

THE PARAGON JOURNAL

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THE
PARAGON
JOURNAL

JOURNAL OF CREATIVE ARTS

Warning: Some published pieces may contain graphic language, violence, and/or nudity. We are sorry if this may cause any discomfort. Consider this to be the only warning, and we hope that you enjoy reading this issue.

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Letter from the Editor

From Saudi Arabia's execution of 47 alleged terrorists in January, the investigation of William Shakespeare's tomb at Holy Trinity Church determining that his skull has been stolen, Harambe being shot after dragging a boy who had fallen into the gorilla's enclosure, to Donald Trump beating Hillary Clinton in the presidential election, 2016 was quite a year. I found myself graduating with two bachelors degrees in December and, despite the trials and tribulations of 2016, I was excited to start the next leg of my educational journey — the Masters Program. I'd be given the chance to further my education which would, in turn, give me the opportunity to educate those behind me. It was the start of something new. Now, with 2017 here and new possibilities just over the horizon, we welcome you to the Paragon Journal! In this issue you will get the chance to read an exclusive interview with photographer Kristen Leigh-Ann Thompson and see her stunning photo collection "Are We Great Yet". You will also see an interview with Emmanuel Kweitsu, the Creative Director of Poetry Ghana, an insightful and informative piece on the "Common Misconceptions About Islam", poetry, and much more! So grab a cup of coffee, sit back, relax, and enjoy!

Sincerely,

Sara Stevenson

Guest Consultant, The Paragon Journal

Table of Contents



Interview with Kristen Leigh-Ann Thompson

Are We Great Yet

Untitled Love Poem #3

Reflection

Ghosts

In Bed

It's Only Natural

so many men, so little time...

The Bedroom Closet

Interview with Poetry Ghana

The Queen and Her Afrotude

Unapologetically Black!

Truth, Not Facts

Who Do We Think We Are?

Timbuktu The Legend

Lying in the Woods

Common Misconceptions about Islam

Nature

Devotion

Change



Exclusive Interview with Are We Great Yet Photographer, Kristen Leigh-Ann Thompson

Austin Shay (AS): Do you think that this photo campaign could be made broader over the next four years?

Kristen Thompson (KT): I think that there are many ways that this project would be able to grow and become stronger. When coming up with the idea, I found it difficult to focus on the quotes of just one person, when there are so many people out there who say things that are similar. The project isn't just about Trump, but it's to show the ways in which a person of power's words affects people, divides people and spreads hatred. It's giving women, minorities and people within the LGBTQ+ community a voice through the words of those who try to silence them.

AS: Do you think that this current United States election is going to make you pay more attention to world politics going forward?

KT: I've always been pretty interested in politics, and as involved as I can be. For this election, there wasn't a lot I could do because I'm Canadian, and like the rest of the world I sat at home watching to see if the United States made the right decision. Whether the right decision was made or not is to be seen, but I would have never voted for Trump.

AS: The creative world has always been liberal, but it seems as if you and other likes you have sparked some discussion among other millennials about the words spoken by our President-elect. I came across a blog post titled “Teen Feminist Artist Trolls Trump with X-Rated Naked Pictures,” and the author states that these photo campaigns are just doing what all feminist do and he will not be the fall guy for the “feminist hypocrisy” that they are producing. Do you think that your photo series is more than just a feminist statement?

KT: To claim that this project is a feminist hypocrisy seems idiotic to me. My models included minorities, trans people, homosexuals, heterosexuals, assault victims, men, and women; this project was meant to give a voice to all – not just women. My being a feminist, yes may have me looking at certain issues a certain way, but I don't see a problem with wanting equality for all, and anyone who does have a problem with that would obviously have an issue with my message, but that's not really something I care about. I didn't do this to gain popularity.

AS: Do you think that the way Donald Trump has spoken about woman is allowing other men to not fear the repercussions of their words?

KT: Trump is by no means the first (nor will he be the last) man to speak about women, minorities or the LGBTQ+ community this way. I feel that Trump's actions should be no more influential than any other racist pig out there. People will always have these kinds of opinions, and though I don't understand them, they will exist nonetheless. It's important when people speak this way that we hold them accountable and do our best to educate them, this is the first step to making a change in our communities.

AS: It seems as if the conservative world is choosing not to see what their President has said or invalidate the actions that he has done. Do you think that the man that they are portraying as “the man who does not drink, smoke, or use drugs, whose children are responsible adults” has any truth? Or do Donald Trump's vial actions and words eliminate his chances of ever becoming a successful President?

KT: I don't think that Donald is incapable of being a good president; to say that he absolutely would or would not is silly to me. Personally, I feel like a presidential candidate should be held accountable for the things they say as well as their actions, so sure he may not smoke, but putting that against some of the things that

he's said, you can kind of see what's important. Further on that note, a lot of people manage to have children who become responsible adults, but raising a child is not the same as running the country.

AS: The words that Donald Trump has spoken across his life have definitely painted women in a negative light. What drew you to this horrible aspect of the man that is soon to be the leader of the free world?

KT: I don't think what Trump has said has painted women in a negative light at all, it's painted him in a negative light. People don't listen to him saying "Grab her by the p****" and think, "wow women really fucking suck." Personally, I've always disliked him, does that mean I think he'll be a horrible president? No. Being a journalist, it's my job to hold people accountable for what they say. This was my way of doing that. Luckily there are laws in place that will not allow Trump to be the "leader of the free world", I'm a part of the free world here in Canada, and Trump won't be changing my laws. He can do his thing south of the boarder (the Canadian boarder) and I'll enjoy free health care, free government, and freedom of the press.

AS: What do you want people to understand when they look at your photographs?

KT: I feel that I said it best in my initial posting of the project:

This campaign in many ways allows for the taking back of the freedoms that were stolen from so many people the day that Donald Trump was elected. It gives us the chance to show that racist, sexist, and discriminatory slurs do not define a person's identity but instead can empower them to stand up to oppression.

This project allowed the survivors and the warriors that I worked with to take back their bodies and take back their identities from this hatred, and show the world that they are stronger than the words that try to hold them down.

Their bodies, minds, and their hearts belong to them, and I hope that this campaign stands to show that. That this can inspire you as much as it has inspired those of us whom have worked on this campaign to stand up to those who have done nothing but try to bring you down. I hope that this shows you that greatness cannot be created through the spreading of hatred, but rather through love, acceptance, and creativity.

AS: I personally voted for Hillary Clinton in the President election, and I agree with the statements that you are making. What do you think is the most important thing that the “non-believers” should understand?

KT: Nothing is ever achieved through the spreading of hatred, but rather, destroyed.

