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Jonathan Groubert: From Amsterdam, This is Bright Minds, the podcast from the John Adams Institute. A treasure trove of the best and the brightest of American thinking. I'm Jonathan Groubert. Forbes called today's guest one of the 100 most powerful women in the world, Christiane Amanpour. In fact, when she was asked if being a female reporter was an advantage or disadvantage, this was her answer.

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Christiane Amanpour: Yeah, I would say it's always an advantage.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Always?

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Christiane Amanpour: Always. It's never been a disadvantage. Reporting while female is a route to success. In my view, you know, the first Gulf War was when I did my first big story and I got a lot of publicity and attention because I was a woman.

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Jonathan: And Christiane Amanpour got a lot of attention here in Amsterdam back on January 25th, 2019, when CNN's chief international anchor and the host of Amanpour joined the Dutch journalist Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal for what turned out to be a witty, revealing and thoughtful conversation about the state of modern journalism. They cover topics like putting humanity into the news and the current journalistic moment. But for this podcast, we're also focusing on their discussion about the role of objectivity versus truth. Miss Amanpour's journalistic philosophy jelled in a place that forced many to confront their sense of morality and their devotion to the truth. The war in Bosnia in the 1990s and so Mr. Rosenthal started this part of the talk by projecting a picture of a graveyard.

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Christiane Amanpour: This is now many years after the war, and it's a beautiful graveyard when I was covering it in the early 90s, that was the main area in Sarajevo and there was no time to put up beautiful marble headstones and marble graves. It was just dig as between the shelling and the sniping. Sometimes bodies going on top of each other, graves being open, more and more people put in just little wooden emblems. They weren't crosses because most of these Muslim, obviously in Sarajevo. But I remember doing one of the most poignant stories I did during the war, was about a little girl called Al Medina and I told the story of the war and the deprivation and the siege through her head stone, which wasn't the stone, it was a piece of wood. And the city had run out of the letter A and run out of the number for the year that she died. And so it was very poignant and very emotional just, you know, to tell that story like that. And it had a big impact on a lot of people. But I remembered, you know, for me, that's what that graveyard says. Always remind myself. It reminds me of that little girl, Al Medina. But it also reminds me of the 1984 Olympics because just near there was the ice skating ring where Torvill and Dean skated to gold medals to Bolero and that ice skating ring, they turned into a graveyard the outside of it, not the inside and the soccer fields around it. So that's what I see when I see that.

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Elco Bosch van Rosenthal: with all the conflicts that you've covered. What place does the Bosnian War take in your memory? Because it's been important.

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Christiane Amanpour: Yeah, it's more than important. It's been formative for me. Well, it definitely, I believe it formed me as an adult. It formed me as a journalist, it formed me as a person. It, I will never, ever forget Bosnia, and I will never forget what I learned in Sarajevo, and I learned very, very key principles that have, that have, that have now I've been able to use going forward. For instance, the principle of truth, first and foremost, because I got myself into this, this situation where people started saying, 'Oh, you know, she's siding with the Sarajevans'. Anyway, the long story is...

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Elco Bosch van Rosenthal: They said you were anti-Serb.

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Christiane Amanpour: Yes. Yeah. Well, I was definitely anti what they were doing. And I told the story because what happened was the truth of the story was, that it was a multi-ethnic city that everybody was intermarried Croat, Serb, Muslim for, for generations. It was the home of the Jews, you know, after the persecution and the Inquisition. Sarajevo University, The National Museum has one of the oldest Haggadah's in the world, it's most beautiful and it was there. So it was a really, really, really, really multi-ethnic, tolerant city.

And for whatever reason, that part of the fall of the Eastern Bloc, the Serbs, who were the powerful ones there, because it was Belgrade and Yugoslavia, they had the army, they had you know, the politics and you know, that was the center of Yugoslavia was in Belgrade. And so when Serbia became Serbia, it was, still had all the tools of the state and they thought, Well, you know what? We want a little more land and we want to carve all this land out to just be ethnically pure white Christian Serbs. So, you know, how are we going to do it? We're going to besiege in a medieval fashion. One of the most metropolitan cities in in Europe, Sarajevo, and we're going to turn it into a medieval disaster zone. And we're going to sit, let's say, in the top rung there on the hill, on the hills, and we're just going to keep bombing. And that's what they did for four years. Shelling, bombing, shooting, sniping. And of course, we were there and we told that story. And that story was a desperately human story.

