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All in the Family

Jonas Noreika and the Quest for Truth about the Holocaust in Lithuania

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1 hour, 16 minutes, 32 seconds

Speakers: Silvia Foti and Grant Gochin

Moderator: Dr. Amelia Glaser

Transcribed by: Rachel E Lieu

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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Time Transcription

00:05 Susanne Hillman: Hello everybody. I am delighted to welcome you to today's Holocaust Living History Workshop, the first of the series of public events of the new academic year. I'm Susanne Hillman the project manager. Many of you know me from uh, well way back when, when we actually met in person. Before I continue, I'd like to acknowledge our sponsors, the UC San Diego Library and the Jewish Studies Department at UCSD [University of California, San Diego]. I would also like to thank the ever-efficient Yekta Mohammady who is in charge of all the technical aspects of this production. Thank you Yekta. We couldn't do it without you. This year's series of public events is titled *Witnessing the Past: Holocaust Histories*. The past is not dead, William Faulkner famously quipped, it is not even past. That statement certainly applies to today's event, as you will see.

01:03 Susanne Hillman: Before I pass the microphone, so to speak, on to our moderator I'd like to draw your attention to the Q [question] and A [answer] function. It's a button at the bottom of your um, screen. We would like to invite questions that are posed as questions. We'll have about twenty minutes at the end of the event but you may submit your questions throughout and I will keep track of it. Then, at the end when the interview is over, um we'll address those. Now it is my genuine pleasure to introduce Dr. Amelia Glaser who will interview our two uh important guests. Professor Glaser specializes in Russian literature, modern Yiddish literature, comparative literature, cultural studies, transnational Jewish literature, and the literatures of Ukraine. She has published wildly widely in this field. Although we cannot clap together in this virtual space of ours, please join me in expand extending a warm welcome to Amelia Glaser. Over to you Amelia.

02:09 Dr. Amelia Glaser: I think I need permission to start my video. I'm happy to - oh there we go. Now I got the video on, great. Okay, um well it's really a pleasure to be here. Thank you for uh, to Susanne for inviting me to moderate this evening's event. It's it's really a great pleasure to welcome our two speakers Silvia Foti and Grant Gochin. Silvia is a journalist and a novelist. She is most recently the author of an incredibly brave work of investigative non-fiction about her grandfather titled - and you can see the cover in front of you - titled *The Nazi's Granddaughter: How I Discovered My Grandfather was a War Criminal* and this is coming out this coming March 2021. Grant Gochin also joins us, who is working together with Silvia on writing a historical blind spot, uh particularly in Lithuania. As the descendant of Lithuanian Jews, many of whom died in the Holocaust, Gochin has been working to demand that the current Lithuanian government remove the formal honors bestowed on Lithuanian collaborators with the Nazi party, including Jonas Noreika Silvia's grandfather. And Grant Gochin currently serves as the honorary consul for the Republic of Togo and also as the Vice Dean of the Los Angeles Consular Corps.

03:34 Dr. Amelia Glaser: So I'm just going to say a couple of things about my own relationship to Lithuania and Lithuanian Jewery which holds a particular place in my

own heart. As someone of, in part, Lithuanian Jewish descent, I went as a recent college graduate looking for any record of my family's past. The last of my ancestors emigrated from the Villna region around 1890 but I had, through family, the names of other relatives who had remained there through World War II. And what I found, this was a very long time ago - it was back in the fall of 1997 when I first visited Lithuania - was a country that was rebuilding itself after the Soviet period. My first stop was the Museum of Genocide and I was very confused to find that there was no mention of the Holocaust there. Rather, the museum, in the late [19]90s anyway, focused entirely on the sacrifices by Lithuanians under the Soviet period. The pain was obviously very real. Lithuania, emerging from decades of Soviet rule, was finally able to write the history of the wrongs done to their country, and in particular, to ethnic Lithuanians. But in the process, this had meant searching for national heroes to replace the Soviet heroes who had been valorized since World War II.

04:50 Dr. Amelia Glaser: At the same time that I that I went to visit Lithuania for the first time, I discovered the very small Jewish community that was rebuilding itself less than a decade after the fall of the Soviet Union. There was a religious community, a Jewish museum, a separate Holocaust museum uh, which consisted largely of photocopies of pictures at the time. But it had this priceless treasure of a few survivors of the Holocaust from Vilna who gave tours of the museum based on their own memories. And I ended up taking a job with the museum for the next two summers. I gave tours where I shared some of the highlights of Lithuanian Jewery that was lost in the Holocaust. This was the country that gave the world Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the reviver of modern Hebrew, S. Ansky [Solomon Zanvel Rappoport] the folklorist who also wrote *The Dybbuk*, uh the modernist poets in the Yung-vilne [Young Vilna] group, not to mention the Vilna Gaon the father of Litvak Misnagdic Judaism, as well as rabbi [Yisrael Lipkin] Salanter the leader of the Musar movement.

05:44 Dr. Amelia Glaser: Over 90 percent of Lithuania's thriving Jewish community died during the Holocaust. This was, the community was probably around 160,000 on the eve of World War II. Some estimates say that it was as high as 96 percent. Nearly two-thirds of this population lived in what is now Vilnius, in Vilna, where Jews made up close to half of the city's population. The percentage of Lithuanian Jews who died in the Holocaust is a much higher number than in Germany or Poland where Jews were more likely to survive because there were concentration camps. There were more survivors of concentration camps than there were in Lithuania where Jews were rounded up in ghettos and um and brought to liquidation points often in the woods. This was carried out by some Nazi guards but largely by Lithuanian collaborators who played a very important role in the process. A large number of ethnic Lithuanians welcomed the arrival of the Nazis who promised to liberate the Lithuanians from Soviet rule. This was not everyone, we need to bear that in mind. Lithuanians also hid Jews, as did ethnic Poles and Russians living in the region. But Lithuanians were harshly treated by the Soviets after the war for their collaboration

uh, which led to a narrative of victimhood after the Soviet Union ended and a strategic amnesia about many Lithuanians' role as collaborators.

