnation of the principles of human dignity, substantive equality, and restorative justice" (7). Each diasporic community has their own unique challenges and processes for reparation. Not only is equity a right for all of us, it means something different to each of us. To develop a specific call to action for Black empowerment acknowledges this.

Heart
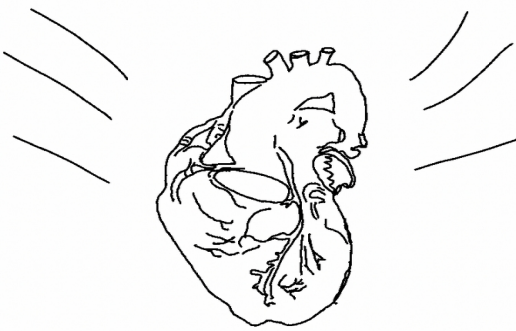
The heart—a big fleshy muscular lump that governs our approaches to care. My peers and I regularly find ourselves in our office questioning why we chose to pursue such a chaotic, depressing, and often solitary career path. After we take turns sharing our misery, we go silent, until one of us breaks it by asserting how they wouldn't have it any other way and we all agree and echo the feeling. But it doesn't have to be so hard. We go around the circle then sharing things we'd change about the university structure to make it more hospitable for those that come after us, noting what past and present faculty mentors have done for us to get by. The Charter feels like a warm embrace: Black students being encouraged to listen to our hearts and assert our own perspectives while we untangle the racist murmurs that intrude our minds.

Everything that is being called for cannot and should not be done by each institution alone. Signatories of the Charter are recommended to collaborate with others from coast-to-coast-to-coast by way of an inter-institutional forum (18). This way, knowledge mobilization may occur. Producing a single document that acts as a blueprint for meaningful change pulls everyone's efforts together to breakdown old structures and engage in the shared process of putting new pieces together—and doing this process over and over again.

Community members are not left behind in this collective work and are in a position of power concerning mutuality with institutions, "requiring Black community prior-impact assessments as part of procurement processes, to move equity initiatives away from risk mitigation toward proactive, sustainable opportunity creation and integrating Black community impact assessments into any restructuring initiatives" (14). They are protectors of their kin, guarding us from scars we might receive. Moving towards a proactive rather than reactive process, we can lay the foundation for long-term practices of care.

I see the Scarborough Charter as a step for Canadian universities and colleges to act on their public commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Our bodies, minds, and hearts are implicated in every principle, passage, and page of it. Our bodies—Black bodies—belong and should bring our whole selves with us. Our minds are critical, invited to unlearn the so-called truths of harmful whispers and learn to work for more equitable spaces. Our hearts are urged to engaged in communal reparative care.

The Charter offers tangible ways each institution can support us, and now those institutions not only have to listen, but must be ready for the rocky transition period that will come—that is honestly happening right now, and the mental health of Black and kin folk must be cared for, and our labour compensated in more tangible ways. I feel a certain amount of trepidation critiquing some sections of the Charter because of all that it stands for, afraid that my words might be leveraged by ghosts in the ivory tower, although, the only way to build more equitable worlds is to continually find the gaps from whatever standpoint(s) we occupy. Moreover, my body, mind, and heart know that this is a journey that can't leave anyone behind. The Charter is clear that we must "[Transcend] any suggestion that to redress anti-Black racism and foster Black inclusion is a zero-sum proposi-

tion by underscoring the complementarity of commit-
ments to Indigenous communities and other equity
groups" (7). As Black students, we have our own com-
mitment to supporting and fighting for the freedom to
experience and thrive in higher education. We do this for
all who care for these lands and waters and we should
hold each other accountable.

Notes

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Embracing Diverse Realities:
What I see is different from what you see!

by Karine Coen-Sanchez

Author: Karine Coen-Sanchez is a Doctoral Candidate in Sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa. Her research interests include Experiential Education, Place-based Learning, Civics Education, Youth Engagement and Activism and Interdisciplinary Learning. An engaged activist, organizer, and scholar, Coen-Sanchez has worked tirelessly to forge relationships and initiate systemic change among Black and racialized graduate students in Canada. She has steered numerous anti-racism initiatives on her home campus as well as on a national stage, including stakeholder mobilization efforts, the development of institutional diversity and inclusivity statements, and the hosting of community-building events. She currently serves as Co-Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's Advisory Committee to Address Anti-Black Racism.

"What I see is different from what you see"

Author: Kaeyla Lenisa Sanchez, 9 years old

What I see is different from what you see
I see kings and queens you see animals
I see an Empire you see a village
I see culture you see dress-up
I see beautiful long braids, but you just see dirty hair...
that's the difference between you and me
we don't see the same thing!

But one thing we both can see is the disrespect.
But if you just open your eyes and open them wide enough
you will see the beauty in what you didn't see before!

