Informed Perspectives: Religion, Migration, and Democracy

[00:00:02] **Jessica Marroquin** Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining Informed Perspectives: Religion, Migration and Democracy with the esteemed guests Maria Hinojosa and Micheline Aharonian Marcom. Today's webinar is hosted by the Religion, Race & Democracy Lab at the University of Virginia. This is the first program in our series Informed Perspectives, which brings journalists, documentarians and humanities scholars into conversation about issues concerning religion, race and politics. I'm Jessie Marroquin. I'm an ACLS postdoctoral remote fellow at the University of Chicago, a member of the Lab, and one of the program managers, Evan Sandsmark, who is online as well as the other for the Informed Perspective series. I'd like to think the Luce/ACLS Program in Religion, Journalism and International Affairs for so generously sponsoring this event. We hope you will join us again on Monday, October 12th, for the next program in our series, Religion and the Race for the White House, with New York Times opinion writer Elizabeth Breunig and UVA professor Charles Mathews. For more information, go to religionlab.virginia.edu. Before I introduce our speakers, a few notes to our audience who I want to encourage to raise questions throughout our event. To do so, please use the Q&A function at the bottom of your screens. The chat and raise hand functions have been disabled. So this is the way to ask questions. There will be time at the end of the event to field some of your questions. But please note that all attendees have the ability to upvote each other's questions. So if you find a question that you find really interesting or you would like to hear, upvote that question. Also, we are recording today's webinar, which will be made available on the Lab's website later this week. And now it is my pleasure to introduce our our two speakers.

[00:02:09] **Jessica Marroquin** Micheline Aharonian Marcom is a professor at the University of Virginia and an award-winning author. She has received fellowships and awards from the Leanin Foundation, the winning foundation and the US Artists Foundation. She has published seven novels, including a trilogy of books about the Armenian genocide and its aftermath in the 20th century. Her first novel, Three Apples Fell from Heaven, was a New York Times notable book and runner up for the PEN Hemingway Award for First Fiction. Her second novel, The Daydreaming Boy, won the PEN USA Award for fiction. Her latest book, The New American, published by Simon and Schuster this August 2020, is about a dreamer who was deported to Guatemala and his journey home to California. She is the founder and creative director of the New American Story Project, which you'll hear us refer to probably as N.A.S.P. So the New American Story Project (N.A.S.P), a digital oral history project. N.A.S.P. is a living archive of voices exploring the forces of migration and the lives of new Americans. Find out more at newamericanstoryproject.org. She currently teaches creative writing at the University of Virginia.

[00:03:30] Maria Hinojosa, our second speaker, is an author, award winning journalist, advocate and activist. Hinojosa's nearly 30 year career as a journalist includes reporting for PBS, CBS, WNBC, CNN, NPR and anchoring the award winning talk show "Maria Hinojosa: One on One." She is the author of two books and has won dozens of awards, including four Emmys. She has been recognized by People in Espanol as one of the 25 most powerful Latina women. In 2010, Maria Hinojosa created Futuro Media, an independent nonprofit newsroom based in Harlem, New York City. The with the mission to create multimedia content from people of color perspective. At Futuro Media, Hinojosa continues to bring attention to experiences and points of view that are often overlooked or underreported in mainstream media, all while mentoring the next generation of diverse journalists to delve into authentic and nuanced stories. As anchor and executive producer of the Peabody Award winning show "Latino USA," distributed by NPR and co-host of

Futuro Media's award winning political podcast "In the Thick," Hinojosa has informed millions about the changing cultural and political landscape in the United States and abroad. As a reporter for NPR, Hinojosa was among the first to report on abuse in immigrant detention facilities and youth violence in urban communities on a national scale. Her latest book, "Once I Was You: A Memoir of Love and Hate and a Torn America," was just released by Simon and Schuster this past month. Thank you both, Maria and Micheline, for being here today. I personally have been counting down the days and I know I've mentioned this to you and you're in my e-mail several times to this event. So let's continue onto the reason why you're all here today. Micheline, if you would like to start us off. That would be great.

[00:05:46] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** All right. Thank you, Jessie Marroquin and thank you, I just I mean, of course, these are strange times. None of us can be in the same room together, which I wish we could be. But I'm still super excited to be here.

[00:05:58] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** To have been invited to contribute and also to be in a company of Maria Hinojosa, whose work I have listened to and read for so many years. So it's just a privilege to be a part of this conversation that we're going to have in this way that we have these days.

[00:06:13] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** So I'm going to talk a little bit and then I'm going to show a few videos. So talk we'll show a few videos and then I think Ms. Hinojosa will go next. I feel like I mean, I'm a writer, so of course I had to write something. So I want to talk a little bit about the novel and then the new American story project and how they're related.

