

# Interview with Lina

## 2013

### TAPE 1

**Nicola Pratt:** Can you begin by telling me when you were born and where?

**Lina:** yeah, I was born on May 15th which is the Nakba day, in 1982 during the Israeli invasion of Beirut.

**NP:** And you grew up in Beirut?

**L:** Yeah, I grew up in Beirut and I'm still in Beirut, I never left. I left on vacation but I'm always here, in Hamra mainly.

**NP:** And what did your parents do?

**L:** My mom is a chef in a hotel and my father he was a steward at Middle East Airlines, but now he was kind of forced to resign and he is working in Saudi Arabia, for a design company, he's a traffic officer, he does proof reading and stuff.

**NP:** What did you study?

**L:** I'm studying journalism. I got a bit delayed with my university because I had to quit for a while, and now I'm finishing, in Spring it will be my last semester, thank God.

**NP:** Which university?

**L:** American university of science and technology.

**NP:** Would you mind saying why you were delayed?

**L:** Yeah, no I don't mind, it's out of financial problems, and it was kind of hard for me not to have a full time job, because what I used to do back then was not doable on part-time basis, and I used to work as an administrative assistant, and then I started like to, if you want, things

started to develop more until I ended up working in communication. So it was easier for me to find smaller projects like social media projects, like festivals or... so I could go back to university, because in both places the attendance is very important, and they don't really tolerate whether at university or at work.

**NP:** And what are your earliest memories of life outside of your house, outside of your home life? Outside, political events that you remember, your first memories?

**L:** I remember the war, and then the liberation war. Which is not the liberation war with Israel, it was between Christians and Syrians I guess, I'm not really into politics, because we were born not to be really involved in politics from my mom's side, my father's side they are very politically active... They are basically Abdul Nasser fans. For my mom's side it was a little bit difficult because she lost her mom during the war, she was hit by a sniper, and I think it was a good decision, that we were not allowed to participate in any political movement or any political party, but we're always involved with the broader, like with the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the Palestinian refugees, because my parents are from Palestinian origin, I am from Palestinian origins, my father was born in 1948 during the Nakba, and then his family moved to Lebanon, and my mom, her parents came here engaged and they got married in Lebanon, so of course my mom doesn't really like it but I work sometimes with the refugees and the camps, it was of insecurities that I totally understand now, I didn't understand it back then. I thought she was intimidated by her origins, but now I understand she was traumatized, she was there when her mom was shot, she was with her, so I started to understand. Do you want me to ask them to...

**NP:** If it's a problem to turn it down a bit.

**L:** Mustafa, can you stop the music? because we're recording here, or I can go sit inside in the theater. Should I go inside?

**NP:** Okay, let's move it. Okay. You were talking about how your mother was worried when you were working in the Palestinian camps.

**L:** Yes because she was worried of the affiliations, because my mom really injured, like she was during the whole war in Lebanon, and she knows what it feels like being a Palestinian and you have to hide it because they are Christians, and they used to live in a Christian... not a Christian area but it was most likely, how do you say this? Not checkpoint, the green line...

**NP:** The green line?

**L:** Yes, so it was between extreme this part and extreme this part, and they always were forced to change their accent to fit a bit with the Christian society, so I grew up to understand why she would be like that. And now of course she accepts and she respects what we do because we're adults anyway but she's still worried, and I can understand why, because she's afraid if the war breaks again in Lebanon that we will be targeted because we have Palestinian affiliations and stuff, which is maybe like she has a point. Maybe it will happen. So, basically my life outside of home during the war either in the bathroom with the neighbors, because it was the safest place in my building or next to the elevator on the stairs. So, and because we were the lower... I live on the third ??? (6:20) floor, so all the other neighbors who had kids, the kids would come down to my floor, and we used to put all our dolls and stuff next to the elevator and this was our playground. When it's heavy bombing, when it's not we can go down to the... there's a small space under the building. Other than that at school, my school was in a hot spot if you want, it's in... now it's called downtown, but back then it was an area of refugees, Southern... Lebanese, not really refugees but they were forced out of their villages so they moved to houses in... and this was one of the neighborhoods. And I remember quite often we had to leave suddenly because my dad would just show up at 11 am saying there has been bombing and we have to go and the classes were suspended for a month or two. That's it, we didn't have any telephones, so I remember when had to do the tour of picking up the cousins because whomever makes it to any school takes all the kids that he can take home, and telephone lines, land lines in Lebanon were horrible. Like, I remember we would wait to get a signal for 30 minutes, just the signal. And then when you dialed a number you have to wait until it gets connected, so once we had our cousin with us and we we're just trying to call to tell his mom that we couldn't reach their place, it was too messy around their place, and we just wanted to

