INTRO: This is part two of my interview with Conor Walsh. If you have not yet listened to part one, I highly encourage you to go back and do that first. It provides some really important context for this episode. That was #209. If you have already listened to part one, then please enjoy the conclusion of my interview with Conor Walsh.

Matt Bowles: Well, another line of discussion that I want to pursue with you is circling back to our very initial conversation that you and I had in Bansko, Bulgaria, where we were sitting outside of the cafe. It was actually another Irish guy that was with us, and we were talking about Irish politics and Irish history, and we were talking about international solidarity between the Irish and other decolonial struggles around the world. And just for context for folks that are not familiar, Ireland was Britain's very first colony, and the Northeastern 6 counties of Ireland today remain Britain's last colony. And there has been a decolonial struggle going on in Ireland for a really long time.

And there has been an incredible solidarity between the Irish that have been involved in that struggle and other decolonial and oppressed struggles around the world. And you and I were talking about that and how our respective consciousness was raised. You obviously being born and raised in Ireland, me being about a fourth generation Irish American, but nonetheless, how our respective consciousnesses have been raised about that, and then how our travels have led us to opportunities where we've been able to explore that on a deeper level in different places around the world. And I wanted to just raise that on this podcast and let you share a little bit about your journey in terms of social and political consciousness development and then how your travels have allowed you to really explore that at a deeper level.

Conor Walsh: Sure. So, I would start to just say that a lot of this consciously only started in the last few years, but the seeds have been sown since I was a kid. So, going back to what I was saying about the kind of school I was in and how by our standards, it was quite diverse, this isn't so much to do with the colonial side of things, but it's where the foundation maybe came from. My friends growing up were very diverse. They were a lot of kind of second-generation immigrant kids, so Bangladeshi, South African, Filipino, and then Irish parents as well. So, I grew up around a lot of different cultures and just kind of been a bit normalized.

But also seeing how they were perceived by the rest of Irish society and the challenges that they experienced just as a 5, 6, 7-year-old kid and having to. I know it sounds really cliche, but like learning racism, because I just wasn't aware. I mean, I could tell they were a bit different to me, but not to the extent that they were perceived. But then also growing up in Ireland, I know you've probably had a very different experience, but my experience of learning Irish history is that it was very isolated. The British came over here for 800 years. They committed all of these crimes, genocides, famine, all of this. And then they went everywhere else, and they did the exact same thing, but worse because they learned it, doing it to us. And then there's all of these anti colonial struggles that take a huge inspiration from the Irish. And as recently as a couple of months ago, I'm still learning how widespread that is.

And when I left Ireland, I was running away, right? I was running away from my family. I was running away from a lot of the trauma I experienced growing up. I was running away from the grief I was experiencing over my mother and my grandfather and everything. And part of that was kind of shedding my Irish identity and like really semi consciously lost my accent. You know, I picked up a bit of an Aussie twang, a bit of an American twang. But from the earliest day, there was something happening that I just wasn't really appreciating. And it goes back to Burma. So, I was in Burma in 2011. It's a very different Time for the

country. You know, a lot has happened, unfortunately, in the decades since. But at the time, Aung San Suu Kyi had just been released from house arrest, and there was definitely an air of optimism.

And I'm 21 years old. I'm in this small mountain town having dinner in Burma, and this guy across the table for me goes, hello, how are you? What are you doing here? Where are you from? I say, Ireland. And he just face lights up, first in the air. A lot of people aren't going to know what that is, but the summary is it's a very important part of Ireland's long march towards independence and autonomy under British rule. I don't even really understand the home rule. How does this Burmese guy know this? I feel obscure part of Irish history. So, after I leave, I go to a bookshop in Bangkok. I pick up a book on Burmese history, and I realize, okay, their entire struggle, not entirely, but a big part of it, was inspired by the Irish fight for independence in the 1920s.

Because as much as we were the first colony, other than the States, we were also the first colony in the 20th century to gain independence. At least part of the country was. So that's also a big part of it and long before anybody else. So that was the first time that happened. But I have a variation of that story in so many different places, including in Kenya, the same thing. So, going back to Khartoum, another sat in that graveyard crying behind my sunglasses, just trying to keep myself together. And this, like, old Sudanese man walks over with his cane. He's like, hello, where are you from? I say, Ireland. first in the air. Jerry Adams, he's ira. And then he goes, Brexit. I say, no, Republic of Ireland. Ah, Home rule. And then he just walks off. And I've had that happen in so many different places. And what I started to realize over the years is that Ireland, as a society and as a country and as a colony is part of a much bigger story than we were ever taught in school. At least in my school.

We are part of a whole planet, essentially, of former British colonies. And it's only in the last few years that I've really started to come to terms with this. And one day, it was genuine. I was sat there and I'm like, what are the countries that have had the biggest impact on me? Kenya, Sudan, Palestine, Malaysia. What do they all have in common? Oh, they're all, to some extent, former British colonies. Like, okay, there's probably something to this I should explore. I try to read as much I can about the regions I travel to because I think it's very important to understand history, especially as a European coming to Africa, because there's just so much misconceptions and so much just inherent bias in how we're raised to view the continent.

