



Martha Awojobi – The Assembling – (Pilot)

Transcription

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SPEAKERS

Sarah Wishart, Martha Awojobi

Sarah Wishart 00:29

Since the pandemic, the act of coming together; to connect, with family, in making change happen, or to simply experience a live event has never felt more important. My name is Sarah Wishart, and I'm a filmmaker, and writer. I've also worked for a very long time in the education and charity sector in the UK. Most recently, I've been working on co-production film projects, where affected communities are the people to talk about the issues that impact them. I've talked to a lot of people over the last few years about ideas around connection, co-production and change. And I wanted to start capturing some of those conversations in this podcast. This is that podcast and it's called The Assembling. I'll be talking to a range of people around their thoughts and experience of change making, community (temporary or otherwise), of the importance of connection, basically, about the moments of coming together around events like friendship, protest, activism, or even death. For a pilot episode, I talked to the incredible Martha Awojobi. Martha is CEO of [JMB Consultancy](#), and curator of [#BAMEOnline](#), they dream of a world free of oppression, and are working towards that true alongside the incredible collaborators from all over the world. We started off talking about Martha's anti-racism work in the charity sector in UK but ended up bouncing off a lot of ideas including thinking about activism as radical love, romance and friendship and issues of consent in the idea of community.

How you doing?

Martha Awojobi 01:44

Okay, I haven't started speaking yet, the day, so I just need to practice.

Sarah Wishart 01:55

First time I met you, I think was that around our [Black Lives Matter takeover](#) when I was still at [EachOther](#). And me and [Aaron](#) didn't really want to do a response like a lot of charities had been doing, we wanted it to be meaningful. And so, we set up a month where we got experts from different areas to talk and you talked about, I think charities and the third sector and what was happening. And that was really great content, and it's still on the EachOther website. It's been a while since we talked, I'm now setting up this perspective on coming together to sort of sit alongside my co-production work. Co-



production is something I'm really interested in, in looking at community and things like that. And I can talk about that a little bit in a while. But I want to find out what you've been up to since we last spoke.

Martha Awojobi 02:41

So much. I'm almost, what have I been doing? Life feels exactly the same as it did three years ago. I remember when we met at the EachOther #BlackLivesMatter takeover. And I thought that was so cool. I had such bad impostor syndrome because I was like, Oh my gosh, [Kehinde Andrews](#). Oh my gosh, [Gracie Bradley](#), oh, my God, [Ife Thompson](#) what can I bring to the table? And it's been really cool, actually. Because all three of them I've worked with or like got to know, in different capacities since which yeah, was really, really great. But since then, what have I been up to? So obviously, I was kind of in the process of launching my business when we met. So, this must have been what the summer of 2020. At that time, it was just me, and my laptop - JMB consulting, and I was just doing the #BAMEOnline fundraising conference, the first one. So, three years later, there's now six of us in my team, which is really quite yeah, there's six of us. And we are doing all kinds of things in my organisation. So, we kind of started... it started as a fundraising consultancy, but that only lasted for about five minutes, because the sector had a lot of other plans for me, we're now about do our fourth #BAMEOnline Fundraising Conference, which feels quite surreal, actually, because I've only just done the first one, only just kind of processing being known in the sector, you know. And more than that, I think something I'm really kind of enjoying that's growing, is kind of working out what #BAMEOnline as an entity is going to be and working with my colleague Khadija to kind of build it into a home for anti-racist learning in the charity sector. So, I'm kind of seeing as like there's something between like a library and a media centre, with a YouTube channel, articles, journalism, art, etc, etc, etc. So, yeah, an alternative not a competitor, an alternative to something like [Civil Society](#) and [Third Sector](#) where the focus is really on anti-racist learning, connecting the history of imperialism and the present imperialism with how the logics of the charity sector function. So, all of that has come out of my understanding from working, you know, doing training workshops, one to one's, endless kind of consulting with organisations around anti-racist practice and understanding that people don't even have the basics down. I think people have got used to using a lot of words. Saying words like anti-racism, decolonization. intersectionality. But when you start asking a few more questions, you realise that every single time they pretty much mean diversity. But are getting used to using terminology that's a little bit more complex, but still continuing doing exactly the same material things. And I think for me, I'm trying, I'm begging and pleading with the sector, like through my work to be like, just say what you mean, just say what you're doing, don't cloak this in fancy terminology. Because it's, you know, it's, I think it's a display of power. And also, it's really confusing for everybody involved, and I think makes it quite unsafe for people of colour, who might go to an organisation, and then oh, they're talking about decolonization work, when actually, they're just saying the word 'decolonization' so that they can get funding from funders who are just saying the word 'decolonization', or just saying the word 'intersectionality' without any kind of practice or theory underpinning it whatsoever. So yes, for me, #BAMEOnline is a place for people to learn, and for people to learn about themselves in relationship to White Supremacy, to learn about the history of the charity sector, the history of radical struggle, so that we can learn from that history, rather than repeat it over and over and over again. Other things that I'm doing? A lot of chilling. I'm just chilling a lot, trying my best to, you know, living the ethos of rest. It comes with a lot of guilt. So, I'm processing the guilt that comes with resting, but feeling the benefits because I work a lot less than I've ever worked before. Yet, my output is enormous, actually. And I feel



