

What If It Were You?

A Collection of Human Rights Poetry

Elizabeth Arif-Fear

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Foreword

What If It Were You? is a book meant to stir the very basal emotions within us that link us to others. It talks to the humanity within us all and attempts to unravel the tentacles of both civil injustice and harmful cultural norms which strangulate and otherwise both individuals and whole communities or sets of people. Written by a human rights activist within Muslim and secular communities, the book speaks a truth that is much needed as an antidote to the cultural and social manipulation of basic human rights norms which should instead have been placed at the fundamental heart of many countries.

Arif-Fear speaks about the sickening realities of child marriage, female genital mutilation and modern slavery and picks up on issues that are affecting many, many lives across the globe and in the UK. She highlights the plight of refugees, the infamous and inhumane 'Jungle' where young men and women's lives remain wasted away in Calais and the war in Syria which has decimated the historical, cultural and human capital of the country. She is fearless in her drive to expose the socio-cultural norms that have been imposed on people and the injustices which many men, women and children continue to face worldwide.

Speaking to Muslim, secular and non-Muslim communities, Arif-Fear seeks to burst open the chains that hold mindsets down so that patriarchy and abuse within communities and civil societies can be challenged. She looks for bridges of understanding, whilst challenging the barriers of ignorance and intolerance.

Some of the very people that Arif-Fear challenges are those men who have been born into privilege just because they are males. Speaking for women and minorities, she is countering the extremist and misogynistic narratives of men placed at the helm of women's lives. It is this passion for life, for humanity and for human rights, that makes Arif-Fear someone to watch in the future. She is shaping a path that many women still fear to tread – challenging faith leaders, holding them to account and bursting open the mental prisons they have created to hold down women and minorities, whilst also challenging wider structures of power, hierarchy and injustice.

Arif-Fear is blazing a trail driven by her faith, based on a human rights approach. This book is testament to her values, her ideals and her beliefs. It also places her at the vanguard of challenging practices that have damaged lives, emotions and minds. If there is anything we can be sure of, it's that this book will set the scene for her work in the future.

FIYAZ MUGHAL OBE

What If It Were You?

As the sun rises,
As the new day awakens,
There's no morning cheer,
No blissful glowing sky,
No bright new day of life, hope and possibility.
No, as the sun rises,
So do the bombs,
The shells,
And the bullets.

As the sun rises,
So do the screams and the heartbroken cries
Of a mother whose baby lies lifeless in her arms,
Of the orphaned child whose hopes and dreams are
 snatched away so cruelly in a single second,
Of a husband whose heart has been twisted, crushed
 and shattered into a million pieces...

No, no blissful glowing sky,
No hopes,
No dreams,
No possibilities,
No cheer.

Instead, there lies a bloody cursed battlefield
Where the streets cry out with waves of blood,
Where the walls crumble with sorrow and fear,
Where the earth knows nothing but death and
destruction.

No, instead here lies a blazing battlefield a million
miles away...

A million miles away from your shores,
A million miles away from your doorstep,
A million miles away from you.

But what if it were you?
What if it were your mother,
Your child,
Your soul,
Your heart,
Your everything?
What if it were you?

What if it wasn't them,
What if it wasn't "the other",
The "stranger",
The "foreigner"?
No...
What if it were you...?

I Am a Woman

I am a woman.
I'm equal in worth – or so they state,
Equal in dignity and rights – though late.

But am I equal as you shut me from view?
When your voice so loudly silences the few?
When you cut my flesh to safeguard desire?
When your position is always, always higher?

Am I equal when it's books I can't reach?
And isolation that you so fondly teach?
When the choice to cover is not mine but yours?
When my body's your source of open doors?

...

I am a woman.
I'm equal in worth – that is true,
Equal in dignity and rights as you.

But when I can simply just be me,
Then – and only then – will I be the woman you
don't see.

Dedicated to Azza Soliman

The Jungle Never Dies

They call it “The Jungle”,
Like the wild green natural lands where the animals
 roam,
Except this is not like any jungle I’ve ever known.

This is a jungle where instead of the roar of nature’s
 beasts,
You’ll hear the tearful cries of innocent children lying
 at your feet.

A jungle where instead of the green fruitful trees
 beaming high,
You’ll see burned out wooden shacks and smoke-filled
 skies.

Yes, a jungle where instead of the peaceful sounds of
 singing birds,
You’ll bear witness to the men in uniform’s unwanted
 words.

You see, they call it “The Jungle”,
But this is not a natural bounty of peace – a land of
 exotic animals and plants,
This is the refuge of innocent humans looking for a
 chance.
It’s a crowded, unsafe haven for people as
 worthy as you and me –
Not a land of mysteries for all to see.

Yes, they call it "The Jungle" but less than a year on,
The site's been demolished and everyone's saying it's
gone.

But the reality is that The Jungle still exists,
For these brothers and sisters are still pushed to persist.
Yes, the fleeing are still stranded and left *alone* in this
foreign land,
In need of any kind of human helping hand.

Yes – The Jungle still exists and we're passing it by,
While young men looking for hope are crossing to die.
For those very tents and shacks may have been torn
down and thrown away,
But you can't throw away a problem – it's real and it's
here to stay.

About the author



ELIZABETH ARIF-FEAR is a writer and human rights campaigner based in London.

Passionate about human rights and interfaith relations, she founded the online platform Voice of Salam in 2015 to inform others about a range of human rights, interfaith, social and cultural issues and provide campaigning advice.

As an active writer, campaigner and organiser for a variety of human rights and interfaith bodies working on a range of issues such as modern slavery and interfaith cohesion, Elizabeth finds poetry to be one of the most powerful, expressive tools of writing to enable her to exemplify the injustice men, women and children encounter on a daily basis across the globe. Tackling a range of areas including FGM, child marriage, misogyny within the Muslim community, LGBTQI rights, Islamophobia and the struggles of refugees, religious minorities and war-torn communities, she uses poetry to raise awareness of the struggles fought by many – including herself – and to call for peace, justice and humanity across the globe.