tell her don't worry he's with us, and it didn't work out for an hour, and she freaked out, she thought that something happened or he was kidnapped because she went to school herself and she didn't find her son. So, there are some few incidents like that that I remember. I remember our neighbor was in a political party, and one day the Syrian army came to look for him, and he ran away and his wife and his kids stayed at our place, and so we were, so to... the Syrians back then were not very friendly, they would just invade the house and do their research without asking anyone for any permission, so my dad told me to pretend that we were sick, me and his daughter so we wouldn't be interrogated, so they wouldn't know this is his family, so we just pretended we didn't know where he was, and that I had a fever. I don't know, I think I'm lucky I was so young during the war, because for me it's not fun memories but they are not as traumatizing as they were for my parents and their generation. For me, like you know one day I was talking to my friend, she's Australian, and we were like 6 Lebanese and she was Australian, she's married to my friend. And we were discussing our childhood, and of course all our childhood was either next to the elevator or sleeping in the bathroom, and we used to watch the world cup sneaking from the hallway, because the living room was not safe, it was very exposed, so we used to put the TV and just sneak from the door. And we were talking about this and then suddenly she burst into tears, and she said: I'm so sorry I had a normal childhood and... and then we were all like: Oh my God! That's not a real childhood that we had! it was so normal for us because we were not exposed to anything else. We thought we were lucky, we were lucky, I mean at least we didn't lose family members, we had a roof on top of our heads, we were lucky in a way, but when she said I'm so sorry I used to go to parks and to read books we were like... a wake up, it was a wake-up call that we had a lot to deal with, it was not a normal childhood, we have to admit that. And, that's it.

**NP:** When did you begin to work with Palestinian refugees? How did that happen?

**L:** the first time it happened it was during the memorial of Sabra and Shatilla massacre, not memorial, during the annual...

**NP:** Remembrance

L: Yes, remembrance of the massacre. I went with my cousin he's a musician, and I think I was 17 or 16, and they were looking for volunteers to do activities for the children in the camp, and it was my first experience and it was overwhelming. I was drawing with the kids, that was my part, painting and drawing, and I met this girl that I wish I remember her name; because she was such a sweetheart, she was like 10 years old, she was very beautiful with red hair and blue eyes, and we were doing the activities on a football playground. And then I was talking to her and she said: my aunt and my grandmother were killed during the massacre and... she really didn't sound like a 10 year-old, except when she talked about her school, because she is very proud she has very good grades and her mom will give her 5 dollars at the end of the year if she is on top of her class, I was like, 5 dollars? Like in my head, and I started to cry and she was kissing me and saying: it's okay, I'm happy. And then she said that her grandfather and aunt are buried under this playground, so that for me was... I had no clue what they did after the massacre. And I think I didn't want to know, apparently there's this massive graveyard that they turned into a football court, and kids play there till now. So then I started to open up a bit, because you know sometimes when you're in the middle between being Lebanese and being Palestinian, not in the form of nationality, in the form of culture, at home my culture is not Lebanese and it's not Palestinian, it's that mixture of things. Sometimes you are looked at with... you are accused with being the daughter of people who sold Palestine, or grandparents who... that we are living in misery in the camps while you're enjoying Lebanese citizenship and you're having a normal life. So that made me want to look more into where I come from, what happened when my grandparents left, and it was a bit hard because my mom was not willing at all to show her experience. And she was born here so what she will tell me will be her parents stories. My grandmother had pictures of tiles of her home in Ramallah, and when I was young I sued to make fun of her like, who puts pictures of tiles and floors in the living room and she said: but this is my house and I'm like, no, this is your house, and she started to explain that they were expelled and stuff, and she always used to cry, the family was divided, some of them didn't make it to Lebanon, so they never met again after 1948, and then when they were, when her siblings died, we never told her because she was too old and she wasn't in contact with them, so we said we were afraid she might have health complications, so when she died we

were like what will be the reunion like up there, like oh how was Haifa during this year? How was it? Oh, my sisters are here! It was kind of... it's, I don't know what to call it, it's sad. On my mother's side my grandfather was let go on a vacation for two weeks. And he came with his fiancé and her brother because of course they were too conservative to leave alone, and so they got here and got stuck, and we always have this joke that my grandfather is still on a vacation, he passed away 10 years ago and we're like for the whole 60 years he spent in Lebanon he was on a 60-year vacation. I don't know my grandmother because she was deceased in the war, but my mother's uncles, one of my mother's uncles he passed away a month ago in Canada because he left to Canada, he was very politically active with the Social National Syrian Party. And he was always followed by Militia men and they targeted his family like 10 times, and it really stressed out the family, he lost a daughter to cancer, and to a stress disease, to a rare nervous disease, and he went to Canada so that also added up to the ban on political activities because they used him as an example, and it's like it's kind of right because I really don't believe any party has any positive plans for anything, like they are just looking for power whether it's left or right, and of course I am, I lean more to the left side, but why should I be under... why not just have it as a lifestyle or as ethics on how you deal with your country, with the people around you, why not have it as a... so yeah, basically that's it.

