

ROOT OF CONFLICT

Root of Conflict Podcast

Episode: Gender and Conflict

featuring

Lina Haddad Kreidie, political psychologist and academic director of gender studies at the Lebanese American University

interviewed by

Hannah Balikci and Zareen Hussain, Pearson Fellows

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Full Transcript

Reema Saleh: Hi, this is Reema and you're listening to the University of Chicago Public Policy Podcasts. You're listening to Root of Conflict, a podcast about violent conflict around the world and the people, societies and policy issues it affects. In this series, you'll hear from experts and practitioners who conduct research, implement programs, and use data analysis to address some of the most pressing challenges facing our world. Root of Conflict is produced by UC3P in collaboration with the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflict, a research institute housed within the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago.

How do war and displacement disproportionately impact women? In this episode, we speak with Dr. Lina Haddad Kreidie, a political psychologist and academic director of gender studies at the Lebanese American University. Her research centers marginalized communities, mainly displaced and refugee women in the Middle East. We discuss her work with the Intisar Foundation, studying drama therapy as a mental health intervention for refugee women and how it's impacted communities within the camps.

Zareen Hussein:

Hello, my name is Zareen Hussein. I am a second-year public policy student at the Harris School of Public Policy.

Hannah Balikci: And I am Hannah Balikci. I'm a first-year student at the Harris School of Public Policy.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: My name is Lina Haddad Kreidie and I am the academic director of Gender Studies at the Lebanese American University. And I am a research consultant for an NGO for the Intisar foundation. Intisar Foundation works with women empowerment for socioeconomically disadvantaged women who are impacted by war and violence.

Zareen Hussein: Could you tell us how you came to your work? What brought you to this intersection between gender, mental health, and conflict?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Just to rewind a bit, my degree is in political science, and I did a concentration in political psychology. So my gender focus and work on women came as a result, what we call experiential

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learning. And based on my own experiences and my own observations and analysis of the different theories and readings I went through. I found that women are invisible, mainly in the political field. And even when they are in, they are subordinated, they are used as tokens and not as effective decision makers.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So this brought me to try to explore more on the causes and the barriers that lead to such gender discrimination. I also wanted to see this in different cultures. So I've read a lot about gender inequality in the western world, but it was not enough explanatory basis to understand the gender inequalities in the Arab world. And my work now, I moved from University of California Irvine to Lebanon to do the work on conflict management and to teach in political science. But I wanted to base my research on gender, starting with women. But with my new position, I'm expanding to look at all marginalized communities and intersectional inequalities where we use race, ethnicity, class, disabilities, and women and men, because gender is not only about women. So this is where my research is landing now, and my academic and intellectual work is at the University. My teaching and the student-based learning process that's taking place on campus is also linked to my work with Intisar Foundation and the approach of empowering women.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: And I noticed that this drama therapy intervention, which I was suspicious at the beginning, of its effectiveness, is an excellent and effective approach that brings in not only psychoanalysis, which I've read a lot about, and cognitive behavioral therapy and EDMR and all those individual approaches to helping people with psychological issues and specifically people who are impacted by compounded traumas.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: In cultures where psychological counseling is considered a stigma and where women are, and men, usually don't see psychologists or psychiatrists because they would be stigmatized as crazy, and men would with their hyper masculinity, "No, I'm not crazy," And women would be afraid to do so. And in academia also I noticed that even in my promotions and academic life, because I got married young and I had children, I would see myself and all the women around me as delayed in their progress. This is at the workplace sector.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: In the humanitarian field, I noticed that women are prominent and specifically in Lebanon where CSOs and the NGOs took the place of the government in terms of providing services. And it was usually women who started and founded and are active in such NGOs. So I noticed that there is a parallel of the role of women where in some sectors they are subordinated, they're weak, but they are given the care, which is also the associated role that was subscribed to them since birth. Women are the caring, men are the providers. So yes, this is what's happening, this dualism in functions in Lebanon where the NGOs are run by women, they are the ones who keep the social fabric of the society in a country that is broken by divisiveness.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So not to expand too much on this but to focus on mainly marginalized communities, which is a subject you are interested in, the Intisar foundation is the field work where I felt myself, I'm not only needing analyzing and writing policy recommendations based on synthesizing literature, but also I am doing it in the field. This is what really brought me to Intisar Foundation and this work.

Hannah Balikci: How did you first get involved with the Intisar Foundation?

