



Healing in Marginalized Communities

Guest: Dr Jad Jaber

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[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow

Hello and welcome back to this conference. My name is Jaï Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. Today I am very pleased to be welcoming Jad, welcome.

Dr Jad Jaber

Thank you, Jaï. Thanks for having me.

Jaï Bristow

Thank you for joining us. You're the founder of Marginalized Majority. Do you want to tell us a bit about what that is?

Dr Jad Jaber

Marginalized Majority is a registered nonprofit in Canada. We're a national nonprofit, but we also work globally with Global South communities all across the world. We are a nonprofit that has a beautiful journey, but unfortunately a sad founding story. I founded the nonprofit during the beginning part of the pandemic, we had lost one of our members, Sarah Hegazi, in downtown Toronto.

A lot of immigrant folks, refugees and asylum seekers that were queer, were arriving in this part of the world, but the follow up on what happens once they arrive was not being considered. It was almost like, come, come here for safety, but then what happens when you're here? When Sarah passed away, a lot of my fellow community members were on suicide watch were having real rough mental health related issues. I felt that if I didn't create something to heal myself, or heal my community, I was going to get really hurt, and I was going to be in a very unsafe space.

I remember just telling my Mom that, hey, I'm going to register a nonprofit organization. I collected a couple of contacts, and registered this nonprofit, when really I was in the most vulnerable point of my life, and I had no one and nothing, no resources. When I registered the nonprofit, I didn't want to do the... I'm going to use the colonial mistake of presuming what people want and need. I wanted to decolonize the system from the start.

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So I ran these large-scale community consultations where more than 1000 people showed up at different times, and each of them had an idea, we need this, we want this, we feel that this is futile, we don't want any more of this. I'm a postdoctorate researcher, so I do a lot of data collection and analysis. I collected all the themes, and then analyzed them, grouped them, and created a programming, and then named the organization.

Once I did that, I created the human resources model and the business model of the organization. I then reshared again through community consultations, and they decolonized everything again, so even the hierarchy of the organization, the organization hierarchy was turned into a circle influenced by indigenous elders' wisdom. The names of the organization, we no longer have anything like an employee or director even, we use the terms conduit, because we just pass knowledge. And even the board of directors, they're called the board of wisdom.

We decolonized the language because the community was critical. They're like, how are you creating a decolonial project when you're still calling yourself leader, when you're still saying there's a CEO, when you're still compartmentalizing, like creating compartments and departments in the organization. That's how we created Marginalized Majority, which was completely created from the community, for the community. And we do this every year. So every year we listen again, we're like, what do you want? We don't want to presume.

Jaï Bristow

Wow, it's fascinating. We have a trauma conference coming up, and as part of that I'm interviewing Melissa Douglass about trauma in organizations. We're talking about that, about how do you create real change in organizations from the systems up? I really appreciate that you're modeling that. You're not just talking about it in theory, but you've actually created this organization, this not for profit to support people.

For people who are unfamiliar, maybe we can define some of the terminology you used. You talked about Global Majority. I think you use Global South perhaps as well. And you're talking a lot about decolonizing. Do you want to just explain a little bit about what those mean?

I did my postdoctorate in feminist economics, and a big portion of it was related to power within knowledge production. We hear knowledge everywhere, and knowledge has power inherent in it, and the way you identify that power... First let me give credit please to Dr Charlotte Karam and Dr Fida Afioni, who started this work with me, and educated me on everything that I know about knowledge production, and Global South versus Global North knowledge.

So inherent in knowledge, there's always power. And the way you identify that power is by asking the questions of, who wrote this? Who is producing this? Who was this produced for? Who's the audience? How easy is it for this knowledge to pass from different spaces? Who has ownership of the knowledge?

And of course, who is the knowledge about, not just who's writing it, but who is it about? When asking these questions, you will discover something. Sometimes there might be a person in Pakistan who's been writing about the queer Pakistani community for the past eleven years, and

then a white person from Harvard. And again, I'm white passing, so I acknowledge my white privilege.

