

Title slide: "Razan Kanjo Presents: The Home That Was Once My Country

My father Zouheir Kanjo came to the United States in the year 1967, viewing it as a land of opportunity. For my father, the "American Dream" meant achieving financial success through working hard and finding a stable prosperous job. He absolutely knew no one in New York let alone America. I myself was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1996 and I came to the United States in the year 2000.

Honestly being born in Syria yet moving to the United States at the age of four has given me the best of both worlds. I know for sure that I am very lucky. I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to spend my summers in Syria because it really helped me comprehend and recognize the hardships and sufferings of what my family and friends have to go through. But yet America has provided me with the ability to perceive things that I may not have been able to witness in Syria.

My peers may see headlines such as "America will take in 15,000 Syrian refugees," but I comprehend directly where they're coming from and why they are coming in the first place. No doubt the conditions and situations today are much more different than when my dad left Aleppo in 1967 or when my mother and I came in 2000. But reflecting on it, that could have honestly been my family trapped in the conflict and trying to not only escape but live.

Upon arriving to America in the year 2000, being Syrian did not really have a blockade or obstacle to becoming an American. Since the war has begun, I always question myself why my family? Was it unintentional or was it simply fate? Back in 2000, I simply boarded the flight with my family with our visas in one hand and our flight itineraries in the other. We certainly did not have to pile on top of one another on rafts in the Mediterranean Sea and we also didn't have to forge passports and id's. I have come to a realization that I should truly be aware of my luck.

Syria is home and it will always be home. It has been seven long years that wherever I voyage and travel in this world, I still try to clasp a glimpse of home. The melody of my relatives laughing, the scent of jasmine, the taste of my grandmother's food, the way our neighborhood looks, and the warmth and comfort of our house. I am never not seeking home and I will never give up the dream of returning to my homeland. It is just heartbreaking and tragic that nowadays, my family and friends are not only insulted and banned, but they are criticized

throughout all parts of the globe.