

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO INSTITUTE OF POLITICS & CNN PRESENT

THE AXE FILES

The Axe Files - Ep. 202: Laura Haim

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[00:00:06] And now from the University of Chicago Institute of Politics and CNN. The Axe Files with your host David Axelrod.

David Axelrod: [00:00:16] Early in Barack Obama's campaign for president a French journalist showed up on the scene to cover the campaign and became a real presence on the campaign trail. And I learned that Laura Haim was one of France's great broadcast journalists having covered everything from war to American political campaigns. Most recently she served as communications director for Emmanuel Macron in his extraordinary campaign for the presidency of France and she's spent the fall quarter at the Institute of Politics at the University of Chicago. Sharing her observations about that election the state of democracy in France and the United States.

David Axelrod: [00:01:01] Laura I'm so glad to have you here both on this podcast and at the Institute of Politics where you've been a fellow of spring. You're a.

Laura Haim: [00:01:13] Fantastic experience. I can tell you that I do not know at all the university world. I do not know what all these special bubble in American society. And it gave me hope because there's a new generation here which is ready to do things. And in my opinion which is really interested by different topics.

David Axelrod: [00:01:36] Yeah. No this is this is why we do the work. And it is you know every time you get despairing about the world you come here and you spend time with these young people and you think you know the future can be better.

Laura Haim: [00:01:49] Yeah and they challenge you and understand what's happening and they're sinking in a global way on this to have hope that trying to understand different aspects of American society and also the world. So it was an amazing experience. And yes I mean you created. I know you were very shy sometimes. But I think you really created some seem quite unique here.

David Axelrod: [00:02:13] Well it's certainly something really satisfying because these kids are not wedded to the sort of orthodoxies of the past. They're skeptical but they're not cynical. And as we said they do give you hope. Let me talk about your life and career. I know you're just filibustering so we don't get to the main topic here but you your folks we're not we're not journalists. Your father was a doctor. Your mother was a music teacher.

Laura Haim: [00:02:50] Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:02:51] Tell me about them.

Laura Haim: [00:02:53] There were extraordinary. They were quite intellectual. My father was a doctor. He wanted me to become a doctor. He did not understand why I wanted to be a journalist. And my mother had a passion. It was classical music. So I was raised with people while doing fellowship in my home to become a classical pianist. So I was Israeli. She was

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French and Israeli and I was raised in non Jewish way. I mean my parents are not religious and we were living in France.

David Axelrod: [00:03:34] Do they have a history in Europe?

Laura Haim: [00:03:35] Yes my family suffered tremendously from the Holocaust. My father's family had to escape in 1941 to be killed. So there are a lot of stories in my family and my mother also was living in France at this moment she was young so she had to hide in the countryside. And my father's family had to get false papers. They had to leave France don't want to Spain, they took a boat. And they went to Argentina for six years. The family which didn't do that was killed in Auschwitz. So when they came back they wanted to come back to France after living for six years in Argentina my father at the time was 13 years old was raised when they came back. They had to rebuild everything and they believed in France after war. So they rebuilt everything and they became quite successful. And then my father you don't want to be CEO of the company of my grandfather. He wanted to be a doctor. He wanted to look after people. So.

David Axelrod: [00:04:41] What kind of doctor was he?

Laura Haim: [00:04:42] He was a kind of. He was a very good generalist doctor and then they created this kind of club in Paris with my mother about discussions human rights classical music. Again when I went to bed I always had someone in my house who was playing piano and that they really wanted to have a quite interesting life in Paris and it was the golden years in Paris at this moment twas the reconstruction. So I was born there. And yeah I I loved them very much.

David Axelrod: [00:05:25] You you at an early age you were pretending to be a radio broadcaster.

Laura Haim: [00:05:33] Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:05:33] So what is it that attracted you to journalism. Because I think if you say you were being urged to follow a different career path.

Laura Haim: [00:05:40] Yes yes absolutely. I was I mean when you asked me if I knew what happened to me this should have questioned what happened but what did she do that I think I was watching TVs. I was very inspired by people who were covering historical events. So I was looking at for instance. I remember when that was out and there was the war in the [unintelligible] in Argentina there were a lot of things happening in Central America. Revolution. And I was very inspired by that. There was also a lot of things in the Middle East and I really wanted to be like them. I watched them and they said was there covering the world. Explaining to us what's happening I want to be like them. So I decided to do political school. And it was not for me and I decided that OK I want to be on the field. So instead of going to school for a lot of years why I'm not trying right away to be in the radio and I convince someone to hire me to radio.

[00:06:58] [crosstalk.

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Laura Haim: [00:06:58] I mean my my mother was what's happening and my father was Are you sure you want to do that. And then he paused and then he said You just have to be happy. So if you're happy I'm going to support you.

David Axelrod: [00:07:11] That's a good parent.

Laura Haim: [00:07:12] I think it was perfect. That he understood me very well.

David Axelrod: [00:07:16] Yeah and he obviously obviously understood that this was a passion of yours and you fell. And you talked your way into a job as you were saying.

Laura Haim: [00:07:25] So my first job was to bring coffees. I did that for six months. I was bringing coffees to people all the times. I was in the radio. I was in intern didn't know what to do with me. I had an interview with someone and I said give me an internship for six months. I was convinced this person and I brought coffee for six months and I make the point to be the first one to arrive and the last one to leave.

David Axelrod: [00:07:54] This is such an important lesson you know. I mean I think about my own life and I wanted to be a journalist. I went back after my first year of college to New York City. And I had no real background at all and I knocked on maybe 75 doors until I found a little newspaper the Village or newspaper in Greenwich Village that was sort of down on its luck and they figured if they could hire me they paid me fifty dollars a week to do everything and I was willing to do everything that it was a good deal. And I spent six months there and it was foundational. I mean I learned so much.

