

Jerwood/FVU Awards 2022 artist Soojin Chang discusses themes relating to their moving-image commission, BXYB, with founder of the Free Black University Melz Owusu.

The conversation explores topics such as transmasculine reproduction, the colonial history of modern gynecology, and the spiritual experience of chronic illness.

Content note: This recording includes discussions of suicide.

Melz Owusu:

Hello. My name is Melz Owusu. I am a PhD researcher at the University of Cambridge in the School of Sociology, exploring different forms of knowledge production. And I'm also the founder of the Free Black University, a project exploring radical education outside of institutions, as well as a Black trans-masculine person who uses "They", "Them" pronouns.

Soojin Chang:

I thought that we could begin by talking about how "You" and "I", we could go separately, got to this point of thinking about expanded kinship, other forms of relating and reproducing, outside the dominant narrative. And I want to be careful about the term, "Dominant" so that we're not reinforcing it by saying it, and we're not in opposition to it.

Melz Owusu:

Yes.

Soojin Chang:

But I do think it's important to acknowledge the dominant system in order to move beyond it, but I don't know how you feel about that.

Melz Owusu:

Yeah, I do agree it is important to recognize that it is dominant or hegemonic. Maybe language of "the normative" may also be workable to give it less power but give it that recognition that it is the societal consensus. And so, when we talk about that as well, just to clarify, I guess we're speaking about heteronormative roots of production within the nuclear family.

Melz Owusu:

My first entry point into reproductive justice was actually learning more about forced sterilization of Black women throughout history. And through my transition process I always say that like, I don't "identify as", I've always been trans masculine, I've always been non-binary or whatever it is. I very much identified as a Black woman for the majority of my life.

Melz Owusu:

And in that experience, understanding that my body was a sight of contestation, that my body had been for centuries, under attack within the society in which we live, and then understanding different reproductive justice movements that are happening now against the reproductive justice of Ethiopian women in Israel. And still, there's questions of reproductive justice across the world and that Black women being at the heart and the center of that.

Melz Owusu:

And so, specifically talking about through slavery, through colonization, the ways in which Black women's bodies had been sterilized or on the other side of that, they were forcibly made to reproduce, and again, just bodies be this site of contestation. And then, through that kind of, mechanism or through that journey, through my transition, I started understanding more about, okay, what is my body now innit? And how does my body function in the reproductive realm? So, I don't want to talk too much. I'll pause it there, but then come back to what trans-masculinity and Black trans-masculinity has made me think about reproductive justice.

Soojin Chang:

For me, I got to this point of thinking about expanded kinship, I think it started with my grandmother and our migration to the West from Korea. And it's not something that I found out about until recently. And it's very possible that I'm also having this reading of my parents' migration. I think there were lots of factors. I think it was economic. I think there were lots of reasons. But I do think that the reason that my father won't go back to Korea is because of a lot of shame that he experienced as a child [inaudible 00:04:20].

Soojin Chang:

Still to this day, in Korean culture, because I'm here now to do a project on surrogacy, and it's this word that people are hush-hush about. But then, everyone has two mothers, like a lot of people. I was working with my assistant for this project and my producer for this project in Korea, and the first day I was like, "Okay. So, I want to do this, this and I want to interview surrogates." And then they were like- they just kind of froze, they were like, "We don't- it's really illegal here, we don't- there's no way we could really access them, no one does it here anymore." Which is not true.

Soojin Chang:

Slowly, through the conversation, it became revealed that both of them also have two grandmothers, and one of them was a surrogate as well. So, I think I'm interested in this generational inheritance of shame, how that corrupts this

opportunity to see power dynamics differently. We could, instead of seeing the surrogate as weaker, this weaker shameful body, instead of seeing this figure as somebody who allowed for ongoingness, right? For life to keep going. And if we honour that, if we could honour that bodily generosity, then power dynamics can shift so much.

