

INVISIBLE CHILDREN



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Tamer, 6, Beirut 2015

ARTIST STATEMENT

Lebanon is a country of roughly four million people, and it now has more than one and a half million Syrian refugees. Hampered by a weak economy and domestic political tensions, Lebanon is finding it hard to cope with the large influx of refugees inside its borders. The presence of so many refugees is creating increased internal tensions and divisions within the already fragile country, making the humanitarian crisis even more difficult to resolve.

We hear the news about the plights of huge numbers of Syrian refugees, but rarely do we take the time to look at each one of the refugees as a person—an individual with an identity.

When I was in Beirut in July and August of 2014, I was struck by the poignancy of Syrian refugee children and teens standing at every other street corner, most often begging for money but sometimes selling red roses or miscellaneous trinkets or carrying beat-up shoe shining equipment. They all said they were “working.” Every morning, they were brought by the truckload, dropped off on the streets, and expected to bring money back at the end of the day. Most people walked or drove past these children without much notice, seemingly indifferent to them. Or perhaps they were fed-up with their cosmopolitan streets being flooded with begging kids and frustrated by the impact that the influx of refugees has had on Lebanon’s economy more broadly.

As a mother, I was truly moved by the children, the teenagers, and the young mothers. I was and remain struck by the fact that these people had become nearly faceless and almost invisible to the locals. The kids and teens seemed to blend with the graffiti on the walls in front of which they were standing as if they were an additional layer of ripped billboard advertising. They seem to have been rendered transparent and invisible, becoming an anonymous part of the history of the area like the walls behind them.

The masses and the media simply call them “the refugees.” The group identity seemed to define them more than their individual humanity. In photographing them—in giving them a platform to be seen—I tried to capture the faces, individuality, humanity, and dignity of these children who have been made invisible.



Lina, 14, Beirut 2014



Wall Detail #3, Beirut 2014



Reem, 11, Beirut 2014

BEIRUT, LEBANON



Khaled, 15, Beirut 2015



Yasmine, 13, Beirut 2014



Imane, 10, Beirut 2014



Ziad, 8, Beirut 2014

Photographs by Rania Matar // INSTITUTE



Wall Detail #5, Beirut 2014



Amal, 9, Zahra, 5 (girl in the mirror), Beirut 2014



Little Brothers, Beirut 2014



Hassan, 15, Beirut 2014