

INTRO: This is part two of my interview with Tammer Abiyu. If you have not yet listened to [part one](#), I highly recommend you go back and do that first. It provides some really important context for this episode that was episode #211. If you have already listened to [part one](#), then please enjoy the conclusion of my interview with Tammer Abiyu.

Matt Bowles: Well, the other thing that you and I have done together here is we went to Rwanda, and we went with Alondo, who Maverick Show listeners know who I interviewed recently and shared a little bit about that trip. One of the things that you and I did while we were in Rwanda's capital, Kigali, is we went to the genocide memorial. And I'm wondering if, if you can just share a little bit about that. And especially for folks that aren't very familiar, let's say, with that piece of Rwandan history and the dynamics of the genocide and stuff like that, can you share a little bit about what the genocide memorial was like, what we learned there, and a little bit about the history and your reflections on it?

Tammer Abiyu: Yeah. And I'll start by saying that it's extremely unfortunate that something that happened not too long ago, this is like 28 years ago in the so-called information age, where information is readily available. And you would think that atrocities like this would have a harder time being perpetuated. Not only was this not prevented, but it was also equally not stopped once it started. And it's just not taught. I didn't learn anything about this growing up. This happened during my lifetime. It's shocking that an event where 800,000 plus people, there are estimates up to like a million people died in less than 100 days in some of the most gruesome ways that you can ever hear about. And none of this was taught to me growing up.

So, the backstory for this is that in Rwanda in the late 19th century, starting with the German empire and then moving into the Belgian colonial period as well, there were ethnic divisions that were created, like strict ethnic divisions on a population wherein there were differences amongst the people. But none of that had played a role in society to that point. And it wasn't like there were any conflicts or anything out of the ordinary like people treated each other like equals for the most part before this period of colonialization. But the Germans and the Belgians were very obsessed with race and defining racial characteristics and tried to map that onto the Rwandan population, which had people from all over the East African region.

So, what they came up with was three major classifications, two of which would later play a role, more so in the genocide. So, there were the Hutu majority, which is about 85% of the population, I think. Then there were the Tutsi minority, which were about 15%, and the TWA, which is a small minority of. They called it indigenous people that maybe were like 2%, something like that. And so immediately after creating these strict ethnic classifications, they broke down societal roles along those lines as well. So, the Belgians, I believe, more so than the Germans, gave the Tutsi minority more power in terms of representation in government. And as you might expect, that bred resentment amongst the Hutu majority. And so, this resentment built over time, over decades, until finally the Belgians had this brilliant idea to flip the societal roles. They took those coveted roles away from the Tutsi minority and gave them to the Hutu majority.

And at that point, it gave license to some elements in this new Hutu majority that finally had power to start imposing segregatory policies of their own in terms of kicking Tutsis out of the government and generally discriminating against them, et cetera, sort of like retribution for the previous decades. And the way that manifested itself was that the ruling Hutu government became more and more extremist as time went on. And you had ethnic violence sporadically popping up where Tutsis were massacred. This is before the genocide, like in the decades before, and a large exodus of refugees to neighboring countries, especially Uganda, and eventually got to the point where the Hutu government's, if not stated, prerogative, unstated

one, was to ethnically cleanse that country of the Tutsi minority. And there were people openly talking about, like, Genocide and that kind of thing.

So if presented to me at all growing up, it was like this was an ethnic conflict, like, 'and like neighbors against neighbors', wherein the reality was, in the early 90s, the Hutu government started training militias with the explicit purpose of exterminating the Tutsis at a future date. And so, they had years of this wherein they were training these death squads, essentially with the help from the French government, who I also learned had no idea was involved in any of this. But the French government was actively supporting the Rwandan government in the years leading up to, and even during the genocide itself, and then immediately afterwards as well, in a different way, by providing a safe corridor for the genocidaires to flee into neighboring, what was then Zaire.

And so, the militias were well prepared for this extermination final solution when the tinderbox event happened, which was the president of Rwanda's plane was shot down in the spring of 94, and within hours, the. This militia, this well-trained militia that had been preparing to commit this genocide, geared up and went into full genocide mode essentially. They had roadblocks set up. They immediately started targeting Tutsis in their homes because they had already had a registry of where all the Tutsis lived. And then they went, like city to city, urging as many Tutsis as they could find. One of the more unfortunate parts of it was that Tutsis thought that they would be safe in churches. And so, a lot of them fled to these churches seeking refuge. And all that did, unfortunately, was give the murderers a single place where they could commit as many murders as possible, essentially. So, they would wipe out, like, 10,000 people in one church and then continue the genocide.