I n a world shaped by diverse perspectives and experiences, the poet's poignant words— "What I see is different from what you see"—resonate deeply with the profound complexities surrounding the perception of race. Authored by my daughter, Kaeyla Lenisa Sanchez, a wise nine-year-old Black girl, these lines encapsulate a universal truth: our individual lenses of reality often diverge, modified by social, cultural, and economic influences. The power of young voices to shed light on the intricacies of racialized experiences cannot be overstated. In this reflective paper, I seek to amplify this youthful wisdom and delve into the complexities of racial perception that persist in the educational systems. Through the captivating words of Kaeyla, I embark on a journey of

self-exploration, aiming to disentangle the intricate web of racial biases that affect our understanding of one another. In doing so, I will discuss my lived experiences as a Black woman pursuing a doctoral degree in Canada.

I believe it is important to make a connection between the Scarborough Charter (2021) on anti-Black racism and Black inclusion, which has been endorsed by more than fifty postsecondary institutions throughout Canada, and this discussion of education and societal transformation. The prominence of combatting anti-Black racism and ensuring Black participation in Canadian higher education is demonstrated by this momentous event. The Charter is essential for directing anti-racism tactics and frameworks for action inside these institutions since it offers innovative strategies and recommendations. The goal is to consider how the Scarborough Charter may address some of the concerns brought up and aid in the deconstruction of exclusive academic institutions.

I matter because I exist:

I wish I knew that I did not need to continuously seek validation by discursively echoing the phrase "I matter because I exist" to a system that is programmed to exclude certain communities. The sense of belonging can be created, by developing new ways of learning and communicating. As a Black woman and scholar in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa, I bring a multidimensional perspective to this discourse, by creating space founded on linear exchanges of international experiences and knowledge. Focus is placed on exploring how the term "racialization" draws attention to how racial identities are constructed and contested within relations of power, thus, critically dismantling colonized knowledge. However, this reflection is not a standard educational practice. As I reflect on the invisibility, I faced in the Canadian school system and how this manifested in my collective consciousness, I reflect on what *I wish I knew*!

I wish I knew that although we inhabit one living space called Earth we are traversing vastly distinct paths encoded by social, racial, and economic influences, as well as positionalities, which cannot be dismissed. Within this disparity of perception, we find the seeds of misunderstanding and the perpetuation of unequal power dynamics. The awareness of this reality demands introspection, empathy, and, most importantly, a commitment to fostering a truly inclusive and equitable society (Coen-Sanchez 2023b).

I wish I knew that Western cultures use an imposed system of superiority to maintain a specific order within a social ideology that benefits the dominant group, and that Black students are NOT beginning their academic journey from a point of deficiency but rather, within a faulty system. And that this is linked to the socio-economic power of the West, which is maintained by rigid structures that filter through the Western consciousness (Holt 2002). *I wish I knew* that the idea of inferiority and of inferior peoples has become modernized by various political and social systems. Understanding the weaponization of misinformation in school curricula and beyond early on in one's academic journey prevents mental segregation and exclusion.

The Scarborough Charter on anti-Black racism does highlight the need to collectively work towards the removal of systemic barriers, to foster an environment that is welcoming to students and to achieve equitable solutions that allow *all* to thrive. There is a commitment to ensure that the knowledge of African/Black people's past, present, and future are honoured, by emphasizing four guiding principles related to governance, teaching, and learning activities, such as *Black Flourishing, Inclusive Excellence, Mutuality and Accountability*. Together, these tenets of action embrace a transformational change that supports the continuous promotion and protection of the human rights of people of African descent.

Racism as Polite Inequality

I wish I knew that in the twenty-first century the face of racism has evolved, adopting more covert and insidious forms that cloak themselves in politeness and subtlety (Coen-Sanchez 2020). Despite societal progress towards overtly challenging racism, polite inequality remains deeply ingrained within institutions and social systems. Polite racism operates through microaggressions, unconscious biases, and subtle discriminations, often masked as jokes, backhanded compliments, or seemingly well-intentioned remarks.

However, I question what it means to be institutionally and socially visible. What does it mean to have equitable access to resources and opportunities? From the lens of an observer, I would say it refers to being accredited for the intellectual and characterized content of the person and not the external features that have been categorically stigmatized by society. Therefore, understanding bigotry is a mainstay in the educational system, as most funded

institutions are a microcosm of the larger macrocosm that have their own agenda to maintain order.

I wish I knew that the politeness of such acts camouflages the harm they cause, making it challenging for those who experience them to articulate their grievances. Consequently, it goes unnoticed or dismissed as trivial, perpetuating its cycle of insidiousness. For example, at the University of Ottawa, there is an apparent gulf between the instructors and the student body, and when I looked up the organizational ladder, I could see the demise of Black representation in leadership positions. The departments as well as professors are not equipped to deal with the diverse knowledge and the increasingly diverse student body. Once more this contributes to a sense of isolation—in my thoughts, academic pursuits, and research ideas. In theory, the equitable and full academic development of human potential is largely made possible by universities and colleges. How is this possible to attain when there is a lack of diverse professorship and knowledge? Again, the Charter does directly address the benefits of eliminating structural obstacles that will promote equity, inclusion, and social justice, and fully acknowledge intersectional identities. This reference provides the space for senior administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders at universities to begin a process of critical thinking/reflection, leading to creative research, and to disseminate knowledge that upholds substantive equality, human dignity, and sustainability.