Laura Haim: [00:08:34] I learned a lot. Then I wanted a job. I wanted to be a reporter. So I found out that.

David Axelrod: [00:08:42] After six months of delivering coffee.

Laura Haim: [00:08:43] Yes. And then I went to see the news director and he said another job you can have is to walk on the read you from 5:00 in the evening and 2:00 3:00 in the morning you have to remember I was 18 I wanted to go to party. So to work five days a week when you're 18 from 5:00 in the evening to 3:00 in the morning it's no life and I said Yeah I'm going to do that. So I did that.

David Axelrod: [00:09:10] There must have been stuff going on after three.

Laura Haim: [00:09:13] Yeah. Yeah I can tell you that I know every place in Paris open after three.

David Axelrod: [00:09:20] I know this story because I was a nightside reporter myself.

Laura Haim: [00:09:23] So I it was really a good year. The best years you I was with a group of people. We see each other. Since then we knew we we really worked hard and we were preparing what you're going to say. It's here the morning show. So we were out doing that.

David Axelrod: [00:09:42] And then you had you had some great mentors back then as well.

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Laura Haim: [00:09:46] Yeah I think I worked hard and I was very competitive. And I was pushing the doors. There was someone told me when you put the foot in the door it's pretty difficult after to.

David Axelrod: [00:09:58] To close it.

Laura Haim: [00:09:59] To close it. And I was really known for that. Sometimes critics. I was a woman so I pushed also for me as a woman in the newsroom and it was absolutely fascinating. And I was really part of this mission. Then I noticed that you have a lot of French holidays you know in France and journalists in France their taking holidays they don't stop. So in the summer it's holidays and the newsroom empties and when the news room empty when there's a big story happening. They're taking interns or the young people. So I didn't go on holidays. I stayed in Paris and I did my first exclusive in the middle of August. There was a very famous TV personality which was missing. He went to Africa and people for three days were looking for him. And they thought it was kind of a promotion for himself to mixing. He was missing and in fact has been kidnapped. He was killed in Africa and it was a big story. And I was right there. So then slowly but surely I made my way up and I.

David Axelrod: [00:11:10] How old were you when you did that story.

Laura Haim: [00:11:11] I was 19. Someone was listening to me all the times during August and he was the [unintelligible] he lived in the United States. He was fascinated by the United States is a very famous French journalist his name is Philippe Labro he's a writer and he wanted to help young people. So when he was listening to me he said how old is this woman. Someone told him she's 19. So he said I want to see her. So I had a meeting with him and he said what do you want to do. And he asked me if I wanted to cover the nightlife in Paris. If I wanted to go to movies, theater. And to do that and to have my own small program. And I said yes. After.

David Axelrod: [00:12:04] Still on the radio.

Laura Haim: [00:12:05] Still on the radio, primetime. I was terrible at it. I mean it was the worst time of my life. But I mean I guess.

David Axelrod: [00:12:12] You weren't interested in that.

Laura Haim: [00:12:13] I was. I mean it was I mean it was interesting because I had fun in a way. But it was really like you know to the Cannes Festival. Go to a lot of Hollywood things and it was not something.

David Axelrod: [00:12:30] Hard duty.

Laura Haim: [00:12:31] Yeah that was the trick. I mean people were Oh my god you're paid too good to see movies and to go to theaters. And then there was a kind of wake up call and it was a very important thing in my mind. I was at the Cannes Film Festival and one of my friends. I began with this friend was in China and he was covering Tiananmen.

David Axelrod: [00:12:50] Yeah.

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Laura Haim: [00:12:51] I was what I'm doing here in Cannes. I don't want to be in Cannes. I want to go to Tiananman. And I want to cover what's happening in China. I was really about that and I went to see my boss and I told him this is it from me I'm quitting. I don't want to do that because I didn't choose Chinese to do that. And he was what you become famous here. What's happening I said No I really wanted to do something about the world we live in. And at this time there was a group of people who created a small video journalist agency which was called CAPA and idea was very simple. No correspondent in front of the camera. You act as a photo journalist but with a small camera. And I have to remember that was in 1989 it was quite a revolution. You're not going to make a lot of money but you're going to cover the world and be with interesting people. And I was the inspiration was Robert Capa the photographer who you know was a famous war photographer and we decided to do that with a small channel. This time the name of the channel was Canal+ and we created a weekly news magazine which was called 24 Hours and for 24 hours with five different video journalists showing a world event and it became extremely successful because we were able to do a lot of cinema, the characters in front of the camera while people were following. And basically it was a tribe and it really became very very important in my life. So from.

David Axelrod: [00:14:26] And you it took you to some pretty tough and dangerous places.

Laura Haim: [00:14:31] Yeah I didn't speak about danger. I was always interested to be where it's happening and I always said to people who ask me this question. I don't like this thing about you have been a war correspondent. I don't think at all like that. I really think that when you go into dangerous situation you just want to witness what's happening.

David Axelrod: [00:14:57] The famine in Somalia.

Laura Haim: [00:14:58] Yeah I did Somalia.

David Axelrod: [00:15:00] The war in Bosnia.

Laura Haim: [00:15:01] Yes the beginning of the war in Bosnia.

David Axelrod: [00:15:01] Gaza.

Laura Haim: [00:15:02] Yes. Gaza. Very interesting for me because I was Jewish so I went to the other side and it was very.

David Axelrod: [00:15:12] What did you learn there.

Laura Haim: [00:15:15] I learned that I met ordinary people doing extraordinary things. That was what I wanted to show. And I learned that you know when people want freedom and independence want to do something at one point life does not matter anymore. There's an idea which is better than them and that's what I wanted to document.