like the more I rest, the more brilliant I become. And it's just focusing on that and leaning into that rather than feeling guilty that I'm not like, sacrificing every single second of my life and every thought that I have to capitalism. That's where I'm at, in a roundabout way.

Sarah Wishart 07:18

So, I'm gonna, I'm gonna jump in, I've got some questions, but like, there's a whole bunch of stuff that I want to lean into. So, the very first thing I want to pick up is that you said you started as a fundraising consultancy, and then realise that wasn't where it was at? Was that super immediate, or you just weren't getting kind of those questions or that you know, it was immediately gone in a particular direction, which you haven't foreseen.

Martha Awojobi 07:43

Mmm, good question. I mean, for me, it started as a fundraising consultancy, because I put myself in a box, I had been a fundraiser from the age of 18, up until I lost my job in COVID. Right. And I didn't know anything else. And actually, I got kind of really boxed into the idea that, okay, this is what I know how to do. This is the only thing that I have to offer the charity sector. And I feel really grateful actually, that it felt like the sector like I'm keep saying the sector like it's this amorphous thing. But it is, in this case, people in the charity sector who were interested in working with me, were interested in taking a chance on my way of talking about race and racism and my way of understanding what I think a charity's purpose is. So, what happened was I set up this fundraising consultancy. I was having conversations with a few organisations, I got this amazing contract that I'm still it's been renewed over the past few years with a funder called [Unbound Philanthropy](#), and they pay me to deliver a certain amount of days of fundraising consultancy, to smaller organisations, usually ones that are working in and around asylum seeking issues and you know, refugee rights, right? So, I was kind of introduced to my favourite organisation [Glitch](#) through them, Glitch is trying to change the world around the experience of Black people, particularly Black women, trans people and non-binary people who experience online abuse. So challenging tech companies, challenging government, really, really exciting, headed up by [Seyi Akiwowo](#), who I think has been brilliant. So, I was kind of doing a little bit of fundraising consultancy, but then my first, one of my first gigs as a consultant was curating #BAMEOnline, the first conference for people of colour in the charity sector to really understand what it means to create diverse, transformative fundraising strategies, right? Particularly thinking about what that means from a racial justice perspective. So, I was commissioned by [Fundraising Everywhere](#) to curate this conference in 2020. This must have been around like May or June time, so I just launched my consultancy on the first of May. So, by the end of May, I'm curating this conference. I've never done this before. And I was like, Oh my God, but the way I speaking of coproduction, the way I went about curating this conference was, I went to speak to loads of, you know, leaders who were in smaller Black and Brown led organisations, I spoke to loads of fundraisers who are people of colour, and to ask them what they wanted from a conference that really represented what they were interested in, that spoke to some of the challenges that they experienced, that kind of decentred whiteness for once. And they were a lot more interested in a conversation about institutional racism. You know, at this time, George Floyd had been murdered, Black Lives Matter, had kind of, you know, made a resurgence, the charity sector was being kind of really challenged by organisations like [Charity So White](#), like [The Racial Equity Index](#), like, you know, [Resourcing Racial Justice](#), all of these things were kind of springing up. And I think it was the perfect time for people to come together. And to learn, to celebrate the fact that change felt like it was on the