The Role of Education in Fostering "Inclusivity"

I wish I knew that I have the power and the voice to challenge the influence of eurocentric ideologies by directly undertaking the process of decolonizing space and knowledge. It was not until later in my academic journey that I began to socially advocate, For example, I developed workshops[1] that focused on subjects that have been omitted by departments, such as What is Race, Black feminism, environmental racism, intersecting identities, disparities in the healthcare systems, and so on. Discussions ignite students to reflect on their own social positionalities and provide the space to recognize the diversity of lived realities in the classroom—a mindfulness space. By including different perspectives and experiences outside of European culture, students' voices and experiences become part of the learning process. It is no longer a structure of imposing knowledge; rather, it becomes a dialogue of sharing and learning.

I wish I knew that although Western society is culturally diverse in terms of composition, it does not necessarily include the integration of various perspectives. The eurocentric homogeneity of viewpoints does not come naturally and points to systematic incompetence, namely in the inability to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds and respect cultural differences. It is the notion of what is 'natural' versus what is imposed as 'truth' through teaching materials. Nevertheless, the Charter does outline in their report the importance of supporting Black students through scholarships and access programs that re-evaluate curricula, to ensure Black expertise and knowledge are represented. In addition to acknowledging the existence of anti-Black racism, the Charter also offers specific action plans to guarantee institutional and cross-sector accountability (Scarborough 2021). This offers the possibility to incorporate new knowledge.

I wish I knew that education stands as a powerful catalyst for societal change, and it plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. And it is within the realms of educational institutions that young minds are shaped, and notions of race, identity, and diversity are formed. Subsequently, education emerges as a primary agent of transformation, holding the potential to deconstruct existing norms and reconstruct new realities that embrace diverse ways of thinking (Tatum 2017). For example, Kymlicka (1995) a political advocate, argues that we must integrate the opinions of minority rights into liberal theory. He argues that multiculturalism in Canada typically refers to the rights of immigrants to express their ethnic identity without fear of prejudice or discrimination. It is through this collective lens that authentic inclusiveness can occur.

The Fostering of a (New) Critical Consciousness

I wish I knew that education must also nurture a new critical consciousness, by encouraging students to question societal norms, power structures, and inequalities. *I wish I knew* that by critically examining and observing the historical and contemporary manifestations of race, I had to grieve the 'old' Karine to embark on a journey of mindfulness. This is a self-empowering process which cultivates a critical consciousness that should be shared. And it should be at the core of our educational system, as a basic cognizance that invites students and teachers to consider various points of view while perusing and in-

vestigating texts. This process of self-exploration provides the space to become an observer of the system, thus critically interpreting teaching materials.

In response to the rising pressure that Black and racialized students felt throughout their academic journey (Koen-Sanchez, 2023a)[2], I *knew* I needed to create a space that would be dedicated to highlighting and publicizing the efforts of students of Black identity and the African diaspora. In 2020, I established at the University of Ottawa an anti-racist committee which worked to create a safe environment for open dialogue through workshops and panels. Annually, I also organize a Black Talent Showcase that promotes Black excellence through spoken word, poetry, and other arts. Such talent shows create space for Black scholars to embark on the quest to change the narrative. One of the main objectives was to educate others during Black History Month, in recognizing that the Black people who were enslaved were composed of doctors, lawyers, teachers, musicians, inventors, and poets, thus shifting the traditional narrative and highlighting the artistry in various Black communities. These types of events validated Blackness as a strong contributor to any given society.

Final Thoughts: *Empowering Silent Voices*

I know now that addressing racism as polite inequality requires a multifaceted approach that tackles systemic issues at their roots. Awareness and acknowledgment of subtle discrimination are essential, as is fostering a culture of openness where discussions about race and privilege can occur without defensiveness or dismissal. We, as social beings, have an ethical and moral responsibility to actively promote inclusivity and diversity by amplifying silenced voices and providing platforms for their authentic representation. A case in point is the signatories of the Scarborough Charter (2021) who commit to reparative justice measures for the future" and "agree to move beyond mere representation and take responsibility for supporting fulsome, transformative inclusion across university and college structures, policies and procedures."

I know now that by addressing social inequalities head-on and cultivating genuine inclusivity and empathy, society can work towards dismantling polite racism and creating a future where all individuals are recognized, respected, and valued for their unique identities and contributions.

I know now by fostering integration, we create spaces where individuals can embrace their identities proudly, challenge dominant narratives, and contribute to a diverse and inclusive society. The celebration of cultural pluralism enriches the social fabric, contributing to a more vibrant and empathetic world.

I know now that there is a need for political recognition of the merging of racial identities and their institutional validation. As the author Bonilla-Silva (2014) notes, failure to recognize this is at the core of the issue, as once racial categories have become naturalized, it will become more difficult to view the world from different angles. Additionally, authors Desmond and Emirbayer defined race as being "a symbolic category, based on phenotype or ancestry and constructed according to specific social and historical contexts, that is misrecognized as a natural category" (2009). *I know now* that addressing racism as polite inequality requires a multifaceted approach that tackles systemic issues at their roots. Awareness and acknowledgment of subtle discrimination are essential, as is fostering a culture of openness where discussions about race and privilege can occur without defensiveness or dismissal. *I know now that* addressing social inequalities head-on and cultivating genuine inclusivity and empathy, society can work towards dismantling polite racism and creating a future where all individuals are recognized, respected, and valued for their unique identities and contributions.