And you really have to break that down and break through it. And if you read about any anti colonial struggle anywhere in the world, there's an Irish man going to pop up, or woman, I should say, sorry. And it's everywhere. And no matter how many books I read about some seemingly obscure anti colonial movement; an Irish person will pop up. Even the most recent one, reading a book about Marcus Garvey. And there's a whole chapter in Marcus Garvey's life about solidarity with the Irish independence movement. Because of the 1920's, so, the timing makes sense. And I've just realized that as an Irish person, my Irish identity now is a lot more international. It's a lot more based on how we are perceived by other people in the world, how the solidarity that we're shown that I don't feel a lot of Irish people are even aware of. And even in my own actions, I don't always reciprocate or live up to.

But it is something that once you start to realize that, it completely changes your perspective of the world and it changes your experiences in countries. Like, I have some Irish friends here in Nairobi and I didn't know anything about Kenyan history before I got here. I didn't know that there is still quote unquote, white Kenyans, like white landowning class. You know, you hear about it in Zimbabwe, South Africa, other places. But I had no idea that it's still ongoing here. For example. And you talk to Irish people in Nairobi and they're like, obviously I don't understand everything. I kind of get it. Like I can kind of see it. I don't know what it is. And the way I've come to describe it, it's like we share the same abusive ex-boyfriend, right? He didn't

quite treat you the same, but he treated you just as badly. And that abusive ex-boyfriend is the British Empire. And it's funny because my 33rd birthday this year, September 8th, the day the Queen of England died. And it was really interesting. I woke up the next day and I have like Kenyan friends texting me, what the fuck is going on in Irish Twitter? What even is Irish Twitter?

How am I just discovering this now? This shit is lit. Then you go on. And I had to take the day off work. I'm not even on Twitter in general. I'm just sat there and just the memes and the solidarity that you're seeing, it was almost like a marvel mashup movie where I Irish Twitter is discovering black Twitter, discovering Kenyan Twitter, and then Indian Twitter and then there's Maori Twitter. And all of these people, many of whom have never known about each other, are like sharing and collaborating and mixing. And it was the first time that I personally, in my life and in the last decade or so, while I've been going on this particular journey, started to really see it happening in like, mainstream Irish culture.

So, so now I'm in Nairobi and my Kenyan friends are like, man, you guys have struggled. I had to go Google a few things because, wow, you had it really hard. And then I have Irish friends saying the same thing to me about, wow, now I get why you're in Kenya all the time. But you're starting to see, I think, and maybe you've seen a similar thing because you've been involved in this much longer than me, that these ideas are becoming a lot more mainstream, I think, and these barriers are starting to get broken down. And I think it's really beautiful, to be honest. And I'm really excited for the future in this sense.

Matt Bowles: And can you share a little bit? Just because we are in Kenya now and you spent so much time here and I know you have been studying Kenyan history for the period that you've been here. Just for folks that have no idea about any Kenyan history, can you share a little bit about the British colonial presence here, the Mau Mau Rebellion, what the British did in response to that, and some of the things that the Kenyans have experienced under the British Empire as well.

Conor Walsh: Sure. I will give a very simplified version. So, Kenya was seen as one of the favorite colonies in the British Empire. It was the holiday colony. It wasn't like India where they were just draining all the resources and just stealing everything and starving 30 million people to death because they were stealing all of their food. It was the holiday destination. It was where you go to retire. And it was debaucherous. So, there's this thing called the Happy Valley set, which is all the British colonists and they're like flying drugs in from Afghanistan. They go up into the mountains and just party constantly. They're not here to do anything but just have the time of their lives at the expense of the local indigenous community.

So, what you have over the course of about 150 years, I think, is Britain just slowly incrementally taking over the region. And of course, you have the scramble for Africa at the end of the 1800s, where the lines are finally drawn, and all of these countries are just invented out of thin air in a room in Berlin. And you have all of these English people flying in and building these great expansive estates and the best land, kicking everybody out. A lot of people will have heard of out of Africa, Meryl Streep and Robert Redford. And it's all about Karen Blixen, the most famous British settler, and the wonderful life that she had in Africa and Kenya. But of course, at the same time, you have 42 officially recognized tribes and ethnic groups. That's how diverse this place is. Some of that is actually also the Indian population, the white population, the Somali population, that kind of thing.

But all of these people were just thrown together into this country that hadn't existed up until, you know, the British decided it did. And then, as European imperialists generally tend to do, they raped and murdered and robbed and stole their way throughout the country and just amassed huge amounts of

wealth. And this is a story that's been told all over the world. Not enough, but this is what was happening in Kenya. But at the same time, this is where I think the first episode of the Crown is, in Kenya in the 1950s, when Queen Elizabeth is here. That's what it was. This is where you go to go on safari and you go shoot some elephants and it's all very lovely, and you stay in this nice hotel where Winston Churchill and Ernest Hemingway like to stay, and you go off and you just have the greatest life ever on the backs of Kenyans. And then the independence movement started to kick off.