And you know, you talked about children who were shot, women who were shot, people just going to do, you know, ordinary things that they suddenly couldn't do; collect food, collect wood because there was no heating, collect water because the water had been turned off. Try to find something to make some light because there was no electricity and they were just massacred and slaughtered. Added to that, the concentration camps, the whole scale ethnic cleansing, which now we know is genocide, because right here in The Hague, in the Netherlands, we had landmark cases, which I reported on, which have enshrined that it was a genocide. And what the problem was, world leaders didn't want to deal with it. They just didn't want to get involved. As we all know, there is an international requirement to combat genocide under the international law, and they didn't want to do it. So the more I did my stories, the more my colleagues did these stories about what was

happening, trying to trying to cleanse a territory in order to annex it. The more those who didn't want to intervene would say that we were lying or that we were siding with one side and it wasn't fair. And oh, this and that. So it was particularly difficult as a young journalist to figure out how to deal with that. And I ended up, after being accused of being pro whatever, I don't know what I was, pro-life and in this case pro-truth , you know.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Pro truth. I think I got a scoop.

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Christiane Amanpour: And anti and anti-genocide. I suddenly realized that I had to make a stand. So I said, look, you know, our golden rule is objectivity. The thing that is the golden rule for every journalist is objectivity. Now, objectivity means definitely telling all sides of the story. But it definitely does not mean drawing false equivalences either moral or factual. So I wasn't going to say, Well, this person is equal to that person. I wasn't going to equate the victim and the aggressor. And I think that in in in times of this kind of issue, if you do, if you are neutral instead of truthful, you are an accomplice. You're an accomplice, right? You are an accomplice. And in this case, an accomplice to genocide. And I was not going to be an accomplice to genocide. So I learned there to tell the truth, no matter how difficult it was and no matter how unpopular it was. And that's why I find it very important.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: But is there a fine line? We just saw Maduro and you said you sat here and you basically said, you know, this guy should go, which is a fair statement.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Sorry?

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Christiane Amanpour: It's not me. It's hundreds of thousands of people on the street, right?

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: But you seem, right. But you seem to agree with that statement.

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Christiane Amanpour: I mean, after.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Is it something you would say on your show?

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Christiane Amanpour: I wouldn't have said it so glibly, right? But I would have. Definitely, definitely 100 percent. I've said it to him face to face, right?

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: No, I that's...

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Christiane Amanpour: Not the 'you should go'. But don't you think you have a responsibility if you claim to be elected and representing the people? No, I'm not like that. I don't sling my opinions around like that, but I do ask the pointed questions.

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Elco Bosch van Rosenthal: And it's a trap for journalists and objectivity trap the false equivalency.

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Christiane Amanpour: Yeah, yeah, it's a trap. And we should be very mindful of it. We should recognize what it is. We're seeing what it is. We're covering and cover it truthfully. And I tell you this business of having to be neutral. That's why we're in the state we're in with climate because journalists have mistakenly believed that they owe it to the tiny percentage of liars and deniers to equate them with the massive, overwhelming evidence of science.

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Elco Bosch van Rosenthal: But is journalism winning in the sense? I mean, if you look at what Trump does, if you look at... the Mueller, the special counsel will come out with a report, maybe in a few weeks. Who knows? But he has called CNN and all the other fake news for so long now. No, no. Trump has sorry that that no matter, no matter what, Mueller eventually will come up with, his base won't believe it. So you're completely right about objectivity. But is it a winning argument or are the Bolsonaro's and the Erdogan's and the Orbán's and the Trumps in a winning mood?