horizon. To mourn, people of colour in the UK were disproportionately dying from COVID at the time. There was a lot going on, you know, and it actually became like, a space that was so beyond what I had envisioned for it what Fundraising Everywhere had envisioned for it, because we needed it, rather than just wanting it. We needed this place to heal, grieve, celebrate, etc, etc. So made this conference. 6000 people bought tickets, which was wild. I know. I was like, it would be great if we could get 200 people to go. Yeah, yeah, because we did, we bought, we did like organisational tickets, as well. So large organisations were booking places for their entire staff team, like it was really, really cool. And my co-host is from the British Red Cross, they brought all of their team, like their entire staff team. And I guess like that, I mean, it changed my life, pretty much. I was nobody. And then suddenly everyone knew who I was right? Like, not like I was nobody, like obviously I'm somebody I was important before. But nobody knew who I was, then lots of people knew who I was. And lots of people came to the space expecting to feel drained. And expecting to feel like okay, this is really important, but it's going to be really exhausting. And actually, people felt energised, they felt excited, like, they might have been crying, but it was crying from like joy. I was crying, I was crying for so much of the conference, like it was just such a big kind of emotional moment. So, I think some you know, some leaders are like, oh, actually, this person is able to talk to us about race in a way that makes us feel inspired in a way that makes us feel excited in a way that makes it feel relevant to us, we want to work with them. So, I started getting booked to do like anti racism training, and never done it before. You know, it was kind of cool. Like, I'm not a trained trainer. So, like really just like pulling together lots of bits of my personality to kind of share with my clients. I started being asked to find like, leaders - people of colour for organisations like Comic Relief, Stonewall, to help them with their recruitment processes, and it was just like, people would just say, hey, we have this problem, do you think you can fix it? And I would say, I have no experience fixing this problem in this way. But I think I could, if you're willing to take a chance and experiment with me, then let's work together, knowing that we might not get the outcome that we want, but we're probably going to have a good time. And that's kind of how I was, you know, bringing in clients and growing my business, trying things out working out what we liked what we didn't like, eventually, we stopped doing recruitment, because I was like, I'm not sure that I'm bringing people of colour into safe environments. But yeah, so yeah, it was just, I mean, I didn't have a business plan. I was just like; I don't have a job. So, I need to do something. And then, you know, two and a half years later, I wrote my strategy for my organisation. And it's become Yeah, a place where people come to learn and have fun at the same time. Like we put the fun back into anti-racism.

Sarah Wishart 14:00

So, you've got a conference coming up?

Martha Awojobi 14:01

Yes. So, the next one is on July 27, which is quite soon. Yeah, I'm looking forward to this one. It's been great having a team working on it alongside me, I normally get really tired while I'm doing it. But it's been really, really wonderful. This year, we are asking the question "[Can the revolution be funded?](#)" It is, I guess, a response to the provocations from [INCITE](#) who wrote '[The revolution will not be funded](#)'. In I think 2007 (And I keep saying 2007, and I'm not quite sure whether it's 2007). And rather than being kind of definitive, the revolution will not be funded. I like well can it be? And if it can be, how? And if it is going to be do we need to rethink what we mean by funding and do we need to think about resourcing instead, or maybe, you know, maybe INCITE were right, all along, right, but I'm just really curious to



kind of see what the UK thinks about this. And to yeah, to make it more of a curiosity rather than a , like a statement. No offence to INCITE. I love their work. Not like they're gonna be listening right now! And there's two tracks. One is about funding. The other is about the revolution, we're going to be talking about oppression Olympics, we're going to be talking about reclaiming anti racism from the jaws of equality, diversity and inclusion. We'll be talking about revolutionary love, radical imagination, black feminist funding. This is a very Black feminist version of being online, as I've been kind of curating. And I'm looking for my, you know, speakers that I think will really elevate the conversations and make it kind of more urgent, yet at the same time, more thoughtful and measured and considered and joyful. It is black women, who, you know, are really doing this work and doing it really, really well. So, a lot of the speakers this year have black women more than we usually have. And I'm really excited for that. I also know that people will have a lot to say, but I'm going to be kind of talking about why Black feminism is the kind of thread that runs through the whole conference as we go through. And I'm really excited, like as a Black feminist myself, like, it's nice to be able to, I don't know, like, yeah, come through for my people, in many ways.

Sarah Wishart 16:15

And I've got to ask, are there gonna be any funders? There? Speaking about the Yes, yes, yeah,

Martha Awojobi 16:22

yes, yes, there usually are funders. We've got one session that is just about the Black feminist funders. So, we have [Black Feminist Fund](#), with [Decolonizing Wealth](#) and [Project Tallawah](#) from the UK, who are all going to be speaking about kind of why Black feminist frameworks are so important when we're thinking about funding and when we're thinking about kind of reparative justice. I'm just trying to think of who else we'll have. We're gonna have somebody who works at [Blagrave Trust](#). And first, I'm looking for the speaker's list now. There are I mean, usually we do have at have a few new funders, which is really, really great. I think what I found quite interesting is, even though this is a conference that is really kind of focused around funding and how money moves, it is never really the funders who show up. Right?

Sarah Wishart 17:14

That's kinda why I asked.

Martha Awojobi 17:16

For their sins! But we'd get as times gone on and we built a more and more of a reputation more and more funders are coming through like this year we're sponsored by [Joseph Roundtree](#). Which is. Yeah, that's cool. I'm just like actually, also by [Corra Foundation](#), Corra Foundation are based in Scotland

Sarah Wishart 17:34

I've had something to do with them, with the documentary, they've got groups that have been screening it in different kind of places.

