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HOST: The idea that we as immigrants who were colonized can move to Canada and become settlers is an unsettling thought.

But to the Indigenous peoples of Canada, that is who we are. We are all immigrants, and we participate in some way in a colonial system inflicted on the Indigenous people.

In her talk, Anubha Momin talks about her Southern privilege in Nunavut and decolonizing herself.

This is The Conversation Piece.

ANUBHA MOMIN:

Hi everyone. My name is Anubha and I am a blogger and my site is called Finding True North, and it's a blog about Iqaluit, which is probably the last place my mother imagined I would move when she immigrated to Canada. I came to Canada from Bangladesh when I was two. My brother and I were raised in Toronto by a single mother who worked very hard to put food on the table, clothes on our backs, lots of money in our university's bank accounts. And I think she did a pretty good job. My brother and I are like fairly functional, somewhat adults now. And I'm here getting to speak in front of all you lovely humans.

I moved to Iqaluit four and a half years ago and like most other people when I first got here, I was like mesmerized by like the landscape and the cold and the dark and the light and all the Arctic-y things that I could share on Instagram.

But what I was really struck by was this like cultural shift that I went through going from South to North, because unlike anywhere else that I have been in Canada, here in Nunavut, the dominant culture is not Western European or mainstream Canadian. And when I say Western European and mainstream Canadian, I mean, it's not white.

It's Inuit culture, community names are in Inuktitut and people are wearing like homemade parkas and sealskin camics, and we liked the qulliq at the beginning of public events and that's what makes it into the National Geographic articles and on the blogs and on the postcards. But despite all that, the reality is that we are on Inuit land and surrounded by Inuit culture, and non-Inuit still do better on indices of health and wealth. Inuktitut is the language of the land, but it is being drowned out by English voices saying that they just can't wait to go down South and back to civilization.

And the jobs and resources are taken up and taken out by Southern bodies. And I found myself, my non-Inuk, English speaking, Southern Canadian self settling, very uncomfortably into the role of a modern day settler. And I'm, I'm assuming this probably sounds a little weird to you because I look more like Pocahontas than John Smith, but one of the most pivotal moments in developing my identity in this country was when I accepted that the immigrant settler is not an oxymoron. And this is a tough pill to swallow that I benefit from colonization. Me, who comes from a part of the world that was like really expertly colonized. I carry a lot of baggage from that about my skin, about my food, about my name, about my language, but why did we come here? Why did my family come here?

Well, immigrants, we come here for that promise of a better life. That's kind of like the immigrant cliché, right? But it's true. What is also true is that as we are coming here in search of a better, we are coming here in search of a better life while the Indigenous people of this place are saying that their lives in this country are not good enough.

It's kind of unfortunate, but in my experience, it seems that a lot of immigrants or newcomers to Canada, aren't always even aware of Canada's colonial history. I mean, it, I guess I shouldn't be that surprised a lot of Canadians are not even really aware of Canada's colonial history. And I asked my ma and she said there was nothing about residential schools or forced settlements on her citizenship exam. So, if we're ignorant about that history, it isn't that shocking that we might unwittingly participate in perpetuating colonialism without even knowing our actions are problematic.

Kind of like how celebrating Canada 150 is like slapping a big red bow on a century and a half of normalized colonisation. Even worse, we are not only participating in the colonial system that was forced onto this stolen land, but we are benefiting from it like how I benefit as a southerner in Nunavut.

Remember that search for a better life? Well, like people find it, right. We know that in Canada, this kind of Indian does better than the other Indian. So, it is a better life, but at whose expense? That's not the better life my mother envisioned when she came here and I know that cause I asked her and she was like, that's not the better life that I wanted. What I'm talking about simply is privilege.

Southern privilege is a real thing in Nunavut, just like I think immigrant privilege is a real thing in Canada.

And of course, white privilege is a real thing everywhere. As a racialized person and an immigrant woman of colour, I know what it's like to be on both sides of that privilege table. And I don't want to be an outsider trying to be an insider on the wrong side of history. And obviously I think all Canadians should play an active part in reconciliation. And I know that what I'm alluding to is placing even more work on new Canadians, who, as I said, are dealing with a lot of our own struggles. But as Canada's immigration rate continues to grow, as we welcome more and more newcomers like my family, I see such an urgency and importance for our involvement, especially for those of us who are also marginalised for our race or religion. Because when you call out any oppressive practices or systemic prejudice, you are not only decolonizing this country, but you're decolonizing yourself.

Remember all that baggage I say that we carry as racialized persons? I've turned some of that into lost luggage in Nunavut. So I'll lighten the mood with a little story. When I first came up here, I was really lucky. I got to go to a lot of different communities and in one Hamlet, an Inuk woman came up to me and she said, "Oh, I love your skin colour. Can I adopt your first baby?" And she laughed because she was being silly, but she probably did not realise that that was a first time in my life that my skin colour was celebrated, because I come from a part of the world where fair is lovely. And I grew up hearing, "isn't it a pity; she would have been so pretty if she wasn't so dark." Oh. And I went back when this like custom Brown baby adoption conversation happened, I was in a relationship with like another Brown skinned beauty.

So when I showed his photo to this woman, her eyes opened really wide and she was like, "I'll take the first two." And let me tell you, it is a lot easier to, um, buck Western European standards of beauty when you're in a place that isn't entirely commanded by Western European culture.

And I'm really grateful for those interactions. And I am especially grateful to all the artists and filmmakers and TV producers of this territory for letting me, a South Asian southerner collaborate and work with and for them. They didn't have to do that. And I'm grateful because it allowed for a very special kind of cross-cultural interaction that it has made my time in Nunavut so influential. And these interactions between Indigenous Canadians and immigrant Canadians or Indigenous Canadians and

## The Conversation Piece Podcast: Anubha Momin from The Walrus Talks

Canadians of colour are more and more becoming a part of what I think will characterise the future of Nunavut.

Like when a group of young Inuit organised a solidarity rally with the city's mosque after the shooting in Quebec, or how Inuit from all over this territory and country and world fill the seats at Black history month events every year, or that anyone who has been to Inuit Nunangat knows that seal skin looks real good on all skin tones. I think anyone who has been up here and paid attention will tell you that it has fundamentally altered their politics and perspectives. And I hope that as Canadians look forward to the next 150 years, that they also look North for examples of what our communities can be and the conversations that we can have, and that we really should be having, because my liberation is entirely linked with yours. And I know as I am like slowly hesitantly, somewhat reluctantly transitioning back into life, down South and abroad that I am also always looking for a little bit of Iqaluit everywhere that I go. Dhanyavad, thank you, nakurmiik.

HOST:

Anubha Momin is a writer and performer in Iqaluit, Nunavut and she's just one of the over 800 fantastic Canadians who have wheeled, walked and webcammed onto a stage at The Walrus Talks.

We're coming up to the end of season two of The Conversation Piece! Do us a favour and give us a starred review on Apple iTunes, Spotify or wherever you download this podcast from so we can start off Season 3 with a bang!