**Acting in Faith, Hibah Berhanu.mp4**

[00:00:01] **Hibah Berhanu** This is Masjid Jami, one of the most famous mosques in Asmara, Eritrea, and a place that my parents made sure to familiarize my siblings and I with as we spent a summer visiting the land of our foremothers. My parents married in 1995, and they had plans for a new life in America. While they wanted to raise my siblings and I with a cultural soundness, they found solace in prioritizing Islam. Home would be unrecognizable without the Quranic calligraphy on the walls, the baskets of prayer rugs, or religious texts from the Hadith to the medicines of the Prophet.

[00:00:47] **Yusuf Berhanu** \*Adhan recitation, or call to prayer\*

[00:00:57] **Hibah Berhanu** My experiences have naturally prompted me to lean into the intersections of my identity. While I continue to learn about the powerful Eritrean woman who served as freedom fighters in battles for independence, the pivotal Black Panthers who organized to self preserve Black lives at the hands of the state, and the trailblazing Muslims who socially and politically liberated women during Jahiliyyah in the 7th century, I'm reminded that long histories of combating oppression and evolving communities are deeply rooted into my existence. The undeniable and looming realities of inequality, discrimination, and exclusion in the United States are irremovable from my identity as a Muslim. How are Muslims in the United States resisting against injustice? How are internal and external community issues being centered and solved? I traveled to the Islamic Community Center of Atlanta to meet with brother Edward Ahmed Mitchell, the executive director of the Georgia chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations. Brother Mitchell described CAIR as an organization with a primary focus on civil rights and legal work.

[00:02:14] **Brother Edward Ahmed Mitchell** In addition to that, we're also trying to be proactive by engaging interfaith dialogue-- the theory being that education is a pretty good vaccine against discrimination. We're lobbying our state and local elected leaders to make sure that they are not passing anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and other unjust bills. And of course, we are making sure that we're supporting other causes of justice, not just causes directly related to the Muslim community. The Muslim ban was never just about Islamophobia. It was also about racism. Racism and anti-Muslim bigotry are very much intertwined because of the false perception that all Muslims are people of color or all Muslims are foreigners, which is obviously not the case. By adding these additional countries to the Muslim ban, he hasn't changed it from being a Muslim ban, it's still a Muslim ban. You might also though be able to call an African ban as well.

[00:03:01] **Hibah Berhanu** Brother Mitchell explained the internal community work was not central to the CAIR mission, though it has become a positive side effect.

[00:03:10] **Brother Edward Ahmed Mitchell** Every Muslim organization, every Muslim community needs to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time and it be mature enough to have different organizations handling different things. CAIR has to be able to say, look, our specific job is to defend what you, the Muslim community, have built in our building because Islamophobia is the threat to all of this. I think that the one mistake we need to avoid making is to think that Islamophobia is the only issue we need to worry about externally. We also need to be talking about a very various other justice issues: police brutality, climate change, criminal justice reform, social issues. There are all sorts of things that we need to be proactively discussing and addressing, not just on defense about Islamophobia.

[00:03:54] **Hibah Berhanu** I traveled to Ar-Razzaq Islamic Center in Durham, North Carolina, to meet with Dr. Su'ad Abdul Khabeer-- scholar, activist, professor and member of CNN's 25 most influential Muslim Americans.

[00:04:07] **Dr Su'ad Abdul Khabeer** This idea that Islamophobia is the thing that people should be concerned about up and above everything else is something that I don't experience in the spaces that I frequent as a Muslim person, although I'm familiar with that kind of general positionality whether it's Islamophobia or maybe it's like Palestine or something that's happening internationally.

[00:04:35] **Hibah Berhanu** Dr. Khabeer said that she is familiar with the tendency of issues to present themselves in a hierarchical way, not always, but often in Arab and South Asian or, quote on quote, mainstream Muslim spaces.

[00:04:48] **Dr Su'ad Abdul Khabeer** I grew up in Brooklyn, but I was really involved in MINA growing up and I also was a part of my MSA and these sorts of things, and these were not Black spaces, right? When I was in college, the first MSA meeting I went to the-- and he's a friend, so it's not... He was like, "the MSA is not a political organization." And I was like, "Really?" and I walked out.

[00:05:13] **Hibah Berhanu** Dr. Khabeer described a political culture in the United States which designates different issues to different groups of people, though they are often intimately connected and built upon their similar forms of inequity and discrimination.