But the main group that was leading this uprising, or the Kikuyu, and there's other groups were involved as well, but they were the most well established. It was an independent movement. It was in response to just the brutality of the British regime here. So, we're talking 1950, a couple of British settlers get killed in their homes by rebels, by Mau Mau uprising. So, the British state just goes into overdrive and announces a state of emergency which leads to a system of concentration camps being built all over Kenya in the 1950s, right up to 1960. As recent as 1960, there was a million Kenyans in concentration camps all across the country, and mass sterilization, mass rape, just the worst you can imagine. Everything we've heard about every genocide around the world, concentration camps, it's all happening in Kenya in the 1950s, and I had never heard of it. Before I got here, I didn't have a clue that this was happening. And if you think about how much the British establishment trumps how they defeated fascism, they defeated Hitler, they turned the tide of fascism in Europe, and then they were committing all the same crimes.

And that's actually what led to a lot of independence movements in Africa, is people who were conscripted from, forced to fight in World War II, sent to Europe to fight for the British Empire, defeat fascism, go home to their homes, which are British colonies, and realize this is exactly what we were just giving up our lives to fight against. And then naturally, they started to resist and fight back. And then Kenya gained its independence. But unfortunately, the independence era in Kenya is complicated, and its relationship with the British Empire is very complicated because the first Kenyan government was sympathetic to the former rulers. But what it means is a lot of Kenyans will tell you that Kenya never really gained its independence because there's still this reverence to colonialism.

A lot of tourism in Kenya is, first of all, it's white landowners who are promoting it. And it's all about this old kind of romantic adventure in Africa that has been lost. And as I come back to Kenya and, you know, sip tea on the savannah and go on safari and wear khakis, you've probably seen it in Nairobi. You've got all these white people dressing up like they're going into the bush, and they're just sitting in the back of a jeep looking at some cheetahs. But it's this very toxic, privileging, let's say, of white people in this society. And it's something that is ongoing, and it's something that, as a white guy living here, you do have to deal with every day.

Matt Bowles: What are your reflections, having spent over three years now on the continent, in different countries on white privilege in Africa and how white folks should understand that and how they should navigate and approach that dynamic while spending time on the continent.

Conor Walsh: So, the best way I've heard to sum it up was a Kenyan activist said white people are Kenya's confederate flag. We are a constant reminder of the trauma that people have experienced in this country, because if you think about 1960, it's not that long ago. And even as an Irish person, there's this perception that colonialism everywhere else is this, like, ye olde archaic idea, like, oh, it was all the way back then. This is an ongoing history, because all of those people had children and had traumas and have had to deal with that. And many countries have never gotten any justice. Or reparations for what happened. And I think

what I have learned here is how you perceive yourself and how you're perceived by your host community can be very different things.

Because if there's one issue, I have with the kind of remote work digital nomad travel industry is you hear a lot of, what can countries do to attract us? How can countries give us better visas like they're not already pretty great for a lot of us? How can you encourage me to come to your country? I feel more like, to be perfectly honest, I'm a guest here. And as a result, there's certain ways that I have to behave, and there are certain things that I have to take into consideration. And I think it requires a degree of almost de centering yourself on a situation. So, one of the big issues that happens in Nairobi, for example, is there's a lot of security in the city. So, every apartment building has private security, barbed wire fences, security guards. You got to sign in, you got to, like, write in a book and everything like that, unless you're white. So last night I was going out for dinner with friends. We were going to an apartment to have dinner there, and I just walked straight in.

Nobody looks at me, nobody asks me where I'm going, no one asks me for my ID or anything. But every single Kenyan friend that I have had to stop at the gate, give their IDs to the security guard as insurance, write down all of their details in the book, and then they're allowed in, and then they get them all out. That's probably going to be pretty shocking to a lot of people who are listening, but unfortunately, that's very common. And it's also, in subtler ways, just in how you're treated in restaurants, in hotels. There's a lot of negative perceptions around white people in this region and how we're perceived by hospitality staff in comparison to the locals, even. I think Barack Obama writes about this in one of his books when he comes back to Kenya, and he's just shocked at how the difference in the experience he's having compared to white tourists, let's say.

And you can be completely oblivious to all of this. I mean, I'm not going to pretend like I wasn't when I first got here, but I think it's important that you have to do the work. As I said, you have to think about these things. And then I started to reflect on it here because I am perceived as being English in Nairobi also. People constantly tell me I'm, like, vaguely intimidating. And when I lived in Uganda, everyone thought I was a drug dealer because I have a lot of tattoos. And in this part of the world, tattoos still have a very negative association to me. I mean, if you told my friends growing up that I'm vaguely intimidating, they'd fall over laughing, like, seriously, that guy, I mean, he cries more than anyone that I know. But to a lot of Kenyans, because of the experiences they've had and the perceptions and the things they've been raised to believe, they fear me and resent me, and then some people find out I'm Irish, and then it kind of gets a little bit easier. Others don't even know what Ireland is, and it doesn't make any difference. And as an Irish person, to be associated with the British Empire is obviously really hard, but I just have to get over it. And that's what I'm saying about you have to decentre yourself, especially in Africa.