[00:06:34] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** I mean, I'm a novelist and a teacher. In fact, I've been a teacher of one subject or another, English as a second language and Spanish in my twenties and creative writing. For many years now, I've taught every level kindergarten, high school, graduate school. But after writing books for twenty-five years, books of imaginative literature, I find that my brain is usually working in the direction of seeing and seeking patterns. And how I come to know anything is through writing itself, writing as inquiry is Toni Morrison once said, which has always felt true for me. I write a book because I want to understand some things better in all of their complexities, their contradictions, even nuances. And I believe in the potency of stories, myths, tales, literature in their capacity not only to endure, but in their service to culture and the way that they encode knowledge actually symbolically, esthetically and in the ways in which stories might honor the dead. And as you try to determines for her or himself how they can be a kind of reckoning with national historical narratives where statistics and generalizations are the norm and where the vanquished are often not recorded. So literature for me is kind of a cenotaph in some ways for the unburied and the unmourned; some of my work around the Armenian genocide based sense of my family stories. But more than that, they provide this rich ecology of the myriad because in stories in the complex world of novels specifically, but including the stories and I talk about in a minute, the specific experiences and lives of individuals into which each artist inquires is the subject. And so the individual is given voice in that sense. And for me, meaningfulness is implicit in storytelling, which by its nature is creative, imaginative. And I feel like even when it's about something sad or violent, it's on the side of life.

[00:08:38] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** So eight years ago, in 2012, I finished a draft of the novel "The New American," which is about a journey of an American kid, is Guatemalan-American who, like a lot of people I've known in California where I have lived

all my life until I moved a few years ago to Charlottesville. I'm here in California now. It wasn't a situation of not having papers while others in his family did. And because of a traffic infraction and the novel that is Amelio, which is his name, gets deported to Guatemala, a country he doesn't have any memory of, for he left it as a baby. And Amelio suddenly finds himself thousands of miles from his family, his friends, school and job with no legal recourse. And he decides without really thinking about it too much. He's 20 years old. He's like, I'm going to go home. He's not aware of what's going on in Central America when he leaves and basically gets onto the migrant trail. I wasn't either, actually when I began the book. The spiking violence, the gang and drug related drug cartel related violence, the corruption of the police who are often on the payrolls of illegal actors and don't protect the citizenry. The general insecurity and danger for unauthorized migrants in Mexico as well as the United States. So the book, "The New American" chronicles Amelio's journey as he crosses Mexico with four Hondurans. He meets along the way and hears their and other migrants' stories. The book, though, is a fictionalized account based on research I was doing in those years, during a time when there was little or no coverage in mainstream American press, except for, as Jessie pointed out, some of the coverage that Ms. Hinojosa doing back then. But otherwise, it was in the Spanish language press in Mexico and in Central America. And it wasn't until 2014 when upwards of sixty four thousand unaccompanied children arrived to the southern border, primarily from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador seeking asylum that those stories sort of came more into the mainland United States. And why were they coming? Their countries had become a place where for many it was not safe to be a child. Boys were forced, really recruited into gangs. Girls were often forced into being girlfriends and worse. Numbers, and I'll just give you a little bit of background here, had been increasing since 2009 when El Salvador had the highest homicide rate in the world, only to be surpassed by Honduras. Two years later, in 2011 and then in 2015, El Salvador surpassed Honduras. The rate of one hundred and three homicides per 100000. So to give you a sense of what that means. That's one out of every nine hundred and seventy two people were murdered that year. In a country of six million, a country that's no bigger than Massachusetts. So at that time, it was estimated when the kids were coming that 60 percent of Salvadoran youth were living under the subjugation gangs. And if you lived in a gang zone and didn't want to be recruited, you had a very restricted life for you. Mostly stay inside and live in your house. And if we were turn to Honduras, violence was spiking there. And also there was a coup in 2009 which the United States tacitly supported, and things became much worse then in Guatemala. And interestingly, the Mara Salvatrucha and the Calle 18, those are the two gangs, they both originated in Southern California and were exported to Central America in the 90s under the Clinton administration. The gangs that still plague Central America today in that sense were made in America, and the unstable, shaking nations that emerged out of the Cold War civil wars were not equipped to handle them. Eventually, for example, in El Salvador, the 4,000 deportees in the 90s became 60,000 gang members present in every state of El Salvador. Today. So I want to show you. Let's play video in a minute here, but just back to the novel. When I finished "The New American" in 2012, I couldn't find a publisher for it. There was no interest in that story. And I put it aside and just decided to do something else. And what I decided to do, because I was being haunted by the research I had been doing, is to teach a creative writing class at a local public high school I worked on in the 90s. My idea was to help students write their own journey stories and be in support of that kind of storytelling. When I went to teach the class with some of my graduate students in Oakland, out of twenty-nine students twenty-eight were recently arrived from Honduras and El Salvador and Guatemala, fleeing the very violence that I was just describing. And it quickly became obvious to me and the teacher that I was working closely with what we were hearing, all kinds of stories from the kids that the writing wasn't going to be the right way to do it, but in fact, a different note was necessary