Melz Owusu:

Definitely. And yeah, even as you were talking, I was thinking about my own family, and we've recently had new life be born into my family. So, my brother's just had his first child. And we were talking about the language that we use for different members of the family. And so, in the Western culture, I call "my aunt", in my Ghanaian culture I would just call her "mum" innit, and then the child would just call her "grandma" as opposed to "grand-aunt", whereas within this language, within European cultures, there's this kind of separation between the person that gave birth and their siblings even though, collectively we're meant to raise the family, within our cultures, there's no separation in that kind of way. It doesn't matter who's given birth. Everybody has the same level of responsibility for that child.

Soojin Chang:

I think I've also looked to my ancestors to also raise me spiritually in ways that my parents couldn't do because they had to leave some parts of themselves behind. There was also a religious conversion, so they don't speak of spirits. My parents don't speak of spirits. Although, until quite recently, there was a long lineage of ancestral worship in my family and in most families in Korea. But I've been thinking a lot about ancestors and spirits, and I don't know what you think, but do you think ancestors and spirits, once they enter that spiritual realm, they leave their physical body, do you think they become... If we take on the categories of which we live through, do you think they become a different species?

Soojin Chang:

So, I've been thinking about inter-species relations. And for me, it's not just with non-human animals. It's also with spirits, it's also with our ancestors. And therefore, because I think that spirits are always with us, visiting us, possessing us, whatever it might be, then our relations are always inter-species.

Melz Owusu:

Yeah. I definitely agree in the sense that there's a way in which ancestors can definitely raise you. And I do a lot of ancestor veneration in my daily life and in my daily practice. I have my altar, I speak to my ancestors. I might give them offerings and that kind of thing. And it's been interesting as well, the ones that I knew in life, how they show up differently as ancestors. And in ways, I would even say that being unembodied and removing their humanness from the equation has actually made them be better guides.

Melz Owusu:

And so, my dad passed away when I was 15, and now I connect with him as an ancestor. And sometimes, I wonder if he's actually a better ancestor than he was in human form. And I guess, that's probably part of my just acceptance of the fact that he's now gone, and so how can I navigate that? And of course, it's still- I would prefer for him to be in human form, but there is a value of me connecting with him as an ancestor, as a spirit, as a guide in that way.

Melz Owusu:

In terms of the language, different species? Maybe, but I guess I consider species as something material. And maybe that's even my limited understanding or just my different perspective on the language of species. But when I think of a species, I consider something that's matter, do you know what I mean? So, I experience them as just pure divinity, just essence, reconnected to the whole, reconnected to the universe and so, less than being a separate kind of thing, it just allows them to fold into everything, do you know what I mean?

Soojin Chang:

Yeah. All the words that you used also made me think of consciousness, and thinking of consciousness that is beyond matter, right? It's beyond just neurotransmitters from the brain, which is what science and law considers consciousness. Conversing with ancestors reminds me of our always connectedness to that expansiveness, that infinity and divinity. That we hold, right? We're always there. We're all part of that.

Melz Owusu:

Yeah, we are. And even just thinking about us as... So, when I think about multi-species as well, we're within the frame of the English language. And so, when we think about things, we always have to, I guess, caveat it with that.

Soojin Chang:

When we have those words, "inter" is obviously a good one, because it's talking about the connectedness of all of those species, but then "species" again, is a categorization that was created by- in like European enlightenment. Can we let go of the word species in the way that being non-binary, we're letting- do you think being non-binary is letting go of gender?

Melz Owusu:

It's almost both, it's letting go of it and embracing all aspects of it as well. And I guess it's even, what is gender is a very difficult thing to pin down as well. And so, for me, I guess non-binary is just complicating everything is being both... Because I do believe that there is a genuine essence in the universe of masculinity and femininity and whether those are the right words, I feel like we've almost, we've as a society really messed up the words, masculinity and femininity. And we've just, done it all wrong. But I feel there is a divine sense of masculinity and femininity, but that doesn't have to have anything to do with a person's gender. It's just

expression. It's just nature. It's just how the cycles go. And so, with that, my understanding of non-binary or my experience of non-binary is to complicate all aspects of the gender binary and to embrace all aspects as well of masculinity and femininity. And so, I guess with species and considering interspecies, and whether there needs to be any form of separation, I don't know. What do you think?

