

Cosmopolitanism: a Journey of Suffering and Forgiveness

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Can Any Beauty Match This?

When the sun within speaks, when love
reaches out its hand and places it upon
another,

any power the stars and planets might
have upon us,

any fears you can muster can become so
rightfully insignificant.

What one heart can do for another heart,
is there any beauty in the world that can
match this?

Brotherhood, sisterhood, humanity becomes
the joy and the emancipation.
Hafiz (Ladinsky, 2011)

Cosmopolitanism is a term that does not come with a single, coherent definition. David Held (2013) argues for an understanding of cosmopolitanism that is politically defined as the equality of all people, as well as the legal frameworks that protect this equality (Held, 2013, p. 29). For Rosi Braidotti (2013), it is “becoming-world,” that is, a “radical relational model of interaction” (p. 8) that is conceived within the framework of our nomadic selves (Braidotti, 2011), an idea that echoes in Hongyu Wang’s (2004) notions of ‘stranger’ and ‘home.’ Wang’s (2004) work is reflective of the notion of the subject as a means of cosmopolitan engagement with the world, by occupying a third space, physically represented by the process of being in transit between places (p. 153). Her autobiographical work is steeped in the notion of subjectively “being in the world” that William Pinar (2009, p. 3) offers, and indeed, later, Pinar (2011) meditates on Wang’s work, drawing particular links between becoming stranger and cosmopolitanism. For Kwame Anthony Appiah (2007), the primacy of our responsibilities to one another is paramount in understanding cosmopolitanism: “One truth we hold to... is that every human being has obligations to every other. Everybody matters. That is our central idea” (Appiah, 2007, pp. 166-167).



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Our relational existence presses against me, with an insistence that cannot be ignored.

Cosmopolitanism as a Deficit Model

There are many ways to start a conversation about cosmopolitanism. Frequently, when I have entered into conversation with others about cosmopolitanism, it very quickly descends into a sense of deficit, various present-day “phobias” and historical injustices are brought forth, and, once delineated, we are asked to find a way to “deal with” our troubles and become more tolerant of one another, to recognize that “‘we’ may all be in *this* together” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 10), and to find ways through legal or economic means to maintain our equality.

In recognizing the proclivity towards the deficit model, it is here that we may see curriculum studies informed by the conception of *hilm* and *ilm* as an avenue through which a new way of thinking of cosmopolitanism may emerge.

The deficit model in education is one which William Doll (2011) describes well as:
 (...) deficit thinking and blame continually infuse the classroom; they enter each time a grade is assigned or feedback given. Both of these operate from a deficit hypothesis. Every grade given (even an A) measures the distance from a desired goal. Feedback is almost uniformly to show mistakes. Self worth is measured on a deficit scale. (Doll, 2011, p. 33)

There is a particular vernacular that is used in the classroom, a dwelling on the spaces in which a student is lacking, the moments that a student did not meet expectations. Doll (2011) uses the word “blame,” which draws us to moments of reproach, revile, blaspheme or evil-speech (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015).

In the deficit model of cosmopolitanism, we begin with an enumeration of the moments of our human history to present day that have acted as challenges to the cosmopolitan ideal, we enter into the realm of blame. Unfortunately, dwelling on the challenge of cosmopolitanism makes the endeavor seem to be a herculean task, impossible to achieve in ten lifetimes, let alone within my own. In essence, we each become a pack-mule, carrying on our already-wounded shoulders an inherited baggage of some of the worst moments in history. Our subjectivities become flattened to: colonialists, terrorists, crusaders, murderers, and victims.

However, it is important for us to hear the truths of our pasts and the pasts of others; these truths allow us to witness the pain of others, and in so witnessing, we are able to recognize our own subjectivity as well as that of the other. As Pinar (2007) suggests, “only the individual can see the other person’s tears.” (Pinar, 2007, p. 34). It opens us up to empathy.

I would suggest that cosmopolitanism is shackled by considering it in terms of deficits. In this model, we are propelled into a conversation of binaries, much as the classroom is propelled into a teacher *versus* student situation rather than the more desired collaborative approach. Similarly, in conversation about cosmopolitanism, it is all too frequent to overhear phrases like “they were not as cosmopolitan as we are today” or even “they aren’t cosmopolitan at all.” Civilizations are equated with their deficiencies, and, though not outwardly, they are ‘graded’ for their achievements. Surely, anyone with a critical mind would be able to look at our own news headlines and recognize the illusion that is their pedestal, if we were to limit our discussion to only the worst instances of our society. Instead, we may take a holistic approach, one that mimics traditional approaches to



medicine. Instead of focusing solely on the pain points, the approach is to look at the body as a system, in its entirety.