listening and recording. And so, I started reporting stories. I started walking around with a microphone and a graduate student, and we just started listening and recording stories of the kids. And from that, the New American Story Project was born and bit by bit emerged as a digital oral history project that continues to develop. I think of NASP, which is what I was talking about, my brain thinking like a novelist as a novel invoices. In this case, juxtaposing the children's voices, and we've interviewed almost 50 children to this point, but with others actually - with journalists and immigration attorneys and human rights activists and historians and scholars - because this is such a complex story. And the kids often can't tell you why it's going on. And so so the big story is this whole thing of lots of different voices together on our website, thinking about migration, immigration causes, effects, et cetera. So, the project is called "Welcome Children." It focuses on unaccompanied minors from the Northern Triangle, which is those three countries. And I'm going to start with one. Let's play one now. This is what a young man from El Salvador who hadn't been here, I think more than a few months when I spoke to him and listened to his story.

[00:14:46] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** And his name is Carlos, although I should say that all of the children's names have been changed to protect their identities. So if we can just play this story, it's three minutes long.

[00:18:35] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Great. Thank you. So that was one of the earliest stories we recorded through the space sanctuary here. And I'm going to show one more video in a few minutes. And I'm not going to, well, I think I'll wait till we do some Q&A and talk about, you know, asylum law and the laws that we have in the United States to protect those who seek refuge, including people like Carlos. But just a teeny bit more about, you know, N.A.S.P. and it's it's in how it in some ways it's tied to the book. And they worked together. But how it's different from novel writing and it was something new that I hadn't done before is that it's a collaboration. And I collaborate with several artists, including the documentary filmmaker Aaron Koke Do, who edited that piece there and has shot many subsequent videos, which you can see on our site. And I also co-direct the project with Sara Campos, who is a former immigration attorney. Tomas Ayuso is given us all the photographs. He's a Honduran photographer who has been documenting the migrant trail in extraordinary ways. And so that's what's been really interesting to me also is how is working with other artists and across our borders as well as we think about this story, which is an international story, and involves this country and Mexico and Central America and I guess finally, what I want to say and then share this video is there's a other of personal side of the story for me, another impetus probably that's always the back of my work, which is that my grandparents were refugees in Beirut in the 1920s. They survived the Armenian genocide. And I have often thought and wished that their stories and others had been recorded because they weren't, and I inherited five sentences in some. I always think it's about five from my mother. What happened to them? So that's me always believing that stories matter for culture and for now and for future. But I want to show you one more video. This was shot, I think, a year after that one. This is Monica. She's from Honduras. At this time, I think she hadn't been here more than three months when I worked with her attorney and I sat down with her and listened to her story.

[00:23:46] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** So I think I'll end for now and we'll take questions at the end. But, you know, I just I'm reminded when I watch these and other videos and listen to the kids or listen to anyone's who's telling their story, that it's through storytelling, that you feel someone: you feel history, you feel what this is like. And I think for me, that has remained the most powerful or one of the most powerful or important parts of anything that we might think of is happening in the so-called news. You know, that these

are we're talking about individuals and in this case, we're talking about children. So that's it. Thank you for listening. And I'm very excited now to listen to Ms. Hinojosa.

[00:24:33] **Maria Hinojosa** I guess that was my introduction. All right, wait. But I wasn't ready, so I have to take a sip.

[00:24:39] **Jessica Marroquin** And now presenting Maria Hinojosa.

[00:24:44] **Maria Hinojosa** Hello, everyone. Thank you, Micheline, for that beautiful presentation. I know those people. I have those same exact stories, I look at my phone, you're like, what are you looking at? I'm looking at my phone because this is where Josue lives. This is where Noemi lives. This is where, Zoe, these are all names that I've had to give these people in order to protect their identities. But they are all in my life. They live here, how they communicate with me. And I've told their stories and they are real for me. So thank you so much for all of the work that you do and for your book, which is sitting next to my bed, so I'm going to I'm going to start reading it as soon as I can. Thank you for your work. And yes, I think that Micheline's words about having only five sentences to understand what surviving a genocide is why we need to tell these stories, as difficult as it may be.

[00:25:46] **Maria Hinojosa** So for me. The reason. What are the questions that I get asked a lot is why the title? And I don't know about Micheline, who's written more than I have, but I didn't have a title when I started this book. And the book actually was going to be, I thought, capturing a moment of when I went viral four years ago, when I said to Steve Cortez, who is a Trump supporter, I said there is no such thing as an illegal human being, and I didn't learn that from a radical Latino or Latina Studies professor at Barnard, my alma mater. I learned that from Elie Wiesel, who survived the Holocaust. He said that's the first thing that the Nazis did. They declared the Jews to be an illegal people.

[00:26:42] **Maria Hinojosa** So that's why I said this, I had this moment. It went viral and I thought, well, that's the book I'm going to write. I'll write a short little pocket book that will be in the airports because I always thought we'd be in airports and people would pick it up.

[00:26:56] **Maria Hinojosa** And that book evolved, as it does with iterations of a book when it's actually the request is not to make a small book, but to make a big book. And I think I want to make a small book because I still deal with. I can't do a big book. I mean, it's a huge post. That's not the size of the book, the book. But, you know, it's like it's a big book.