[00:05:25] **Dr Su'ad Abdul Khabeer** You know, if I'm Latinx I care about immigration. If I'm Black, I care about criminal justice, you know? The political culture is very issue oriented in sort of a narrow sense of what identity means and how all those things are actually really connected to each other. Anti-Black racism, classism, elitism also encourages that type of behavior in communities, and so people do see this thing as like-- even when they're rally around or having some form of solidarity, they end up sort of sidelining or really parochializing or minimizing the the real interconnectedness of the struggles that people are facing. Again, it has a lot to do with the politics in this country and the kind of liberalism and this idea, I think this idea that people don't want to have conflict. They try to avoid conflict, they try to be neutral, try to hear both sides of the story, you know, all things which in the abstract sound, relatively reasonable. But in community life, you know, it's a bit of a myth. If you take like like an issue like Kashmir, you know, where these Muslim minorities are being sort of attacked and brutalized, right, this idea of people losing their citizenship and becoming stateless, all this kind of stuff, right? It's intimately connected to what's happening in Kashmir. So the concern that the Indian Muslim students may be ostracized because we talk about it means you don't really want to have a community. You just want to have a bunch of people in a room together which, you know, is really not valuable, in my opinion. If you've sort of created multiple opportunities for someone to come into a space and they're not coming, then you have to figure out why. The fact that Black Muslim students want to create their own MSA means the community's already broken so they're not breaking anything, right? Like, it's not.... you actually haven't done that work. And so I think, you know, it's like the age old thing where we you know, you get the speaker of the event and there are no women, and they're like, "Oh, well we reached out and no one was available". It's like, really? Is that what happened? Or did you reach out to the one person that you liked and that person wasn't available? Or did you reach out to multiple people and they weren't available that date so you said, "You know what we're going to do? We're to change the date so we can accommodate." Or was it because they needed childcare and you don't provide that. Or was it-- you know there's a range of possibilities around why you're not able to do or you know why this group is not coming, but I think people think, "Well, I extended an invitation and they didn't come." And so they throw their hands up. It's really disingenuous and lazy. Black is a racial category. Black people have ethnicity. There's a lot of range of ways of being Black. But I mean, anti-Blackness is something that we all share and we deal with on multiple fronts all the time. And, you know, I don't think there's any harm in having a space where folks can kind of process that in a way with people understand and they don't have to do a lot of translation.

[00:08:15] **Hibah Berhanu** I asked Dr. Kabeer what the message would be to Muslim Americans who believe that activism should not interfere with religious spaces.

[00:08:22] **Dr Su'ad Abdul Khabeer** So I don't even understand those people, so I don't know if I can answer that question. I'm really like, how do we get here? I have no idea how in 2019-2020 people like rallying against social activism. Literally, I literally do not understand. Most Muslims in this country are people of color. They are people who -- and for that reason-- they are people who are marginalized. They are people who are pushed to the side, they are people who are sort of discriminated against and targeted by state violence, everyday violence, et cetera. And so in our communities, we have our little fiefdoms where we have a little power and influence, and I think people want to hold on to that. A lot of the discourse around social justice in general really is about challenging power and authority, and asking for fundamental change in how we relate to each other. And I think for people who have a little bit of power in authority, that's frightening and scary. And so they're invested in with the little they have and so they don't want it. So then social justice and activism as a thing becomes this boogey man that's like, "Okay, we have to fight that because it's gonna like, you know, make everybody a kafir or something." I don't know. It's like, it's bizarre. I mean I know what's happening, but it is really bizarre. And it really and it's also sad, I think, because, you know, as De La Soul says "Stakes is High". And so we don't have time for this, to be quite frank.

[00:09:51] **Professor Mariam Kashani** My name is Mariam Kashani. I am one of the lead coordinators of Believer's Bail Out. We are a national organization, but we are based in Chicago, Illinois, where we have Cook County Jail, which is the largest single site jail in the country. Long story short, we were like, we have this mechanism, zakat, where people give charity and we thought it would be really great to start directing that towards paying people's bail. A few months later was when a lot of the work around ICE and immigration detention started to be really, sort of, out there in the media, and we felt that since we still had money left over, we wanted to start addressing that issue. So initially we had very little faith in the community that they were like, that would give to a cause like ours. You know, we thought they would assume everyone was a criminal, and why would they deserve our, you know, our money? Because folks who are incarcerated pretrial fullfil so many of the categories of our charity in that they tend to be poor, they tend to be needy, people who have debts, right, if we can think of bond as a kind of debt, that they are held captive, or are travellers, right, in the case of the immigration detention. For people, it's really hard for them to think of a contemporary, like, parallel to something that revelation talks about. And for us, you know, when we made that argument to folks, it was like a light bulb had clicked. We use the issue of money bond and bailing folks out to educate our communities about larger ideas around abolition and transformative justice. And, you know, and we tell our constituencies, too, that we are working towards the end of money bail. Like, we're not going to just keep doing this forever. And I think that's a really important distinction that we don't just want to be another cog in this wheel. Actually, what does it mean to redistribute resources to communities that need them. So could we imagine what we would do with one hundred and eighty billion dollars a year, right? That wouldn't look like, you know, what we have now.

[00:12:09] **Hibah Berhanu** In the wisdom of Dr. Khabeer we should prioritize individual curiosity, then intra-community needs, and finally, intergroup solidarity.

[00:12:19] **Brooklyn, New York** \*Prayer during Black Lives Matter protest\*