Recently, I had an interaction with a colleague which felt both surprising and unsurprising at the same time, something Ted Aoki (1993) describes as “both this and that, and more” (Aoki, 1993, p. 295). It illustrated so clearly to me the way that the deficit model limits our ability to become cosmopolitans to the core. My colleague fundamentally disagreed with the premise of my work, citing that the Ottomans were brutal rulers of the Greeks, and that today the Turkish government was still denying the Armenian genocide. He felt my studies were based in a false view of history, one which looked too favorably upon what he viewed as a tyrannical moment in history, a view, he believed, was only bolstered only by the behaviour of the current government in Turkey. He did not bring up my work to engage in a discussion, but rather as a way to inform me that I should be “careful” about the narratives I believe. The Ottomans, for him, were nothing but brutal, though there are many instances in which their policies may be lauded, but that is a discussion for another time. I did quite feebly offer that I was studying the Muslim Empire in Spain, not the Ottoman Empire, in what is now Turkey.

“The Ottomans were no better in Spain. What is your ethnic background, anyways?”

The question came packaged as an inquiry about myself, but the real question I was being asked was: how can I explain away your bias towards these people? It seemed to him that I must have some kind of political motivation.

And perhaps I do. As one who is most attune to the insecurities associated with confessing to practice Islam in a post-9/11 world, I am sensitive to the difficulties that those who seek to balance identities of “Islam” and “Canadian” or “American” may experience. This extends to the study of so-called “Muslim Civilizations” as well, and in this, I reflect Aoki’s (1979, p. 336) experience in balancing *both* Japanese and Canadian identities during World War II. He sought an identity that allowed him to dwell in the space between, a space that many who are both Muslim and Canadian or American may struggle to dwell in today. Yet, I find this challenge laughable sometimes. Finding a way to reconcile two nationalities who are at war must surely be more challenging than to reconcile a religious identity and a national identity. Nonetheless, there is increasing distance between these two identities, as a result of the heinous acts committed by those who claim Islam as their faith, as well as the narratives we choose to construct around these acts in our news and politics.

In looking to the wisdom of Al-Andalus, I am not seeking to idealize a moment in history. It is important to recognize first that we could easily say that the “Ottomans” (substitute whichever ruling class existed in that moment) were no better in Troy, Mongolia, South Africa, or Canada. I seek to learn, for a moment, from those who were able to achieve something more than we are able to do today, who surely existed in each of these civilizations. Indeed, even in Nazi Germany, one of the most reviled moments in our recent human history, there were individuals who did not adhere to the bigoted beliefs of their political leaders. If we continue to go back in history, all people can carry blame, and all people have been victims.

It is not only perplexing but worrying that an educated individual would not only be unable to distinguish between an empire founded by Oghuz Turks and that of the Umayyads hailing from the Arabian Peninsula, but also to speak so self-assuredly on a matter of which he has so little knowledge. The inability to distinguish these empires is

akin to being unable to distinguish between Napoleon and Mussolini, and in this case, it would be impossible for me to determine which would be “no better” than the other.

I am discussing this situation at length because of the subtle nature of the bias that was presented. Unlike an earlier classroom experience just after 9/11 in which, I, 14 years old at the time, was identified by my teacher as being “of the people” of those who committed the atrocities on September 11, 2001. It was a time when I and my classmates were expressly told that I belonged to the same community of such names as Saddam Hussein (following a very descriptive reading of his horrific acts upon the Kurdish communities in Iraq with biological weapons) and Osama bin Laden, who did not need an introduction at the time in class as he and our newspapers were doing an excellent job of advertising his particular brand of cruelty. The Taliban, I was told, are my people.

They are as much mine as they are everyone else’s, in this world. In the words of Appiah, “every human being has obligations to every other” (Appiah, 2007, p. 167).

Unfortunately, seemingly more and more often, Muslims who practice a wide variety of interpretations of the faith are subtly and less-subtly pushed to either identify with the intolerable likes of ISIL and the Taliban, or to disassociate from the faith altogether. In all honesty, a part of me is extremely reluctant to engage with matters of faith. My own faith is, and has always been, fluid. My practices have also changed throughout my lifetime. To do this work today, I realize, is to capture this moment, these complex feelings I have about religion in general, and Islam in particular. I am wary that to speak of Islam will anger some who disagree with my views from within the faith group, while others may dismiss this work as something that is relevant only to the world of Islam and not beyond. And yet, this research is important. It has spoken my name.