[00:27:18] **Maria Hinojosa** You know, the idea is to say it's a life, but it's a book about the history of this country. And I and I was having another interview yesterday and I realized that the reason why I struggled the most with the book in terms of writing the whole history, part of it was because I, I think I doubted that I had the capacity or the right to tell the history of this country.

[00:27:41] **Maria Hinojosa** And so it's the ways in which we continue to self doubt ourselves. You know, to believe to to think, well, do we actually cannot do this? Can I tell this story? You know, I'm not a historian. Should I?

[00:27:55] **Maria Hinojosa** So the book is basically there's a lot of history, a lot of what I call spinach, but like delicious, tasty spinach like spinach made in a delicious Italian restaurant. You know, olive oil and garlic.

[00:28:09] **Maria Hinojosa** But it does, you know, tell kind of beginning with my parents. My father leaves Tampico. My mother leaves Mexico and kind of tells the story. Of how they arrive here. After I finished the book, you know, my editor said, great, we need you to write an introduction. I was like, are you kidding? What? What, what do you mean?

[00:28:37] **Maria Hinojosa** And so inspired by one of my muses, the great American writer Sandra Cisneros. Who said to me, you know, don't always write about what you remember, but write about the things that you wish you could forget or that you're trying to forget or that you have forgotten so dark. And I thought about this moment of seeing the little girl. So these are the children that become the young adults and the teenagers that Micheline and I then interact with. But this was a little girl in an airport being transported by people she didn't know to a place she wasn't aware. She did not have her documents. She was told not to speak to anyone and she didn't know who was transporting her. These are all textbook definitions of someone being trafficked.

[00:29:26] **Maria Hinojosa** And so the introduction is basically me in this moment in the airport at McCallan at seven o'clock in the morning. And and then at the end, I basically say, you know, I see you. I want to speak to you. I want you to hear me. I see you. Because once I was you. And that leads to another big revelation in the book, which is that I didn't quite realize it. I had another story of my arrival that I used to tell of my Mexican mother standing up to the immigration agent at the Dallas airport as we were flying to meet my father, who is at the University of Chicago. But it wasn't that way. In fact, it turns out that they tried to take me. So trauma, you know, that I think it's because I've done a lot of spiritual work that I'm able to kind of do this. And because I do therapy, that I was able to kind of process a bit of the trauma that led me to write this book. That is very personal, very intimate about certain parts of my life that I wasn't kind of expecting to talk about as well. Being a survivor of rape that occurred in Mexico. But it's also it's also a book that's going to give you information. And I give it to you with a lot of love. It just came out. Not even a week go. So I'm still kind of writing that, like what's going on. And it's been my honor to be with with you and look forward to your questions. Thank you so much.

[00:31:01] **Jessica Marroquin** Thank you so much, Maria and Micheline. So we have a couple of questions that I can start us off with, and it's really interesting to see these two conversations that deal with a very similar topic in very different ways. Right. So we have Micheline is a novelist and a writer who is compelled by these stories and fictionalizing. Right. That oral history, which Micheline discuss very thoroughly in her presentation. And then Maria, who's writing from a testimonial right from a point of testimony. And so I was just interested if we could talk a little bit more about that process. Right. Like writing oral history through fiction and how that's a platform for getting these stories out there and reframing the narratives that we see present in mainstream media regarding the different groups of migration in the United States. So I was wondering if you could comment a little bit about that. And aside from that money, I mentioned and discussed your title and actually wanted to ask Micheline about the word or the term "new American." Right. American is such a politicized term, right? What is it to be an American today? So I was just curious if you could delve a little bit deeper into that. So I don't know if you want to start us off Micheline or Maria, whoever wants to jump in.

[00:32:20] **Maria Hinojosa** Go ahead, Micheline.

[00:32:21] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Well, I can start with your question about "The New American" and you know, it's funny money, what you said. It's like when you have a

title, and every book is different from me, but sometimes I just know the title and sometimes I don't, like my first novel I didn't. Then a friend helped me figure out that it was in there somewhere. For some reason with this book, I knew very quickly it was "The New American." And I think in many ways we're all new Americans. I mean, there are indigenous peoples of this land and the lands of the Americas. But even the term America is a fiction and invention, right. Based on a medieval based futoshi and a German, you know, cartographer who gives it its name. I mean, so America's a series of fictions. And in some sense, in that sense, we're a very young republic. We are all new Americans. And so it's thinking about that and playing with what that is. And in fact, "The New American" in the book is not Amelio, actually. So I don't know if that answers your question. It is obviously a politicized term, I suppose, but so on.

[00:33:28] **Jessica Marroquin** Absolutely. And it makes me think. I think about my professor in colonial studies who said America was not discovered. Right. And we talk about a discovery. It really wasn't discovered. Right. So. Absolutely. Thank you for expanding on that title.