07:07 Dr. Amelia Glaser: One of the people that I met in the Vilna Museum was someone, a woman by the name of Xenia who had survived the Holocaust only to go to St. Petersburg, which was then Leningrad, enroll in University and eventually be arrested as you know a Lithuanian who must be a collaborator with the Nazis because she'd survived. So it's a very very painful history for many people. So you know, following the Soviet period, Lithuania within it, within a period of rebuilding. And part of the process was to tell a national story. This is the story that Silvia encountered with her um, you know, in terms of her her grandfather. And what I'm really really interested in hearing today is um, is how she moved within her own family, uh within her own memory from a grandfather that she had always been told was a hero to understanding what her grandfather had done, and the ways in which her grandfather was implicated in the death of thousands and thousands of Lithuanian Jews. So I'm going to turn the story over right now to Silvia and I wonder if you can begin by um by telling us a little bit about this discovery and your decision to write this book.

08:17 Silvia Foti: Sure, thank you, Amelia. Well um, I grew up in Chicago in a, in a Lithuanian family uh, in the 1960s uh, speaking only Lithuanian at home because they were very proud Lithuanians. And uh, as soon as I could talk, or understand language, it seems I was already hearing about my wonderful grandfather Jonas Noreika. And um, as I grew older, I heard about all the heroics of him. He fought against the Russians twice. He was in a KGB prison where he was tortured for uh, almost two years. Then he was executed and um, died at the age of 36. And uh, I had heard how he was in a Nazi concentration camp for two years. And I, the version I heard was that he had tried to help Jews while he was head of the Šiauliai District during the Nazi occupation. So um, by the time, you know, I was growing up my mom had been asked by the Lithuanian community to write the definitive book on her father. And so, I'd always seen her collect material on him and um in the year 2000 uh, she had gotten sick - and she was only 60 years old - and uh she went to the hospital. And um had, I went to visit her and she looked much worse than usual and I uh was very, very worried about what was happening because I thought it was just a routine hospital visit and that she'd be out like she's always out of it. But she, you know um, called me to the side of her bed and took my hand and she said Silvia, you have to write the book.

10:21 Silvia Foti: I was 38 years old then. This is the year 2000. I was a journalist and I said no, no, no, no, no. You're gonna come out of the hospital, and you're going to write the book, and everything's gonna be fine. But she uh, said you have to, you have to promise me. You have to do this. Everybody expects that book to be written and it has to be done. And, you know, I still wasn't accepting the fact that my mother was dying but I thought I would appease her and I said yes. And then she, she

closed her eyes and started to fall asleep. And then the next day I came back, and she was already in a coma. And uh so, and then within two weeks she had died. So um, here I was with this deathbed promise to uh take over the project of my mother, write the book about my heroic grandfather. And that is all I knew. And uh, my grandmother survived my mother still. She was still alive - my, my mother's mother and his, Noreika's wife - and uh so she was in her 80s at the time. And she had another heart attack five months later and now she's on her deathbed. And she says how's that book going? And I said well don't worry about it, you know, I'm gonna write it. I'm not gonna let it go the way Mom did. Uh, I'm young; I'll get it done. And my grandmother takes my hand and says Silvia, don't write the book. Just let history lie. There's no reason, there's no need to dig around in there.

12:10 Silvia Foti: And I, and I said Grandma, you know, why in the world would you say something like that? And, and I said besides, I promised Mom five months ago. Of course, I'm gonna write the book. And she just wouldn't answer me and turned over uh to face the wall and, you know, put her back to me. And I said okay and I just, you know, said goodbye. And then when I, the next time I came to visit her she was in a coma and had died. And so, um so, that was in July 2000 when she had died. And then both of them uh, wanted to be buried in Lithuania. So uh, my brother - who's in California - uh took their cremains to Vilnius, Lithuania. And now it's October 2000 and uh you know we had the whole funeral ceremony for them in the Vilnius Cathedral and we buried them at Antakalniai Cemetery. It's, it's like the luminary cemetery uh, and because my grand - they wanted to be buried next to my grandfather who, in the end, they couldn't find his body because he was uh, tossed in a pit of 700 other men near that KGB prison. But they had a spot ready for him and so my mother wanted to be buried in case they ever find him, in that spot.

13:36 Silvia Foti: So anyway um, it was a huge, many people showed up uh, some politicians came and, you know, my brother and I were astounded by, by those who had shown up. And they weren't there for me or my brother. They were there for Jonas Noreika, you know, to pay their respects to his uh, descendants of the hero, this hero. And um, shortly after that my brother and I were invited to um, visit the school named after our grandfather, the Jonas Noreika Grammar School, which is in Northern Lithuania. And we go there and um, they have a beautiful, you know, ceremony for us. The children are outside and they're holding these, you know, flowers and they're singing Lithuanian songs and, you know, we were greeted like like rock stars. And uh, it felt, it was a very special moment. And um, then my brother and I go into the director's office, and he's got a scrapbook of Jonas Noreika and, you know, lots and lots, and lots of articles about him. Even in the year 2000 uh, there were articles about him. And um, yeah so um, the director says oh I'm, I'm so happy you're writing this book - that you took this project over from your mother. You're such a good daughter to do this. And I'm saying thank you. And, and then I said, you know uh, maybe you can tell me why you named the school after my grandfather. And he said well, you know um, as soon as Lithuania got its

independence, uh, we had to get rid of that terrible Russian name the school had and we had to give it a good Lithuanian name. And your father's name came up right away because he was born in this town.