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Lina Haddad Kreidie: It was in a meeting at the Lebanese American University. Actually, my husband, who's a neurologist and a psychiatrist, met with the CEO of the foundation and they were talking about their work to him because he's a neurologist, and he said, "No, no, my wife is best, she's a political psychologist, she's interested in women empowerment and she keeps talking about gender issues," so here comes the man. He said, "This is women empowerment, this is not my job," although they wanted to recruit him. So he referred them to me and this is where we found each other, actually. And it was the best time where I could translate my work on the ground. And I met Sheikha Intisar AlSabah, who is the founder. She's from the royal family of Kuwait. And one would think that they are not involved with the people, but she's very much involved with the people. And for children we manage bullying, but for women it's the drama therapy intervention.

Zareen Hussein: Before we get into understanding what drama therapy is, can you help, for those who don't know, what is political psychology?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Excellent. Political psychology is a field that focuses on the micro level of analysis. When we are analyzing any issue, whether it's electoral issue, electoral campaign, leadership, decision making at the level of the government, the behavior of individuals and groups, political psychology explains the why question. Meaning, for example, to explain terrorism, we don't judge, we explain why those groups chose to do this. So we look at the emotions, we look at the psychology of fear, we look at identity politics, we look at the cognitive behavioral aspects in the sense of the group-think aspect, the conformity aspect, what we consider as cognitive dissonance, meaning we have mental schemas, we have norms. So when something happens that contradicts our mental schema, we give it the deaf ear and the blind eye. And how we build empathy and altruism, and all those factors are part of explaining conflicts and other issues pertaining to human interaction.

Zareen Hussein: And that's really interesting because, for example, when talking about ISIS, the uninformed thought is that it's just extremists joining an extremist group where there's a lot more caveats to that.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Yes.

Zareen Hussein: So Dr. Lina, could you give us an example on everything you've just said, maybe in Lebanon or with ISIS specifically?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: You know, I will start with my own. As I mentioned, everything comes with experience. When I was in Lebanon in the '80s, I saw around us that religiosity has been increasing, and there is a resurgence of Islamist groups, Muslim Brotherhood and others. And women who did not wear any covers, we started seeing more women with cover. I said, "What's happening? Why is this happening?" And then there was the political tension between the US and certain groups in Lebanon, and we started seeing hostages taken.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: And at every corner of the road, it's the Islamists. It's the Islamists who are doing the harm and so on. And I believe this because we saw that there is this. And Libya came to train certain Islamist groups. Iran came to train other Islamist groups, and the whole region was involved in Lebanon. And this is during the Civil War. So I wanted to do this study, but I could not because of the threats the professors had from Islamist groups. The professor I was working with was a British guy: he was kidnapped in Lebanon, and I thought it was because of the study he was helping me with, and it was not.

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Lina Haddad Kreidie: So I had the question of why blame Islamist groups? So to make the story short, to understand I wanted to look at the economic, the political situation. I could not find the right answer. It was always insufficient. So I thought into that. I went into the individual level of analysis, to understand the difference between how they view the world versus how the West views the world. For example, what does terrorism mean to them? What does self-sacrifice, a freedom fighter versus terrorist? What does democracy mean to them? Because we've learned that there is no democracy in Islam, but they do have an understanding of democracy completely different. They base it on justice, while in the US we base it on individual freedoms. So there are different understandings. So this was based on my political psychology background.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: For the ISIS situation, also the concept of yes, there are Islamist groups who are using Islam as a political tool, and they are vulnerable because of the marginalization they lived in. So whether they are men and women, who lately started joining ISIS, because we have these misperceptions that only men do that, but also women, yes with a lesser number, because they felt they were marginalized in their communities and they found an answer in this ideological, religious, emotional attachment. This could be an example, but the Palestinian camps and the Syrian camps are hubs of extremism. So when you have extreme poverty, marginalization, certain perceptions of people as being prone to being terrorists. So when you give them a certain role, they become the role, and it becomes them. So political psychology helps us understand how to explain, so we can solve the problem better. That's the idea behind political psychology.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: In addition to, we did analysis of the Gulf War. And how a country like the US where we have leaders who are in power and they are supposedly intellectuals and the best in making decisions, they come up with defective decision making and it's based on certain phenomenon that's called groupthink. When you are working in a group and you want to belong into the group, even if they're making a bad decision, the misperceptions of the situation, the in-group, out-group, "I love my in-group, I hate the other group." So you tend to make defective decision makings and personalities and the right-wing authoritarianism and all of this.

Zareen Hussein: So definitely an us-versus-them mentality?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: It is the us-versus-them mentality.