David Axelrod: [00:15:40] You know I'm interested if if I could just stop there for a second about being being Jewish and covering that side of the conflict and whether you felt conflicted yourself in any way.

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Laura Haim: [00:15:56] I felt that I didn't know Israel and that they didn't want at this time to know Israel. I was walking in Palestine with the Palestinians. And I really understood a lot of things that they didn't understand when I was in Paris. And then years after because I went out to Gaza I went to Hamala I went to Bethlehem. Years after I said I have to stop because now the conflict is there. I'm Jewish. What's happening with covering the Palestinians specially when the Palestinian cause especially in 2003 became really radicalized with a lot of suicide bomb being that was more and more difficult. And the I it was also I became very depressed. I mean when you're in the Middle East when you're covering what's happening after a certain point you the story is getting on you and you really going down. If you're not careful. I still have mixed feeling about covering the Middle East.

David Axelrod: [00:17:11] We're going to take a short break and we'll be back with Laura Haim. You also had an interview with Fidel Castro. How did you get that interview.

Laura Haim: [00:17:24] Oh it was kind of thing. I sit down in the hotel. It was during the Olympic Games. He was in Barcelona this time. And I heard that he was coming. So I went to the hotel and I sit down for one day and I wait for him to get out. When you get out I stopped him and I was speaking a little bit of Spanish. He stopped in front of me and he said "buenos dias, como esta" and then I began to speak and I had it was not a sit down interview but as a kind of encounter. But that's also the things that I used to do because I was with CAPA. We had someone who was pushing us to be on the road there were times to try things which were never done before. To be idealist and to really push to get closer to the real events. So we did that and Castro was part of this time. Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:18:23] I'm going to interrupt you to go back. I feel like I'm thinking in my head I need to pursue one thing and then we'll pick it up with. OK you say the Middle East became more difficult to cover presumably not just because of the the threats associated with it.

Laura Haim: [00:18:44] No you don't think about the threat.

David Axelrod: [00:18:45] But what. Why did it become more difficult.

Laura Haim: [00:18:50] Because you always have to choose sides. And there are good and bad people on both sides. And that's where the conflict happened for me. You know which side I'm choosing and I don't want to choose a side as a journalist I want to be neutral I want to see what's happening. So that was difficult. And I you maybe were going to speak a little bit of that but I was in Baghdad or so.

David Axelrod: [00:19:17] Yes.

Laura Haim: [00:19:18] And it has deep effect on me. So I wanted to do a post from my middle east experience and then I'm always saying it's addicting because when my father died two days I had a very stern moved about that. But I had to go back to the Middle East. Two days after when when was that. It was in July 2014 and two days after the war in Gaza began. And they said to my editor at the time OK let me go back to the Middle East.

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David Axelrod: [00:19:54] What conclusions have you drawn from that. All of that reporting there about the prospects for resolving resolving this.

Laura Haim: [00:20:03] I think it needs strong people and strong people with sensitivities and sensibilities from both sides.

David Axelrod: [00:20:12] You see them now?

Laura Haim: [00:20:13] No I don't. I see a radicalization from both sides. I will always encourage people who are walking in the Middle East to live the ordinary life on both side. I did a documentary about a Palestinian family and an Israeli family and I was working at the time as a video on the news producer for 60 Minutes 2. And I remember this story vividly. There were two women. One woman her name was Rachel. She was 20 years old and the other woman her name was Ayat she was also 20 years old. They really look similar Rachel was living in Israel. Ayat was living in Palestine. And then one day Ayat decided to blow herself up in a supermarket and she killed Rachel and I documented the families from both sides. I followed them. Year after year after year I went to see the mothers. I went to see the brothers. I wanted to understand the woman looked like sisters. I think Newsweek did a cover on them. What happened to them and how. At one point seemed to have been in school together and suddenly boom one is killing the other that you don't know each other even if when they were a child that had been in school. What happened to them and what was very interesting for me. Year after year used to sleep slowly but surely the radicalization of the two mothers. I wanted the two mothers I think five years after to meet it was impossible. And then they told them that you lost a daughter you have to meet. That's how peace is going to begin. And they never wanted to meet.

David Axelrod: [00:21:57] Listening to you reminds me in 1994 I was with a group of Americans who went to Israel and we met with Rabin shortly before he was killed. And this was in the midst of the Oslo peace process and someone in the group said What will you tell the settlers who will have to move if you strike this deal. And he said I remember very clearly he said I'd say that too many too many of our children have lost their lives too much blood has been spent and peace has a price. And this is a price. And it speaks to what you are saying. He was a leader and you could sense it. And I've said this before but I think when you consider the last hundred years of history there probably wasn't a more destructive act than the young Israeli who who shot Rabin because I think that.

Laura Haim: [00:22:55] That was the beginning of the big shift in Israel. And it still is. There is also the religious aspect happening at this moment.

David Axelrod: [00:23:05] You move to the US.

Laura Haim: [00:23:06] So in 1992 I was in CAPA and I fell in love with New York. I went home. I was in New York. I was working in the streets in New York and I said that I have to live there. So I come back to Paris and I said that to my family was what you are going to move back.

David Axelrod: [00:23:25] By this by this time they're probably used to your baffling decision making.

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Laura Haim: [00:23:28] Yes. Yeah I had to be crazy as was my mother but saw you all because when they came back from Sarajevo my mother was in tears telling me I didn't enjoy it to go to Sarajevo. It was very difficult but.

David Axelrod: [00:23:43] Because she was worried about you.