And so, this lasted for almost 100 days. Think about how long 100 days are. This isn't the era of mail and telegrams and that kind of thing. We had phone service. We had an Internet service for the most part. We had well developed modern communication tools wherein people knew what was going on in this country. The United Nations had been informed, they did nothing about it. The French government had been informed, they did nothing about it. Obviously, the U.S. did nothing. And so, this just went on with thousands of people being murdered per day until what stopped it was. And I think you went to a separate museum that was dedicated to this next part, but there was a group formed by refugees that had fled to Uganda in the years before this genocide that had become armed and were trying to take back control of their government in Rwanda through an invasion from the Uganda side.

And this group, once they learned about the genocide, fully invaded and managed to make their way all the way to the capital, Kigali, and overthrow the government. And it was only at that point that the killing stopped. And without that, without intervention, imagine how many more thousands of lives would have been lost before someone had done something about that. And that's one of the more, like, heartbreaking parts, is that the world was just content to let this happen.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. It was really remarkably heartbreaking to understand the range of actors. And you understand that the Catholic Church leadership was involved with aiding, abetting and carrying out the genocide. The French government was involved with aiding, abetting and carrying out the genocide. The United Nations evacuated their own people, the peacekeepers, they evacuated the foreign nationals. They did not evacuate the Tutsis or intervene in any way to prevent them meaningfully from being completely wiped out.

Tammer Abiyu: Yeah. I think there was one exhibit that had a quote on it that said the number of UN peacekeepers that were used to evacuate foreign nationals would have been sufficient to stop the genocide.

Matt Bowles: Right.

Tammer Abiyu: Which really, like, it hits home, like.

Matt Bowles: How little it was really remarkable. And then to add to that experience of going through the museum and reading about it and seeing the documentation of it all and understanding the lead up to all of this and how this comes about was the fact that this genocide memorial museum is also the burial ground of a mass grave of 250,000 of the victims.

Tammer Abiyu: Right. You walk outside of the museum and there are these concrete slabs, maybe 11 or 12 slabs on the ground with really no marking on them, maybe the occasional flower here and there, and then a plaque or something that says, please do not walk on the graves. And that's where 250,000 people are buried. It's just you can't even wrap your head around what that is.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. It was an incredibly powerful day. One of the other things that they have in the memorial museum there is, which they have in a number of different genocide museums that I've been to, is they have examples of other genocides that have been carried out. And in this particular museum, they show the Nazi Holocaust, and they show the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia, and then they show another genocide, which I thought was really important. And I hadn't seen highlighted in as high of a profile in any other museum as was highlighted here because of its direct relevance to this one. And that was the genocide that was carried out by the German government about 30 years before the Holocaust. So, this would have been the early 1900s, 1907 type period.

And the German government in 1910, 7, carried out another genocide which was in present day Namibia. So, there it was, this was the German colony in southwest Africa, and they attempted to completely exterminate the indigenous people there. And then they brought the remains of the slaughtered tribesmen back to Germany and used that to promote racial superiority. And the reason why that is so directly related and relevant to the Rwandan genocide which happened 80 or 90 years later, is because the Germans, at the same time they were doing that in southwest Africa, also controlled the East African colony of present-day Rwanda.

So, the Germans were in both places and they were promoting race science and racial superiority in similar ways. And that is what was really the origins that you just talked about of that artificial ethnic power distinction between Hutus and Tutsis that were constructed that eventually 80 plus years later led to this genocide.

Tammer Abiyu: Yeah, and I consider the Rwandan genocide to be on the conscience of the entire modern world because we had the capability to stop it, and we chose not to. It was a conscious choice not to do something, and it was within our lifetimes. And it's the direct result of some of these Western powers that had a hand in creating these divisions. And so, it's sad when things like this, like, happen in countries that people in the west especially, that's where I'm from. So that's all I can speak to. Just either ignore it or just grow up not knowing about it. And that's tragic.

Matt Bowles: I want to build on that and talk about another example of ethnic cleansing that has been going on over the last couple years in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. Which I think in a very similar way is something that is not getting a lot of coverage in certainly the mainstream American media for sure, as atrocities of just devastating scale have been carried out there over the last couple years. But I want to just start off by just letting you talk a little bit about what's been going on, just for people that aren't familiar with.

Tammer Abiyu: This at all, I'm happy to talk about this. I think a good place to start is just some background here on the politics that are at play in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, unfortunately, a lot of the politics is along racial, tribal lines. So, you have political parties that are heavily associated with the region of the country where the tribe that they represent is located. And so, there are many tribes in Ethiopia. One province called Tigray has a population of about 8%. It makes up about 8% of the country somewhere around there.

