

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

Matt Bowles: Well, I want to also ask you about some of your critiques of the neocolonial dynamics in the travel industry more broadly and how some of those critiques led to the development of your travel company, [The Hybrid Tours](#). Can you share some of that information just analytically, just so people can understand? And then the role that [The Hybrid Tours](#) plays and the opportunities it offers.

Hira Aftab: I'm just going to say the most obvious one. It's crazy how former colonies have to get visas to visit the countries of the former colonizers, but former colonizers can trapeze all over our countries. That's the biggest one to me. You're telling me you can go into Pakistan. I think Pakistan requires a visa. But you can go into former colonies. Britain owned, Spain owned, Portugal had, Belgium had, and you can go and just go to your former colonies. It's nobody's business.

But then when people from there try to come here, you make them jump through a thousand one hoops. It's absolutely insane. And I think a lot of the travel market right now unfortunately is catered to people from the global North. People who have that purchasing power of traveling is still very much a privilege. And I think it's not afforded to everyone. Even though there are people in Pakistan who would like to travel. For example, I was talking to a friend of mine and she said she really wants to travel, but she lives in Pakistan. But she turns around, said the currency is so bad, the political situation is so bad that if she tried to apply for a visa, for example, I don't think people would give it to her.

And I had another friend who's from Lebanon, she tried to come for a conference to the U.K. and I remember she told me the story that she was rejected, her visa was rejected because they thought she would come here and apply for asylum. Even though she gave all the information saying that she has a job back home, she has family back home and she had a return ticket. And I think that is the biggest part of all of this, that we somehow have labeled these countries developed, undeveloped.

And another thing that kind of irks me, if you will, is when people go to these countries with preconceived notions because we have somehow come to believe what was formerly Mesopotamia, what were the empires, the great empires in the global south, that somehow those same people are now dirty or downtrodden. And let's not even talk about voluntourism. I think that's a whole another part that makes people from the global north go and feel good about themselves. But it doesn't provide any sort of benefits to people actually on the ground in these countries.

And I think when people go and you sometimes you see it on TikTok, you'll see people and then they'll just start berating a country completely. Oh my God. I didn't have this; I didn't have that. What were you expecting? You're in Lahore, dude, you're not in London. There's obviously going to be a difference. I will say travel will open people's eyes to a certain extent, if you want it to open your eyes.

Otherwise, you will very much just stay ignorant because you have basically centered yourself and your way of living as being better than everyone else. So, I think it's a double-sided thing. Either it will break your perceptions or will reinforce your stereotypes.

Matt Bowles: So, tell us the origin story of [The Hybrid Tours](#). What it is and what it offers today.

Hira Aftab: Its origin story was in 2018; I went with my parents to Bosnia and Herzegovina for the first time. And if anyone speaks to me or knows me, they know how much I love Bosnia and Herzegovina. And I remember I went there, and I'd already done my first master's at that time. And I went there, and I'm like, what do you mean there was a war in Europe? What do you mean? I was never taught about this.

And I had so many questions coming out of that trip that I came home, and I bought, I think, 10 books or something. I read them all over that summer before I joined the next Masters. And when we were in Jordan, I remember we were hearing all these amazing stories about NGOs, all the amazing things they're doing, how they're helping all these people. But then in the back of my mind was kind of this question, why do we keep learning about when they did well? When do we learn about what they did wrong and how we can learn from that in the future? And Bosnia just kept coming back again and again.

And that same year, I think Jordan was February 2019. In August, I think, is July or August 2019, I, and by extension [Our World Too](#), organized a trip to Bali and Herzegovina for my friends and my co-founder for [The Hybrid Tours](#), Sibü, was actually on that trip. I did all this research. I'm like, I have to show them everything and kind of structure our lecture is had in Jordan. So, I remember I reached out to Demir, who is our friend on the ground in Bosnia, absolutely amazing human being and the most random connection ever. Which is why I believe everything happens for a reason. Because that same job that had that racist interviewer and asked me to explain Islam, I actually got that job.