I'll see this in the Facebook group that I have for digital nomads here. I'm going to Africa. How can I help? I'm going to Africa. How can I volunteer? I'd like to volunteer for a week. What can I do to help? You're not asking that when you're going to Portugal. You're not asking that when you're going to Mexico. It's like this idea that we have been raised to believe that we need to go to Africa and save everyone and fix everything, and that's like our duty as white people. But it's something that's just deeply ingrained in a lot of people. And compared to other regions that I've traveled in; I think it is something that you really have to work a lot harder on.

Matt Bowles: Well, you've been nomading now for 11 years. You spent a number of years on this continent. And I know that you have been in relationships with Black Kenyan women here, and I know you've been in relationships with other women in former European colonies, women of color. And I want to ask you for your reflections on some of those dynamics and thoughts that are important to keep in mind. In a dating context.

Conor Walsh: I would say you have to think about the emotional labor you're putting the other person through. Especially for guys dating. I mean, this is going to be a very heteronormative conversation. But that's my experience as a white guy dating local woman in different parts of the world. You really have to consider their experience in this because it's a wider context of like, well, I'm not doing any harm. Like, I'm just Here, I'm not causing anyone any harm. I'm harmless, I'm benign, I'm great. But I have numerous experiences around the world where a woman dating a white guy is basically perceived as a whore. And that's not a judgment on sex workers or anything, but it's the connotation that you are selling yourself. You're just with this white guy for economic benefit. You're selling out your people. How could you be with that person? Talking about decentering yourself. I haven't had these experiences. My former partners have. I've had guys trying to buy my girlfriend for the night when I was in Malaysia.

My ex-girlfriend in Malaysia and my ex-girlfriend here in Kenya. You know, it's like, I've dated very successful women, very independent women, very strong women. So, the last thing that they want is to be perceived as a trophy to this white guy. I've dated women who are far more successful than me, but it's also friendships. I have a lot of female friends. I was raised by women. I was raised by very strong women. So, I just end up in that environment a lot. And I suppose if I look back, I was probably getting a concept of microaggressions before I even knew what they were in. How the women I was in relationships with were being perceived by being with me. You know when you're walking down the street and someone is saying in Thai, like, how much which has happened if you're in a nightclub and someone's coming up to you and like, how much is she for a night? Can you give me her when you're done? Whatever. I mean, this is deeply uncomfortable.

But I've had to come to terms with how the women and also just friends that I have are perceived by the societies that we live in, by the fact that they're just stood next to me and walking down the street with me. And I think you can be oblivious to that, especially if you're in a society where you don't speak the local language because you don't know what's being said. It could be anything, and it's usually pretty horrific. But then of course, you have to ask your partner what's been said to her. So, you're just adding to the trauma because now she's got to explain. And this is a conversation I've honestly had with a lot of Kenyan women as well. The experiences that I've heard from them of dating white guys here also, again, guys who are just coming in and just are completely clueless about a lot of things. Just Being completely oblivious to the lived experience of the person that you're dating. Again, going back to the perceptions of white guys here that even in dating there is a lot of toxicity and you're kind of put on a pedestal, but you can take advantage of that, which a lot of people do, or you can make a conscious effort to say, okay, there's a lot of toxicity in this and I'm not going to perpetuate it.

Matt Bowles: Well, you mentioned the *Digital Nomads in Africa* Facebook group. Can you share a little bit about why you started that group and now it's grown to 2,000 people and what the group is all about?

Conor Walsh: Sure. It was mostly just when I left Kenya and East Africa for the first time in 2018. I could just see that at some point this region was going to end up on people's radars. It already was. I just wasn't aware of it. But there's a lack of information. So, I was on just general digital nomad grouping on Facebook

and someone was asking, how's your experience in Kenya or Africa, whatever. I just remember a comment is like, oh, if you're white, just remember anywhere you go you'll be a target. Like, this is fucking crazy. So, I decided, okay, if this is the narrative. Yeah, it was one person and one comment, but you can see it. You can see just a lot of misconceptions. And then I also just felt that like there's no reason people from this region can't also just fully embrace a remote lifestyle. Like there's a narrative that Africans can travel. But Kenya as an example, I think they have visa free travel in like 60 countries or something. That's not a small number.