There exists a symbiotic relationship between the two forces of Islamophobia and fundamentalism, often associated with Salafism, an interpretation of Islam that began in the mid-19th century (Shah Kazemi, 2012, p. 131). The two, on the surface, seem like unlikely *symbios*, companions, and yet, a defining element of both is their inability to see nuance, their absolute clarity in the correctness of the narrative they believe (Shah Kazemi, 2012, p. 131). A defining characteristic of the Salafi movement is the decision to negate all texts since the time of the Prophet (that do not serve their political purpose), and reinterpret religious doctrines to legitimize their actions (Hafez, 2010, p. 364). An equally defining characteristic of the Islamophobic movement, sadly, seems to be to choose to focus only on the interpretation of Islam that Salafis present. This is not the moment for an extensive study of the specifics of Salafism or Islamophobia, but a moment to just reflect on the idea that the two have, in essence, perfected Aristotle’s definition of friendship: a single soul dwelling in two bodies.

Diversity is an uncomplicated question in Islam, despite what some may wish to suggest. Cosmopolitanism as established in an Islamic context emerges from the revelation. In the Quranic chapter entitled “The Table Spread” (*al-Ma’ida*), we find the most unequivocal celebration of diversity. The title of the chapter itself suggests the notions of companion, one with whom we break bread:

For each We have appointed a Law and a Way. And had God willed, He could have made you one community. But in order that He might try you by that which He has given you [He has made you as you are]. So compete with one another in good works. Unto God you will all return, He will disclose to you [the truth] of that which you had different opinions (5:48) (Shah Kazemi, 2012, p. 77)

We find here an unequivocal celebration of the difference amongst communities. There is a recognition that difference is not an easy reality, that it would try us, but that, in the end, each community has been given their law and their way, and that reality must be protected.

If there was any doubt, the Qur'an goes on:

Say: O you who disbelieve, I worship not that which you worship, nor do you worship that which I worship. And I shall not worship that which you worship, nor will you worship that which I worship. For you your religion, for me, mine (109:1 – 6) (Shah Kazemi, 2012, p. 108).

Ultimately, we can see that the “irreducible differences between the revealed religions of the world are vital expressions of the infinite creativity of their unique source” (Shah Kazemi, 2012, p. 110). This is, perhaps, ever clearer as we begin to think of the 99 names that are attributed to the Beloved – diversity cannot be undervalued.

While entire tomes have been written on the “lost history” of Islam, those parts of history that are forgotten within the philosophical, scientific and artistic contributions of people of the East, I have chosen to focus on one moment of history that is extraordinarily significant today, many hundreds of years later: the experience of Al-Andalus.

Al-Andalus

In considering the time of Al-Andalus, the Muslim rule in Spain and Portugal, one idea that I have held has troubled me a great deal: I, like many others, consider Al-Andalus a time, solidly delineated, in which a foreign community ruled in Spain. Looking at the history, the timeframe of the Muslim rule seems to be fairly well delineated between 711 and 1492 (Irwin, 2011). However, the notion that despite a rule of almost 800 years, the Muslims in Spain remained foreign, is one that is challenging for me to digest. In the context of Canada's recent efforts to recognize the gross injustices that were perpetrated against our indigenous communities through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I have become increasingly aware of my status as part of the colonial legacy (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). It is a complex identity – a bit more of Aoki's (1993) “both this and that, and more” in which my cultural and spiritual identity is increasingly distanced from my Canadian identity, which is further complicated by the compliance I hold as a beneficiary of colonialism. However, if we were to take Columbus' arrival in the Americas as the date of first contact between the European colonizers and today, what we may call the beginning of this current empire we inhabit, we have been in the Americas for only 523 years. It is unfathomable that the Muslims born in Spain, even those born to parents who had moved to Al-Andalus from elsewhere as my parents did to Canada, would not consider themselves deeply tied to Al-Andalus, as I do to Vancouver. And Vancouver is unceded Coast Salish territory (Meizner, 2014). There is now evidence that much of the territory the Muslims ruled in Al-Andalus was ceded quite willingly as a result of the deteriorating Visigothic rule in the late seventh century (Copestake, 2008) that had the populations eager for new leadership. If we are to simply accept that individuals of that time remained foreign, it is imperative on those in North America to examine their status as local or foreign as well.