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Let's say a white Englishman would come into Pakistan for a quick study on queerness within Islamic communities, and then would publish the words of that author, or that Global South individual who's been writing, who had been writing about their own experience for the past eleven to fifteen years. And when that person from, say, Harvard or Oxford or somewhere that's more Global North publishes that Global South knowledge, that knowledge becomes appropriated. It becomes part of the ownership of that person, of the Global North person.

It also starts to travel in a different way. It's almost like asking, why did the knowledge that was produced by Global South folks for Global South not go anywhere? And why, when a Global North person produces this knowledge or appropriates it, why does it travel so fast and becomes so well known?

When we speak about Global South and Global North countries, we speak about the have and the have nots. And this is an invisible, or a figurative, or an imaginative, geographical, and cultural cutout of the world. It's not real, we're imagining that there are some Global North countries and some Global South countries. I hope that made sense.

It does to some degree, I'm wondering if you could just define what you mean by Global North and Global South.

Dr Jad Jaber

So Global South usually is cultural, local, indigenous, and Global North is usually seen as global. So Global North knowledge is seen as global knowledge, as CNN, as Al Jazeera, as New York Times, while Global South knowledge is seen as local, indigenous, part of the culture that we are speaking of. I would say that's the best explanation. And again, when they explain it in terms of anthropologically or sociologically, they'll tell you that these terms are imaginative. We have to use our imagination to create these terms. We have to imagine again who are the have and have nots of the world that we live in, and who has more resources and who doesn't.

Jaï Bristow

Thank you. So I'm hearing that you've set up this foundation, this not for profit, Marginalized Majority, which is supporting people from the Global South, I think from the Global South. And that's another way of saying the people who are more oppressed, is that right? And more marginalized. More marginalized in today's society. And you've looking at decolonizing that, and so you've learned from these two doctors that you mentioned about how to do that, which is fantastic. And you talked about how building this project has been very healing for you. Could you tell me a bit more about that?

Dr Jad Jaber

I think everyone should listen to their hearts, close their eyes and meditate, and listen to what they're meant, or what they feel they're meant to do, or what they feel their calling is. And many times we avoid that kind of calling, or we avoid what we feel was meant for us. I always knew that I

was going to be in a place to protect my queer community, and protect my Global South marginalized queer community.

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I just didn't know how because I was in the Arab world, I grew up my whole life in the Arab world. I only moved to Canada, where I had never stepped foot before, beginning part of the pandemic. Before that, all my education, all my work, all my feminist, and queer, and anti-oppressive and decolonial work was back home. And I knew that I wanted to do something good for my community. I just didn't know how or why. And once I moved over here, I felt that it was a calling for me. And once you are involved in something that feels so organic for you, you're immediately going to start healing.

And I'll tell you something else, this goes against neocapitalism, and it goes against what we have an idea of being functional and being in a job that is going to, for sure, secure your future. And we tend to get into that scarcity mindset from this capitalistic perspective, because everyone's competing, everyone is fighting for that job, and everything is hierarchical.

So if you're an Arab in a company, it means you're going to think, hey, they gave me this position for one Arab, they're probably not going to give it for another Arab. So everything is a scarcity mindset, it's a minority versus minority, it's a hyper-capitalistic, hyperspeed. And then suddenly you find yourself in something organic, and paced, and slow, and something that everything that you do is part of your inherent wisdom, and part of your accumulated knowledge. And that's where the healing starts.

So that's what I would advise anyone to do, is stop what you're doing, if you're just running on a treadmill and close your eyes, take a deep breath, look inwards, and look at what your calling is. Look at what you feel you were meant to do, and also what scares you most.