During that job, I met someone who interned with Amnesty who knew Demir. And he was like, oh, you should meet this guy. And I'm like, oh, cool. So, I messaged him randomly. I'm like, oh, hey, I want to organize this trip, and we want to learn more about the war. And at that time, I was still calling it the Bosnian War, but I'm like, oh, I want my friends to learn about what I kind of saw and what I read about. And he was like, yeah, yeah, for sure. So, remember we went to Croatia, he drove all the way. I think it was Split. And he drove us from Split all the way to Sarajevo.

And he showed us around for a week, and he showed us everything. He walked us through Sarajevo. He told us about the siege. He went into Srebrenica. We saw the memorial there. We spoke to other survivors. When you stare someone who's survived a genocide in the eye, I don't know how you come out of the meeting unchanged. I honestly, I can't tell you.

And I think from that trip, that was 2019, I think soon after that, Sibü messaged me, and she's like, Hira, do you want to do this? Do you want this to be a permanent partnership between [Our World Too](#) and Go Global with Sibü? And obviously, I had done the educational part of that tour, but Sibü has so much experience, and she travels the world, literally. She is absolutely amazing, and she has all this amazing travel knowledge and hacks that I've traveled to, but I don't have anywhere near as much knowledge as she does.

And I was like, this is amazing, and this is a great idea. And also, then it's [Our World Too](#), we had the podcast, we had the social media, we had websites. But the problem is the humanitarian sector is great. I know I listed a whole bunch of issues in the beginning, but they are some very dedicated people. Amazing activists, amazing humanitarians in the sector. But when you start talking about a topic, I wanted to raise awareness about the Bosnian genocide, you realize you keep talking to the same people because they already know about these topics. That's what they were kind of engaging with.

It's very rare that you meet people and you're like, oh, I learned so much from this one post, or I learned so much from this one podcast. So, we wanted to push these messages further. And I discussed this with Siby, and she was like, let's just start this company. So that's how [The Hybrid Tours](#) were formed.

Matt Bowles: Well, Maverick Show listeners know Siby. If anybody has not yet listened to my interview with her, we will link that up in [the show notes](#) for this episode. We'll put a direct link and you'll definitely want to check out that interview as well.

Hira, can you talk a little bit about the importance of studying genocides? Obviously, you and I have been doing a lot of advocacy work over the past year to try to stop the genocide against the Palestinians. You've studied the Bosnian genocide. You've studied other genocides as well. Can you talk about why it's so important to study, what leads to genocide and, you know, in the contemporary environment now, things that people need to be paying very close attention to.

We've obviously seen a lot of these fascist pogroms going on across the U.K., anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim narratives that are behind those and so forth. So, can you sort of contextualize the importance of studying genocides and then what we can take from the history of those genocides and apply today and why that's important?

Hira Aftab: So, honestly speaking, when I started off as a humanitarian or decided I want to be an activist, or even started learning about what I then called the Bosnian war, I never thought [Our World Too](#) get to a place that we were raising awareness about genocide. It wasn't even in the back of my mind. It was kind of something that I'd kind of heard about and I'd kind of read about. I met people who had been displaced because of genocide. But I remember when I went to Bosnia, and I started learning more and I started talking to people who were Bosnian refugees or who had been Bosnian refugees because of the war.

When I was all over the world, and they started talking about their experiences. And when they started talking about their experiences, it made so many things kind of click into place. Because the fourth stage of genocide is dehumanization. It's a purposeful dehumanization of a group of people to legitimize the use of violence against them. It's what happened in Bosnia, it's what happened before the Holocaust, it's what happened in Rwanda.

And then you realize that this is the same thing. It may be in a different way, or they've remixed the sentence a little bit. It's exactly the same thing people are saying about refugees now so that they can get to a point that they can legitimize violence against them, which is exactly what we saw this summer in the U.K. when people were attacking accommodation which had asylum seekers in it, people who had fled war, people who had fled persecution, were now being attacked by some random men who believed they were a threat. Why have we got to this point? Because of the rhetoric, one, when we left the E.U. of taking back our borders, and two, saying they're illegal or terrorists or they're coming to steal your jobs and scapegoating them.