[00:33:41] **Maria Hinojosa** You know. This is everything that I do in terms of the reporting you were asking. Kind of like based on real life and how you tell these stories. I mean, that's that's where I live in the space of journalism. So everything right now that we do and I run a nonprofit media company, Futuro Media, as you said, and everything that we do is basically based on real life. Now we're actually moving in to some potential fictionalized work, but it will be based on real life, like the work the Micheline did with new Americans. So for us, I think it is a way again to exalt the stories.

[00:34:23] **Maria Hinojosa** You know, I'm, well, I like to joke that I'm Mexican, which means that I have 16 jobs. I can never say no to work. I'm like, oh, there's a job. Yeah. So I'm also a college professor. I started at DePaul and now I'm at Barnard, my alma mater. And I'm in the English department, which to me is kind of like what? I never thought I'd be there. But, you know, I listen to my students as I interview them. That's how we start classes. They get a Maria Hinojosa interview just for them. And they're telling me their stories. And I'm like, what have you written about this? Have you talked about this? And many of them some of them are like, yes, and I know. But many of them are just like, no. This is the first time because I worked really hard at creating a safe space for them to speak.

[00:35:12] **Maria Hinojosa** And it's just like I try to tell them these are not Latino stories or immigrant stories or Asian stories... they're American stories, as complicated as that term is. And I completely agree with you. And by the way, you know, as a Mexican, it's the whole termino "Dominicana estadounidense," I mean, I really wish we would start calling people here, United States people that would be, it seems, United States the would be the best. But we just the fact that we don't know these stories and there's so much shame. That's why Micheline ends up with five sentences or where you know, people I know, they'll just be like, "abelita doesn't like to talk about." I understand. But that's a bit of what our job is. Micheline's job, for example, is to listen and to try to draw people out and to not be afraid of the silent pregnant pauses. If you ask that question of like, so how did it happen? And they can't answer. Don't be like, no, no, really tell me. No, no. Don't be afraid. Like, actually, just let the pause. Because when you're talking about trauma, again, it's you have to be able to be a just a little bit more patient there.

[00:36:30] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Yeah. As you're saying, I mean, a common response to trauma is silence, you know, after the Holocaust, there was an Armenian

genocide. Mostly people didn't speak. And so and then there are those who speak a lot. But, yeah, so I just I always think about it. I don't think all of my work has been driven by not only these migrations in my own family, but in those stories that get elided or erased for lots of reasons, some of which are shame and trauma, some of which are power and force area. You know, the vanquished in that scenario and your story is not told, but for me, that's always where my interest is. And in fact, so New American Story Project, part of it was like it was so hard. There weren't that many journalists just capturing people's stories, like what happened to what is this like when you ride La Bestia? You ride the trains north. What is that like? Which for me is so much unimportant. It's such an important part of history that no statistic. I mean, I said some statistics, but nobody feels anything in their heart. When you say, you know, El Salvador has this homicide rate. You have to have someone's story.

[00:37:35] **Maria Hinojosa** And by the way, this story that you captured of the young woman, very similar to Noémie, whose story we're in the process of trying to tell, but I can't find her right now. You know, I'm having this happen sometimes, but the level of horror that the young woman just kind of spoke about that. You know, there should have been. Not to say this, but it's just like in terms of the graphic kind of horror, what she said, that the level of physical mutilation of women's bodies because of impunity. Women in Honduras, for example, or El Salvador, rather, have become so dehumanized the way undocumented immigrants are dehumanized here. It's like a comparison. It's like, you know, they're they're dehumanized to such a degree that they say that they're another. I mean, the United States has, I don't know, thinking about the Supreme Court. OK, well, next question anyway.

[00:38:37] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** I know we didn't even I didn't touch on what you just mentioned the impunity rates of crime in this country in the 90th percentile. I mean, basically mass murders as a woman or child without reliable protection.

[00:38:52] **Jessica Marroquin** And just for everyone out there, La Bestia is the train that runs from Central America all the way up. So that's the one that a lot of migrants hop on to try to make it to the United States. So we have a question that follows up on what you've both been discussing in these last couple of minutes. Why are these stories not getting told more widely? Right. So Micheline, you talked about journalists or stories not encapsulating these oral histories or testimonies. And Maria, also, you were one of the first journalists to talk about the state of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Right. What they were going through in 2011 and your report. So why are these stories not getting told more while they are receiving that coverage?

[00:39:35] **Maria Hinojosa** Because because journalists are human beings and they, too, consume the narrative and the narrative - that's what I captured "Once I Was You" - the narrative is that, you know, the anti-immigrant hate really began in the late eighteen hundreds in terms of people coming here. It was Asian women who were excluded. So it's based on that kind of hatred. To me, the notion that you have - like I'm a stone's throw from the Statue of Liberty, if I had a really strong arm, you know, and could throw like maybe five miles. So what is this that the Statue of Liberty says we welcome you, but then everything in terms of the policy says not. And what ends up happening is that as you internalize this kind of self-hatred, you internalize the shame. You you internalize this notion that that we shouldn't be talking about this, which is why, like Micheline, I am so thankful that people tell us their stories. You know, that that that that they decide to stay in contact with me. In many ways, they don't realize that they are capturing this moment of history for a journalist to then be able to say and repeat their story. And so they are very

important part of this story. But it's also very difficult right now. There's a lot of there's so much distrust right now in this whole process. It is hard. This is probably one of the harder times that I've had as a journalist just speaking to undocumented immigrants because they are so afraid. So that only silences more people.