Perhaps, then, we can settle in an understanding of this community from the outset, that is much like the non-Indigenous in North America. Those of us who are non-Indigenous to Canada are therefore quite analogous to the Muslims in Spain.



If we are to cast blame on the entire civilization based on certain political acts that we find reprehensible, then we must also be prepared to carry the blame of Smallpox blankets, Napalm, and Hiroshima. However, if we can look to Al-Andalus and recognize that from it emerged several of the greatest philosophers, scientists, and artists within both the Islamic and Judaic traditions, who went on to influence many in the Christian world, perhaps it is worth revisiting this moment in our history of wisdom to discover what enabled this confluence of knowledge to come about.

What is different about the society of Al-Andalus is that, unlike our world today, the spiritual elements of our lives were not separate from the other parts of our lives. The notion of the secular did not exist, and language itself was tied to the spiritual in all aspects (Nasr, 1989, p.13). Today, our spiritual lives are expected to remain separate from the rest of our lives, but the reality is that no one stops being a Christian just because she is not in Church. Our complex spiritual lives and beliefs remain with us at all times, to discount them from the complicated classroom conversation may facilitate greater ease of conversations in some instances, however in so doing, our classroom conversations can only reach so far into the reality of one's being. Intimacy is limited when certain topics, particularly those of belief, are kept off-limits. For all of our efforts in keeping public discourse secular, we have been woefully unable to prevent Anti-Semitism or Islamophobia, and indeed, though we try not to talk about it, religion still seems to be an important player in the politics of the world. I am concerned that we continue to struggle for secularism when, as I look around, these efforts are not working. However, a conversation that engages religion and spirituality can only be conducted in a milieu of respect and kindness in which people of the full range of beliefs are enjoined to participate. Perhaps in our extreme times, such a conversation may be impossible.

In the time of Al-Andalus, however, there was no notion of the separation of spiritual and worldly lives. Therefore, this society was able to achieve, in some instances, something that we are unable to achieve today in a widespread way: the added layer of spiritual complexity to the complicated conversation.

It is here that we might explore the concept of *hilm*.

As is so often the case, *hilm* is a challenging word to translate. It is understood as “reason and grace” (Daryae, 2012, p. 239), “extreme humility or submission” (Abbas, 2010, p. 151), and “forbearance, moderation, tranquility in the face of passion” (Lapidus, 2014, p. 862), amongst others. Shah-Kazemi (2012) offers that, along with the qualities suggested here, that the term “gentle” is often used as the translation of *hilm*, but that this translation must also adopt an earlier notion of “gentle” that suggests nobility. For Shah-Kazemi (2012), *hilm* is a nobility of the soul:

So if the word ‘gentle’ be used in the sense of nobility and aristocracy – thus, with the meaning of perfect self-mastery, together with the sense of love – thus with the meaning of tenderness, compassion and kindness – then it comes close to connoting the range of meanings implied by the single word *hilm*... Tolerance can be seen as a natural concomitant of the attitudes of forbearance and patience towards the Other.(Shah-Kazemi, 2012, p. 115)

It is important to highlight the connection Shah-Kazemi draws between *hilm* and *ilm*. *Ilm* is perhaps one of the most important concepts in Islam, and is most easily translated as ‘knowledge.’ However, *ilm* holds an urgency that can be understood through its root, ‘*alama* or ‘way signs’:

For the Bedouin... the knowledge of way signs, the characteristic marks in the desert which guided him on his travels and in the execution of his daily tasks, was the most important and immediate knowledge to be acquired. In fact, it was the kind of knowledge on which his life and well-being principally depended. (Rahman, Street and Tahiri, 2008, p. 20)

Ilm, therefore, is knowledge and wisdom that sustains us. Knowledge of our world, through artistic expression and scientific discovery, is a sustaining of ourselves, an uncovering of the way signs, the *ayat*, the signs offered to us by the Beloved.

This connection between *hilm* and *ilm* is drawn from the term *jahl*, often translated as ignorance, which serves as the antonym to both *hilm* and *ilm* (Shah-Kazemi, 2012, p. 115). Ignorance, therefore, is also an inadequate translation. It is not only ignorance in the sense of not knowing, but ignorance that results in ignobility of the soul, harshness of action, and arrogance. The relationship is another example of Aristotle's view of friendship as one soul dwelling in two bodies: "one observes a symbiosis between *hilm* and *ilm*, so that one might define *hilm* as that forbearance which stems from knowledge, and *ilm* as that knowledge which generates forbearance" (Shah-Kazemi, 2012, p. 115).