**NP:** How old were you when you first went to help in the refugee camps?

**L:** I was I think 16 or 17, I think.

**NP:** So that wouldn't been at the end of 1990's.

**L:** Yeah. Yes, after the war. And, I don't believe the war is over but anyway, after the official declaration of the end of the war. And then I started to work with Zakera which is an NGO that... it was done by a group of friends, so it's not really an NGO seeking funding and this kind of NGO's, and we created a project to teach photography to Palestinian kids, because we wanted them to express, you know Palestinian refugees they are always like these items in the camps that journalists and foreigners and visitors come and take pictures of with no consent with no respect of their personal lives, they are just like statues or houses, and people go in and take pictures and publish them, so we wanted to give them this voice, that through your voice and

your eye, express what's your life like, and it was really amazing, it was supposed to continue because we said we didn't want to be like all these major NGO's who go in and open the eyes of kids on cameras and then we go and then they will never be able to afford the cameras, so we're supposed to create a studio in every refugee camp, they are 12, with cameras that children can take for free and use and share with the rest of the kids, and with a photography lab where they can develop their own films and stuff. But that didn't happen because we are not a major NGO and it was quite hard to get money for real projects. So...

**NP:** So it wasn't successful in the end?

**L:** It was great, first of all we didn't take any... yeah, the project went on, the studios didn't. and we were asking people not to donate money, we were asking people to donate the material that we need, like we started with disposable cameras, we received like 600 disposable cameras from all around the world, and we worked with the kids, you know you can change a few lives, not change, I'm not god, I'm not better than them, but you can influence a few lives living in such horrible conditions, if you're working with 500 kids, I was very happy to influence 10 people because it's really hard and some kids did great, like there's one girl, I forgot her name, Alia I think, her name was Alia, she started to sell pictures, she was 14 and she started to sell her pictures to newspapers, and she started to write stories about argeeleh places in the camp, or once she made a report about young children smoking, like she's so cute with the age and percentages, and on this street there's more like lalala, and she analyzed what are the reasons, so coming from a 13 year-old who was doing nothing waiting for the groom, waiting to be old enough to get married and go on with this miserable life, it was amazing, and another boy used to work, he was like 8 and he was working, he used to transport water gallons. And I'm not exaggerating; they were heavier than his own weight. And he would be paid 5000 liras a day I think, a week, 10 thousand liras a week, which is almost 6 to 7 dollars, and that was his thing, and we started to pay him the same amount he gets from his work if he attends classes because he didn't know how to read or write also. And this guy is still now committed to this. Lie, this is why I tell you, stories that go on are really nice... there's the story about a young boy not a guy, he's 10, and they were giving a photography workshop in Sur, in

Rashidiyyah camp, it's next to the beach, it's on the beach actually, and this boy disappears from the class and he's obviously the gang master, like he's the... everyone follows him and he gives the orders and stuff, he influences everyone. And so he disappeared and they went after him to see where he is and they found him smoking on a train rail, and the teacher was telling him, why did you come to smoke here? Aren't you afraid you're going to be beaten up by your parents and stuff? He was asking, he said no but they told me.... I like this place because they told me the train that passes here goes to Haifa, and my homeland, and so this is why I come with my friends waiting for it, and it was like... it was very moving. Yeah, I left the NGO, not I left, the project stopped and we couldn't do this, now they are continuing with Syrian refugees, the same project but with digital cameras because they are getting more donations now so you can get more high-tech tools, and that's it.

**NP:** You said earlier that people would say ???(23:40) of somebody who... you know, you have a nice life whilst we are in the refugee camp. Who would say that? People you met or this is like something you heard?

**L:** Yeah, well... yes, I've heard it from people. But not as harsh, they used to be polite saying it or they would joke about it. But you can tell it's not a joke, and even though they didn't say it you would feel a bit guilty, because you would feel you were privileged, and when you think of why you're privileged like my mom used to tell me: it's not safe to go work in the camps, it's not safe to do this and that. I used to tell her you were only privileged because you were born a Christian, that's it. If you were born a Muslim you'd have been one of them, so you cannot tell me... so put yourself in their shoes and imagine someone I not coming because it's not safe. It is safe, people are living there, it's fine. It's as safe as any other place, like, you never know where is going to be a huge security issue in Lebanon, it can happen anytime and anywhere. And these are children, I mean... I don't know, I have this weakness towards children because I really think it's not their choice. When it's their choice they are free to do whatever... but not it's not their choice, they are being forced to live in inhuman conditions, like, there was this pool that this boy took a picture of during the project, it was one of our major pictures in the exhibition, they



used to pay 250 liras, which is like 10 cents, 15 cents, no... almost, to swim in. it's like, you say in English basin? It's not even a pool, it's a tub, not a tub.

**NP:** Yeah, like a tub, we would say tub.

**L:** It's built with stones and with water that is horrible, like it's gray, it's green, it's... it's very dirty, but this was the only way they could go to the beach, not to the beach, to have fun in water only. Yeah so, yes I do feel privileged, because my parents are born Christians, that's it, that's it, that's the only reason. And... yeah.