And I think that is how [Our World Too](#) got involved in raising awareness about genocide, because it's all connected. And eventually if you keep going through the stages, you're going to get to a point that violence will be legitimized. People won't be talking about it. And that is honestly why I think we should learn by genocide. But then also, it's not a new phenomenon. It's been happening throughout human history.

This is the part that gets me the most because we always say that we're the most well-connected generation ever. But if we are, what are we doing different than generations who didn't have social media did?

And that's something that I keep kind of playing with in my head. We have a lot of people talking about Palestine. We have a lot of people talking about Lebanon. But you also had people talking about the Bosnian genocide. You also had people talking about Rwanda. So sometimes it gets really disheartening. But at the same time, we cannot be blind to the fact that genocides continue to happen. And if the term never again is meant to mean something is going to take all of us acting to stop something happening.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk about some of [The Hybrid Tours](#) and what those itineraries are like? So, for example, if someone is interested in going to Bosnia and learning about this, as well as seeing all sorts of wonderful things that Bosnia has to offer, or if someone is interested in going to Jordan and being able, while they're there, to meet with Palestinian refugees whose families obviously are incurring a genocide right now in Palestine and so forth, and actually interact with folks and meet with those people. In addition to seeing all of the wonderful things that those places have to offer, share a little bit about how [The Hybrid Tours](#) itineraries are structured and what people can expect if they want to try to go on a trip.

Hira Aftab: So, I think with [The Hybrid Tours](#), we really wanted to kind of attract people, be like, oh, my God, I've never been to Bosnia and Herzegovina, or I've never been to Jordan or now Pakistan. But people who had a general interest that we could then introduce them to. But did you know about the Bosnian genocide? Do you know Palestinians have been here since 1948, since before that. Did you know about colonization in Pakistan?

So then introduce them to topics they generally may not have heard of before. So, [The Hybrid Tours](#) very much are combining at leisure with the human rights aspect. And we take people to the most amazing places in all of these countries. For example, Bosnia, we will go to Mostar, which is the one most people will go to. But then they will miss out so many places like Stolac, such a cute, amazing town. It's an amazing town. And our guide is from there, Demir. So, he will show us in a personal capacity around his town. Then we'll go to Sarajevo. We'll obviously go to Srebrenica. But then we'll also highlight the point that genocide just didn't happen in Srebrenica, was all across, across Bosnia was three years of this.

And then I also kind of just wanted to say that we do invite people to share their experiences as guests on our tours. For example, the Bosnian genocide survivors. But I just kind of wanted to emphasize that when we invite them, it's fully on their terms, so they don't even have to talk about their experiences during the genocide. They can literally just talk about their day, they can talk about their week, they can talk about their farm. I don't know whatever they want to say. Because we don't want to reduce people one to their trauma because that's a huge disservice to people in general. You cannot just reduce them to genocide survivors or refugees or asylum seekers when there's so much more to that beyond a label.

But then we also, we're fully put the power in their hands to talk about whatever they want to talk about. So, you can expect the best sites a country has to offer, but then you can also expect us to talk about sometimes difficult topics, which are human rights, which are genocide, which are their concentration camps in Bosnia, we talk about those. For example, we'll go and talk about the colonization of Pakistan, which is something that often gets looked over. And in Jordan, for example, we'll meet. Unfortunately, Jordan has seen successive groups of refugees. So, you have Syrian refugees, you have Eritrean refugees,

you have Iraqi refugees, you have Syrian refugees, and you get to engage with them on whatever level they choose to engage with you on.

So, I think [The Hybrid Tours](#) really offer it all. And we wanted, yes, to highlight the incredible countries, but then also we didn't want to gloss over any of the history.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to talk with you about Pakistan for sure. I am so excited that there is a Hybrid Tour now going to Pakistan in 2025. There's a very good chance that I am going to try to be on that tour. I'm going to do the best I can because Pakistan has been so high on my list for so long and I have not yet been there. And there's no way that I would rather see the country than with you and Siby and your amazing hybrid tour.