I know now that through education, we can deconstruct to reconstruct new realities that embrace different ways of thinking, a new collective consciousness that can eventually be translated into policies and procedures. This is my aha moment during my journey of reflectivity, to understand that the programming that was once prescribed to be 'true' and 'right' can be rewired. It's the process of introspective reflectivity that requires space and time to fully embrace a new consciousness. By becoming an observer of the system, by embracing authentic inclusiveness, we create a world where everyone's humanity is recognized and celebrated, where the rich tapestry of human experiences is woven into a collective narrative of understanding and compassion.

As we move forward, let us remember the words of Kaeyla: "We don't see the same things." Let us embrace this difference as a source of strength, innovation, and beauty.

Endnotes

1. See: https://opirg-gripo.ca/creating-a-space-for-bipoc-to-strengthen-their-social-positionality/

2. Mitacs-funded research I conducted to explore the lived realities among undergraduate and graduate racialized (international and domestic) students during their higher education studies: https://www.mitacs.ca/en/projects/inclusivity-canadian-educational-system

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Book Review: #BLACKINSCHOOL

by Stephanie Fearon

Book under Review: Diallo, Habiba Cooper. 2021. *#BlackInSchool.* Regina SK: University of Regina Press.

Author: Dr. Stephanie Fearon joins York University's Faculty of Education as the inaugural assistant professor of Black Thriving and Education. Her research draws on Black storytelling traditions to explore the ways that Black mothers and educational institutions partner to support Black student wellbeing. Stephanie uses literary and visual arts to communicate, in a structured, creative, and accessible form, insights gleaned from stories shared by Black mothers and their families. Her publications have appeared in several scholarly journals, including *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, and *Journal of African American Women and Girls in Education*. Stephanie has worked nearly fifteen years in public education systems assuming leadership positions in France, Guadeloupe, and Canada. Most recently, she was the program coordinator for the Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Team and the Model Schools for Inner Cities Department at the Toronto District School Board. In this role, Stephanie provided leadership to administrators and system leaders in implementing policies and practices that promote student academic achievement, wellbeing, and belonging in schools.

A burgeoning body of literature investigates the academic achievement and engagement of Black youth in Canadian schools. This scholarship further reveals the violence waged by an education system long committed to the exclusion and surveillance of Black students and their families (Aladejebi 2021; Litchmore 2022; Maynard 2017). Data collected by large school districts in the country point to the wide array of injustices faced by Black students. For example, Black students are overrepresented in special education programs and experience high rates of suspension and expulsion (Toronto District School Board 2019; Peel District School Board 2022). Academic and public discourse, however, continues to prioritize the educational performance and disciplinary experiences of Black Canadian boys (Litchmore 2022, 233; McPherson 2020, 150). A limited amount of scholarship on Black students' schooling experiences intentionally centres the voices of Black Canadian girls. Moreover, such work fails to advance Black Canadian girls as experts on the schooling lives of Black students.

Habiba Cooper Diallo's #BLACKINSCHOOL presents a much needed gendered perspective into the manifestations of anti-Black racism in the education system. The book comprises a series of journal entries, spanning from 2012 to 2014, written by Diallo during her teenage years. The author leverages her lived experiences as a Black teenage girl to expose the racism inflicted on "the physical, mental, and emotional bodies of Black students" (2). Diallo's journal excerpts trace her schooling experiences in the wake of her father's death and a subsequent family relocation from Ontario to Nova Scotia. The book is organized into three sections and documents the unabating acts of racism ravaged against Diallo and other Black students in her final two years of high school.

Diallo's intimate narrative focuses on the perpetuation of anti-Blackness through school practices, policies, and curriculum. Diallo's journal entries invite readers to witness the varied ways Black girls process and resist the violence levied against Black students in the Canadian education system. In so doing, Diallo repositions Black girls as social theorists and change makers committed to cultivating affirming learning spaces for Black students. #BLACKINSCHOOL upholds the integral role Black youth play in the "the long and ongoing fight to bring

an end to anti-Black racism and ultimately create a loving, respectful, and inclusive world for everyone" (2).

Section I

#BLACKINSCHOOL opens with a poignant account detailing school practices that dehumanize Black students. In the first section of the book, Diallo documents the barrage of school assignments, presentations, videos, and images that portray Africa and Blackness as primitive, backward, and inferior. Reflecting on those schooling experiences, Diallo writes, "I was horrified, humiliated, and indignant all at once" (3). Diallo argues that this "constant, mundane discrimination" (14) contributes to Black students' disengagement in schools. Echoing Diallo's stance, student and parent census data collected by school districts reveal that Black students are less likely to view school as a welcoming place (Yau 2017; Peel District School Board 2022). Section I also examines the relationship between schools and the police. After witnessing the arrest of a Black student at her school, Diallo interrogates the criminalization and abandonment of Black youth by the education system. The section documents the creative ways Black students, especially Black girls, heal from the onslaught of racism and epistemic violence endured at school. Diallo's journal entries depict her use of the arts, namely Reggae music and Wassoulou dance, to reconnect culturally and spiritually in the safety of her bedroom.