So, it was kind of two things. One was having a space where people could ask questions about nomad in Africa and actually have people from the countries, they'd be visiting answer rather than it's just a circle of white Europeans or whatever, just all telling each other the same thing and it's all complete bullshit. And then also introducing, just showing my friends as well and my colleagues here that like, it is actually possible to travel here. And there's also lots of places you can travel within the region. Like you don't have to travel to Europe. You don't have to travel necessarily to Southeast Asia. Rwanda is pretty great. Uganda's amazing. Zanzibar is just down the road. So yeah, I just started it in 2018. But it's growing, it's growing quickly. So, I can see that East Africa is coming up. We were in Bansko Nomad fest. I wasn't at the festival, but I was there for it. And three years ago, when I told people in Bulgaria that I live in Kenya and East Africa, like, oh, they have Internet. Is it safe? I'm like, are there other digital nomads there?

Why would you go somewhere where there's no other digital nomads? And then I'm back this summer And I swear nine people out of 10 are like, yeah, Kenya. I'm going there this winter. I'm going kite surfing in Diani. Yeah, I'm doing. I'm. Oh, yeah, I'm going to Tanzania. I'm going to Zanzibar. I'm going to Mozambique. And I'm just thinking, okay, this place, it's. It's finally on everyone's radar. It was going to happen eventually. So maybe, I don't know if I ever actually put some effort into it. It's just one corner of the Internet that I can kind of create a healthier narrative around traveling in the region and helping people experience it in a way that they don't perpetuate a lot of the problems I've kind of been talking about today.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, that's awesome, man. I think it's super important. We are definitely going to link up the group in the show notes. I am a part of that group and have been posting in it since I've gotten here, so other folks can join in as well. And I'm super excited to try to connect with some of the other people in the group who are traveling around the continents and stuff like that. Some people have already responded to some of my posts and stuff like that, which has been really cool. So definitely appreciate you hosting that space. One of the other things I want to build on that you mentioned before is you were listing some of your experiences of learning about the Irish solidarity.

You listed Palestine in your list of places that you went that made an impact on you. And I want to ask if you can share about that. That's certainly been one of the strongest affinities I think that I have observed over the last 20 years or so. Is the Irish Palestine solidarity super, super powerful both in Ireland and in Palestine and in the diaspora. But I'm wondering if you can share a little bit because your context on those politics before you went. I know what was your experience like when you finally got to spend time in Palestine?

Conor Walsh: It was profound in many ways. The thing about a lot of places I've been to that would raise some eyebrows is they're often just a lot of fun. Sudan is Just fun. You forget people who live in these places and they're living, and you go out, you eat out, you, like, people are hanging around, they're having parties. God forbid that you just go, and you just have a good time. But the first thing you realize is that like, oh, this isn't necessarily a religious conflict. It's a land conflict in essence. For context, I was in Egypt at the time in Dahab, long before it was kind of coming up as a nomad spot.

And then I took the bus up to Israel as an Israel for a week. And then I crossed over into East Jerusalem and Palestine. And the first thing you realize when you get to Ramallah is honestly just how secular it is. Again, despite my kind of thinking, I'm this worldly guy and I'm like super progressive and I'm not falling into cliches. Get to Ramallah and it's just like any other city really in, but certainly in the Middle east. People are hanging out, they're going on dates, got great ice cream. I don't know if you've ever had the ice cream in Palestine by your face. You know what I'm talking about, right? Right. Everyone's sleeping on Palestinian ice cream. It's fucking lit. And the food, of course, is incredible. The wine is incredible because I was still drinking semi healthily back then.

So, you're just learning that like, wow, this city has, God forbid, it's just got this incredible culture. Just I would meet people and like, why are you here? I'm like, I'm just here on holiday. Whoa. Okay, cool. Thanks for visiting our country. That's awesome. Have a great time. Because again, even their self-perception is like, no one ever just comes here to hang out and. Because at the time, through a series of events, my bank basically locked me out of my bank account. So, I had no money. I ended up staying in Ramallah for longer than I expected. And you see people who are just trying to live life, all they want to do is just live their life.

That's it. So, I was there for just the tail end of Ramadan and the backpacker hostel I was staying in. There's this weekly protest in one town that's been slowly encroached upon by the nearest settler community. They have a weekly protest. They just keep it in people's memory, just let everyone know that this is still happening. And it was on Eid. So, we go out and, you know, there's this big protest. We're getting tear gassed by the idf and I'm like falling over a wall in the field, and all the Palestinians, hey, man, get the fuck up. Like, what do you think you're doing? Because to them, this is just another Friday, right? I'm like, eyes burning. I have no idea what I'm doing. And they're just like, brah, come on. This is what you signed up for. Okay, sorry.

So, I get up and then we go back to Ramallah, and then it's this big party, and next thing I know, they've got the tear gas canisters that were fired at us earlier that day, and we're doing shots out of them. We're, like, doing tequila shots out of these tear gas canisters. Because that's their way of just being like, fuck you, right? We're going to a party. And then we end up in a rave in this office building. It's just like another Friday night in any city, right? But it's within the context of how you're experiencing it. And then the conversations you have and, you know, you're talking to Israelis as well. Again, going back to North Korea, having that context. One of the most striking memories I have of being in Pyongyang is we're having dinner in this restaurant and this fun kid's cartoon comes on, and it's this conflict, and there's these ragtag group of bunny rabbits and square squirrels and cute little forest animals, and they're fighting this army of weasels and vermin and who are taking over.