So, I'm going to do my best to be on that trip if I can, but we're definitely going to link that up and give folks more information about when and where if they would like to join as well. But I want to talk a little bit about Pakistan with you in general here, and I would love to just kind of go all the way back and just talk about your connection with Pakistan. And maybe just when you were a kid, you had mentioned earlier that you had gone back a couple times with your family. Can you share a little bit about those experiences. And then as you've gotten older, how your reconnection with Pakistan, eventually moving there for a year to live there, how all of that has evolved for you.

Hira Aftab: Well, I think my identity as a Pakistani has been complicated, to say the least. I think a lot of it, when you're younger, you are shaped by external stereotypes. Unfortunately, a lot of them are colonial, some of them are racist. I remember being at the UK and you were othered because you were brown or because you were Pakistani and you're considered, you're just foreign, you were considered lesser than. And then the same thing.

I love Saudi, don't get me wrong, I loved growing up in Saudi, but there was also racism there and it was a whole bunch of racism towards Filipinos, for example, towards South Asians. And then you tried to distance yourself from being Pakistani because it wasn't cool. It wasn't cool to be Pakistani, it wasn't cool in the U.K. to be Pakistani, it wasn't cool in Saudi to be Pakistani. So, you just kind of either said you were British, or you lived in Saudi, and you never went any further with that.

And I think a lot of the time I was like, oh my God, Pakistani. You're so lame. In my earlier teenage years, it's so lame. I don't want to say I'm from there. So that was very much how it was when I was younger. Obviously, I loved my family who lived there, my grandparents lived there, and I went every couple of years for three or four weeks, met up with my cousins. It was good to see my cousins, but we didn't really do anything. We just sat in houses chilled with each other all day. Which is great that we can look back on it now and laugh at the time we were so bored.

So, it was interesting. But as I grew older, I don't think it was until I was 25 or 26 because I was working in the U.K., then I was working some admin job and I think I just got up one day, I'm like, I am not working admin. I didn't intern in the UN, and I didn't do this whole humanitarian degree or international relations degree to end up in admin. So, I literally. Yeah, yeah, peace out U.K. So, I went to Pakistan with my mom. I was meant to be a three week visit again ended up turning into a year because I got a job there with this organization called the European Union Punjab Access to Justice Project.

And it was reverse culture shock because there's so many different kinds of culture shock. But you go there and in your mind you've kind of been told, oh, Pakistan is this. Pakistan is really backwards, even by other

Pakistanis. And you go there and you're like, yo, I'm the backwards one. What are you talking about? What do you mean you're dressing like this in Pakistan. It was really interesting. And I started working there. People knew I was Pakistani, but it was diaspora. So, they considered me what we call valeti, which is like foreigner. And if they're Pakistanis listening to this world, what is that pronunciation? It is what it is. It's diaspora Urdu.

And I remember I started working there and I mean there were issues in the project, as in it was a great project. I love my team lead; he was such an amazing person. I made friends there, Azul and Umme and they're absolutely incredible and they made my entire experience so much better. I got to experience things in Pakistan. Cultural festivals, there's a Lahore Literary festival. I got to go places like Islamabad that has a collage festival, or it was in some USAID funded organization in Islamabad.

They got to go see that. I got to see parts of Pakistan I had never seen before. And I think it kind of created the sense of wanting to know more. And I think that was a year I kind of started learning more about my grandmother's experiences. Partitioned because we actually visited the house, she ended up staying in right after partition because it was still in the family, and she lived in that house. They would walk me through the house, tell me about all this history. And I think that was the first time I started to connect. And I remember this whole, I think identity shift over that thing that I'm like, you know what? If you have a problem with it, I don't care. I think that was that year and I started working there again.

I saw the ins and outs of the humanitarian sector and international development sector from being in country versus being in a head office. And it's just very interesting. It was such a weird out of body experience because you're going to be in Saudi and your Pakistani or look down upon, you're in the U.K., you're Pakistan, you're Dand upon, but then you're there and you're Pakistani with a foreign nationality and people are treating you completely differently.

And I remember this, we had some event, and we had to hand one somebody money and one of the people came up to me and he was like here are you, look after this envelope. And there was another lady standing there, she was far more senior. So, he could have just given it to her. She's like, why didn't you give it to me? He's like, oh, because she's not Pakistani. She won't steal it. I'm like, what? I'm like, how? I'm like, what in the colonized mindset is that?