Soojin Chang:

Well, I was thinking maybe non-binary could also be used for species as well to go beyond species, because I don't know, what does it even mean to be human, right? When the category of 'human', Zaia Iman Jackson, she talks a lot about how the category of 'human' has been built on, creating a spectrum where black people have to hold this spectrum up from the bottom. Because they're brought into the category of the human, but in the lowest, under the spectrum. And so, therefore she would say, "Why would any of them want to be even in association with that category of the human?" Why should it be considered a gift or a big achievement to be considered human? So, I think she was starting that, to talk about how we could go beyond, to abandon it in a way... yeah.

Melz Owusu:

Yeah, no, that's really interesting. And I definitely vibe with it because even our concept of human is just so based on European understanding, both philosophically and biologically of what a person is and what personhood is. And so, moving beyond the category of 'human' and I guess as well, coming again back to this idea of divine consciousness and everything being one, is that we're just trying to find language for things that already exist. And if everything already exists and everything is already there, why do we continue to create almost taxonomies, you read my article on reproductive justice is not just about language. So again, this thing about language, and that came from a frustration of the end of the discussion of trans masculine people. And our reproductive rights being about, let's not just call it "pregnant women".

Melz Owusu:

We need to call it "pregnant people" and all of that stuff. And that stuff is deeply important. However, it runs so much deeper. And I found out, up until I think about 2005 or something, the NHS was almost telling trans-masculine people that if they don't have hysterectomies, that then they're going to experience, they could get cancer et cetera. And then, this science was found to be entirely false. And so, to me that is literally telling people to sterilize themselves out of fear of a baseless science and it's just transphobic really. And so, in that, I was like I don't want to get rid of my womb innit. I want to have children that are biologically related to me and I want to keep my right to give birth innit.

Melz Owusu:

And again, coming from this fact that over history, black women have routinely been denied that, right? And so, where does my body sit in a sense that I have this

ability to give birth, but I exist within a masculine body. And again, this split between my body has the ability to do it, but would I be able to hold it in a sense of dysphoria as well. And so, that's again, a complication. But I really just want to push against this idea that trans-masculine people need to have hysterectomies or need to essentially get rid of all of their reproductive rights in order to be as a part of the transition in it. We all have choices and whilst it's been something that's been pushed onto us, we don't have to do that unless that's the choice that we make.

Melz Owusu:

And I feel it's a very political thing. And moving from this space that trans people shouldn't have children is essentially what I see this reproductive fight to be about. And so, we're telling trans masculine people to get rid of their wombs. And I feel like the underlying narrative of that is that, 'You shouldn't have kids anyway. And why should you want to have children? Or, you should just adopt children as well.' And again, if you want to adopt children, that's a choice. But if you don't, you should be able to give birth to children as well or you should be able to have your eggs taken out and put into a surrogate or all the other different forms of having children that can be had.

Melz Owusu:

And so, just how much I feel the trans masculine womb and reproductive system is such a site of the unknown. And so, it's not considered, it's not spoken about. We're just expected to get hysterectomies, but also such a site, again of contestation.

Soojin Chang:

I also think there's so much areas of dynamic intersectionality here. For example, it reinforces the idea that being a woman is equated to giving birth and equated to reproduction and once you transition, that's supposed to all disappear, right? You're supposed to give it up, right? And that has different repercussions, right? For people who aren't trans as well. And I'm saying it because that area of intersectionality is a reason that everyone should care.

Soojin Chang:

When I read your article, I was telling you that I was reading it coming from a fertility clinic that I was filming in as part of filming the XBY. Because originally, I was going to film the whole process or as far as I can get with assisted reproductive technology, just wanting to know, what was accessible and wondering if I could go to the clinic, they would get my eggs. And I wanted to ask them if I could take my eggs home, right? Do whatever I wanted with them. And I was going to experiment with those eggs in a bio hacking way. And, I was first like, "Okay, the most controversial thing that's going to happen is that they're not going to let me take my eggs home." I anticipated it, which is super strange, right? Eggs are inside of my body yet the moment that they exit my body, when they're extracted, they're

not under my ownership anymore, you have to be a licensed clinic in order to hold cells and eggs, which that in itself still boggles my mind.