Section II

In Section II, readers continue to witness the ways Black girls resist injustices within the education system. In a series of concise journal entries, Diallo recounts the Eurocentrism expressed in educators' pedagogies, school-wide events, and course textbooks. This section also introduces readers to the ways Black girls are hypersexualized when engaging with the curriculum. Diallo uses petitions and conferences to incite change at her school and assert her personhood. She also boldly addresses peers and educators who espouse racist discourses and practices in the classroom. Diallo's journal entries locate Black girls as educational leaders committed to reimagining schools as affirming learning sites for Black students. Diallo challenges educators to adopt culturally sustaining pedagogies that honour the complexities and beauty of Black life in Canada. Diallo argues, "all teachers should be racially aware and should have the tools and terminologies to discuss race with their students" (30).

Section III

Much literature explores the schooling experiences of Black students in special education (non-gifted) classrooms (Anderson 2020). Few scholars investigate the academic journeys of Black girls in enriched academic programs (Anderson 2020; Evans-Winters, 2014). #BLACKINSCHOOL extends the educational scholarship by centering the unique and nuanced voices of high-achieving Black Canadian girls. This final section focuses on Diallo's graduation from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. The journal entries capture the strategies Diallo and other high-achieving Black students draw on to navigate deficit thinking, hyper-surveillance, and negative stereotypes. This section offers readers a glimpse into the ways Black mothers help their high-performing children, in particular their daughters, hold firm to their Blackness amid attempts by the school system to dismiss their identities and achievements.

Concluding Thoughts

#BLACKINSCHOOL is an invaluable read for all those who wish to understand the complexities of anti-Blackness in the Canadian school system and comprehend how it is perpetuated through policy, pedagogy, and curriculum. The author offers an accessible, yet intimate account of contemporary acts of resistance led by Black Canadian girls in high school. #BLACKINSCHOOL concludes with a series of calls to action directed at Black students and education workers. The book challenges Black students to assert their voices at school, even when educators attempt to diminish their histories, realities, and futures. The author urges Black students to take a stand against institutionalized racism in their schools and communities.

Scholars, education workers, and Black families have long decried the injustices faced by Black youth in Canadian schools. Indeed, data garnered by educational institutions report that Black students are less likely to feel supported and respected by school staff (Toronto District School Board 2019; Peel District School Board 2022). #BLACKINSCHOOL adds to such scholarship by providing education workers with an insider view into the adverse impact of anti-Black racism on Black students' academic achievement, wellbeing, and development. Diallo's book is an impassioned call to those working in the Canadian education system. It summons edu-

cators, administrators, and policy makers to partner with Black students and their families to cultivate learning spaces where Black youth will "not be hurt, stigmatized, hindered and nullified…" (132). #BLACKINSCHOOL invites us all, irrespective of our identities, to heed the following demand: Affirm Black students culturally, spiritually, and intellectually.

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Rising Black Sea

by Dáminí Awóyígà

We have seen so much
We have seen hardships and overcome
Risen from pitch-dark nights,
Nights raging like never-ending wars
That left the hope in our hearts, battered and
torn Broken and bruised, left unattended to
Silence, so deafening you could mistake it for calm

In this Black sea
Let your baggage go
And let them fall where they may
Unload them
The Black sea erodes them
The Black sea heals us.
Let the winds carry your pains away
Feel redemption

In this Black sea
We see a reflection
Of our power
Of our Unity
And struggles

Justice grew on the tips of our tongues
It fed a palette that craved freedom
Craved liberation
Free as the lines of free verse
Praying liberation would cut us loose
Praying that the chains that were eating us alive would be halted

We lifted our tongues,
Each, a wave of our overlooked
And untold histories
Each pushing truths to the surface
Our stories, and experiences that couldn't be erased

When darkness descended
So did strength and resilience
Only love, hope, and family could transcend
The suffering we faced
We have braved
Stormy oceans and seas
We still hope and believe
there will be new horizons
Like waves anew
We will rise again

We stand here
Our faces, shown in this Black sea
The fire in our souls
Giving Life to power.
WE raise our voices collectively in song
We, a song to be sang
A story to be written
We are the tides
That will transform our communities

In this Black sea
Let your baggage go
And let them fall where they may
Unload them
The Black sea erodes them
The Black sea heals us.
Let the winds carry your pains away
Feel redemption

When darkness descended
So did strength and resilience
Only love, hope, and family could transcend
The suffering we faced
We have braved
Stormy oceans and seas
We still hope and believe
there will be new horizons
We will rise again

Dáminí Awóyígà is a 16-year-old high school student. She is an activist, spoken word poet and Halifax's Youth Poet Laureate. Dáminí is the founder of Dáminí Creatives and the Afro-Indigenous Book Club, a book club created to encourage young people to read books written by Black and Indigenous authors and to share the realities and experiences of Black and Indigenous Canadians. She is a youth freelance journalist for CBC's Mainstreet and Vice-Chair of CPA High School's Black Student Association. Dáminí is a board member of the Nova Scotia Girls Institute for Resource and Learning (NS GIRL), she is also part of the HRM Youth Advisory Council. Dáminí has received multiple awards including the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. As a spoken word poet for over five years, she enjoys writing, singing, and performing poems that bring attention to social justice issues.