**NP:** You said you left the project, is that because the project ended at the time?

**L:** Yeah. By the time they were working now on a different thing. It's a volunteer NGO, no one gets paid, so it was... so people would come and go all the time, and we were always like, if you wish you can get involved if you have time, but usually photography students and art students are mostly involved and they are young, like early twenties, and they know their way more with these kids. You know, like at 30, I'm 31 now, I would love to go, but I have... my schedule is really uptight with many things, especially with my courses and stuff. If they need me of course I will go in again, but they don't need me, there are other people going and leaving and coming and joining.

**NP:** When did you start to dance and sing?

**L:** Yeah, my uncle is a famous conductor in Egypt, he was in Lebanon, he's Lebanese, and he had his orchestra here, and I used to sing with him as a back vocal in the troop, band, it's not a band, it's an orchestra

**NP:** Choir?

**L:** In the choir. So, and then when he traveled to Egypt all my music activities stopped in Lebanon because it's kind of this specific mowashahat or oriental really old music or traditional music, Tarab, until Yassmina contacted me, and she asked me if I'd like to be in a choir for her concert, I had no clue it was a show, I never was on stage, never in my life before, except to sing but not to perform. And we met, I thought I was auditioning, apparently I was in. and this show

is casted ion perfect characters, we're not really performing, it's kind of our characters, we're having fun on stage, and this is how I got involved with Hishek-Bishek, I thought it was a concert, it turned out to be a show, and I panicked and I freaked out and on the opening night I drank like half a bottle of Chaves and, because I was like: I can't do this, I can't do this. And I was singing like this, it took me like... it took me 3 months to stop panicking. Every time we go on stage, every time the curtain opens I was like, oh my God! I'm going to forget all the lyrics, I'm not going to do well, but it always went well, because I have great company on stage.

**NP:** What made you go on? I mean if you were so nervous and scared?

**L:** Because I enjoyed it, I was nervous but I enjoyed it. I was nervous because I felt I had a responsibility, we are portraying work that is not performed anymore, not even in Egypt, because all the Egyptians who have been here have been begging us to go perform in Egypt, but it's not doable for production issues. But they were all saying that we lack this, it's either the boring orchestra or the very cheap pop music-like things, and I am in because I love the people I'm working with, I love the songs we are singing, I was raised to listen to them, like I was forbidden to listen to pop music when I was young. It was a no-no at home, I remember I used to go to my neighbor's house, and we used to listen in secret to Michael Jackson or to Arabic pop music, and it was only allowed during birthdays, only, and Christmas dinners; because we used to do it with the whole family, like all my uncles and... yeah but it was like a sin, that if you know about some new Michael Jackson hit, I would be grounded. Yeah, I was grounded once, because my father foud a cassette of Michael Jackson, because he believes that culture and music build your good character... not your good character, how do you say it? That you would be more cultured and so you can be more... patriot?

**NP:** Patriotic

**L:** Yeah, patriotic. Yes, because he believed the music of Abdul Wahhab, not he believed, it was true that the music of Abdul Wahhab and Um Kulthoum and Abdul Haleem, they had part of their work on emotional stuff, and the other part because it was the Abdul Nasser era so it was highly patriotic. and it's really nice music, and I was forced to... now I enjoy it, now I know the value, when I grew up, but when I was younger I was like, no! it's music time! I hate that! But

now I appreciate the value of the knowledge that I inherited from my parents. Yeah, it was like either Mozart or Bach or Beethoven, or Abdul Wahhab and Um Kulthoum.

**NP:** So your parents thought that if you listened to pop music that it would undermine your cultural identity?

**L:** Yes, and mentally I would grow up to be silly or ridiculous. Yeah, I will not be challenged, and he used to say: at 18 you're free to do whatever you want, listen to whatever you want, but my job as a parent is to build up your musical background on the basics, and then you do whatever you want. So I always felt left out a bit because everyone was very like in with Madonna and Michael Jackson and I was like, what's that? Yeah.

**NP:** Do you have memories of the 1990's of your teenage years? And this is a period where people often sort of discover themselves.

**L:** Yeah. Well... I have... I'm trying to remember some things that are, that stand out. I was in a catholic school with nuns, and it was quite depressive and boring, especially for a teenager, and again it's a decision that my parents took because they thought that at a catholic school you learned perfect...

## TAPE 2

**Lina:** French, you learn discipline, you're always tidy, which is not my case, maybe I think I did the opposite reaction. I didn't get along with nuns, I was always shy a an introvert but at the same time I always have this personality of being independent, like you cannot tell me what socks I can wear. I am free to wear whatever socks I want. They were always like, only white socks, even if they had like this thin stipe, I would be grounded, or beaten with a wooden ruler on my feet, and for me this is what pushed further for the revolutionary side in me, because I always felt I'm in a fight with a system at school, it was really horrible. We had to go to the mass by force, because I'm Christian, we had to go to religious classes by force, it was all forced, and

we had to speak French by force, even during the break. Yeah, recess. There was a student who was the, how do you say, the rat?