- 15:24 Silvia Foti: And I thought oh. And I thought that was the end of the story. And then he took me and my brother to the side and he said but, you know, I got a lot of grief over naming the school after your grandfather. And I said grief from who? And he said grief from the Jews. And I said why would you get any grief from the Jews? And he looked at me like, like I was the strange one. And he said well he was accused of killing the Jews. And I said what? And I almost fainted. I, I was, I was, I almost fainted. I just, I, I couldn't function for a few minutes. My knees buckled. I had to sit down. My heart was beating fast, you know, and I and I had to like - it just felt like he physically punched me when he said that. And uh, he could see how, you know, reacted I was to it. And, and, you know, he's stroking my arm and he's saying don't worry Silvia it's okay. That's all in the past. It's no big deal anymore. It's just communist propaganda, don't worry about it.
- 16:41 Silvia Foti: So um, so, you know, it was, it was hard for me to forget that. And I come back to Chicago and I start talking to my father and my mother's friends. And I'm like, have you ever heard this story about um Jonas Noreika involved in killing Jews? And they knew about it. And I, and I'm like what? And they said yeah, it's just communist propaganda. And why didn't you ever tell me about this? And they said why would we tell you anything, you know, something like that when it's a lie? There's no reason to talk about it. And um, and I thought wow. And uh, and I talked to some of my other friends, and none of, none of my friends of my generation really heard this. So it was like my parents' generation had had heard this already. And um, and so I thought for a long time it must be communist propaganda. It can't be true, you know, um and then I struggled with the, with, with going forward. And I thought uh, you know, as I would move forward that I'm gonna, I would have to address it because I'm a journalist, you know. So, I knew that I could not just ignore this but um, I thought I could exonerate him. I'm gonna prove once and for all but this is just not true and so that was uh what I was set out to do after I had heard that.
- 18:19 Silvia Foti: And um, I moved very, very slowly and it took me about 10 years to really get into the Nazi era because, because he literally does have a lot of heroic uh, you know, all these bookshelves behind me is everything my mom collected. And that's all just his, you know, what I'm calling the heroic side of fighting the Communists. And so, I did research, all that, and that included 3,000 pages of KGB [Committee for State Security] transcripts. Um you know, he, he wrote he wrote 77 letters from the Stutthof concentration camp to my grandmother. He wrote a fairy tale from that concentration camp to my mother. And then, of course, you know, the hundreds and hundreds of articles about him. But about 10 years in - now it's like 2010 - um I come across a brochure that he had written, and it was sort of tucked in between all

these other things, and um and it's called *Raise Your Head Lithuanian*. And it's a 32-page brochure and Jonas Noreika's the author.

19:32 Silvia Foti: And I'm like okay, and I'm thinking it's going to be something patriotic, you know, about Lithuania. And I'm reading it, and I'm reading it, and I'm reading it and by the time I'm done reading it, I want to burn the thing because the whole thing is a rant against Jews and how they're the foreigners in Lithuania, how they're taking over everything, how they own everything, how Lithuanians have to boycott uh anything Jewish in Lithuania. And on, and on, and on like this for 32 pages. And I thought oh my gosh. This is terrible and um, and then, and then here it says 22-year-old man um, in Lithuanian [speaks in Lithuanian] My grandmother, this is my grandmother's handwriting and it's like she appeared before me and she said he's just a, he was just a 22 year old. He was just a hothead. It's not that bad. And it's true, he wasn't, he didn't ask to kill them. He just asked to boycott their, their goods. And so, I was sort of rationalizing all this and I thought okay. But then, shortly after that - and this was my big turning point.

20:54 Silvia Foti: This was also in my mom's archives *Mass Slaughter in Lithuania* [speaks in Lithuanian], *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje* and it is a collection of some Holocaust documents in the 1970s that had already been discovered. And I go on the index and I'm like I really hope I don't see his name. I really hope I don't see his name. There's, there's Jonas Noreika in the index. And I open the page and I see a couple documents when he was a district chief of Šiauliai. He had uh signed um some some orders asking Jews to be rounded up uh from [unclear] and sent to Žagarė, which is a northern town in Lithuania. And about two, and about 2,000 of these Jews were killed shortly after they were rounded up. And um when I read that in here, that was, that was like a light, a light switch went off for me. And I said okay, now I'm really gonna look into this. And uh so, I had spent seven weeks in Lithuania, and I lined up a lot of interviews, and I talked to a lot of people, and I went through, you know, archives. And um, I had found out that in Plungė he was, where he was the leader of this uh uprising against the Russians, which also happened to coincide with Operation Barbarossa, which also happened to coincide with the introduction of the Holocaust in Lithuania um 2,000 Jews were murdered.

22:49 Silvia Foti: Then he was head of Telšiai, another city where uh nine or ten thousand Jews were murdered and then he was head of that Šiauliai region where about four or five thousand Jews were murdered. So, by my count and it's as accurate as I could get, and mind you I don't have the the names or anything like that, 14,500 for these three cities. So um, that's what I discovered and so I had to come back home and it took me a long time to write the book because you know um I was a high school teacher then, children, and I had to do all this in my spare time. And then I finished it in 2018. So that's my side of the story. So then in 2018, um uh I put up my website because I, I needed to find an agent to sell my book, to find a publisher. And so, when I got my website up literally uh within days of that a researcher in Lithuania

contacts me via email. And he says hello, my name is Andrius Kulikauskas and I am working for a man in California whose name is Grant Gochin and he is um launching a lawsuit against the Genocide Center for Holocaust denial mostly about your grandfather. Would you like to meet him?

24:24 Silvia Foti: And, and I thought what? I, I just can't believe this. You know, I thought you know, I thought this was like a little family story which was already exploding. And now it's like this lawsuit is going on against the Genocide Center which is, you know, practically a branch of the government. And I, it took me a lot; I was scared to call him. It took me a long time to call him, like six weeks until I could talk myself into it. And I finally, the way I talked myself into it is I thought um, you know because I had heard that uh he had lost a lot of relatives uh during the Holocaust in Lithuania. And I thought well, who else am I writing this book for if it's not for someone like that? And so, you know, I imagined I would contact him if he'd be really upset with me, you know, the granddaughter of a perpetrator. And what is he gonna think? Um but uh, to to my pleasant surprise um he was very nice about it and and eventually became very excited about it, as I did. And um, you know, more than two years later we have become very very good friends and partners in this project. So, now you should hear Grant's story.

25:45 Dr. Amilia Glaser: Thank you so much, Silvia. Yeah, I want to turn to Grant now and the way that you've framed your your um meeting of Grant is is really beautiful because in a, in a sense it's a, it's a story of a um of an author meeting her ideal reader - which is of course the fantasy of everyone who writes a book. Um, so Grant maybe you can back up a little bit and tell us about your own research into uh World War II and Lithuania and tell us about um this relationship from your standpoint.