With this understanding of the relationship between *hilm* and *ilm*, we may reflect once again on those who seek to eliminate the intellectual and spiritual community from whence these ideas emerged. To cultivate these qualities, there is an element of both knowing the injustices that have been in this world and that are today, and growing from that wisdom to act in a loving way.

The intimate connection between *hilm* and *ilm* was understood by those across the Muslim world from Arabia to Central Asia, from India to Spain. In Spain, this understanding led to a flourishing of thinkers including Ibn Arabi, the Andalusian Sufi master. His words describe the kind of spirituality I seek for myself:

My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles, and a convent for Christian monks, and a temple for idols, and the pilgrim's Ka'ba, and the tables of the Tora, and the book of the Koran I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith. (Junghare, 1979, pp. 69 – 70)

Cosmopolitanism Reimagined

Cosmopolitanism understood in the context of *hilm* and its relationship to *ilm* is one that asks us not only to admit to our responsibilities to one another, but to realize our intersubjectivity, stemming from the depths of ourselves and shining through not only in our thought, but in our actions. This cosmopolitanism not only asks us to follow the Golden Rule, but to hold each other as beloved, noble souls.

At this moment in history, I am consuming and am consumed by stories of what is happening in our world today. We in Canada are talking about Truth and Reconciliation for the horrors and the legacy of residential schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). We are adopting a new language of xenophobia (Globe and Mail Editorial, 2015). In the United States, we are witness to the horrors and the legacy of slavery and racism (Coates, 2015). Globally, we have created the largest refugee crisis since World War II (Graham, 2015). And though, on the whole, things are not as bad as they have once been there is a palpable sense that things are taking a turn for the worse once again (Delman, 2015).



The attack upon the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina by Dylan Roof is one example from recent news that has brought a great deal of anguish to the United States, and indeed, the world. The subsequent African-American church burnings have been heartbreaking to witness. Many have and would perhaps still argue that there is no 'race issue' in the United States, but incidents like this draw attention to the reality of the African American lived experience in many parts of the United States today.

And yet, before I digress into the narrative of the deficit model, something incredible happened during Roof's trial.

The families of the victims made their statements. Instead of blame, they offered Roof forgiveness (Izade, 2015). Where did this ability come from? Perhaps it came from their faith. Perhaps it came from other convictions. Perhaps it came naturally, requiring little thought. I wonder, too, if some part of the ability to forgive emerged out of their ability to feel compassion towards Roof. As members of a community that has suffered the pain of racism for generations upon generations, perhaps that suffering had carved out space for empathy.

My experience was different from theirs in many ways. On March 20, 2014, four boys entered the hotel where my mother was staying in Kabul, Afghanistan and killed her and eight others in the hotel restaurant. The boys who killed my mother and the other victims that night were also killed in the ensuing gunfight. The Taliban claimed these boys as their own. I don't know their names, and I never had a chance to see their faces. Forgiveness came easily to me perhaps because I could imagine these boys as the hundreds of other Afghan boys I have met. Perhaps they grew up in refugee camps like the ones my parents, who were providing eye care to the refugees, had taken us to during the long, hot summers we spent in Pakistan. Regardless of where they grew up, their lives were certainly surrounded by violence. They were angry at their situation. Perhaps they were bored. These qualities I have imagined up for them have made them human, somehow less villainous. Certainly, misguided. Most importantly, I think of their families. I wonder whether they are proud of them or as deeply hurt as I am.

I didn't read the news reports in the early days after my mother's passing. But in the time since, I have read several of the reports and two things have struck me significantly. The first is that it was one of the few instances in which the local casualties, that is, the Afghans who were killed, were named, and were mourned by the world (Rosenberg & Ahmed, 2014). Mum and I used to talk about the way our news carried numbers of local victims and names of the international victims. In this instance, there was more of a balance. Every life was mourned, not just those with the right passports. A small victory in the face of extreme sadness.

The second relates to the Afghan family as well. The victims were a reporter, his wife, and their two young children (their third child miraculously survived the attack, despite being shot five times). Though the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, even they would not claim responsibility for the death of this family, particularly the children (Rosenberg & Ahmed, 2014). This does not redeem them for these wonton acts of murder or their policies that actively incite violence, but somehow, it suggests to me that even they have a line they do not wish to cross. Perhaps, we shared in the mourning of those children. Even as I write this, I can feel a battle within: can I *really* believe that I share anything with *them*, let alone the depth of emotion that mourning calls us towards?