Hannah Balikci: In regards to what you were mentioning about refugee camps, we know that women and children make up over half of all refugees, internally displaced and stateless people. Why is bringing a gender perspective to conflict and displacement important in the context of refugees, and what happens when it's not taken into account?

Zareen Hussein: And also definitely in political psychology, why are the women not in that discourse?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Men usually are the ones in the war. So when there is displacement and forced migration, the majority are women who leave. And during that time women are disproportionately impacted because they are the ones who take care of the house. They are the ones who take care of the children. So when their husbands are not around, they have a double burden. They have to provide, and they have to care. So it's both jobs are done on them.

Zareen Hussein: So it's a shift in the gender roles, almost.

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Lina Haddad Kreidie: Exactly. There's a shift. So this is one. On the other hand, if men are also with the woman in the house, and she's not a single mom, as we mentioned, his role becomes less because humanitarian agencies with their mindset that we have to help the women. So it's not the right approach because when you give the woman, I remember from my work in Jordan with refugees, the woman would get the 20 dinar to spend, and the male is sitting at home and he feels "What happened to my role? I am the man of the house."

Zareen Hussein: Demasculinization.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Exactly. Demasculation. And his hyper-masculinity gets attacked and hurt, and this is where the toxic masculinity starts to work and he transfers it on his wife and children, mainly girls. And this is where domestic violence rises at times of crisis. So there is a need to definitely support men and women, but more so women because they are disproportionately impacted, and they are the backbone of the family. They do both jobs when needed. They do revert to informal jobs, and they don't ask for much, which is something that's not good. Because they are used to, "I have to do it. I am the mother, I sacrifice." Most of their work is unpaid, but they try to do everything when they need to. So it becomes their motherly work and their informal work where they get paid less. So they tend to be the ones hired more than men, but this adds to their trauma, this adds to their bad relationship at home with their husbands and brothers.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So there is a need, and supporting women meaning supporting the family and supporting the community. And I believe, if the mother is able to listen to her husband, not in the sense of being obedient, in the sense of understanding the background of his violence and being able to communicate with him better and not accepting what he does by being more self-confident, by reporting if she has violence, if there's any violent attacks against her.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Because usually woman in those communities tend to be afraid of reporting because this might increase their violence. So with the drama therapy we do, we help them report. So it is important to make those communities more peaceful, to reduce the vulnerability to extremism so their children would learn from them the significance of communication, the significance of speaking up, the significance of finding other ways of expressing their anger. It doesn't have to be transferring it on other people and so on. So yeah, that's mainly some of the factors that are helpful.

Hannah Balicki: Great. You've said previously that women who have experienced trauma, such as war and displacement, usually don't seek help because of their inability to know that they need help. What are the consequences, like you were just mentioning about the effects on their children, what are the consequences of not taking this trauma and how it impacts people into consideration?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: I think it is very important. First, to bring awareness to all, and more so to women because women are suppressed and, as I mentioned, they don't report their situation. They feel that they are responsible, and they have to take it in: "I'm not going to get angry at my husband or report because I have to keep the peace in the house." But they are actually destroying themselves from within. So they need to be become more aware of the need for psychological help. And this is something that needs to be done via NGOs or even for girls at school to start with this. So as this will bring more awareness and then the way

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they raise their children, the way they speak to their husbands and to their community, would be more effective. Just if you want to repeat the question because I think I missed an aspect of it.

Hannah Balikci: What are the consequences of not taking this trauma, and how it impacts people, into consideration?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: If you don't treat psychological illnesses, they could become more physiologically destructive. Meaning, for example, post-traumatic stress disorder, the more it becomes severe, the more it impacts the brain, it affects the memory, it affects the emotions, they become more angry because of the low impulse control, they tend to be aggressive. I did a study on the link between post-traumatic stress disorder and violence, and there was a significant correlation between PTSD and aggression because people tend to react with anger and they regret it after, but they keep repeating it and they know that they did something wrong, but they cannot control their emotions. So imagine a community where, like among Syrians, every three Syrians in Lebanon, one has PTSD. Every four, one has generalized anxiety.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So if you have a community with all those psychological disorders, then you have a tendency for more violence. I know there are many studies on the macro level that blame Islam or blame the culture or blame economic situation. Yes, these could be factors, but if you have a healthy mental health or a healthy psychology, then you don't have any psychological disorders, then you can manage the situation better. You can manage your poverty better, you can manage marginalization. We all, as women, we go through this. If we have the ability to deal with it in a healthier way, then we reduce use the problems of... There are many studies done in the US on the veterans with PTSD when they come back from war, and we have higher rates of suicide, we have high rates of domestic violence, specifically because the government is not spending enough to support them.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Imagine in countries like Lebanon or Syria or Iraq or Yemen where the government is lacking and they're not providing. If NGOs are not active, or any institution, in helping such communities, then we are leading those countries into disasters. So yes, mental health is very important. I think reconstruction of zones of conflict or when you want to build peace, you cannot have peace if the levels of psychological traumas or compound traumas are not relieved, then we don't build highways if we don't have people that are productive and healthy.