Laura Haim: [00:23:44] She was extremely worried and you have to think about people who are so much worried about you when you're doing these type of work. But anyway so I moved to New York I decided to convince Canal+ which was a good time and Canal+ for the American audience was became very very successful after the United States now are part of Vivante Universo produced a lot of movies but at the time it was like the beginning of HBO. And I decided to convince my boss to create a first office in the United States in New York. And he looked at me said OK for three months. So that's my theory. I had a foot in the door so I went for three months and then I stayed 12 years and I developed Canal+. I always during my holidays I didn't take any French holidays. I was really living in New York where I always made the point to do two documentaries about important issues. When I was in New York. So I did a lot of documentaries for CAPA and I was also in New York and then.

David Axelrod: [00:24:54] Documentaries elsewhere so.

Laura Haim: [00:24:56] Completely I did a documentary about Calcutta woman who was trying to fight AIDS and created a program to educate poor women in Calcutta. I did something about crimes in America with a very famous photo journalist and we were out doing a lot of things about chain gangs in Alabama. I really wanted still. Because you can be in a bubble when you are in a corporation. And I really wanted to make sure that I was not staying in this bubble and that that was going to be able to see always to always see the real world. So I did that and then the 2001.

David Axelrod: [00:25:41] 9/11.

Laura Haim: [00:25:42] 9/11 happened.

David Axelrod: [00:25:43] And that was right... you were living nearby.

Laura Haim: [00:25:46] Yeah I have a very I wrote a book about that. So I'm going to try to be quick telling you the story I was doing a story about gang violence in Miami. And then I was supposed to fly back on ten of September. I decided to fly back on 9/11 in the morning. My apartment was three blocks away from the World Trade Center. So I was in a plane on 9/11 landing in New York. It was 8:30 because they took my plane at six o'clock in the morning and it has a huge impact of me because my basically I know people who are there my neighborhood was destroyed. I really saw some seeing of course like all of us Americans that I never saw before. And I became very American.

David Axelrod: [00:26:43] Yeah I know it's interesting you say all of us Americans that was the moment when you decided to become an American citizen.

Laura Haim: [00:26:49] It was in my mind but I really wanted at this time to shift big time. I decided.

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David Axelrod: [00:26:56] What it was. But explain that decision to me.

Laura Haim: [00:26:59] The unity of the United States at just particular moment which I found extremely moving and I became very patriotic about the best values in America and the endless possibilities. But I saw in New York during 9/11 the best of people. I was very moved by that.

David Axelrod: [00:27:23] You know it's interesting because we are very divided now as a country. And I mean there's no disputing that. And yet when things happen whether it's a hurricane or some other event you see people rallying to each other's side.

Laura Haim: [00:27:38] Yeah that's what I'm calling.

David Axelrod: [00:27:40] So you know I'm trying to reconcile the fact that when when when things happen. Houston was a good example of that. You know people rally. They weren't checking each other's voter registration card they weren't asking themselves they weren't asking quizzes about politics they were sleeping in trying to help each other. And it was inspiring and then we retreat into our back into our silos and paint these paint portraits of each other that you know are often dehumanizing. It's it's it's baffling. The other thing that happened as a result of 9/11 is a war. And you mentioned earlier that you had you went to Baghdad. You spent four years there.

Laura Haim: [00:28:29] Yeah I was. So 9/11 happened. I became more and more a video journalist like a photo journalist. I documented the downfall of Enron which also had an impact on me because I saw how you can be layoff in America in less than one hour when a corporation is going down. And then I decided to do this type of work with my small camera and then I went back to Israel for French TV and a bus exploded in front of me. And I had the camera always me Dan Rather was across the street and he was taking a coffee. He didn't have a camera. And he came to me said you have a camera can you film for me. And I filmed in the way that I knew how to film for French TV. This kind of cinema vérité way. So Dan Rather was moving around the situation they really liked my things.

David Axelrod: [00:29:27] This became a kind of partnership.

Laura Haim: [00:29:30] Yeah. And then Rather told me you have to come to New York. I said I live in New York said the watch with your French accent you live in New York. You said I want you to work with me. And do breaking news with me.

David Axelrod: [00:29:42] So did you. Did you set him with your Texas accent.

Laura Haim: [00:29:45] Yeah exactly. I said Oui with my Texas accent. So three weeks after the beauty of America. People are recognize sometimes that they need you. It goes quickly. So I went to New York. I was hired by Rather had a freelance contract for CBS. And it was.

David Axelrod: [00:30:06] But you're still doing your work for.

Laura Haim: [00:30:08] Canal+ Yeah and they took a sabbatical from Canal+ and it was time for me to do some seeing as I really felt it. And it's my sixth sense which is telling me that I

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always feel that that was time I need to be with new people to learn something I always want to learn new things and I mean Dan Rather that was a big person.

David Axelrod: [00:30:32] Yes.

Laura Haim: [00:30:32] And still is in the journalistic world you know and CBS News at the time was a big name. And I said OK I really want to try to do that. So I also had a French passport. The Middle East was going to explode. And the fact that I had a French passport was in my opinion a big plus for them because I was able to go to see again. And what I'm calling the other side so they hire me and ask me if I wanted to go to the Middle East. I went back to Gaza at the beginning of the war then really nothing happened. I desperately wanted to go to Iraq so I based myself in Jordan for two months and I can tell you that it was really hard for me to get a visa. I sit down in the Jordan embassy for two days and two nights waiting for their visa.

David Axelrod: [00:31:27] And they finally won. They were so desperate to get rid of you.