Jai Bristow

That's beautiful. I love that idea of just taking a break, pausing, slowing down. And instead of reacting, or living from a place of shoulds, of expectations, like tuning in to what actually feels right, to what is your heart longing for, what is your heart calling for, stepping away from the societal pressures and expectations, and all of that. That's really beautiful. There's a lot of questions arising for me and I'm aware of time. One question is you talked about back home, and could you say a little bit more about that?

Dr Jad Jaber

My parents do come from conservative backgrounds that are part of Abrahamic faiths. I grew up in very Arab cultures, in predominantly cultures that there's a lot of self-suppression and self-oppression. We grew up where almost everything is a taboo, and you internalize all that stuff. I would say that is what I was describing in terms of back home. Not to say that you can't maintain emotional and mental freedom, and not to say that queer spaces back home are not extremely magical, or are less important.

And I'm going to say something controversial, even less safe than queer spaces in this part of the world. You can be very unsafe as a queer person, especially as a brown, black, Arab queer person in this part of the world, in America, in Canada. And you don't feel that unsafety when you're queer

back home, but you feel another kind of unsafety. And we joke around and we say that for many queer immigrants, you have to decide what unsafety do you want?

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Do you want physical unsafety, where someone can walk into your home and harm you? Or do you want emotional and mental unsafety where you know that if you get ill over here, you get ill by yourself. If you don't make enough money to pay for your rent, you're homeless. No auntie is going to come knocking on your door with a warm dish. No cousin, or friend, or childhood friend is going to be like, come stay in my home until you find your footing. And so you exchange a feeling of unsafety with another and a feeling of safety with another.

Jaï Bristow

I think that's so important, what you're talking about, about the safety, because safety is paramount for healing, for trauma healing, and all kinds of healing. And the cultural differences you're pointing to I think are really special. Really important that you're saying, it's very different in different cultural contexts, the safety that you will or won't. And you have to trade one for the other almost, which is tragic in some ways, that we live in a world where you have to choose between which kind of safety do you want to trade, for which kind of lifestyle? I really appreciate your honesty and openness in sharing this, and sharing your journey, and sharing this project that you founded, which is so vitally important, so thank you.

Dr Jad Jaber

Thank you.

Jaï Bristow

I'm wondering if you could say a bit more about therefore what this, you talked about founding this community, and what this community is, but can you say more about what this not-for-profit does, what this organization actually does, and how it does that?

Dr Jad Jaber

The community has always been there, I founded a space to have the community connect and collect together, and to feel witnessed, to feel witnessed by each other. What we do is, we do a very wide range of programming, we've done everything from a feminist reading of the Quran, of the Holy Quran. We've done Queering Ramadan, we've done queer and ramadan events, we've done workshops, intersectional education workshops on anti-fatness as anti-blackness, on anti-Asian racism in the Global North, on polyamory within lesbian culture, on diversity within intersex individuals.

What we do is two sides, either we're doing intersectional educational programming, which is always for free, so wherever you are in the world, you can hop on and join, and if you're there in person, you can join us as well in person. So we have the line of intersectional education programs, and we have the line of community programming.

Community programming can be events, they can be a picnic, they can be an art and healing atelier space, they can be, like I told you, very niche cultural events. So we're trying to do, right

now, a Muslim Arab prom, or we're trying to do coffee shops with specific themes. We're trying to move into celebrations because also queer joy is revolutionary.

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At the end of the day, all we want to do as queer people in the diaspora is be in our body, be present in our body, feel joy. And that is literally the ultimate revolution. There is no bigger thing that you can fight bigots and oppressors, and harmful people, than feeling joy.

Jai Bristow

That's beautiful, thank you for sharing that. I think it's so wonderful that you talk about the educational programs, the joyful events programs, and that celebrating of voices that are often marginalized. Now, you spoke a bit earlier about internalizing messages. And internalizing oppressive, harmful, let's say, toxic messages. Maybe you can talk a bit about that internalizing that and healing from those internal messaging.