Soojin Chang:

But I didn't even get to that point because when they were doing this ultrasound scan, they found huge, ovarian cists in my ovaries. They were so big that, basically I don't have any ovarian function because the cysts are so big. And if and when I go into surgery, they might have to just make a decision while I'm not conscious, that when they take the cysts out, they'll take out all of my ovaries. And so then I would go into early menopause, be on medication for the rest of my life... But all of this, I wouldn't have known if it wasn't for this art funding, right?

Melz Owusu:

That's wild.

Soojin Chang:

It's so wild. I've been in pain since I've had my period and all the doctors have said it was normal. They just wanted to give me birth control. it's always birth control, right?

Melz Owusu:

Ain't that the truth?! That's exactly what they'll do.

Soojin Chang:

When I was reading your article, I went from feeling so alone after the clinic, just this kind of frightening loneliness. If it's your physical internal timeline, it feels so internal. It feels so private. It feels so like, 'No one can actually understand me'. I remember being in the train being like, 'I can't relate to anybody here. This fear and this suffering is so overwhelming.' And then, I read your article and I was like, "Simultaneously with this feeling so alone and so scary, this is so common. It's so common. And if it's not this, it's on a different level in terms of what's hidden from us, what's available to us..."

Melz Owusu:

Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. Thank you. I actually feel really emotional and I'm so sorry that that is the case. And I feel emotional because I just relate so much. And I relate so much to that feeling alone as well, because recently, after I wrote the article, I've been on testosterone for three- coming up to three years later this month and with testosterone, your cycles are meant to stop within three months to one year. And I still have mine continuously. And so, whilst my body is morphing and changing into a completely different visible person, my womb is still in a completely different space. And so, it kind of almost creates this dissonance within myself.

Melz Owusu:

And I've similarly been going to the doctor since I was a child, as soon as my periods began saying, "I'm in incredible pain and this is not normal." And so, it starts off with painkillers and then they tell you to go on birth control and then they tell you to put in the coil. And so, all of these things were- I was doing all of these things and they were literally making it worse and they were affect my men-- nothing in this world affects my mental health as much as birth control pills. And if there's anything that makes me more, not to... I don't know if you'll have to do any content warnings, but nothing makes me feel more suicidal than progesterone anything that has any level of progesterone in. And so, in this attempt to I guess, save me from my dysphoria and save me, they're actually putting hormones into my body that make me want to die.

Melz Owusu:

And so, from extreme levels of progesterone pills and then to the coil, et cetera, finally earlier- at the end of last year, someone was like, "Maybe there is actually an issue with your ovaries or with your womb." And so, maybe we should get some tests done to see why you still continue to bleed because we've tried all of these different things, and had the coil worked and not caused so many mental health issues for me. Oh, sorry. Siri. Haha. Had the coil worked and not caused so many mental health issues or had progesterone pills worked or had any of the above worked, I wouldn't have been referred for any further examinations.

Melz Owusu:

And so, when I was referred to examination, they believed that I have both endometriosis and PCOS. And so, obviously been living with that my entire life. And now, I'm also on the waiting list for a surgery that they go in and have a look and try to cut off the endometriosis, lesions and see what's going on. See whether, what the case of my fertility actually is. And it's been a horrible process. It's been- and a process that I'm still in. And then, on top of that, just how dysphoric it is going into the women's units within the hospitals being questioned about why I'm there, being spoken, continuously being misgendered, even though I look like this or being misgendered in letters and it's such a horrific experience. So, I just really resonate.

Soojin Chang:

Yeah. Yeah. I resonate with that too. I mean, on top of everything, then to be misgendered and to be constantly reminded of your dysphoria. That's terrible. It's not a place for bedside manners to begin with.

Melz Owusu:

It's not, honestly.

