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# THE picture SHOW

## From Boston To Beirut: A Girl And Her Room

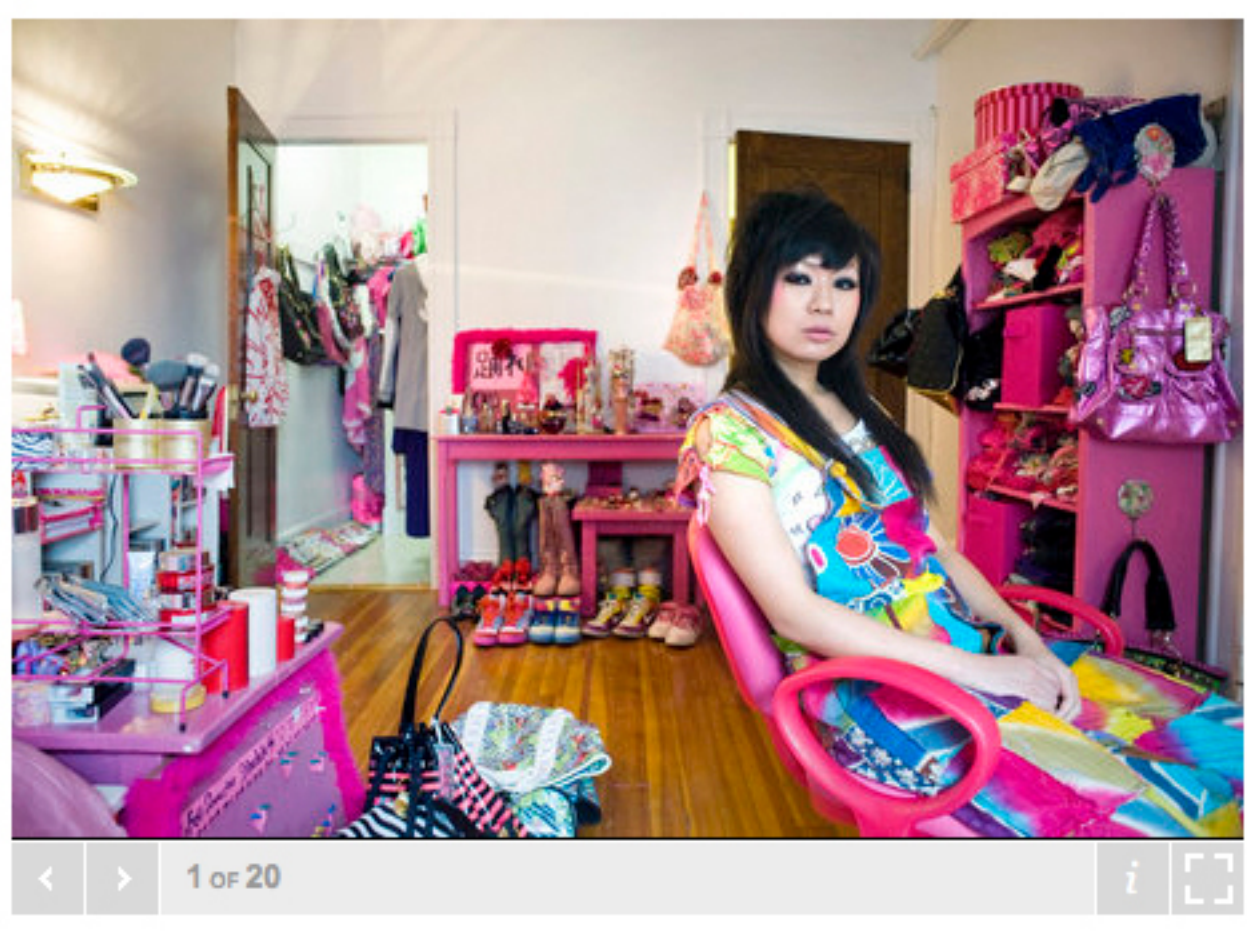
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by CLAUDE O'NEILL

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Rania Matar

If you want to know something about a teenage girl, start by studying her interior decorating choices.

"This is her private space where she can be herself," says Rania Matar over the phone. The photographer, who has two teenage girls herself, would know. She's spent the past few years working on her new book, *A Girl and Her Room* — documenting rooms around Boston, where she lives now, and Lebanon, where she spent her teenage years.

"People tend to look at the differences, but for me it was really about the similarities," Matar says. "This is Lebanon, and nobody would guess that," she says, referring to a blond Christilla, posing suggestively in her hot pink room — practically a reincarnation of the Marilyn Monroe poster that hangs behind her.



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Christilla, Rabieh, Lebanon

Rania Matar

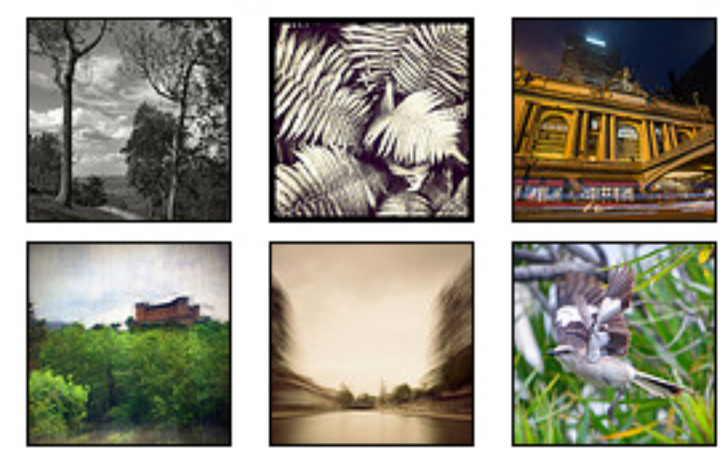
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Matar recalls her teenage bedroom: orange paint, posters of French singer Johnny Hallyday, "stuff all over the walls," she says. One difference between her room and her Boston-raised daughters' was that Matar used to collect bullets and shrapnel.

"I grew up during the war," she says, referring to the years of civil strife that raged in Lebanon, "but I still had happy teenage years in some strange ways."

Many of Matar's photos from Lebanon were taken in refugee camps, and though the differences are obvious, the similarities really are striking. One photo shows a girl named Amal, at Shatila Refugee Camp in Beirut. She's in a hijab, but that doesn't say much. The Hannah Montana T-shirt and stickers obscure the lines between Massachusetts and Middle East.



Rania Matar

Amal, Shatila Refugee Camp, Beirut, Lebanon, 2010

The thing is: Although Lebanon, in many of these photos, could pass for the States, you probably won't find yourself thinking the inverse — that a Boston bedroom looks like Beirut.

But Matar doesn't lament what seems an undeniable "Westernization" of Lebanese teens. If anything, she celebrates the fact that girls will be girls no matter where they live.

Ideally, at a certain age, we grow more comfortable with who we are, and stop projecting who we want to be on walls and graphic T-shirts. But at that age, Matar says, "girls are very vulnerable ... even when they pretend not to be. They're trying to find who they are."



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