[00:41:32] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Yeah, I think people know. I mean, you know, as we've sort of shut off the borders and are terrified. Which also just sickens me to do that to people. But in terms of this, like demonizing of the other, that's just as old, I guess is as human beings. I don't know this pattern of the scapegoat and seeking the scapegoat and, you know, creating a group by pushing out. And, you know, historically, politicians and pundits have always framed immigration and migration as a crisis, often not really paying attention to the underlying realities. I mean, you know, apprehensions at our border have been at historical lows since 2000. But why? You know, why don't people want to pay attention? I don't. I don't know. This is an important question for us to ask ourselves. You know.

[00:42:22] **Maria Hinojosa** Look. I think, I think you have to acknowledge that. Who runs the media? That's what I was trying to say, that so they grow up hearing this. I mean, the people who are running the media right now are mostly middle aged, white, straight men of privilege who grew up hearing this narrative. My experience as a journalist. I mean, I'm just gonna be straight up. I say this in the book. When I did "the FRONTLINE the executive producer of FRONTLINE was kind of meh on immigration. It's so complicated. It's never an easy story to tell. If you if you look at FRONTLINE, up until 2011, they had not reported on immigration for 20 years because it was just like seen as complicated, which is exactly why you report it. But I think that you have a lot of a lot of people in the mainstream media who sees immigrants and sees them as less than, again, immigration is a crisis. So I posit this for you. What would have happened if, let's say the three of us were running The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal? Let's say and, you know, we were we were just basically putting headlines that are true, right.

[00:43:53] **Maria Hinojosa** Immigrants sustained American economy through pandemic. Latinos and Latinas, you know, seven trillion dollar market boom. You know, immigrants, great lovers. You know, like like what if we like all the time we were just say, oh, my God, how cool is it that immigrants are coming? Refugees are cool people because they're like actually like the survivors. There are people who are going to die because they're too afraid to leave. You know, the refugee is the person who's like, I'm choosing for life. I don't know what's on the other side. So what would happen if we if we were running the newspapers and et cetera like that? Then we would care. But the narrative, again, that I get to in "Once I Was You," which is like the control of the news media was central to this, the very first televised refugee crisis. Want to take a guess?

[00:44:56] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** What year?

[00:44:58] **Maria Hinojosa** Well, think about television. Think about refugees, too, you know? OK, I'll tell you.

[00:45:06] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Vietnam?

[00:45:06] **Maria Hinojosa** Did you say Vietnam?

[00:45:08] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Yeah.

[00:45:09] **Maria Hinojosa** Bingo. Most people don't get it. But you're exactly right. And what what did the mainstream news call the refugees? The war refugees?

[00:45:20] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Boat people.

[00:45:22] **Maria Hinojosa** Boat people. How dare they.

[00:45:23] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Yeah, I remember that.

[00:45:25] **Maria Hinojosa** So it's right. It's right there. That's what I write. It's just like a say that that would be saying that the people that we're talking to who are forced to sleep on the concrete in Juarez are now concrete people. So that's why we need representation of all forms of the media, because there's no way that if I had been in charge that those would. Which is why that I became in charge and created my own company because I didn't want to be frustrated anymore.

[00:45:54] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Yeah, I remember. You know what? I couldn't sell "The New American," you know, I wrote it a long time ago and it just sort of sat. But I'm used. I mean, this isn't my first time not selling novels. Not easy to sell novels, certainly. But part of it was that in New York, talking about our southern border, which I grew up in Los Angeles, it didn't mean anything. It was just so far, you know. And it just didn't seem to be much interest. And then that sort of, you know, changed. It was.

[00:46:23] **Maria Hinojosa** Which is crazy because there are children from that border who are ten blocks from where I am right now. 125th Street in the heart of Harlem. There is one of those places that houses in this case in New York. The children that are separated, they are put into into temporary foster care. So they have a foster care home where they sleep at night, but during the day, they are housed in what used to be a bank. There's no windows, so we can't see this. They're here on 125th Street. So this is the elitism of New York publishing, which is for the US.

[00:47:02] **Maria Hinojosa** It's right in front of your. It's right in front of your faces.