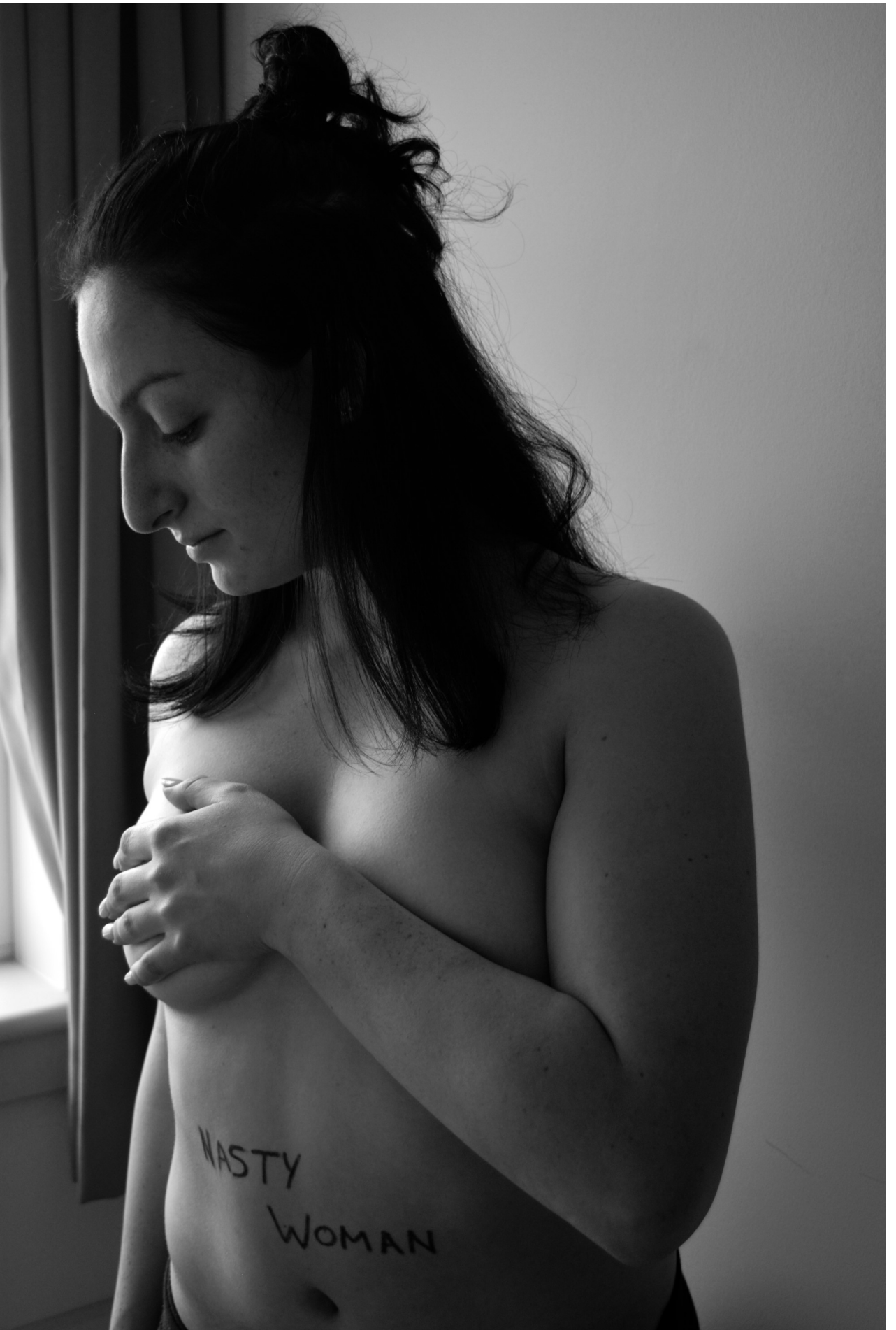
AS: The fact the he has said this, and other things like this and still won is truly frightening. Are you worried that these kind of actions will become a normal part of society?

KT: I'm not worried. There will always be those of us who are willing to fight for the greater good. This is definitely not the first time that these kinds of actions have been celebrated in America, but people fought then for what was right, I don't see that changing. I'm hoping that this will help spark even more change, and encourage even more people to fight, and give more and more people back their voices.

AS: Donald Trump truly has some pretty inexcusable things about women. Trump has called his opponent a “nasty woman”, fat shamed a former Miss USA, and has advocated grabbing women “by the p*ssy”. Are you going to continue advocating against his presidency for the next 4, or - heaven forbid - 8 years?

KT: I will continue to fight against racist, misogynist, bigots until the day I die. I'm not afraid of Trump.

ARE WE GREAT YET? | KRISTEN LEGIH-ANN THOMPSON



SOPHIE, 20, ARTIST





SOPHIE, 20, ARTIST



OWEN, 20, PRES



SCHOOL TEACHER

ARIC, 25, FATHER, ENTERTAINER



ABBY, 20, LATINA, JOURNALIST



LARA, 23, JOURNALIST, MI'KMAQ





JAKE, 21, ATHLETE



JANE, 21, ECON



ATOMICS STUDENT

JANE, 21, ECONOMICS STUDENT



JOHN, 21, JOURNALIST





AVI, 21, JOURN



ANALYST-WRITER

JASMINE, 20, ACTOR, BISEXUAL, SURVIVOR





MORGAN, 22, MUSICIAN



SARAH, 20, KINES



IOLOGY STUDENT



Bailey Belgarde lives in Middletown, PA. She is a self-proclaimed minimalist with a love for Julia Child and tequila. Her favorite animals include cats, bats, rats and sea manatees.

UNTITLED LOVE POEM #3 | BAILEY BELGARDE

You can't stop me

When I see her from across the bar and her eyes meet mine and she smiles

You can't stop me.

When it's six months later and it's 2 a.m and I'm holding her

You can't stop me.

Will you be here? Will you come in through my window and tear her away from me?

No, no you can't stop me.

You can't stop us.

I'm her Sappho, she is my muse.

She's the warmth on my cheeks

The body pressed against mine in the middle of the night

As familiar to me as my own thoughts

All of your words will fall flat.

All of your hate will do nothing but remind me

Why I need her love.

So I guess a 'thank you' is in order.

REFLECTION | CINDY O'QUINN

I looked into the mirror
out of habit – not vanity

I wondered who I would see.
A woman with familiar eyes
was there,
staring back at me.

There were lines in the mirror
as well as her face.

My eyes could see
past the reflection,
before the decades,
at the person that used to be me.

I touched the reflection
and was completely replaced.

GHOSTS | CINDY O'QUINN

The memories are all around me
like ghosts in a horror movie,
they are around every corner,
some days there is no appeasing them.

I just have to be patient
while they play their picture show in my mind,
giving me a front row seat
to the past and all that went wrong.

