Inclusivity in Trinity – from a Black Muslim perspective
| Chill Chat Podcast by Amirah & Zainab

AMIRAH: Hi guys, my name is Amirah Ayinde and I'm a third year nursing student.

ZAINAB: Hi guys, my name is Zainab Kareem and I'm a third year pharmacy student.

AMIRAH: Today we're here to talk about inclusivity in Trinity as an institution. We're speaking from the perspective of black Muslims and we're going to base this whole discussion on our experience within Trinity. That poses the first question of.. Zainab, do you think Trinity is inclusive?

ZAINAB: So for me, I feel like that's a really complicated question to ask because personally I don't feel and I haven't experienced anything where I'm like these measures are put in to include me. I haven't felt particularly included in Trinity unless it's within my own group of friends who are predominantly black. So I feel like Trinity needs to do more to be inclusive but on the other hand, it's kind of weird to say that ok, these are minorities so we need to include them. I'd rather not feel like I'm different so here we go lets include these people because they're different from us. Let's integrate them into our society, that type of thing. I just want to be there and to just be seen for who I am and to just be treated the way everyone else is treated. To just be treated equally. To not have stereotypes placed upon me just because I'm black, or just because I'm Muslim, or just because I'm black, I'm Muslim and I'm a woman.

AMIRAH: Triple whammy there you get me

ZAINAB: Triple homicide. So personally, I feel like they can do a lot more to make black Muslim students feel more included from my perspective but then I don't want it to feel like a thing of look at what we're doing to include you. I just want to be there and just be integrated into the society and just feel like I belong there and right now I don't feel that to be honest.

AMIRAH: I think the major problem is at the moment, the majority of people feel there isn't an issue at hand but there really is. Even speaking with friends and people I know within university and even other universities as well because it's not just within the walls of Trinity, it also applies to every situation. We have experienced otherism or if you want to class it as racism or anything like, just isms. We are always feeling as if we're other or not included and that is happening, I feel like, personally I have experienced that in almost every aspect of university life to be honest because if you think about it. For example, walking into a lecture hall, I just know I'm being perceived a certain way even before I open my mouth and say anything so that in itself isn't a nice feeling to experience on a daily basis. It can even make you feel like you're not, I don't know, worthy on being on Trinity… Because we all know the kind of prestigious status that Trinity holds within Ireland and worldwide. It makes you feel like you don't deserve to be in such a university and it also makes you doubt your own abilities which I feel like is dangerous to someone's self-esteem.

ZAINAB: No, for sure. Everything your saying is literally exactly how I feel. It's not even just in these walls of Trinity where you feel ok I'm walking into a lecture hall, I have to act a certain way just so I'm not stereotyped or I'm just not seen as this girl is black so she's most likely going to be loud coming in. Or she has three other black friends she's with, they're most likely going to be loud when they're coming in. And I'm just like, it's just little stuff.

AMIRAH: Yeah I feel like it builds up. It's almost something that you feel like you can't even speak about because it's always microaggressions that I feel like.. well personally I feel that I experience because I can't speak for the majority of people. But I feel like its microaggressions that build up over time and then it becomes this whole thing and obviously add to the lack of self-esteem or seeing yourself in a certain way

ZAINAB: And it kind of makes you feel a bit crazy but your feelings are valid. I'm feeling all these little microaggressions that even the person doing it towards me may not even know that they're doing it but it's just so integrated into society, their mentality and just how they've been taught and how life is that they might not have any ill intentions but you just have all these little ways that people are treating you because you're 'different'. And then it's just building up into something and you're just like, you're just there and you feel like why am I even feeling like this when I don't have something solid.

AMIRAH: Yeah you feel like, is this even happening? Like you're questioning it.

ZAINAB: Yeah like am I crazy? Did that happen or am I just imagining it? Because it doesn't have to be someone coming up to you and saying that look here, you don't belong here. Like it doesn't have to be like that, it's just little ways they treat you, the way they speak to you and then you see the way they speak to others.