Laura Haim: [00:31:30] I mean at the end that I wish I would have his name the guy came and said you know we closing the Iraqi Embassy in Jordan. You the last one and I see you in the past two days and two nights. OK. I'm going to give you your visa. So I got the visa. And I went I went to Baghdad. I worked for CBS there and my assignment was as a producer to help them as a video journalist to document what was happening to the life of Iraqis people.

David Axelrod: [00:32:03] And you stayed for you.

Laura Haim: [00:32:05] So we were out doing rotations six weeks three weeks six weeks in Baghdad three weeks back in the United States or wherever you wanted to. It was extraordinary to. As a collective group. And there was Dan Rather there was another woman called Kimberly Dozier Elizabeth Palmer. There were extraordinary executive producers Peter Ablove Jim Murphy. I mean there are good people and we really wanted to show some things. So I did that.

David Axelrod: [00:32:36] I spent some time as you know recently with your friend Christiane Amanpour.

Laura Haim: [00:32:41] Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:32:42] And we talked about that about Iraq and what went wrong. And she said that it was after the war went fine. It was the aftermath and the complete sort of misplaying of the situation after the war that led to where we are.

Laura Haim: [00:33:05] Yeah I cannot agree more. It was really the aftermath because when the Americans arrived in Baghdad the Iraqis and I was with the Iraqis at this time that they didn't know what to expect. And there were OK let's maybe it's going to work. Saddam was not good for us and let's see what's happening and I'm always like to tell again stories about ordinary people. And there's a story which happened in Fallujah that I witnessed in the July July 2003 in Fallujah. There were American troops down there and Iraqis wanted to talk to them and they were doing a big lunch. You know Arabic lunch. I remember that the tribal leaders. It took them one week to prepare what they call the mishwi want to do Americans to have a good mishwi.

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Laura Haim: [00:33:58] And when the American troops arrived someone was probably in the first minute of the discussion he said Can I have a Coca Cola. And the level of trust was over from before the discussion began. I mean it's everything was wrong with this sentence. It was something that you don't do in the Middle East you know the importance of having a coffee. The importance of sitting down and so I witnessed a lot of things happening like that. There were more and more troops acting this way. They didn't know what to do. There were also political decisions which were made by Paul Brenner at this time it was completely over in less than six months so the aftermath was not thought.

David Axelrod: [00:34:52] Yeah.

Laura Haim: [00:34:53] Definitely.

David Axelrod: [00:34:54] That's what I learned in my brief experience in government was the question that isn't often asked and the one that is most important is what's next. You know exactly and it was just there I came to know you in 2008.

Laura Haim: [00:35:11] Yeah. I remember the sweater you had in Iowa. I mean it's one.

David Axelrod: [00:35:17] That was confiscated by the board of health.

Laura Haim: [00:35:22] I remember you were behind the scene in Des Moines and I saw you. So I came back to New York in 2006. I don't want to do wars anymore. I was really tired. I went to the pros and they said I maybe I'm going to work on the political campaign. So everybody in France I went back to France because Dan Rather was fired in 2006 and I was part of the package. So I went back to the French and they asked me do want to follow Hillary Clinton. And they said I'm interested by following someone who is an outsider. And they said who. And I said Barack Obama. And I remember on the phone my editor telling me Who? Barack who?

David Axelrod: [00:36:07] We got a lot of that back then

Laura Haim: [00:36:10] And I said Barack Obama because I was following the Democratic Convention in 2004 and I thought his speech was quite low cranked and I don't know I wanted to do someone there just follow someone there on Hillary Clinton. So I went to Harlem. I remember it was in October 2007. And I wanted to see Barack Obama in Harlem and there were thousands of people outside who wanted to come. And there was and energy. There was something and I said I want to see what's happening with this person. So I am there I went to Iowa. You met me there. Yes. Since you told me if the French are there maybe we have a chance. And then I was part of the beginning of an extraordinary campaign and I know.

David Axelrod: [00:36:57] You were with us in Europe when we were with you in the summer of 2008. So you were there when we were in France and you must have been there when we went to Germany.

Laura Haim: [00:37:08] No I was not. [crosstalk] I know the Berlin Wall.

David Axelrod: [00:37:11] So what was your impression when of how the Europeans were reacting to him.

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Laura Haim: [00:37:17] Oh my god it was. There were fascinated by him and they really wanted to follow him. They wanted him to be American president. Why. Because he was the symbol of hope and a new face. And I mean there was the fact that he was African-American was also a big thing for the French. Look what's happening in America. It's possible for someone like him to become president of the United States and then he's doing an amazing campaign based on the hope of change he's in. He was very inspirational. Still is. There was recently appointed in France that if Obama wants to be president of France people are waiting for him at 80 percent. So I mean he's a huge I mean he's extremely popular in France and it was not only the campaign you know it was the civil society that you saw there after the endless reports a country which is switching to country which is pushing for someone new that was really important and it still is. I mean people have vivid memories under 2007 campaign and the 2008 election.

David Axelrod: [00:38:39] Explain what America. I think Americans don't perceive necessarily completely what the role of our country is in the rest of the world.

Laura Haim: [00:38:54] I will say that the rest of the world he's speaking about America when America doesn't speak at all about the rest of the world. So when does a presidential campaign happening in France. People are following that closely. Tonight each morning in the news you have at least one or two reports about the on those people at this time. New Jamaican the new Barack Obama the new you. I mean Everett they're really interested in American politics because they think that America is a big country in the world and that they have to pay attention to what's happening in this democracy.

David Axelrod: [00:39:32] What what's the mood now.

Laura Haim: [00:39:35] Depressed right. What's happening. I used to the first power in the world. What's going to happen with Donald Trump. If you go from Sonnys you have a discussion of French people they're going to ask you two questions. They're going to have. Q What's happening with Trump he's crazy. Is he going to be impeached and then when you speak about Obama they are going to question about President Obama which is what happened in Syria.