26:14 Grant Gochin: Thank you, Dr Glaser. Um well, Lithuania regained independence in 1990 and I was one of the very first people to go to Lithuania after they were liberated from the Soviets. When I was growing up my grandfather always used to tell me stories about the old country and there was always this incredible pain. This, this love for the old country but this incredible pain. And my grandmother was from Latvia and there was this incredible pain. And my maternal grandmother didn't even know which country she had been born in. Um, she'd been orphaned, adopted and the - today I recognize that as, as, as unbelievable PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder]. And I was fascinated with history so I was one of the very first people to go to to Lithuania. And I started looking for family cemeteries and for signs that the family lived there and it was compellingly interesting. So, I started going back and back and back and back. And one day I was in my grandfather's village um, with an academic and there were three death pits, three murder pits in my grandfather's village and it was looking away, you know, I wanted to say a prayer for the dead and, and acknowledge the the at least 100 relatives that I trace that that were murdered in the region.

- 27:53 Grant Gochin: And I said to the academic, okay we know what happened. We, we know there was a Holocaust and murders. At that point, I actually didn't know what had happened and so I said who did the shooting? Who issued the instructions to take my relatives to this death pit to murder them here? And the academic looked at me and said it was a man by the name of Jonas Noreika. There was no hesitation no - it was straightforward. So I came back to the United States and I started researching Jonas Noreika and I discovered that in 1984 the biggest magazine in Germany published data that showed that Noreika was the leader of about one-quarter of of Lithuania or 1/8th of Lithuania and had issued the orders to ghetto, plunder, wear the yellow star, do everything else. So the, the information, there was no doubt about the information. There was no reinterpreting. Um so I, I look at this and I see that he's honored as one of Lithuania's greatest national heroes. So I think okay, they've made the most awful mistake. All I need to do is go to the Lithuanian government and say folks you're honoring the wrong guy.
- 29:30 Grant Gochin: Um, this was a very very bad man who murdered thousands of Lithuanian citizens; you need to revoke these honors. So, I started approaching members of the government and I was just rebuffed. And I thought, this this can't be they, they're either stupid, or they're ignoring me or - it never entered my mind that they were deliberately honoring murderers of Jews. So I carry on, and I carry on. I go from one department to the next department, to the next, and in 2015 the mayor of of the city of Vilnius took down some artistic statues um for Soviets. They weren't even honoring individual Soviets. They were just artistic, gorgeous statues um of of the period. And I thought okay, if they can take down statues for Soviets then they can take down statues for murderers of Jews. And now Noreika isn't the only murderer of Jews that's honored. There are many, many, many murderers of Jews that are honored as Lithuania's national heroes. Far too many for it ever to have been accidental as if somebody just slipped through.
- 31:04 Grant Gochin: So, when the Mayor of Vilnius took it down I was like okay, he can take down Soviet statues. I'm going to push forward to take down the statues for murderers of Jews. So I approached the the um Mayor of Vilnius and I was just met with with total dishonesty. And I'd had a long history with with Lithuania already for for 25 years and I recognize the dishonesty that I was facing. So I said okay, they're not going to respond to me. They're going to lie to me. I'm going to take a legal route and I'm going to do this legally. So I started submitting formal legal appeals demanding here are the documents that he's a perpetrator. By any objective standard, by any legal system in the world, these are mass genocidal murderers. There's no way to whitewash them. There's no way to reinterpret it. These are people that murdered 220,000 Jews on Lithuanian soil. So, just to take a step back because when I said that I didn't know the history of the Holocaust when I was standing there, just, just to throw out a couple of of of of items, the murder of the Jews in Lithuania took place primarily in the second half of 1941.

- 32:38 Grant Gochin: By that stage, the Germans were ghettoing Jews and murdering some Jews. The Wannsee conference only took place on January 20th, 1942. The plan to murder all the Jews of Europe only took place after Lithuania had already completed their murder of the Jews and the leaders of these murders are being honored throughout Lithuania. So I, I take this legal approach and I start contacting more departments in the government and I started litigating. Because I thought okay, these, these people in government are clearly whitewashing. All I need to do is get this in front of an intelligent, independent, impartial judge who's going to look at these documents and say you can't whitewash when the documents are this clear. Unfortunately, the Lithuanian court system is not independent um, and they are not impartial. And to cut a very long story very short, I now have the cases out of the Lithuanian legal system and we are into the European legal system and the case is going forward to the European Court of Human Rights. Um, what what I've shown with with all of my lawsuits and legal actions is that there is absolutely no path to truth inside Lithuania.
- 34:23 Grant Gochin: So, Silvia was talking about the Genocide Museum. Well the Genocide Museum is, you know, there's there's consumption for Lithuanians inside Lithuania and there's consumption for foreigners. So, the elevation of the murderers is for domestic Lithuanian consumption. The righteous war against Russia um is, is, you know, the these are and and and the hiding of the of the facts about the Holocaust is for foreign consumption. Um Dr. Glaser I'll even, I let me just bring up one other perpetrator. They were so comprehensively rewriting history that when I brought it to the attention of US [United States] Congress that the Lithuanian government had misused Congressional documents, reinterpreted them, restated them and we're using them for Holocaust denial, US Congress actually stepped in and wrote to the Prime Minister of Lithuania and told them to stop using US congressional documents for Holocaust revisionism. So I was well along the path um of, of exposing this when, one day I'm sitting in my office, um on my computer and I don't know how to stop it but these the emails just pop up. I, I need one of your students to come and and show me how to reprogram my computer so it doesn't so, so all these alerts don't don't pop up.
- 36:15 Grant Gochin: And this email pops up and it says sender Silvia Foti. And I start reading it and it says hello Mr. Gochin. My name is Silvia Foti. I assume you know who I am and I knew exactly who Silvia Foti was. Yes, she's the granddaughter of the man that murdered at least 100 of my relatives. And my skin turned clammy, and my hands started shaking, and I was like oh my God. Oh my God, what is this, this woman contacting me for? And she said um, if you're willing to talk to me I'd like to please talk to you. So I responded to her and I said to her, you know, I need a few days which I needed just to calm down because I didn't want to respond to her immediately. I said I need a couple of days. Let's schedule a time. And I had made all of my research publicly available. And so, I get on the phone with her and I'm deeply suspicious. And she says to me um, I've read all of your research. And I go,

okay. She said I agree with almost all of it and my hackles start rising and I'm, I'm ready to start getting into a fight. So I said, what don't you agree with? And she says to me you missed approximately 10,000 of my grandfather's victims. And at that, all of my defenses washed away.