**Nicola Pratt:** Snitch

**L:** Snitch. She used to take our names if we are talking in Arabic, and she would report it to the nuns. She was a child just like us, she was taught to do this. (side talk: bon soir)... yeah, it was harsh at school. It was fun at the same time because the tighter the system the more fun you have breaking it. And I really used to enjoy breaking it, and then when I was expelled at 14 or 15, I was a really bad, not student, I had good grades, but I had a problem with discipline, I had a problem with anything that was forced. So I went to another school which met my chaotic personality, and I was very sad because it was not a challenge. I was like, this is not a challenge for me, I need a challenge. So, yeah.

**NP:** And you remember the atmosphere, what was the atmosphere like in Beirut in the 1990's after the civil war had ??? (2:36) ended?

**L:** Yeah. It was the trend of Solidere building in Beirut, we used to go on school trips to see Solidere, and that's what I remember. Brain-washing people into creating this cosmopolitan Paris-like, New York-like city, and I was always... because I used to go to school there, I remember in details how it was, and I remember how ugly it was from a beauty point of view, that buildings were really... they all had bullet holes, and water was flowing everywhere, the smell was horrible, but real people lived there, like when you go to a shop, you had connections with the people there, you know the persons who was at the shop, you know his sons, you ask about them, you mingle with them, now we lost this, in every other neighborhood not only the downtown, but for me this is a special case because it's... I grew up there at school, and now when you see it's very fancy and glossy, but it's lifeless, it's really lifeless. The streets are lifeless, my school is lifeless, everything is lifeless, I don't enjoy going there at all. Yeah, actually I barely go there, like, I never have to go there. So I remember the rebuilding Beirut lie that they forced on everyone, and I remember the joy of having a normal land line for a phone, like we didn't have to wait until... and now it's a memory that people share like, remember when we had to wait for the signal? I remember when the mobile was introduced, I feel so old when I say

that, I remember when the internet was introduced with the (makes sounds) the modem with the very loud...

**NP:** The dial up?

**L:** Yeah, the dial up, and... and... that's it. I remember the cars. The cars began to become also glossy, new, brand new. During the war cars had, a trend, not a trend, it's like a thing, because of the war and the bullets and stuff you would always see the paste like before they paint the car they put a certain paste, and because it was the war no one used to paint over it, it was like we just need it for survival, if we have to run at the end of the night we just use the car, and then suddenly this image started to change for me, it was always new cars and brand new cars and these cars started to fade away, until now you can't see them anymore. And for me these are childhood memories or if you want, authentic images in my head about the society I used to live in that I miss, because it's not there anymore, people are very sophisticated, because they haven't dealt - I believe- they haven't dealt with the war, and they haven't dealt with their culture, and they are always running away from whatever they are, and looking forward to being Europeans, and they will never get anywhere, I will not be sad if they want to be Europeans if they are really imitating Europeans like, let's do the laws of Europeans, let's work on these European good things, but no, we decide to be arrogant, we decide to be not Arabs because of some complex that I will never understand, I tried to understand but I can't understand, and stuff like that. Can I...

**NP:** Yes, sure.

**L:** Yeah, so for me it took me... I'm a very nostalgic person, and I like my routine, and it took me a while to grasp these big changes, it took me a while to realize that the shop under our house is not uncle something, it's a brand or a franchise, it took me a while to grasp this that, how come this is a cold brand that is opening a shop next to our house, where is "Ammo" whoever, Abu Ali or I don't know who. So it was kind of... but that's me being nostalgic. And we lost one aspect which we had during the war which is friendliness in the neighborhood. Like, I always remember that everyone knew everyone in the neighborhood, although I lived in Hamra which is considered a very busy area, neighborhood, and people always come and go, but we were

always connected some way. You would maybe not like them but you would say hello, you would mingle, you would ask for some ketchup if you don't have, or some lemons or vice versa. Now this disappeared also. Look, I have people in my building that I've never met and this was also very strange for me, not only because of them, because of me as well. Because I got used to this new... that there is no need to know your neighbors, that's fine, you just move on with life. Yeah.

**NP:** Do you remember when Hariri was assassinated?

**L:** Yes. When Hariri was assassinated I was at work. I was at work in Tayyouneh which is very far from the explosion. And it was so huge that we thought it was around. And, in Lebanon due to security issues they pretend... that because of security issues they don't give the information to the media immediately. So we had no clue what happened, we just saw an explosion on TV live, in the office with no information, not about the area, not about what happened. Like, anyway it took them I think an hour or two, maybe more to say that it was Hariri assassinated. They said first that he survived, and then they said he was gone, he passed away. Yeah, I remember that and I remember the revolution of the cedar. I was one of the people who went because... not because I wanted Syrians out, I do want Syrians, like, I do want this militant intelligence system to be really broken and away, but I didn't go because of that, I went because it was the first chance I had to say something about my country, although I am not a fan of Hariri. Not a fan of anyone, and not his crowd as well of course. But it was not a habit to go down the street and say something. It was very new, it was very new because it was denied before, and it was allowed back then because it was the Hariri crowd who wanted it to happen, so they allowed it, it was not genuine, and it was not real, and it was not about freedom, it was not about patriotism. It was about saying: we have more people than you, and we will beat you down in a battle, and so the other side started to organize the same, and they started to go opposites, and it was very funny because 2 demonstrations that both parties are really proud of were led by politicians. Like by MPs and ministers and, like for me it doesn't make sense. The people are led by MPs to demonstrate against MPs, really? Like, yeah. One genuine demonstration I participated in was to take down... I forgot what was the name, occupy Lebanon, occupy... I