And then you realize, ah, this is obviously North Korea, Japan, US, whatever. And this is a kid's cartoon. And my tour guides are like, oh, I love this cartoon. I grew up watching it because they only have one channel and one tv. And you're looking at this going, okay, no wonder you believe everything you believe about the outside world when this is what you're being raised on. And then you get to Israel, and you see the exact same thing. You would talk to IDF guys, as in Hebron, which is, you know, a particularly challenging city to visit. And there's. There's just so much tension. You're getting spat on. You're getting things thrown at you just because you're in the Palestinian quarter and the settlers are. Anyway, and we were talking to these IDF guys, and you're having a conversation, and they're just about to recognize the Palestinian people as just human. And then they pull back and it's like, they're nearly there, and then it clicks in. It's sad. If ever

you wanted to talk about a part of the world, that the narrative is just so completely wrong. I can't say it any more profound than that. It is really just Palestine, Israel and everything that's going on there.

Matt Bowles: I want to ask you about your travels in general now. When you think back on 11 plus years of world travel and all of these places that you've seen and the things that you've experienced and the people you've met and the reflections that you've had, how do you think that all of that has impacted you when you look at that journey? What does travel mean to you at this point in your life?

Conor Walsh: I mean, it's my entire identity, man. I left Ireland when I was 21. I only realized now, like I was a kid, I was completely fucked up. I was grieving, I was suicidal, I was an alcoholic. And then I left. And my entire adult identity is travel. There is no version of me that exists. I honestly don't think I would even be alive today if I hadn't left. Because my life in Ireland was not particularly going anywhere positive. My entire perception of myself, my entire perception of the world. My place as a straight, white, able bodied, neurotypical, cisgendered Irish guy is defined by the experiences I've had around the world. And I've been very lucky that places I've lived, I've generally been able to in most places, get out of the kind of expat tourist bubble just enough so that I am challenged. And it's not always comfortable, but it has shaped like who I am. The example I'll never forget is I'm in Malaysia and I'm talking to a Malaysian friend. I'm like, oh, yeah, you know, I was really poor when I was growing up.

And then she looks at me like, were you though? Like, were you, were you like Irish poor? Because you've told me your life story. I don't think you were that poor because, like, come on, look where we are. And I'm looking at her, I'm going like, yeah, okay. And then it's actually also Kuala Lumpur. So, at the time, I was in a relationship for about a year with Black American woman from Texas. We could not have come from two completely different worlds. Like, she had come from this poor neighborhood in Houston, working her way up to being an environmental Lawyer in Washington D.C. I'm just some bum in some fucking drunk kid in Southeast Asia, just completely lost. But hey, we made it work. We're still friends. All these years later, I'm in a train station in Kuala Lumpur. I've got a few tattoos at this point; this woman looks at me and her son are looking at me. And then her son's maybe 5 years old, and she just pulls him closer, like pulls him away from me out of like fear or something. And I'm talking to my girlfriend at the time. I text her, I'm like, fuck, I can never believe what happened.

This is absolutely crazy. And she just texts me back, wow, you just experienced being black for 30 seconds. I'm like, I'm just going to have to process that for the afternoon. So, yeah, and I'm a better person for traveling. I know everyone probably says that, but genuinely, I got to Africa, and I thought I had figured everything out. Like, I know everything. Nothing can shock me; nothing can surprise me. I've nothing new to learn. I grew up in a former colony. I've traveled to former colonies. Is Africa going to be any different? And I was a fucking idiot. I knew nothing. You have to go out into the world with some degree of being uncomfortable and being challenged. And if you can try to leave as many of your perceptions as possible at the airport to whatever country you're getting into, then, yeah, travel is going to have a pretty profound impact.

Matt Bowles: Let me ask you one more question, then we'll wrap this up and move into the lightning round. So, in light of all of these observations and reflections that you've been doing, what tips do you have? Let's just say for primarily for privileged folks from dominant groups and high-power countries and things like that. For people that want to be thoughtful, conscious, responsible travelers and spend time and immerse themselves in places like Africa or Southeast Asia, former colonies where there's a lot of power disparities

and things like that that go on today. What tips do you have on things that should be top of mind and ways that people should try to travel more thoughtfully and responsibly?

Conor Walsh: First thing that springs to mind, maybe this is just me, but you have got to read a lot of books. There is a whole genre of literature out there that is addressing this. Maybe not in the context of travel, but I do feel ever since that experience in Burma, I'm like, okay, I really need to understand the countries that I'm in. And the best way to do that is honestly through books. Now, unfortunately, a lot of African history is defined by white people writing about Africa, so you really got to do a little bit of digging. But the past is context. You need to know the past of the place you're in. The good thing is, honestly, it's pretty easy now, especially since George Floyd's murder, for example, in 2020.