AMIRAH: I think it's that comparison that makes it blatantly clear that we are being treated differently. Because when I look to how my friends who are white or white passing are treated by other people. It's completely different. When I see that I'm like wow is there something wrong with me. I'm thinking am I being less friendly or are they getting a weird vibe from me but to be honest that's not the case.

ZAINAB: And I feel like aswell, we always have this thing, well I personally, let me not speak for anyone. But me personally, I have to always think that ok let me not have a bad day because if I have a bad day, my bad day will not be treated the same as a white persons bad day. I can't be moody and my face can't be anything because they're going to think that oh look at her she has an attitude. She's a black woman with an attitude.

AMIRAH: And they'll use that to kind of like and use that as a representation of all black people and they're always angry or in a bad mood or something like that. It plays into every aspect. Even if we're having a bad mental health day, you can't have that, you can't show it.

ZAINAB: Yeah I can't show it because I'm like you're just going to be looked as that. If you make a little.. my face is straight. That's you're being rude, you're being something. I'm always thinking to myself, let me be extra cheery, let me be extra nice, let me be extra this just so I can feel somewhat, so they don't look at me a certain way. I feel like that's just

mentally draining and emotionally draining aswell because I'm like I don't want to have to fake my emotions so I'm accepted by a society that will probably never accept me fully. They're always going to see I'm different, I'm always going to be treated different. it's a bit...

AMIRAH: Yeah I definitely feel we're definitely dehumanised to some aspect. It's as if you can't even show any other emotion but happiness or cheeriness. And like, realistically that's not how life is. Life is up and down and when you go into college, you're going to have good days and bad days.

ZAINAB: And that's the thing we don't get as much excuses as white people.

AMIRAH: Yeah we don't get excuses. So like what we'd want, personally what I would want is for people, lecturers, academics and anyone within the walls of Trinity to not come with these preconceived ideas. I always feel like before I even open my mouth, people already make presumptions about me.

ZAINAB: Or like you open your mouth, you suddenly sound, oh wow you sound so intellectual. Why are you so surprised? And then you ask where am I from.

AMIRAH: It's always that next question, where are you from? And then you say where your from Lucan and they're like where are you REALLY from? And its like what?
So I guess, Trinity does need to be more inclusive.

ZAINAB: So yeah Amirah, I just wanted to ask what are some situations you felt you weren't included?

AMIRAH: I actually feel like this applies almost every single time I walk into a lecture hall. I feel like because we've been at home for the most part because of COVID, I actually haven't experienced this throughout last year, being at home and everything. But I feel like when I was in first year and we we're still having in person lectures. Walking into a lecture hall, there was definitely preconceived ideas that most people had including the lecturer had about me as a black person and even groups of black people aswell and even me as a black Muslim woman aswell, there's preconceived ideas that people have about me. One thing that really sticks out to me is the fact that I'm studying nursing and we learn about different illnesses and we have different pictures in textbooks of how different illnesses present, maybe some type of issues that regard to dermatology or anything like that and I never see pictures of black people and people of colour or we never learn about how certain illnesses might present in people of colour or black people. And I just feel like in that instance, we're feeling not included, we're feeling othered, and as if us being represented within healthcare or within the curriculum is not important. And that is a very big issue because in Ireland there is growing number of black people and people of colour. And not even that, even if there wasn't a growing number of black people, we still have those people entering our healthcare services and needing help aswell. We are being trained to go into those fields and care for the general public and we're expected to have that knowledge to being able to take care of everybody but we're actually, within our curriculum we're actually excluding people and that is dangerous within itself because that could mean possibly in the future, hopefully this never happens. But this could mean, in the future, when someone comes in to

us, we could have no idea what is happening to them because we never learned about it and we never learned about its presentation in a black person. So that's really dangerous

ZAINAB: 100%, that is detrimental to society. If you're not able to have trust in the healthcare system as a black person, I don't know how we're meant to live? How am I meant to go in, even, that's what I mean like all this stuff about inclusivity and feeling included and part of the society, it doesn't just stop. All the stuff we're experiencing doesn't just stop within the walls of Trinity. It's there on the outside when we go to the doctors, when we go to the shops. Its literally there is every single aspect of our lives until we come home.