Martha Awojobi 17:41

They're really cool. Like, there is someone there who has been really supportive of our work. And it's just been quietly pushing through the agenda for Corra Foundation for a really long time. So, they're



also a sponsor, and they were a sponsor last year. And I think that that's kind of helping more kind of funders see the value in it. We do have funders come as individuals; we don't have funders.... Actually, tell a lie. I'm making stuff up last year, we had like [Impact On Urban Health](#), come and like, bring quite a few of their staff. But what I think is quite interesting is does it really matter if funders are there, because when we think about how change has been won, it's not by the people who are holding the seat of power, it's by those who may have been felt as though they were powerless. Those who are in the grassroots, those who are, you know, not visible when we're talking about kind of what the sector, you know, the kind of identity of the sector, which is pretty much you know, middle class white women. It is the people who have the most to lose who topple oppressive systems, and it's about them coming together and demanding better and taking power. So as much as I'm like, 'Ah, funders aren't coming'. So, what you know, actually, this is about us. This is about us kind of taking back our own power. But you know, they do come like not in droves. But I haven't necessarily had like a strategy for like getting all the funders there. This year, I thought about having a strategy, but suddenly we're two months before the conference is like, oh, okay, well, maybe next year. But yeah, it's definitely been really interesting seeing the shift in who comes we have a lot of organisations kind of buy bulk tickets for their staff teams and actually quite a lot of international development organisations, which is something I find quite interesting. I've always stayed away from international development. I've never worked in international development. I don't even like critique it too much because I don't know the mechanisms so well. But I work with two people that do, and actually the work that kind of [Jon Cornejo](#) has done for us and the work that [Khadijah Diskin](#) does, Jon does the kind of the more practical like workshop -y, helping people transform their organisations and Khadijah does the very kind of understanding imperialism and understanding International Development as a part of imperialism. So, yeah, we get we get large, large international development organisations do like to come, which is a bit of a surprise to me. So, if you're listening, we sell organisational tickets.

Sarah Wishart 20:17

Where can people find out about this?

Martha Awojobi 20:20

They can find out on JMB consulting website, on Fundraising Everywhere's website or [Everywhere Plus](#)'s website, Everywhere Plus is our sponsor, they've been our sponsor for the last four years they run the tech in the background and make it into a really kind of luxurious and cool experience because otherwise we'd just be with me on Zoom being like 'everybody makes sure you're muted'. They can also kind of check out our Twitter we haven't been online too. So, we also have a big online Instagram. I'm not really on Instagram. So, you'll see for yourself on that one. And yeah, just like anywhere where like cool stuff is happening in the charity sector

Sarah Wishart 20:57

I'll make all the links available when this comes out. So, this is yeah, my new thing really, I'm I've gone freelance after being made redundant earlier this year. And I'm looking at doing a lot of stuff around coproduction. And I'm therefore really interested in expanding and thinking about working together, people coming together to make a difference coming together to create something build community, I guess. The new website will be www.theassembling.co.uk This kind of focus offers an opportunity to talk about activism, talk about community and it's a good wide remit. I'm kind of interested in the "whole



good trouble, necessary trouble" quote from John Lewis. Okay: Good trouble necessary. trouble is not only okay, but necessary to enact and inspire meaningful change". So yeah, I want to sort of like think about that and community. And if you've got any perspectives on it in relation to your work, or anything really.

Martha Awojobi 22:13

Hmm, a little bit for me, is who gets to decide what's trouble? You know, I personally feel like I may be considered to be a troublemaker in the charity sector. Absolutely fine. Although I don't believe I've done anything particularly troubling. I have organised conferences. I have written position papers. I have spoken as keynotes. But what is this trouble that people are talking about? If anything, I think the shady stuff that goes on in our sector is the real trouble, right? So, I guess I've never I've never reflected too much on this phrase apart from in relation to my ADHD. Because when I was at school, I was always known for not being I was in trouble, you know, being disruptive, let's say. So, I'm kind of disruptive by nature. And that is because I literally can't help it. I just don't help it. It's quite funny, kind of the same things that were leveraged that me in school; disruptive, doesn't know when to shut up, just you know, annoying, not annoying everyone, but like, messing with the status quo is exactly what I should have been doing all along. And I kind of got to kind of feel vindicated. That school is so oppressive anyway. You know, I remember when I was young must have been in year five or six. I'm like 10, at this point. And I led a campaign to change the uniform regulation, because I wanted to wear trousers, because I wanted to do cartwheels. I was like I want to do cartwheels all the boys are doing them. I don't want to show my knickers. I didn't realise that it was actually like, having my first kind of foray into my relationship with my gender through this kind of prism of trousers. So, I guess yeah, I think I've always been like, you know, a troublemaker, but I don't really want to call it trouble. Because what I'm looking for is freedom and like, liberation, you know, so I. Yeah, it's, but what I what I am inspired by and people might not like this, but I'm inspired by like, the [Just Stop Oil](#) stuff that's going on at the moment, like absolutely inspired by it. That I think is real trouble, like going out on the streets and doing kind of, you know, not just kind of protest but direct action. That I think is the coolest shit, right? I'm, I'm a wimp. I'm afraid. People might think I'm like a badass or whatever. But I'm afraid to do that. Like even I'm too scared to go outside of the frameworks that have been offered to me for my sins. You know, I sometimes feel a bit like yeah, embarrassed stuff like I still use the master's tools, I still use the terrain that has been kind of given to us, maybe I might tinker with it a little bit and make it accessible to everybody take it away from being behind a paywall. But yeah, I think the people who are going out there like putting their like bodies online are some of the coolest people out there like, and, and I don't really have the excuse of like, oh, if I get arrested, like so, like, that's gonna ruin my life. It's not I run my own business like is actually not? Because I don't