Zareen Hussein: Absolutely. And I think using the US veterans example is perfect because I know our conversation is about women and how they respond to the lack of resources while also experiencing PTSD, like you said, there's violence, domestic violence. But imagine on the flip side, men who are also in this exact same situation. There's an immense high rate of suicide amongst US veterans, and they're going through the similar things: PTSD, lack of resources. So it's almost not even a binary gender situation, it's just a humanitarian issue, but we're addressing it through a gendered lens.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Exactly.

Hannah Balikci: Would you say that the PTSD levels of refugees in camps is a factor in terms of the gender-based violence that is... We know that gender-based violence surged during COVID-19 as a shadow pandemic, and it's also very prevalent within refugee camps in general. Is the factor of PTSD amongst the camps, do you think, related to the increase in gender-based violence in refugee camps?

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Lina Haddad Kreidie: There's a variable, or a confounding variable. For the patriarchic system and the masculinity factor, it becomes toxic at times of crisis. Refugees live in crisis. When they live in a camp, it's a crisis situation. And when males are unable to provide, so their masculinity factor impacts their relationship with their wives, and even boys who are seen as lesser than them. So definitely the gender factor, the patriarchal system. But then PTSD is an added factor because they have low impulse control, they have been going through trauma. And the trauma, it could be war and violence, but it could be also their inability to meet the masculinity expectations. So this is an added trauma for men, which I think should be also resolved.

Zareen Hussein: And Hannah, just going off of what you asked, I can also see how those suffering from PTSD in these camps are attracted to extremism. Because like you said, they're demasculinized, they have these violent tendencies. And I'm talking about both men and women in this situation because a lot of women, young women, joined ISIS.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Yeah, I agree 100%. And there are other psychological disorders, but there are studies that have proven that there is a link between PTSD and violence because of the low impulse control, and it depends on the level of PTSD, the severe ones versus mild or moderate ones. So yes, it is a factor.

Zareen Hussein: Dr. Lina, we've been talking a lot about what happens when there's a lack of resources. You, alongside the Intisar Foundation, you work a lot on drama therapy as a, not necessarily alternative to CBT or EMDR but a...

Lina Haddad Kreidie: An intervention, a group therapy intervention versus an individual-based intervention. Definitely, psychoanalysis or the couch psychoanalysis or the CBT or the EDMR can help. Some of them, they have to be within a short period of time. For example, with PTSD, if you don't really treat the person who witnessed aggression or who suffers from drama within a certain period of time, it's helpless. It does not help, psychoanalysis or CBT.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Drama therapy applies also for people where the witnessing of the event passed for some time, so it has an added value. And it is group therapy, which is one of the criteria also from reading the VA history, that social cohesion, social support, is very important. In the US, we know that they talk about it in the family, it's well reported, but in refugee camps they keep it a secret, they don't even know about it. So when they are suffering from a problem and they go to an NGO for help, they start becoming aware. They tell them, "Oh, you need counseling," or "You have depression," or "You could have the PTSD." And definitely the diagnosis is built only on clinical and not the other factors. So when we are using drama therapy, we are basing it on clinical analysis done by other NGOs and psychiatrists and psychologists. So it's an intervention approach that has its own value on its own, because it can happen after a long period of time. It doesn't have to be within this short period after the event itself.

Hannah Balikci: And I think it's an interesting point you've made about drama therapy and the group aspect of it. How has it made an impact within the refugee communities you worked in and how do you evaluate? If you're taking into drama therapy, how do you evaluate the pre and post impacts of it within the communities that you've worked in?

