

Asma Ali

I love America, I really do.

She has given me opportunities I would have never imagined in any other country. She has provided me with a home that was safe from wars and dictatorships. She has allowed me to grow up with religious freedom and the chance to express myself. She has given me an education that allowed me to rise to my fullest potential.

I love her people, her lands, and her culture. Her people welcomed me with open arms, her lands gave me a new home, and her culture allowed me to find my identity. I ran to her open arms, because she was what my mother country was not. I call her my home, because I was forced to find another. I found my identity and my name, because she asked me for them.

My name is student, Muslim women, hijabi. My name is Arab-American. But at the airport my name is random search. And in the hallways, my name is terrorist, towelhead, and oppressed. On the news, my name is jihadi, suspect, and radical.

My name reflects who I am, my culture, my family history, my morals and my declaration. America has painted me with a broad brush, missing the crooks and crannies that make the art so intricately beautiful and diverse.

When America doesn't ask me for my name, she neglects my identity. How she names me shows me her fear. She confined certain names with certain depictions. Wrongfully including some and excluding others.

Her dreams, values, and principles are what lured me to her beauty. She enticed me with her freedom. She baited me with the stripes on her dress. Her red stripes proclaimed the fearless courage and integrity of American fathers and sons, and the self-sacrifice and devotion of American mothers and daughters. Her white stripes stood for equality and liberty for all. Her blue of heaven, loyalty, and faith.

But it was all an image. She was the siren; I was the sailor. Her immense and ethereal beauty led me to her. She bewitched me with her beautiful song that spoke of a life that seemed surreal. Transfixed, I wanted to dive into her world and leave everything behind. But when I got close to her and became involved in her affairs and in her system, I realized she was not what I thought she was. She was not perfect, she was flawed. When met with the harsh reality, I realized that the life she had sung of, were all lies.

She did not uphold the values upon which she was founded on. She used the evils of media to portray a picture filled with hate and ignorance. She allowed for the rise of a political climate that plays on fear and islamophobia. She seemed welcoming yet turned her back on me when I gave her my name.

She tells me that she does not accept me for I was not born on her soil, but what she doesn't know is that my country is not where my grandfather was buried, but where my grandchildren are raised.

I see myself as an American. But she does not. I listened to her name; I just wish America listened to me when I told her how to pronounce mine. I wish America had paid attention and not assigned me her own name. A name that doesn't represent my culture, my family history, my morals and my declaration. I love America, I really do, I just wish she loved me too.