Sarah Wishart 25:33

I like this, you know, that sort of thing. I mean, I like the contrast of the two words necessary trouble, right, that there's no, that you have to do something that the situation is such that you've got no choice that you're, you know, compelled to do something. And I think that's really interesting. And I also have been somebody who's, I think I've been known as some of the charities I've worked for as a naysayer. Because I question and I say, well, why are we doing this project? And, you know, why are we taking that money? Or why are we going down that direction. And I agree with you, I'm also a very nervous sort of protester, I get very panicky about and so I'm really, I agree with you, I'm really envious of



people who, like weighed in, and I think that what they do is incredible. I've seen footage this week of like, Just Stop Oil and being, people walking in the street being attacked by members of the public and the police not weighing in. Yeah. And, and, but that it does afford change. You know, I watched the documentary recently about the, the [anti-opioid protests, led by Nan Golding](#) protesting against the Sackler family, and those protests, that same sort of thing being at the Tate being in these different places, trying to get our institutions to stop being funded by this family, you know, that came off, they have stopped. So, you know, I think it gets dangerous when they do impact kind of, like change like that, I think, I think that was when they started looking really, and it's been interesting that those kind of interactions have gotten a lot of press recently, like, you know, they're really trying to push the, 'this is really out of order, these people should be arrested'.

Martha Awojobi 27:17

And when, when we look back on this in the future, we've still got the same messed up media system that we have, they will talk about how these organisations created change, but they won't talk about how they disrupted traffic. How they were an absolute nuisance, how they were like, thoroughly, luckily, like everything's recorded now. And like, even the work of like [Palestine Action](#) that are doing these kinds of like stunts that are literally stopping weapons from, from being able to kind of, you know, be traded, I think it's just like, so, so incredible. But again, it's that, and I get that people want to like, blame words and be like, yes, like, this is necessary trouble, etc, etc. But like, for me, like, that's revolutionary love, like that is love in action, you know, and I don't really see it as trouble. So, I struggle with that like terminology. I think that if we reframed what people who are engaging in direct action are, they're loving us, they are loving the planet, and they are putting themselves on the line so that we can have the future that we all deserve. Right. Yeah, I'm trying to bring love back into it, you know, a really like militant form of love. Like a love that isn't like a wishy washy kumbaya nonsense. A love that is literally like, I guess, a life-or-death kind of, kind of thing. Not to be dramatic,

Sarah Wishart 28:38

I love that concept. I mean, it's what I say about love all the time. It's a verb. It's not what you say, you're gonna do, it's what you do. Right? So yeah, I love that idea of militant love. That's, that that's the action

Martha Awojobi 28:50

100% I keep coming back to [bell hooks'](#) work, and I feel like, yeah, you're right, loving action, but I want to, see love from like, this embarrassing-ness and, you know, bring it, make it cool again. And like, I look at the 70s. And it was just love, love, love, love, love. And like now, even just like to say you love your friend is just like some there's something so cringy and corny about it. And I think that's intentional, as well, you know, so that we aren't able to form bonds of empathy and solidarity with each other that are rooted in love. We're much more comfortable talking about care and talking about community than we are talking about love. I don't know if it's because it's scary because of what it demands of us. Because I think love demands of us to turn away from capitalism.

Sarah Wishart 29:43

I was just about to say that I was talking to somebody recently about friendship, right? I really got a fascination about it. And they said, it's the only thing that can't be fiscally categorised. Or the



government has no capacity over friendship like marriage and marriage as an institution and there's laws around it, and there's finance around it. And it is still very much embedded within capitalism, friendship, not so much. There's no legal aspect around it. It's the one area where it's outside of things. And as a result, feels really, I don't know, revolutionary in that space, in being widely capable of different kinds of definition, different kinds of ways of us thinking about it.