David Axelrod: [00:40:08] In Syria.

Laura Haim: [00:40:09] Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:40:09] And his decisions.

Laura Haim: [00:40:10] Yes absolutely. This is a big question for the French people. What happened was him and his decision regarding Syria because then it has a direct effect.

David Axelrod: [00:40:21] Because of the migration.

Laura Haim: [00:40:22] Absolutely.

David Axelrod: [00:40:23] Yeah yeah. You've covered several terrorist attacks in France.

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Laura Haim: [00:40:30] Not in France. I was living in the U.S.

David Axelrod: [00:40:32] But you you went back when a Jewish school was attacked in Toulouse.

Laura Haim: [00:40:36] No I was in the U.S. that I followed that very closely because I was always and I'm still interested by the radicalization. I mean I think our daily life is for ever has forever changed.

David Axelrod: [00:40:54] You also commented from the U.S. on Charlie Hebdo.

Laura Haim: [00:40:59] And on the Bataclan. Yes because my friends were there you know I worked with a lot of young people. And my brother lived in this neighborhood and the Bataclan. I don't like to do a comparison but it was 9/11 of France and it was a very tragic event. And you know fun since it happened on November 13 to us two years ago and a few days ago President Macron went on the site and all the French people were extremely moved and I was extremely moved but nobody was talking about that in the United States. That the Bataclan attacks happened two years ago.

David Axelrod: [00:41:42] And these attacks have France felt a heavy blow that obviously the the British had. But these attacks are happening around Europe. What impact has this had on the politics of Europe.

Laura Haim: [00:41:57] It has a huge impact because it's in our daily life. Now each week unfortunately on that topic when you speak to the French people about that they're not telling you oh my god it's over. We had the Bataclan. Everybody is prepared for when it's going to happen again. What's next. We learned to live with that and it has a big impact also on the seabed inside the French political life because you can play a lot with terrorism and you can play a lot with the fear of people. This is quite dangerous. Some politicians in my opinion have to be extremely careful when they are exploiting the fear factor.

David Axelrod: [00:42:38] We have to take another break and we'll be right back with Laura Haim. You talk about the fear factor. We've seen and you've studied here during your visit at the Institute of Politics at University of Chicago you've been talking about the state of democracy in Europe. And you know there are similar concerns on both sides of the ocean here. But you look at someone like Angela Merkel.

Laura Haim: [00:43:12] Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:43:12] Who is really has been at the center of European politics for a decade more than a decade now unable to form a government because the right wing.

Laura Haim: [00:43:24] Exactly. And that's that's unfortunate. [unintelligible] I mean people are frightened when they are afraid they'll go to the people. who are saying what they want to hear they're going to what. People the populists. Know really well how to do that. The exploitation of the fear factor the exploitation of look he's coming to your country. He's going to be bad he's going to do bad things he's going to blow himself up he's going to take your job. And when you're looking at this moment in Europe a populist movement not only in Germany with the far

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right but also fun sums in Poland last week in Poland. There was a demonstration which is more than 60 thousand people for the White Poland. You know it's happening all over. And this is very very scary because Europe has to be extremely strong to get united to fight that. I always come back to the notion of education and to the notion of what is our responsibility when we explaining something to people. Can we explain in a better way what's happening in the world and what are the important problems and can we really do this type of deep work.

David Axelrod: [00:44:43] You made a decision. You've spent your life in journalism.

Laura Haim: [00:44:47] Yes.

David Axelrod: [00:44:48] And you made a decision to take a little a little detour into politics and was a candidate who is considered kind of certainly an outsider maybe a longshot. When he began but talk about your association with Emanuel Macron.

Laura Haim: [00:45:05] I followed Barack Obama I'm going to be quite precise with you because I'm not sure even yourself you know the full story. So I.

David Axelrod: [00:45:13] That's why I'm here.

Laura Haim: [00:45:14] Yeah exactly. So I followed Barack Obama for eight years in Washington and then the last year I wanted to know who was going to be the next president of the United States. And I went to Iowa and I went to South Carolina and I went to Florida and I spent a lot of time in the bars in the restaurants. I was documenting that for my channel. I spoke with people and there was always in them coming back. Trump. I was what I did not know really well TRUMP You know I was covering Barack Obama. I watched TV. So this guy is saying you're fired. I saw him as a TV personality and then I really began to be interested by him. I followed his activities in New York as a businessman and in April 2015 on French TV. I was questioned and I said Donald Trump might become president of the United States. And I had a lot of fights with the very.

[00:46:17] [crosstalk]

Laura Haim: [00:46:20] But if I went I can tell you the story that I never said before. But in the summer of 2015 I was invited to the Hamptons and someone a very famous person I can give his name the founder of Doctors Without Borders Bernard Kouchner. He asked me what do you think he's going to be president. I said Trump has a big chance and we had a terrible fight like screaming. He was screaming at me. You're crazy you live too long here. And then I had a fight with my editors because I wanted the budget to cover Trump. I want you to do a book about Trump. The publisher declined saying you're crazy you have having far too long in America. I remember the quote. And then finally the Canal+ people said OK we're going to give her a budget and they cover Trump for one year. I felt that he was coming to the United States to the political life because I'm not talking about his ideas. I'm talking about where he was doing a campaign. He understood something inside American society that very few people understood and it's the desire of the middle class. And he was exploiting that in a very clever way. And I saying people are saying especially in France he's stupid he doesn't know what he does. This guy I always said he's not stupid. He knows exactly how to do a good campaign. So I was quite known for that.

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David Axelrod: [00:47:50] So let me just stop you for a second and say how much do you recognize in some of these populist nationalist movements around Europe. How much do you see intimations of what you what Trump has done.