And for several reasons that we don't need to get into now, this region and its political party had an outsized influence on politics in Ethiopia for the last three decades. Going from the end of the communist era, like I talked about earlier, until about 2018. This political party was basically the de facto ruling party in Ethiopia. And so, in 2018, the power balance shifted and the person from outside of that political party was elected prime minister. His name is Abiy Ahmed. He's the current prime minister of Ethiopia. You may have heard of him because ironically, he won a Nobel Peace Prize recently for mediating an end to the conflict with Eritrea. So, hold on to that for ironic purposes. So back to Tigray, this political party that was no longer in power basically receded to the Tigray region in the north and is still the influential power of that region but 2020 happened.

In 2020, with COVID as a pretense, the Ethiopian government decided to postpone elections. And there had been mounting tension between the federal government and this former ruling party for a while. And obviously at that moment, that caused the relationship to sour beyond repair. And there was an attack on a federal military base in northern Ethiopia by the TPLF, the Tigray's People's Liberation Front, which is the name of that party, the former ruling party. And this sparked an immediate all-out civil war. So, within days, there was an invasion of Tigray by the federal government.

There was a full blockade of the region in terms of no supplies coming in and out. They shut off electricity, they shut off water, the Internet, all communications, that kind of thing. The violence started to manifest itself in massacres in various locations across northern Ethiopia. Eventually it spilled out into other regions outside of Tigray as well, like Afar and Amhara. And essentially thousands and thousands of people were being killed, innocent civilians, mind you, in addition to soldiers, even though they continue to not admit their involvement. There was a presence of Eritrean troops as well that invaded from the north. And so, the Ethiopian government was behind the scenes working with these Eritrean militias that invaded on their behalf, supporting the invasion of their own country.

So, through this conflict now it's been two years almost to the day, there are estimates of 700 to 800,000 people who have died, both from direct violence in terms of being in conflict zones, from starvation, because this region has been completely cut off from the world. And as you may know, the Horn of Africa is in a severe drought and has been for several years now. This is the fifth straight failed rainy season in this part of the world. And so, I don't even know how the people that are being cut off from supplies and humanitarian aid are surviving for all this time, but there are people dying of starvation.

And I think my main point that I want to make here is none of this is breaking through to American media. I know for a fact I have never seen a story about this conflict on CNN, on NBC, or any other mainstream media source in the U.S. and I've searched, I've even looked online. I can't find anything that would have made it to a primetime audience or some sort of mass market. And it's just. It's the most frustrating thing that I could ever imagine.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I mean, the extent of the atrocities, which are just absolutely horrific. And unfortunately, they're the standard types of atrocities that occur in ethnic cleansing situations in Tigray. There's been mass rapes, there's been systemic torture of civilian populations, you know, systemic massacres of large groups of civilians and things of this nature. And it's really, really similar to the things that we just read about in Rwanda have been going on in Tigray over the last couple years and getting very little military media coverage.

Tammer Abiyu: Yeah. And I think in the early days of it, I just assumed that when the U.S. Sort of had like a, like a slow news day or something like that, I would eventually see something about this conflict. The first few weeks I was just like, okay, eventually we're going to hear about how the province of 6 plus million people has been completely cut off from the rest of the world and is being invaded by its own government. I would have assumed that I would have made a news story at some point, but there was nothing. And that lasted for months and months and months.

The lack of attention to this is directly contributing at this point to people dying. Because if there was international pressure on this government to open up this region to humanitarian aid, open it up to journalists and that kind of thing, how many lives could have been saved by just shining a spotlight on this? Maybe there could have been faster mediation between the two parties and more forceful mediation, to be honest, maybe we would have avoided having, like, relapses in violence because there was a ceasefire like six months ago that broke down.

And so, you can see the difference in what happens when a conflict breaks out in Africa especially, or anywhere in the global South. But as someone who is African, I can speak to what I've seen here versus what happens in other parts of the world. The biggest one, of course, is Ukraine. That when Russia's invasion of Ukraine started, I was a year into wondering why nothing about Ethiopia ever came out. And so obviously my first instinct was to feel deep sorrow for the Ukrainian people about what they're about to go through and to hope for a quick resolution to that where they maintained the sovereignty of their country, et cetera? Because there were some really bad, like doomsday predictions about what would happen there.