Martha Awojobi 30:26

I really agree with that. And I think the more I reflect on what it means to be to love and to form relationships, I always focus on my friendships, because I'm just like, those are the ones where we choose each other, and we meet each other as equals, in many ways, you know, yeah, there's always going to be structural advantage happening within friendship groups, but I often use my friendships as a way to like, measure the other parts of my life. Like, what I allow a friend to treat me like this. Would I show up for a friend like this? Would you know, and I'm, like, wildly romantic with my friends, like wildly? Yeah, like, I'm literally that I would die for you. They mean so much to me. But they've also been the terrain on which I practice being a person, right. And I've learned how to love, properly. Because you're right, like, there isn't so much Clore literature about, how to be your friend and how to be like the perfect friend and how to win a friendship and blah, blah, blah. And it is right, it really, I have there's two friends in particular that I'm thinking of Chanelle and Rajane, who are in this friendship group together. Whatsapp group, Signal group. Now because I'm paranoid. We're all getting on signal; the government is not listening to my conversation. But in the last like, six or seven years with them, like we have all grown so much, and we have given each other like permission to force each other's growth in many ways. And I think I learned I've learned how to communicate my boundaries, through my friendship with them. I've learned how to ask for help. Through my friendship with them. I've learned how to I guess I live with myself, in many ways, right. And it's really interesting because I know you wanted to talk a little bit about community. And then I think I got community wrong for a really long time. But what it what it was, I thought it was just like people that looks like me, maybe people who had like shared interests or people who, you know, have the same romantic or sexual orientation to me. And I had a conversation with my colleague, Khadijah who was like community is about consent, you consent to be in community with people, right? You know, it's like, it's a relationship of consent, where we agree to show up for each other, you can't be in community with someone who hasn't agreed to be in community with you. And I think that took the pressure off so much, because in 2020, right the Black community, like everyone's in community with each other, we all have to hold each other to account and that's where you have like, random people I've never met in my life telling me that they want to hold me to account for some shit, that's irrelevant to me a lot of the time on Twitter, etc, right? And ever since having that conversation with Khadijah and really being like, oh, actually, like the community that I have on my friends, and the people that like I want to, you know, be like side by side with, when the revolution comes, if it does come, it is happening anyway. And it is the people that I'm side by side with, the people that I'm in the trenches with, for want of a better word. And actually, like bell hooks, and Chanelle and Rajane have, like showed me what it means to be in community and what it means to show up every single day, even when you don't feel like it, which is, you know, which I think has just been so freeing. Like, I don't feel like I have to be accountable to the entire, every single fucking queer Black person in the world, which is what I thought was the thing.



Sarah Wishart 34:12

I really love this because I think I had thought that community was something external, something I entered into something that was like, exactly what you're saying, these groups that I was attached to in various kinds of ways. Whereas actually, if I think about it, in terms of the people that I'm working with the people that I'm, you know, choosing to be with her choosing to be with me, and, and I'm already there, I'm already present, I don't have to kind of go external to anything.

Martha Awojobi 34:40

100% It's a relationship of trust, like how can you enter into a relationship of trust if one of you doesn't know that you're in the relationship? And that has made me so much more intentional, and also so like, much more relational? And I think because capitalism and these, you know, White Supremacy etcetera, like breaks down these bonds of kind of relationality. And like solidarity between us. Of course, you're just saying that any person that you're standing near is in community with you, because you're just two individuals' part of this, like a wider like set of individuals. But now, I'm like, okay, so if I want to work with someone, if I want to struggle with someone, I've got to get to know them, I have to make the effort, I need to understand who they are, like, what we have in common, what is shared, what their tactics are, how their tactics kind of complement my tactics, what we'd have in common, what we have that's different. And that requires a lot of investment. Like that requires like, getting to know somebody, talking to them, eating food together, sharing each other's hopes and dreams, getting romantic, in many ways, not in the way that people might be thinking. I mean, like, you know, in the cool, like, political way. And, yeah, in many ways, that's been absolutely freeing for me. And it's taken away a lot of the, I think, anxiety that I have, that I'm not measuring up. Because I'm like, who am I accountable to? I'm not accountable to random people on Twitter. I'm accountable to my community, to the people who've said, we are in this together. And that's really, really helped me to be like, I know which direction I'm going in. I know who's got my back. I know what is expected of me from this group of people because we've agreed it together. And that is so much better than like, feeling like you're under kind of sacrificial altar of like the court of public opinion. I know, fuck what people think I care about what my community needs. Right? And that's been a huge shift for me over the last like three years. And it's such a welcome change in perspective as well. So yeah, I say that it's been the last six months that's the big 'Ah ha' moment.