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Lina Haddad Kreidie: Drama therapy in itself is a very intensive program and the main purpose of this is to improve emotional awareness and self-awareness, to create a sense of belonging. Something that refugees, men and women, in our case, the women, have an identity crisis. In Lebanon, specifically, they are displaced. They're considered internally displaced because Lebanon is not a signatory to the refugee situation, and Lebanon and Syria have a kind of relationship of less borders. They go into this dilemma, so they needed a sense of belonging, and drama therapy tackles negative psychological symptoms, focusing on providing structured and sequential mental health intervention.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: And there is a five-phase model, the way we do the drama therapy. The first phase... Do you want me to explain? Okay, the first phase, which is a dramatic play. It allows the group to develop a rapport and to build trust among each other and the facilitator. We have a drama therapist. The same one goes for the 12 sessions because they build trust with the woman. During this phase, what happens is name games. They get to know each other, and they would say, "What do you want to call yourself?" So they give, other than the real name, how they see themselves. And then we try to bring the women—first, there's an individual meeting and then group meeting with everyone. And this game encourages participants to gradually build towards personal disclosure as they see and hear others in the group sharing their life details. There is one of the games that's called image, where smaller subgroups are tasked with using their bodies and working together to create a still image that presents a certain concept.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: For example, I mentioned the example of four, and they would do the image and they would stand still. And you would be the ones watching me, then you would imitate me. And there is a group who's not seeing but from what they are feeling, then they would do the same thing just from what they heard. And this is—we kind of train the memory from just using their sensories, like their hearing sense. And "What do you think?" So they would stand up and try to imagine what the people were doing, the other women were doing.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So it's a game of senses, the vision, the listening, and then trying to revive their memories and to use their collective memories in explaining what certain concepts mean, what certain situations mean. For example, we show them a picture of people moving as refugees from, let's say, from Ukraine, not the Syrian, and how would they see this? Do they see it as similar to their situation or is it different? So it's bringing the reality on the stage and how they respond to it. So this is the first phase. The second is the scene work where we use games to introduce the participants to theater techniques that help them better manage and understand their emotions. To express yourself, how can you do it better? How can you manage your emotions? How you can explore yourself when I say anger, when I say being happy, all those terms, how do you express it? Then we do certain forms of meditation and the breathing exercises, certain physical relaxation exercises.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Then comes the third phase, which is the role play, which encourages the use of imagination to distance oneself from their own issues, to gain a different perspective, play the role of someone else, and then to build more group solidarity and sense of community. And here comes also guided meditation is used to encourage the participants to discover areas of themselves that they do not speak about or acknowledge openly. And here we have more advanced games like the life map, typically used where one participant uses the space within the room to map out her life in a monologue style, highlighting the life-defining events that she experienced. This exercise is performed while the rest of the group seated in an audience formation as witnesses, which introduces the participant to the idea of exposing more personal

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aspects of her life to others, so this kind of exercise. The fourth phase, which is culminating enactments, uses previously developed skills such as personal insight, memory, recollection, and trust in the group to give the participant a safe space to openly express their personal issues and experiences. And this is where the play comes and how they act their experiences.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Which takes us to that dramatic ritual, either by singing... There is Fairuz, in Lebanon, a very well-known singer, and her songs come from themes. So we use the theme of her song, and we give them different songs and then we ask them, "Which one would you choose?" And interesting that they choose the ones that after we have looked at them and analyzed, we think that this is the song that would fit or this kind of group game that would fit, and they would choose the same one. So after this song time then we kind of create a play or a collection of vignettes.

Zareen Hussein: Dr. Lina, I think it's really interesting that you bring up Fairuz, who is such a famous singer in the Middle East and originally from Beirut. Which leads me to ask, when you're doing drama therapy in the five phases, how important is it to consider cultural context and cultural nuances? Because in America, mental health is getting more and more recognized day by day, but still a long way to go, whereas in some countries it's nonexistent. So using Lebanon as an example, can you talk to us more about the controlled context that's considered while treating people with drama therapy?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Yes, I think this is very important. Drama therapists that do the work are trained using books that come from the western world so-

Zareen Hussein: In Western, in America?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: American, European. There are more European works on drama therapy and art therapy. So this is one aspect of it. Then they have to take this and customize it to really fit the group of women they are helping. And believe it or not, it's not only about the Arab culture or the Islamic culture or the patriarchic system in that part of the world, although there is this big umbrella of such a culture. But doing drama therapy in Chatila camp is different than doing drama therapy in the north in Tripoli, in Akkar, or doing drama therapy in a town in the mountains.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: They have based on different religious backgrounds and sectarian backgrounds and ethnic backgrounds and different socioeconomic needs. So we customize to that level and this customization does not happen before, it happens after we meet the woman. We do the biographic background and listen a bit to them. And of course, the drama therapists who are doing the work are from Lebanon and they know the cultures and they work in theaters and they do playbacks. They are highly involved in aspects of coexistence and helping resolve conflicts, so they are experts on this. So yes, definitely, the cultural nuances are very important. We cannot parachute norms, values, ways of dealing with people.