But my second thought was there is 24-hour coverage of what is going on in Ukraine in a war where we have not a single soldier involved, right. And so, for the last year, almost a year it's been, we've learned every little detail about this conflict that's going on between two countries that are not us. And I've learned so many Ukrainian city names, I've seen so many different versions of the map of Ukraine. And I want to stress that Ukraine deserves our attention and support. But what is so different about Ukraine than Ethiopia, right. Why do the people of Ukraine get interviews on the ground in random villages with people that are just having to go through some of the most horrific nightmares of conflict, whereas in Ethiopia, I have not seen a single interview with a single person on any news channel in the U.S. and so they're just faceless people starving to death currently in Tigray and in neighboring regions, and there's just nothing that can be done about it. And that's the frustrating part.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. And to your point, in addition to the direct crimes of killing and raping and torturing and all that that's been going on, there has been a manufactured humanitarian crisis and collective punishment of the civilian population by blockading the ability of basic humanitarian aid and things to get into the population.

Tammer Abiyu: Yeah. And it's really eye opening too, because what an amazingly horrific thing that this government has discovered, or at least some of these governments are discovering now, which is that if you cut off communication to a region, you almost have carte blanche to do whatever you want in this region. And, and have some weird kind of plausible deniability where the international media can just say there's conflict happening there and hand wave it.

Imagine, like you were an unsupported province that's completely cut off from all humanitarian aid. And people have been in that situation for two years and they still call it people on the verge of starvation, or they'll say their food insecurity or something like some euphemism like that, where it's like, no, the, these people are not on the verge of starvation, they're actively starving to death right now. Why aren't we doing something about that? We have these near apocalyptic words to describe situations, maybe so that we can sleep at night or something. But the truth of the matter is people have been dying from starvation in this region for the last two years, and we've done nothing about it.

Matt Bowles: Right. And if folks want to learn more about this, there is plenty of documentation that you can look at. A lot of the international human rights groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International and other organizations have done some pretty extensive documentation of the crimes that have been committed, and you can go and research that and look that up online. But a lot of it has not broken through in any meaningful way into the American media. There have, however, been some political developments just literally while we've been here. And in fact, in the very city that we are in in Nairobi, Kenya, just this past week. Do you want to talk about where things currently stand and what your thoughts are on those developments?

Tammer Abiyu: Yeah, it really is a weird confluence of events right now. So we're in Nairobi, and I think within the last couple of days, the representatives from the federal government and the leader of the Tigray rebel force have met here in Nairobi to agree to a peace treaty, which I'm a bit more optimistic about than the previous ceasefire, because that didn't have really, I guess, strong formal terms. And it broke down within a couple of months. And they were on the verge of continued and lasting disaster after that ceasefire broke down because conflict had come closer and closer to Addis Ababa, the capital. Both sides were amassing thousands of more soldiers, conscripts, that kind of thing. And it looked like it could be an extremely even more prolonged war than it already has been. But this peace treaty has been agreed to by both sides. So, I'm cautiously optimistic about this because, honestly, I don't know how much longer the people in that society can survive living in such a state. They're going to open up the humanitarian corridors again. Hopefully they'll be honest about that. Yeah, we'll see what happens.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, they literally just signed the agreement that was negotiated in Nairobi last week to allow humanitarian aid into the Tigray region.

Tammer Abiyu: Yep, exactly.

Matt Bowles: So if you want to follow the story moving forward, you can probably be intentional about Googling for it, but there are media outlets that are covering it, and if you do search for it, you can follow

along from here on out. Now that if you were not aware of this before, it's a really important thing to follow, and hopefully this will definitely be moving in a positive direction. You and I have had a lot of political conversations over the last couple of months. Walking up Kilimanjaro.

Tammer Abiyu: We had a lot to kill around.

Matt Bowles: A really wide range of issues. I mean, we were literally hiking up Kilimanjaro, and we're talking about rising fascism in India and Israeli colonialism and Palestinian liberation and all sorts of different topics. The elections in Brazil and things like that. Can you share a little bit and maybe reflect back on the evolution of your political consciousness around all of these different types of issues and maybe the extent to which that has overlapped with your travel experiences and your interest in seeing and understanding the world?

Tammer Abiyu: Yeah, I would say that for the most part, growing up, I wasn't very politically inclined, I think, with the notable exception of the 2008 presidential election, obviously, because Barack Obama was someone who looked like me, was running to be president. So, I was in tune with that. But even after that and going into college, I really didn't have much interest in politics.

