## BETWEEN HOME AND HOMELAND

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ike many first-generation can and sophomore Ranim my peers, whose families had live in the Middle East in midand often lived a quick drive gan to realize how unique her away. My favorite memories identity was. By understandare my family trips to Turkey ing her ancestral connection and Syria: visiting my par- to another region, Ranim beents' childhood homes, being gan wondering what life there embraced by their communi- was like, wishing she could reties, and seeing where my an- late to the stories of her family cestors lived for hundreds of in Palestine. To Ranim, Palesyears. My mother always says tine carried a sense of home. she feels lighter once she ar- and though she also views rives in Turkey, and the more America as home, it lacks an I travel to Turkey, the better I integral part of her identity. understand this sentiment. As We bonded over facing disgraduation draws closer and I crimination despite techniconsider different career and cally being considered white life paths, I find myself pulled and—due to the recency of back to the Middle East, our diaspora—the absence of Speaking to my Arab-Amer- cultural channels as robust as ican friends, I learned that other minorities'. With simmany of us feel this attrac- pler lifestyles, shared customs, tion, even though most of our and a connection to the land, parents worked tirelessly to Ranim said she wants to "live escape the region's mass in- there long enough to expeequality, corruption, and in-rience the life my ancestors stability. Why do we want to have lived." go back?

this desire in others, I inter- dle East was revived by her viewed fellow Arab-Ameri- trip to Istanbul, Turkey, last

Americans, the overarch- Albarakawi, whose family is ing theme of my child- from Burga and Tulkarem, hood and adolescence Palestine. She shared that she was a sense of difference from first remembers wanting to long histories in America dle school, when she first be-

Ranim explained that her To get a clearer sense of aspiration for a life in the Mid-

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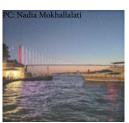


"Talways
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summer. She found that Turkey's lifestyle embodied both the American and the Arab. ty being connected."

does not envision this as a per- a different nation. manent move. When I asked



sider when living in America. reer; given the existing widespread corruption and weak governmental institutions in cannot make a difference.

few international students the other hand, as a scholwith a healthy balance of time who were born and raised in ar and activist of the Middle at work and with friends and the Middle East, they echoed East, I worry for its future, family. Ranim also enjoyed Ranim's fear of settling down as wars and conflicts force its being in a Muslim-majori- in their home countries and brightest minds into displacety country that incorporated lamented the dearth of op- ment and exile. It can be esreligion into daily life, with portunities. Elie El-Kefraoui, pecially painful to see the dismosques at each corner, the a sophomore from Lebanon, array of the Middle East and adhan (Islamic call to prayer) noted that as Arab-Ameri- continued suffering of its peoprojected on loudspeakers, cans, we "don't realize the freeand halal meat available ev- dom, power, and privilege" erywhere. Overall, she loved of our American passports; my privilege. The opportunity seeing a modern, open Mus- however, he warned that while of experiencing two countries lim society, and said that she moving between the U.S. and felt the "pieces of [her] identithe Middle East may be easier war between regions. as an Arab-American, it is still Though Ranim hopes to both emotionally and logislive in the Middle East some- tically difficult to move once time in the near future, she roots have been established in

Like Ranim, sophomore about her key concerns in Zaid Tabaza, born and raised long-term relocation, Ranim in Jordan, wants to build a emphasized her fear of polit- better future for his country. "I ical and economic instability, feel like I can do more to supwhich she rarely has to con- port [Jordan] if I'm not actual-

ly living [there]," he explained. Just as other Arabs who have lived in the Middle East, Zaid raised concerns about limited opportunities within Jordan, hoping to explore chances for success beyond his country to better advocate for his home.

I still hope to live in the Middle East after graduation so that I can experience the Regardless, Ranim hopes to culture, lifestyle, and cities of help improve daily life in the my family and ancestors. My Middle East as part of her carecent visits to Turkey and memories of pre-war Syria carry me between trips, but I always find myself homesick her home country that are for a place that has never been products of Western imperi- my "home." That being said, I alism and intrusion, however, worry that my dream is based she fears her individual voice on a romanticized vision of the Middle East rooted in When I interviewed a summertime memories. On ple, including my own family, while pondering the cost of comes with an eternal tug-of-