Hannah Balikci: Going through the different cultural differences within Lebanon itself points us to the fact that Lebanon currently hosts the largest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometer in the world, currently estimated at 1.5 million Syrian refugees and around 300,000 Palestinian refugees, if I'm correct. Do you have any insights, or I think, could you go through just the general background of the camp that you were working in with drama therapy and the different populations you were working with and similarly to the cultural questions, how the camps...

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Lina Haddad Kreidie: Culture?

Hannah Balikci: Yeah. Could you go through how, within the camps, the cultures of the different communities that are living there coexist and how drama therapy has impacted the communities?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: I think this is an excellent question. I mentioned that there are different ethnographic cultural differences within Lebanon, based on the geographical location, based on the class level or sectarian or religious background. The camp is a small area, let's say Chatila camp, because we did another camp. Chatila camp hosts Syrian, Palestinian refugees. Palestinian refugees are as old as 1948. Syrian refugees started to come to Lebanon in 2012. And Lebanese who are below subsistence level, who have no ability to rent or buy outside the camp, and they usually go and live anywhere. It's not that you have to pay. In addition, all those who are running from justice or criminals who hide in the camp because they get the protection there. Nobody would come, the police, no one will go in to take them. So it's not secure place. But all those challenges, all those, I would say traumas, live together in this community. So how to deal with that culture.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: The first study we did, we on purpose chose only Syrian refugees. Then in the second group we have second Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese women. The first phase when we met them individually, they would talk about their life, their situation in the camp and each would blame the other. So they were blaming each other. "They took my space and this is where we live..." The Palestinians talking about the Syrians and the Syrians saying that the Palestinians hate us and then the Lebanese say, "This is our land." All of this was happening.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So the challenge was putting them together and creating a common space for people of different perceptions, different fears. They have traumas, violence, displacement, etc., etc. But they all have comparing themselves to the outside world in the sense of outside the camp. So we started telling them, "You have similar situation." And then we would shed light on their humanity and on their needs. So we bring them together on that factor and then they start feeling comfortable and this becomes a safe space. And at some point, we allow them to tell the other why they hate them, to speak openly about that, and this creates tension. But then they started laughing at this situation. "How come we all have the same problems? You have the same problems with kids. I have the same problems with my husband and with the Lebanese people," and so on. So they started taking it with more manageable way, and it created friendships and trust. And this is where we would like to follow up on this later on after we finish the sessions. We don't want this to be stopped there.

Hannah Balikci: Great. It sounds very cathartic, especially for women. It's like going through, as you were going through with the five phases, women unpacking trauma, especially older women have more trauma, we know.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Yes.

Hannah Balikci: Did you find that between the ages of the women that you were working with that it was more impactful for, say, older women versus younger women or the ranges that you were working with?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: In the first two studies, we noticed, based on observation, that young women tend to be easier and faster in responding to our goals. However, the study that we are doing now to compare

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different groups and to compare different age groups to see the significance of the change pre and post the therapy. Sometimes young people can make it a fun thing and dancing and playing games and maybe at the end the impact is not that high. But while older women, when they are so impacted, a 20% change might be a relief, might be a positive, might be more significant. So this is the psychometric analysis we're doing now to see the pre and post change, based on the age and different demographics.

Zareen Hussein: Dr. Lina, this week you're at University of Chicago as part of the Pearson Global Forum, a day-long conference at the university on discrimination and marginalization. You're speaking on a panel focused on the past few years, addressing the crisis that is going on in Lebanon. Firstly, could you give us some contextual information? So for those who don't know, what has been happening in Lebanon over the past years, and then what are you going to be speaking at the Pearson Forum?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Lebanon, you said the past few years, but I could go back to the days of the inception of what's called the Nation State of Lebanon. Since its inception in 1943, Lebanon was created on the wrong foot, meaning the different religious groups were not taken into consideration in a way where they would come together as a nation. And it was done by the French for Lebanon. So the Lebanese elites and the Lebanese people were not involved in the Sykes-Picot agreement, and they did not sit at the table. It was decided upon them, with the context that we need to protect the Christians in Lebanon because the Christians in Lebanon represent the Eastern Christians and Lebanon is the symbol for that.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: And the Maronites were good collaborators with the French, so give them some benefits, while the rest would be added to the system. So by having such a confessional start, they called it consociational democracy. They thought we are in Belgium, but it's not because it only divided the political representation and among the elites of the Lebanese, so the elite Maronites, elite Sunni, elite Shia, elite Roman Orthodox, the Jews. So it did not take into consideration how this could circle from the top elite to the people.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: And so the elites took over in building the relationship with the people. So the relationship was the clientele system. Each felt that there's a threat from the other sect. So they need to collaborate to create an equation where they politically can work together. And they all had, they were on the verge of "If I don't protect my sect..." but actually they were protecting their own self-interest to stay in power, "then someone will take over."