As if this form of torture
could change even the smallest detail.
It's almost over,
they are rolling the credits.

Only one name appears
over and over it plays.
My name, of course,
I've seen it time and again.

It is my show after all,
I should know it well,
I watch each day
until the very end.

IN BED | CINDY O'QUINN

There's not many things more inviting than a cold bed.

This must sound unappealing to all those who seek out the comforts of a heated slumber.

Sliding in between layers of warm blankets.

Have at it if that's what you like, but it's truly not for me.

Give me the iciness of crisp sheets and cool quilts.

The heat from my body takes in the coolness making it my own.

Heat seekers beware what happens when you get hot.

Feet make their way out of the covers to touch the night's cool air.

Beneath the antique quilt I am protected from the darkness.

And what comes alive within its hours.

No foot will I allow to slip from beneath the covers.

No bad thing will have access to my unexposed skin.

The blue hour will come and pass without teeth gnashing or claws scratching.

Early morning shadows will exit through the dawns yellow rays.

While those sweating and exposed in their heated beds wept.

The cold bed served me well yet again.

Cindy O'Quinn lives in the North Woods of Maine, on a working home-
stead, with her husband and two sons.

Her work has been featured, or is forthcoming in, Sanitarium Magazine,
Blood Moon Rising Magazine, Red Fez, Rat's Ass Review, Black Petals,
and on Poetry Breakfast.

Cindy's debut novel is Dark Cloud on Naked Creek.

IT'S ONLY NATURAL | VALERI PAXTON-STEELE

In the closeness we seek
an unattainable, indescribable
compression of souls.

We are heavy with the desire
to be connected.

It's only natural,
this yearning for contact,
blood on blood.

We are selfish for fulfillment.

The power of our yearning
is formidable, indeed.

We break through all
the furrows of concealments
in order to triumph

hand-to-hand,
and heart-to-heart.

The experience of struggle
is overwhelmed by the
sweet hug of another.

In this way, each of us
is transparent.

We expose ourselves
passing over the open channels
of our urgent proximity.

The connections are porous-
flowing both into,
and through, each
and every other human being.

Voids cannot exist.

We triumph over barriers
for the consolation
and solace of friendship.

Our experiences linger in
the thoughts and feelings
of others of our ilk.

We are legends in the making.

The intense vitality of
our connections assure our survival.

It is only natural.

Our spirits see to that,
with fervent enthusiasm.

SO MANY MEN, SO LITTLE TIME... | VALERI PAXTON- STEELE

overcoming abuse
childhood sexual abuse
takes a certain
twist in thinking
a mind flip

wherein you
tell yourself that
sexuality is
not serious
but flippant
not holy
but sport
not sacred

and men become
a free-for-all
faceless drones
one after another
nameless bodies
you give
yourself to

before they
take it
from you
by force
by rape
by coercion

you surrender
your soul
and your body
to sex
to fulfill
the longing
for normalcy

this is
what they want
all I am
good for
my only use
my only purpose

this must be
the way
to survive
to disdain myself
to hate me
devalue me
as they did
they all did
so I do

the problem
with this thinking
is the trick
the flip
is wrong

the value inherent
in myself
as sacredly holy
my value
my worth
is more important

the men
were wrong
their actions abhorrent
the monsters lie
with forked tongues
so easily believed
by little girls

THE BEDROOM CLOSET | VALERI PAXTON-STEELE

there is a lock inside
the closet door
she hides in there
when the yelling starts
rage against her
against them she loves

the man mommy loves
threatened
to throw her bunny rabbit
off the porch
three floors down
into the dirt

she hides and cries
she can't stop him
he is too big and tall
and she is
too little and small
she is only seven

but she is brave
mommy yelled at her
to run for help
she unlocked the lock
mommy put inside the closet
to keep her safe
from the man she loves

and she came out
from her room
she was thrown
shoved back inside
by this newest man
her mommy loves

he hurt her chest
when he did that
then he hurt her mom
and no one ever came
that long crying night

and mommy's black eye
turned purple and green
after the man mommy loves
banged mommy's face
into the sink

Interview with Poetry Ghana Creative Director, Emmanuel Kweitsu

Austin Shay (AS): The first thing that is important to ask is about the beginning of Poetry Ghana. What was the reason that you started this online poetry group? What were your original goals?

Emmanuel Kweitsu (EK): PoetryGH is something I wanted for myself, I thought it would be great to have and belong to a community that appreciated creativity, self-expression, and sharing. The response showed that I was not alone. Many people wanted what I wanted.

I also wanted to be part of the discourse and to set the agenda, having a platform that informed the debate, Ghana has a growing and flourishing middle class with a thirst for art, good music, and poetry. We also have a politically charged youth with a need for some direction and search for meaning. I thought poetry had that potential to give the direction and

meaning people were looking for.

AS: According to Facebook you have 1,150 likes on PoetryGH, how does it feel to know that over a thousand people are looking at the work that you are producing?

EK: It's encouraging. PoetryGH has a group page on Facebook with 1800 members and growing. Having this kind of audience and knowing our poetry goes straight to their walls gives us courage to do more and select the best themes that speak directly to the needs of the readers. Whether it is entertainment, sparking the curiosity or setting an agenda with political implications, we know our message goes into someone's heart, and that is how change starts and ideas spread.

AS: Do you believe that your skills as a poet have grown by reading the work of

others and/or participating in the complication poems?

EK: As we write and share our poetry, we see our poetry synchronizing and harmonizing together. I have personally seen my writing improve as I was used to writing about love and romance, being in a group has expanded the depth and breadth of the subjects. We find ourselves writing about more complex, exciting and rich themes others in the group suggest.

On improvement, one of my greatest joys is the level of democratization we have achieved on our platform: I see how the poetic license we give and encouragement we give to poets that they too can write poetry and express themselves works that magic of discovering talent. I've seen shy and intimidated poets come and suddenly find confidence in their abilities and then grow to become some of the best we have.

AS: I understand that poetry is a platform for self-expression, community, and a common interest. Do you think that this group is allowing a plethora of people the chance to come together and express themselves freely?

EK: We also have on our platform: medical doctors, Clinical Psychologists, mathematicians, software designers, English teachers, Laboratory technologists, Students, graphic designers, mar-

ried, single and searching, boys and girls. We have a rainbow of people. The views are rich and diverse. There is freedom to speak one's mind as we encourage debate, and especially seek alternate views and different perspectives. When we discuss other issues than simply writing poems, we always allow a devil's advocate to show us the other side of the debate so that we don't create that false sense of consensus and fall prey to our confirmation bias. Such is the nature of the group; we are seekers and messengers of the truth and best ideas out there.