[00:47:08] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Yes. Do you so that I think about is when the kids that I've talked to I mean, there's this there is this heroism, this just incredible. This is this beauty of wanting to to, you know, seeking something better for yourself. And not just the kids. The adults, too. I mean, it is you just see the fortitude of the human spirit. I mean, yes, people who have gone through to get here and really are the lucky ones if they're here and like the kids that, you know. I sure do. Tha, have a asylum, thank goodness. But, you know, for your aunt who was here with asylum and it's so difficult to get asylum, it's OK. You know, we have laws protecting refugees, but my goodness, it is nearly impossible under our law. But it is possible. But for every one child who here with asylum, you know how many others are not.

[00:47:58] **Maria Hinojosa** Yeah, that's that's that's why they're the heroes. If we if we saw it in the other way, they are. And that's why they inspire me because. Oh, my God. Kate, Kate. Kate. Choosing life. The very conservative choosing life. This is what it looks like, they were choosing life looks like. Not in the way you're talking about. This is what it looks like.

[00:48:20] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** And that's so much of the American story. Right. Going back, how many years like, you know, that these massive migrations of

Italians and Poles and Jews and people seeking life seeking, you know, fleeing Europe because there was no food or because of the persecutions, the anti-Semitism. I mean, this is this is part of a long story in this country. Or fleeing religious persecution, you know, left the British Isles.

[00:48:43] **Jessica Marroquin** Micheline. Sorry to interrupt, but that actually ties into a question that someone had about the religious groups. One of the questions was, are religious groups helping tell the stories? I noticed the young man mentioned a church which presumably was helping him. Or what are the roles of the churches? I personally know that there are several religious organizations on the border between United States and Mexico that do provide services, health care, but also legal help. Right. But I don't know if you could expand on the religious role in migration.

[00:49:19] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** I can just say on Maria, you probably know more than me, but like inside of Mexico, these casas de migrantes, these houses for migrants, that are run by religious organizations from the Catholic Church, the dioceses, and there, you know, they give people respite on the migrant trail, which is very dangerous, and I have such deep admiration that I think there are groups on the border inside of this country as well. There are religious and non-religious groups leaving water for migrants in the desert where it's extremely dangerous. And because of American policy in the last 20 years, you know, deliberately pushing migrants into the desert as a way to slow migration, that sort of thing. So, yeah, absolutely. There are many, many groups who who support and provide, you know, three nights of rest and food.

[00:50:13] **Maria Hinojosa** Oh my god, there's a blue jay outside my window here in Harlem. I just love that when that happens. That's a big deal, of course. Urban nature. So, yes, casas de migrantes and people just having a space where they can go and have a respite. But it's interesting, the last time that I was on the border, which was in January, there was almost a sense of, you know, false, I'm sorry, but false hope. You know, almost como que "no pues ten fe, ten la fe," and its like "es que la fe no te va a resolver esto." Faith is not going to resolve this one. This is you. And so that was an interesting moment that I was like, oh this is interesting where it's just like. But is it correct, you know, to, to, to give this kind of inside those migrant shelters where I was, which are exploding. There's a whole conversation about what Mexico is or is not doing. But the notion of it is very frustrating. But there is as Micheline said. I mean, the people who I know right now, Josue from Honduras is he's just so thankful because he was given a permit to be in Mexico. So he's like, OK, for now, at least I can get to Mexico City. I have a contact there. I want to go to school. I want El Sueno, that dream of coming to the United States. So in that sense, every administration that has attempted to build the wall, block the border, restrict - they're winning some cases, you know, and we won't get amazing people who should be here because they have the American spirit in the sense of, like, wanting to be here and being good. They should - excuse me. They should be here. It's hard.

[00:52:14] **Jessica Marroquin** That's okay, Maria. It's the excitement of the conversation. Yes, it's really interesting to think about the religious role, particularly both the actual practical function of the religious institution in migration, but also the symbolic, right. Ten fe, have faith. So that's a really interesting notion to think about. One other question is, do you think that oral history you talked a lot about oral history and then also using your novel or memoir right there, platform's literary platforms to get these voices out? But the question is, do you think that oral history and other alternative formats of history will become more prevalently taught to younger students? And if so, how might that impact our perception of these stories? And I can keep adding onto that question. I mean, I think we are seeing a

shift right now. We're seeing a focus on individual stories. You know, we see in the NASP, we see these different what books? Digital histories. Right. Digital archives, which are, you know, I think that the way forward. Right. Is we live in a digital world. Right. That is where we're going to be seeing all these podcasts. So I was wondering if you could maybe expand on that question then.

[00:53:28] **Maria Hinojosa** So I am to be honest. There's a piece of data that I heard - get ready for a dog bark.