38:04 Grant Gochin: She asked me if I would read her manuscript. Now I've been involved in this, in this Noreika matter for for so long I've, I, I'm so familiar with with the data. I sat down and I started reading a manuscript - the book that you had on the screen at the opening of the session - and I didn't get up. I read it from cover to cover in one sitting because it's compelling, compelling reading. It's, it's written, it it grabs you from the first word and it doesn't let you go until you're finished. Um and when I finished I, all of my defenses were gone. And since then - it's probably been two and a half years - Silvia and I have formed the most extraordinary friendship. You know, reconciliation, reconciliation can only be based on truth. If, if a government such as Lithuania, when a government such as Lithuania tells lies any reconciliation that does get built gets destroyed when the lies are are exposed. So when there is truth at the, at, in in the opening sentence then you can build a relationship of trust and goodwill. And ultimately there has to be reconciliation between people because it's the only path forward. And Silvia and I have formed the most extraordinary, trusting friendship, partnership um, that I think once her book is out, and once this gets cleaned up and the truth is told, I think this will create a path to true reconciliation between people.

40:01 Dr. Amilia Glaser: Thank you so much. I have a couple of follow-up questions. So, I'll um maybe jump in and start to uh to ask that. Um, and I wanted to just back up a second and acknowledge that um we're talking about the 20th century which is a moment when you have two horrific regimes threatening individuals in Eastern Europe. You have the Nazi regime and you have Stalinism. Um, but the dangers of an era when so many suffered - beyond all of the lives that are lost - is also that we fail to learn as individuals to recognize the suffering in which our forebears are implicated and and in which we as um as heirs might in some ways be be implicated by perpetuating a history through who we we honor. And um, and Silvia your book is a remarkable example um, of you as an individual who - without discounting the pain involved in memorializing your grandfather - have chosen to focus on how your grandfather and therefore your family is is implicated by extension, right? You weren't out there. You weren't alive then. But um you know, you uh, you nonetheless felt a responsibility to tell this story. And Grant's talked a little bit about the resistance that he's met in his campaign to remove this heroic memory of individuals that were collaborators with the Nazi regime. I wonder Silvia, if you can talk a little bit about the reception of your own work in your family and in the broader Lithuanian community both here and in Lithuania itself. Oh, you're you're muted still, okay.

- 41:48 Silvia Foti: Sorry. Uh, generally I think uh, in Lithuania, people don't want to know the story, most of them. And uh, those who do, there's, there are some who, who are willing to entertain it and think about it and, and, you know, acknowledge what happened. I think most are still very much in denial uh, of what happened. I think the conversation is starting slowly to open up. There's another author from Lithuania, she has really started the conversation going uh, with her two books. But um, generally uh here in Chicago uh I would say the Lithuanian community is completely ignoring me, and uh discounting me, and not believing me. Uh, I I have gotten some hate mail. Um my, my father uh, wishes I, I wouldn't go forward with this. Um, he doesn't really see the point of it. It's, you know, why air the dirty laundry? There's no reason to do that uh, you should, you know, be protecting your father and protecting the good name of Lithuania. And all this is going to make Lithuania look bad, and it's gonna uh pour shame on Lithuania. And and uh, so so, you know, it's not like he's disowned me or anything but um, he he wishes I wouldn't do it.
- 43:20 Silvia Foti: And uh, my brother though uh has been very, very supportive about it, I have to say, and some friends, you know some close friends of mine, have been supportive about it um, but I think it has polarized the community. I think it has polarized it with most still against it and some, some brave enough to look into uh the deep dark past. You know, Lithuania only knows how to be a victim. That's the only role they've had since the Soviet Union took over for uh 70 years and that is all they know. And to say that they're the victimizers like, their mind is blown. That's just not the way it is. They can't, they can't fit anymore in their minds I think and, and really that's how it was for me except I was, you know, raised in America. So um, and I, and I think my whole American background mindset, uh, you know, helped a lot in being able to face this.
- 44:26 Dr. Amilia Glaser: Um, I wanted to, I wanted to ask a related question to Grant if I, if I may? And that's that, I'm wondering whether you - I sort of asked Silvia whether she'd had um a trouble reaching her audience - and I'm wondering whether you have had any sympathetic voices? Um, do you feel that there are any fronts on which going the legal route has been successful?
- 44:53 Grant Gochin: So, it's it's really complicated. Look, the majority of Lithuanians are fine decent people. It's not the ordinary people um, you know, most of the youth has no interest in in what happened during the war. But Lithuania has been free and independent for 30 years and they've had 30 years to begin telling the truth. And instead, they've doubled down on the lies and, you know, the the government has threatened me with criminal charges for submitting a historical study. Now, you know, that that comes from the old Soviet strong-arm system where somebody does something, you send them to a gulag. So I, I submit the the the main study on on Noreika and I'm met with with a - and it's still on their website - a public statement that they are investigating me for for criminal charges.