Sarah Wishart 36:51

That's amazing. I love all this. I'm gonna be Yeah, really thinking about it. I particularly like the idea that not just love is like something that you want to reclaim but romance, like the concept of the romantic/planning/futures/connection, like how we're supposed to communicate, what we're going to do better, you know, that that's romantic, and it is.

Martha Awojobi 37:13

100%. And I think that's been, and maybe it's just for me, like I'm a big I'm a big (people might not know this about me, but I'm super romantic, right? I'm, like, so romantic. It's embarrassing, like, I can't help it). And when people talk about making a change, and making like revolution irresistible for a big romantic, like, it's got to be romantic for me, someone's work who I love, is [Bolu Babalola](#). Right, who writes loads and talks about kind of, like, you know, sitcoms, and like romantic comedies and talks about them from very kind of political perspective. And it's just like, really reclaiming that romance. Right. And that we



just deserve that. And I think because all these words; 'romance/ love', I wouldn't even say wouldn't maybe say 'community', but it's been , you know, shoved into the realms of embarrassment. And we should be focusing on getting that money, having side hustle all of that stuff that I don't like, it makes me want to vomit. Like I'm of love, so put, so bringing, bringing the things that I love into the things that like I need and what matters to me, and it has been so important. And yeah, I do think that anti racism and anti-oppression is romantic. Like, is it like you said, like building a beautiful future, right? Like, [Audre Lorde](#) talks a lot about kind of the erotic in kind of this work. And I'm gonna start thinking a little bit more because I'm only just talking this out loud. Like, I don't normally talk about the romantic side of anti-racism? This is I'm really making me think about how do I kind of, you know, how do I articulate like these, these two things together? And why I enjoy doing this work so much because it's hella romantic to me. You know? Yeah,

Sarah Wishart 39:10

That's incredible. That is really incredible because it is about building an amazing future is like that's what otherwise why?

Martha Awojobi 39:17

Why I'm doing it together. Right? You know, I'm doing it together. Like even talking about it. I'm like, my heart is singing. People are learning a lot about me right now.

Sarah Wishart 39:33

So um, who else do you think is doing well, and good work in this sort of area that you're looking at and you're going I want to work with them, or you are already working with them?

Martha Awojobi 39:43

Um, I It's never been a large organisation I'm very sorry, large organisations, you're all doing a terrible job. But small, smaller ones. I mean, I love the work of the [Good Ancestor Movement](#). And so, this is Stephanie Brobbey's work. And she has managed to somehow bridge the gap between some kind of very grass roots transformative revolutionary frameworks and private wealth. She practices as a private wealth lawyer, and is now helping rich people get rid of their money, right? Doing that through the lens of reparative justice. I love it. I absolutely love it. Right. And it's sitting alongside my work working with funders, and she does a lot of work with funders. But I really love how practical it is, she understands the private wealth system, you know, and the same with [Decolonizing Economics](#), like they understand the private wealth system. And instead of it being a really aspirational reparations, Kumbaya, etc, they're like, oh, no, these are the actual practical steps that you can take in order to get rid of your money in order just to kind of you know, create. Yeah, I think her work is really, really cool. Healing Justice London, I really, really, really love [The Free Black University](#) as well. I mean, there are so many organisations. So recently, I would say an earlier that I was I've been working with smaller organisations through Unbound Philanthropies, there's a few that I've worked with and I'm just like 'Oh, wow'. If everybody could understand this, we would all be free. I've been working with [Love and Power](#) who are supporting to train feminist organisers within their communities, and [Act Build Change](#) doing kind of similar work like kind of training organisers, and I think, you know, that's the future, I love [Civic Power Fund](#) as well. I think they're really, really, really cool. They're like one of the only funders I'm just like, okay, like, they're alright! Recently, I've been working with my favourite organisation, which is



[Migrants in Culture](#). Yeah, they're so cool. Oh, my God, I worked with them and Civic Power Fund together for this event. And it was just like, the most magical day, you know, of just having these very distinct groups of people come together. Something I love, I don't quite understand, and I think that's why I love it, is the power that the arts has to transform political imagination. I went to university to study politics, right, so I'm very bookish about all of this shit. And the written word, again, a tool of white supremacy, but it's been very much drilled into my head that way. And I'm like, jealous and in awe of how the arts, you know, drawing, music, poetry, all of that, has the power to unlock revolutionary spirit in like everybody. So, like working with Migrants In Culture, and like, the way they kind of dance around the unexplainable they move. I can't even I can't explain it because it can't be explained by words. You know,

Sarah Wishart 42:56

I'm working at the moment. I mean, this is my background is like live art and performance and the capacity to be in space, with bodies, physical bodies in a space raising questions, challenging audiences, the impact that kind of work has, I think, is just fascinating. I'm just doing some work for a live art festival in Glasgow called [Take Me Somewhere](#) and very exciting performances that are gonna come out in the autumn. So, I hear you as to its power, really.