And the wider conversation around Black Lives Matter, it is very easy to find the resources that you need. I honestly feel. I remember at that time, somehow, I ended up with a Google doc that was just anti racism for beginners. And it was just books, videos, podcasts, documentaries. And it was like, this is your introduction. And just start there. When I was living in Thailand, we used to joke that I wish there was some kind of cultural workshop on the flight to Bangkok, because the culture there is just so different to everything that we know. There are little things, certain things that you can't point your feet at people. If you're walking in front of someone who's older than you, you shouldn't do that full stop, but you can at least bow. These are all little things that you're oblivious to till you've lived there for like six months or a year or two years. And I just always wish that as you're flying into Bangkok, they do this safety thing, you know, exists here, here, and here.

And now here's a video on how to behave while you're in our country. Fortunately, that doesn't exist, so we have to do it ourselves. You got to decolonize the media you consume. You got to think about where you are getting your travel advice from? And if you're coming to East Africa, don't come to me. I've only been here 2 years, find Kenyan travel influencers. I know you've interviewed a bunch of people from this region.

Matt Bowles: Yep.

Conor Walsh: Talk to the people who are from here. That's what I was trying to do with the Facebook group is take me out of it and just direct people to the source.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I think that's awesome, awesome advice, and I think that is a great place to end the main portion of this interview. And at this point, Conor, are you ready to move into the lightning round?

Conor Walsh: Probably not, but let's go.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it. All right. What is one book that you would recommend that people should check out?

Conor Walsh: Okay. It's got nothing to do with travel, but there is a chapter on travel in it. There's a book called 30 Lessons for Living. I don't think it's very well known. It's written by a gerontologist. So, this guy interviewed 1600 Americans over retirement age from every socioeconomic background you could imagine. These people were like 60 to 100 plus, have lived through 100 years of just American history. And then he compiled their life advice into 30 lessons. So, it sounds super cheesy, but I really miss my grandfather. He was a man of great wisdom, and I would love to still have him to just learn from, but I don't have that. But so, this book is my standard. I think it's about 10 years old. I still have this first copy I ever

bought and it's basically, here's how to live a fulfilling life in work, in relationships and parenting and travel. The gist of the travel one is travel. Just travel as much as you can.

It was the first book that I really started to think about the long-term impacts of my lifestyle. If you have substance abuse issues, because it wasn't just booze for me, you always tell yourself, oh, well, I'll have fun and then I'll die at 50 of a heart attack. But what actually happens is you get diabetes, or you have a stroke and then you get something else and then you get another terminal illness and it's a slow, painful process towards a very painful death. And I was reading that book thinking, holy shit, what am I doing to myself now? It took a few more years, but that was definitely one of the books that just changed how I approached my own life.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. If you could have dinner with one person who's currently alive today that you've never met, just you and that person for an evening of dinner and conversation, who would you pick?

Conor Walsh: Do you know who Samantha Power is?

Matt Bowles: Yes.

Conor Walsh: Okay. Yeah. You would? Of course. Have you read her memoir?

Matt Bowles: I have not.

Conor Walsh: Okay. You should. Irish American for context. Samantha Power was an Irish American woman who worked as a journalist in, I think Bosnia was her first thing. Like she was in Sarajevo during the siege. I've been to Sarajevo. I love Bosnia. Just also the beauty and the history and everything. So, she started out as a conflict journalist and then she was like a thorn in the side of the American administration for never doing enough during various genocides. She, I think, won a Pulitzer for a book about just purely genocide and how the international community keeps letting it happen. And then Barack Obama got her to join his team when he was a senator. Then she becomes the U.S. Ambassador to the UN and now she's the administrator of the USAID. So, her whole journey is like, how do you go from a conflict constantly holding the administration to account to then being in the most bureaucratic institutions in the world? And I just found her a really inspiring person. I've listened to a lot of interviews and it's really annoying because she was in Nairobi recently.

So, Matt and I were eating in a restaurant recently here in Nairobi called Pallid Cafe. It's a friend of mine that runs it and he hires people with hearing disabilities. So, hearing impaired. It's really powerful. Train them as serving staff. And it's a great place. It's really nice. Anyone coming to Nairobi, go to Pallid Cafe. But I was having dinner with the owner last night, and he just mentioned Samantha Power. And she had been in Nairobi. She'd eaten in his restaurant. She had written him an email saying, I just want to say, I think what you're doing is really powerful, all of this kind of thing. He had no idea who she was. And I'm, like, fanboying over a U.S. Government bureaucrat, but I'm like, fuck, I could have met Samantha Power. This is so nerdy. But I just want to sit with her and just talk about everything and her experience and her book and her experience as an Irish American and traveling to these places. Yeah.

Matt Bowles: All right, Conor, what is one travel hack that you use that you can recommend to people?