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Christiane Amanpour: Well, I mean, you could say yes, you could, and it's very depressing thing to say. The very depressing thing is that a Duterte in Philippines or Orbán in Hungary or, as you said, Erdogan and the others, you know, they have no incentive to like a free press or to respect the free press. It's just not in their bones, it's not in their blood, it's not in their DNA. You kind of expect authoritarians who are not, not nurtured in the democratic world.

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Elco Bosch van Rosenthal: Trump is different.

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Christiane Amanpour: Yeah, that's so that's what I'm coming to. We I have, my whole career has been working in countries that are run by people who don't respect a free press. So I'm used to that and it's dangerous physically. Many of our colleagues have been wounded, not just because they were caught in the crossfire, but because people didn't want, people wanted to shut them up, in Russia. You know, in many, many places, journalists are actually targeted. The Committee to Protect Journalists, which you know, has its own sort of statistics. Every year puts out statistics with the following sober line. The leading cause amongst journalists today is deliberate murder, which, as you know, is quite skewed from the leading cause the general population, the leading cause of death. So this is a real problem. But what's a thousand times worse, and what compounds this problem is when the leader of the United States of America, the world's most developed democracy, says the same stuff, and therefore makes it even more permissive environment for these other non-democratic, authoritarian leaders around the world. So that is a very, very big problem and certainly the first year of Trump with the fake news thing. I think now everybody is a bit bored. You know, people are just going to fake news, OK? How many times can you say fake news? All right. We'll say it again. OK? But, but I think at the beginning, you know, certainly when I would go places, you know, you'd hear people just being delighted to accuse us of

fake news. If the president of the United States says it, it must be true. And by the way, that's true. People actually truly believe that if the president of the United States says something, he must know something.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: which should be how it is.

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Christiane Amanpour: Yeah, it should be.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: with any other president.

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Christiane Amanpour: But I was surprised about that. I, you know, you always have these conspiracy theories all over the world. I thought that, that other leaders were using it as an excuse. But actually, they, many people in many parts of the world believe what comes out of the White House podium and is... now so are they winning? I think they, I have had a very good run for a couple of years, but I think the tables will turn and I think the tables are beginning to turn. The great thing about journalism is that, and we journalists, is that we have not surrendered and we've not bent over and we will not take it.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Yeah, there you go. Yeah, this is...

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Christiane Amanpour: Yeah, so this is Israel during the 2006 war against Hezbollah.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Right, Peter Arnett, a well-known correspondent, foreign correspondent in the Vietnam War, Iran, Iraq, etc. And you must know him well. And he has said there are some stories that may be worth dying for. You just said, you know that your perspective was changed when your son was born. Are there stories worth dying for?

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Christiane Amanpour: But it's just too hard a question to answer, because there's just too much pain and suffering for everybody around when one of us gets hurt or one of us gets killed. I would say that subconsciously or unconsciously, I probably thought that before I thought, before my brain kicked in when I became a mother. But I mean, we obviously believe that in Bosnia. I mean, we were there for years and years and years under the bombing and the siege and the shelling and the actual targeting of journalists, you know, Bosnia was the very first war where journalists were deliberately targeted. All the others before that, whether it was Vietnam or Middle East wars or Central America and all the rest of it. Journalists were caught in the crossfire, or it was accidental. Bosnia was the first time, and part of that is where they targeted us. And part of that now, of course, is de rigueur. We are targeted, de rigueur by, by, by state actors, by non-state actors. It's a really terrible situation.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: So Bosnia was the riskiest place?

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Christiane Amanpour: It was at that time, the riskiest place. And we stayed and we stayed and we stayed and we lost a lot of friends, a lot of friends.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: In the Middle East, where you were working there, you're being a female reporter has that I can foresee circumstances where it's an advantage and maybe sometimes it's not. Can you talk about that?

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Christiane Amanpour: Yeah, I would say it's always an advantage.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Always?

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Christiane Amanpour: Always. It's never been a disadvantage. Reporting while female is a route to success, in my view.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: I'll think of that when my career evolves from here.

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Christiane Amanpour: Well, you know, we live in a very fluid world.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Yeah, I know. Yeah, doctors can do a lot.