AS: The poems that I have read on your Facebook group seem to be informing an audience about culture and the identities of people who may be otherwise voiceless. Why is important to share your culture with others through the poetry that your group produces?

EK: I'm glad you discerned one of the central themes of our writing, Identity, and culture. When the people know who they are, they are healthier and can engage meaningfully in all discourses. The African Identity has seen a lot of crisis. History has not been too fair in letting our people know themselves and the full extent of their potential. It created a false narrative where all the answers were sought from outside sources, and it created an Africa with a dependency problem.

I believe that when the message of identity is conveyed with the devices of poetry, it is powerful and the effect is amplified. An Africa with a healthy sense of self and one that rediscovers its culture and identity will benefit the world, and we are humbled we can play a part in that role.

AS: In a previous conversation that we had you mentioned that in West Africa you are aware of everything that goes on in America. Do you believe that our freedom of speech should be used to criticize public officials that are creating obscene laws and regulations?

EK: During the recent US elections, it was reported that Google trends posted on their twitter handle that Ghana topped the list of countries outside the US that searched for #elections2016. Two reasons may have accounted for that: we were having our 2016 elections fever, and also many Ghanaians are naturally drawn to the US and everything it stands for. Freedom, excellence and prosperity and we often model our systems to rival what is happening in the US. My take is that West Africa has always been a center of curiosity and learning and excellence in Governance because the West African region gave us the old and most often forgotten ancient Ghana, Mali and Songhai empires of which Timbuktu at its apex gave its center of learning and

libraries. It gave us the Richest man of all time (Mansa keita Musa). Ghana (then the Gold Coast) was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence from the colonial British Empire something we have in common with the US (independence from the colonial British Empire). Remnants of that culture of political activity still exist, and that may account for that level of political awareness in the West African region.

On your question, I do not necessary believe free speech for its sake has a real chance at power especially when raw power seeks to perpetuate itself. Because real power, especially tyrannical power, will clamp down on free speech or seek to undermine it. I believe if we have a voice, we should direct it at educating the people and giving them knowledge and independence from power and the establishment. That will have the overall effect of making them capable of change, they will hold people in power to higher standards of accountability, they will elect better leaders, and the true democratic power of the people will be restored.

AS: We all know that the creative minds in America will help to turn the tides and create something wonderful. Do you think that it is possible through creative writing to influence the mass population

of America? Do you also think that the world's creative population will help speak out against horrific acts that may be committed in America and the rest of the world?

EK: These are questions we at PoetryGH ask ourselves from time to time. What is the power of creative writing on reality? Why should we stop to do poetry? Poetry does not put food on the table and poetry cannot stop a bullet. Or does it?

We believe that the act of writing itself, any writing, is creative and transformative. No one can underestimate the power of a beautifully crafted word of inspiration and oratory; no one can deny that poetic speeches and powerful words have changed the world. For the American people, there are several examples of this. The Declaration of Independence by the founding fathers of America, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The power and beauty of the Gettysburg Address in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln who told the American people, their government was all "a government of the people, by the people, for the people." Or when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his first inaugural address March 1933 inspired the people

of America to have the courage and face the future by telling them "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Or the "I have a dream" speech of Martin Luther King, Jr. In all these, it was the power of the written word that gave the American people something tangible to hold on to.

Poetry and creative writing can indeed change the world. Creative people by their very nature are the change agents, to be creative means one has to liberate him or herself from his or her natural instincts of fighting for survival, believe in his or her agency for change and now want to partake in the creative process which is inherently a process of transformation and change. It is an optimistic view of the world that holds in it a great potential for real world effects. Jason Silva, the modern day artistic guru, and futurist, talks about that process, as a self-amplifying-feedback loop, "We create our world and our world, in turn, creates us."

What we write, writes us. When we write of beauty and change and do beautiful art, the very act of doing so sets in the process of causing that change in us and others. Creative people have changed the world, and they will continue to do so.

AS: Do you have anything that you would want the world to know about

your group or anything else?

EK: The poets of PoetryGH want to inspire the world with the power of their written word. We have created on our platform a haven for creative people to concentrate their effort and have a clear shot at transforming themselves and the world. The style of compiling our short poems on a single theme is symbolic of our vision of bringing minds together to solve the problems of our world. We are grateful for the opportunity of sharing our story and extremely humbled by the opportunity. Thank you.



THE QUEEN AND HER AFROTUDE | MS. NAA*

They are up in arms again!

Ready to shoot it down to conform

To the set rules of discrimination, oppression and obeisance

But you won't dare touch this! No!

No one plays with the crown of a Nubian queen

That mane that spells my name even before my mouth opens

Enough with the brainwash of straight is silky and falls beautifully around you

I don't need it to look down! Only slaves bow;

I need it to rise with the 'tude of a true African

Better stash your arms; you wouldn't need it

And learn to let my Afro be!

It ain't going anywhere!

#PoetryGH

*Ms Naa (Pen name) is an editor. She is a tutor of English at Ghana's most prestigious secondary school for girls. Her full name is Elsie Gifty Afoakwah

UNAPOLOGETICALLY BLACK! | VARIOUS POETS

Ms Naa

What is your problem with us?
Is it the hate for the melanin?
Gifted from the heavens?
Or is it that we pierce your eyes
With that dark tone: the genesis of your disdain?

A naked-strip to shame us
Turns into admiration of the firmness of our breasts and buttocks
And the idealization of the pendulum that suspends between the thighs of our warriors
Detest me, loathe me, abhor me

Yet, I won't bow in shame and apologize!
For I am unapologetically black!

Diane

I'm created in my makers image
I'm a representative of my generation
The color of my skin is not limited to suffocation
I will not run because you detest me
I will not hide because you chase me

My origin is the pride of my today
I'm black doesn't mean I'm dirty
I'm black; Yes! but I don't lack nor do I slack
My color is my pride; my blood is red just like yours
I'm proud of my color

And I won't apologize for being black
Because I'm unapologetically black!

Mic-el

They look at me with disdain
Their hatred is so plain
Shaking their heads with disgust
Incensed by my sheer gust
This race to them is accursed
The reason I'm being cursed

But just read between their lines
You'll sense jealousy behind their lies
Why hate someone with such passion
If not yearn to be like them in same fashion
This grace of being black is mighty
They can't bear the spell of its beauty
I am asked to live on my knees
Yet I plead to die on my feet
For I am unapologetically black.