forgot what, but it was about taking down the sectarian system in Lebanon, it was really genuine because it was made... like it was instantly declared on facebook, and the first time I think like 300 thousand people went, and you would recognize everyone because it's everyone you have a drink with or coffee with in Hamra, and it was raining I remember, and it was so crowded under the rain, people had garbage bags as umbrellas and it was very nice. But then it was, the system was very clever and some sectarian parties went on television and said that this is was their revolution and they are with it, so by embracing it they just killed it, they killed it. People lost motivation, no one participated in the other ones, and even the organizers started to fight who will be the leader and who takes the credit, it became a horrible... that thing.

**NP:** When was that? When did it start?

**L:** It started I think in 2010... no, no. before the Arab spring and all this fuss, I will have to check, in 2009, 2008, 2010, and it's... sometimes they do try things out but I always participate because I owe myself to take a stand with these people, with the message and with what they are asking for. Not their needs, their demands. But like once we did this funeral of the "electricite de Liban", because we never have electricity and it's a dead sector, so we made this funeral because electricity died in Lebanon and we went and it was also nice because during these marches or demonstrations we always call on people from the balconies because people would come with their cameras and we're like: we're together in this so come down and come with us and some people actually would come, it's fun. So, but it's only symbolic, it doesn't really make any change. Yeah. Too bad.

**NP:** Do you think it's important to participate in these demonstrations? Even though they don't make change.

**L:** Yes, of course. Because we cannot always nag about how the government is horrible and bla bla and then do nothing about it, I do the effort on a personal level, from simple stuff, like respecting the law, while driving, I don't know how doing these stuff, boycotting merchandise like whatever it takes, and I participate in these activities. Because I owe myself, I don't want to end up like that generation of my father who's depressed and, not depressed they are...

**NP:** Frustrated?

**L:** Yeah, they are... how do you say it? Disappointed, badly disappointed, so they lost any... because they were during a political era that was really active and stuff, and then when they lost everything they just became depressive and introverts and grumpy, I don't want to end up like that, I want to say I tried, if it didn't work out at least it worked out on me on a personal level, if I ever have kids I think I will try to do the same with them, but that's all I can do, and if it requires me to go invade the parliament and do whatever I will of course I will be there. Lately like 2 months ago there was the "occupy the parliament movement" in Lebanon, because the MPs decided to extend for themselves. Even though people didn't want that, and they did. So we went there and people were beaten up by the army. In a very bad way. It was my first encounter with the police on a close scale, because usually I am in the back, and I was coming near and I saw this wooden stick that the soldier was holding, it was a wooden stick like a one you would kill a vampire with, and it was pointy, and he was putting it in people's faces, like he was frightening people with it, I took a picture of him because it was, oh my God! It was so horrifying. They were like, I don't know what, like dogs that you kept like Rottweilers, like angry dogs that you've kept without food and then you freed them and they were going after the fresh meat, it was horrible. It was horrible. Yeah, some people were really hurt. Yeah.

**NP:** This was the first time that the army had attacked a demonstration?

**L:** No. it always happens, especially during the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Students used to be really beaten up, it was horrible, they used to be thrown in jails, television stations would be shut down, suddenly it was more controlled than now, but my first encounter was this. It always happened in Lebanon, although the army has a reputation of being very friendly, and that's it's the one thing that all Lebanese agree on, I don't know how they live with this lie, because it's not independent, it's not friendly, and it's not what everyone agrees on. Everyone is fighting to control the army although the army... like, the militia men in Lebanon have more modern weapons than the army, I swear. Like the helicopters of the army we get them as gifts from the United States or elsewhere, and they are like antiques, they should be put in museums, they don't actually work. Once it stopped working and a soldier died because the



helicopter just dropped down. Yeah, it's a big lie, if you put now militias against the army of course the militias will win. So, that's why when people ask to disarm Hezbollah because we have the army... it's kind of a joke. I'm not a fan of Hezbollah, I'm a fan of a resistance. And, I'm not a fan of any religious fanatic or someone who is abusing religion to get somewhere. But, you cannot tell, like it's very funny it's very ridiculous to say that the army will fight Israel, how will they fight them, with stones? With the not working weapons that the USA is sending? Like, yeah. So, I'm sorry I'm drifting away.

**NP:** No... do you remember how you felt when the Arab revolutions began or what some people call Arab revolutions, Arab spring?