AMIRAH: I also feel like, if you compare Trinity to some universities in the UK, it's a completely different story and you can definitely see that Trinity has some improvements to do.

ZAINAB: Yeah for sure

AMIRAH: Alright, so Zainab are there any situations where you felt stereotyped?

ZAINAB: When you say that, I think two situations come in mind. There was one situation where me and a group of friends, mind you there was eight of us or something. And most of us were black. We were there, we were talking, we were just you know having lunch. There was another group that were sitting really close by to us. They were like maybe 10 white people and others scattered around the room where we were having lunch. Mind you, its lunch time and what happens at lunch time? Everyone's a bit loud and stuff, you know everyone is chatty. So we were just chatting and then we were laughing and then mind you, everyone is like. My group at that table that were like eight of us or something. And the other group, mind you we were making the same level of noise. Maybe one or two laughs were a bit louder, but they were laughs, we weren't laughing the whole time. So then, one of the people that were working in that room came and she was like oh can you guys keep it down. So obviously in our head we're like since we're already in the mentality that someone's probably going to come up to us just because.. to be honest just because we're black. I know people say don't make everything about race but everything is about race. Like you already have preconceived ideas.

AMIRAH: And this whole notion of 'I don't see colour', I don't buy that to be honest.

ZAINAB: Can you see it please so we can acknowledge what you're doing wrong, like you have to see it to acknowledge it. You can't just say you don't see it and you're still acting a certain way
But anyways, so then she comes up and says can you guys keep it down. We were polite and we're like ok, let's not do any trouble because then they'll say we're a certain type of way because we're all black women, do you get me? Well most of us are. So then we were like oh ok. So then we continued, and mind you we were making the same noise as the table next to us. She could've easily said to the whole room, can everybody keep it down. If you have something going on, its lunch time. Can you like take a break? Or can you tell everyone else to quieten down, you have something to do

AMIRAH: Or even go to the library where you know it's going to be quiet

ZAINAB: So then, mind you, this was a staff, it wasn't someone else having lunch. And no one came up to us, mind you if someone came up to us and they were trying to do work, 100% I'd understand you know. She came up to us, can you keep it down, we were like oh ok. Then maybe like 5 minutes later, we were talking. Everybody's still noisy and then she comes up to our table again and says I'm not going to ask you guys twice, I'm not going to ask you guys another time, can you guys keep it down or something something, you're going to get kicked out of the room. We were just like, ok. I think we didn't want to make the situation even worse than it is, even though we shouldn't just accept people talking to you and picking on you.

AMIRAH: Especially when there's another group of people

ZAINAB: They were making the same amount of noise, they observed you coming up to the only table where black people are present telling us to keep it down, then you come back again with more attitude telling us to keep it down. Saying I don't want to tell you again to keep it down. Mind you, the other group were making the same amount of noise. It was just kind of embarrassing. If everyone is making noise, why are you just picking on this particular table and its 100% because we're black. You can't deny because if everyone is making the same level of noise, and you're only coming up to the black people at the table saying can you keep it down, 100% you've already had. When we walked into that room, you already had this preconceived idea. You stereotyped us, straight away. These are black women, black women are loud, rowdy, whatever you want to call us. I don't know why us talking, that particular sound of our group having a good time eating lunch was just bothering you, it was ringing in your ears more than.. as if we were the only ones in the room.

AMIRAH: And that is exactly what we were trying to highlight, it's the fact that us as black people, it's as if we irritate or is a little bit more annoying, like we're a nuisance to other people.