Signing the Scarborough Charter: Notes on Looking Back to Move Forward

by Adelle Blackett; preface by Christiana Abraham & Rohini Bannerjee

Author: Adelle Blackett is a Professor of Law and the Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) in Transnational Labour Law and Development at the Faculty of Law, McGill University, Montréal, Québec. She holds a BA in History from Queen's University, civil law and common law degrees from McGill University, and an LLM and a doctorate in law from Columbia University. A fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, she is the recipient of several prestigious research grants and awards. She is widely published in English, French, and Spanish in the field of transnational labour law with a focus on decolonial approaches. Her 2019 book manuscript entitled *Everyday Transgressions: Domestic Workers' Transnational Challenge to International Labour Law* (Cornell University Press) garnered the Canadian Council on International Law's (CCIL) 2020 Scholarly Book Award. Her current SSHRC-funded research focuses on slavery and the law and supports her general rapporteurship for the International Academy of Comparative Law.

The virtual launch of the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education was held on November 18, 2021. Attended by close to fifty university and college leaders, this landmark event in the history of tertiary education in Canada saw the collective official signing of the document by these leaders pledging to fight anti-Black racism and promote Black inclusion in higher education.

The official signing followed a year-long collaborative and collective work that involved extensive feedback from students, faculty, staff, senior leadership of partner institutions, Black political and civic leaders, and organizations. The ceremony hosted by Wisdom Tettey, Principal of the University of Toronto Scarborough and Chair of the Inter-Institutional Advisory Committee and was live-streamed to higher education communities across Canada. It featured presentations and round tables with key leaders and thinkers of the Charter where the document's grounding philosophies and implications was discussed.

Included in this event were these closing remarks offered by Professor Adelle Blackett, Canada Research Chair in Transnational Labour Law at McGill University and principal drafter of the Scarborough Charter. The speech, deliverered with English and French sections, has been transcribed for publication here and translated in full for French-language readers.

—Christiana Abraham and Rohini Bannerjee

Signing the Scarborough Charter: Notes on Looking Back to Move Forward

by Adelle Blackett

Thank you, Wisdom Tettey, co-members of the Inter-Institutional Advisory Committee, signing partners, each insightful participant and audience member and all who have contributed to the year-long co-creation process, for the shared vision that inhabits the Scarborough Charter.

I am the descendant of enslaved Africans in the Americas, joining you for this historic launch from the traditional unceded territories of the Kanyen'kehà:ka nation of the Haudenosaunee confederacy. I am grateful for the heritage of ancestors who have relentlessly worked for emancipation.

As a daughter of Québec, given my family and community and social and economic positionality, I was not destined to be a university professor. Far from it, but I was able to benefit throughout my academic trajectory from encouragement, confidence, and engagement from teachers and other communiy members who worked to build an inclusive future. The Scarborough Charter aims to pay tribute to them all.

Drawing on the co-creation process and the discussion during the launching of this Charter, I posit that the Scarborough Charter may be seen as both an archive of special significance in this moment, and a framework of action inspiring our future engagements.

As an archive, the Scarborough Charter chronicles in its preamble Black communities' insistence against all odds upon our profound humanity. It offers at once an acknowledgement of how much academic excellence has historically been lost through exclusion and silencing, and a reclaiming of presence and belonging, grounded in purposeful centering of the experiences, contributions, and aspirations of people of African descent in Canadian higher education.

As a framework, it offers precise, detailed, and comprehensive guidance catalyzing action, within an architecture that enables institutional actors in the higher education sector to share data and informed practices, foster and strengthen implementation and hold each other accountable.

Both the archive and the framework offer "an ontological affirmation of Blackness", through a collective act of refusal, to draw on Kanyen'kehà:ka scholar Audra Simpson's work: that is, refusal of an exclusionary status quo. That refusal, and the archive and framework it has engendered, open up boundless possibilities.

To invoke legendary Caribbean historian, C.L.R. James' famous affirmation from his semi-autobiographical, "unending allegory" of cricket, *Beyond a Boundary*: "It is movement that matters; not where you are or what you have, but where you have come from, where you are going and the rate at which you are getting there."

Signing the Charter signals not an end point, but a commitment to keep moving, beyond where we were in Canadian higher education, captured in the archive, toward where we are going through a framework designed to propel us forward with determination, to realize the

Charter principles

• of intersectional Black flourishing, which includes the spirit of *Sankofa*, or going back to get what's ours, cultivating and honouring the contributions to excellence that are in reality all around us;

• of inclusive excellence, or the opportunity to look anew at our academic world, changing what it feels like to walk into a room and know that it is inhabited by plural communities and traditions of excellence, broadening and fostering the emergence of alternative canon;

• of mutuality, embodying in Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, our common, inescapable garment of destiny;

• and of accountability, challenging ourselves and our institutions of higher education in late poet Maya Angelou's words, to do better as we know better.