However, I think one of the things that started to change my opinion of consuming politics and current events and on a global scale and that kind of thing, was that I started to notice inconsistencies, I guess you could call them, in the way that my government, the American government, described its position on things. I had noticed inconsistencies between what they said and what actually happened. And this happened regardless of which political party was in power and regardless of which politicians were running and campaigning. And I think when you start to appreciate that there are things that our government does, regardless of who's in charge, that don't necessarily line up with your values, then you start to investigate that more. And the end result of it is, whether you like it or not, you're going to have a little bit more political nuance in your opinions, and you're going to start seeking out outside opinions, like from people around the world, for example. And one of the greatest ways to do that is to travel, right?

So, when I started to travel more and started to speak to people in different countries, especially during the Trump era, you didn't even have to try to get political opinions out of people traveling. They would just be like; do you support Donald Trump because you're an American? And then I would have to be like, no, I don't. And I have engaged with them and say what my views are. And when you start talking to people more who are willing to talk to you about experiences in their countries, and everyone has gripes that they talk about in their own home countries. But at least in my experience, you develop kind of a curiosity in terms of what our relationship is with the rest of the world. And as you know, America has a very checkered relationship with a lot of countries out there.

And whenever I heard about a different conflict in some part of the world that may or may not have been tied to something the U.S. did within the past century or so, I would look it up and just learn a little bit more about that. And you start to find different documentaries and programs and that kind of thing online, and you broaden your horizon that way. I think my biggest driving force, really, if I were to nail it down to one thing, is that I really hate hypocrisy. And there's a lot of hypocrisy to be found in political dialogue, especially from people that hold elected office.

And for you to just blindly consume whatever people tell you without necessarily being as informed as possible on those subjects, I think you do a disservice to yourself. And it's just not really compatible, in my

opinion, with traveling, at least in the sense that, like we do, it is because we try to be conscientious members of this global community. We don't want to just say whatever we were taught growing up, like there's more out there to know. And so those two things definitely go hand in hand. Being more politically informed and traveling, I think they go hand in hand.

Matt Bowles: I agree. I think it's super important, particularly for people to understand the role of their own government's policies in other countries that they're going to currently and historically. So as an American, when I walk into, say, a country in Southeast Asia like Lao or Vietnam, and to understand the history of my government's role in creating the contemporary situation that exists there right now, and what I am stepping into, I think, is super important.

The same thing with Central America and South America, where the United States was funding, backing, arming, training, death squads and atrocities that in some cases escalate all the way to genocide, in other cases, overthrowing democracies, installing dictatorships, all this kind of stuff, and creating situations that I am walking into, and I think in general, it's important to know the history of a place, to understand the contemporary context, but particularly and especially when your own government has been involved in creating that.

Tammer Abiyu: I agree 100%. And I think that there's a lot of American history that, like you say, that overlaps with the histories of countries that we've been to and that we continue to go to. And you just don't want to feel like an ignorant American when you show up in Vietnam or something and you have no idea what's going on, because I can tell you for a fact, I did not learn much about the Vietnam War. Growing up, I didn't learn about the Rwandan genocide. I didn't learn about all of these. And it's not because I was uninterested. It's just this was the curriculum in the community that I grew up in.

And I grew up in a pretty diverse community, so I'm sure most of America is probably in the same boat as me. But it's for your own personal sake and for just being a good traveler. If you are open to history and just learning about the history of these places, then it'll enrich the rest of your life as well. You will have a more nuanced appreciation for the countries that you visit. You will have more nuanced opinions in terms of your own political opinions, whatever you are, whether you're liberal or conservative, what have you in the entire spectrum of that. And yeah, it's intellectual curiosity in terms of the history of your own country is definitely, I think, a prerequisite to being a good person and a good traveler.

Matt Bowles: And how do you find information beyond the mainstream narratives of the media and the education system, which obviously don't teach you about a lot of this stuff, to your point, like, you've gone through really incredibly high-quality education. You went to one of the top universities on the planet of Earth, you went to Yale, and you were able to get through all of this education. And still, they don't necessarily teach you about a lot of this U.S. Foreign policy history, as well as the contemporary stuff. In terms of the narratives, we're exposed to about why the U.S. is funding Israel, why the U.S. is funding Saudi Arabia, why the U.S. has funded all of these other incredibly repressive regimes over years and years and years around the world. That's not something that tends to be front and center on either the American educational curriculum or in the American media. And so, what has been your process for really understanding what's going on in a place like Palestine, where we don't get a lot of that information in the mainstream news?