ZAINAB: Yeah I feel like we're a nuisance. I'm thinking to myself, in that situation I was kind of embarrassed a bit. I was thinking to myself, what are we meant to do, you know. Because we're all friends, are we meant to go out. Because you know, there's eight people. There's a limit to the level of noisiness that we can make. We can't be that quiet if there's a lot of people, do you get me? Even if it's in a big lecture hall, with like 100 and something people there, even if everyone is talking at a normal tone, it's still going to be noisy, do you get me? So I'm like, there's only certain amount of things we can do to be extra quiet just for your own comfort. For us thinking that oh they're going to say something about this so let me not be myself and have fun with my friends. Maybe next time we shouldn't all go in a big group. That's just.. why am I making myself at a disadvantage, making myself at an inconvenience just to suit someone else or just to not have someone come up and embarrass us, talking about oh we're so loud blah blah blah. It's absolutely ridiculous and I'm just like, if it was just us and then she had work to do and stuff like that, I'd 100% understand but it was everything.

AMIRAH: It's the comparison, it's the fact that there was another group of white people, doing the exact same thing you guys were doing and not being given out to.

ZAINAB: It's just really annoying because you're always thinking to yourself, why do I have to think to myself, let me not hang out with these people because we're all black, I don't want them to look at us a certain way and treat us differently because there's a lot of us.

AMIRAH: I've definitely had the exact same experience where I've been in the lecture hall, sitting with my friends who also happen to be black and feeling as if other students/ the lecture was looking at as if we were a nuisance or just going to be causing trouble so I separated myself from them. Why should I have to do that?

ZAINAB: That's what I do in lectures and mind you, I'm not friends with every single body. I'll just go sit and sit by myself because I don't want to be like, because 100% the lectures are going to be focused on your sections because you're all black people. So like why am I saying oh I'm just.. so I don't have to deal with the embarrassment of the lecturer just picking on us.

AMIRAH: That in itself is just a terrible feeling to have to endure, not just once, like regularly, almost everyday kind of. That is just not great and its definitely something Trinity can improve on as a whole.

ZAINAB: Yeah its emotionally draining and exhausting to be honest to have to always think, let me behave like this so then these people... you know and just always thinking and not being yourself. That's the thing, I don't feel included, I feel like I have to act a certain way to be accepted or I have to act a certain way for me to be treated the same as other people. And even when I act that way, I'm still not treated..

AMIRAH: And I'm not enough, it's like you can never do anything to be enough. It's not great.

ZAINAB: That was that situation and one of my friends reported it but obviously nothing.

AMIRAH: That's one of the problems, I also feel like there's also not a clear path on how to report things and who to report it to and then you could just end up ignoring it or forgetting about it and just being like there's nothing I can do about it. But in order for there to be real change, it has to be recorded and there has to be a clear path on how to report things like that.

ZAINAB: It's really tricky.

AMIRAH: Even to verbalise this has been really difficult for both of us because we had to really think about how we were going to say this because all these little things that are happening sometimes it's like, you could just like brush it over your shoulder and just be like oh its nothing but when its loads of little things are happening to you at once or throughout the day or over time it builds up and it becomes something that is noticeably a problem within Trinity and the wider society to be honest.

ZAINAB: So I feel like that ingrained type of stereotype that black people are subjected to, it's like ok some people.. like there are good and bad people do you get me. There are people who have certain traits that they need to change or there are people who cause trouble more than others. The thing with being black is that is if a lecturer had that one terrible black student who caused trouble and was rowdy, everyone is going to be labelled as those traits that that black person who was rowdy displayed so next time the lecturer is going into a lecture he doesn't see these new people as individuals, he only sees them as oh these people are black so then black people do this so I'm going to label this stereotype on this person. But if it was a white person in a group being rowdy or being disrespectful, that individual person is going to get the repercussions for that. They're going to say ok you get out of the class room or you're going to be isolated but if it's one black person causing the trouble, the whole black community gets crucified for it because it's like ok I had that one or two or three or four but that does not explain or characterise every single black person you're going to meet. And even in a group of black people, there could be like one or two that are rowdy but I think they just have tunnel vision and they just see this group of people.