Dr Jad Jaber

Absolutely. For many of us, many queer people from Global South countries, whether you're in Nigeria, whether you're in Beirut, whether you're in Jordan, whether you're in Iraq, whether you're in Afghanistan, whether you're in Pakistan. For many of us, we might be so and so called woke queers, in terms of being part of somewhat a global queer culture, and having access to TikTok University. But at the same time, the truth is that we've internalized a lot of transphobia and femphobia from our cultures.

And that is a whole other journey of healing that many cis gay men need to do. And as well, just queer people, honestly, from all over, not just cis gay men. Femphobia and transphobia is amongst all different parts of queer culture. So when I moved here, I thought that, well, I was part of the queer culture, I had published back home, I had done stuff, and I didn't still deal with my own fear of appearing as feminine. For a long time, I thought myself to be ugly and unattractive when I'm feminine. I thought myself to be not welcomed by my community if I'm feminine.

I didn't have any internalized transphobia, but I knew people around me, very close to me that did. I grew up with the language of transphobia in my brains, in my heart, and in my brains. I needed to deal with all of that, I needed to look at myself in the mirror, I needed to put on dresses and put on makeup. Not just necessarily... I don't want people to think this is a shallow thing, gender representation is a huge thing. We all dress up in our gender every morning, and we all make choices in how we want to be represented.

Playing around with these choices is much bigger than what we presume to be, and much more important for our healing process. So definitely having the freedom and the flexibility to play around a little bit more in my representation, and go deeper into my femphobia and transphobia, allowed me to heal in a very different way.

And part of that, I'll say, is when you're queer and you're healing from that, you're going to go to incidents, you're going to close your eyes and you're going to go to incidents in your head, you're going to remember stuff. You're going to remember what was the first time your Mom told you you're disgusting when you look feminine, or when your Dad told you, you can't sit on this table if you look like this?

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Part of the healing is unfortunately looking inwards, and dealing with the traumatic events and incidents that made you hate the femme within you, and made you build up these opinions that just are harmful for you, and for the community around you.

Jaï Bristow

Thank you for sharing that. I really appreciate your honesty in what you're sharing, your authenticity, and showing up and naming these things. I think a lot of people worldwide can relate to what you're sharing. Even though your examples were a lot about gender, or including trans community femininity, queerness, I think they're also applicable to other things. But even in that, I think there are probably a lot of men who can relate to what you're saying, as well as other people in other genders.

We were talking earlier about cultural differences that that's enhanced in certain cultures. I think it's really great to name that, to acknowledge that. So in the work I do, I do these different courses and programs on power, privilege, and prejudice, and I'm informed a lot about the trauma healing I've learned. And so one of the things, one of the formats I use, is the idea that you have to name the problem, feel the problem, and really look at the issue, before you can start building capacity and resources to heal it, and then finding strategies in place and work to actually heal it.

Sometimes there's the fear in certain communities to name that, because it's considered racist, or it's considered bad, or it's considered culturally insensitive to name that. There are certain cultures where that anti-feminess is even more heightened than in other cultures. And that's not to demonize any particular country or culture, but it's to name it, you need to name the issue to be able to heal it.

So really naming these external messages, that get internalized and turned towards oneself, as well as turn towards others, when you internalize these messages, you can be hard on yourself, and you can be also hard on other people. I appreciate you naming that and sharing some of your journey.

Dr Jad Jaber

Thank you, that's just beautiful what you said. First we have to understand that there are certain systems of oppression that are existent everywhere. Patriarchy, for example, for me, patriarchy comes before faith. For me, the religious books were written to primarily install the patriarchy, and instill the patriarchy in us, and in our souls. So there's patriarchy, there's systems of faith, there's everything. And like you mentioned, I love the title that you said I think it was three privilege...

Jaï Bristow

Power, privilege, and prejudice.

Dr Jad Jaber

So beautiful, because you can't just keep your eye on one when you're healing, especially within collective healing. When you're dealing with these big issues, for example, just anti-black racism,

you can't keep your eye on one, you have to keep your eye on everything. You have to keep your eye on systems of oppression, systems of privilege, and systems of power.