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Christiane Amanpour: Seriously, seriously. OK, so I never thought there was something weird about being a woman or that I was at ever, ever, ever, ever at any disadvantage. Now call me crazy. Call my parents brilliant. But I was raised never to have thought that there was anything unavailable to me because I was a woman. So, yeah, so I thank my parents and my family for just that. Without ever indoctrinating me. It was just I was never told I can't do something because I'm a girl.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Not everybody you run into was raised by your parents.

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Christiane Amanpour: But who gave a crap about them. I was doing my stuff and, and it was great and I was, I came across, came up at a time when it was. You know, the first Gulf War was when I first did my first big story, and I got a lot of publicity and attention because I was a woman. But that's when it became more and more visible, more and more women and behind the scenes in front of the scenes, everything. I think the big issue right now is that there are not enough women running news organizations. In fact, there aren't any women running any news organizations as far as I can gather, except for CBS News now, the great Susan Zirinsky has been made president of the network, which is fantastic.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Obviously it's a problem. But do you also see it in programming? Is that what you mean?

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Christiane Amanpour: No, because you see many women fronting programs, I think on the air.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: But in choosing items, topics.

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Christiane Amanpour: Yeah, I mean, I just think that, yeah, I mean, look, the world is made up of 50 percent women, 50 percent men. And when men have 100 percent of the power there's a problem. I mean, it's a skewed look.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Look what happened, Right?

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Christiane Amanpour: Yeah, yeah.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: So you're saying, it's always been an advantage,

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Christiane Amanpour: It has been for me.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: In making first contact with people or anything?

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Christiane Amanpour: Yes, first contact with people. I think probably because we do live in a patriarchal world still, so that often men will maybe think that they were not getting such a hard, you know, deal when they saw a woman or whatever, or they would open the door for a woman. They just usually nice to women.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Right, Usually.

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Christiane Amanpour: If they're not, not, you know, so. So for me, it was like, OK, well, they're letting me go. I'll, the opening the door. I put my foot in the door and I won't take it out. And that's what happened.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: You've been traveling. I read with all female crews.

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Christiane Amanpour: Yeah, actually, you're right in some areas, let's say in the Muslim world or whatever. You can't actually go into the into the women's part of the home or whatever. If you're a guy. So in that regard, being a woman was actually substantively advantageous.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: OK, great. Let's go to the next photo, which is the Haiti earthquake in 2010, I believe. Yeah, yeah. This is Haiti. Now, there were so many journalists there on the ground.

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Christiane Amanpour: That's my old mate David Rust. He's a great, great cameraman and he's a great hoarder.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: What does he hoard?

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Christiane Amanpour: He could fill this theater and make a museum of all the things that he's collected from all the war zones, all the places we've been together, it would be the most brilliant CNN Museum. Phenomenal.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: So you've traveled with him to many places?

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Christiane Amanpour: Yes. Since 1992.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Yeah. How important is that, by the way? I mean, traveling with your own crew?

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Christiane Amanpour: It's great, actually, it's really great. I don't, we don't always do that. I mean, there's a big pool of people, but sometimes in some circumstances we end up being the same people working together. And actually, it does. It's like a cohesive unit of brothers and sisters in the same, in service of the same end.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Now the Haiti earthquake in 2010, which I covered myself and there were hundreds of journalists there and being CNN and you have to go live all the time. How do you pick your story? How do you realize this is one I want to focus on?

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Christiane Amanpour: It's difficult and it's not difficult. I mean, a place like Haiti. I mean, you know, you were there because it's so much need. There's so much catastrophe. And again, for me, telling the story is always trying to get to the human angle of the story. And I really was very, very concerned with the actors in the field on the ground, whether it's war or famine or whatever it is.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: How do you feel about politicians?

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Christiane Amanpour: Oh, that's a misleading question.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: it doesn't sequester. No, I know it's but it doesn't sound like your favorite breed. I mean, it's not my favorite.

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Christiane Amanpour: No, no, no. That's not true. In fact, what I think is a real problem is the lack of respect amongst society that politicians have these days. You know, its

politicians, its journalists. It's I don't know what we're all really right at the bottom of the pile of popularity. I mean, that's a problem. I think it's a problem, and I think we have, we have a duty, I think not to just piss all over any politician just for the hell of it.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: No, no, no. But you've seen the House of Commons, you've seen Brexit. You've called Congress dysfunctional. I mean, some...

