

REGIONAL REVIEWS

Massachusetts

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RANIA MATAR: A FORGOTTEN POPULATION



Rania Matar, *Slippers*, Mar Elias Refugee Camp, Beirut, Lebanon, 2003.

During numerous trips to Lebanon, Rania Matar documented Palestinians living in several Lebanese refugee camps. Her collective photographic work, *A Forgotten Population*, constructs the vitality of these displaced people. Youth and old age, sun and shadows, are juxtaposed in black-and-white imagery. From scenes of everyday life and activities—children laughing, elderly men playing cards, women huddled together gossiping—bursts the dynamism of hope thriving amidst desolation.

The *Generations* series touches upon concepts of history and the present, what seems to be and what actually exists. *Ghost Girl* depicts an elderly man and woman with a young girl standing between them. The shutter speed has captured the girl as an ethereal vision of the elders' own youth passing between them, unfocused but present. Age differences work together—in the camps and in the photographs—to define the refugees' viewpoints, the joys of the past brought to the present by the elders and learned by the children. Memories of a true home breathe life into the future.

In *Slippers*, a young boy looks out from a stairwell landing of wrought-iron balcony gates and crumbling walls. White sunlight glows over an abandoned pair of sandals at the bottom of the stairs. Conviction is drawn into the foreground, pulled out of the alley's shadows; the image communicates a larger, unified message enhanced by the documentary whole: hope is not abandoned. The boy waits to continue his journey: up the stairs, through life, charged by patience and solid faith instilled by his elders.

The political posters and spray-painted graffiti provide a mere backdrop for the larger design of human perseverance. Matar captures the physical reality of the situation—the peeling paint, the desolate alleyways, the poverty—while manifesting the invisible. The viewer, like Matar, stands on the edge of this world, residing in the shadows. *Jenni T. Williamson*