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Last week, I think I did a meeting, something happened for the first time ever in my whole life, which is in the meeting, the person we were trying to collaborate with, the partner, straight up said, I'm going to tell you something, I was racist and I was Islamophobic, and I've been working on myself for a very long time. All of us looking at the person who was saying that were shocked because we've never heard that.

And the reason that we've never heard that is, because you also alluded to that, there's a lot of shame in unlearning and there's also fragility. There's also fragility because when you're unlearning, you are removing those pillars that have built your ego, you're removing them. And so you need new pillars if you're a family man, and the way you see yourself is in terms of the control you have on your daughters and what they wear, and the control you have on your wife.

And when you're telling him, hey, you're toxic and this is harming your family. When that person is going to remove those pillars, there's fragility there because what is that person's ego going to be built on? How is he going to feel like he's a good father and he's a good man again? And the same thing goes for so much stuff.

As well as different cultures have different propensity to internalize shame. In my culture, for example, we're a very shame driven culture, and we have a term for it which is called aib. And aib is said for everything. What? Aib, you didn't call your cousin yesterday to wish him happy birthday. Aib, you are queer. Aib, you're not praying. Aib, you didn't go to school. So it's a term that is used for everything.

And in my culture, we're almost shamed into everything from, the first time, from the first age you're born, from when you're first born, you're ashamed into all the gender constructs. You're ashamed into faith. We have shame in our cultures, in our bodies.

Jai Bristow

Shame is such a powerful tool of oppression because it paralyzes the person, it initiates that trauma response. Shame in itself is a trauma response, and so using it to control people, the way that it can put you in the fight, flight, freeze, fawn responses. It puts you into those responses, often freeze, that shame, that I'm a bad... It shuts you down. It makes you feel small and inadequate.

And in the trauma conference, we talk a lot about shame as well. I think it's such an important piece and element to bring into this conversation around healing. You talked as well about collective healing, that's another really important piece. So I'm wondering if you could say a bit more about the collective healing.

Dr Jad Jaber

Collective healing is simply putting community members together with caution, and intention, and awareness. You can't put a bunch of racists with black folks and tell them, let's heal. You have to maybe probably put the racists together in order for them to, in a sense, heal in that collective. And

also, I think I've read a lot of research about this. If, for example, you're a white racist, then you will more likely listen to other white folks who are no longer racist, than you are to POCs, or black folks.

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There's a lot of awareness and intentionality in how you group people together. And you have to keep your eye on safety, on emotional safety and community safety. But, there's a big but, when you get community members together to talk about healing and talk about their trauma, not only are they all going to notice that they've all shared that trauma together, which is healing in itself. Community best practices are going to start to show, so you're going to hear from a person who says, ooh, I've tried doing this for the past eight years, but in the past one year, this is what I did. You're going to hear from another person who says, oh, I tried doing this, but because of my condition of this that didn't work, what worked best for my condition is this.

So within this shared knowledge comes so much power, and shared knowledge also is the basis of indigenous wisdom. It's the background of indigenous wisdom. It's the background of even intergenerational wisdom. It's shared knowledge, it's what did, out of these 16 people, what did all of them feel was the best solution for that.

It's also important when you're creating community consultations, or you're creating community healing collectives to have the right team. So we work with somatic healers, we work with trauma-informed healers. We worked with folks who have been community elders, community wise folks. And yeah, these folks also have a lot of shared wisdom, a lot of collective wisdom, and that's what makes their wisdom so applicable and so helpful.

Jai Bristow

Amazing, thank you. I really hear that about what you're saying about collective healing. A. It needs to be attuned collective healing, so having white people working on race together, and POC, or people of color, or racialized people, people of the Global Majority, there are different ways of naming these days, working together, for example.

