

AMANI NASSAR

The Palestinian Boricua

Coming from such a diverse background of being Palestinian and Puerto Rican, I have gotten a lot of mixed reactions from people when I tell them about my background. Some would be shocked and ask “how did that happen?” Others would say something like “wow, that’s an amazing combination” and occasionally I get a “you foreign Amani” from my friends. One reaction in particular that I never liked getting was when people would ask if I was a Muslim or a Catholic.

Religion can be a sensitive topic to discuss for some people, and for me this question made me feel rather uncomfortable for the simple fact that I felt as though I had to choose one religion over the other. If I were to say I was a Muslim people would question why I never wore a hijab. If I were to say I was a Catholic, people would ask why I did not attend church regularly or ask me something about the Bible, all of which I would not have an answer to. I had never put much thought into my religious nature or upbringing. In my household, religion was never really a huge topic of discussion, no one was judged for believing in what they believed in or how they chose to believe. My parents never forced religion on me, they had always left it up to me to choose any religion I wanted or even no religion at all.

My mother was brought up as a Catholic from a young age, attending every now and then. My father was a devoted Muslim, born and raised in Israel, later coming to the United States. Typically, most Palestinian men have children with women within their religion, but since my mother is a Catholic my father was actually able to marry my mother and have children together. Even without knowing much about religion, one could assume that being a Muslim is

Carrie Hall 2/22/19 8:09 PM

Comment: I love the sentiment of this. I think you can rephrase things to make it sound a little more straightforward (and maybe add a little mystery:) Sometimes when I tell people about my background, they're shocked and ask, "how did that happen?" or sometimes they say, "that's an amazing combination." Occasionally, I get a "you foreign Amani from my friends..." It's a simple change, but it sounds a little more direct. Then, in the next paragraph, you can say, "See, I'm Palestinian and Puerto Rican—and for some reason people want to know what religion that makes me. But I don't want to choose one or the other." Of course, you can phrase it differently, but phrases like "some would be shocked" sound a little strange, like you're trying to be more formal than you are!

Carrie Hall 2/22/19 8:09 PM

Comment: Church

Carrie Hall 2/22/19 8:10 PM

Comment: This doesn't actually explain! I think in some families this would not go over well! Can you tell us more?

quite different from being a Catholic. They have different places of worship, different names for their God, different scriptures, different ways of praying, and all around many different practices for fulfilling their religious duty. I felt like I had a confliction of religions that seemed to be more different than alike.

Carrie Hall 2/22/19 8:11 PM

Comment: While you might not be super schooled on these religions, do you think you can give us some concrete details of what you DO know? See note.

I grew up in my Puerto Rican household with my mom, brother, abuela, and my father once upon a time. All of my life I only knew about my Puerto Rican roots, the food, the music, the Spanish language, and of course the people. All of my family functions consisted of the *boricuas* (another name for Puerto Ricans) on my mother's side. Any birthday I ever had, was attended by only my Puerto Rican family. I celebrated, and still do celebrate holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, which Muslims do not celebrate. I do not fast or celebrate Eid and I do not pray 5 times a day, but one thing I do follow as many other Muslims do, is not eating pork. Although I did not follow many of the Islamic practices my brother, who is fully Puerto Rican, actually adopted to the practices of Islam and converted to become a Muslim because of his interest and liking to the religion, he grew fonder of the religion and found a new appreciation for it.

My name often times grabs many people's attention too. Amani is an Arabic inspired name meaning desire or wishes. Nassar is also an Arabic name meaning helper, protector or victory. I've had people who are from a middle eastern descent ask if I was also from a middle eastern descent. There has been instances where my teachers would even ask me where I was from after reading my name off of the attendance sheet and seeing what I looked like. I remember sitting in 9th grade English class one day having a discussion about Hinduism as a collective group. My teacher had made a comment about Indians, then out of nowhere looked at me and said "no offense to you." I didn't know how to take that comment. One part of me felt disrespected for

being singled out like that and on top of that being categorized for someone who I was not based on an assumption of what I looked like. On the other hand I thought it may have been just a honest comment that wasn't intended to offend me, which made me decide to take the comment as an emphasis on my Palestinian side being noticeable from the outside.

Carrie Hall 2/22/19 8:12 PM

Comment: Although Palestinians aren't Hindu, so it was really a weird thing for him to say!

Everyday is a new learning experience for me when it comes to my cultures. From my first semester of English class, I have learned new things about the Muslim beliefs from classmates writings and discussions of practices. My brother even talks to me about Islam and the meaning behind certain things in the religion like the people and the names of parts of Israel. Being mixed is something that I have always embraced and will continue to embrace. I love everything my cultures have offered me from my thick curly hair to thick eyebrows and even my effortless Spanish tongue. Although I do not know much about my Palestinian culture or family, it is something I plan to indulge in as time progresses. I want to learn Arabic, I want to know more about my family, and I even want to read the Quran.

Carrie Hall 2/22/19 8:12 PM

Comment: Again, can you get specific?