Soojin Chang:

And, I was so upset. I mean, So, it's this feeling of isolation. I mean, you have to go through it alone as you're going through it. But then, it's so common because it's



systemic and it's happening on so many different layers and different positions. I was so frustrated when I went in. I paid so much money for this one private appointment and she didn't tell me anything important. And I was like, "Okay, I need to ask some questions, she's an expert." I'm like "Okay, so is it food? Is it genetics? Is it stress? What can they do to just minimize it?" And she laughed at me. She straight up laughed at my face and she was like, "Ha ha ha! It's none of those things, we just don't know how to- there's no explanation for it. There's no explanation." And she didn't give me any advice, and I was like, "You're shitting me if you're saying it's not stress," I could feel myself being in pain when I'm in stress. it exacerbates- it flares.

Melz Owusu:

No, definitely. That's why we have to be our own doctor so often. And that's just something that I've come to peace with. And even when you're saying you were going to the doctor's, as soon as your period start and you knew that you was in so much pain and then you were just fobbed off. We need to listen to those internal voices and the people outside of us, the experts will tell us that there's nothing wrong, but we know that there's something wrong and all we can do is try and heal ourselves as well. And I even think there's a spiritual element to it all as well. And so, one the internal knowing of our bodies and knowing when we're in pain, that there is actually something that's not right. But then also I was talking to a friend yesterday about when I go into... So, I also have PMDD.

Melz Owusu:

And so, when the progesterone in my body is high, the natural progesterone, I naturally just feel really depressed or suicidal. And so, it's an extreme form of PMS. And we were talking about how this cycle hasn't been as bad as others, but it's because in my general life, things are not as bad, just a bit better. And it's almost a time when the veil drops and that's not to say I didn't feel sad. I just didn't feel extremely suicide. And so, whereas, in my day to day life, sometimes I can push away any of the negative feelings that I have, when that cycle comes, it's like the veil drops and I can feel things spiritually as well. I can feel other people's energy like that. I can feel anything that's within myself that I've suppressed like that. And it all just rises to the top. And so, it's given me a way to think about my PMS and PMDD. Less so, from a medical 'you need to get rid of this extreme upset that you feel' into this spiritual, the veil is dropping, what is it here to teach me?

Soojin Chang:

Yes. I also have PMDD and it's so great to hear that especially in moments in moments, in periods where it's not as severe, that you can exercise and practice that porosity that you mentioned and how you can move within that, right?

Melz Owusu:

Yeah. Definitely, trying to. It's all just a process, but literally when I realized that I hadn't felt massively suicidal over the week prior, I was like, "This is new, how did we get here?" And I guess, also just things exercise and making sure that I'm

eating balanced and all of these things of course, suppress the- or support the symptoms. But it's also a lot to ask in racialized capitalism, do you know what I mean? It's a lot to ask to do. And so, yeah it's being able to kind of- well, trying to find ways to connect with the experience of it that are actually more generative. And because it is my experience, this is what I'm living with. It may be what I have to live with for a long time. And so, what is the wisdom within these dark times? And I'm able to see the wisdom a lot more when I'm out of the dark times, but trying to integrate that perspective or that level of consciousness when those times do arise.

Soojin Chang:

That is really helpful to hear. And- that's so helpful to hear. It's hard, It's a lot of work like you said, especially because in systems- It's getting a tiny bit better in some fields, in some industries, but what I'm experiencing is that even if there's access rights, most of the time you have to advocate for yourself.

Melz Owusu:

Yeah.

Soojin Chang:

And it's through trial and error, right? It's like going through those suicidal periods and next time, if you can- and it's, and next time will feel like, "Okay, I'm feeling really, really bad, but I'm going to have to say something for myself." And that in itself is so taxing. We need to keep asking questions to each other about those fluctuating energy levels and thresholds before it gets to the point where that person is so sick that for them to advocate for themselves at that point, it's kind of oxymoron, right? And it's the same thing with NHS, you have to be so sick to be deserving of care.