If we let it, the Scarborough Charter can be part of a living process, resolutely and steadfastly positioning Canadian higher education at the vanguard of transformative change. But forgive me for closing with a caution. My late colleague at McGill and former Royal Society of Canada president, Rod Macdonald, reminded us through CLR James that to know the rules, to clothe oneself in them and to act in conformity with them – even to know the spirit of the rules—is not enough. He stressed that the problem is resolutely not with attempts to adapt the rules to local context—that is to be expected, and is anticipated. Rather, he was concerned that "in the absence of an intention to organize conduct purposely to achieve its objectives," one is not "playing the game"; one is simply playing at the game, or possibly playing with the game.

In other words, we must avoid [deploying] "EDI with a vengeance," recalling instead the truth of the popular maxim, "nothing for us without us."[1] The racial reckoning [following the killing of George Floyd] is a reminder of the pernicious legacies of enslavement and anti-Black racism, and the extent of the trust that must be rebuilt with care and with a love of justice, to move beyond.

We have a tremendous opportunity through the Scarborough Charter's ongoing co-creation process—in the

Inter-Institutional Forum and Steering Committee[2] and the material support that member institutions must bring to these—to work with purpose to move beyond a boundary of anti-Black racism to foster meaningful inclusion in Canadian higher education of all equity-deserving groups. We can co-create an academia in the world where members of all communities can pursue truth in excellence, live, learn and flourish.

Endnotes

1. The phrase "EDI with a vengeance" should be understood in reference to caution required in the risk that institutional actors are playing at anti-Black Racism equity work, without actually achieving equity. "EDI with a vengeance" is not an inclusive, participatory approach to redressing anti-Black racism. For more on this see Adelle Blackett's Employment Equity Act Review Task Force Report (2023). https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/portfolio/labour/programs/employment-equity/reports/act-review-task-force.html

2. See "Anti-Black Racism and the Signing of the Scarborough Charter: Insights, Processes, Challenges, and Inclusive Futures in Canadian Higher Education. An Interview with Dr. Adelle Blackett and Dr. Wisdom Tettey" in this issue.

Signature de la Charte de Scarborough: Retourner our avancer

par Adelle Blackett; préface de Christiana Abraham et Rohini Bannerjee

Traduit de l'anglais par Yingjun Chen (elle)

Le lancement virtuel de la Charte de Scarborough sur le racisme anti-Noir et l'inclusion des Noirs dans l'Éducation supérieure canadienne a eu lieu le 18 novembre 2021. Presque cinquante dirigeants d'universités et de collèges ont assisté à cet événement marquant dans l'histoire de l'éducation postsecondaire au Canada, qui a vu la signature officielle collective du document par ces dirigeants s'engageant à lutter contre le racisme anti-Noir et à promouvoir l'inclusion des Noirs dans l'éducation supérieure.

La signature officielle a suivi une année de travail collaboratif et collectif impliquant des retours d'information approfondis de la part des étudiants, du corps professoral, du personnel, des cadres supérieurs des institutions partenaires, ainsi que des dirigeants politiques et civiques noirs et des organisations. La cérémonie, animée par Wisdom Tettey, principal de l'Université de Toronto à Scarborough et président du Comité de direction interinstitutionnel pour l'enseignement supérieur inclusif, a été diffusée en direct aux communautés de l'éducation supérieure à travers le Canada. Elle comprenait des présentations et des tables rondes avec des leaders et des penseurs clés de la Charte, où les philosophies fondamentales et les implications du document ont été discutées.

Cet événement incluait également des remarques finales prononcées par la professeure Adelle Blackett, rédactrice principale de la Charte de Scarborough. Ce discours a été transcrit et traduit en français pour les lecteures francophones.

—Christiana Abraham and Rohini Bannerjee

Signature de la Charte de Scarborough: Retourner pour avancer

par Adelle Blackett

Merci Wisdom Tettey, co-membres du Comité consultatif interinstitutionnel, partenaires signataires, chaque participant perspicace et membre du public ainsi que tous ceux qui ont contribué au processus de co-création d'une année, pour la vision partagée qui habite la Charte de Scarborough.

Je suis descendante d'Africains esclavagisés dans les Amériques, vous rejoignant pour ce lancement historique depuis les territoires traditionnels non cédés de la nation Kanyen'kehà:ka de la confédération Haudenosaunee. Je suis reconnaissante pour l'héritage des ancêtres qui ont travaillé sans relâche pour l'émancipation.

Fille du Québec, par la position économique et sociale de notre famille et communauté, je n'étais pas destinée à devenir professeure. Loin de là… mais j'ai pu bénéficier le long de ma trajectoire académique des encouragements, de la confiance et de l'engagement à la fois de nombreux membres des lieux d'enseignement et de membres de nos communautés qui œuvraient pour un avenir inclusif. La Charte de Scarborough vise à leur rendre hommage.

En m'appuyant sur le processus de co-création et la discussion lors du lancement de cette Charte, je soutiens que la Charte de Scarborough peut être vue à la fois comme une archive d'une importance particulière en ce moment, et comme un cadre d'action inspirant nos engagements futurs.

En tant qu'archive, la Charte de Scarborough relate dans son préambule l'insistance des communautés noires contre vents et marées sur notre humanité profonde. Elle

offre à la fois une reconnaissance de la quantité d'excellence académique qui a historiquement été perdue par l'exclusion et le silence, et une réappropriation de la présence et de l'appartenance, ancrée dans la mise en valeur intentionnelle des expériences, contributions et aspirations des personnes d'ascendance africaine dans l'éducation supérieure canadienne.