Tammer Abiyu: Yeah, it's hard for me to pin down one sort of medium that I would recommend or a process to follow. But I think that whenever there are glimpses of conflict that are either underreported or

perhaps glossed over in some way, and you feel like in the back of your mind there's probably more to this story. There almost certainly is. So just Google it and you will find resources out there, whether it's Wikipedia or even Reddit or any of these news aggregators that post stories. There are journalists out there that are doing good work that are trying to reach out to us. It's not necessarily that it's their fault that we're not consuming this media, nor is it our fault that we don't know about it. It's just that it's pretty surprisingly difficult to scratch the surface of what you are kind of like fed, I guess you could say, in a media landscape like America, there are certain themes that you will constantly see that you will never escape from unless you decide to investigate more.

And so, to your point, funding is real. That is something that is relatively unquestioned throughout American media, regardless of their human rights record. And so if you have in the back of your mind the question, like, why is it that we are so wholeheartedly, regardless of political spectrum, in support of this country, despite what is going on, maybe you dig a little deeper and just start searching online for resources about the Israeli Palestinian conflict. And eventually, without even attempting to form a political opinion on something, just from consuming the historical facts of what has gone on, whether it's in the recent past or further back, you will eventually come to have your own opinions. I think that's probably the most organic way of doing that.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. And I think you can connect things with concepts and values that you're already familiar with. It was interesting for me, the way that my consciousness was raised, for example, in the Israeli Palestinian conflict, because I was in college and had no idea about anything about that conflict at all. And I went to study abroad in Ireland for a year. And I'm Irish American and didn't know very much about the Irish history or the decolonial struggle in Ireland. And then I spent that year in Ireland, and I really dug deep into that. Right. And I understood by the time I left Ireland that Ireland was Britain's first colony, that the Irish people had been involved in a decolonial struggle against the British Empire for hundreds of years.

And that the north of Ireland today is still the final British colony that still exists that's still going on. And so, I understood this framework of colonialism very much. And then my advisor in undergrad was Native American, and I took his Native nations class. And then he and I were doing comparative work on the colonial processes over the Irish compared with the colonial processes over native nations. And so, I had this framework. And then the first time I went to Palestine, which was actually part of a semester program that I did, which was in the late 90s in my senior year of college, and I went to Palestine for the first time, and I just looked around and I was like, I get it.

It's very clear what's going on here. This is settler colonialism. There is extreme power asymmetrical here. And you just recognize things from other injustice frameworks that you've understood and the values that you've developed along those things. And then you just see this and you're like, okay, now I understand it because there's a lot of effort that goes into obfuscating what's actually going on. Oh, it's an age-old historical conflict. Oh, it's a religious war. Oh, it's this and that and all of these different semantics that are being thrown around to obfuscate the power asymmetry, the apartheid reality, the colonial reality and all these other things. And then when you just go there on the ground and you just start to see, oh, this is what a refugee camp looks like in the Gaza Strip and this is what settlements look like and this is what the settler bypass roads and the matrix of control looks like. And this is what the apartheid wall looks like. Okay, there's really not a lot of confusion here.

Tammer Abiyu: None of that. You would never get any of that in your living room watching CNN.

Matt Bowles: Right.

Tammer Abiyu: It's just, it's not going to break through to you. You need to search for that. It just starts with just asking the question first to your search browser of choice and just drip feed yourself a little bit of what you're interested in.

Matt Bowles: Right. And I think also getting to know other people that have more information about certain things than you do and asking them to recommend you sources on that stuff and having conversations with people and being open minded in terms of self-reflecting and learning on different things and all of that I think is super important part, which is also one of the values of travel. Talking with both local folks in the places that we are about their own history and struggle and everything, as well as talking to other travelers who have maybe been to other places and put a lot of time into thinking and learning about things that we're not familiar with. Right. I mean, hopefully for example, some people on our trip that didn't know much about the situation in Tigray before coming on this trip after having interacted with you, will now learn a lot more about that and be more aware about that and can now tell other people about that.

Tammer Abiyu: Yeah, I think the mind share of just being informed as you travel is like constantly growing for me and I hope that I've helped some people to shed some light on this subject, but I also have gained from other people like you've said And I have a Palestinian friend that has taught me so much about this conflict that I didn't know about. And just going through museums in places like Rwanda or whatever, like, you're constantly expanding your mind share of what the fabric of this global society is. And it's not something I would have expected to start out, but it's one of the best benefits, I would say, of traveling.

Matt Bowles: A 100%, man. All right, Tamar, let me ask you one final question, and then we'll move into the lightning round and wrap this up. When you think back about all of the travel experiences that you've had over the last number of years, through all your nomading experiences, what do you think has been the overall impact on you as a person, and why do you continue to keep traveling? What does travel mean to you at this point?