Melz Owusu:

Absolutely. That's why in my future I'm unfortunately, even though I'm massively on the Left and et cetera, but in terms of the body, I'm really considering whether I need to get private healthcare and even just with my transition and just to be able to, have a private room and things like that. So I don't have to feel this way about my gender and have that expressed and treated in certain ways within the NHS and all of that kind of stuff. And just to be taken care of, because my body is- there's a lot going on, there's a lot going on and I want to survive. I want to fulfill the things that I want to do in this world and I guess it's that question of whether the care that I can receive on NHS is going to be enough and to not have to go and constantly face the dysphoria that I always experience with the NHS because they do not care enough to gender me correctly.

Soojin Chang:

Absolutely. I mean, on top of an operation already being so scary, there's the added awareness like you were saying about the history of medical racism and sexism and that makes it's statistically proven, right?

Melz Owusu:

Absolutely.

Soojin Chang:

But going back to what you said about harnessing transforming periods of porosity, I'll say instead of targets, porosity in a way that's generative, do you have some examples, is it creative for you too? Is it writing? Does that help? For me, I guess making films is a way for me to move through dissociation and to be able to do that dissociation in pieces and be able to step in and out of that porosity into a different scale of porosity has been helpful.

Melz Owusu:

I really don't necessarily even know. For me, I have found that when I'm engaged in my work and my creative process, life in general is just better. And so, but then, whether I'm able to- when I'm experiencing my PMDD symptoms, whether I'm able to engage with my work to the same level that I would like to, is difficult. And because, a lot of my work requires me to be able to sit down and write and to be able to do those things alone. And so, I'm not in movement, I'm not in my body all the time innit, I'm often in my mind. And so, that becomes a difficulty. But I feel like right now, I'm at the stage of trying to understand the spiritual dimensions of the PMDD and- whilst allowing myself to feel the feelings that I'm feeling.

Melz Owusu:

And so, I'm the kind of person that when I'm sad, I'll probably watch something that's going to make me sadder and just process the feelings in that kind of way and see how I feel at the end of it. But again, just trying to find that wisdom, because I think a lot of my life, I can disassociate from my feelings in order to just keep moving and making everybody else around me happy. But when I'm in that state, I can't disassociate from the sad feelings that I have, or in my life, in general, I think I can really easily associate with the good feelings that I have and the things that I'm happy with in life or the people that I'm happy with, et cetera. But when it comes to the PMDD state, I can't disassociate from the things that I'm not happy with.

Melz Owusu:

And just understanding how that impacts my life in general and where I've been scared to make decisions when I'm in that space. Because I'm like, 'This is just an extreme space', trying to find out what the wisdom is. And so, not fearing the feelings, going through the feelings. And also, just recognizing that the feelings have an end. That they're not going to last forever, even though they often feel like they will, that they're going to have an end. And from that end, there's going to be a new level of wisdom for me to integrate.

Soojin Chang:

Because you have to stick through it in this way. There's chronic illness. You don't really have a choice. And for me, for all my dissociation, pain is the only thing that

takes me out of it. And it's to recognize that pain too. And strangely, it only really came after a doctor said it, that I was able to snap out of decades of dissociation that had to do with physical pain, which is something to think about. But now that I'm aware of it and when I do feel the pain, I do feel it wholly right? It's one of the moments where I don't dissociate. You mentioned that there was a part that you couldn't watch, where you had to skip through. I think it's important to talk about that. I'm curious.

Melz Owusu:

Yeah, just some very visceral images. And so, the things with the speculum and I guess, because so many of those images as well, I relate to learning about the early days of gynaecology, and in those early days of gynaecology how black women's bodies were tested on without anesthesia, without care, without respect and how the whole practice of it is just based within the pain of black women. And so, seeing images... and I just found it really difficult to watch and be present with. And I'm also just quite a squeamish person anyway.

Soojin Chang:

No, no problem. I totally hear you on the history of gynaecology, modern gynaecology being based on black women as experimental slaves. I mean, this happened... I'm looking more into if there's a chronological or a theoretical connection to different periods of colonization as well. In Korea, there were Korean sex slaves during Japanese colonization and Korean women were also similarly experimented on and also being forced to gestate. I think a lot of people are also going to have difficulty watching some scenes. I don't know, I feel next time I should just make a film about a flower, just blooming haha!