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So this inequality between the different sects, mainly between, let's say, all Muslims and all Christians, was more obvious when the Palestinians came to Lebanon and they were allowed in to form a military movement, with the Arabs accepting this, with the Americans and the Europeans saying okay, not explicitly saying but implicit, by not saying no. So the Palestinians formed the Palestinian Liberation Organization in Lebanon, and they started their mission of fighting Israel from Lebanon. At the same time, the Lebanese government did not give the Palestinians who came to Lebanon their rights as human beings. They only dealt with them as refugees who have a cause for right of return.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So if you give them citizenship, if you give them work permits, if you give them all those aspects, they wouldn't go back. So this will take away from the cause. This led to marginalization. This is the Palestinians. It led to the Civil War. This is a factor. The inequality between the different Lebanese sects, the poverty, the elites were in power were rich, the rest were poor. So we have a recipe of a civil war,

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and this is what happened during the Civil War. So when the Civil War ended, to solve this problem, they managed this problem by keeping the same war lords in power and creating a new agreement called the Taif Accord, which they said, “Equal representation between the different sects in the government,” but the president is Maronite, the prime minister is Sunni, the Speaker of the House is Shia, so a confessional system... saying in the Taif Accord, “But we need to abolish the confessional system, gradually.”

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Never happened, because managing the problem with the same people who were the warlords stayed in power. They have no interest in changing the system that makes them superior to the people under them, the constituencies. “I’m protecting our sect.” You know, now every time a politician is blamed of corruption, if he’s Maronite, the patriarch will come out say, “He’s a red light. You cannot touch this person.” If he’s as Sunni, the Grand Mufti of the Sunnis will say, “No, this is our...” So you cannot reach them because of the fear aspect that’s present and the people would come and stand by them because—

Zareen Hussein: Tribalism, almost.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Exactly, it’s like tribalism, but based on this confessional sectarian fear. This is where political psychology comes. So every time the problem is managed, it’s managed in a wrong way, by keeping the confessional system, by maintaining the corruption system where the elites use their dirty games by saying, “I’m helping my community,” but at the same time, they’re actually stealing the money. They’re using victimization and fear to promote their own interests rather than the public interest. Same applies for those political elite, they not only rule in the public space, but they also own banks. They have shares in the banks, they have shares in every big business where the public benefits from. Because in Lebanon the electricity is public, the water provision is public. There’s a social security system, of course, that is definitely government. But this social security system is also very discriminatory because you only provide social security to people who are employed. So I am employed, I pay, I get social security.

Zareen Hussein: And I imagine that excludes the refugees.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Exactly. It excludes refugees, it excludes people who work in private businesses. Because of that corruption, there is avoidance of paying taxes, so you don’t pay social security. And if I have a private business, I hire people for three months, I fire them, I rehire them, so I don’t pay social security fees. See? So there is this culture of corruption that’s adding to marginalization and to setting the foundation of conflict and instability and fragility of the government and the country.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So even when Rafic Hariri, late prime minister, came to Lebanon to save Lebanon, to reconstruct Lebanon, also he reconstructed Lebanon on a wrong basis because he turned Lebanon into a corporation. Many people owned property in the downtown area that was completely destroyed during the war. And he built a beautiful facade, beautiful buildings, and roads, but the Lebanese people cannot afford to live there anymore and to even go to a restaurant there. So it’s not for the Lebanese, it’s for the image of Rafic Hariri and the elite in Lebanon. And it was mainly personified in him and in his entourage. So some actually called his work as effective corruption, which is still, but you’re feeding the people at the same time. It’s not Robin Hood because he made so much money out of—

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Yeah, he just made so much money out of it. And that, the Lebanese government, 100 times more than it used to be before.

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Zareen Hussein: It's almost as if the twisted assumption of what people think socialism is.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Exactly.