Tammer Abiyu: If I had to sum up why I travel, I think there's a motivation, and then there's also a no going back type relationship I have with it. So, the motivation was I just wanted to explore. I come from a physics background. I love space. I love the concept of going into the unknown, of being uncomfortable, of just witnessing things that you couldn't have conceived of before and then just growing your image of what reality is. And barring, like, going to space, the next best thing is to travel to this Earth, right?

So here I am crisscrossing this planet, trying to experience as much of human society as I can, trying to learn as much about our world as I can. And I think that never goes away. So that was the impetus for it. But the state of things now is that I really have a hard time envisioning going back to not doing this. I've mentioned this to you before, but you kind of have like a dopamine resistance almost that you develop after going through so many different experiences that just elevated your quality of life at so many different points in time. I remember when I was living in New Jersey a few years ago, I had read online, like, a thought experiment that was like, how many days of the last month do you remember? And I remember thinking to myself, I barely remember what I did yesterday. Like, it's such a monotonous thing level of living that I had been experiencing at that time. But I realized I wanted to get more out of each day in this limited amount of time that I have on this planet. And it just so happens that one of the best ways of doing that is to travel.

And so, this is the status quo now. For me, this is the baseline. Especially. I keep telling my Parents. I'm only like six months away from settling down. Don't worry, like, they'll be like, ah, when are you going to pick a place to live? You need to have a community. You need to get married. You know, that whole nine yards. And I'm like, yeah, it's four, five, six months away, tops. And it has been like five years of being six months away. So at this point, Matt, I really don't know what I'm going to do and how I'm going to walk this back. There's no putting this genie back in the bottle, you know?

Matt Bowles: I love it, man. All right, Tamara, at this point, are you ready to move into the lightning round?

Tammer Abiyu: Let's do it.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it. Do it.

What is one book that has significantly impacted you over the years you'd most recommend people should check out?

Tammer Abiyu: I think this dovetails off of the discussion we had about informing yourself about history, especially America, and like, consuming media. But I would say that [Understanding Power by Noam Chomsky](#) would be my number one recommendation. I gained so much from reading that book. It was recommended to me by a friend and it's almost like a manual for how to understand America's motives, place in the world, and our historical relationship with a lot of different countries that we've impacted. And after reading that book, I consume media totally differently. I can sit here and watch the same CNN program that I was watching 10 years ago. And rather than just take everything at face value, I can read through the obfuscation that you've talked about in terms of how they describe certain conflicts and certain interests around the world and all that kickstarted with this book. So, I would recommend [Understanding Power](#).

Matt Bowles: That is a fantastic book. I have read that, and I think it is an excellent book especially for Americans to learn about the history of American foreign policy, but also for anyone else as well. It is a fantastic read and a really great book that deals with a lot of different places around the world and will give you an incredible amount of really important global history. So, I highly recommend the book as well. We're going to link that up in [the show notes](#) so folks can just go and click on the link if they want to try to check that out. Tamar, who is one person currently alive today that you've never met that you would most love to have dinner with, just you and that person for an evening of dinner and conversation.

Tammer Abiyu: The first name that comes to mind, honestly, is Barack Obama. President Obama, because for multiple reasons, actually. So, one would be what was your mindset? I guess you know how they say people that think they can be president are all like delusional psychopaths? I wanted to know what his mindset was in the early years of his political career and whether he saw himself doing something like that. And I want to talk to him as he was my age. Then there's also the questions, like if he was forced to answer any question that I posed him, I would sit him down and be like, what was your rationale for Guantanamo? What was your rationale for drones? How do you account for some of these things that were not in line at all with the values that you professed as a candidate? And so there would be different sides of that conversation. It might be a little awkward at times, but I think overall I gain a lot from talking to him.

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

Tammer Abiyu: My most valuable item traveling other than my passport is my noise canceling headphones. Bring them with you and then use them on flights. Especially if you have a hard time sleeping like I do, just put them on. Don't worry about the movie. Just like putting these headphones on with either really low music or no music at all. Get a window seat and just enjoy cutting out 80% of your trip and so that you can just wake up when you land. It's as simple as that.

Matt Bowles: Nice. All right, Tammer, knowing everything that you know now, if you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Tammer.

Tammer Abiyu: Other than buy Bitcoin, of course. One piece of advice I got somewhere along the way that has stuck with me is that when you travel, your problems travel with you. And so, if you are missing something in your life, if you are unhappy about something, if there's something that preoccupies your mind constantly, it's not going to go away with the change of scenery, it's going to persist. And you need to figure that out. You need to do that before you can truly enjoy what it is that you're trying to do by traveling. And so, 18-year-old me wasn't really traveling yet, but I would tell him, you're going to start traveling soon and the first few years of it, you're going to still have the same things on your mind that you did before. So, I would make sure that you get your mind right first and then start traveling.