And then I think I started realizing more about colonization then too, because not just a process that happens to a country, it has to happen to the people as well. Because I think when you've been fed these stereotypes by your own country, you start internalizing some of them. And there were so many interesting experiences there because you have to have this Pakistani identity card and to move to go into the country visa free. And so, me and my sister were stopped at a checkpoint because to go into Kent, you have to be Pakistan, or you have to have no objection certificate. There's a whole thing around that.

And they stopped us because you guys don't look Pakistani. What do you mean? We get called Pakistani outside and here we're telling us I don't look Pakistani. And I remember it was such an interesting experience because that was the first time. The second time is we went to a museum and there's local prices and there's foreign prices. So, my mom paid, and she got the local ones, obviously. And we went inside, and we showed our tickets to the man. He looks at us, he's like, yeah, yeah, you. You're Pakistani. She points to my mom. These two aren't. And I'm like, I'm her kid. What do you mean? I'm not Pakistani. And I'm like, I'm speaking to Urdu. He's like, yeah, yeah, white men speak Urdu now too. I'm like, well, that was humbling.

That was a really interesting experience because you are fundamentally too other for home and then you're too other for your other home and you don't really belong to any of those because I'm never going to be Saudi. I'm not according to the most right-wing definition of it. I'm not British. But you go to Pakistan and then they consider you a foreigner as well. So, you're left with this identity of essentially when people ask me what I am, I'm a third culture kid because I don't fit into any of those boxes. So, it's been really interesting kind of developing that relationship with being a Pakistani and I think then engaging with people like Zakaria, who I interviewed on my podcast More than a Statistic and talking to her about history with Pakistan.

And also, Saadia Gradezi, who is a co-Founder of Project Dastan and how partition affected families and learning more from them and more about all decolonization initiatives happening in Pakistan and other places. And then learning from Azul all about all of her work and her introducing me to the culture of Pakistan, which I'd never really seen or experienced before, I think that led me down the whole path of accepting that.

And to be honest, being happy with Pakistan, I don't think maybe you should be proud, but you can be happy about being something, but pride leads you to strange places. But being happy that I am Pakistani and now when I go back to Saudi and someone tries to talk down to me because I'm Pakistani, I'm like, I am Pakistani, Anwa. And what? Fight me. You're not going to shame me for being Pakistani. So, I think it's been a very long learning curve and has definitely taken me the better part of a decade.

Matt Bowles: Well, I wanted to see if you can go a little bit deeper and share a little bit more about what you said or very early on in our conversation about how growing up you weren't really taught a lot about the history of Pakistan. And if you can talk a little bit about your journey, being intentional about seeking out and learning about that history.

One of the interviews that you did and the episodes you did was on more than a statistic that I messaged you about right away because I thought was one of the most important episodes, and for me it was really touching and important that you did. This episode was about the Bangladesh genocide of 1971. And I'm curious if you can just share a little bit about your journey, learning about Pakistan's history, including that genocide, and just explain how your consciousness was raised on those things.

Hira Aftab: So, I don't think when we were growing up, because we never really lived as a family in Pakistan, we learned British history and British history was basically a British or American history because of where I was in school. Pakistani history wasn't something we were really taught. We knew when Independence Day was, for example, I think there's an Army Day. We knew when those specific days were, and we knew about partition, and we knew about this is the day you should be proud.

Pakistan was created and there's Bangladesh and Bangladesh used to be East Pakistan. And it broke away and that was basically how I learned about it. I didn't really go into depth again until much later, until 25, 26 when I learned about Pakistan history. And I'm still nowhere near being an expert in that at all. But Bangladesh was interesting because you hear about East Pakistan and you hear about Pakistan, East Pakistan, and then there's this overwhelming narrative that it wasn't Pakistan.

Pakistan were the heroes in the situation. And it's exactly what Anam says in the podcast that is presented in a way of loss for Pakistan, but it was independence for Bangladesh, which is a really interesting perspective to come across, but it's actually a really weird story. But that conversation was not the first

time I'd heard about the Bangladeshi genocide. I was on Twitter having this back and forth with a Serb nationalist. Actually, he was arguing about the Bosnian genocide, whether it happened or not. And he's like, ain't no way a Pakistani is talking to me about genocide with what happened in Bangladesh? And I'm sitting there going, what happened in Bangladesh?