- 45:54 Silvia Foti: And they asked you to do that study.
- 45:57 Grant Gochin: Yes. They, they said if I, if I wasn't satisfied with their research I should do my own. So, I did do my own and then they threatened me with criminal charges for it. Correct Silvia, thank you. Um from the Jewish community, I really haven't had much support. Um, I've done this entirely on my own. From Jews, I get well of course we know what the Lithuanians were and um, you know, we know what the history was and we know that they're lying. Why are you wasting your time when we know the facts? But you know what, Jews ultimately have to reconcile with Lithuanians and there's got to be a path forward. Our families lived there for 700 years. We've got to be able to to walk a a common path together one day. And it's not just, it's not just for accountability for my own family it's truth has to truth has to out because if we allow a society to make monuments um, and to name schools for perpetrators of genocide it leads into the next genocide.
- 47:13 Grant Gochin: So I'll close this comment just - I'll personalize it. Um, you you teach at UC San Diego. Now, Silvia, Silvia mentioned the school in her grandfather's name. Imagine UC Hitler High and imagine 20,000 students a year going to Hitler University and what that does to 20,000 students that graduate. Imagine the thousands of students that have graduated from Noreika Elementary School. What does it do to them? What does it do to you? This last weekend was was Noreika's 110th birthday. Now the pamphlet that Silvia showed you *Raise Your Head Lithuanian* there was a, there's a political party. Everybody knows that that was the *Mein Kampf* of Lithuania and there's a political party that was running saying raise your head Lithuanian with a picture of Noreika and that's their rallying cry. So what it is is, okay let's murder all minorities. Let's persecute all minorities and we're an open political party vying for power in Lithuania. It teaches the next generation to be perpetrators and if we don't stop that in its tracks then it's going to lead to the next human rights crimes.
- 48:46 Dr. Amilia Glaser: Yeah. Yeah, thank you. I, I um, I would agree that I think that, you know, one of the important messages that comes out of this story is a message about education uh, in the in a broader, in a broader sense. Um and I, you know, turn as a, as a guiding voice in the study the Holocaust to Hannah Arendt who in her discussion of of the Holocaust talks about this banality of evil, right? It's far more terrifying than this idea of one evil genius is the normalizing of a perpetuation of an injustice on the day-to-day, right? This, this general injustice, this general justification of the murder of innocent civilians which often begins as simply a um, uh, you know, things like boycotts. And um, it's a story that generations need to learn from when we study the Holocaust that it's not um the Holocaust is not only a story of how easy it is to be killed it's a story of how easy it is to become a collaborator or to help to perpetuate a crime. And in an ideal world I, I think we would recognize this kind of implication. This is something that my colleague

Michael Rothberg at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] has written about in his recent book *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. He talks about the, the binary divide between victims and perpetrators um, where, you know, we need to understand how victims may also recognize uh, the participation in a broader system of injustice.

50:15 Dr. Amilia Glaser: Until one can allow those two things to live together it becomes very difficult to recognize the coexistence of victimhood and of, of uh perpetratorhood. If that's a, if that's a term, right? Lithuanians have undoubtedly been victims of so many horrific injustices. That's real um, so what do we, what do we do about this? And you know, I guess a question that I'd like to end on because I know that we're going to have questions lining up in the Q and A very soon is um, whether we're also talking here about the danger of relativism. It's, it's very easy when we're talking about a horrific moment like the 20th century in Europe to recognize that everybody's suffered and so everybody's entitled to their own suffering and everybody's entitled to their own commemoration of their pain. Um but, there's very little learning in this. Um so, how do we um, how do we get out of that? How do we get out of that loop? And I wonder if each of you could say something about um uh, you know, perhaps um, perhaps lessons from this, this particular story that, that could be broadened. Maybe beyond Lithuania - obviously for Lithuania as well - but um, I don't know. Silvia or Greg, would either of you like to jump in?

51:28 Silvia Foti: I just keep, a new thought struck me as you were talking about the relativism of, of suffering uh and that all suffering is equal. And, and in a way they're using the tenets of Communism and equalizing everything among everybody uh, which is exactly what they say that they've always been fighting against. But uh, they, they're missed, they're totally misusing the term genocide as it is applied to Lithuanians because genocide, again, is not a relative term. People have to be killed en masse particularly because they belong to a specific group. And yet there are many, many Lithuanians who survived in Lithuania and when they were sent to Siberia, as awful as that was, many survived and came back. They were psychologically damaged. They, you know, had a hard time starting over but they were alive. That's not genocide. As bad as that is, that's not genocide. So um, you know, they, they have to change the name of their Genocide Museum uh, because what happened to Lithuanians is not genocide. It's, it's a lot of other things but not that. And you know, I think that they're in some kind of competition with the Holocaust, and to me, there's no competition. The Holocaust is the most horrific thing that ever happened and the in the most advanced civilization on Earth.

52:59 Grant Gochin: So, so Sylvia said the most advanced civilization on Earth.

53:03 Silvia Foti: Um, I'm talking about Europe not, not just Lithuania.

- 53:05 Grant Gochin: No, no I, I absolutely understand. So I mean Germany was, was, was identified as the most advanced civilization on Earth at the time and they devolved into barbarism of, of unbelievable proportions. So people look at, at this. There's current genocides going on right now in Asia, in Africa, and people say well, those are um less educated, lesser, lesser whatever. We don't need to pay as much attention. But it was happening in Europe 80 years ago. There's very little difference. So you know, let's, let's go back to the term relativism. So Noreika is responsible for the murder of about 14 and a half thousand people and the Lithuanians say okay, you know, he didn't see anything. He didn't know anything. Nobody told him anything. He didn't know what he was signing. Uh, he didn't know what was going on in the environment when he gave orders. People misheard and, and you know, but secretly we know that he was saving Jews. So you know, it's, it's distortion of the information. It's presenting forged documents as as true documents. Um, it's attributing conclusions to documents that, that report the opposite.
- 54:31 Grant Gochin: So the big enemy of, of Lithuania today is Russia. If Lithuania says um, oh, we can just say somebody murdered those fourteen half thousand people. We don't know. Nobody saw. Nobody heard. Nobody knows. One day everybody woke up and they were, they were gone and yes Noreika signed the orders but we really, he didn't know anything. Well, what happens if tomorrow Russia comes into Lithuania and murders 14 and a half thousand Lithuanians tomorrow? Do we then say oh, nobody nobody knows who it was? Nobody's responsible. Nobody gave the orders. Nobody, there's no way to prove it. You know, it's a very, very slippery slope. So if you say well we, we, Noreika did some heroic things. You've also got to say well, he did some monstrous things. So if you want to honor him for the heroic things he did, put it on one monument, and right next to it, of equal size, put another, put another monument that says he murdered fourteen and a half thousand of his own citizens that just happened to be Jews because he was a rabid Jew-hater that, that, that was genocidal. But you know what, he stood up to defend legally 11 other people.
- 55:59 Grant Gochin: Um you, you, when you commit murder, when somebody commits murder there is no way to relativize it. There's no way to clean it, expunge it. When somebody orders the construction of a concentration camp, you can't say well, that was the Prime Minister of the country. He was heroic for other things but we're just going to pretend that he didn't sign those orders to to create a, a concentration camp. Um you know, one of the cases that that that Lithuania has is there was a man by the name of Baltūsis [Antanas Baltūsis-Žvejas] that was Commander of the Guards at Majdanek Concentration Camp. It was a completely public camp everybody knew what was going on and the Lithuanian government says well, he served on the outside of the camp. So, he didn't know what was happening on the inside of the camp. Therefore he's not guilty and he's a hero. You know, what they're doing is inviting the same thing to be said about them at a future time and that's the risk.