Matt Bowles: That's awesome advice, man. All right, Tammer, of all the places that you have now traveled. What are your top three favorite destinations you'd most recommend other people should check out?

Tammer Abiyu: Well, we cover Japan. That would be number one. Number two, I want to travel Iceland more. I think it was one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen. So as a whole, I would say, like, if I had to pick at the country level, Japan and Iceland are really high bars for me because I love nature and I love everything about Japan. And then third, I would say is probably if I had to pick a specific place on earth that I really enjoyed, it was paragliding in Lauterbrunnen, Switzerland, which was just a mind-blowing experience. I don't know if you've paraglided before.

Matt Bowles: Once in Medellin, Colombia.

Tammer Abiyu: Awesome place to do that as well. But here it's a huge valley, like a thousand-foot-deep valley. And you're on one side of the valley when you start. And I assumed they were just going to take me up on the cliffside and just hover there and look out at the scenery. No, you cross this thousand-foot-deep gorge in a parachute and there's just nothing beneath you. So, this to me was on that level of out-of-body experience and I highly recommend it. It's just utterly beautiful and you will not regret it.

Matt Bowles: All right, Tammer, what are your top three bucket list destinations? These are places you have not yet been to, the highest on your list you'd most love.

Tammer Abiyu: See, number one is Antarctica. I've been trying to go there forever. And then number two would be Mongolia. I would love to land in Ulaanbaatar and just find a horse somewhere and just pick a direction. Literally just be an actual nomad, not just a digital nomad, but be a nomad for a week or something. And then number three randomly is. I don't even know the name of it. I think it's called Pit of Hell.

Matt Bowles: The Gates of Hell in Turkmenistan.

Tammer Abiyu: Gates of Hell. Have you been there?

Matt Bowles: No.

Tammer Abiyu: That thing looks ridiculous. Google it. If you're listening to this and you haven't seen it before, it is a crater that's been burning for like 40 years or something. Methane gas or something constantly being released and it looks like the gates of Hell. So, I want to go and see that and hopefully not fall in.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. All right, final question. Tammer, you are a fan of Afrobeats, and we are currently on the continent of Africa and you, and I have been hearing some amazing Afrobeats together. And I definitely want you to put my audience onto some of them. So, I am going to ask for Your top five favorite Afrobeat artists.

Tammer Abiyu: Okay, here we go. So, I have to say disclaimer. I'm relatively new to Afrobeat. I've just started listening to it more heavily in the last like year or two. So, I'm not the like authority on this. But I will try to put you on to some good artists if you too are new to it. So first and foremost, you got to start with Burna Boy. That's the guy. He's pretty much the king of Afrobeat. He's everywhere. You'll hear him at every club in at least the countries we've been in Africa. So that's number one. I like Asake. Got a couple of good songs I heard when I was in Cape Town and added them to this playlist that I've been making in Africa. Third Ayra Starr. Look her up. She's got some good songs. You might have heard one of them, Bloody Samaritan. I think it was all over Instagram recently. But she's got some good stuff. And then number four, slash, maybe even higher than that was Wizkid. I would say last but not least, it's got to be Fireboy DML. I think that's a solid, solid one to round it out. Right?

Matt Bowles: Good, good pick man. Strong Nigerian lineup there. We are going to link all of those up [the show notes](#) so folks can just go to one place at themaverickshow.com there you can see all of Tammer's musical picks, the book he recommended, everything else we've discussed in this episode and Tammer, at this point I want you to let folks know how they can connect with you, follow you on social media, learn more about what you're up to, man. How do you want people to come into your world?

Tammer Abiyu: Yeah, so I don't have a huge social media presence but if you want to look me up on [Facebook](#), *Tammer Abiyu*. I've got my [LinkedIn](#). I've got an [Instagram](#). If you like my day-to-day activities, you can add me at *tourincomplete*, one word. It's a software engineer might get that pun. So, *tourincomplete*. As for business related inquiries, you can go to bedrock.comp and reach out to me or my co-founder on there and that's what I'm doing professionally if you want to look at that as well.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. We're going to link it all up in [the show notes](#) folks. So just go to one place, themaverickshow.com, go to the show notes for this episode. There you will find all the ways to contact Tammer and everything else we've discussed.

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

Tammer Abiyu: Thank you for inviting me, dude. I had a blast.

Matt Bowles: All right, good night, everybody.