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Christiane Amanpour: That's today, now, but that doesn't mean to say it is all the time.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: No, of course not. And not everyone.

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Christiane Amanpour: You've got to be able to look for those who are prepared to break with their party or to reach across the aisle. And I really try to promote and interview those people because I think it's really interesting and it's mature and it's. But I think what I think is really sad is how in the democratic world, in the free world, the number of young people who vote, you know, is just not high enough. I think it's getting higher. I think in response to these cataclysmic political developments we've had since Brexit, the whole 2016 to 2019 has been a particular moment in history.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: And the midterms could make you optimistic when it comes to turn out.

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Christiane Amanpour: That's right. But I think that if we're going to treat politicians like criminals. Then, we're not going to get good politicians and we're not going to get good policies. So I actually think it's a much more nuanced relationship that the press should have with politicians and with politics. Of course we have to keep, hold everybody accountable. But we also have to report on the good stuff and the success. If we constantly just report the bad stuff, it's not just that, it's just a one-Note, Johnny, we are contributing to the cynicism in society to the lack of hope in society. And I genuinely believe that one of the big problems is a lack of hope and a lack of belief in the future, because I think we humans, you know, without hope, were nothing. And I really, really do strongly. That's a huge part of my broadcasting and my reporting has a I'm looking for the hope I'm looking for the reconciliation. I'm looking for the tolerance. I'm looking for the brave new policies. And when I that's what I want to focus on.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: I want to end with a question about Europe, but that also brings me back to where we talked about the Bosnian War being one of the key moments in your career. Maybe it may be the key moment. It cemented your reputation. This thing happened only 40 years after World War Two in Europe. For many of us, I guess it also underlined the need for a strong European Union. This should never happen again. Do these things and maybe also the danger of nationalism. Is this in the back of your mind when you're in the field reporting all the time? Because it seems so.

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Christiane Amanpour: It is now, it's the motif and the backdrop for what we're reporting right now. Yeah, this ugly rise of populism, nationalism, which is all centered, a lot of it's centered around hatred of foreigners. I think Europe, to be honest with you, failed on the great challenge of our time, which was the immigration crisis and Europe did not.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: the recent one you mean?

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Christiane Amanpour: from 2015. I think that, if Europe had been more willing to take their fair share and not letting all of them go to Germany or all of them try to come through Hungary and all that kind of stuff, I think maybe, you know, this continent of 500 million people could have absorbed a million and nobody would be in any the wiser. But because it became such a fight, because it became such a thing, it destabilized. It destabilized so many countries, and it made craven politicians able to use that as a way to, you know, to give rise to their populist politics. So I regret that. I regret that Europe wasn't able to deal with that properly. And then, of course, we're still suffering the effects of austerity in so many areas. And, and you know that, that's real people really hurting.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: And if we end with an optimistic note,

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Christiane Amanpour: Despite all of this.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Exactly.

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Christiane Amanpour: Well, look, I think. As I say, I believe 2018 was one of the most difficult years in modern, certainly in my career. I mean, politically and in every way, because it really did seem like the world was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and nobody quite knew how to deal with all these, this turbulence. I think it's sort of to an extent calming down. I think also where I get hope is from a backlash, whether it's against guns, whether it's against racial inequality, whether it's for women's rights. I think that has been one of the most important reactions to this reactionary force that we've been seeing. And they also think journalism has stood up. And I think the one thing I've learned, which maybe I didn't know, I thought that history went in in a nice, progressive line. But I realize that it doesn't is just circular. It's just circular. So if we can get through this, you know, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

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Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal: Perfect.

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Jonathan Groubert: An optimistic note there ending Christiane Amanpour's talked, led by the Dutch journalist Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal Bosch van Rosenthal.

Did you know that you can go to our website, John-adams.nl/videos, where there's a link to the video of this extraordinary event. We also have a newsletter you can sign up for and a

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