Laura Haim: [00:48:08] I think Marine La Pen when she was running a campaign that was very much inspired. [crosstalk] the leader of the National Front she was extremely inspired by Trump she wanted to be Trump woman she did a campaign like Trump did. But I mean France is not the United States. So the populist message is very simple. It's a formula. You know you go on stage you have a lot of personalities you're saying I'm not a traditional politician. You playing a lot to the cameras on the crowd. You make sure that in each event some sing you usual happen and you're doing a kind of political meeting like you doing a guy in a game. You don't develop a precise ideas you have two or three good formulas you'll make people loath and then that's it.

David Axelrod: [00:49:02] So we were getting up to Macron and your decision.

Laura Haim: [00:49:04] So my channel at the end of Donald Trump campaign my was my news division was completely destroyed because when CEO came and said we want to do entertainment and we do not want to do so use news anymore. And it is an important element because we fought we went on strike. You know the French people love to strike and we decided to go to the streets and to have saying we're going to die but we're going to die by defending serious journalism. And there was during the Trump campaign at the time I was deeply affected by that idea of the Trump campaign. I had to film with my cell phone the Trump events. And I of course I was with my coworkers defending serious journalism. So after the presidential campaign after eight years in Washington I wanted to pause. I came back to Paris. I wanted renewed poise because of course against the big corporation which wanted to do writing some time and we lost so the news division was completely killed. And I said that's it. I really have to think about what's happening. I went to Paris we know in the beginning of December I watch on my bed Macron on TV. It was a meeting which is called the [unintelligible] meeting because suddenly Macron is onstage and he screaming but really screaming I'm going to change things I'm going to be president. I'm going to do things. And he had passion. And I said this guy he's going to be president. I picked up the phone and I called his team and they said listen to told me you won't do an interview. I said No I don't want an interview. You know what happened in my news channel. I just wanted to see how I can help you. I have some experience in America. Do you think I can have an appointment with him just to speak about what he wants to do and then I had my appointment two days after. And we spoke for 35 minutes. T was last year. And yeah I met him in his office his wife was there. And I told him Listen I think you're going to become president. And he said what I said I really think you have a chance to become president of France because you're coming at the right moment. And I also saw a light in his eyes and you probably saw that. But there always the politicians the people want to do that. They have what I'm calling a special gene.

David Axelrod: [00:51:47] If they're successful.

Laura Haim: [00:51:50] Even In the fight they want to do it. And sometimes you can see that people want to do it for us something else than their own ego. They really want to transform us.

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David Axelrod: [00:52:01] You sense that from him.

Laura Haim: [00:52:02] Absolutely right away. I felt it.

David Axelrod: [00:52:04] Because he seems like a terribly ambitious person.

Laura Haim: [00:52:07] Yeah but ambitious in my opinion is part of you know when you want to become president don't you have to be ambitious.

David Axelrod: [00:52:13] Of course.

Laura Haim: [00:52:14] I saw that he was young he had a lot of energy. I was also interested a lot by his wife it was I mean you know there's been a lot of interest because it's unusual. I mean in December it's the first time I saw them together. I guess I thought it was a very strong couple. They still think it's a very strong gap. And then he asked me if I wanted to become part of the team to join the adventure. And they said I just have to move from Washington. And you said when can you. I would like you to be there as soon as possible. So two weeks after I was in Paris.

David Axelrod: [00:52:51] So what was that journey like.

Laura Haim: [00:52:53] Interesting because I was crossing the line and one to the other side. So.

David Axelrod: [00:52:58] Was that hard for you.

Laura Haim: [00:52:59] Very hard. I mean it was extremely hard.

David Axelrod: [00:53:02] I made that. I made that switch. But much earlier.

Laura Haim: [00:53:05] It was really hard it was not hard with the candidate. It was hard we the people around because the people around are really politicians. And you were coming from the civil society and you're bringing something from the civil society [crosstalk] I mean yeah I have interesting discussions.

David Axelrod: [00:53:25] What about with your former colleagues in the in the media.

Laura Haim: [00:53:29] Oh my god I become the story of the week and the month. And there were jokes on French radio was saying we speak much more about her than we speak about Macron so it was good fro Macron because I mean just saying which was good for Macron was the ability to show that he was able to capture people from the civil society. There was me. That was a very very strong economic advisor. His name is Jean Pisani-Ferry was very reliable very serious and he came at the right time. And each day in January make a nuanced someone coming from the civil society joining En March. And you have to remember it's not America. It's France, traditional parties.

David Axelrod: [00:54:12] He created his own movement.

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Laura Haim: [00:54:13] So he created this movement and he was able to show OK at En March we able to have people from the civil society joining us.

David Axelrod: [00:54:26] What what what I was wondering about that was did you. Was there any cynicism on the part of your colleagues that you had somehow sold out or that you traded in your objectivity.

Laura Haim: [00:54:38] No it wasn't not cynicism. It was. Why did you do that. I mean that was the question. You are serious journalist you have been through a lot. You were respected. Why do you cross the line. Because it's not like in America when you cross the line in France you're crossing the line. And I said because maybe I have been disappointed by the kind of journalism that I wanted to do. And that was my motivation. I mean what do I want to do. I was journalist do I want to do so use issues or do I want to do two minute clip about a Hollywood star and I think it was time for me to switch to do something still serious about you know society and to see the other side. So and I'm very American on that because I have this debate in France and the was saying I think in one life you can have multiple lives. I defend this idea.

David Axelrod: [00:55:33] You you say you didn't accept a position in the government you could have.

Laura Haim: [00:55:40] Yeah.