**L:** Yeah. Yes I remember. I remember actually when Saddam was, when Iraq fell down to the American occupation. I remember when they were taking down the statue of Saddam, my aunt's husband told me he was crying, he hates Saddam, it's not about Saddam, he was crying and he said: this is the end of any Arabic power and politics in this region; because if they decided to take Saddam down they will take everyone else down and we will be a Mcdonald nation. And this is what's going on, and this is where it all started. Yes, I believe in the need to remove all these figures, because these people were assigned by the Americans or whatever power that has the power to control this stuff. They were assigned by them and they were taken by them when the Americans decided that they wanted to adopt a new fashion of being free and yay, but at the same time I don't have the right to ridicule people who died fighting for their rights and fighting for their freedom, they had great courage, they lost family members, and even though it's conspiracy theory or whatever it may be, some people fought for their freedom, and I don't really care about conspiracy theory, and these people were bad guys these regimes were bad regimes, and especially Egyptians, I was very surprised that they were not letting it go, like although it's more clear now what was manipulated and stuff, but they are not letting it go. They fought, they died and they will go on. Which is what I find really impressive. Like in Bahrain the revolution stopped, and in Saudi Arabia it was killed instantly, in Qatar, you know what the Arabic press said about Qatar, that because the Emir resigned and he assigned his son, that's the Arab spring of Qatar, and I was like, he assigned his own son who was going

to be assigned either way, so... so they tried, they ridiculized the freedom demands not freedom demands, life demands, because it was very harsh for people. Like I know a journalist that we used to work with in Syria, despite my opinion about the Syrian war, because we used to publish for her anonymously, I was part of a website where, before the revolutions, we used to take to collect articles that do not fit the standard of being published in newspapers and we used to put them under anonymous names. And once we lost contact with a journalist, and we knew that not because of our website, but she published something I don't know where, and the secret service went into her place and beat her up in front of her 3 daughters, the older one was 12 years old I think, and she was left deformed and they left. And, this for me is a good reason to participate in a conspiracy theory... like, I don't know, it's your right to be a human, and that's why I don't like to go into these details of whether it's political or not, whether it's made or it really was born, because you can influence revolutions or whatever in a conspiracy theory way, but if people didn't have the need they wouldn't, and I don't think these people are part of a bigger scheme. I think something erupted and it was abused. I don't think it began because of this James Bond, Lawrence of Arabia thing, I really don't. and I think it's for everyone who died to say that, it's unfair to tell a mom: oh by the way, when your son at Tahrir square it was only a joke, and conspiracy theory. Yeah.

**NP:** You think the conspiracy theory that somehow these revolutions were formulated, is widespread in Lebanon?

**L:** Yes, it depends on which side you are. When it was Egypt everyone was happy, or neutral, so it was a revolution. When it went to Syria it was conspiracy theory for some and freedom for others, like it depends if you have American or Iranian affiliations, if you're Iranian it's a Zionist scheme, if you're Hariri or American it's the call for freedom and suddenly Bashar Al-Assad became this monster whom they didn't see before, you know like now they just opened their eyes to all the crimes and all the facts and massacres that happened. So it's ridiculous from both sides. Hassan Nasrallah made a statement calling... he always makes fun of the Syrian revolution, but then when he talks about the Bahraini revolution he says that it's the right of the Shiite to be free from the Sunni royal...

**NP:** Royal family?

**L:** Yeah. Governance, like, not governance, torture.

**NP:** Rule?

**L:** Yes, but they are kind of, because Shiite in Bahrain are kind of...

**NP:** Oppressed

**L:** Yes. But it's either that you're against oppression or with oppression, it's not, it doesn't depend on the sect and on the political thing, that's what the Americans do badly as well, they created this lie and they are not even through with their own social issues about this, but, yeah. But I'm not in, I don't follow up on politics, I don't read a lot on politics, I just follow big events so I can't give you specific information, I can remember what I can remember from the bulletins.

**NP:** Just to clarify, the website that you were working on, what was the name of that website?

**L:** It was called MenaSat

**NP:** And is it still going?

**L:** Yes but it's a different concept now, and I haven't read it ever since it stopped, the whole team quite. It's MenaSat like Satellite and the Mena region but in Arabic it means platforms, the word. So, it was really nice, it was really great work that we sued to do, not us, I mean the reporters that used to take their chances and send us the articles, it was great and some reports are still online if you go, but we quit in... 2010, I think, 2009 we quit, yes.

**NP:** Why?

**L:** Because the owner of the website was, I have to be polite, I'm being taped

**NP:** If you don't want to say it you don't have to

**L:** No, he's an asshole. That's what I wanted to say, and I couldn't find a more polite term to express it. And he started to abuse the website in a way so... and we really worked hard to make this website trustworthy, because you need time to create a network of people who trust you to send you material, and then we paid them so we know the real names so it was really critical for these people to trust us, and then he started to abuse it in a way so, we quit, we were 7 in the team and for a short period of time, the funders who were a Dutch NGO association, it was called free voice, they told us to go until they figure out what they will do with him as the owner of the website, and so we worked as, we were managing the whole thing, he was not a director or a manager, and it was the peak of the website, it was the best period of articles, pictures, everything. But then they decided to settle, and he owns the address and by contract it's his so it's his. Yeah.

**NP:** I've asked you quite a few questions, do you want to... is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think is important to you that you haven't had a chance to talk to me about?