Suzzy

I am black, why apologize?
A skin color cosmetics can't buy
Curves and rings; hard built of a wo-man
In molten rays or algid dew; I'm vitalized, I'm black
That's no lie
Your treat of a delicious chocolaté

Edna

I'm sorry my skin's so strong that conditions don't compel me to change colour:
I'm strong!
I'm sorry this beautiful black hair defies gravity: I'm a rule breaker!
I'm sorry I don't need to spend a dime to make my lips look fuller: I'm natural!
I'm sorry I hold every precious stone you desire: I'm wealthy!
I'm sorry but...
I woke up like this: Unapologetically Black

Emma

Nubian black, charcoal finish
Deep: born of the darkness
Black crack and click Clack
Bad black or black sheep
Stubborn dead goat syndrome
As ugly as you will shamelessly
Want and wish to call it ... I'm Unapologetically BLACK!

Stella

All of one genetic engineering from the beginning of time
When did we stop to describe our uniqueness by hair texture and skin color. Damn!
You put me in a box, call me black, dirty, inferior, stupid
I call you racist; it hurt to your bone
You ask for apologies, I tell you no!
I will be a fool to owe you such duties
For I am black with beauty, beauty with brains, brains with a future, a future with
hope, amazing in every way
I AM UNAPOLOGETICALLY BLACK

Nayabinghi

Be exorcised from my mind
Ye moths that eat away my pride
Let my butterflies fly

You cross the world in one stride
To bask in the Sun's glide
Just to gain a tan in your hide

Yet, you feign to spite my colour
Tagging it with everything inferior
Whiles secretly you covet its glamour:

Black, sweet Chocolate Black!
Black, stimulating Coffee Black!
Black, glistening Ebony Black!

Black, Unapologetically Black!

My Black has dazzled your tortuous crave
Lined sublime verses in your poets' maze
Your gimmicks cannot deter my blaze: my fiery black blaze
I am black, without apologies

Shooter

In the sun skin glistening
Ebony black, royalty redefined
Shades of brown, chocolaty and delectable
Nubian in every essence
Forged in the honeycombs of Timbuktu
More elegant than diamonds from King Solomon's mines Unapologetically
black...and mighty proud

TRUTH, NOT FACTS | ADU BARIMA SARKORDIE

Here I am, down on my knees
No longer the little man but I'm in need
Before thee I lay my troubles bare
My sins and shame I can no longer bear
Not the joy to share but I know you care.
Your words are golden
Like a drop of sunlight; a token
I come in search of truth
Yes! the truth!! Not the facts
Truth devoid of falsity
I'm searching for verity:
When clearer than light is the reality
I come for the truth not the facts
I'm told by the stripes I am healed
So I hoped never, to suffer hurt
Yet! I feel impaired even in my heels
Each step is a pain
A twinge never feigned
Indeed, I come for the truth not the facts
Unrestricted like breeze from the ocean
Are the untold riches of your glory
Such, my needs should be supplied
But!!! my sacks are dried; So I worry
The good book gave me a promise
A hope impossible to miss
I will not be forsaken it says
I should not fear it commands
Then again, here I am with my cross
Hmm! My splendor gone
Bitter beyond words; my suffering.
I feel alone, helpless and hopeless
My body quake with fear
From my eyes drop the tear
But I come for the truth, not the facts
My sins are many and my soul defiled
My burdens are heavy, on my path I stumble
I may have the facts but the truth I lack
For my liberation was the sacrifice on the cross
Here I am, bowed before thee
My path you knew before you made me

I find more than sufficient your grace
So I lay me down for your praise
For if I fall, I fall into your embrace
In your arms I find my solace
I had my facts, now I know the truth
It's the way
It's the life
The truth, not the facts

WHO DO WE THINK WE ARE? | VARIOUS POETS

Emma(GH)

We are sons and daughters of Kemet
The first men, the gods and goddesses
Architects and builders of great civilizations
Nubian goddesses, legendary heroes
Ferocious warriors and mighty kings
Mineral rich, economy shuttering
Adventurers, patrons of ideas
Commissioners of arts and wisdom
Mathematicians and extraordinary astronomers
We are the Pharos,
We are Queen Nefertiti
We are Queen of Sheba,
We are Shaka Zulu,
We are Queen Nzinga,
We are Mansa Keita Musa
We are Dr. Kwame Nkrumah,
We are Haile Selassie,
We are Bob Marley,
We are Usain Bolt
Rich in all ages, now and forever.....
We are the GIANTS, We are Africa!

Telmah (South Africa)

Africans are we chickens?
The eagle is flying low; it's eyes on us
Like dickens we hiding under the bush
Who do we think we are?
When we can't smell the coffee
Face your reality because water can't stop the cough
Up your game; possess your priceless possession
Embark on the journey of self-realization

Stella (GH)

We are royalty
We are hope
We are faith
We are a peculiar nation
Long before the foundation of the earth we are
We are gods.
They promised us winged messengers of heaven
Coming to bless out hungry souls
We waited
We prayed
We knew not that there were no messengers but savages
For all we needed we have
All we have we gave
Who do we think we are?
We are chosen, we are Africa

Ms Naa (GH)

We lost that ages ago
When we allowed for them to tread on our soil
When we allowed for them to turn us against each other
When we allowed for them to dictate the pace of our feet
And the movement of our bodies
We strive to come out from the dug hole
The hole we dug with our own hands
We strive to reclaim that which we possess
The possession we don't know how to manage
The next time I see this question
"Who do we think we are?"
I will look you straight in the face
And say

I am not a daughter of a queen
Neither am I daughter of a king
Cos slaves they were
I am who I am
I am who I want to be
I am me
A daughter of the soil

Brandon (South Africa)

Her heart tumbled down the stream
Of conspicuous emotion
Mumbling and meandering in beam
Never roaring like the great ocean
Pacific islanding segments of the world
Much isolated
Gently flawless
Flowing from high ends
To the low lying shreds
Of intricate humanity
Brush painted upon the conglomerate canvas
On which mine soul patiently anticipated
Selection from her glorious enactment.
Tenebrous pupiled eyes
Hover above a company of noble men
Legitimate bachelors darn Quixotic
Manifestations of Midas impacted; until then
Hearts blast beat and race among
Themselves in antagony agony bestowed
Upon through an echoing gong
From the picturesque villa
Prince Mogadhi from Africa
Black as scapegoat but with a sweet tongue
Lord Bringham down from England
A land within extremes of beauty and displeasure
Leisure spoilt Anglo Saxon senator
Slightly annoyed by the identical men-squid
Eyes decorating the China's face
What more concealment prided by Muslim
The apparel of his face much slim
Will they be handpicked?
Or trashed from the prospects of acceptance?