David Axelrod: [00:55:41] And you and you decided not to. So having made the switch because of governing you didn't want to do.

Laura Haim: [00:55:46] You know because I think that you have two times. You have the campaign and you have the government aspect. And I was not sure on there had this discussion with the president I was not sure that I was going to be able to function inside a government and the I.

David Axelrod: [00:56:05] Journalists by nature are iconoclasts they're challenging authority challenging institutions it's a tough adjustment to move inside of government.

Laura Haim: [00:56:14] Yeah they always want to be critical and they were so wanted to make sure that I was going to be accepted by the team. And I think at one point I did the campaign. And for me it was time to go back to.

David Axelrod: [00:56:28] The issue of your, dual citizenship that's...

Laura Haim: [00:56:31] I have an American passport. So when you have an American passport and when you have a French passport I think one day you have to choose which country you prefer.

David Axelrod: [00:56:42] And you did.

Laura Haim: [00:56:43] I came back to Chicago.

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David Axelrod: [00:56:44] Yes. We were happy. We're happy to have you. Good talk for a couple of minutes about Macron where he is now he seems to have ambitions to be a force for the reconciliation of Europe. He's clearly trying to reform some of the institutions of France. And these are major lifts. How do you think he's doing.

Laura Haim: [00:57:12] I think he's going very. Quickly. And that's part of his strength in my opinion on his ambition. He definitely wants to reform France in the union aspect. And I'm saying that my no new CEO of France. He really wants to change everything he's trying. He did a lot of things in less than six months. People when he was elected said in France everybody is going to be in the street. The unions are going to demonstrate it's going to be a new French Revolution. It didn't happen. So he already did a lot of changes about a law to mobilize the political life. He did some executive orders about how the working system he's operating in France when you company how you can be more flexible how you can fire more people how you can hire more people. So he's doing a lot of things which have never been done before. He has a very good image all over the world. He's trying to be a key player on the international scene. So that's the positive thing.

David Axelrod: [00:58:22] I saw internally his approval ratings are low.

Laura Haim: [00:58:26] Yeah but I would say that it's so difficult country to change and due to the fact now I'm outside I have my freedom of speech. I will say that you have to be careful about two fronts because you have a France which is ready to move on which understands the globalization which really wants to create companies which is extraordinary and then base that buried under Peiper also. And you have another France which is you know attached to other things doesn't mean good or bad. But for instance when you are 55 years old you. Maybe do not have the energy to create another company and to go back to the beginning or to move to another city. This second France has to be careful with them. That's my feeling.

David Axelrod: [00:59:23] That's of course there's another parallel there with the United States because that is the that is the core of the Trump constituency when you say Make America Great Again that really resonates with these 55 year olds who aren't going to or don't want to retrain and move.

Laura Haim: [00:59:38] Macron has it where during the campaign he was talking about that and he said we're going to do formations so if you losing your job at 40 or 45 years old. There will be a special program which will be putting which we which will be in place to teach you another job. But it's also in the mentalities. You know you have to make sure that you're not just doing a country for startup-ers.

David Axelrod: [01:00:07] Yes.

Laura Haim: [01:00:08] On the other way a lot of people want France to change. So you know we are very complex. We love to debate. We love to go to the street when there's something happening. The French people love to have long intellectual discussions. For instance during the companion France I was mesmerized when I arrived to see how French campaign is happening compared to an American campaign because you can do a stump speech you know in America. The candidates are doing 22 minute speech Macron speech was for two hours thirty minutes. And sometimes we had to tell him it's too long. You cannot do that. And he said I need

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to do those type of speeches because the French people love substance and it's true. The French they love substance take politics very seriously and they're like when someone is explaining to them for two hours what we wanted to do.

David Axelrod: [01:01:06] Two and a half hours could be substance abuse.

Laura Haim: [01:01:08] No no no no no. It was very good. I mean when you speak about important issues you know it's like what's happening in the TV world. I mean we have different laws in France. We have the principle of equality. Like the last two weeks of the French presidential campaign each candidate by law has the same a lot of time on TV and on the radio. Which as you know didn't happen in the United States but the French people and the French system are taking very seriously their responsibilities about democracy.

David Axelrod: [01:01:41] Last thing because I'd be remiss if I didn't ask everybody here it was sort of fascinated by the world about long speeches. We also saw the world's longest handshake between Macron and Trump.

Laura Haim: [01:01:52] I was not in the room when it happened but I can tell you knowing Emanuel Macron that it was not at all prepared I think it was like a moment in which Donald Trump shook his hand there was a lot of photographers. And don't forget to mention my home he's 39 years old. He's young so sometimes you know yes he's doing a handshake. He doesn't know how in which direction it's going to go. And then the press is speaking about the handshake. But I really think that in a more serious way for Emanuel Macron from the beginning the relations between the United States and France is extremely important.

David Axelrod: [01:02:30] So he's going to he's going to try and work with Trump. They have probably a better relationship from a distance than Trump has with a lot of other traditional American allies.

Laura Haim: [01:02:41] I was witnessing the first phone call between Donald Trump and Emanuel Macron and I can tell you that on honest issues they're definitely going to walk together. I mean there's a big disagreement about the Paris Agreement on climate on climate change but on the fight against terrorism yes it's important. And I really think you have to understand that about President Macron you know he's young he wants to do something he wants to build up a new France he wants to build up a new Europe and I hope he's going to succeed.

David Axelrod: [01:03:19] Laura Haim it's been a such a pleasure to have you here. This quarter at the University of Chicago and I think you're a person who's had great impact with your journalism you've had great impact in your brief political career and I look forward to see what you can do.

Laura Haim: [01:03:38] Thank you. So much.

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