[00:53:34] **Maria Hinojosa** There's a piece of data that came out that said something like, I'm not going to get it right. But it was a very low number of U.S. educated young people who are aware of the degree of what happened in the Holocaust. And I'm just like, what is going on here? That this is happening. So I think that this notion of history is super important. I mean, I agree that, like, you know, we're all here and there's podcasts and everything, and that's where I get confused. So how is it that? Because I do feel like right now, especially in the moment of another another version of Black Lives Matter, which began from the first day an enslaved person ended up on these shores. So, you know, this Black Lives Matter movement right now is, yeah, reading black authors, reading history, kind of rethinking. So we have to take this moment and make those connections, so I always talk about, you know. And I learned this from others, you know, that the first the original sin was slavery. But the first sin was genocide. And that that hatred is. That's where anti-immigrant hatred comes from. It's built on those. So this deconstructing of history is essential. And there's a lot of reckoning. You know, that's why when people say this is not new or this is new or this is new. It's not new. The taking of children is not new. The forced sterilization of women, experimenting on our bodies is not new. The Tuskegee experiment, you know, in fact, the way it was in this moment that apparently the man who developed gynecology - the way he did this - was to experiment in the bodies of black, enslaved women. So, we have a history here. It's not you. And this is a moment to reframe, reframe, reframe, reframe it and tell, tell, tell, tell.

[00:55:46] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Yeah, I absolutely agree. I mean, I you know, there's that story of Hitler and his some of his ideas for concentration camps inside of 1930s, 1940s Germany under National Socialism was from concentration, you know, the concentration of indigenous people reservations in the United States. So as you're saying, these ideas are moving around and have been and knowing our history. Not to shame people. I don't think it's I don't think it's around, you know, shame or waving one's finger, but like, this history is ours and we should contend with it boldly, bravely, truthfully, you know, and with our hearts, I would say to open in the way that I think a story can open the heart.

[00:56:32] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** You know, when I was in the eighth grade I had a teacher who was Cherokee and we read "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee," and for me, that was a reckoning, an awakening. And it's like, OK, well, I'm part of this place now. I live here, you know, in the end. And what is my duty as an American? And I think we do have a duty as Americans to know the history we share that we were part of or not. You know, this part of being here is part of the duty to the place.

[00:57:00] **Maria Hinojosa** Thank you. Thank you for bringing that up, because in my book, what's revealed is that so now it's like another part of the continuum that the gas that was used to gas people, Jewish people in the Holocaust was gas that was developed in El Paso and used to clean "dirty Mexicans" and their clothing. So I didn't know about the reservation. You know, the concentration of people. But then they tied that along with the

gas that they were using to clean the clothing of the "dirty Mexicans." And so they they took the construction of that space where they would put the gas to clean the clothes. And that's what they were using to gas Jewish people. So. As a Mexican, right, I have a connection to that, and that happened because I wrote this book, which is really, really crazy. So as much as we can and again, tell these stories and tell these truths we have to reckon.

[00:58:08] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** And that's so beautiful too I think about that so much. I was trying to say that in my talk, it's just the connections, you know, the ways that there are these connections. And, you know, so the other thing Hitler talked about in 1939 is no one today remembers the Armenians, and he was right. 1939? No one remembers that. And a group of indigenous you know, and I know this because of my family history, had been deported, removed and exterminated. So let's you know. And so and it's just to say that I think that's quite deep in my brain. And also I write books. When you write books, you discover connections that you see oh, there are these these are these connections historically and how things move around. I think that benefits all of us. And, you know, Central America is not separate from us. The United States with all those wars that went on during the Cold War, all the manipulation. You know, that has a lot to do with why those states are not functioning well today. And so, again, connections, connections to Mexico, the land I'm sitting in right now talking to you was Mexico, you know, so to just at least know that, I think that will help all of our conversations.

[00:59:13] **Maria Hinojosa** All right. It's interesting, Jessie, because you you introduced me as an activist, and whenever that happens, I'm like, no, I'm because I'm not an activist. I'm a journalist. And to be called an activist when you're a journalist is. But, you know, I was an activist in college. That's what I write about in "Once I Was You." And I love the fact that I you know, I'm like, no. In college, I was an activist for women refugees of El Salvador. So, yes, please. Hello, Central America. United States has been involved and meddling there for over a hundred years. So how is it that people have forgotten that the United States was in Central America in all of the 1980s? Por favor. So we just need to be on the right side of history by telling these stories.

[01:00:05] **Jessica Marroquin** Thank you so much. I think that's a great place to wrap up our great conversation today. I really want to take a moment and think if we had more time, I'd ask more questions because there's still so much to discuss, especially and I love hearing about the recovering of histories. Right. It's really uncovering and recovering and reincorporating these. So thank you to both Maria Hinajosa and Micheline Aharonian Marcom for your presentations, for engaging in dialog and and sharing our questions. Thank you, everyone in the audience, for being here today. We hope that you will join us again on Monday, October 12th for the next program in our series, which, as I mentioned, is "Religion and the Race for the White House." So very appropriate given the timing right now, right? And this one will be hosted by my co-manager, Evan Sandsmark. So thank you again, everyone, and please take a moment to visit the NASP website if you're interested in learning more and both books, Maria Hinojosa's memoir, and Micheline Marcom's novel are available for purchase. I really recommend I have both already also. So I'm really excited to keep on reading them. I've been simultaneously doing this. Thank you so much.

[01:01:19] **Micheline Aharonian Marcom** Thank you.

[01:01:20] **Maria Hinojosa** Thank you.