**L:** No, I think if you want to know more about women and their influence, women are very powerful in Lebanon, but only when it's their own crusade to be powerful, because in the government they are not and they are not allowed to be, but women has this opportunity in Lebanon to create their own association, and when they do and when they have the will they really work on it and whether it was political like many fighters were women during the war, the Arab Israeli conflict, not the Lebanese war, the Lebanese war as well, but I don't think that's heroic. And in associations and mostly all the NGOs are led by women, old ones and new ones, like the latest would be Nasawiyah, but before that the NGO's that work on people who have special needs, because you know in Lebanon of course we have no respect whatsoever for their existence on the street, on the drop-curbs, on the stairs, and mostly it's mothers who started this, and they became very powerful in the society and getting funding, fundraising and making contact in school to start training these schools to accept more and to be able to professionally host these kids, so women are pretty powerful in Lebanon when they want to. You have the ability to do it, but you have to put a lot of effort, no one is going to tell you you can't, it is a challenge, it is not as easy as I'm a woman, I'm going to start my association. You have to work

hard, you will be ridiculed, you will be looked at inferiorly, and you'll be told: Ah, you're going to change the world now! But then when you look back at history and you see that it's women who made most of the changes in Lebanon, it was a man who would take the credit because he would be a minister or, because he would be the one signing the final outcome, but mainly the whole work and the whole battle was done by women. Mainly mothers. Not in mothers as in mothers with sons but, people who started before NGO's became a trend, they started their NGO's because of certain personal objectives or... oh my God! I can't find my words today! Motivation. So, that's it.

**NP:** Do you have personal motivation to start your own association or initiative.

**L:** I had, I don't know if I lost my motivation. I have this dream of building a library that has all the books and documentaries that are not main stream. Like, the real thing, the none-glossy things, and it would be mainly targeted to kids, not to adults, and I really hope one day I will be able to do half of this or a quarter of this dream; because it took me a while to get out of the Disney fantasy and I believe... not that kids should suffer and not see princesses and stuff...

### TAPE 3

**Lina:** but life has a colorful side as well, so why make it as ridiculous and.. you know this, I'm not a feminist in a way, I'm with human rights in general and I think feminists are a bit racists, because they believe only women deserve to be whatever, I believe kids, women, men, everyone is entitled to having his whole rights respected and all. So, I have a problem with this princess thing in Disney, not only Disney but Disney is the major company, we are always taught we have to be blonde first to be pretty, to be very skinny and we have to not speak, we have to sing or be pretty. And then prince charming will come and he will be kind enough to take us, like to accept us and take us. And I was like, but there are millions of other stories that you can teach girls with great outcome and you choose like snow white and Cinderella and I don't know what, so that's the objective of my library or mini media center.

**Nicola Pratt:** so that children will have an alternative?

**L:** Yes. And then they can make their choice but I will offer the alternative, like... yeah, I have a real problem with... and growing up as a Disney person, like you know what I mean as a Disney person, the concept of glittery and... then when I started to get involved with all this work and I started to read about human trafficking and child labor and stuff and I started to get these reports about the Disney gadget stores, and I felt it was so personal, that they abuse kids in Bangladesh and India and elsewhere, to produce Mini Mouse's that they sell to other kids. I mean, how horrible can you be? How horrible can you be? so, that's why I would like to offer a space for good things to have a gate to reach people, and you don't always have to go talk to your artist fans to be recommended for a nice movie, it can be there, you choose it or you don't choose it, but it has to be there, it shouldn't be a quest towards none mainstream media. So, yeah, that's it. So I hope one day it will happen, I will work on it but not now, now I can't.

**NP:** Now you want to focus on finishing your studies.

**L:** Yeah, because I'm really bored at this point. At 31 it's kind of hard to go and sit in the class and listen to your classmates who are 19 and 20. Justin Bieber generation, I mean I respect them and they are free to be, I respect what they are but I can't sit for hours and hours discussing Miley Cyrus and... it's just not my thing. That's a bit challenging, a bit.

**NP:** They are all like that?

**L:** Yes, but they are a few, like two in the whole department that I really enjoy their company and I'm really surprised because they are young, they are like 21 or 22, but they are always with their books and their debates, you think they are... they feel, they look like little men, not little men, or young fellows, you know they have this blood flow, this motivation like we're going to change the world and we're going to... but there are very few of them. I remember when I started university in 2000, we were many, like there is always both sides but not the other side is too minor and the Beverly Hills 90210 side is like occupying campus.

**NP:** The hegemonic

**L:** Yes, oh my God! I don't know how they have the time to put all this make-up and plan the outfit before coming to class and all you would be doing is... and you would hear the heels, and they were like (makes sounds) I'm just like, I'm writing an essay, stop it! Yeah. And then I say, well, the nuns had one good side, you couldn't wear heels. Yeah. So that's it.

**NP:** Sure?

**L:** Yeah, unless you have any other question.

**NP:** No.

**L:** Okay, I have to go anyway, I'm sorry.