- 57:16 Dr. Amilia Glaser: All right, thank you both so much. I know we're starting to see questions stack up. So, I want to get to some of the questions from the audience. Um uh, calling, obviously calling Lithuania's story a double genocide one of the biggest risks in that and I see that as a relativizing gesture is, is missing this opportunity to recognize the nature of each individual tragedy that took place on that soil and, looking beyond the you know the ethnic uh race-loyalty, to a kind of civic understanding of space. Um, it also runs the risk of misrecognizing the horror of ethnic supremacy that can turn to ethnic murder. And I I really appreciate uh both of your being here. And Silvia, I really look forward to getting to read your book uh when it comes out. This is a brave and important gesture that you've made um so, thank you. I'm going to uh, turn the floor over to my colleague Susanne Hillman who will be fielding the question and answers from the the Q and A section. And do remember to go ahead and write those in if you have questions. Thank you
- 58:20 Susanne Hillman: Okay. Thank you, Amelia. Now that's better. Uh, thank you both for a very insightful uh discussion and this hour just flew by. I can't believe it. I think I could listen to both of you for much longer but we have some questions. So the first one is from Frederick uh, why did the Nazis imprison Noreika?
- 58:47 Silvia Foti: He uh and about 45 other men uh in 1943 um - it was at the time when the Nazis asked Lithuanians to join the SS [*Schutzstaffel* or Protection Squads] - and he stood up to this. He finally stood up to the Nazis, with 45 other uh, Lithuanians, and said Lithuanians are not going to join the SS. So uh, because of that they sent him to the concentration camp.
- 59:14 Grant Gochin: Well okay, can, can I just add to that for a moment? Okay so, so Noreika was was a nationalist and he wanted independence for Lithuania. And so, when the Germans said create this SS division his response was okay, but we want a guarantee that you will allow us to have an independent state. And they wouldn't give a guarantee, so they wouldn't create the SS division.
- 59:47 Silvia Foti: No, he didn't do that for the SS. He did that two years earlier when they came in he asked for the guarantee. Yeah not him but uh, but other Lithuanians. Although by the time it was the SS, there was no deal-making. Um, the the Germans just wanted Lithuanians to join the SS.
- 1:00:05 Grant Gochin: Okay, and then because of their nationalism, because it was now a threat to Germany that they wanted to break away and be independent and not a German vassal state, that's why they rounded them up and sent them to Stutthof.
- 1:00:23 Susanne Hillman: Okay next question, a question by Deborah. Do either of you, Silvia or Grant, think that Germany has been a model of remembrance and repentance? If so uh, how do you explain this phenomenon and why is it limited to Germany and not to any other country?

- 1:00:43 Silvia Foti: Well, here's my take on it. Uh, it I I'm gonna contrast this I think Germany has has is the model for this. And um, and so, so they have shown how it can be done and still be the most advanced country on Earth. Uh with Lithuania, it was subjugated by the Soviet Union and when, while it was subjugated by the, by the Soviet Union it was not allowed to dig into its own history, even if it wanted to. So because Germany was - at least half of Germany was - free, it had the luxury of uh, digging into what happened uh during World War II and its own role in the whole Holocaust. Um the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union played a big role in covering up the Holocaust when it took over Lithuania. It called the Jews Soviet citizens. It didn't call them Jews. And so, it was just the mass murder of many Soviet citizens and so um, you know, Lithuanians just went along with that too. So uh, and then what I from what I understand about Germany uh, Germany really only started digging and uh, doing some soul-searching about its role in the Holocaust the 1970s, which is about 30 years from when it happened. So I, I would say Lithuania was in a deep freeze until it gained its independence. And now it's, now it's been a free country for about 30 years. So maybe it's following um Germany's path as far as just beginning to open up on the conversation of what role it did play in the Holocaust.
- 1:02:35 Susanne Hillman: Okay. Grant do you have any particular view on this question of Germany as a model?
- 1:02:42 Grant Gochin: So, England and the United States went into Germany after the war and denazified and enforced uh denazification and truth-telling. And still, most of the judges on the German court were ex-nazis that um held very few Nazis to account because they were the same ideology. But because of the denazification process, and because of the education of the youth coming up um it has led to a denazification process and it's been very successful. And there is reconciliation between Jews and Germans. Um, ultimately I would like to see a similar process between Jews and Lithuanians. But it took a long time for that to happen um and I hope that what we are doing will ultimately lead to a similar result.
- 1:03:55 Susanne Hillman: Thank you. A question from Arnold, is the Genocide Museum in Vilnius on the typical tourist agenda? This is a person who has actually visited Vilnius but they did not go to this museum.
- 1:04:12 Silvia Foti: It is um, it was the former KGB [Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti] prison and then uh, which is where my grandfather was executed. And then uh, and his name is on that wall as are all the others who were executed in that prison, who were Lithuanian. So um, then when Lithuania became free they changed it from a KGB prison to the Genocide Museum. And you can take a tour of it. They they have tours of it and and you could see where, you know, like like little cells of uh the KGB prison and and where prisoners were held. Um, and the focus is overwhelmingly on Siberia, and Lithuanians being sent to Siberia, and the oppression of the Soviets on the Lithuanians.