At times, I have felt that my sorrow has carved hollow spaces in my body, in my psyche. And when I hear of the pain of others and offer them some kindness, I can feel these spaces being filled with nourishment.

I never had the opportunity to address my mother's killers as the families in South Carolina have, but I did write a poem to those boys:

Oh, boys. You can't have known
 The silent mystery of the wind,
 Tousling the hair of the childish grass
 As if it had just made
 A cheeky joke.
 Or the laughter of the birds
 Who were eavesdropping
 The. Whole. Time.
 But I will continue watching.
 You can't have heard
 The endless waves of secrets
 Held in every shell
 Or the delighted squeals
 Of a child bearing
 Witness
 To it all.
 But I will continue to press my ear close
 So I don't miss a single heartbeat
 This world has to offer.
 You probably never knew
 The grace of the sun
 Caressing the caterpillar
 Assuring it that
 There will be light
 When it is reborn.
 You can't have known
 The giddy feeling of a first picnic
 Or the electricity of holding hands
 For the very first time
 With one who will see you
 Through everything.
 You can't have known
 The hilarious struggle
 Of a very pregnant woman
 Trying to put on
 Socks.
 Oh boys.
 You can't have felt
 The undeniable mercy
 Of kneeling,
 Touching your forehead
 To Earth's Lips



That the universe may tell you
 Over and over and over again that
 It loves you.
 Yes, I am completely enthralled by
 The Irresistible Beauty
 Of this world.
 And I will stay forever in that embrace
 And love it back with all I have
 And quietly pray that
 Though you never knew it here
 The peace is with you now.
Written on April 20, 2014

It was not until quite recently that I have thought about this idea of forgiveness and recognized its vital importance to my grief. In thinking of the attackers as humans, as just young boys, I was able to forgive them. In forgiveness, I was able to grieve my mother in a world where I had suddenly begun to notice every inch of beauty around me, not in an environment of hate and anger. I am, in a way, grateful for the hollow spaces that have been carved in me. I think they have enabled me to become more patient, more compassionate, and much more forgiving and loving to those with whom I interact.

This has influenced my conception of cosmopolitanism. I struggle with the term cosmopolitanism itself. The notion of the universal, coupled with the *polis* suggest something about citizenship, ignoring the intimate relationship between us as living, breathing creatures. I prefer a conception of a dyad: cosmopassion and cosmocharis. Cosmopassion, as the word suggests, draw us into a world of compassion, suffering with, but recognizing also the universality of suffering. This notion immediately disables blame, and it carves room for empathy. It creates a space for the individual to “see the other person’s tears” (Pinar, 2007, p. 34). This is the wisdom, the thought, the *ilm* we require to become cosmopolitan. The *hilm*, the nobility of our soul, comes from the action of cosmocharis. This entails universal forgiveness. *Charis* itself is a Greek word that carries a similar meaning to *hilm*. It connotes grace, kindness, and graciousness of action (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). Forgiveness; perhaps the most gracious act of all.

And perhaps in forgiveness, I have found space for optimism, for hope.

And hope, really is what keeps me from falling to my knees. My mother, one who experienced the sudden loss of her father at a young age, who was born in Uganda out of the anguish of the India-Pakistan Partition, who lived through truly difficult circumstances as she grew up in England, held a great deal of wisdom on the question of hope. It is perhaps why she chose to name the schools she started in Kabul, *Omid-e-Afghanistan*, the Hope of Afghanistan. It is a place where our pain is given voice and heard, where deficits are destroyed, and for me, since her passing, forgiveness has been given a name.

It leads us back to the wisdom of Hafiz:

Can Any Beauty Match This?

When the sun within speaks, when love
 reaches out its hand and places it upon
 another,

any power the stars and planets might
 have upon us,



any fears you can muster can become so
rightfully insignificant.

What one heart can do for another heart,
is there any beauty in the world that can
match this?

Brotherhood, sisterhood, humanity becomes
the joy and the emancipation.

Hafiz (Ladinsky, 2011)

Humanity, in our thought and our action, in our compassion and our forgiveness,
can offer us hope, happiness and freedom. What one heart can do for another heart, is there
any beauty in the world that can match this?

Notes

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