

Personal Statement
618 words

PARADOX OF AN ETHIOPIAN MOTHER

“Ali’wedom,” she grunted.

He lips curled in disgust at

Disapproval is a paradoxical concept in the context of my relationship with Mami. A chain shackled us both to the mutualism we had bound ourselves to. Our relationship existed straightforwardly: we simply hated each other.

After fleeing a corrupted country, Mami sought a fresh start in America but held tightly to the traditions of our Ethiopian culture, which was stiflingly closed-minded. Meanwhile, I grew up forgetting Amharic and eating junk during *Tsom*, while my Orthodox mother constantly wore a netela and spoke purely Amharic. Being Ethiopian was her identity.

Throughout high school, I worked at Mami’s Ethiopian market after school, juggling groceries from Food Fest and laboring as a cashier twenty to thirty hours a week without pay, all while trying to complete my assignments. Mami thought she was doing me a favor, teaching me how to be a respectable daughter who revolves everything around family and *culture*.

I despised her for it.

Dissociation became my escape. Whether through music, movies, or books, I lost myself in other worlds. This disconnection sparked a passion for storytelling, and crafting fantasies became my solace. When I entered a new world, I became my own master, uncontrolled and free. I could break away from the parts of my identity I despised and the ones I was too scared of.

Throughout high school, I drowned myself in clubs and programs, hoping to distance myself from Mami. I found a platform of fellow dissociates after beginning a YouTube channel, a

community of writers, artists, cinephiles, and weeps who used their passion as an outlet to escape the world. All I wanted was to be free from the chain—from *her*.

However, my mindset changed when I documented her process of baking Injera for a class assignment. I was so used to her routine, but through a lens, I discovered her ire as she rolled the grill with tightened muscles, the steam hitting her face. I asked myself how she felt, repeating that routine for years, just scraping by as she cooked her skin in the heat.

I realized then how little I understood her. Mami was never the issue; My frustration was directed at a reality she couldn't change. We didn't like each other because we didn't understand each other. But through that lens, I discovered who my mother was. She mourned the life, the people, and the culture she left behind. She stayed here so I didn't have to escape.

I found growth in my mother's flaws. Our disagreements continue over contrasting views of a life she dreams of and a life I despise. But our words don't hit like fists, nor do they leave scars in their posts.

Through this experience, I hope to become the conduit that allows people to understand stories like ours. Of girls who left their families for a better life. Of girls who juggle different identities to survive. Stories like ours can help people find humanity in their struggles and not disconnect to find happiness in sheer fantasy.

I'm sure one day we can smile at our differences, that the chain binding us will be a strength rather than a curse, that I can find contentment in practicing Tsom, and that my mother can accept me holding hands with a girl.

A naive hope brightened by a cherished memory—my mother holding my small hand as we walked through the gates of Laguardia in a new country. I remember her whisper.

“Ewedishalehu.”

I learned one thing that day:

1. Love is forever better than disapproval.