En tant que cadre, elle offre des orientations précises, détaillées et complètes catalysant l'action, dans une architecture qui permet aux acteurs institutionnels du secteur de l'éducation supérieure de partager des données et des pratiques éclairées, de favoriser et de renforcer la mise en œuvre et de se tenir mutuellement responsables.

Tant l'archive que le cadre offrent « une affirmation ontologique de la noirceur », à travers un acte collectif de refus, pour reprendre le travail de la chercheuse Kanyen'kehà:ka Audra Simpson : c'est-à-dire le refus d'un statu quo exclusif. Ce refus, et l'archive et le cadre qu'il a engendrés, ouvrent des possibilités infinies.

Pour invoquer la célèbre affirmation du légendaire historien caribéen, C.L.R. James, dans son semi-autobiographique, « allégorie sans fin » du cricket, *Beyond a Boundary*: « c'est le mouvement qui compte; pas où vous n'êtes ni ce que vous avez, mais d'où vous venez, où vous allez et le rythme auquel vous y arrivez. »

La signature de la Charte ne marque pas un point final, mais un engagement à continuer d'avancer, au-delà de là où nous étions dans l'éducation supérieure canadienne, tel que capturé dans les archives, vers là où nous allons à travers un cadre conçu pour nous propulser en avant avec détermination, pour réaliser les principes de la Charte

- de l'épanouissement intersectionnel des Noirs, qui inclut l'esprit de Sankofa, ou retourner chercher ce qui nous appartient, cultiver et honorer les contributions à l'excellence qui sont en réalité tout autour de nous;

- de l'excellence inclusive, ou l'opportunité de regarder à nouveau notre monde académique, de changer ce que l'on ressent en entrant dans une pièce et de savoir qu'elle est habitée par des communautés et des traditions de l'excellence pluralistes, élargissant et favorisant l'émergence d'un canon alternatif;

- de la mutualité, incarnant dans les mots du révérend Dr Martin Luther King Jr., notre destinée commune et inéluctable;

- et de la responsabilisation, nous mettant au défi, nous et nos institutions d'éducation supérieure, selon les mots de la regrettée poète Maya Angelou, à faire mieux lorsque nous savons mieux.

Si nous le permettons, la Charte de Scarborough peut faire partie d'un processus vivant, positionnant résolument et fermement l'éducation supérieure canadienne à l'avant-garde du changement transformateur. Mais pardonnez-moi de conclure par une mise en garde. Mon regretté collègue de McGill et ancien président de la Société royale du Canada, Rod Macdonald, nous a rappelé à travers CLR James que connaître les règles, s'y conformer et agir en conformité avec elles, même connaître l'esprit des règles, ne suffit pas. Il a souligné que le problème n'est résolument pas avec les tentatives d'adapter les règles au contexte local—cela est attendu et anticipé. Au contraire, il était préoccupé par le fait « qu'en l'absence d'une intention d'organiser délibérément la conduite pour atteindre ses objectifs, » on ne « joue » pas vraiment au jeu; on se contente simplement de jouer ou éventuellement de s'amuser avec le jeu.

Autrement dit, nous devrons éviter [le déploiement] de « ÉDI avec une vengeance » en rappelant plutôt la vérité de la maxime populaire, « rien pour nous sans nous. »[1] Le réveil racial [à la suite du meurtre de George Floyd], est un rappel des héritages pernicieux de l'esclavage et du racisme anti-Noir, et de l'ampleur de la confiance qui doit être reconstruite avec soin et avec un amour de la justice, pour aller de l'avant.

Nous avons une formidable opportunité grâce au processus de co-création continu de la Charte de Scarborough dans le Forum inter-institutionnel et le Comité directeurs[2] et au soutien matériel que les institutions membres doivent apporter à ces derniers—de travailler avec un objectif pour aller au-delà d'une frontière de racisme anti-Noir pour favoriser une inclusion significative dans l'éducation supérieure canadienne de tous les groupes méritants d'équité. Nous pouvons co-créer une académie dans le monde où les membres de toutes les communautés peuvent poursuivre la vérité dans l'excellence, vivre, apprendre et s'épanouir.

Notes de fin de page

1. La phrase « ÉDI avec une vengeance » devrait être comprise en référence de la prudence requise dans le risque que les institutions prennent avec le racisme anti-Noir, le travail d'équité, sans vraiment acquérir l'équité. « ÉDI avec une vengeance » n'est pas, par exemple, une approche inclusive, participative pour redresser le racisme anti-Noir. Pour plus d'information, veuillez consulter le rapport du Groupe de travail sur l'examen de la Loi sur l'équité en matière d'emploi écrit par Dr. Adelle Blackett (2023) https://www.canada.ca/fr/emploi-developpement-social/ministere/portefeuille/travail/programmes/equite-emploi/rapports/groupe-examen-loi.html

2. Voir "Anti-Black Racism and the Signing of the Scarborough Charter: Insights, Processes, Challenges, and Inclusive Futures in Canadian Higher Education. An Interview with Dr. Adelle Blackett and Dr. Wisdom Tettey" dans ce numéro.