Hannah Balikci: Given the current situation in Lebanon, we also wanted to give you the chance to share briefly about both your fears and hopes for the country. What is the biggest challenge and fear at this point, and what is your biggest hope?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Okay. Definitely, Lebanon is in almost a failed state. The only foundation that's kept in Lebanon is the military. Lebanon was based on the banking sector, the tourism sector, the health sector, the educational sector. The educational sector is losing a lot. The banking sector is down. The health system is unable to provide for the people, only the military. So there is hope in keeping the military standing, although there is a lot of dissatisfaction among the soldiers and the people in the military because their salaries, if they used to get paid five million, five million was around \$3,000. Now it's \$125. And the prices in Lebanon are international because we are not a country of industry. We are a country of services. And if you don't produce, you buy everything. We import most of the products, so they are poor.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: There are some external supports. The US supports them, literally just to keep them standing. So we need to build on this. But at the same time, the banking sector, the IMF is highly involved in putting conditions on the same political elite to reform the country before any loan can be given to the country. And I have a problem with those two. First, the political elite have no interest in reforming something that threatens their power. Two, I have no hope that a new liberal system that takes away the support of the government and by making people pay more taxes to be able to pay back the loans will really help.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Because we have many examples of where the IMF came up with solutions for underdeveloped countries or countries in conflicts that really flourished. So actually, it maintains the status quo of poverty and just live and let others live in a way, just barely minimal. I have hope in the Lebanese people that are trying to manage their everyday life. I know that everyone... there is a few who have abilities, who have the fresh, what we call the fresh dollar, the money that comes from abroad versus the dollars that were put in the banks before 2019 and are stuck in the banks, because the banks loaned them to the government, the government went bankrupt, so there's no money to give back to the people.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So there is a bubble. There's something happening on the bottom of the country where people are managing their situation. So what they need is external support, not the way it's being conditioned. Because even with their power to adapt and build, they still live in this culture of corruption. So they're survival of the fittest. It's the law of the jungle, survival of the fittest. This is what's happening in Lebanon. So to create a new system where what people are doing becomes institutionalized in good governance.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: We need new policies, we need new political establishment to say, call it establishment. We had hope in the 2022 elections to have a change. But it seems that the fear of each other made many of the people who went to the revolution... we thought that this would be the change. And it failed drastically with very minimal... I would say changes only from a woman's perspective. Because women became more seen and their issues became more on the table, to be discussed. They're still on the menu, but women are not sitting at the table to make decisions.

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Zareen Hussein: Not yet.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Not yet. No, not yet. Even now we have many women ran for candidacy, but they did not make it because they need the financial abilities, they need networking and so on. So not to delve into this, there is hope in the people. There is hope in the Lebanese expats. There has been a major exodus of highly educated Lebanese people who still have hope to send back money and help Lebanon. But this is not enough. We need more institutionalization of good governance from the bottom up.

Zareen Hussein: And just a background for American listeners: Dearborn, Michigan is the highest concentration of Lebanese expats and diaspora outside of Lebanon.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Yes.

Zareen Hussein: So their work connects back to Lebanon country.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Yes, yes. A lot. Many of the Lebanese, not only in Dearborn. There are 12 million Lebanese expats all over the world. In the US, I don't know how many, I don't know the number, but there's a good number of Lebanese who actually send money to their families. After September 11, this became less so because of the fear of money transfer.

Zareen Hussein: Of course.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: And, "Oh, you're sending to Lebanon. Who are you sending to?"

Zareen Hussein: Of course.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: So there was those restrictions, but still family support more than big money that's coming in. But what we need is our projects... first of all to get those political elites in power out. It's time. It's time.

Zareen Hussein: It's time. It's been 80 years?

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Yeah.

Zareen Hussein: It's time for an overthrow.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: It's enough. Yeah, exactly. The same warlords, the same families, little change, but still, as if you go into the swamp and you become part of this culture.

Zareen Hussein: Thank you, Dr. Lina.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Thank you.

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Zareen Hussein: It's been insightful, impactful, and as women in the public policy sphere working on conflict and refugees and just two days ago was World Mental Health Day.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Yes. Monday. Yep.

Zareen Hussein: The intersection has been profound. Thank you so much.

Lina Haddad Kreidie: Thank you.

Zareen Hussein: I'm Zareen Hussein.

Hannah Balikci: I'm Hanna Balikci.

Zareen Hussein: And thank you, Dr. Lina Haddad Kreidie.

Reema Saleh: Thank you for listening to this episode of Root of Conflict, featuring Lena Haddad Kreidie. This episode was produced and edited by Reema Saleh and Ricardo Sande. Thank you to our interviewers, Hannah Balikci and Zareen Hussein. Special thanks to UC3P and the Pearson Institute for their continued support of this series. For more information on the Pearson Institute's research and events, visit the Pearsoninstitute.org and follow them on Twitter.