Suzzy (GH)

A culture deep in traditions tied to the roots of Genesis
Cowries hidden in the hard shell of the aged tortoise
Rich tongues of melodious rhythms
An alluring beauty in the darkness of the head
A pool of royalty in the mire of disloyalty
Africa, the brightest hope, is who we are

TIMBUKTU THE LEGEND | VARIOUS POETS

Stella

From across the horizon
With dazzling array of dessert sands
We speak of a legend
Timbuktu, land of nobility
Grazing and sizzling gold they upheld
Wealth unmatched
Flourishing and meandering its way into the hearts of neighbouring city like the
river Niger.
We live to tell the tale of the Black Lady
Long after death, the legend of Timbuktu goes on

Ms Naa

As magnetic fields attract
So did you attract men to your well
Of wisdom, wealth and beauty
Mother of civilization
You still stand tall
Long after your fall
A toast to Timbuktu
Our pride as Africans

Nayabinghi

Your gates kissed Sahara and Niger
Gathered camel and canoe
Condensed the north and south to meet
Where the sun arose and fell the same
A mystery that confounds the time
I speak of you, Timbuktu
The fame of thy name, Timbuktu
The Black Lady, Tin Abutut
A woman who manned the merchant's ware
Nursed the ware that brought you worth
And marked the beginning of thy wealth
I speak of you, Timbuktu
You gave rest to the sojourner
Whilst athirst their thirsts quenched
With water cool from the Niger
Your foliage fed the beasts
Enough to make a feast
I speak of you, Timbuktu
Timbuktu, tales of your wealth endure
Gold, salt and books of knowledge, pure
A hub of sagacity inured
A home of Divinity enjoyed
You taught the world your truth
I speak of you, Timbuktu
You homed emperors of great might
Mali, Songhai and Morocco in their heights
Counselors of scholars with foresight
Directing the course of your empire's might
Whose fame went beyond lands and seas
I speak of you, Timbuktu
How are your fortunes dwindled?
Whose memoirs published across the lands
Sages renowned through the ages
Teachers that fed our curious minds
A Centre of learning across the globe
I speak of you, Timbuktu

Suzzy

Timbuktu, the great ancient empire
In the deserts of Africa
Your affluence spreads through the lands
Wealthy in knowledge; wise in the trades of power

Excellent in the harsh sands; a formidable one you were

Emma

Sweet wells of satisfaction in the desert

An Oasis of men of power and wisdom.

They came and told stories of you and your glory

Timbuktu! This is your legend

Stable society, richer than any in history

Your name: Timbuktu, resonates across worlds

and the luster of your gold, the sun
of the West African desert.

Your books your, most prized possessions,
defies the notion of how they chose to remember
you: an ignorant poverty stricken and forgotten city.

Today we sound the drums and you dance as Timbuktu! The African Legend.





Do you want to voice your opinion? Do you want to express yourself? The Paragon Journal is looking for talented writers who want to branch out and have their work read. We are also looking for artists and photographers to fill our publication with vivid imagery. If you are interested please send your submission to submissions@theparagonjournal.com by April 16th, 2017.

LYING IN THE WOODS | JEANNE MCKINNEY

Steve sat, gasping for air. Butt on the bench, legs slightly apart, elbows resting on his thighs as he leaned forward and looked at the ground. He was going to vomit, he thought. Sputtering, coughing. A hacking cough. And then he spit. He watched his saliva fall ineffectually making a tiny bubbly puddle on the dirt between his feet. He stayed hunched over, watching and hoping the earth would quickly absorb this bit of his DNA. He could hear children's sing-songy voices and laughter in the playground behind him, and the jingle of a dog's collar. He steeled himself and looked up.

The playing field, park-brochure green, was in front of him, covered with awkward children in baseball uniforms and their proud parents. He was at the edge of one of San Francisco's largest parks, home to red-tailed hawks and owls. According to warning signs posted at the entrance of the park, the resident predators now included coyotes. On a Saturday like today a predictable stream of joggers (all with headphones), dogwalkers and new parents parade in and out of the park

He felt well enough now to sit up and lean back against the bench. He surveyed the surroundings and tried to project confidence. As if he was enjoying the scenery. But somewhere, he was certain, Robert was looking for him, and he hoped Laura was with him. Or, just Laura. Not the police.

He'd started out that morning with the idea of seeing Laura bright in his mind

like an old-fashioned digital alarm clock insistently blinking the time on the far side of a dark bedroom. He remembered sharing such an alarm clock with Laura many years ago. Now, with smart phones, she had probably gotten rid of the digital clock. And of course, with Laura was her new husband Robert. He thought, this is a good thing; if Robert is there, Laura can't be mad or overreact, right?

He'd dressed in a new pair of jeans, a not-so-new oxford shirt with an ink stain on the sleeve, and newish tennis shoes. The shirt was more wrinkled than he would have liked. He shaved. Brushed his teeth. He told himself, he wasn't so much trying to impress Laura, which would be impossible, as was showing that he had a robust life without her. He thought of "robust" as a Cooking Channel term for rich and full of flavor, or hearty, or just a mixture of different things that need an adjective. It was a versatile adjective, signifying nothing.

He could feel the desperation and loneliness of "signifying nothing" and he had lived it last night.

Last night was not the first time Steve had broken into cars to steal loose change, but it was the first time since he moved to San Francisco with Laura. It was a logic of his teenage years, kicking in after a certain amount of beer, that if a car isn't locked, then anything inside is fair game. Sometimes, with enough beer, that logic extended to breaking windows.

The evening started off well enough. He met the usual friends at Oasis #2, in the deep Mission, where he'd had a few beers. He ate peanuts and waited for one

of his friends to buy a round, but the round never materialized. Then his friends headed off to this or that with the wife or the girlfriend or no one in particular. Steve counted up his remaining \$6 and change and headed to the corner store. With a plastic bottle of Popov in his back pocket, he drifted back toward his apartment (or, more accurately, room), and the more he thought about it, and the more he walked, the more it made sense to him.

His brain, always sharp in some ways, knew the way, up the hill, away from Mission Street, to the quiet narrow residential streets where everyone was already asleep. He couldn't remember how many car doors he tried before he found one with a pile of ancient CDs on the passenger seat: Radiohead, Smashing Pumpkins, Garbage and Oasis. He thought back to Oasis #2 and realized this was not a coincidence. He went ahead and smashed the window. He grabbed the change from the driver's side and gingerly picked up the Oasis CD, lifting it carefully so that all the shards of glass fell off.

Then he'd opened the glove compartment and found it. He didn't know what it was at first. Wrapped in a piece of dark cloth. Soft cloth. A heavy object. He removed the cloth, and then he'd touched it, and then he was afraid to put it back. He couldn't tell much about it, except that it was a handgun. A pistol he thought. It was heavy. And probably loaded. He didn't stop to check.

That night, Steve placed the gun on his bed stand, next to the Tom Wolfe novel he would have been reading if his head was not spinning. What did it mean,

this gun? And how could he possibly dispose of it? What if the owner came looking for him? Could someone have been watching him when he broke in? He fell asleep with his mind whirling between logical and illogical repercussions.

