

**Hanaa Hijazi**

## **DO YOU LOOK LIKE YOUR NAME?**

*What's in a name? That which we call a rose*

*By any other name would smell as sweet;*

That what Juliet – or actually Shakespeare, using Juliet's voice— said about names. The Arab poet, Joseph Harb, said something similar: "Our names, how did our families choose them for us, what did they think of us. Names are words. What's in words. Our eyes are our names. How they look are our names". But there is also an Arabic adage that says that everyone resembles his or her name.

Well, my name is Hanaa. I have no trouble when I mention it to anyone, it seems it's an international name, one that crosses cultural boundaries.

In Arabic, Hanaa means happiness. My friend Kyoko, a Japanese writer, tells me that in Japanese Hana is a flower. It's a popular name in Japan. And I wonder now, is that why I smile all the time, trying to spread happiness around me? Is it to resemble my name? Or would I still be smiling if I had another name? And does that mean I'll smell good in Japan or look pretty as a flower? I guess I'll never know.

But it's not my first name that made me decide to talk about names, it's my last name. I have two last names. I publish my work under one. The other one is for my 'official' work and all the other things in my life that aren't related to writing.

Hijazi is not my real name, and it's not totally fake either. My father was a famous soccer player in his youth, and he was known by this name. That's partly why I choose to use this name instead of the one on my ID card.

My other, official name belongs to a big tribe, a huge one. In Saudi Arabia, my tribe is known to be very conservative. I wanted to escape the name, I didn't want anything to do with them in my writing. I didn't want them to interfere with my work, or to say how dare she write in this rebellious way? And I didn't want them to feel proud because a member of the clan was writing in this way. I wanted to make what Shakespeare said true for me. My tribe members had nothing to do with me, they didn't make me. My great grandfather migrated from their area a long time ago and I don't really know them or their traditions very well. That was my thinking when I first began to write. Now, if I had the chance to go back in time, I don't know if I would change my name. I have changed and I don't think my real tribal name is a big issue for me now.

Why Hijazi. Nostalgia maybe, for my father who was known by that name, and who died before I knew that I'd be a writer. Hijazi is the name of the area I was born in; Jeddah, Makkah and Madinah are in the region known as Hijaz. But earlier, 40 or more years ago, Hijaz referred to those who come from the Hijaz mountains, where my tribe live. So, for me it was perfect, since Hijaz means so many things, Hijaz were I was born and Hijaz as a reference to my tribe. Nobody really knows all this information, but I know, and this makes me happy, which brings us back to my first name, Hanaa.

Everything I'm talking about is so personal, but this discussion is about the name, the most personal thing in our lives. By mentioning a person's name, you remember everything about her, how silly she was, how awkward she was, talkative she was, untalented she was, and how much you hated her. I know everything I'm saying is negative, the things that we might want people to forget about our names so they won't remember all those stupid things about us. So yes. Maybe we don't resemble our names, or maybe names aren't that important and don't mean anything. Maybe if we call a rose by any other name it'll still smell as sweet. But nobody will remember who the person you're talking about is until you stamp her with a name.