And I remember that was kind of when I heard it. And I think that same week I interviewed Anam, and she was talking about and talking about her book and about what Pakistani army essentially did in Bangladesh. And I think that was very eye opening for me because it shows you the other side of what Pakistan was saying, basically. I'm not saying everyone in Pakistan, but what mainstream narrative was. And when you start engaging with it more, and there's a lot of things from Pakistan saying, oh, India did it, or the Indian intelligence agency. Is there an element that could have been that. Yes, there could have been. Is it all of them? No, there was very much also committed by the Pakistani army.

And then I remember some NGO released a report, and I remember reading survivor narratives of women who had been sexually abused during that time. And I'm thinking, this is nothing I learned when I was younger. This was nothing I had ever heard of. And now it's really interesting to see because with the current situation in Pakistan, a lot of the older generation are now coming out and saying, no, what we did in Bangladesh was wrong. They're acknowledging that it was a genocide in Bangladesh. They're saying that we committed as Pakistani troops committed those atrocities in Bangladesh.

And it's very interesting to see how they're now owning up to that history when in my lifetime, 10, 15 years ago, there would have been no Pakistan went to defend itself. Some went here and they wanted to break away. And it was the Indians. It was all of them. And seeing that narrative shift has been very interesting because I'd only really heard about the Bangladesh narrative that week, I interviewed Anam. It was not something that had even been on my mind before that. So, it's really interesting to come to terms with your own history. Yes, you were colonized, but then just because you were colonized, or war crimes were done to you doesn't justify you doing that to someone else.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, and I think it's really important to look into that as well, because it's also a genocide that was backed by the United States government. And likewise, a lot of Americans are not aware of that piece of history either. And so, I think, you know, to the extent that you and I can use our platforms, you listen to The Maverick Show interview that I did with my friend Roshni, whose family is Bangladeshi and talked about her family story histories from the Bangladesh independence war and the genocide and everything else.

And so, I think if anybody hasn't heard that episode yet, we'll link it up in [the show notes](#) as well. But super important history to look into. So, I really appreciate your platforming and doing what you're doing with the More Than a Statistic podcast. We'll link it up and hopefully everybody can go and check out that episode out some of the other really important interviews that you've done. So, for people that are interested in going to Pakistan with [The Hybrid Tours](#), what is the itinerary going to be like? What do you have in store for people that would like to join this trip?

Hira Aftab: So, I am super excited because I'm going to be seeing Pakistan away. I've never seen it either, so it's going to be a first time for me as well. We'll obviously be checking out Lahore and Islamabad. Lahore is where I'm from, so it'd be great. I'm also going to meet up with my friend Azil. She has an environmental organization. She raises awareness about environmental rights and conducts educational training. So, she's going to be meeting up with us. I'm so excited for everyone to meet up with her.

We'll be going north then, which will be absolutely incredible. Going to Hunza, and we'll be going to see the Kalash Festival and hopefully meeting with local activists there as well. So, there's a lot to look forward to. And there is also going to be a lot about learning about colonization, which it doesn't really get taught a lot. Colonization from the point of view of the people who are formerly colonized, from the point of view of how it still affects Pakistan and from what you don't see in the media narrative and how it continues to affect a lot of Pakistani politics and the situation in the country even today.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. Well, as I said, I am going to do whatever I can to try to be on this trip. And folks, if you would like to join and sign up for this trip. You can get a special \$100 discount just for being a Maverick show listener. When you sign up, you can just enter the code Maverick, and you can get \$100 off. We are going to link up in [the show notes](#), a direct link, so you can see the full itinerary, see the exact dates that this is going to be. It's in May of 2025.

So, we're going to link up the exact dates and the full itinerary and all the details and what's covered and how much it is and everything else in [the show notes](#). So just go to themaverickshow.com go to the show notes for this episode, and there you will see that as well as how to get your special Maverick show discount.