Conor Walsh: I recently started learning how to dance bachata and then salsa kizomba. And it's one thing that I kind of wish I had done a long time ago, because it's huge in Nairobi. It's huge all over the world, because also when I was drinking, I would just go out in bars, and that's how it experiences. Experience the

city. And when I stopped drinking, I needed something to do in the evenings, so I started to learn to dance. And I've only done it in Kenya and Bulgaria, but even when I was back in Bansko over the summer, they have salsa socials now. My dance partner at one point ended up being a career coach that I've been working with for the last couple of months. Hopefully Juliana will listen, so thank you for all your help. And I just realized that shit, man I should have been doing this for years. If you want something to do in basically any city in the world. I was dancing with an Eritrean woman last week, and we were chatting about dancing all over the world, and she's Eritrean diaspora. She said, yeah, I went back to Eritrea recently, as in Asmara, and I found a salsa social, and it was all at Eritreans. It's like last fucking place I ever imagined I'd done salsa. So, I do think if it was one thing I could go back to and do maybe 11 years ago, that would be it. And then finding socials all over the world, any city that I go to. So that's what I recommend. It's a great way to meet people.

Matt Bowles: Absolutely. All right, Conor, if you could go back in time, knowing everything that you know now, and give One piece of advice to your 18-year-old self. What would you say to 18-year-old Conor?

Conor Walsh: You know, it's possible to meet women sober. It sounds fucking ridiculous, but in the society, I grew up in, you didn't date, you just got drunk, went out and hoped for the best. And it sounds so trivial and immature, but a big part of why I didn't stop drinking for so many years is I just could not imagine meeting women in particular or just experiencing a city without alcohol. So that would be one thing. Or maybe I would have just told them it's going to be okay.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. All right, of all the places that you have now traveled, what are your top three favorite travel destinations you would most recommend? People should check out.

Conor Walsh: Cliche answer. Thailand. I'm sorry. I love that place. I also think it does live up to the hype quite a bit. It's spectacularly beautiful. It's the food, the culture, whatever you're looking for, you're going to find it there. So that is one. And it's easy to travel in. Like, fuck it, it's a good place to go. I got to say Sudan as well. Honestly, I just think maybe not right now. If you want to talk about just an underrated destination, I think that's got to be one. And then Montenegro, have you been?

Matt Bowles: I have been very briefly, and I have only been to Kotor.

Conor Walsh: Have only been to Kotor, so I love Montenegro. I've been a couple of times. I don't understand how beautiful our country can be. And I took the bus from Bosnia to Kotor and that is honestly possibly the most beautiful place I've ever been. It's like the second deepest canyon in the world, I think, after the Grand Canyon. And you're just winding down this canyon down into the Adriatic Sea. And if you go out into the smaller coastal towns in Montenegro, such a small little country and it's just so much spectacular beauty packed in there and it just blows my mind. I love it.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. All right, last question. What are your top three bucket list destinations? Places you have not yet been highest on your list.

Conor Walsh: You'd most like to see Namibia. I love the desert. If anyone hasn't worked out yet, it looks incredible. It's a country that fascinates me. So, I want to see that. Iran has been on the list for a while and then honestly, I mean, we've already talked about it, so it's not going to shock you. I want to go to Belfast. I've never been to Northern Ireland. Everyone who's probably been listening to this conversation, if knows anything about Irish history. What the fuck? This guy has never been to Northern Ireland after everything he's just been talking about. But yeah, I've never been to Northern Ireland. I think while I was there it was

when I was like six for a day. And I just think it's about high time that I actually get there and experience this part of my country that is such a huge part of my identity. And me, none of my friends, none of us have ever been there as fucking insane.

Matt Bowles: Well, it is a super special place, so hopefully you'll get to make that happen pretty soon. Connor, this has been amazing, brother. I want you to let people know at this point how they can fly find you, how they can follow you on social media, how they can join the Facebook group and how you want people to come into your world.

Conor Walsh: LinkedIn is about the best place I think apparently if you just Google. Conor Walsh writer, Africa I come up number one. I mean I write about data privacy for a living, so that kind of pisses me off. But here we are. So, LinkedIn, the Facebook group, is just *Digital Nomads in Africa*. It'll come up. I think we're basically the biggest because we're the only one. And I don't know if you are going to ctwalsh.com I'm finally building a little portfolio website. There's a contact form on there; you can message me but honestly the Facebook group is probably the best place to get my attention.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. We are going to link all of that up in the show notes so you can just go to one place at themaverickshow.com go to the show notes for this episode. There you will find all of the ways to contact and connect with Conor and join the Facebook group and links to everything else we have talked about in this episode, all the books he's recommended and other things we have referenced that will all be there in one place at themaverickshow.com.

Conor, this was amazing brother. Thank you for coming to the show.

Conor Walsh: Thanks a million, Matt. It's been awesome.

Matt Bowles: All right, good night, everybody.