

IMPORT/EXPORT

GAINING FOCUS

A nation's turmoil hits home for Brookline photog Rania Matar.

BY EVA MEDOFF

GROWING UP IN A SHELTERED, Americanized household in 1970s Lebanon, Rania Matar knew little of the civil war raging outside, or even of the refugee camps located less than 10 minutes from her home. At age 20 she moved to the United States, eventually becoming a respected photographer whose work would earn a place in galleries from Cambridge to St. Petersburg. But three years ago, this longtime Brookline resident found herself face to face with the darker side of her birthplace—violence erupted as she and her children were on vacation there—and was struck by a powerful inspiration. “As soon as I knew we were safe, the first thing I did was reach for my camera and photograph women fleeing on a truck,” she remembers. “I felt alive; I wanted to photograph.” That moment led to Matar’s first book of photography, *Ordinary Lives*, published this month by Quantuck Lane Press. It’s filled with haunting black-and-white images of Lebanon’s people—children playing in the shell of a blown-out building, an old woman rummaging through rubble, a girl dressing herself in a shattered mirror—all part of a singular quest to, as Matar puts it, “discover the Lebanon I did not know.”



PHOTOGRAPH BY JEAN ABUHAMAD