Hira, I want to ask you just a few more sort of reflective questions. When you think back about all of the travel experiences that you've had over the years, how do you think all of this travel has impacted you as a person?

Hira Aftab: I think the biggest one for me is it made me open and willing to listen to different perspectives. And it made me realize that there is a much larger world out there full of people who have many different experiences. And if we choose to just keep looking at the world through our own eyes, we will never actually one grow as people. But also, you're going to ignore all these different cultures, these languages, all these experiences you could have. And I think that's been the biggest part of traveling for me. And I think it's also just that flexibility of to be able to go somewhere and then to hit the ground running.

Matt Bowles: For people that are either already traveling the world as digital nomads or looking to get into more of a travel lifestyle. What tips do you have for how we can be more thoughtful, conscious, ethical travelers as we move through this world?

Hira Aftab: I think there are multiple answers to this question because we all know that when you travel somewhere, it pushes up the price for locals, especially if you're going with a lot of foreign money. Basically, if you're earning in dollars or pounds, you go somewhere like Bosnia, you go somewhere with a much weaker currency, you will be pricing out locals eventually. And I think it's just being very mindful of how you're supporting people.

You being there, is it doing more harm or good to the local community. And I think that's very important to keep in the back of your head as a first point, but then as a second one is very much go into everything with an open mind because there are so many countries in the world, and they will not do things the same way you do in your country. There's no point getting frustrated or angry because someone isn't acting like they would in Australia or New Zealand or wherever you're from.

You should take time to get to learn to know their culture and to learn to know more about their about the country and its history in general. And you should go into a country and want to learn more about its

history. It's great knowing the sites and it's great seeing things that get famous on, for example, TikTok. But then I think you really need to decide what kind of traveler you want to be.

And if you want to go through these countries and really see them, you should see them one through the eyes of a local. But then also learn about their history and the experiences they've all had which have inevitably shaped this country. And I think those would be my tips. But be very conscientious as you move through the world. And if you have any privilege, make sure you use it for good rather than trying to assert your authority or your dominance over anyone else.

Matt Bowles: You talked about how Palestine was such a central part of your activist journey and motivation. And obviously you and I have been corresponding a lot. We're both spending a lot of time to try to raise awareness. The genocide against the Palestinians has now been going on for over a year.

For people that are interested in learning more about that and interested in trying to do something, maybe they don't know what they can do to help to stop the genocide against the Palestinians. I just want to open the floor for you to share anything you'd like to share. Direct people, anywhere you'd like to direct them. And then any calls to action or things that you'd like to ask people to do to contribute and try to help to stop that genocide.

Hira Aftab: I think the biggest thing I'm going to say is amplify Palestinian voices, whether they're in Palestine or in the diaspora, because they are the ones who are being most affected by this. They're the ones who have been refugees since 1948. And also make sure when you talk about it, educate yourself. Read books written by Palestinians. Read books that talk about Palestine before the 7th of October, because the apartheid, the occupation of Palestine, existed in the 6th and the 5th and the 4th and the 3rd of October last year as well. It didn't start on the 7th.

And really look beyond those media narratives because if you take the 7th of October as a starting point, you essentially have historical blindness because it completely ignores The Balfour Declaration. It ignores how the U.N. partitioned it, how there have been successive waves of resistance which preceded Hamas, which were destroyed also by the Zionist government. And I think it's really just about educating yourself. Continue to amplify the voice of Palestinians, donate and keep sharing content. Because I know sometimes it may feel like you're doing nothing, but it could reach the right person.

You could spark the person who does end up going into the office to change things. You don't know one small thing can have such a big effect. For example, whether that was me going to Palestine or to Bosnia and then sparking this whole journey of raising awareness about other contexts in the world. There's never an action too small. And I think we have more power collectively as people than the people in power. But we need to learn how to effectively mobilize. We need to have set objectives, and we need to collectively work together. Because I think what the people in power and the people who are facilitating this genocide want us to do is feel hopeless. But that shouldn't be what we do. Because this resistance, the Palestinian resistance, has been going on since 1948. This isn't the beginning until Palestine is free. This isn't the end.