At the same time, I really hear about when you bring people to work on stuff together, it really enables a sharing of resources, a sharing of strategies and practices. I remember hearing many, many years ago when I was growing up, something along the lines of learn from other people's mistakes because life's too short to make all the mistakes yourself. There's something about that, that's why we get taught history often is to learn what went wrong.

So really this sense of being able to learn from each other because there's a lot of emphasis on individual healing which also does need to be done. And at the same time when you bring people together, it enhances and speeds up the healing process in a different way.

And there's also, creates a community of support of people you can bounce ideas off of, people you can be vulnerable with, people who can support you and create safety, and healing, shame or fragility, or all these things that have been mentioned.

And I think the more people are able to do the healing with themselves, or in community, and the more they can speak up about it and name that, the more it gives permission to others, the more it models the behaviors that are needed from others.

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So when you talked about this partner in this place saying, I was racist, Islamophobic, I can't remember exactly which ones, and yet I'm really working on that now, it can sound like, oh God, that's the worst thing you could possibly say. But actually it creates a relief because, like I was talking about earlier, you name the issue to be able to work on it. If not, it's this sort of unsaid... And then it gives permission to other people to say, hey, I also struggle with this thing, or I've also noticed this pattern in myself and I want to work on it. Where do I begin?

We were talking about shame earlier, and the term racism or racist brings up a lot of shame. People are constantly trying to avoid that word, and avoid being in any way associated with that word, which of course is understandable especially in today's environment. And at the same time, if we aren't able to name the structures, again, that are often learnt and were conditioned and that are internalized, if we're not able to name those structures, then it makes it a lot harder to work on them.

Jad, thank you so much for your time. I just want to let listeners know as well, we talked about community healing and facilitating that, finding the right community. I did a great interview with Martin Aylward on how sometimes community can have good intentions, lead to dysfunctional dynamics, and how to create healthy community. So if people are interested in the community element of this talk, check out that talk next.

I also interviewed Ty Powers on using Internal Family Systems in oneself, but also with other people, to enable the possibilities to stay present in toxic environments, or in toxic relationships. So that when you have, like you were giving that example of a family patriarch who sees things in a very rigid binary way. How to respond in that way, or how to be in relation with someone like that. So I also recommend people check out that talk with Ty Powers.

Jaï Bristow

Jad. Thank you. Sorry, I can't hear you, say that again.

Dr Jad Jaber

I can't wait to check them out myself.

Jaï Bristow

Brilliant. Thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate this conversation, I appreciate your honesty, and authenticity, and your vulnerability, and everything you've shared. And thank you for the work you do in the world, and setting up this fantastic organization that's helping other people heal. Especially people who don't get as many opportunities as some do to access healing resources. So how can people find out more about you and your work?

Dr Jad Jaber

Well, thank you so much, Jaï. I appreciate you, I love the space that you're creating. I hope more people gain access to it. I hope this is only a beginning of many, many beginnings for you, and I hope every one of the projects that you're doing reaches the ears and the hearts of the people that need it, and causes the change that you imagine.

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People can find me on [queerarabs](#), that's my personal Instagram account. And there on [TikTok](#) as well. I put out a lot of the videos and community related stuff, and people can find Marginalized Majority collective on [Instagram](#), on [LinkedIn](#), on [TikTok](#), that's the nonprofit. That is now being led by our associate executive director, who is the founder of Black Arabs collective.

And Marginalized Majority has everything from indigenous drop-ins to anti-black racism work, to all types of intersectional work. And we want everyone to learn from each other's wisdom, and we don't want any cultural eco chambers to occur. We want these best practices to also be through each other and through our intergenerational wisdom. So thank you so much, Jaï.

Jaï Bristow

Thank you. It's beautiful to hear what you're sharing. I often talk about how diversity is a real opportunity for richness to learn from each other, and instead we live in a society where it's often used to categorize us, and put us in hierarchies, and so I really appreciate what you're doing.

Dr Jad Jaber

Thank you so much.