ZAINAB: So another situation that comes into mind is when I was in first year and we were in a lecture hall and the professor made a really insensitive joke that was really offensive to everyone who believed in God. So he was basically making fun of God and that was really offensive to those who believe in God, even the Muslims and the Christians, we all felt really like excluded in that moment in time when he made the joke and it was really just out of nowhere in the middle of the lecture. And imagine we're all just paying attention and the lecturer just says something and it just made us feel really uncomfortable. And a lot of us didn't know how to deal with that at the time like now that I'm thinking back at it, I probably would've stood up and left the class room if I was expecting that but I just wasn't expecting it and it just felt really.. and imagine, this is me going into Trinity in first year and literally one of the first couple of weeks and this happened. I was just feeling really.. I just felt really offended like why would you say that but I just tried to brush it under the carpet so I was just like let me not take this too personally but I feel like lecturers should be more sensitive with the jokes they make and not completely disregard your beliefs in a joke. I know he was trying to make a joke but it wasn't really funny to the majority of people in that class

AMIRAH: Yeah so at the end of the day, everyone's free to have their opinions about things but when it comes to something that's quite subjective and personal then I feel like lecturers shouldn't enforce their opinions on other people and their students aswell because obviously, like you said, there were people who do believe in God and were offended by that and that's not ok that they felt uncomfortable in the classroom and even you reflecting on that you're like oh you wish you could've like just stepped out of the classroom to kind of show the lecturer that this wasn't ok to say because that's the best way you know you could've possibly shown the lecturer that but in the first instance that shouldn't even happen. And also, I guess in that case we'd like for lecturers to be more sensitive and in the case of things that can be deemed as someone's personal opinions, not to like force them on other people aswell because everyone has their own opinions on different aspects of life you get me.

ZAINAB: So how can stereotyping be avoided?

AMIRAH: I think that's a massive question to ask because there are so many aspects involved in it. I feel like one of the major problems one would have in addressing this issue is the fact that something that's so deeply embedded in society that fixing it within Trinity as an institution may actually be difficult because of that.

ZAINAB: Yeah and I feel like it's really hard because in order to avoid stereotyping, you have to reflect on yourself and you have to look within yourself and see what biases do I have? What can I change about my views about this? What can I change about my views about that? You know so I feel like its really hard because it takes every single individual to work on themselves and to not falling into biases and treat people the way they're not meant to be treated.

AMIRAH: Yeah definitely, in this case, introspection is probably the best thing you can do. So you need to look within yourselves and see those things that you are doing that may negatively impact someone from a different background to yours and could change their experience of university.

ZAINAB: And I feel like lecturers have a really big impact on student experience in university. So I feel like if the lecturers can look within themselves and try to notice any of these. And its.. you probably wouldn't know.. unless you actively think to yourself: I am going to proactively try not to do this, I am proactively going to try not to think about these people that way, you might not know you're doing it so I feel like it's just an introspective thing.

AMIRAH: I also think, speaking to those who may have experience in this aspect like those who have been experiencing different biases placed on them because of their race, their religion or their background, I think it'd be really beneficial to ask them about some of the stereotypes that have been imploded on them and basically take from what they say the learning that come from these type of conversations and implement them within the curriculum, within different teaching styles aswell.

ZAINAB: Yeah and I feel like, this goes for every single diverse background, every single individual. The lecturers need to speak to these students and see what they have been through because the scenarios that we expressed are literally just scenarios we've been through. So many other people have been through either the same, less or worse but everyone is still significant. All their experiences are still significant and it's still going to affect them in college life so I feel like, just to ask the students themselves how they feel in order to get feedback and in order to improve the way you organise your classroom, the way you teach in your classroom, in the things you can joke about in your classroom. If you speak and have a relationship with your students, I see that as a very progressive thing to do and I feel like less mistakes will be made in all them like joking aspects or even yourself, you're going to improve on not having these biases against different groups of people.

AMIRAH: I think one thing that's really important to note, is the fact that everyone has a part to play in this like it's not just certain individuals making people from diverse backgrounds feeling like this, it's actually majority of people as a collective. And like we said previously in the podcast, it's all these microaggressions, like little little things that people

are doing over time that build up and then lead to someone like myself feeling inferior or having lack of self-esteem so it's really really important to try your best to kind of notice these little things that you could be doing in your classroom or while you speak to different students, or even within the curriculum and the different reading lists that you provide students with. Different things like that can really impact a person's experience within Trinity.