So, you should never be silent. You should always speak up, and you should educate yourself about the rights of Palestinians, the rights of human beings, basically. So, I think that would be my biggest takeaway. Amplify Palestinian voices and read beyond what the media is trying to show you.

Matt Bowles: I mean, the other perspective that I would add to that is the level of influence that people have who live in countries that are funding and arming and backing this genocide. So if you live in the United

States, or you live in Germany, or you live in the U.K. or you live in a country that is arming and politically protecting and backing this genocide, you have not only a high level of responsibility to do something, but you have a disproportionate amount of influence to do something right, to call for an arms embargo, to exert political pressure towards an arms embargo.

I am a citizen of the United States. Those are my tax dollars that are being used. Those are my democratically elected representatives that are funding, arming, backing, politically protecting and facilitating this genocide. And so, we have not only a responsibility, but a disproportionate amount of influence to try to cut off those weapons as a mechanism of stopping this genocide. So, anybody that lives in one of those countries that is supporting in any of these ways, we really have an important opportunity, I think, to really raise our voices and pressure our own political representatives to change course on this.

Hira Aftab: Absolutely.

Matt Bowles: So, with that, Hira, I think that's an amazing place to end the main portion of this interview. And at this point, are you ready to move in to the lightning round?

Hira Aftab: I hope so.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it. All right, what is one book that you would recommend that people should read?

Hira Aftab: [Natives by Akala](#).

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

Hira Aftab: I book flights midweek because they're normally cheaper.

Matt Bowles: All right, if you could have dinner with any 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 choose?

Hira Aftab: Bisan from Palestine.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. If anybody is not following Bisan Owda, she just won an Emmy for her journalism in the Gaza Strip. We'll link up her social media handle because everyone should be following her and getting direct reporting directly from Bisan. That is an amazing choice.

All right, here at 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 Hira?

Hira Aftab: Keep going and raise your voice against any injustices you see.

Matt Bowles: Love that. All right, of all the places that you've now traveled, what are three of your favorite destinations you'd most recommend? Other people should definitely check out?

Hira Aftab: Bosnia and Herzegovina. Palestine.

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

Hira Aftab: Kosovo. I would really love to go there. Uzbekistan. And the next one, it's Monaco. Because I just started watching Drive to Survive on Netflix and I now love Formula one.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. I have been to Monaco. Actually, I have not been to the Formula one Grand Prix in Monaco, but I have been to the Formula one Grand Prix in Singapore, which is the street circuit night race. And when I went there, I did not know anything at all about Formula one.

I was in Kuala Lumpur with a whole bunch of travelers and they're like, dude, you want to go to the Formula one? And at that point I was basically just like, is that like NASCAR? They're like, no, dude, it's not like NASCAR. They're like, just come. You're going to want to be at this event. We'll tell you everything you need to know.

And I went with people that know, like, everything about F1. They know all the drivers, all this. So, I'm like, this is perfect. It's a great group to go with and the event in Singapore was like unbelievable. I mean, it was really quiet something. So that is amazing. That is a great choice.

All right Hira, I want you to let folks know how they can find you, how they can follow you on social media, listen to your podcast and once again, how they can learn more about [Our World Too](#) and [The Hybrid Tours](#).

Hira Aftab: So, we are on [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#). So please follow us there. We have a website, www.ourworldtoo.org.uk and I'd like to say please follow us and amplify the voices of the incredible people who've already spoken to us because they have some incredible experiences that deserve to be shared. And for *The Hybrid Tours*, follow us at www.thehybridtours.com and we're also on LinkedIn for [The Hybrid Tours](#) and also [Our World Too](#). And then we're also on [Instagram](#) at *The Hybrid Tours* and also on [TikTok](#) at *The Hybrid Tours*.

Matt Bowles: We are going to link all of that up in one place. So, you can just go to [the show notes](#) for this episode. There you are going to find links to all of those social media handles, all of those websites and everything else that we have discussed in this episode.

Hira, I think you are amazing. I think you're doing amazing work. Thank you so much for coming on the show.

Hira Aftab: Thank you so much for having me and thank you so much for your support and the work we're doing.

Matt Bowles: All right, good night, everybody.