Martha Awojobi 43:26

Yeah. I mean, I'm always sneakily trying to get closer to the arts. I'm creative, but like, not in that kind of way. I'm gonna

Sarah Wishart 43:32

I'm going send you invites to like all the stuff. Come and crash in Glasgow.

Martha Awojobi 43:38

I see I sit on the board of [Complicite](#)

Sarah Wishart 43:40

I saw that! They were one of the reasons I got into performance!

Martha Awojobi 43:45

I think they're so cool. Like, obviously, because I'm on the board. And yeah, it's been it's been really, really great. Because it is, I don't know, I feel like all of the big moments in my life when I've like truly enjoyed things and I've truly felt connected. There haven't been words involved. You know, it's the one that the one of the most transformative experiences for me like it's so random, but I was a teenager, and I went to go see the Whirling Dervishes. I literally had like a spiritual epiphany in silence. And like, it was just like, unforgettable. And it's those kinds of older ways of connecting, like old. It's getting me going ahhhh

Sarah Wishart 44:25

Like all my favourite things, friendship, activism and performance! And maybe I'm gonna end every single one of these podcasts with like, what your favourite performance is. So, you've just set that ball in motion, like, you know.



Martha Awojobi 44:39

I go to the theatre, like all the time, there's one Theatre in Manchester, the [Contact Theatre](#) and I recently went to see the [Cocoa Butter Club](#), which is a cabaret show, which is all people of colour, performance, right? And I saw this pole dancing performance that moved me to tears. Who would have thought, who would have thought I am there crying thinking this person. I was also in the back as well. And I was like, it's just me and her in this room, like, and I'd never seen anything so unexpectedly beautiful, right? And it's always in these moments where like, I'm not expecting to be like moved that I'm truly moved to tears, you know the Whirling Dervishes I was on a school trip. I was just like, trying to be cool, you know, like buying fags and secretly smoking there and the teachers can't know that we're all drinking in our room. And next thing you know, I'm having this like spiritual experience. I helped me reconnect with my mum. You know, maybe it's like coming back to that romantic, you know, it is? Yeah, it's, it's been really interesting like coming back as an adult to basically all of these ways that we understand the world as a child and honouring the child in me because I don't think I'm an adult, I think I'm just a child trapped in this adult looking sack of flesh. And what it means to you know, be a child, it does come back to love, joy. And it's just been so nice finding my way back. I feel like everybody loses their way like we're kind of forced to. But I feel very fortunate that I just found my way back home to my seven-year-old self, basically.

Sarah Wishart 46:35

Oh, I love this idea. And what a great way to finish this off. I can't believe just we've just talked about all my favourite things like

Martha Awojobi 46:45

because everyone wants to talk about it. We all want bloody love and romance. Let's stop pretending.

Sarah Wishart 46:51

Like putting it in that bloody box over there.

Martha Awojobi 46:54

It doesn't have to be the heterosexual version of love that results in marriage. But there is something about claiming love and you know, romance on your own terms. And I feel like yeah, I'm getting there. It's fun. It's fun to talk about it. I feel

Sarah Wishart 47:12

It's really fun to talk about it. I love this.

Martha Awojobi 47:15

Thank you. Me too. Thank you. Thank you for allowing me to talk about my feelings.

Sarah Wishart 47:22

Didn't really "Allow", you know, just here is your space! Amazing. Well, I will light up the conference and put all the kind of details in and yeah, what is it did you say the 27th of July



Martha Awojobi 47:38

27 of July at 12pm. But you don't have to be there on the day because if you buy a ticket, you'll have access to the content for 30 days after. Last year, we gave people access for 90 minutes because we generous so we might do the same again this year.

Sarah Wishart 47:53

I will see if I'm available, I feel like I need to come along and listen to all this. So

Martha Awojobi 47:59

We will be talking about love and romance.

Sarah Wishart 48:01

Yay!

Martha Awojobi 48:03

You've got me started now I can't stop. I'm itching like I need to talk to somebody else about love now.

Sarah Wishart 48:10

Have a great Friday and thank you for talking to me.

Martha Awojobi 48:15

Thank you for having me on the show. I will speak to you soon

Sarah Wishart 48:20

Take care Martha. Thanks for listening to the latest episode from The Assembling. Keep up to date with us via the website www.theassembling.co.uk or follow us wherever you listen to your podcasts. Music was by [Charles Ballas](#). Thanks for listening