But when he woke up, the gun was the first thing he saw. The room was already light – it was after 7 am – and he opened his eye to see the gun sitting on top of the book. He thought, it looks like it had moved closer to the bed during the night. He lay in bed and stared at it for a long time. But his mind kept coming back to Laura.

That was when he knew he needed to see her. He needed her to tell him what to do with the gun. He needed to talk to her. She would know the answer. Laura used to tell him, you're not crazy. She used to argue with him to stop saying it. That no one was rational all the time. That he had a good job, and friends, and that he would make a good father someday. He played these scenes back in his head, nodding thoughtfully, as he rewrapped the gun in the cloth and put it in a small paper bag. And then put the paper bag in in his backpack. And brought it with him.

And now here he was in the park. The backpack on the bench next to him. Scanning for cops and his ex-girlfriend while pretending to be amused when a brown and white dog came up and sniffed his crotch. He sat there, catching his breath. And then, when his breath was caught, he continued to sit there.

A woman with a double stroller and a Labradoodle stopped a few feet away. She lifted each child out of the stroller. Two identical small girls in lavender and

peach colored dresses with matching hats. They smiled and toddled around in circles while the woman threw a ball for the big dog. A middle-aged couple walked by in expensive exercise outfits. By middle-aged he realized he meant older than himself, so they could anywhere between 40 and 60. 38 is not middle aged.

The couple stopped and exchanged remarks with the mother. And everyone smiled. Steve thought of Laura and Robert and the plate of waffles he'd seen on the kitchen table. A stack of waffles. He'd only been there a moment, but the visual was lodged in his brain: waffles in a sun-strewn kitchen. It was like Laura and Robert were about to sit down to brunch in their warm kitchen where the curtains, the napkins, and the dishtowels were all color coordinated.

In fact, when he'd walked up to their building, he thought he saw Laura's face looking out the kitchen window at the rarity of an August morning without fog. It was wistful face he'd seen before. Her long hair was pulled back severely, which would mean she is tired and trying to keep herself awake by pulling her eyes open. That was their joke anyway.

He felt a twinge of disappointment, like a quick tap on his heart, when he realized she hadn't rushed to the apartment door to let him in. He still had a key, which Laura might not be aware of, but as he reached for the lock the door fell open. Robert, clad in high-tech wicking active-wear. Possibly on his way out for a run or bike ride. Steve couldn't tell for sure. His own wardrobe did not include technical sportswear.

“Laura, I think your old boyfriend is here. Steve, right? You’re Steve.”

But Steve had already pushed past him to the kitchen.

Steve got Laura to sit down. “I didn’t know where else to go. You’re the only person I trust,” he whispered.

“Steve! You can’t be here. We’re about to eat breakfast.”

Steve didn’t answer, he put the bag on the table, and began the process of unwrapping it. And then there it was on the table between them. Neither of them spoke.

“I don’t know what to do with it.”

“Where did you get it?”

“I can’t tell you,” Steve said, but he felt the words ready to flood out of him, to confide.

“I was in the Mission, at Oasis, with Joe and Malcolm, and . . .” He began, but the front door opened, he turned. Laura picked up the phone.

“Don’t call the police,” he whispered, just as Robert appeared in the kitchen holding the Sunday New York Times.

The gun lay on the table, next to the stack of waffles. There was a long pause before Steve grabbed the gun off the table and his backpack, and ran. Later, he would only remember the waffles.

The sound of Bob and Laura barely reached him: “Did he hurt you? Are you OK?” “He’s got a gun.” “Don’t hurt him.” And then he was here, on the bench.

Steve pulled his knapsack closer and felt the heft of the gun inside. The mother and the middle-aged couple were looking up and pointing at the park entrance. They seemed curious about something they were observing. Steve imagined a dialogue of pleasantries where the three chatted amiably about a branch that had fallen or a strange bird. In the distance, above the sound of the little league game, he could hear the police siren.

He grabbed the knapsack and began running down the path. Deeper and deeper into the tangled forest. The backpack bounced awkwardly as he held it in his hand, making it harder to navigate the root strewn path.

He'd never been this far into the park and he was surprised at how dark it was. And far. And wild. The path became narrow and with scraggly willows enclosed cutting off access on either side, their trunks bent and twisted. Old before their time. Their branches obscured the sky. And blackberry bushes grew tightly along both sides of the path. He saw a hole in the bramble. Big enough for a large dog. He dove into it head first.

He scrambled a few feet on his hands and knees, and then curled up as far from the path as he could. He could feel the mud and blackberry brambles underneath him, and the brambles catching every bit of exposed skin and biting through his clothes. He could see his left hand and it was bleeding. But he lay still and silent.

He stayed that way, curled up in a ball. It was San Francisco, cold and damp. He told himself he didn't feel it. He didn't feel a thing. With his eyes closed he didn't see a thing. He heard the sounds of joggers pounding down the path, the shriek of a hawk, shouts for Maggie, Max and Tango. But they were all invisible to him, and he could wait them out. When he awoke, many hours later, he found himself alone, except for the desolate and abject yowling of coyotes.

Common Misconceptions About Islam

Currently, Islam is one of the fastest growing religious groups in the world per the Pew Research Foundation, now occupying nearly a quarter of the global population with over 1.6 billion people. Despite this reality, many people in the United States appear quick to condemn the religion while knowing relatively little, or nothing, about it. With such a contentious and polarized political season filled with divisive rhetoric, misconceptions have been inflamed rather than elucidated. This is a reminder that identity, as a functional relationship, is in part an aspect of how others view us as well as how we view ourselves. We are what we should defend and everyday it angers me how ardently people who follow Islam must defend themselves and their religion. So, if you wish to look farther beyond the media and Donald Trump's Twitter account, here are a few common misconceptions about Islam and Muslims debunked.

Firstly, you may have probably heard the word Allah and the various phrases that tend to follow along with it. Deriving from Arabic Allah just means the God, as in the God of Abraham and the other monotheistic religions of Judaism and

Christianity. So, no Muslims do not have a different God but rather a different interpretation of how that relationship with God should operate. However, while the lineage for Jews and Christians falls under Isaac, and in their interpretation Isaac is the son that is almost sacrificed, Muslims follow the lineage of Ishmael. Both are the sons of Abraham.

Another misconception might be that Arabs and Muslims are adjectives that are simply and easily interchangeable. While across the Arab world many countries state themselves as majority Muslim there are very significant portions of the population that are not, including substantial Christian minorities in countries such as Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt for example. Globally North Africa and the Middle East account for only around 15% of the Global Muslim population with much of the Muslim population centered around South East Asia and countries like Indonesia. Another prominent example is the country of Iran. It is a country that is neither Arabic speaking or majority Arab although many might have this mistaken interpretation. In fact, despite having a prominently shared lexicon with the Arabic language, the majority language of Iran, Persian (or Farsi as it is called by speakers), has more in common grammatically with European languages than it does Arabic. And as a side note, be conscious of the use of Arabic as an adjective. People cannot be Arabic, but they can be Arabic speaking.