Melz Owusu:

Haha! Nah! I respected it, I respected it because it's not like anything I've necessarily seen before. So, I was just like, "Wow!" And I hear you about people meant to have difficulties because it's not comfortable subject matter and it shouldn't be comfortable.

Soojin Chang:

I mean, your perspective is quite unique because this is what you think about professionally all the time, but I've been thinking about like, okay so, a woman's anatomy inevitably trigger people on different levels. Like what you said was absolutely valid. For me, I mean, I just make the work that comes to me, right? But in terms of the normative narrative about Asian women or Asian women's experiences. It's quite invisible. And I think that contrast with black narratives where it's like, suffering is so on the main screen, main page, main media of black narratives. And I'm not trying to assume that your work is a response to that in order to bring joy and liberation, to offset that, I think if it is that's really valid. In terms of Asian suffering, I feel it's just not talked about. Asian women are objectified in a different way where it's almost an unspeaking, docile...

And for me I feel like the dominant pop culture narrative that comes out from East Asia is just quite pristine, infantilized, pop figure. And so for me, it was important to show that side of what I was going through, because it was quite totalizing.

Melz Owusu:

My vision for my future is definitely to live in and very close to nature and to live off the land as well. And so, to be by rivers and streams and have land that we can cultivate on and just have love. And I think, in so many ways that love in itself, like romantic love and... obviously to continue to cultivate platonic love and platonic relationships. But sometimes, I think the idea of successful romantic love just feels so speculative, and so... haha!

Soojin Chang:

Yeah, that's the grand, radical..!

Melz Owusu:

Yeah, it's radical! And I guess, because in my family, I've never seen that success in my relationships. I haven't experienced- whilst I've experienced beautiful realms of love in many forms, I haven't experienced the form of love that I would like to have, like get married and have children and continue building a life in that kind of way. And so, that in itself, I think it's so speculative, it has to reside in the imagination because yeah...haha.

Soojin Chang:

Yeah. I mean, I think you're right. I think just, I always- with so much respect to my parents, I always felt so alien being diaspora, being immigrants and being of multiple cultures simultaneously, I always felt really, really alien. And so, my hopes were for something other than being with your nuclear family and that being everything, the end all, it was really a desperate, desperate hope and longing, needing something that was more than that. And then experiencing and receiving, and learning how to love through platonic relationships really liberated me.

Melz Owusu:

I hear that. I hear that. And I guess, people- our engagement with kind of stuff like, relationship, anarchy and different forms of how to love. But of course, then when things come down into practice, things can get a lot more difficult than they do in the theory. And I think for me, I've just really accepted the fact that I traverse so many different boundaries. I'm so- in so many areas of my life, I'm like radical, all of that kind of stuff. But when it comes to romantic relationships, I'm monogamous. And I accept that about myself and I want this kind of- whilst it's still going to be some level of relationship anarchy to the sense that there's still going to be deep, platonic love, and that's going to hold me just as much as the relationship, but in terms of romance, I'm monogamous.

I want one romantic partner that I can build a life with. And that's not something that I'm willing to- that I don't want to compromise on. And there's going to have to be a level of intentionality in that particular relationship. And even though, it is the normative narrative at the same time, it's deeply speculative because I don't see any successful- barely any successful relationships, less so successful queer relationships. Because queer people, we have so much trauma, we have so much pain. And when you show up to the relationship, it's complex.

Soojin Chang:

I see what you're saying. Regardless of how radical our intentions are in most fronts, we are still beings walking through the society that we live in. Having inherited all the systems of it. It's a lot for us to push against it in every single way. And like you're saying, to even embrace the normative is incredibly challenging to embrace. To embrace it is actually radical

Melz Owusu:

It is! It can be. It really can be. It really can be. Because by virtue of existing, especially, I guess as I am a trans masculine person, anything that I do, surviving full stop is a radical act.