- 1:05:01 Grant Gochin: So it's, it's actually the number one tourist destination in all of Lithuania. Um so, it would, if if somebody was on an organized tour, it would be unlikely that they didn't go there. The museum is full of disinformation um and when Silvia, when Silvia says yes her grandfather's name is engraved on the outside just think of the irony of this. A museum calling itself a Genocide Museum prominently displays the name of a major genocide perpetrator as an honoree. Um it, it it makes no sense um but it yeah he, whoever asked the question, couldn't have gone on an organized tour.
- 1:06:03 Susanne Hillman: Okay, a question by Clarice. Did Noreika have anything to do with the killing of Jews in [unclear]? I hope I'm pronouncing this name of this -
- 1:06:13 Silvia Foti: Not that I know of. Not that I know of.
- 1:06:17 Susanne Hillman: Okay next question. Lorraine asks where and when the book will be available, your book Silvia.
- 1:06:27 Silvia Foti: Um it'll be available in March. Uh, it's available now for pre-orders on amazon.com, uh, and so in March it'll be printed and, and distributed.
- 1:06:41 Susanne Hillman: Okay excellent. A question from Jurg um, what, if anything, is special about the Lithuanian response to uh this whole question of collaboration? How have other countries handled this issue Poland, Ukraine, etcetera?
- 1:07:00 Grant Gochin: You want me to take this Silvia?
- 1:07:05 Silvia Foti: Please.
- 1:07:06 Grant Gochin: Germany's been the model. Austria is excellent. There are problems in many other countries. Um, I focus exclusively on Lithuania um because as one person it's as much as I can deal with. Um, what it's shown in Lithuania is the total collusion of the state, and the courts, and how badly misinformed the population has been how, how absolutely deliberate. Um now, when the Lithuanians talk about who who perpetrated the Holocaust, they normally refer to the Nazis and the Soviets which is their enemies and they avoid mentioning the Lithuanians that did it. When they do mention Lithuanians that were complicit, they say a couple of degenerates. But they weren't degenerates. It was the cabinet of, of their provisional government. It was the Prime Minister. It was the father of the first um Chairman uh of of of of Independent Lithuania. It was Noreika, who was part of the intelligentsia of the nation. This was the cream of of Lithuanian society that led the organization and structure. And there was mass participation of the population in plunder, uh in the sharing of the loot, in moving into Jewish homes. Um so, so the very narrative that they teach the Lithuanian population - it was the Nazis and Soviets and a couple of

degenerates - this is deliberate miseducation. So the Lithuanian people are not responsible for for for much of this and I think in time, when there is a free flow of information and they are educated, it will be resolved.

- 1:09:24 Susanne Hillman: Thank you, Grant. A question by an anonymous guest. Why do you think you received such little support from the Jewish community when you - you Grant - first started researching this story?
- 1:09:40 Grant Gochin: You know, one has to separate out Jewish interests and uh, Israeli interests. Israel is a nation-state that has their own national uh priorities and Lithuania is a voting member of the United Nations um, and a trading partner. So on, on the individual Jewish level, most Americans are are actually of Polish descent. There were very, very few survivors from Lithuania. There are very few in the United States that are of Lithuanian descent and people are focused on their own heritage issues. Um, the Jewish community uh sees this as an insurmountable problem. They don't believe that truth will become available and the responses I usually get from Jewish leadership is we know this information, so you don't need to tell us. Um, but what I'm trying to do is to get the Lithuanians to tell the truth. And unfortunately, they are correct, it is an insurmountable issue. Um, but like I said, I'm now out of the Lithuanian court system and into the European court system. So, truth will shortly be available and the Lithuanians, the Lithuanian population, is either going to have to listen to this or or carry on as they are right now.
- 1:11:30 Susanne Hillman: Okay. We have one final question from uh Debbie. Do you - no actually I have two more questions, Debbie and Elizabeth. The first one is, do either of you know uh Regina or Regina Kopilevich, in Vilnius?
- 1:11:47 Grant Gochin: Yes.
- 1:11:49 Susanne Hillman: Okay. You do. Okay, I'm not familiar with this person. So the last question then is uh from Elizabeth. Are there others uh, in Lithuania or Eastern Europe who are doing the kind of work, uh you know, who are embarking or have embarked on this quest for truth that Silvia for instance has embarked on?
- 1:12:12 Silvia Foti: I know uh, of two American authors who uh, have done something similar um and there is a Lithuanian author who um, is very well known now in Lithuania. And uh, she, she just came out with I think a very important book that's about to come out in English with um, one of the best historians on all this, and he's from Germany. Uh, and it's called *How Did It Happen?* [author, Ruta Vanagaite] And so, she posed, her book is where she poses sort of this naive uh Lithuanian who just wonders, you know, kind of what, you know, asks very basic questions. And then, and then the historian is like the wise guru who like really lays it out in a very logical, uh, you know, order. And um, you know, it's, it's very cumulative where you can just see that the culpability of Lithuanians um is quite large.

1:13:22 Grant Gochin: So, so let me let me weigh in on that, please. That um, the the lady that that wrote the book that Silvia just mentioned, um the the chairman of of the party that led Lithuania into independence Mr. [Vytautas] Landsbergis um, his father was was a Holocaust perpetrator. His mother was a rescuer; his father was a was a perpetrator. When this lady came out with her first book, he publicly told her to go and suicide, to hang herself in the forest out of shame for having told the Lithuanian people the facts. Um, she eventually had to leave Lithuania for three years because of the intimidation. Now, I told you how they threatened me with criminal charges for submitting a historical study. Unfortunately, this is a holdover of the Soviet system where dissension is just not allowed and this is one of the areas where there is huge resistance and huge pressure from state institutions. In Silvia's book she, she uses excerpts out of some of the lawsuits and some of the means that they use to intimidate, silence, and negate people that want to speak about facts. Um you know, we we all have to be very careful because the Soviet strong-arm tactics. They, not far beneath the surface, the veneer of civilization in humanity is not very deep. If we don't guard against these very human tendencies, things like this can happen again. And, and certainly, from my perspective, my work in this is, is to make sure it doesn't happen again. This is, what what Silvia and I are doing, are effectuating the term never again. We're trying to make sure that it doesn't.

1:15:52 Susanne Hillman: I think that's a wonderful way of concluding this program. Thank you both Silvia and Grant for what you are doing. It is beyond important and I'm sure all of our audience uh, is joining me in that sentiment. I would like to thank everybody for attending. I also would like to draw your attention to our next event which will be on November 5th. We're uh, featuring Professor Emeritus Lawrence Baron who will talk about Kristallnacht in film. So please join us again. I wish you all a good night and thank you again, Silvia and Grant.

1:16:27 Grant Gochin: Thank you.

1:16:28 Silvia Foti: Thank you.