Also, today much rhetoric also seeks to consistently conflate Islam with terrorism and violence. Islam, the word itself, means submission and derives from

the root for peace. Those who practice Islam practice submission to the one God evidenced especially by the daily prayers (Muslims are required to pray five times daily with a few exceptions). The act of prayer itself requires one to prostrate and put oneself in an extremely vulnerable position. The intention is to cast oneself down on the ground in humility, adoration, and submission. Additionally, a typical greeting common among Muslims itself starts out by wishing peace upon the other. I tell you these details about practice because I want you to see intimately how images of violence and hatred could not be farther from the truth. However, with every religion, there exists a spectrum of behavior and attitudes and Islam is therefore not unique to extremism nor extremist interpretations. And as Islam advocates a direct and personal relationship with God there is no figure or figurehead (like the pope in Catholicism for example) to direct authority and interpretation of the Holy text (for Islam the main Holy text is the Quran). Therefore, who should speak for Islam is a constant struggle and open to rigorous debate. Another word bounced around often in the media conflating Islam with violence, with little attention paid to its complexity, is Jihad. Derived from a root meaning to struggle or to strive, the greater meaning of this word describes the constant internal battles an individual might face in getting closer to God as well as the struggles of different vulnerable communities. However, the greater meaning of this word is consistently ignored. The horrendous assumption that views of terrorist can and should be applied to the entire Muslim community fuels anti-Muslim sentiment and bigotry. For example,

per FBI Hate crimes statistics hate crimes against Muslims rose 67% in 2015, and keep in mind these stats include only those that are reported.

Lastly, but certainly, not least, there is a common misconception that Islam is to blame for the subjugation of women across the globe and within predominately Muslim nations. This threatens to conflate a sort of static interpretation of Islam as inherently medieval and in opposition to modernity while blatantly disregarding the various interpretations by many contemporary men and women who reject putting limitations on women and that do interpret the Quran from this perspective. Seeking to prove their point, many hoping to prove Islam and Muslims as oppressive site the use of the headscarf, in its many forms (Here is a link to a short guide of some varieties (<http://visual.ly/guide-islamic-veils>)). As the Quran directs both men and women to dress with modesty, this is a dictate that is consistently interpreted a variety of ways. While there are nations, who do impose wearing of the hijab most women choose to do so of their volition and for complex varieties of reasons. Increasingly however Western nations are imposing bans on veiling such as France and now Germany, seeking to ban niqabs and burkas, or full covering veils. I must argue that in supposedly democratic societies this policing of women's bodies is serving as a detriment for people who identify as Muslim women to be able to choose how they wish to represent themselves based on personal motivations, beliefs, and attitudes. A woman's body, and what she chooses to do with it and wear it, should not be the battleground for politics. Meanwhile, when you look

at leadership roles across the globe, eight countries have had Muslim women as their heads of state including Turkey, Indonesia, Senegal, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh (two different women), Pakistan, and Mauritius. Many Muslim countries- including Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia - have a higher percentage of women in national elected office than does the United States. Realities are often a lot more complicated than mainstream discourse might want to make them seem.

Elie Wiesel, a prominent activist and Holocaust survivor, once said the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. Consistently, through such mediums as the media and politics, people who identify as Muslim are increasingly demonized creating a field of debate where race, culture, religion, and political regimes are confusingly conflated. The President-elect himself has supported the idea of mosque surveillance, registration programs (both historical failures), a “shutdown” of Muslim immigration, and consistently questioned the ability of Muslim Americans to be truly American and integrate within American society. The United States own Muslim population consists of only around 1 percent of the total population of its 330 million inhabitants. So why does such a small population appear to be such a big threat and in the end, with such a small localized population, does this rhetoric then matter? Does it matter how Americans view Muslims and other Muslim Americans? Yes, enormously. I mentioned Elie Wiesel because he recognized, as many other commenters now have also, that when placed in circumstances ordi-

nary human beings can act with atrocious inhumanity. People define themselves in part, as a function of how others view them. We are what we must defend. In the coming years, the worst things Americans can do is to paint the wrong picture of Muslims and to allow that picture to propagate hateful stereotypes and myths that remove individual complexity and agency. Please do not be indifferent.

Respectfully Signed,

Helen Ard

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NATURE | LUKE MUMMAU

Nature, they say,
Cannot be changed.
Then why do you ask me to?
Then why is it wrong,
For me to love him?
For her to love another?

Nature, they say,
Knows best.
But still you ask me,
Is it just a phase?
Have I not found the right girl?
She'll come along soon enough.

Aren't we are all products of nature?
Does this mean that some things,
We cannot change?
Maybe I wish I could.
But I know, I cannot.
Do you?

DEVOTION | DAVID MAYERHOFF

Loyalty is a thing of the past
Say the masses to each other
It is all for themselves
And none for anyone else

Then there is
The one who is devoted
To all who
Need to rely on him

He is there for them
When none else are around
He has the patience
To forebear that which others cannot

He listens patiently
Gives of himself
To charities and to family
And aids the helpless and the sick

His friends count on him
When they are in need
They know he will be there
And can count on his discretion

For friends
People look elsewhere
For heroes
They look to him

He does not waver
In his commitments
Nor does he give excuses
When he reached his human limits

Where do people go
To find one such as this?

CHANGE | DAVID MAYERHOFF

Change is the ever constant of life
It is dependable, reliable
Sometimes lamentable, sometimes soulful
Ever gratifying to the restless

It is the way of all things
Yet it is something many fear
Better the devil you know
Then the one you don't know.

It is surely not easy
For the human condition
To grapple with;
Inertia tying most of us to our seats

We like the comfortable
The familiar
But growth does not like these
Hence we are uprooted and forced to adapt

Ever so wistful a writer
Has lamented
Why life had to be ordered like this
Why could not man and woman stay put?

Indeed there are times
We grow in place
And other times
We seemingly fall back with movement

Yet there it is all the same
Families moving out of town
Loved ones moving on
New neighbors, new strangers

New jobs, new bosses
New routines
New homes, new zip codes
New countries

New languages
Changing weather, changing seasons
New children
New hopes

New apprentices, new eateries
New shopping malls
Old neighborhoods
New job requirements

Changing currencies
Changing world powers
New World Champions
New heroes

Is it any wonder
Why the ancients
All created societies
That respected and revered the elderly?

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